



TOGETHER *for* CHRIST
8 Studies in Philippians

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'I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel' (Philippians 1: 3-5)

INTRODUCTION

Sometime between AD 49 and 52, the apostle Paul – that self righteous Pharisee turned faithful follower of Jesus – received a vision of a man calling him to ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’ (Acts 16: 9). Paul, who had been working to advance the good news of Jesus throughout the province of Asia (now modern day Turkey), set sail from Troas and arrived in the Macedonian seaport of Neapolis, in what we now call Greece. Travelling ten miles inland, Paul arrived in the city of Philippi and began to preach the gospel to a group of women who gathered for prayer by a riverside outside the city each Sabbath. Through Paul’s preaching the Lord opened the heart of one of the women and she believed the message about Jesus and was baptised (Acts 16: 11-15). Thus, the first church in Europe was established at Philippi and one of the most wonderful gospel partnerships in the entire New Testament had begun.

Throughout these studies we will be working our way through a letter in the Bible that the apostle Paul wrote to the church he established in Philippi (Philippians 1: 1). At the time of his writing, Paul was in prison awaiting trial. The outcome was potentially very serious and Paul acknowledges the difficulty of his situation (Philippians 1: 13-14, 17, 19-20; 2: 17-18 cf. 2: 27-28). However, throughout the letter Paul is full of joy not only because of the Philippians and their partnership (Philippians 1: 4-5), but also because of the knowledge that his imprisonment had served to advance the gospel (Philippians 1: 12-13). Exactly where Paul was imprisoned when he wrote Philippians is difficult to determine. The traditional view is that Paul wrote during his imprisonment in Rome in AD 60-62 (Philippians 1: 12-14; 4: 22; Acts 28: 30-31). If correct then a decade had passed since he first brought the gospel to Philippi. During those years Paul had visited the church on numerous occasions (Acts 19: 21-22; 20: 1-3; 1 Corinthians 16: 5), and the Philippians had faithfully supported Paul through the triumphs and trials of gospel ministry like no other church had (Philippians 4: 10, 15; 2 Corinthians 8: 1-2; 11: 8-9).

Not long after Paul's imprisonment, the Philippians became aware of his situation and, true to their generous nature, began collecting a gift to support and encourage him in his present difficulty. With the gift assembled they sent Epaphroditus to Paul, but at some stage during the journey it appears that Epaphroditus fell ill and nearly died. God, however, spared Epaphroditus and at great personal risk he delivered the Philippians gift to Paul and helped him in his imprisonment (Philippians 2: 25-30; 4: 18). Somehow the Philippians heard of Epaphroditus' illness (but not, it seems, his recovery) and were greatly distressed for their friend. Epaphroditus was also concerned about the Philippians, knowing the distress they would feel when news of his condition reached them (Philippians 2: 28-29). Paul thought it best, therefore, to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians quickly, giving him an opportunity to send this letter to them. It appears that Paul had a number of purposes in mind in writing to the Philippians. He writes to explain why he is sending Epaphroditus back so promptly, to instruct them to greet him warmly, and to thank them for their generosity (Philippians 2: 28-30; 4: 14, 18). Though Epaphroditus' time with Paul was cut short, he was able to give Paul an update on how the Philippians were progressing in their faith. Overall it seems that the report was basically good. Thus, Paul writes to express his joy and gratitude for the way that God is carrying out his saving purposes in the lives of the Philippians and for the special bond that exists between him and the church (Philippians 1: 3-8). However, at the same time, there is also a sense of seriousness to the letter. Paul's Christian friends at Philippi were facing opposition and persecution (Philippians 1: 28-30). The threat of false teaching, which had the potential to distort and subvert the very gospel that had brought them together, meant that they had to be on guard (3: 1-21). Furthermore, disputes and rivalries had arisen between members of the congregation at Philippi, endangering both their internal unity and external witness before a watching world (Philippians 2: 1-4, 14-16; 4: 2-4). In response to such challenges, Paul writes to encourage the Philippians live in a manner worthy of the gospel, to stand firm and persevere, and to be united. Unity, though, is not to be maintained at the expense of the gospel. Like Jesus, Paul makes clear that unity among believers is central to being a Christian, but it is only Christian unity if it is based upon the truth of God's word and the gospel of Christ. Throughout the letter, Paul himself models how to maintain Christian unity, not only in the way he vehemently opposes those who threaten the gospel (Philippians 3: 1-11, 18-19), but also in the way he prioritises the needs of others above his own (Philippians 1: 23-26) and gently handles less mature

Christians who think differently than him (Philippians 3: 15-16). He also upholds Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples of Christian unity in action (Philippians 2: 19-23, 25-30). But at the heart of Paul's letter is his appeal for the Philippians to adopt the attitude of the Lord Jesus, 'who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant... He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Philippians 2: 5-11). Only by following the example of Christ can the Philippians shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted world, and live in a manner worthy of the gospel as they stand firm together.

As partakers of God's grace, Paul and the Philippians had been united by Jesus in the cause of the gospel. They were partners with a shared identity and purpose. Despite the distance that physically separated them, they stood 'Together for Christ'.

STUDY 1

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1: 1-11

1. Describe a partnership that you were involved in. What were the role(s) of each partner and what were some of the challenges or blessings that resulted from the partnership?

Read Philippians 1: 1-11

2. Imagine that you were one of the Christians in Philippi who received this letter. What might be your first reaction or emotion after reading verses 1-11? Why would you feel or react this way?
3. How did Paul describe himself and the Philippians? Why do you think he described them this way? How are these descriptions similar or different to you and me?
4. What was the relationship between Paul and the Philippians? What was their relationship with Christ (vv. 1-2, 5-8)?
5. Why was Paul thankful to God for the Philippians (vv. 4-8; 4: 15-16, 18)?
6. How was Paul a partner with the Philippians in the gospel (vv. 3-4, 7-8; Acts 16: 11-40)?
7. What is the 'good work' Paul refers to in verse 6?
8. What is God's role in a believer's life (verse 6)? What warning or encouragement does this truth bring to you?

9. What three things does Paul pray for the Philippians and why do you think he prayed for these things (vv. 9-11)?
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Think/Grow/Live

- How is the partnership observed in these verses similar/different to your current context? How can you as an individual or as a cell group partner with others in proclaiming the gospel?
 - Why are partnerships important in extending God's kingdom? Can you share an experience when you partnered with others in proclaiming the gospel?
 - Think about the close relationship between Paul (the goer) and the Philippians (senders/supporters). How can we do our part in fostering this kind of intimate relationship between us (senders/supporters) and our global mission partners (goers)?
 - Paul's letter to the Philippians clearly shows that a church community that has a strong focus on global mission is not immune to spiritual issues or threats (e.g. unity within the church, false teaching, pressure from the world). How can a church community guard itself against these issues or threats?
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Prayer Points

- Praise God that he not only initiated our faith, but promises to mature and complete our faith.
 - Praise God for giving us the privilege of partnering with Him in sharing and spreading the gospel. Pray for God to help us to be faithful in this task individually, as a cell group and as a church community.
 - Pray for our church's global mission partners throughout this week.
 - Pray for the saints at CrossCulture using Paul's prayer in verses 9-11.
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STUDY 2

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Philippians 1: 12-26

1. Think of an adverse circumstance you have faced or a failure you have experienced. Briefly share the outcome of this experience and the lessons you think these have taught you?

Turning adverse circumstances for God's purposes – Philippians 1: 12-14

2. What did Paul want the Philippian believers to know about what has happened to him?
3. Consider Romans 1: 10-16 and Acts 19: 21. Paul was commonly known as the apostle called to reach the Gentiles. What was Paul's desire?
4. Paul wanted to go to Rome as a preacher, but instead he went as a prisoner. To many, this would have looked like a failure! Do you think so? Why or why not?

Paul's opposition – Philippians 1: 15-18

5. It is obvious that Paul's ministry of advancing the gospel was not without opposition. What was this opposition and why did people oppose Paul?
6. How could people preach Christ out of envy and rivalry? What would this look like today?
7. In spite of his critics and their opposition, Paul could still conclude by saying, "... because of this I rejoice."
 - a) Why could Paul rejoice?
 - b) What brought about this mindset in Paul?

8. What lessons have you learned from these verses as you seek to serve God and advance the gospel of Christ?

Paul's motivation in life – Philippians 1: 19-21

9. In verse 19, Paul says, "...what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance." What do you think Paul meant by "deliverance"?
10. What factors contributed to Paul's deliverance? What can you learn from this in your own walk with God?
11. The apostle Paul laid his heart bare and revealed the deepest motive of his life. What was Paul's motivation and deepest desire in life (vv. 20-21)? How would you apply verse 21 "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain"?

Life or death, does it matter? – Philippians 1: 22-26

12. Paul confessed an almost unbearable tension within himself. What was the tension he was facing (vv. 22-24)?
13. How did Paul resolve this tension? What are the implications of Paul's decisions?
14. Throughout the ages, people have always been gripped by the fear of death. How has this study helped you overcome this fear?

Prayer Point

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
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STUDY 3

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Philippians 1: 27 - 2: 11

1. Can you relate to a time where you have been extremely stressed or afraid?

From the first-century Mediterranean world, to the current situation in Iraq and Syria, there have always been people determined to stamp out talk of Christianity, often resorting to extreme, barbaric ways to get their way. Even in Australia, where society has become increasingly post-Christian, the influence that relativism, scepticism and cynicism have within our culture should not be understated. We see it through the media, on television, or even in our high schools, universities and workplaces (e.g. a recent news headline reads “School Christian chaplain program puts kids 'at risk', warn counselors and psychologists”¹). It’s easy for us to be intimidated by these subtle forces, but Paul insists we must not. In this study, we’ll discover why not, and more than that. Paul will point us to the ultimate example of how we can live our life in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Read Philippians 1: 27 - 2: 11

2. What does it mean to “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ (v. 27)?
3. Why is it important for you and our church to remain unafraid in the face of opposition, even subtle opposition (vv. 1: 14, 28-30; Romans 1: 16; 1 Thessalonians 2: 2)?
4. Given the seemingly infinite possibilities within churches on styles of worship, preaching, and varying traditions, what kind of unity is Paul talking about? How is it attained (vv. 1: 27; 2: 1-4, Ephesians 2: 18-20; 4: 4)?

¹ News Limited, *School Christian chaplain program puts kids 'at risk', warn counsellors and psychologists*, <http://www.news.com.au/national/school-christian-chaplain-program-puts-kids-at-risk-warn-counsellors-and-psychologists/story-e6frfkvr-1226083530464>.

5. What is wrong with selfish ambition and looking only to our own interests (v. 2: 3)? Isn't this what our Western culture encourages?
6. Did Jesus remain equal to God whilst on earth? What did he actually "empty himself" of (vv. 2: 6-7 cf. John 1: 14; Colossians 2: 9)?
7. How were Jesus' actions an ultimate display of God's character (vv. 2: 6-9)?
8. Why was a death on the cross so humiliating (v. 3: 18; Galatians 3: 13)?
9. How should we respond to this ultimate act of servanthood?
10. In light of Jesus' profound example, we need to obey. Have the mindset of Christ Jesus! What does it practically mean to "in humility count others more significant than yourselves" and to not only look after our own interests "but also the interests of others"? How do we apply this truth in our:
 - a) households?
 - b) church community?
 - c) relationships and communities outside of church?

Prayer Point

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
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STUDY 4

OBEDIENCE FOR CHRIST

Philippians 2: 12-30

1. When in your life have you found it hard to obey authority?

Read Philippians 2: 12-18

2. What insights do we get in the passage regarding Paul's relationship with the Philippian church (vv. 12, 17, 24)?
3. What was the state of the Philippian church as described in these verses (vv. 12, 14, 17)?
4. Read Philippians 2: 12-13 and Ephesians 2: 8-10. Summarise verses 12-13 in your own words. What does Paul mean when he says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (v. 12)?
5. Paul's exhortation to do all things without grumbling and questioning reminds us of the Israelites grumbling in the wilderness (Exodus 15: 24; 16:2, 7-9). Whom do you think the grumbling is directed towards? What behaviour is Paul trying to correct here?
6. Paul refers to "the day of Christ" (v. 16).
 - a) What day is he referring to?
 - b) How are we to prepare for this day?
7. The sacrificial drink offering was usually poured out around the altar when Jews were offering an atoning sacrifice for their sins (Exodus 29: 40-41). In light of this, what do you think Paul was saying in verses 17-18? How does this relate to his request in verse 14?

Read Philippians 2: 19-30

8. List the qualities of both Timothy and Epaphroditus mentioned here. How do these qualities relate to those commended in verses 1: 27 - 2: 18?

9. Paul exhorts the Philippians to "honour such men" (v. 29). How does this relate to his appeal in verse 14?

10. Paul begins the passage in verse 12 with "therefore". In light of the passage's theme of obedience, what is the "therefore" there for? Always look at verses preceding a "therefore".

Think/Grow/Live

- Paul writes that as we do things in obedience to God's appointed authorities, we "shine as lights in the world" (v. 15). Are there areas in your life where this could be improved as we strive to be good ambassadors for Jesus?

- 1 Thessalonians 5: 2 says, "...for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." What things are you doing to prepare for that day, and what areas in your life should you seek to change as we grow to be more like Christ?

- In what ways is CrossCulture similar/dissimilar to the Philippian church? In what ways can we grow to better reflect Christ's obedience to God the Father?

- Today we are surrounded by conflicts around the world – in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Ukraine to name a few. Discontent grows for the leaders of these nations and the roles they play in these conflicts. How are we as Christians to respond to these leaders, being fully aware that God has appointed all leaders according to his perfect plan?

Prayer Points

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
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STUDY 5

LEAVE YOUR QUALIFICATIONS AT THE DOOR

Philippians 3: 1-11

1. What is one achievement that you are proud of and why?

Read Philippians 3: 1-11

2. In verse 2, Paul starts this chapter with a warning for the Philippians to look out for enemies.
 - a) How does Paul describe these enemies (Philippians 1: 15-17)?
 - b) Who do you think these enemies were?
3. As a contrast to these enemies, Paul highlights three qualities that characterise true people of God. What are these three qualities (v. 3)?
4. List out some of Paul's impressive credentials from his "spiritual resume" (vv. 5-6).
5. Why do you think Paul is boasting about his previous achievements in this passage? What sort of personality do you think Paul had before he met Christ?
6. Describe some of the things that make you put confidence in the flesh.
7. Despite being an extremely "high achiever" in his day, Paul now has a different perspective on his achievements. How does he see these achievements now (vv. 7-8)?
8. What happens when we measure our achievements against God's standards (Mark 10: 17-27; Isaiah 64: 6)?

9. Instead of a righteousness that comes from the law, we now have a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ (v. 9). How do you explain this difference and why is it so important to the Christian faith (Romans 9: 30 - 10: 4)?
10. In light of this paradigm shift, how has Paul's life focus and direction changed (vv. 10-11; Matthew 13: 44-46)?

Prayer Point

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
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STUDY 6

TOWARDS THE GOAL

Philippians 3: 12 – 4: 1

1. Has there been an experience recently where you felt frustrated or discouraged? What drives you and keeps you going?

Read Philippians 3: 12 – 4: 1

2. Read verses 12-14 again. What metaphor or imagery comes to mind when you read this passage?
3. How do you think this compares with passages such as 1 Timothy 4: 8; 2 Timothy 4: 7; 1 Corinthians 9: 24-26; and Hebrews 12: 1?
4. Why do you think Paul uses the metaphor of training and running the race? What attributes can we learn from athletes? List three (or more!).
5. Paul yearns to know Christ even more fully and be more like Him. In verse 12, he declares a connection between “I press on to make it my own” and “because Christ Jesus made me his own”.
 - a) Why do you think Paul made this connection? What two truths does he hold in balance? (cf. 2: 12-13)
 - b) Oh the sweetness of the confidence that Christ Jesus has made us his own! How does this perspective encourage you to “press on”?
6. In verse 13, Paul mentions about “forgetting what lies behind”. Do you find this difficult to do sometimes? What do you think is required for us to come to terms with the past?
7. According to verse 15, if God has granted us maturity in Christ, how would we be thinking?

8. Paul talks about a group of people who “walk as enemies of the cross” (vv. 18-19). While the exact identity of this group is unclear to us, we can probably identify with parts of their descriptions.

Try explaining these statements in your own words and contrast them with how we as Christians have been called to live instead:

- a) “their god is their belly” (cf. Galatians 5: 24)
- b) “they glory in their shame” (cf. Romans 6: 20-21)
- c) “minds set on earthly things” (cf. Colossians 3: 1-2).

9. What words would you use to describe these people? Where are those who live like this headed?

10. Verses 20-21 clearly contrast verses 18-19. Just as Philippi prided in being a Roman colony, we enjoy the privileges and have obligations that come with our citizenship in heaven (cf. Philippians 1: 27). Therefore, we also await eagerly the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness with our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Have you experienced much waiting in your life? What insights or lessons have you learned from waiting (cf. Romans 8: 23-25; Lamentations 3: 24-25)?

11. As we consider our citizenship and look to our Lord Jesus who is able “to subject all things to himself” (cf. Colossians 1: 15-19), what encouragement does Paul give in 4: 1?

Prayer points:

- Give thanks that there is now no condemnation in Christ Jesus because His work on our behalf has fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law. Furthermore, He is amazingly able to work past all our failures and for our good and for His glory.

- Give thanks that even when we stumble, the Holy Spirit gives us the encouragement and perseverance to run this race marked out for us, as Christ has made us His own.
 - Pray for the discipline, commitment and obedience to “hold true to what we have attained” (v. 16) and to keep our eyes on Jesus, as we have been crucified and united with Him (Galatians 2: 20; Romans 6: 5-11).
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STUDY 7

LIVING FOR CHRIST

Philippians 4: 2-9

1. Can you tell of a time when you have invested significant time and energy in a group of people, working with them, only to find that they later drifted away from what you worked on together?

Being a parent of teenage children gives you some understanding of how our heavenly Father must feel at times. No doubt Paul experienced this at various stages in his ministry. Though Paul never married or had natural children, he did have many spiritual children in whom he invested time and energy (1 Thessalonians 2: 7-12), teaching them about the one true God who loves them and asks them to love Him in return by keeping his commandments. In this passage, Paul begins to close his letter to the church at Philippi by encouraging the Philippians with a brief re-statement of what it means to truly worship the one true God and walk in His ways.

Read Philippians 4: 2-9

Know Christ

2. In verse 4, Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice." Answer the following:
 - a) What does it mean to "rejoice in the Lord"?
 - b) How is Christian joy different from worldly joy?
 - c) Why does Paul write "Rejoice in the Lord always", and then repeat the word "Rejoice" again?
3. In verse 6, what does Paul tell the Philippians NOT to do (cf. Matthew 6: 25)?
4. What three things does Paul say they are to do (cf. Matthew 6: 32)?

5. In verse 7, what does Paul say will be the result of taking everything to God in prayer (cf. Matthew 7: 7-11)?
6. Are there times when you feel anxious?
7. Contrast the start of verse 7 with the end of verse 9. What does this difference mean?
8. What do you find tends to happen when you attempt to do things in your own strength?
9. How often do you find that, in God's strength, after fervent prayer, you are able to achieve much more than you thought was humanly possible?

Grow in Christ

10. "These women, who have labored side by side with me (Paul) in the Gospel...whose names are in the Book of Life". In your own words, explain what the following means:
 - a) "...have labored side by side with me (Paul) in the Gospel"
 - b) "...names are written in the Book of Life" (cf. Revelation 20: 12–15).
11. In verse 2, what is Paul asking Euodia and Syntyche to do?
12. At the start of verse 3, what is Paul asking another person to do?
13. Do you know of any Christian people who are in dispute?
14. How might such disputes be resolved? What role might you be able to play to make this happen?

Proclaim Christ

15. In verse 8, Paul lists a number of virtues. Are any of these unique to Christians?
16. Why do you think Paul lists these virtues (some of which are unique to this passage)?
17. In verse 9, how does Paul guide the Philippians toward godly behaviour?
18. What kind of behaviour is characteristic of true Christian belief?
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Think/Grow/Live

- Read Mathew 6: 6-8 and 14-15. What does this teach us about prayer?
 - If we are human, and as a result, weak, how can we truly walk in God's ways?
 - Given that even those who have laboured together in the gospel can be in profound dispute, how can we be on guard against disunity?
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Prayer Points

- Praise God that he listens to our prayers.
 - Thank God for the peace, comfort and love that he gives to His children.
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STUDY 8

A CONTENT RESPONSE TO GOD'S PROVISION

Philippians 4: 10-23

1. Discuss the times when you have struggled most with being discontent.

Read Philippians 4: 10–23

2. In verses 10-12 Paul is grateful for the Philippians' gift to him; however, he talks about having learnt to be content with every situation, whether in difficulty or in abundance. Explain verses 10-12 in your own words (cf. Philippians 4: 19; 1 Timothy 6: 6-8; 2 Corinthians 9: 8, 11: 24-29; 12: 6-10; Hebrews 13: 5).
3. How can you be content in all circumstances, even whilst experiencing difficulty?
4. "I can do all things through he who strengthens me" (v. 13).
 - a) How might this verse be misunderstood?
 - b) What does this verse mean?
5. How does the knowledge that God will strengthen you according to His plans give you hope for the future?
6. Looking at verse 17, how was the gift received by Paul ultimately for the Philippians' benefit (cf. Titus 3: 14)?
7. What meaning does "sacrifice" have in the present context (v. 18 cf. Hebrews 13: 16)?
8. The Philippians support Paul in his troubles through financial aid. Discuss the ways we can support our church pastors and missionaries:
 - a) as individuals
 - b) as a cell group
 - c) as a church.

The contentment that God provides is not tied to the situation in which we are placed, but to the unchanging truth of the Gospel by which we have been redeemed.

Prayer Point

- Pray through the truths of this passage using the acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).
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