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LEADER'S GUIDE

Paul

To Live Is Christ



To me, to live is Christ. . . . PHILIPPIANS 1:21



Paul To Live Is Christ

LEADER'S GUIDE

by

Jeff Stam



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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ISBN 978-1-59255-485-0

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How to Use This Guide

Discover Life is a small group outreach Bible study series. It gives members of the church a way to reach out to friends, relatives, neighbors, work associates, and others who need to come to Christ, grow spiritually in Christ, and enjoy the fellowship of the body of Christ.

Here are ten strategy guidelines to keep in mind when organizing Discover Life groups.

1. **Meet at times that fit people's schedules.** Don't expect all the people you want to reach to come together at the same time or on the same day. Personal schedules will vary a great deal. A church that wants to reach many people should have groups meeting in the morning, in the evening, on Saturday, at lunchtime, and so on.
2. **Lead the groups with a team of at least two.** Make sure you have leadership depth and strength. Group leaders are busy people. Work and family activities usually take precedence over Bible study. Leadership will be stronger and the group will more likely benefit from the leaders' combined strengths and giftedness. Leaders working together can share the load of leadership and give each other mutual support.
3. **Meet at convenient, nonthreatening places.** People who don't go to church will feel more comfortable in a familiar environment such as a restaurant, boardroom, or conference room than in a church. Try to meet in "neutral territory" where people will feel comfortable.
4. **Invite prospective members for a definite short-term period.** Many people are wary of long-term commitments. After the first series of lessons is complete, take a break and invite people to another study in a month or so. Keep repeating this as long as members are interested. Discover Life material is designed for short-term studies.
5. **Require no advance homework or prior knowledge of the Bible.** Requiring homework can build a cycle of discouragement and defeat among participants. Busy people who are not able to prepare will stay home rather than risk embarrassment. To avoid this, do not make advance assignments. Make clear that the group will start fresh with the material at the beginning of each meeting.

Tear the lesson pages out of the study guides and hand them out as single sheets at the beginning of each meeting. Begin with the approach question (the first question) to help participants warm up to the subject. Read the first Bible passage and then allow a brief silent study time so that members can get acquainted with the material and prepare to answer the first inductive questions. The AfterWord material (on the backside of the lesson page) provides optional material for reflection after you've finished with the main lesson.

Be careful not to assume members' prior knowledge of the Bible. Participants without a church background will soon feel left out of any discussion that draws on prior knowledge. Stick with the passage at hand and relate it to everyday life.

6. **Recruit by personally inviting friends and acquaintances.** Very few people come to a group through newspaper ads, posters, or flyer announcements. The most successful invitation is a personal one from a friend or acquaintance who offers to take a person to the group meeting.
7. **Put a lot of effort into building relationships.** The concern of people who come will not be "How much can I learn here?" but "How well am I accepted as a member of this group?" They will not so much ask "Is this true?" as "How does this group make me feel?" Respond to their concern by reaching out to them and becoming a channel of Christ's love to them. Invest time and energy before, after, and between meetings; get to know those who come. Good meetings are not enough; you need growing relationships too.
8. **Use appropriate materials.** Most people are used to dealing with letter-size, black-on-white pages. Discover Life material is designed with this in mind. Including the Bible passage as part of the lesson avoids embarrassment for people who may not be familiar with the Bible, and it gives everyone a common version to work from.
9. **Help group members discover truths from the Bible for themselves.** People don't like to be told what to think. They prefer to make up their minds after examining the evidence. They are also more likely to believe what they discover for themselves. The inductive questions in the Discover Life lessons make it possible for group members to discover for themselves what the Bible says. The leader's material encourages the leader to keep asking questions as the group moves more deeply into the material and applies the truth to their lives.
10. **Make sure that Bible truths are related to life.** When studying the Bible, people are usually concerned about knowing what it means for their life. They tend to lose interest in an abstract discussion. To help keep the discussions life-oriented, we include a number of application questions in the leader's guide.

Optional Study Elements

Depending on the goals and makeup of your group, the Optional Prayer Time and Optional Accountability Question may be incorporated into your Bible study. These two elements are for establishing a more relational dynamic in your group.

Optional Prayer Time. In the leader guide, each session includes a suggested format for group sharing and prayer. Be sure you create an environment in which individuals don't feel forced to share prayer requests or to pray aloud. Never ask someone to pray without checking with them ahead of time. You may experiment to find an approach that works best for you. In some cases you may ask individuals to pair off to pray. If you meet in a public place such as a restaurant, you may want to use index cards on which group members can write their prayer items and then have members swap cards for individual prayer throughout the week.

Optional Accountability Question. For spiritual growth to occur, it's essential that group members apply lessons to their own lives. That's the purpose of the Optional Accountability Question at the end of each lesson in the leader's guide. Use or adapt the question in a way that fits your group, or feel free to supply a question of your own.

Accountability suggests follow-up. There are several ways you might follow up on the Optional Accountability Question. One is to have individuals write their accountability issue for the week on an index card and hand it to the leader. The next time you meet, the cards can be distributed to the group members, who pair off for a few minutes to discuss how things went. Another approach is for each group member to hand the card to another individual. Then at the next meeting those two can pair up to share for a few minutes.

And Finally

Whether you are leading a group in your workplace, in your home, or in another setting, the following guidelines can help you in your leadership role.

- 1. Pray.** Prayer is essential in preparing you for leadership. Pray for God's direction in making organizational decisions. Pray for the Holy Spirit's direction regarding whom to invite, and ask the Spirit to prepare the hearts of those who will be invited. Pray faithfully for group members, and request that your eyes be opened to the truths in God's Word and how best to communicate those truths to your small group.
- 2. Prepare.** First, **prepare yourself.** The leader's material for each discussion reinforces the discovery method of Bible study. We suggest highlighting key phrases or questions for easy reference as you prepare. Take your leader's guide with you to the group and be relaxed and informal about using it while you are leading. If you freely show you have extra help in preparing for the discussion, your group members may dare to ask their questions more readily. They'll see it's not that you're so smart and they're ignorant, or that the discussion is just an unguided free-for-all, but that it is planned and focused. Be sure to cultivate group discussion rather than acting as a teacher with the "answer book."

Second, **prepare your group.** State the ground rules before you begin the group. You may need to repeat them as new members join. This will help group members know how the discussion will proceed and what will be expected of them. Here are some basic guidelines:

- We're here to see what the Bible has to say, not to argue opinions.
 - No previous experience in studying the Bible is needed.
 - This discussion will not require homework or outside preparation.
 - Respect the confidentiality of the group and affirm each group member. "What we say here stays here."
- 3. Persevere.** It takes time to build relationships. Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in your group members, and that they will respond. Take into account that the Spirit's work in each person may be different, depending on personalities, life circumstances, and other factors. Some group members may be eager to learn and grow spiritually. Others may be wary, especially if they have been mistreated by Christians in the past. Still others may be in such pain that they'll come to the group because they are desperate for friendship and a sense of community. Accept the people God gives you—unconditionally. Often God's timetable is not the same as ours, but be confident that God will use your efforts. Modeling Christ's love may be the most important thing you do. Relax and watch the Spirit work!

Introduction

Paul was dedicated to serving God with all he could muster. He grew up as a Jew in the Roman Empire during the first-century A.D., and he became a blue-ribbon member of a powerful group called the Pharisees. In those days the Pharisees were among the most respected people in all Jewish society. They were scholars, teachers, and rulers of the people of God.

There was a major problem with the Pharisees, though. They refused to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. That meant there was also a problem with Paul, who aimed to be a Pharisee among Pharisees. Paul grew to hate believers in Jesus so much that he wanted to destroy them. He put all his energy and determination into destroying those people and the church of Jesus Christ.

But Paul found that his hatred and hard work were no match for the love of God. One day Jesus showed Paul that he really is the Son of God—and Paul was never the same again. In fact, Paul became one of the most extraordinary Christian examples the world has ever seen.

The book of Acts records most of the biblical account of Paul's life; that book was written by Luke, who accompanied Paul in some of his travels. Other pieces of Paul's story come out in letters that he wrote, many of which are included in the New Testament.

As you study these lessons about Paul, you'll notice that he really was a remarkable example: a dedicated follower, a faithful witness, a church planter, a missionary to people of all nations. Though persecuted and in prison, Paul even brought the good news of Jesus to kings and queens and their palace workers!

But let's not stop there. Paul himself would want to make sure that whatever we learned from his example would point us straight to Jesus and his love.



The Person God Uses

Lesson 1

Purpose

To recognize that God uses very imperfect people who are aware of their sinfulness but also know they are forgiven as a free gift from God.

1. Have you ever heard of the apostle (or saint) Paul? If so, what do you know about him, and how would you compare yourself to him?

2. Acts 7:57b-60

^{57b}They all rushed at [Stephen], ⁵⁸dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul [Paul].

⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1-3

¹And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 9:1-2

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Introductory Comments

In conversations about Paul (Saul) people usually refer to his life's work as a missionary. But here we see a slice of Paul's life that often goes unmentioned. This picture of Paul from the book of Acts can help us see just how flawed he was before Jesus called him to serve.

You may want to note that in the Bible this man is referred to by his Jewish name, Saul, until he goes on his first missionary journey (see Acts 13:9). After that point he is always called Paul, a Greek name that he may have been given at birth (since he was born a Roman citizen—Acts 22:28). Using his Greek name may have helped Paul connect more easily with Gentiles (people who were not Jews), to whom he brought the good news of Jesus. At that time, Greek was the common language of the Roman Empire.

Questions

a. How would you describe the character of Paul (Saul) at this time of his life?

This man seemed to be obsessed. He was full of bitterness and hate. He was willing to see people torn from their families, thrown into jail, and even killed for being followers of Jesus.

If some group members aren't familiar with the story of Jesus, take a few moments to explain that he is the Son of God who became human to free us from slavery to sin and death. Through his death, Jesus paid the price of our sin, and now all who believe in him will have eternal life with God. (You may want to point out John 3:16 as you explain.) God's traditional people of Israel (the Jews) didn't accept Jesus as this Savior, so they had him executed for claiming to be the Son of God. Paul was one of the most dedicated Jews at that time, so he agreed with persecuting all who followed Jesus and even having them killed. He believed they all broke God's law and had to be punished.

b. Have you ever reacted strongly to something only to find out later that you were wrong? What happened in that situation?

Paul was zealous and passionate about what he thought was right. He thought he was doing God's will by persecuting people who believed in Jesus as the Son of God.

- What character traits do you have that can be both negative or positive? (For example, the drive to persevere can be good, but that same drive can lead to dangerous stubbornness.)
- What makes the difference between a positive or a negative result?

If we follow the way of love for both God and others, we'll get the best possible results. That's the way of true wisdom. If you have time, read Luke 10:25-37 and reflect on it together.

3. 1 Timothy 1:12-16

¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Introductory Comments

Obviously a significant change occurred in Paul's life. While it is true that God uses sinners, God delights in using saved sinners. Paul was more aware than anyone else of the "before and after" change he experienced. We'll talk about how the change took place in our next lesson.

Questions

a. How does Paul view his former self in this letter to Timothy?

Paul recognizes that he was a blasphemer (a person who defiles the name of God), a persecutor, and a violent man. He describes himself as "the worst of sinners."

- Have you ever felt that your sins were so bad that you were beyond God's love and forgiveness?
- Do you suppose Paul was amazed that God had saved him? Explain.

b. How did Paul receive God's grace and love?

- Through whom did Paul receive these amazing blessings?
- Where else do people look for love and acceptance?
- What's the difference between God's love and other sources of love?

c. What was God's purpose in showing mercy to Paul (v. 16)?

- What has God shown to others through you? Or what might God want to "display"? (Think of talents and gifts you have and how God may want to use them to show his love to others.)

Additional Notes

- *Blasphemer*—Paul's use of this word in 1 Timothy 1:13 refers to saying or doing something that insults or dishonors God. *Blasphemy* can also refer to claiming to be God (Mark 14:60-65).
- *Grace* refers to receiving something we don't deserve, and *mercy* refers to not receiving something we do deserve (such as punishment).

4. Philippians 3:4b-11

^{4b}If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in

Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Introductory Comments

Paul had significant religious "credentials" before becoming a Christ-follower. But he learned that nothing compares to knowing Christ.

Questions

a. What did Paul put his confidence in before becoming a Christ-follower?

- What religious deeds or behaviors do people put their confidence in today?
- What things have you put your confidence in?

b. When Paul says he now counts all these things as a loss, what is he comparing them to? Why?

- What makes knowing Jesus as Lord so valuable?
- What does knowing Jesus as Lord look like in everyday life?

c. What two sources of righteousness does Paul mention? Is it possible to earn our own righteousness? Explain.

- What's the source of true righteousness?

Additional Notes

- There has been much debate about the place of good works or deeds in the Christian life. Paul makes clear that we are saved by faith in Christ, "not by works" (Eph. 2:8-9), and then he explains that good works are a purposeful result in Christian living once we are saved (Eph. 2:10).
- *Righteousness (justification)* is a legal term. A legal price was paid (Christ's blood—Rom. 5:6-9) to satisfy the penalty of our sin (death—Rom. 6:23). While we may not feel righteous or even act righteous at times (though the Spirit works in us to change us), God accepts us as righteous, based on what Christ has done on our behalf (Rom. 3:20-26).

Main Ideas

- Paul (Saul), when God chose to use him, was a sinner. Though he was very religious, he acted in opposition to God's will. God uses people who sin.
- God can best use people who are aware of what they were before meeting Christ and what they are (and can become) because of knowing Christ. God delights in using saved sinners, who see how much he has done in and through them.

Good News

Though we all miss the mark (because we still sin), God wants to use us for his purposes. Because God is God and we are saved through all he has done for us in Jesus Christ, we all have the potential of being used for great things in God's kingdom.

Optional Prayer Time

As leader, you may want to guide the group in a closing prayer during this first lesson. If there is already a level of trust and familiarity among group members, you may also want to ask for a sharing of prayer requests—and perhaps invite everyone to participate in the prayer, if they wish. In connection with this lesson, be sure to include thanksgiving for the ways God wants to work in our lives.

Optional Accountability Question

What is one thing I struggle with that makes me feel unworthy of being used by God?



The Person God Uses

Lesson 1

Acts 7:57b-60

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⁵⁸dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul [Paul].

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Acts 9:1-2

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

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Philippians 3:4b-11

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Questions

1. Have you ever heard of the apostle (or saint) Paul? If so, what do you know about him, and how would you compare yourself to him?
2. Acts 7:57b-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2
 - a. How would you describe the character of Paul (Saul) at this time of his life?
 - b. Have you ever reacted strongly to something only to find out later that you were wrong? What happened in that situation?
3. 1 Timothy 1:12-16
 - a. How does Paul view his former self in this letter to Timothy?
 - b. How did Paul receive God’s grace and love?
 - c. What was God’s purpose in showing mercy to Paul (v. 16)?
4. Philippians 3:4b-11
 - a. What did Paul put his confidence in before becoming a Christ-follower?
 - b. When Paul says he now counts all these things as a loss, what is he comparing them to? Why?
 - c. What two sources of righteousness does Paul mention? Is it possible to earn our own righteousness? Explain.

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afterWord

Who Was Paul?

From the Bible and other sources we know a few details about Paul, but not much. We know that Paul was single (some feel he hinted that he wouldn't mind being married but realized it would have been difficult, considering his calling). He was well educated under Gamaliel, one of the most influential rabbis of his day.

Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, so he may have come from a family of wealth or influence. He was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia (modern-day Turkey). He also had a nephew who lived in Jerusalem. Paul suffered from some sort of illness, possibly with his sight, which he refers to as his "thorn in the flesh." Though he was a good thinker, he claimed that he was not a very gifted speaker.

One of the most personal glimpses we get of Paul is found in Romans 7. There he talks of his struggle with sin, describing it as a battle that wages war inside him.

What is a Pharisee?

Paul identifies himself as a "Pharisee" in Philippians 3:5. The Pharisees were an elitist group of Jewish religious leaders in Palestine during the New Testament period. The origin of this sect is probably connected with the development of the Hasidim ("faithful ones"), a group of traditionalist Jews who did not want the surrounding Greek culture to influence Jewish society. The Hasidim developed in the second century B.C. after a Jewish revolt freed the people from their Greek oppressors for about 70 years.

By the time of Jesus' ministry (around A.D. 30), the Pharisees had become a part of the Jewish ruling council (John 3:1), which governed the Jewish people in all religious

matters while under the rule of the Roman Empire. Rome had seized power in 93 B.C.

Having high morals and a strong desire to obey God's law, the Pharisees were highly respected citizens in their day. But Jesus often criticized them for paying more attention to rules than to the heart of the law: love for God and love for neighbors. For example, the fourth commandment stated, "On [the Sabbath] you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:10). In reaction to this, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had come up with more than 1,500 rules on Sabbath-keeping that went far beyond God's command. One of these even stated that on the Sabbath a Pharisee could not rescue someone who was drowning!

The Pharisees and other rulers refused to listen to Jesus because he didn't fit their idea of the Messiah who had come to deliver God's people. Eventually they plotted to kill Jesus because he claimed (truthfully) to be the Son of God.

We find out in the book of Acts that eventually a number of Pharisees became followers of Jesus (Acts 15:5), but they still wanted people from other nations (Gentiles) to follow the law of Moses. Paul opposed these "Judaizers," and they often made trouble for him in his work with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14; 5:6-15).

—compiled from the *NIV Study Bible* (Zondervan, 1985); *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Baker Book House, 1988); and www.wikipedia.org

A Person God Used

Most of us wouldn't recognize the name of Edward Kimball. He was a Sunday school teacher in Boston who wanted to help a teenage boy of 17 who attended his class. The boy's uncle had said he could work in his shoe shop if he attended the Mount Vernon Congregational Church, where Kimball taught Sunday school.

One day in April 1855, Kimball went to the shoe shop and told the teenager about the love of Christ and the way of salvation. God worked through Kimball, and

the teenager, Dwight L. Moody, received Christ into his heart.

Moody went on to become one of the best-known evangelists of the 19th century, leading thousands of people to faith in Christ throughout the United States and Great Britain. He also had great influence on the modern-day Sunday school and evangelistic mission movements.

—compiled from www.moodyministries.net, www.biblebelievers.com, and www.wikipedia.org

Like Andrew

We don't hear much more about Andrew except that he brought people to Jesus, including his brother, Simon Peter (John 1:41-42; 12:22). And Simon Peter went on to be one of the greatest influences in the history of Christianity. We cannot all be Simon Peters, but we can all do what Andrew did—we can bring someone to Jesus.

Albert McMakin was a twenty-four-year-old who had come to faith in Christ. He was so full of enthusiasm that he filled a truck with people and took them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. There was a good-looking farmer's son whom he especially wanted to bring to a meeting, but this young man was hard to persuade. He was busy falling in and out of love with different girls and did not seem to be attracted to Christianity. Eventually, Albert McMakin managed to persuade him to come by asking him to drive the truck. When they arrived, Albert's guest decided to go in to the meeting. He was spellbound and began to have thoughts he had never known before. He went back again and again until one night he went forward and gave his life to Jesus Christ. That man, the driver of the truck, was Billy Graham. The year was 1934. Since then Billy Graham has led thousands to faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot all be like Billy Graham, but we can all be like Albert McMakin—we can all bring our friends to Jesus.

—Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha: Questions of Life* (Cook Communications, 2006), pp. 180-181. Used with permission.