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Discover Your Bible Series

Discover
PHILIPPIANS

LEADER GUIDE



LEADER GUIDE

Discover **PHILIPPIANS**



by
Neva Evenhouse
and
Sylvia Boomsma


FAITH
ALIVE[®]
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage.

To avoid giving the impression that you have an answer book or that you know all the answers, we suggest that you not take the leader guide to the Bible study session. After all, the answers are in the Bible, and you are a guide to help your group find the answers in God's Word.

Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Try to offer at least a few minutes for

reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*. This book is a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leading with Love in the Coffee Break Core Values series is another important tool for leadership development.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the many leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

- write to Discover Your Bible at

2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE	or	P.O. Box 5070
Grand Rapids, MI 49560		STN LCD 1
		Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.SmallGroupMinistries.org (for training advice and general information)
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Introduction

Have you ever wanted to be a star? Paul's letter to the Philippians can help. But it's not about stars primping in dressing rooms or showing up at Hollywood parties. Paul urges believers in Jesus to "shine like stars in the universe" as they "hold out the word of life" in homes, offices, factories, schools, hospitals, neighborhoods—even in prisons—spreading the light of God's love in this broken world (Phil. 2:15-16).

As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul had learned the art of shining in the world's darkness. When he wrote this letter, Paul was imprisoned and awaiting trial, most likely in Rome around A.D. 61. Even under those circumstances, Paul let his light shine by sharing the gospel with the people around him and keeping in touch with churches he had planted.

In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul shares with his Christian friends much of what he learned about Christian living. The tone of his letter is loving and personal; the Philippians, whom Paul calls his dear friends and his "joy and crown" (4:1), held a special place of affection in his heart. They were also especially supportive of Paul through their financial help, prayer, and commitment to the gospel (1:4-5; 4:14-18).

Though written to first-century Christians, Paul's letter is timeless. It speaks to all believers everywhere of the importance of standing firm in the faith, deepening a personal relationship with Christ, living in humility and unity with other believers, and grasping the peace and joy we can experience in Jesus Christ, whatever the circumstances. It teaches us as God's children how to be blameless and pure, how to shine like stars for Jesus, who calls us to be "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14).

Glossary of Terms

- Benjamin (tribe of)**—one of the twelve tribes, or divisions, of the Old Testament Israelite nation (see also **Israel**). Paul was born into this tribe.
- Caesar's household**—the emperor's family and all who served at the palace in Rome—probably including palace officials, secretaries, clerks, servants, dependents, and slaves.
- Day of Jesus Christ**—the day when Christ will return.
- circumcision**—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded the Old Testament Israelites to use circumcision as an outward sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives. In the New Testament, circumcision is replaced with baptism.
- deacons**—church members chosen to collect and distribute gifts of money and other necessities to serve people in need.
- depraved**—corrupt, wicked, perverted.
- drink offering**—wine or some other drink poured out as an offering to God. In the Old Testament, Israel's priests sometimes poured a drink offering over an animal or something else that was to be sacrificed.
- Epaphroditus**—a man from Philippi who had brought gifts to Paul and was very helpful to him in his imprisonment. Epaphroditus probably also served as the courier who brought Paul's letter to the other Christians at Philippi (Phil. 2:25-30).
- faith**—taking God at his word, "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1). True faith consists of accepting as true all that God has revealed in the Bible and being confident that all one's sins are forgiven through the saving work of Christ.
- gospel**—from the Greek word meaning "good news." The gospel is the message that the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, took the punishment for our sins upon himself, dying on the cross and rising again for our salvation to give us new life forever with God.
- grace**—God's kindness, undeserved favor, and forgiving love.
- Hebrews**—the people of **Israel**, also known later as the Jews.
- humility**—the state of humbling oneself to serve God in obedience and gratitude in response to God's salvation in Christ (see Phil. 2:1-13).
- Israel**—the Old Testament chosen people of God, descended from Abraham, through whom God promised to bless all peoples (Gen. 12:3). Jesus the Savior, who was born into the Israelite tribe of Judah, fulfilled that promise by saving us from sin.

- Jesus Christ**—the second person of the Trinity, equal to and one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As the sinless Son of God, Jesus gave his life to pay for our sin.
- legalistic righteousness**—a misconception of righteousness concerned with technical obedience to the law while disregarding the heart of God’s law: love.
- overseers**—also called elders; church members responsible to see that the Word of God is preached and order is maintained in the church.
- palace guard**—members of the elite imperial regiment assigned to the emperor’s palace.
- Pharisees**—Jewish leaders who dedicated their lives to studying, teaching, and ruling by the Old Testament law. Many of the Pharisees claimed to obey the law perfectly. Though some of them may have had sincere motives, Jesus often rebuked them for their hypocrisy (see Matt. 23).
- righteous, righteousness**—being right with God, perfectly conformed to God’s will and free from any guilt or sin. God regards believers as righteous through faith in Christ as their one Savior from sin (Rom. 3:21-24).
- sacrifice**—the act of offering something precious to God or in God’s name to show gratitude for all God has done for us. To fulfill the law’s requirement of the sacrifice of a life to pay for sin (Lev. 16), Christ gave his life as the one sacrifice for all our sins; now all who believe in him can receive God’s forgiveness.
- saints**—from the Greek word meaning “set apart for God.” In the New Testament it refers to all who live by faith in Jesus Christ.
- salvation**—eternal deliverance from death and punishment for sin. God gives salvation to all who repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
- Spirit (Spirit of Jesus Christ, Spirit of God)**—the third person of the Trinity, equal to and one with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, works true faith in believers’ hearts, empowers them to live for God, and ensures that they will receive all God’s promises.
- Timothy**—a fellow worker who traveled extensively with the apostle Paul and was with him when he wrote to the Philippians.
- Word of life**—the message of salvation to new life in Christ (see **gospel**).

Lesson 1

Philippians 1:1-11

From the First Day Until Now

Introductory Notes

Paul begins his letter to the Philippians with joy and thanksgiving. Other churches he wrote to were struggling with persecution and inner turmoil, but the Philippians were holding steady and growing spiritually—a cause for great joy for Paul in his work as a missionary. In this letter Paul reports on his missionary work and comments on personal and practical matters. Because the church in Philippi was relatively free of the threats that caused Paul much concern over other churches, the tone of this letter is more relaxed and joyful than that of some others. As you study this lesson with your group, try to catch the enthusiasm of Paul, who, even though imprisoned in Rome, is overjoyed by the reports he has heard from his supporters in Philippi.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session, or it may fit better at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

Think of some people you've grown to appreciate because they've been helpful, caring, and reliable, perhaps especially at a time when you were in need. What did they do for you? Why? If you sent them a letter today, what would you say to them?

1. *Philippians 1:1-2*

- a. *How does Paul describe himself and Timothy? What does this tell us about them?*

Paul describes himself and his coworker Timothy as “servants of Christ Jesus” (“slaves” is another possible translation that may actually be closer to Paul’s meaning). Timothy was Paul’s young coworker who traveled extensively with Paul and was present in Philippi when Paul first brought the good news of Jesus there (see Acts 16:1-15). Paul describes Timothy in Philippians 2:22 as a son in the faith.

- **What does it mean to be a servant (or slave) of Christ?**
- **Why do you think Paul identifies himself this way?**

For group members who might not be familiar with the story of Paul, you may want to describe briefly his single-mindedness in advancing the cause of Christ, a determination that becomes clearer in upcoming sections of Philippians 1. (See Acts 9-28.)

b. To whom is Paul writing?

Paul's use of the word "saints" to describe the Philippian believers may spark a discussion in your group. You might want to ask the group this question:

- **What comes to mind when you think of a saint?**

One person's comment illustrates a common misconception: "I thought you had to be dead to be a saint." For many people, the word *saint* refers to someone who is unworldly, extremely devoted and pious, and long dead. (The Roman Catholic Church, for example, generally reserves "sainthood" for a believer whose life has shown extraordinary faith, gifts, and service, and the church usually awards this status after the person has died.) According to the Bible, however, the word "saints" refers to all believers in Christ, including those who are very much alive. To help group members grasp Paul's meaning here, mention that some Bible translations use the term "God's people" instead of "saints." (See also the description of "saints" in the glossary.)

- **Why do you think Paul includes the phrase "in Christ Jesus"?**

Saints are living believers who are holy and set apart. They are not holy in themselves, but they are made holy in Christ by believing in him as Savior and Lord. And because they belong to God, they stand out from what is ungodly in the world they live in, as Jesus did. Being a saint is possible only through belief in Christ Jesus, who gives us power through the Holy Spirit to live holy lives for God.

c. What does Paul want for his readers? What does this mean?

The opening of Paul's letter concludes with a blessing: "Grace and peace to you. . . ."

- **What is the meaning of grace? Of peace?**

- **Where do these blessings come from? How?**

As the glossary points out, grace is “God’s undeserved favor.” Another way to explain this is to think of GRACE as an acronym for **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**. *Peace* results from God’s grace to sinners—and it is more than just the absence of trouble or conflict. Peace is a total sense of well-being that results from oneness with and trust in God and does not depend on the circumstances of life (see Isa. 26:3; Phil. 4:4-13). It’s important to understand that the grace and peace referred to in the Bible come only from God, as Paul makes clear.

2. *Philippians 1:3-8*

a. *How does Paul regard the Philippians? Why does he feel this way?*

- **Why is Paul thankful for these believers?**
- **What is it about them that makes them dear to Paul?**

Paul feels a bond with the Philippian Christians, as we can see in such phrases as “your partnership in the gospel” (Phil. 1:5) and “all of you share in God’s grace with me” (1:7). Later in the letter Paul also mentions several ways in which the Philippians have supported him (2:25; 4:10-19). At this early point in the letter Paul is emphasizing that the Philippians are Paul’s coworkers in spreading the gospel and that their own reception of the gospel (recorded in Acts 16) has led to the blessing of genuine and active faith.

- **What is “the gospel”?**

The word *gospel* literally means “good news,” the news of God’s free gift of salvation and eternal life for all who believe in Jesus Christ. (Group members may want to turn briefly to John 3:16 for a one-verse description of this good news.)

- **How are the Philippians Paul’s partners in the gospel?**
- **What does Paul mean by “the first day”?**

The Philippians accepted the good news from Paul the first time he stopped there (Acts 16:12), and they have remained active in their faith.

- **Why does Paul appear to be so bonded to the Philippian Christians?**
- **Who or what is the focus of their bonding?**

People committed to a common cause can become deeply bonded to each other, and clearly Paul feels a profound spiritual bond with the Philippians who share in the cause of spreading the gospel. Most important, Paul and the Philippians are profoundly bonded because of the fellowship they share in Christ. In connection with this we can see that Paul's confidence in this church is founded on God's work in and through the Philippians.

b. What is Paul confident of? What do you think this means?

Because Paul can see evidence of the Philippians' commitment to the gospel, he is confident that the good work begun in them will continue.

- **What is this good work? What makes it evident?**

The good work Paul refers to is the spiritual growth produced in the Philippians by the Holy Spirit and expressed by their faithful service for the cause of Christ.

- **What does Paul mean by "the day of Christ Jesus"?**

You may want to read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Revelation 21:1-6 if some members of your group are not familiar with the Bible's teaching about "the day" of Christ's return to fully establish God's kingdom on earth (see also Rev. 22:1-5). This term will come up again in this study, so be sure each person has at least a basic understanding of its meaning.

- **According to Paul, what will God do among the Philippians until the day of Christ Jesus?**

God's good work among them will continue. As Jesus declares in Matthew 24:14, the gospel will be proclaimed "in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Committed believers will continue to grow spiritually during their earthly lives (2 Cor. 3:18; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:13-2:12).

- **Do you think missionaries today have the same kinds of feelings for their supporters as Paul did for the Philippians?**

If there's time and group members are interested, you may want to discuss how Paul's words might connect with missionaries today.

Paul clearly had a deep, godly love for the Christians at Philippi. They had shown faithful care and concern for him and were especially helpful to Paul while he was "in chains" (Phil. 1:7; see 2:25; 4:14-18).

- **What situations might be most encouraging to missionaries today? What situations might be discouraging?**
- **In what ways can their supporters be most helpful?**

3. *Philippians 1:9-11*

a. *What is Paul praying for in these verses?*

- **What is the love Paul mentions here?**

As you answer this question together, encourage group members to express in their own words Paul's prayer for the Philippians. It's important to understand each phrase in connection with living for Christ.

It's clear from earlier verses that the Philippians already have a great love for God and the gospel. And Paul is praying that as this love grows, these believers will grow in their knowledge and understanding of God so that they can live more and more faithfully for God in Christ.

- **How can love lead to greater knowledge and depth of insight?**

Commentator William Barclay explains, "If we love any person, we want to learn more and more about him; if we love Jesus, we will want every day to learn more and more about him and his truth. Love is always sensitive to the mind and heart of the one it loves. If we really love Jesus, we will be sensitive to his will and his desires. Real love leads to knowledge and obedience increasingly every day."

b. *Why does Paul want this for the Philippians?*

- **What does it mean to be discerning?**
- **How can a discerning person be pure and blameless?**
- **What do you think Paul wants his readers to be discerning about?**

Paul wants the Philippians' discernment and holiness to continue increasing throughout their lives so that they will be everything God wants them to be when Christ returns. This is not something the Philippians can do on their own. It results only from the work of God's Spirit in their lives until the day that work is completed—either at the end of their earthly lives or when Christ returns, whichever comes first.

c. *According to verse 11, what will be the final result of Paul's prayer for the Philippian believers? For God?*

The final result of Paul's prayer here is that the Philippians will be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ."

- **What is the "fruit of righteousness"?**
- **How does a person receive it?**
- **How does Christ provide it?**

If you have time, you may want to read John 15:1-8. In these verses Jesus makes clear the connection between living close to God in Christ and bearing "fruit" that reflects the Christlike, godly character growing in all believers. You may also want to read Galatians 5:22-25, which highlights the fruit of the Spirit's work in our lives and shows that righteousness comes from the work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. (If necessary, point group members to the glossary for a definition of *righteousness*.)

- **How do fruitful lives give glory and praise to God?**

When believers live fruitful lives such as Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-25, ultimately God is praised and glorified. (See also 1 Cor. 13:4-7.)

- **How do we honor or dishonor God by our decisions and actions?**

4. *Summary*

- What does this passage tell us about Paul and his relationship with God? What seems to be the motivating force in Paul's life?*
- What do these verses tell us about the Philippians? About their relationship with Paul?*
- Why is Paul certain that the Philippians' faith is genuine and will continue?*

Paul communicates through his own example as well as through his teaching. Group members can probably already see that Paul's love, strength, and confidence result from his relationship with God. Even in Paul's comment about being "in chains" (Phil. 1:7) we can sense his trust in God and his ability to depend on God for his needs.

As you discuss the faithfulness and good example of the Philippians, focus on what God has done and will continue to do in their lives. Clearly they are already bearing "the fruit of righteousness" (1:11) and will continue to do so as they increase in insight, discernment, and holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover for yourself what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions. If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or if you would like more information on how to start a small group Bible study,

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