

# Philippians Overview - All for Christ Jesus

Philippians is a letter full of joy, affection and encouragement. The apostle Paul had planted the church in the Roman city of Philippi (you can read about it in Acts 16), then visited twice more. The philippians had supported his gospel work with prayer (1:19), finances (4:15-20) and by sending Epaphroditus to minister to his needs (2:25). The letter is full of mutual affection. The letter is also profoundly challenging. Paul addresses some specific issues in Philippi. He also lets us into his thinking, his values and priorities which he also urges the church to imitate.

**Read through the whole letter**      (You might like to use the 2 page version below)

1. What is your overall impression of the letter? What stood out to you?
2. What was confusing for you? (Don't try to solve the problems in this first overview study).
3. What does the letter tell us about the situation of Paul and of the Philippians?
4. What repeated ideas / words did you notice?
5. In the letter Jesus is mentioned over 60 times. In what different ways does Paul indicate that Jesus (and the Gospel about him) shapes his thinking, values and/or behaviour?
6. What are the main things (other than Christ Jesus) that tend to capture the hearts and minds, and shape the lives of people today (including us)?
7. How would you summarize the main message of the letter? Can you identify a key verse?
8. From this overview study - what has most intrigued, encouraged, comforted or challenged you?
9. Pray together about what you have seen from Philippians.

# Philippians 1:1-11 - Our Purpose

1. In our culture people sometimes say “I wish you all the best”. What do people commonly assume this “best” would look like?

Read Philippians 1:1-11.

2. How does Paul ‘define’ himself (with Timothy) and the people at Philippi? How do you think we might be different if we defined our core identity in this way?
3. From verses 3-6, why does Paul always give thanks for the Philippians? Do you think it’s simply because they have been supporting him? Who or what is at the centre of their relationship?
4. Why does Paul have the Philippians on his heart (v 7-8)? Can you think of examples where being ‘partners’ in something cultivates deep affection? What do you think Paul means when he says he misses the Philippians with “the affection of Christ Jesus”?
5. In verses 9-11 Paul tells the Philippians what he prays for them.
  - a. Why does Paul pray for the Philippians’ love to grow in knowledge and depth of insight? What reality and priority shapes his prayers for them?
  - b. How might love growing in knowledge and depth of insight, look different to love that isn’t? Can you think of some examples from everyday life?
  - c. What could you do to see your love growing in knowledge and depth of insight?
  - d. To what extent can we say that Paul’s priorities reflected here in his prayers, should also be our priorities for ourselves and others? How might we cultivate hearts and minds that reflect this priority?
  - e. What can we learn from Paul’s prayer to shape our own prayers for ourselves, our church and others? What could we do to pray more like this?
6. Pray together about what you have seen from Philippians.

# **Philippians 1:12-30 - Our Passion**

1. Based on how people spend their time, money and effort, what are people in our society (and we ourselves) most passionate about?
  
  
  
2. Read Philippians 1:12-30. From verses 12-20...
  - a. What is Paul most passionate about?
  
  - b. What does the text indicate about why he is so committed to this, and how it leaves him feeling even when he sacrifices personal comfort and security for it?
  
  - c. How do you think he came to think to think like this? (What truths do you think he reflects upon?)
  
  
  
3. In verses 21-26 Paul contemplates whether he would rather be executed, or continue living.
  - a. What does he see as the pros and cons of each, and which does he ultimately decide is better?
  
  - b. How might this passage help us as we think of believers who have died?
  
  - c. What does Paul's conclusion reveal about the connection between serving Christ and loving people?
  
  
  
4. Many people see verses 27-30 as the key verses, summarizing the message of the letter.
  - a. From these verses, what will living lives 'worthy of the gospel of Christ' look like? How might these things look for us today?
  
  - b. In what ways does Paul expect that the passions of 'ordinary' Christians will be similar or different to his own?
  
  
  
5. Many Christians find Paul's priorities here confronting, even 'extreme'. Why do you think this is? What are the barriers for us in thinking and living with these values?
  
  
  
6. What could you do (practically) to cultivate these Christian passions (for Christ, for the gospel, and for the progress and joy of others) in yourself and in our church?
  
  
  
7. Pray together about what you have seen from God's word.

# Philippians 2 - Our Model

1. Think about a Christian person you know, on whom you would like to model yourself? What is it about them that particularly makes you think of them?

After outlining his prayers (1:3-11) and describing what is happening with him (1:12-26), in verse 27 Paul begins to urge the Philippians to live their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). This verse is a heading for the whole section from 1:27-2:2:18. It includes both exhortations, and a series of examples or illustrations of what this looks like. In the centre of the section is the prime example of Jesus, our ultimate model.

2. Read Philippians 2. What exhortations are given (see esp v 1-5, 12-18 & 29-30)? What motivations are also given for these, and what results will follow (from the text)?

Exhortations	Motivations	Results

3. Which of these strikes you as particularly important for you/our church at this time?
4. At the centre of the passage is the beautiful summary of the gospel of Christ (v 5-11).
  - a. From verses 5-8 list precisely what Jesus did. What attitude did he display (see also v 1-4 & 12-17)?
  - b. From verses 9-11, what was God's response to the work of Christ, and his purpose in it all?
  - c. How do you think this passage functions in its context? (ie. Why do you think Paul includes it here? Or what impact is it meant to have on us?)
5. In verses 19-30 Paul tells us about two men he is sending to Philippi. Why is Paul sending them, and what does he tell us about their character? In what way do Timothy, Epaphroditus (and Paul himself) illustrate living lives shaped by the gospel of Christ?
6. How might living with the attitude of Christ Jesus make a difference to our homes, work or church?
7. To whom are you an example of Christian living? What is one thing you would like to work on to be more like Christ, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus?
8. Thank God for his grace in the gospel of Christ. Ask him to give you and our church the attitude of Christ Jesus?

# **Philippians 3 - Our Goal**

1. What are most common and/or powerful goals that shape the lives of people in our society?

Read Philippians 3.

2. In verses 1-9 Paul warns the Philippians about those who have and promote confidence in the flesh (relying on Jewish law keeping and religious credentials), rather than trusting in Christ.
  - a. Make a list of the different ways that Paul compares and contrasts these two ways of relating to God.
  - b. Why does Paul place such value on knowing Christ?
  - c. In what ways might we be tempted to put confidence in the flesh, and not value Christ as Paul does?
3. From verses 10-16 we see how Paul's trust in Jesus is not only for his final salvation, but it leads to a whole new direction in life.
  - a. What is Paul's goal in life? (See also v21)
  - b. To what extent does he see that he can/will reach this goal?
  - c. How does Paul pursue the goal in his present life?
  - d. In light of verse 15, what might sharing Paul's goal and pursuit of it look like for us? How do these verses encourage you to persevere?
4. In verses 17-21 Paul calls on the Philippians to follow his example, and that of those who live like him. He also warns the Philippians not to follow the bad examples of others.
  - a. What are the features of those who live as enemies of the cross (v 19)? Do you think Paul has in mind the same people he warns against in v 2-3, or people more broadly whose focus is on earthly things?
  - b. Where (or on whom) are Christian's lives focused? What will be the outcome?
  - c. Who are the people that you see following the example of Paul?
5. To what extent is Paul's goal also your goal in life? What could you do to keep moving forward towards maturity in this?
6. Pray together for each other in light of what you have read and discussed.

# Philippians 4 - Our Joy

In the final chapter of this letter, Paul provides specific instructions for the Philippians, and also encourages them about gifts they had sent him. The chapter is soaked with wonderful promises for Christians who put Paul's teaching into practice. There is much to understand and apply. The first three questions seek to draw out the main themes of the chapter. Question 4 digs deeper into specific issues, as time permits. (You may even want to take 2 sessions!).

Read Philippians 4.

1. From verses 1-7
  - a. What different things are the Philippians called to do "in the Lord"? What do you think this phrase means?
  - b. What encouragements and incentives are given?
  - c. Of the 5 instructions given, which seems most important for you/us at this time? What could you/we specifically do to make progress in the area you have identified?
2. From verses 8 & 9
  - a. What impact do you think it might make on your life if you dwelt more on the things listed?
  - b. What could you actually do (or not do) to help you put this into practice?
  - c. How might a deep appreciation of the promise at the end of verse 9 motivate us?
3. In verses 10-19, Paul describes his response to receiving gifts sent by the Philippians.
  - a. Why does Paul rejoice in the Lord greatly? (Is it because he was happy that his needs were met?)
  - b. How does the apostle understand the value/nature of the giving? How might this encourage us in our support of gospel work?
  - c. What do you think the promise of verse 19 really means? To what extent do you believe it?
  - d. How does the prayer of verse 20 help to keep a right perspective on the matter of giving and receiving?
4. Optional questions from verses 1-7 (as time permits)
  - a. What do you think it means for two Christians to "agree in the Lord"? Does this mean to agree in absolutely everything? What practical steps can be taken to help people (or yourself and others!) to agree? Why do you think this is so important?
  - b. How is it possible for Christians to "rejoice in the Lord always"? Is this commanding an emotion, and somewhat insensitive to people struggling through hard times? How might we put this into practice?
  - c. What might it look like to be known for your graciousness? Do you think the reminder that "the Lord is near" is an encouragement or a challenge?
  - d. What do we learn from verse 6 about how we can/should pray? According to verse 7, what is the ultimate benefit of being diligent in praying?
5. Stepping back to look at the whole chapter
  - a. What impression do you get of the character of a faithful Christian life? What would you say to someone who saw these instructions as a burden? In what ways is it attractive?
  - b. What impression do you get of God and how he relates to us?
6. Spend time praying together about the things you have seen and discussed tonight. Informed by this passage, for what can you praise or thank God? What can you ask of him?

# Philippians 1-4 (HCSB)

**1** Paul and Timothy, **slaves of Christ Jesus**: To all the **saints in Christ Jesus** who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the **Lord Jesus Christ**.

<sup>3</sup> I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you <sup>4</sup> always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of **Christ Jesus**. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and establishment of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the **affection of Christ Jesus**. <sup>9</sup> And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you can approve the things that are superior and can be pure and blameless in **the day of Christ**, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of **righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ** to the glory and praise of God.

<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has actually resulted in the advance of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard, and to everyone else, that my imprisonment is in the **cause of Christ**. <sup>14</sup> Most of the brothers **in the Lord** have gained confidence from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the message fearlessly. <sup>15</sup> To be sure, some **preach Christ** out of envy and strife, but others out of good will. <sup>16</sup> These do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel; <sup>17</sup> the others **proclaim Christ** out of rivalry, not sincerely, seeking to cause me anxiety in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup> What does it matter? Just that in every way, whether out of false motives or true, **Christ is proclaimed**. And in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice <sup>19</sup> because I know this will lead to my deliverance through your prayers and help from the **Spirit of Jesus Christ**. <sup>20</sup> My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now as always, with all boldness, **Christ** will be highly honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

<sup>21</sup> For me, **living is Christ** and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup> Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. <sup>23</sup> I am pressured by both. I have the **desire to depart and be with Christ**—which is far better—<sup>24</sup> but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. <sup>25</sup> Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that, because of me, **your confidence may grow in Christ Jesus** when I come to you again.

<sup>27</sup> Just one thing: Live your life in a manner worthy of the **gospel of Christ**. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith that comes from the gospel, <sup>28</sup> not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your deliverance—and this is from God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been given to you **on Christ's behalf** not only to **believe in Him**, but also to **suffer for Him**, <sup>30</sup> having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

**2** If then there is any encouragement in **Christ**, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, <sup>2</sup> fulfil my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

<sup>5</sup> Make your own **attitude that of Christ Jesus**, <sup>6</sup> who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. <sup>7</sup> Instead He **emptied Himself** by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He **had come as a man** in His external form, <sup>8</sup> He **humbled Himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason **God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name** that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of **Jesus** every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>12</sup> So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup> For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose. <sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world. <sup>16</sup> Hold firmly to the message of life. Then I can boast in the **day of Christ** that I didn't run or labour for nothing. <sup>17</sup> But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. <sup>18</sup> In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.

<sup>19</sup> Now I hope **in the Lord Jesus** to send Timothy to you soon so that I also may be encouraged when I hear news about you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; <sup>21</sup> all seek their own interests, **not those of Jesus Christ**. <sup>22</sup> But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father. <sup>23</sup> Therefore, I hope to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> I am convinced **in the Lord** that I myself will also come quickly.

<sup>25</sup> But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus—my brother, coworker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need—<sup>26</sup> since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup> Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another. <sup>28</sup> For this reason, I am very eager to send him so that you may rejoice when you see him again and I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup> Therefore, welcome him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in honour,<sup>30</sup> because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up what was lacking in your ministry to me.

**3** Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a protection for you. <sup>2</sup> Watch out for “dogs,” watch out for evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh—<sup>4</sup> although I once also had confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup> But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ - the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,<sup>11</sup> assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead,<sup>14</sup> I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. <sup>16</sup> In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. <sup>17</sup> Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.<sup>18</sup> For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things,<sup>20</sup> but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.

**4** So then, my brothers, you are dearly loved and longed for—my joy and crown. In this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. <sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, I also ask you, true partner to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things. <sup>9</sup> Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. <sup>12</sup> I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. <sup>13</sup> I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> Still, you did well by sharing with me in my hardship.

<sup>15</sup> And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. <sup>16</sup> For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. <sup>18</sup> But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup> Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. Those brothers who are with me greet you. <sup>22</sup> All the saints greet you, but especially those from Caesar's household. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.