



Philippians Core Group Study

Overview of the Study

This six-week Bible study is intended for use in core groups, or as a personal Bible study. It is also designed to work in conjunction with the MNL Sermon series on Philippians, “To Live is Christ,” should you desire to follow along week by week.

The study will not be all encompassing, but will be a jumping off point for further understanding of Paul’s letter to the Church in Philippi. Each week will focus on a different lesson, but all will stem out of the heart message of the letter: “To live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Philippi, an urban political center and Roman colony located at the eastern end of central Macedonia (currently Greece). Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled there after Paul’s divine vision of the Macedonian man begging him to “come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Upon arriving in Philippi, they looked for ways to share the gospel. One Sabbath, they went to a place of prayer and met Lydia, a worshiper of God and a wealthy cloth merchant. She responded to their message on Christ, as did the rest of her household! She would end up hosting the first house-church in Philippi. Later, they freed a slave girl from demonic oppression and were imprisoned as a result. Despite abuse and captivity, God used the situation for the salvation of their jailer and his family. The Philippian church was being born.

Although the length of their stay is unknown, the visit (in addition to a few subsequent visits) was long enough to establish a close spiritual friendship. It is on the basis of this friendship that we find the foundation for Philippians. There were two major reasons for Paul’s writing. First, the Philippian church was in the midst of persecution from Roman citizens who were fiercely allegiant to their emperor. They viewed the emperor as their “Lord and Savior”, whereas believers in Christ could not - hence, their rejection from Roman approval. Paul wanted to encourage them to hold strong to joy despite this persecution. In addition, Paul wrote because of internal conflict in their church. He was concerned that this could prevent their unification in the face of persecution, and diminish their witness.

Ultimately, as always, Paul’s main purpose in penning the letter was to draw their attention to the gospel. He was always guiding and leading believers back to the importance of Christ in all situations. Jesus Christ was the answer to facing persecution, embracing humility in all relationships, and rejoicing always.

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Week One: Philippians 1:12-26

To Live is Christ: Everything is Transformed

Objective:

This week introduces us to the phrase “to live is Christ, to die is gain.” When living for Christ, your outlook on every area of life is transformed! Specifically, this week’s text explores how Paul had a life of joy in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Opening Question:

Was there ever a period in your life that felt like it was bad, but turned out to be good in some way?

Body of this Week’s Study:

Paul is clearly imprisoned while writing this epistle. But instead of harping on his hardships and difficulties, he finds the strength to rejoice! How? Because his joy comes from his relationship to Christ, not from earthly circumstance. He explains it this way: to live is Christ, and to die is gain. In life, he could serve Jesus, and in death, he would get to be with Him - either way Paul’s source of joy was secure! When you live for anything other than Christ (success, comfort, romance, etc.), your joy is dependent on if you have that thing or not. And if you live for anything other than Christ, death is a loss because that thing is gone.

Paul also had joy because he realized that when living for Christ, what appears to be a setback may really be a divine set-up! Consider: the palace guards responsible for Paul were the emperor’s private bodyguard. This guard was **incredibly influential** in the Roman Empire, and likely difficult to reach for the gospel. As a prisoner, a different palace guard would have been chained to Paul every four hours for their shift. So every four hours, Paul got to share the message of Christ. Later he mentions that “the saints in Caesar’s household send their greetings.” The point? People were coming to faith in the most hard-to-reach and influential places! God was using Paul’s imprisonment to change the face of the Roman world.

Text Questions:

Read Philippians 1:12-18.

1. What is happening to Paul at the time of writing this letter?
2. Why does Paul say it is actually beneficial for him to be suffering in prison (v. 12)?
3. In verse 14, why would Paul’s “brothers in the Lord” have been made more confident by his imprisonment? (*They saw God using it for good.*)
4. How do you think most people would likely feel if they were imprisoned by the Roman guard? What emotion is Paul experiencing (v. 18)? Why?

Read Philippians 1:19-26.



1. What do you think "to live is Christ" means?
2. From verse 23, why would Paul consider dying to be more desirable?
(Important to note: Paul saying he prefers death is not referring to suicidal thinking. Rather, he's using a literary device to emphasize that being with Christ is the best possible thing. The point is that death is no longer something to be feared. If needed, show how Paul's main emotion in this text is joy (v. 18).)
3. From verse 24, why would Paul consider living to be more necessary?
4. What choice does Paul make?

Application Questions:

From Philippians 1:12-18.

1. Paul's joy was not rooted in his circumstances or his life compared to others. Where did it come from?
2. If God used Paul's imprisonment for good, what are ways he could potentially use your hardships for His glory? Give concrete examples.

From Philippians 1:19-26.

1. Paul presents us with an equation: "If to live is _____, then to die is _____." How do others at UVA fill in the blank: "To live is _____"?
2. When Paul fills in the first blank of the equation with Christ, the second blank becomes gain. When you fill in the first blank with any of the above answers, what does the second blank automatically become? (If life is money/fame/comfort/sex, then death is loss.)
3. What do you find yourself tempted to replace "Christ" with?
4. Discuss as a group: How can we grow in living for Christ? (ex. devotional life, lordship, surrender)

Spiritual Exercise:

Break into lunch buddies to connect with one another! Encourage each pair to follow up on the conversation you had in Core Group.

Memory Verse:

"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Philippians 2:22.





Week Two: Philippians 2:1-18.

To Live is Christ: Transformed Humility

Last week, we looked at how we fill in the blank in “To live is _____” and how that answer impacts our view of life profoundly. When we put other things in the blank — career, prestige, money, sports, beauty — it inevitably will end in loss, but when we put Christ in the blank, it overwhelms all the other variables and transforms all areas of our life. This week, we are going to see how living for Christ changes our relationships!

Worship Idea:

Consider singing/listening to the song “Let It be Jesus” by Christy Nockels. It is a song that includes the words “for me, to live is Christ.”

Opening Question:

Think of a movie about high school you’ve all seen (like High School Musical or Mean Girls). How do you think the plot would change if every character lived by “to live is Christ”? (This may turn goofy. Embrace it.)

Important to Know:

The Philippians are in the midst of internal conflict. Paul is asking them to band together and stand as one unified body in the power of Christ. We are to “do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (v. 3). Then we can shine like stars in the darkness of our world and hold firmly to the word of life (v. 15-16). Paul encourages us that we can do this by grasping the attitude of Christ (v. 4) — one of extreme *humility*. He goes on to further elaborate what Christ’s humility looked like, and then what ours can look like as well. And when we embrace humility, our relationships begin to change!

Questions from the Text:

1. There are many details in this section on how to live humbly and in unity. What are they? (*ex. doing nothing from selfish ambition, looking to others interests, doing all things without grumbling*).
2. How was it an act of humility for Jesus to take the form of a man?
3. How was the type of life Jesus lived an additional act of humility?
4. How was Jesus’ death a final act of extreme humility?
5. What is the result of our living the way this section describes? (v. 15-16)

Application Questions:

1. What effect do you think grumbling has on a community? What about selfishness? Competition?



2. In light of all that Paul has said, what do you think it would look like for you and your friends to shine like stars in your generation?
3. Which piece of Paul's advice for living in community do you most want to grow in?
4. What are ways we can help ourselves replace grumbling with gratitude? Selfishness with sacrifice? Competition with honor? (*challenges from Pete's sermon.*)
5. How can you as a core group grow in these areas?

"To Live is Christ—TLC" Challenge:

Read through the book of Philippians, a chapter a day. Then on the fifth day, sit and read the entire thing. Repeat this each week we are in the "To Live is Christ" series.

Memory Verse:

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father." Philippians 2:10-11





Week Three: Philippians 3:17-21, 1:27-30

To Live is Christ: Transformed Citizenship

Objective for the Study:

Last week, we read that when we observe Christ's humility and learn to live the same way, our communities, families, and relationships of all kinds look different. We become people marked by gratitude, not grumbling. Honor, not competition! Sacrifice, not selfishness. This week, we will look at how living for Christ transposes our citizenship from the world to the Kingdom of God. We gain a new King, and we are called to live lives that would honor him.

Worship Idea:

Put on worship music. As it plays, have everyone write a list of things they have to thank God for this week. Close out worship by having someone pray thanks for all the things written.

Opening Question:

What is your favorite place you have ever traveled? What made it different from home?

Important to Know:

In the Roman world, the Caesar was the supreme leader. In fact, he was so respected and revered that Roman citizens called him their "Lord". In a country defined by its incredible national pride, unsurprisingly, great tensions arose when people who became Christians said that they could no longer call Caesar Lord, as their Lord was Jesus Christ alone. Paul encourages the Philippians that they are actually citizens of heaven, and reminds them to live lives worthy of their Lord, Jesus Christ, even as they currently reside in a nation hostile to them. We can learn a lot from Paul's words about how to live in a culture that stands in opposition to many aspects of faith.

Text Questions:

Read Philippians 3:17-21.

1. Whose example is Paul calling the Philippians to follow? (v. 17)
2. What are the characteristics of those who are enemies of Christ? (v. 19)
3. What is the characteristic listed for those who have citizenship in heaven? (*they are eagerly awaiting their Savior, Jesus* — v. 20)
4. What will Christ do for those whose citizenship is in heaven?



Application Questions:

1. Reflecting on earlier weeks, what sort of example is Paul living out that he may want the Philippians to learn from and follow?
2. What would it mean for someone to have their stomach as their God?
3. What examples in our world do you think reflect the statement that some “glory in their shame”?
4. We know that this verse contrasts enemies of the cross with citizens of heaven. We are told this of enemies of the cross: “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.” In contrast, what should be the God, glory, and destiny of those whose citizenship is in heaven? And what should they set their mind on?

Text Questions:

Read Philippians 1:27-30.

1. What are the three things Paul says he knows that the Philippians will do if they are living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? (*standing firm, striving together, not being frightened by those who oppose you*)

Application Questions:

1. Standing firm (v. 27) implies that **CONVICTION** is part of being a citizen of heaven who lives in a manner worthy of their Lord, Jesus Christ. This means refusing to edit out your faith from your life in the presence of others, or alone. Where are you tempted to edit out your faith?
2. Striving together (v. 27) implies that **COMMUNITY** is part of being a citizen of heaven who lives in a manner worthy of their Lord, Jesus Christ. What are ways that community would help someone live well for Christ?
3. Not being frightened by those who oppose you (v. 28) implies that **COURAGE** is part of being a citizen of heaven who lives in a manner worthy of their Lord, Jesus Christ. Why do you think courage is a characteristic of a citizen of heaven? (*ex. if you don't have courage, it won't matter what you believe because you'll never live it out.*)

Spiritual Exercise:

This section of Philippians (vv. 1:27-28) ends by saying that these three things serve as a sign to the world that God will save His people. Close core group by providing thank you cards (or paper) for everyone. Have them write a note to someone they know who has served as an example to them of conviction, community, or courage, thanking them for the impact it has had on their life. Then, encourage people to consider giving the note to that person this week!

Memory Verse:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Philippians 3:20





Week Four: Philippians 3:1-14

To Live is Christ: Transformed Walk with God

Objective for the Study:

Last week, we saw how living for Christ transposes our citizenship from the world to the Kingdom of God. We gain a new King, and are called to live lives that would honor him. This week, we will see how living for Christ transforms how we relate to God. Before Christ, the Jewish people tried to achieve righteousness through laws. Now, we can *rest* in the sacrifice of Jesus becoming our righteousness. All that's left is for us to pursue Him! This is what Christianity is: a restful pursuit of God.

Worship Idea:

Play a worship song that has been gaining momentum in your community. Consider sharing briefly on what the song means before playing it. Be sure to print lyrics for everyone.

Opening Question:

If you were to die tomorrow, what do you think you'd be remembered for? If you were to live until you were 90, what would you hope to be remembered for then?

Important to Know:

The Christian movement began among the Jewish people of Palestine. They were highly ethnocentric, often calling non-Jewish people, or Gentiles, “dogs” — a highly derogatory term. As the Christian movement began advancing into the Gentile world, some Jewish Christians began teaching that Gentiles must first become Jews (shown by circumcision and obedience to Moses' law) before becoming Christians. Some Gentiles even picked up this “false gospel” and began to spread it.

In this passage, Paul turns the “dogs” epithet back on these false teachers. Their gospel was not good news, but another attempt to accomplish a right relationship with God, apart from faith in the cross and the resurrection of Christ. Paul's response is a direct contradiction to their teaching. Paul puts no confidence in the flesh or worldly accolades, and calls the Philippians (and us) to do the same by renouncing all self-initiated attempts toward righteousness. Instead, he seeks only to know Christ, in whom is eternal life (John 17:3). Paul's words show us the “restful pursuit” of the Christian life. We rest in the reality that our résumés of righteousness no longer matter — our salvation comes from Christ alone. However, that same reality is what causes us to have a desire to pursue Him and know Him more. To be a Christian is to rest in Him, and yet also pursue Him. A restful pursuit.

Text Questions:

1. Using context clues, what do you think Paul was talking about when he referenced “mutilators of the flesh?” (*Jewish circumcision.*)



2. What is the difference between the circumcision Paul describes of Christians (v. 3) and the circumcision of the Jewish people? (*Jewish = physical, Christian = spiritual.*)
 - a. Consider referencing Deuteronomy 30:6 *"Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live."*
3. In verses 4-6, what is Paul trying to communicate about himself to the Philippian church? (*if Christianity was about having a good religious résumé, he would be the best.*)
4. In verses 7-8, Paul says all things are a loss, or garbage, compared to what?
5. What does verse 10 reference as ways of knowing Christ? What do you think it might mean to participate in his sufferings?
6. From verses 12-14, does Paul think that he has learned all he can about Jesus? What is he doing about that? (*No, and forgetting what's behind, straining toward what's ahead, pressing toward the goal.*)

Application Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul considers it so important that the Church understand that physical circumcision should not be considered a prerequisite for being a Christian?
2. In this week's sermon on this passage, Pete described the Christian life as two sides of a coin. One side is *Rest* (resting in knowing that you are saved wholly and completely by Christ's sacrifice, and no action or status of your own). The other is *Pursuit* (striving to know Christ more and more, "pressing on towards the goal"). A well-balanced Christian life encompasses both.
 - A. Rest:
 - a. What gets in the way of us feeling like we can rest in the salvation of Jesus, without trying to earn it in other ways?
 - B. Pursuit:
 - a. If someone looked at your life, what would they say you were striving for most?
 - b. What is a way you can strive to know Christ more this week?

Spiritual Exercise:

This passage has a lot in it to meditate and pray about. Take time to write this chapter in your own words. This will help you to fully understand and internalize what Paul is saying. Pray that God will direct you and convict you on how to pray for yourself.

Memory Verse:

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things." Philippians 3:8





Week Five: Philippians 4:1-13

To Live is Christ: Transformed Inner Life

Objective for the Study:

Last week, we saw how living for Christ transforms how we relate to God. Christianity is a restful pursuit of our Lord! This week, we will see how living for Christ shapes what goes on inside of us, changing our inner focus, our fears, and our perspective on suffering.

Recommendation for Group Opener:

Consider not having them share their lows at the beginning, but rather, writing them down and saving them for the end. We are going to learn about how to be content in any situation, and the power of knowing “the Lord is near”. In the spiritual exercise at the end, there will be the chance to respond to their “lows” based on this truth.

Consider asking them to share their high of the week through this framework: *“What is something wonderful going on in your life right now? This could be a situation, a friendship, something from your spiritual life, or even just a feeling.”*

Worship Idea:

Respond to all of the wonderful things you just shared by sharing in worship! Play a worship song that focuses on worshipping God for who He is, and how He loves us. Be sure to print lyrics for everyone!

Important to Know:

Paul's intention in writing Philippians was to encourage them to rejoice in every circumstance, whether that is when conflict arises, hardships come, or when we're stressed or anxious. This was especially necessary as they lived in an increasingly hostile Roman world. He tells them over and over again to look towards Christ to give them strength. The final chapter of this letter is encouraging because it teaches us that we serve a God who cares about us, is near to us, and who brings us peace.

Text Questions:

1. Paul specifically speaks to two women, Euodia and Syntyche, about an argument that they're having. How does he ask them to respond?
2. What does verse 6 say should accompany our prayers when we are anxious? (*thanksgiving*)
3. Does verse 7 promise that our prayers will always be answered? What *does* verse 7 promise? (*No, and that the peace of God goes above what we understand to be possible.*)
4. What are some of the things verse 8 says we should focus our thoughts on?
5. Paul says he has learned the secret to being content in any situation. What does verse 13 say about the secret?



Application Questions:

1. What sort of things in our lives might be noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy? How do you think our lives would change if we did what Paul said and focused our inner thoughts on those things? How do you think the subsequent verse (v. 9) plays into this?
2. Verse 5 ends with the phrase “The Lord is near.” Paul proceeds from there and shares what we should do when we are anxious, and how he has learned to be content in any situation. Since the Philippians’ suffering was at the hands of those who proclaimed Caesar as Lord, Paul wanted to remind them that the true Lord is near. For both the Philippians and us, what comfort can be found in this verse? What encouragement? What power in persecution?
3. This section of Scripture started with Paul writing about two Christians in a conflict. How do you think their conflict would change if they lived out the principles in the subsequent verses?

Spiritual Exercise:

Get out your “lows” that you wrote down and get into small groups (or if your core group is small, you may want to do this all together). Share your lows, and talk about what this section of Philippians has to say on it. If a low is conflict in a relationship, this section may encourage you to be of one mind with your opponent. If it is anxiety, the Lord may ask you to pray about it with thanksgiving, not necessarily expect an answer to the problem (though sometimes this will happen), and to fully expect peace. And finally, if it is a hard situation, the Lord may just want to tell you that He is near and can be your strength in it. Take some time to pray with each other about the responses you are called to have.

Closing Prayer:

Close out the whole night in prayer of Thanksgiving to God for His strength and peace, asking the Holy Spirit to help you live out the kind of inner life that you have read about.

Memory Verse:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7





Week Six: Philippians 1:1-11, 4:14-20

To Live is Christ: Transformed Priorities

Objective for the Study:

Last week, we saw how living for Christ shapes what goes on inside of us. Anxieties are lifted to the Lord, and peace fills our hearts and minds. Tonight, we find a theme of Church partnership with those who spread the gospel where there is no Church.

Worship Idea:

Play a familiar song that has a version that includes different languages. “Revelation Song” and “How Great is Our God” have international versions on Youtube. Ask people to listen and consider the beauty of God’s truth being for every people, tribe, and nation! Maybe put a map in the center of the room to aid the practice.

Important to Know:

Theologian and commentator Gordon Fee notes three matters that make up the most of the letter. One is news about Paul’s present imprisonment and what he expects to come of it. Another is an appeal for steadfastness and unity in light of present opposition, and the danger of false teaching. Both we’ve discussed. But there is another main theme we haven’t yet addressed. In fact, it is the theme that bookends the entire letter! That theme is: “gratitude for the Philippians’ partnership with him in the gospel over many years, evidenced most recently by a material gift brought by Epaphroditus.” We know it matters, considering its primary placement, and the depth of Paul’s emotional response to their partnership! Paul wants the Church to share God’s priority for His Kingdom advancing to where it is not.

Text Questions:

Read Philippians 1:1-11.

1. Why does Paul thank God for the Philippian Church? (v. 5)
2. What does verse 7 say that Paul shares with the Church? How does this make him feel about them? (*thankful, joyful, longing for them*)
3. In verses 9-11, what is Paul’s prayer for the Philippian Church? (*Real Community: that their love would abound. Real Devotional Life: that they would have right thinking and living. Real Responsibility: that they would be fruitful people because of Christ*)
4. What does verse 11 say is the goal for living this way? (*the glory and praise of God*)

Application Questions:

1. What sort of partnership do you think the Church provided Paul? (*prayer, finance, sending people, etc.*)
2. Paul feels so strongly for his friends in Philippi that he thanks God and prays for them. What are ways we could be praying for churches both near and far from us.



Text Questions:

Read Philippians 4:14-20.

1. What does verse 14 say the Philippian Church did with Paul? How? (vv. 15-16)
2. How does God feel about our gifts to missionaries? (v. 18)
3. What does Paul encourage the church with after thanking them for their gifts? (v. 19) *(He reminds them that God will also meet all of their needs)*

Application Questions: *Feel free to adapt these questions to the needs of your group!*

1. Paul's words seem to imply a connection between our generosity and God's provision of our needs. How do you think they connect? *(ex. maybe being confident that God will meet our own needs helps us to feel free to give more generously).*
2. What are ways that we can partner with God's Kingdom advancing in the world? *(Financially? Spiritually? Physically?)*

Spiritual Exercise:

Close in prayer for the advancement of God's Kingdom across the globe, particularly in those places where the gospel does not yet have a foothold. Pray for our community to be as helpful as the Philippian Church was to Paul.

Pray as a Core Group about if there is a particular ministry or missionary that you could partner with. Think beforehand about which is best for your group: to either collect a one time offering that night, or challenge all the individuals in your group to give a monthly amount for 6 months (recommend an amount but don't mandate. Maybe \$20 a month — the price of about a latte a week.) Provide them with a link to the missionary's giving page. Close in prayer for the global church.

Memory Verse:

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God."

Philippians 1:9-11

