

SESSION 1: Philippians: Paul's Letter to the Church

This lesson will be a brief overview of the Philippian church and Paul's relationship with them. Once we've established this as the foundation for our study, we will look at some key scriptures over the next several weeks that will help us grow and mature as believers, leaders and ministries.

In any book study, there are some important things you need to know that will make it easier for you to understand what you are reading.

1. Author: Who wrote the book?
2. Audience: Who were they writing the book to?
3. Purpose: What was the main goal in writing the book?
4. Time and Place: When and where was the book written and are there any significant historical events that were taking place during that time?

We will answer these questions as we begin the book of Philippians and this will help to set the foundation for the rest of our class sessions.

As we are learning about Paul's instructions to the church in Philippi over the next several weeks, we will be asking ourselves some of these questions:

- What does this teach me about God?
- What does this teach me about others?
- How can I apply this to my own life?
- How does this apply to my church/ministry/calling?

The Book of Philippians

1. **Author:** the Apostle Paul
2. **Audience:** the church of Philippi (*including the bishops and deacons*)
3. **Purpose:**
 - a. To share his love and appreciation for the relationship he had with the church over the years (including the support they had provided him.)
 - b. To reinforce the need for unity among the believers
 - c. To encourage them to remain joyful
 - d. To express the need for humility
 - e. To explain the importance of living life with a kingdom perspective
 - f. To warn them against false teachers and wrong theology
 - g. To remind them of the need to stand firm in their faith and in the gospel of Jesus Christ
4. **Time and Place:** Paul is writing this letter while in jail (or under house arrest) likely in Rome where history reports that he was chained to Roman guards for 2 years.

**** It's important to know that the book of ACTS is the background or "back story" for most of Paul's letters.**

Reading Assignment:

1. Philippians Ch 1:1-11 Paul begins his letter to the church in Philippi
2. Acts 16:1-15 Paul and Timothy are directed by the Spirit to take a detour and go to Europe - specifically, Macedonia (Philippi) - instead of staying in Asia to preach the gospel

Paul Comes to Philippi

Let's look at a brief history of Paul's relationship with the church in Philippi.

Philippians 1: 3-8

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

You will notice in **Philippians 1:3-8** Paul is remembering back to the beginning of his relationship with the people in Philippi. You can see his love for them as he specifically mentions how deeply he misses them and carries them in his heart. That's why many refer to Philippians as Paul's "love letter" to the church in Philippi. Most of the time Paul's writings were as a mentor, leader or an apostle; but out of all the letters Paul writes, Philippians is the most emotional and affectionate letter he pens. He references his memories with them and is reflecting back to when he first met them (this is recorded in Acts 16). We read in Acts 16 where Paul came to Philippi on his second missionary journey. In fact, this was not even Paul's original plan, he had planned to stay in Asia and share the gospel, but the Holy Spirit would not allow him to do that, and compelled Paul to make an adjustment in his plans.

Note: God closed the door to Bithynia in Asia (Acts 16:7); and while this must have been frustrating or seemed like a setback to Paul, it was part of God's plan all along.

Thank God for closed doors because what we see as a detour, is often God redirecting us and setting us up for His perfect plan!

Now where was Paul to go? The Holy Spirit would not allow him to follow through with his original plan. That night Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading with him to come (Acts 16:10) so Paul concluded that it was the Holy Spirit who was speaking to him and they set out to travel to Europe, making their first stop in Philippi. They found a group of Jews outside the city praying by the river (Acts 16:13) and they decided to join this prayer meeting! One of the people there was a woman named Lydia. She opened her heart to receive the gospel, and was

baptized along with her household and this encounter began Paul's relationship with the church in Philippi.

Now that we know who wrote Philippians, the audience, the purpose of the letter, and the historical background, let's look at a few more verses:

Philippians 1: 9-11 (nkjv)

9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

(amplified) *9 And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more [displaying itself in greater depth] in real knowledge and in practical insight, 10 so that you may learn to recognize and treasure what is excellent [identifying the best, and distinguishing moral differences], and that you may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ [actually living lives that lead others away from sin]; 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God [so that His glory may be both revealed and recognized].*

Paul's prayer for the church:

- ☐ That your love may abound more and more in knowledge AND discernment
- ☐ That you may approve the things that are excellent
- ☐ That you may be sincere AND without offense
- ☐ That you be filled with the fruits of righteousness

ALL of this, to the glory and praise of God!

Take some time to reflect and pray. Ask God to help you answer the following questions:

- What does this scripture teach me about God?
- What does this scripture teach me about others?
- How can I apply these verses to my own life?
- How can I apply them to my church/ministry/calling?