

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

PHILIPPIANS

*Find peace and contentment
in perilous times.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit www.NavPress.com.

Philippians

Copyright © 1997, 2013 by The Navigators. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAVPRESS and the NAVPRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

Logo Flower City font copyright © by wubstudio/Creative Market. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of hazy mountaintops copyright © Fré Sonneveld/Unsplash.com. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,® copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-800-323-9400.

ISBN 978-0-89109-072-4

Printed in the United States of America

24 23 22 21 20 19 18
37 36 35 34 33 32 31

CONTENTS

How to Use This Study	5
Historical Background—Paul And Philippi	9
Map of the Roman Empire	9
Timeline of Paul's Ministry	10
One—Overview	15
Two—A Prayer for Partners (1:1-11)	25
Three—The Important Thing (1:12-26)	35
Four—Worthy Conduct (1:27-2:4)	43
Five—The Mindset of Christ (2:5-11)	53
Six—Working It Out (2:12-16)	61
Seven—Co-workers (2:17-30)	69
Eight—Gains and Loss (3:1-11)	75
Nine—Citizens of Heaven (3:12-4:1)	85
Ten—The Peace of God (4:2-23)	93
Eleven—Review	101
Going On in Philippians	109
Study Aids	111

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The LIFECHANGE series has been produced through the coordinated efforts of a team of Navigator Bible study developers and NavPress editorial staff, along with a nationwide network of field-testers.

SERIES EDITOR: KAREN LEE-THORP

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of Philippians. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author's *aim* for the whole work? In lesson 1 you will lay the foundation for your study of Philippians by asking yourself, "Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?"

In lessons 2 through 10, you will analyze successive passages of Philippians in detail. Thinking about how a paragraph fits into the overall goal of the book will help you to see its purpose. Its purpose will help you see its meaning. Frequently reviewing a chart or outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.

In lesson 11, you will review Philippians, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the "how" and "why" questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray,

"Lord, what do You want me to see here?" "Father, why is this true?" "Lord, how does this apply to my life?"

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 111. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the Revised Standard Version Bible (RSV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as The Living Bible is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen's studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and

mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 114–115 lists some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

PAUL AND PHILIPPI

Historical Background

Map of the Roman Empire



Paul wrote this note to his friends in Philippi as he sat in a Roman prison, yet the word *joy* is one of the most frequently used words in the letter. The reason for Paul's overflowing joy is found in some even more frequent words: *God, Lord, Christ, and Jesus*. It is a warm letter of thanks for kindness rendered, yet it contains some of the New Testament's deepest teaching about Christ and the gospel.

Saul the Pharisee

The man we call the apostle Paul was born in the first decade AD in Tarsus, a small but prosperous city on the trade route from Syria to Asia Minor. Tarsus was known for its schools of philosophy and liberal arts, and some scholars believe that Paul must have had some contact with these. Like most cities in the Roman Empire, Tarsus probably contained synagogues of Greek speaking Jews who were often as devout as their Hebrew-speaking brethren.¹

Timeline of Paul's Ministry

(All dates are approximate, based on F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*.)

Public ministry of Jesus	AD 28–30
Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-19)	33
Paul visits Jerusalem to see Peter (Galatians 1:18)	35
Paul in Cilicia and Syria (Galatians 1:21; Acts 9:30)	35–46
Paul visits Jerusalem to clarify the mission to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10)	46
Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13–14)	47–48
<i>Letter to the Galatians</i>	48?
Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)	49
Paul and Silas travel from Antioch to Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia (Acts 16–17)	49–50
<i>Letters to the Thessalonians</i>	50
Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18)	50–52
Paul visits Jerusalem	52
Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19)	52–55
<i>Letters to the Corinthians</i>	55–56
Paul travels to Macedonia, Dalmatia, and Achaia (Acts 20)	55–57
<i>Letter to the Romans</i>	early 57
Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1–23:22)	May 57
Paul imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:23–26:32)	57–59
Paul sent to house arrest in Rome (Acts 27:1–28:31)	59–62
<i>Letters to Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon</i>	60?–62
<i>Letters to Timothy and Titus</i>	?
Paul executed in Rome	65?

However, in Philippians 3:5 Paul calls himself “a Hebrew of Hebrews,” which probably means that his parents spoke Hebrew and raised him in a strict Jewish home, isolated as much as possible from the pagan city around them.² They named their boy “Saul” after Israel’s first king, the most glorious member of the Israelite tribe of Benjamin, to which Saul’s parents traced their ancestry (see Philippians 3:5). It was a rare Jew outside Palestine who could trace a pure lineage back to the ancient days of Israel, and fellow Jews would have envied the pedigree. Furthermore, Saul’s family must have owned property and had some importance in the Gentile community as well, for Saul was born not only a citizen of Tarsus (see Acts 21:39) but also a citizen of Rome (see Acts 22:27-28).³

Saul was sent to study Jewish law in Jerusalem under the foremost rabbi of his day, the Pharisee Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14). The Pharisees (the Hebrew word means “the separated ones”) felt that God had set them apart to live by the *Torah* (the Law, or Teaching, of Moses). For them, this meant following the interpretations of the *Torah* laid down by generations of teachers. Some Pharisees held that a man was righteous if he had done more good than bad, but Saul apparently followed the stricter group who insisted that even the least implications of the Law must be kept.⁴

The Pharisees expected a *Messiah* (Hebrew for “Anointed One”; Greek: *Christ*), who would deliver them from foreign oppression and rule with justice. However, Jesus of Nazareth had infuriated many Pharisees by interpreting the Law differently and claiming a special relationship with God. Thus, when some Jews began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord (a term usually reserved for God), strict Pharisees opposed them vehemently.

Saul helped to lead the fight against the proclaimers of Christ in Jerusalem (see Acts 7:58-8:3; Galatians 1:13). When some were driven out, Saul obtained permission to pursue them to Damascus. But on the way there, Jesus confronted Saul in a blinding encounter (see Acts 9:1-19), revealing to Saul that he was persecuting the very God he professed to worship. From then on, Saul’s understanding of God and the *Torah* began to change dramatically. He joined those Jews who were urging other Jews to believe in Jesus, and after some years God called him to proclaim Jesus as Savior to the Gentiles also. Saul took the Greek name “Paul” when he turned to work among Gentiles.

Paul the missionary

Paul’s conversion may have marked his first move outward from cloistered Judaism into pagan culture. He spent ten years in the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Syria (see Galatians 1:21), probably preaching Jesus along with Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem during the persecution. Then a believer named Barnabas called Paul from Tarsus to Syrian Antioch, where by this time rapid conversions had made the church more Gentile than Jewish.⁵

After a while, the church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to evangelize the provinces of Cyprus and Galatia. The two men succeeded in founding churches in several cities. Indeed, the mission to the Gentiles was so successful that the apostles in Jerusalem invited Paul and Barnabas to a

council to clarify exactly what God expected of Gentile believers (see Acts 15). Paul asserted that both Gentiles and Jews were reconciled to God by faith in Jesus, apart from keeping the Law, but certain Jewish Christians felt that Gentile converts must keep all the Jewish laws. The council confirmed Paul's view of the gospel, although some people thought that rejecting the laws as necessary to salvation would alienate potential Jewish converts. Those opponents remained Paul's enemies and continued to preach against him.

To Philippi

After the council in Jerusalem, Paul left Antioch with a new partner, Silas, to revisit the churches Paul had founded in Galatia. In a town called Lystra, they invited a young half-Jewish man—Timothy—to join their mission team. Along with his mother and grandmother, Timothy had accepted Christ during Paul's first visit to Lystra, and local church leaders now considered him an extremely promising disciple (see Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul wanted to spend more time in Asia Minor (see the map of the Roman Empire on page 9), but the Holy Spirit seemed to be guiding them away from further evangelism there. Then Paul had a vision of a man urging him to "come over to Macedonia and help us" (see Acts 16:9). So, the team set out for the province of Macedonia, north of Greece. The first city they visited was Philippi, a Roman colony planted to guard the Roman road across Macedonia.

Because it was primarily a military outpost, Philippi contained too few Jews even to have a synagogue, which required ten adult men. Furthermore, Romans were notoriously anti-Semitic—about the time Paul arrived in Philippi, the Emperor declared Judaism a superstition and expelled all Jews from Rome.⁶ So, the few Jews and sympathizers met at a "place of prayer" outside the gate of Philippi (see Acts 16:13); they were probably banned from meeting within the city limits.

The Jewish women and Gentile "God-fearers"⁷ at the prayer place received the gospel warmly. Among them was Lydia, an independent businesswoman from Thyatira in Asia. Lydia invited the mission team to stay in her house, and for some weeks the converts continued to meet the missionaries at the prayer place. However, the team ran into trouble with the Roman authorities when Paul delivered a slave girl from demonic oppression. Her owners, who had been profiting from her ability to prophesy, accused Paul and Silas of disturbing the peace and trying to convert Romans. The city officials had Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned.

That night, an earthquake shook the prison and freed all its prisoners. The jailer accepted Christ because of this miracle, and Paul and Silas agreed to remain in the prison. The next morning, the city magistrates ordered their release, but to protect themselves and future missionaries from similar mistreatment, Paul and Silas informed the officials that they had been treating Roman citizens like ordinary subjects, and demanded that the officials escort them out of town to uphold their honor.

So, Paul's mission team was scarcely in Philippi for a few weeks or months when they had to leave the fledgling church. The new believers had

to live in a city where some people had been hurt economically by the missionaries, the magistrates had been embarrassed, and almost everyone was prejudiced against a supposed Jewish cult. Subtle discrimination and outright persecution were inevitable, yet the church flourished.

Partners

The Philippian Christians remained Paul's most loyal supporters. They sent him money when he was in Thessalonica, so that he would not have to live off the church he was founding there (see Philippians 4:16). Later, when they heard he was low on funds in Corinth, the Philippians sent money again (see 2 Corinthians 11:9). After that, they may have lost track of the apostle for years, until they heard that he was imprisoned, probably in Rome. It was ten years since Paul's first visit to Philippi. He was under arrest in a private house, so he had to pay rent and buy food, but the Christians in Rome would not support a missionary accused of an imperial crime. It was not illegal to be a Christian, so prudent people would have kept at arms' length someone Rome suspected of agitation and treason.

When they heard this news, the Philippians sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, to bear a gift of money to Paul and to take care of him while he was under arrest. But Epaphroditus became severely ill, and so Paul felt he should send the man back to Philippi to finish recovering. He sent Epaphroditus with a letter explaining the unexpected return, thanking the Philippians for their gift, informing them about his circumstances, and exhorting them to respond to their current situation as Christians should.

1. A. T. Robertson, "Paul, the Apostle," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 2276.
2. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 41-43.
3. Bruce, 32-40.
4. Bruce, 50-52.
5. Bruce, 127-133.
6. Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 5-6.
7. Acts 16:14 calls Lydia "a worshiper of God"; the Greek word means literally "God-fearer." Jews used this term to describe Gentiles who believed in the true God and joined in Jewish worship but did not fully convert and keep the Jewish laws. Because the meeting place is called a "prayer place" not a "synagogue," we infer that there were fewer than ten Jewish men but an unknown number of Jewish women and God-fearers. Jewish law required ten men for a "synagogue" but had no rules for a "prayer place."

OVERVIEW

This overview will probably take you more time than any other lesson of the study. If necessary, allow one week to read the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5–8, the historical background on pages 9–13, and the whole letter to the Philippians. Then take a second week to answer the overview questions.

First impressions

The Philippians had not seen Paul for years. Then they heard he was under house arrest, and poorly supplied with food and other necessities. So, they sent Epaphroditus to take Paul some money and care for him during his ordeal. But now Epaphroditus is back unexpectedly. Surprised to see their emissary, but glad for news after months without word, the Philippians (if they treated letters as most people do) probably read through Paul’s epistle quickly at first, searching for the main points and their friend’s state of mind. They probably went back to study the profound words in detail later, but their first reading was likely to have been swift and general.

In the same way, read through the whole of Paul’s letter at one sitting. Get a general impression of his themes and state of mind.

Optional Application:

Compare Paul's mood and the ideas he emphasizes to your own mood and the issues that preoccupy you. Is there anything in Paul's example that you would like to follow? Talk to God about this, and ask Him to renew your thinking (see Romans 12:2).

For Thought and Discussion: What clues does the letter give regarding Paul's circumstances? The situation in Philippi? The occasion that prompted the letter?

1. How would you describe the *mood* (emotion, state of mind) Paul conveys in this letter? What appear to be his attitudes toward his circumstances, the Philippians, other people, himself?

2. Repetition is a clue to the ideas that are most important in a book. What words and ideas are repeated in each of the following sets of verses?

1:27; 2:2-4; 4:2-3 _____

1:5,7; 2:25; 4:14-15 _____

1:4,18,25; 2:2,17-18; 3:1; 4:4,10 _____

other _____

Broad outline

If your impression of Philippians is vague after one reading, a broad outline can help sharpen it.

3. Reread Philippians, preferably in a different translation. (A different version can help you notice new things and can make a confusing passage clearer.)

This time, think of a short phrase or sentence that can serve as a title for each paragraph. You may want to include key words from the paragraph. Write your titles on the next page.

(Be creative. There is no one right answer; the first title is given as an example. Your Bible's paragraph divisions may differ, so feel free to alter those given here.)

1:1-2 Servants to Saints

1:3-11 _____

1:12-26 _____

1:27-30 _____

2:1-11 _____

2:12-18 _____

2:19-30 _____

3:1-11 _____

3:12-4:1 _____

4:2-9 _____

4:10-20 _____

4:21-23 _____

For Thought and Discussion: What title would you give to this letter?

Theme/purpose

People usually write letters in response to a particular situation in their own or their readers' lives. They normally have reasons for choosing the topics they cover in their letters. It is often not possible to reconstruct exactly what circumstances moved a person to write, but the more we can reconstruct, the better we will understand the writer's message.

Our own purpose for studying the letter will often differ from its original purpose, but how we understand and apply a writer's words should be influenced by how the Holy Spirit meant them to be understood and applied in the first century.

- 4. From your first readings of Philippians, what seem to be Paul's chief aims in writing this letter?

- 5. If you have not already done so, read the historical background on pages 9–13. If you feel that additional background would help you to better interpret Paul's letter, you might write down your questions here. Some of your questions may be answered later in this study guide. The sources in Study Aids on pages 111–115 may help you to answer others.

- 6. In your first readings of Philippians, you may have come across questions you'd like answered as you go deeper into this study. While your thoughts are still fresh, you may want to jot down your questions here to serve as personal objectives for your investigation of the letter.

Study Skill — Application

James 1:22 urges us to do what the Word says, not merely listen to it. So, the last step of Bible study is asking yourself, "What difference should this passage make in my life? How should it make me want to think or act?" Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person.

At times, you may find it most productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer. At other times, you may want to list many implications a passage of Scripture has for your life, and then choose one to concentrate on for prayer and action. Use whatever method helps you grow more obedient to God's Word.

- 7. You have been reading Philippians as just an ordinary ancient letter, but it is also God's Word to us today. Does your first reading of Philippians suggest any areas in which it might apply to you? If so, what are some of those areas?

Optional Application:

a. If you were in prison, what kind of letter would you write to your friends? What would you talk about? How would your topics and feelings be like and unlike those Paul expresses?

b. Ask God to give you Paul's attitudes toward prison, life, enemies, and so on. Be specific about how you want to change.

For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select and adapt what suits your group. The main goals of this lesson are to get to know the book of Philippians as a whole and the people with whom you are going to study it.

Worship. Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning, but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments for a while and then move to the study, leaving worship until the end.

Warm-up. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your group—out of your study of Philippians, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. Why do you want to study the Bible? If you have someone write down each member’s hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. Allow about fifteen minutes for this discussion.

How to use this study. If the group has never used a LIFECHANGE study guide before, you might take a whole meeting to get acquainted, discuss your goals for the study, and go over the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5–8. Then you can take a second meeting to discuss the historical background on pages 9–13 and the overview questions. This will give you more time to read Philippians and prepare lesson 1 for discussion.

It is a good idea to clear up any confusion about how to do the study as soon as possible, so at the beginning of your second meeting, ask the group if anyone was confused about how to do lesson 1.

Reading. It is often helpful to refresh everyone’s memory by reading the passage aloud before beginning to discuss your lesson. Reading the whole letter may take time, but the effort will be rewarded. Have a different person read each chapter, using the tone of voice he or she thinks Paul was trying to convey so that the letter sounds like the work of a living person. It should take perhaps fifteen minutes to read all of Philippians.

First impressions. Ask the group to share first impressions of Philippians—its style, mood, content, or whatever strikes the group. If members don’t understand the question, you might ask them how Paul’s letter is like and unlike letters they write or receive, or like and unlike a sermon, a graduation speech, or advice from a father. The point of question 1 is to help the group see Philippians as a real letter from a person to real people for a specific occasion. Don’t spend more than a few minutes on this question.

The setting of a letter is an important part of its context. The background on pages 9–13 may help you to understand the setting. Ask several group members to tell who Paul was, how he got to know the Philippians, what is important to know about the Philippians, and what was going on in Paul’s and the Philippians’ lives when Paul wrote. By piecing together everyone’s recollections of the background, you can probably recall the main points. Then, using the background and clues from the letter, see how much you can conclude about why Paul was writing and what was going on at the time.

To help the group get to know Paul as a real person, ask them to share what kind of person they think he was (based on the background and the letter). Application will require you to put yourselves in Paul’s shoes, and it will be easier to identify with Paul if he seems real to you.

Looking for repeated words and ideas (question 2) should help the group see themes and main ideas in the letter. You might ask the group to name as many repeated phrases and ideas as possible, and then move to question 4 on the letter’s themes. You could share your titles (question 3) after that. Remember that there is no one right way to title a passage.

Questions. Give everyone a chance to share questions about the letter or the way you are studying it. It is good to clear up confusion about the book, the group, or the study guide as early as possible. You may want to leave some questions about the book until later in your study; they may answer themselves as you go deeper if you are looking for the answers. You could point out the list of references on pages 111–115 or encourage members to seek answers from their pastors or other Christians they respect.

Application. Question 7 ties in with the expectations and objectives you discussed at the beginning of your meeting. If some group members are unfamiliar with how to apply God's Word to their lives in specific ways, this is a chance to think of some sample applications together. (You could do this next week if you are running out of time.) Application is often the most difficult part of the study, since many people have never been taught how to apply Scripture consciously, yet it is essential to the Christian life.

Wrap up. The group leader should have read through lesson 2 and its "For the group" section. At this point, he or she might give a short summary of what members can expect in that lesson and in the coming meeting. This is a chance to whet everyone's appetite, assign any optional questions, omit any numbered questions, or forewarn members of any possible difficulties.

You might also encourage any members who found the overview especially hard. Some people are better at seeing the big picture or the whole of a book than others. Some are best at analyzing a particular verse or paragraph, while others are strongest at seeing how a passage applies to our lives. Urge members to give thanks for their own and others' strengths, and to give and request help when needed. The group is a place to learn from each other. Later lessons will draw on the gifts of close analyzers as well as overviews and applicators, practical as well as theoretical thinkers.

Worship. Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs and prayers that respond to what you've learned in Philippians

or prayers for specific needs of group members. Many people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer, and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader, might be an appropriate end. You could share requests and pray in pairs instead, if appropriate.

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

A Prayer for Partners

Paul begins his letter with the form customary in his time. He identifies first the senders and then the receivers (see 1:1). He writes a greeting next (see 1:2), and follows with a prayer for the readers' continuing blessing (see 1:3-11). However, for Paul, the form is not mere empty convention; he uses it to glorify Christ and upbuild the Philippians.

Read 1:1-11 slowly. A second reading in another translation would be helpful. Look for repetition and for Paul's overall train of thought.

Servants to saints (1:1-2)

Servants (1:1). "Bond-servants" in NASB. The word means slaves who belong to a master. The Old Testament describes holy men as "servants of God," but Paul puts Jesus on the Father's level.

God's holy people (1:1). Literally, "holy ones" or "set apart ones." In keeping with the theme of this letter, Paul writes to *all* the holy people, not just the leaders. (Note the word *all* in 1:4.)

Overseers (1:1). In the second century AD, this word "bishops" (κλν) came to mean the chief elder or pastor in a city, but in Paul's time there were apparently several "overseers" in the Philippian church.

Deacons (1:1). Literally, "servants," a more general term than "slaves." Acts 6:1-7 tells the origin of

For Thought and Discussion: What do Paul and the Philippians have in common that makes them partners (see 1:6-7; 2:1-2)?

this office among Christians: deacons were servants/ministers to the sick, poor, hungry, and those with spiritual wounds.

Grace (1:2). The normal Greek greeting was *cherein*, meaning "greetings" or "favor from me to you." Paul preferred a related word, *charis*, which named God's favor bestowed on sinful man with no strings attached. This greeting reminded the Philippians of God's gift of redemption through His Son's death, and wished them continuing favor from God to face daily needs.¹

Peace (1:2). This was the normal Jewish greeting. It meant wholeness and well-being in all aspects of life — health, harmony between people, a flourishing earth, and so on. To wish someone peace was to wish him a foretaste of the Messianic Age foretold by the prophets, a taste of God's presence and the fulfillment that flows from that presence.²

Thanks and prayer (1:3-11)

Partnership (1:5). "A joint participation in a common interest or activity."³ "Fellowship" (KJV) or "participation" (NASB). *Koinonia* was also the Greek word for a business partnership or a community.⁴

1. Paul thanks God with joy for the Philippians because they are his partners in the gospel (see 1:3-5). Observe how they are his partners.

a. What are the goals of this partnership (see 1:7,12,27)?

b. How have the Philippians shown their participation with Paul (see 1:19; 2:25; 4:14-18)?

c. In what other way can they demonstrate their partnership (see 1:27-30)?

d. How does Paul show his partnership with the Philippians (see 1:3-4,7-11,23-26)?

2. How could you act as a partner with other Christians in God's service?

Optional Application: How often do you remember other Christians and thank God for them? Try doing this.

Optional Application: How should Paul's confidence in 1:6 lead you to regard your own future and "good work"? Try meditating on verse 6.

For Thought and Discussion: What difference would it make to a person's life if he or she knew that God will complete the work He starts in any believer?

Optional Application: List some practical ways in which a person can love others with the "affection of Christ Jesus" (1:8). Choose one to act upon.

Study Skill — Cross References
Other parts of Scripture can often shed light on the passage you are studying. These other passages are called *cross references*.

3. The Philippians have behaved as partners with Paul "from the first day [that we met] until now" (1:5), and Paul is confident of something for the future (see 1:6).

a. What "good work" did God begin in the Philippians (see Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:28-29)?

b. What does Paul mean when he says that God will carry this work "on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6)?

c. Why can Paul be perfectly certain that the "good work" will be completed? (What is the basis of his confidence?)

4. Gratitude for the Philippians' partnership leads Paul to the prayer of 1:9-11. What does he ask God for?

(see verse 9) _____

so that (see verse 10) _____

and so that (see verse 10) _____

and so that (see verse 11) _____

for the ultimate goal of (see verse 11) _____

5. From 1:9, why is it important that our love abound in . . .

"knowledge" (of God, of His truth)?

"depth of insight" (moral judgment, discernment of best methods)?

Pure (1:10). Literally, "sincere" in NASB and KJV. Fine pottery was fragile in ancient times, and it often cracked when fired. Instead of discarding flawed pottery, dishonest merchants often filled in the cracks with a hard wax. The wax was undetectable in a shop but could be seen when held up to sunlight. Honest merchants marked their unflawed pottery *sine cera* ("without wax") because it held up to sun-testing.⁵

For Thought and Discussion: How is it possible for your love to grow? What does God need to do? What do you need to do?

Optional Application: How can you pursue greater knowledge of God, insight, or the ability to discern true from false and good from bad?

For Further Study: On question 5, see 1 John 4:7-8.

For Thought and Discussion: Does God expect us to be flawless? What does He expect (see Philippians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 4:7)?

Optional Application: Write out a prayer for someone that expresses the spirit of Paul's prayer in 1:9-11. (What feelings and desires does Paul express?)

For Further Study: How is it possible to bear the "fruit of righteousness" (see Philippians 1:11; John 15:1-5)?

Optional Application.
a. What can we learn from 1:3-11 about how to pray for each other?
b. Commit yourself to pray for a few other people according to Paul's example.

Blameless (1:10). Literally, "not stumbled against," that is, not a stumbling block to others.⁶

6. Why are purity and blamelessness crucial Christian traits (see 1:10; 2:15-16)?

7. What sorts of fruits result from being rightly related to God (see 1:11)? (*Optional:* See Matthew 5:1-10,38-48; 25:37-40; Galatians 5:22-23.)

Study Skill — Summarizing
Summarizing a passage after you have studied it verse by verse can often help you to remember what the whole is about. You can refine your title for the passage or summarize it in a sentence.

8. Look back at the title you gave to 1:3-11 on page 17. Then, try to summarize this passage in a sentence.

9. a. What is the most significant insight you have had from your study of 1:1-11?

b. Does this insight suggest any area of your life in which you could respond to Paul's words? If so, what further prayer or action seems appropriate, if any?

10. If you have any questions about anything covered in this study, write them here. Plan to seek answers from your study group, from written sources such as those listed in Study Aids on pages 111-115, or from some person you trust.

For the group

Worship.

Warm-up. Some groups like to begin each meeting with a brief warm-up or ice-breaker question to get members' minds focused on the topic at hand. For

For Thought and Discussion:

a. What encourages this sense of partnership among Christians? Name some of the attitudes, circumstances, or practices you think are necessary.

b. How could you encourage attitudes between yourself and other Christians like those between Paul and the Philippians?

For Thought and Discussion: What do you learn about God's and Jesus' nature from 1:1-11?

For Thought and Discussion: Think about 1:10. How do you think it would affect a person's life if every day he or she thought about Christ's imminent return?

this meeting, you could try something like, "What does the word *fellowship* mean to you? Give an example of Christian fellowship." The question is meant to draw out people's preconceptions, so that Paul's use of the word *fellowship* or *partnership* can be contrasted with popular understandings of the word. Don't let anyone jump into Philippians just yet.

Read aloud. Ask someone to read 1:1-11 aloud to refresh everyone's memory.

Summary. It's easy, and frustrating, to get so lost in the details of verse-by-verse study that you forget what Paul is talking about. To help avoid this, have someone quickly summarize what is said in 1:1-11. You can let two or three people summarize at this point, but don't be concerned if they are vague or see the passage differently. If you return to a summary at the end of your discussion, you will probably find the group much more articulate.

Background. Treat the word definitions and other text in the study guide as background. Urge group members to ignore whatever they cannot absorb; they can return to it when they study Philippians again in the future. Try not to get sidetracked discussing individual words.

Questions. The questions cover essentially these topics:

- Partnership (questions 1-2)
- God's good work (question 3)
- Paul's prayer (questions 4-7)
- Summary (question 8)
- Application (question 9)

If the group has prepared well, you should be able to spend about half your time discussing what the passage means, and about half discussing how it applies to each of you. You may prefer to discuss applications of each topic as you come to them, or to interpret the whole passage and then go back and apply it. For instance,

- question 1—Observe and interpret about partnership.
- question 2—Apply the idea of partnership to your lives.
- question 3—Observe and interpret about God's good work.

What are the implications of God's work for you?

questions 4-7—Observe and interpret about what Paul prays for.

How can you apply these observations about Paul's prayer?

Feel free to focus on one or two of these topics, to cover some of the optional questions, and/or to omit some of the numbered questions in your discussion.

Summary. Ask one or two people to summarize the main points of your discussion and Paul's words in 1:1-11.

Worship. When you close in prayer, ask God to shape your group into partners as Paul and the Philippians were. Ask Him to show you how to be partners with other Christians. You might pray 1:9-11 for each other also.

Practicing Partnership. Your group is an ideal place in which to begin practicing the kind of partnership Paul talks about. How could you begin to think and act more like partners? You could pray daily for each other along the lines of 1:9-11. You could look for ways to encourage each other in love, knowledge, and insight. You could express appreciation for each other as Paul does. What other ways can you think of?

1. James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 27-30.
2. Hartmut Beck and Colin Brown, "Peace," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 776-783.
3. Kenneth Wuest, *Philippians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1942), 31.
4. Jerry Bridges, *True Fellowship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985), 17. See also William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962), 93.
5. Boice, 55.
6. Wuest, 37.