



DISCOVERING MORE OF GOD  
**TOGETHER**

# THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

## Session 1: Philippians 1:1-11

### OPEN

**Who has been a hero to you?**

**In what ways has that person impacted you to be the person you are today?**

We can all think of someone – a parent, teacher, friend, boss, or coach – who’s impacted us. The book we’re about to study was written to a group of people that made a difference in Paul’s life. The book of Philippians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a church he cherished and that also cherished him.

This session looks at the beginning of chapter 1, where Paul starts off his letter greeting and praying for the beloved church. Speaker and author Jo Saxton will walk us through what these opening verses mean for us as members of God’s family.

### WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jo Saxton’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Jo answers the following questions.

**How did the church in Philippi get started?**

**How would you describe Paul’s relationship with the Philippians?**

**What does Paul do to express his love for the Philippians?**

### DISCUSS

Jo Saxton started off the video by explaining the back story of the Philippian church. She recalled the story told in Acts 16 of Paul meeting Lydia (a businesswoman who became the first Christian in Philippi) and the events that followed. **From Jo’s explanation, what impression do you have of the church in Philippi and of Paul’s relationship with them?**

**READ Philippians 1:1-11**

## Session 1: Philippians 1:1-11

Jo compared Paul's relationship with the Philippians to the kind of friendship that picks up right where it left off – full of joy, fondness, and gratitude. **What from these first eight verses show Paul's affection for the Philippians?**

Paul talks about the gratitude and joy he has when he prays for the Philippians. The theme of joy runs throughout the book – Jo called it the “letter of joy.” **How would you describe the joy Paul talks about in these opening verses?**

Joy is more than simple happiness. Joy is an attribute of God, produced in us by the Holy Spirit. When we experience joy – especially among other Christians – we know it's been supernaturally supplied by God. **What does it look like to experience joy because of the fellowship we have with other Christians? When have you experienced that type of joy?**

The next few verses unpack why we're able to experience joy because of our relationships with other Christians. In verse 6, Paul reminds the Philippians that God will complete the work he started in them. The same can be said of us – we can be confident that God continues to make us more holy. **What difference has it made in your walk with Jesus to know that God is working – and will continue to work – in you until Jesus comes back?**

God works in us to make us more holy. Paul continues by explaining why that truth directly impacts the fellowship we have with Christians. **What reasons does Paul give in verse 7 for why he feels the way he does about the Philippians?**

Paul cares deeply for the Philippians – that much is evident in verse 7. But he also reminds the Philippians that he has affection for them because they share in God's grace. In other words, they have common ground through the grace God has given all of them. **What are some other examples of things all Christians have in common? In what ways is it helpful to remember what we have in common?**

## Read Philippians 1:9-11

**What does Paul pray for the Philippians in verses 9–11? How would your life look different if you knew another Christian prayed the same things for you?**

**Looking back over these first eleven verses, what are some ways we benefit from the community we experience through the family of God?**

We are members of a family bound together through the love and grace of God. This foundation can help us grow our relationships with other Christians to the point where we're as affectionate, prayerful, and joyful as Paul is in this letter.

**What's your experience been like with other Christians? In what ways have you experienced the type of relationship Paul had with the Philippians?**

The importance of Christian fellowship will come up a lot in our study of Philippians. Following Jesus means we've been brought into a family. Jo talked about some of the Christians in her life who've influenced her faith. **Who has made an impact on your walk with Christ? What did you learn from him or her?**

As we saw in this opening session, Christian community is a two-way street. Paul called the Philippians his partners in the gospel. If we want Christian community, we have to be willing to invest in the Christians around us. One of the ways we express our love for other Christians is through prayer. Jo encouraged us to pray like Paul did for our Christian friends. **What could it look like for you to spend some intentional time in prayer for a Christian friend this week?**

## LAST WORD

The book of Philippians unpacks what it means to follow Jesus in day-to-day life. One of the key aspects of life with Jesus is his people – the church. Paul's relationship with the Philippians gives us a glimpse of healthy Christian community. The reality is, however, that many of us have experienced unhealthy relationships with other Christians. Jo encouraged us to fight for healthy Christian fellowship instead of retreating away from the Christians in our lives when we feel hurt. Whether you are in a wounded or healthy position when it comes to the church, we can all take practical steps toward loving the Christians God has placed in our lives.

When Christian community is healthy, we can experience the same joy, gratitude, and love Paul expresses for the Philippians in these opening verses. As we discussed in this session, healthy community can begin with us. Following Jesus means we love his people. One of the most loving things we can do is pray for the Christians in our lives.

Let's love the people of God by praying for them this week.

---

## GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. But you can also use these sections as short devotionals before your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book of Philippians.

### 1. Background

Read Acts 16:6–40.

**How does Luke describe the city of Philippi in verse 12?**

## Session 1: Philippians 1:1-11

Jo mentioned in the video that, since Philippi was a Roman colony, it would have been immersed in its culture and traditions. It was a stop on the Egnatian Way, a trade route through Asia Minor. It was a town with a variety of people of various classes and standings, a few of whom we meet in Acts 16.

**Who were the first two members of the church in Philippi? What, if anything, did they have in common before they became Christians?**

**What's similar about their conversion stories?**

Lydia and the Philippian jailer had little in common before they followed Jesus. We'll talk a lot about Christian community as we study this letter. One of the ways we can benefit from being a part of God's family is the common ground we gain through belief in Jesus. If we have conflict or division in the church, we can always remember the ways God unites us through belief in Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Make a list of what you have in common with other Christians because of Jesus. **What could you do to remind yourself of those truths as you interact with other Christians this week?**

## 2. Peek at the Greek: Paul's Greeting

Read Philippians 1:1–2.

We learn in elementary school how to write a formal letter. We format it a certain way and start with "Dear." Letters in the Roman empire also followed a specific format, and we can see that format at the beginning of Philippians. In verse 2, he offers the common greeting of grace and adds it to the Jewish greeting of peace. But he includes other important words that set up what he's about to address in his letter.

**Why do you think Paul would describe himself and Timothy as slaves of God?**

The word for slave, *doulos*, referred to someone who was controlled completely by another person. While the kind of slavery in the Roman Empire differed from the kind of slavery we're familiar with in North American history – or even from modern day human trafficking – it still meant a person was owned by someone else. They had no rights, no freedoms, no say. For Paul to call himself a slave of Jesus shows how devoted Paul was to Jesus and how Paul viewed himself in comparison to Jesus.

**What stands out to you about how Paul labels himself at the beginning of this letter?**

Paul calls his recipients *hagios*, a term commonly used to describe people who belonged to God. Right at the beginning of the letter, Paul reminds the Philippians of their special relationship to God through Jesus Christ. **What difference does it make in your day-to-day attitude to know that you belong to God?**

This study on Philippians will explore what it means to be part of God's family. When we follow Jesus, he changes the way we view ourselves and each other. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to prepare you for what he will teach you through this study.

### **3. Peek at the Greek: Joy in Philippians**

Read Philippians 1:3–6.

#### **What's Paul's tone toward the Philippians in this passage?**

The book of Philippians is commonly known as the letter of joy. It earns the name partially because it's one of Paul's most positive books. It, unlike all of Paul's other letters, doesn't carry heavy criticism for the church that received the letter.

Read Galatians 1:6–7 and 1 Corinthians 1:10–13.

#### **What's different about Paul's tone in these passages compared to the opening of Philippians?**

One of the ways Paul shows his positive attitude toward the Philippians is through his word choice. He uses the Greek word *chara*, meaning joy, fourteen times in both noun and verb form throughout the letter (1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10). What's most astounding is that Paul writes about joy while in prison. We'll dive more into the specifics of his imprisonment later, but for now, let's reflect on Paul's attitude.

Take some time to think about your attitude toward God, yourself, and your life.

#### **Would you describe it as joyful? Why or why not?**

Spend a couple of minutes in prayer, asking God to teach you more about joy through studying Philippians.

### **4. Prayer in the Church**

Prayer has always been an essential marker of God's people. From the earliest days of Israel to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane to the church in Acts, the people of God cry out to him in prayer. Prayer can be as simple as talking to God about your day and as powerful as beseeching God for a miracle.

#### **Take a moment to reflect on your attitude toward prayer. What's been your experience with prayer? Where do you see room for growth?**

Jo encouraged us to pray for the Christians in our lives as Paul did for the Philippians.

#### **How can you make prayer for other Christians part of your spiritual routine?**

## Session 2: Philippians 1:12-26

### OPEN

Think back to one of the biggest life-changing moments of your life – graduation, your first job, your wedding day. **What were your expectations going into that moment?**

**Looking back now, were your expectations accurate? Why or why not?**

We all have expectations for how our life might play out. Even when we decide to follow Jesus, we expect life to go a certain way. Maybe we think being a Christian should be easy, or that we should never feel pain, or that we'll always get what we want. In today's session, we'll see that following Jesus involves sacrifice, pain, but also joy.

### WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jo Saxton's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Jo answers the following questions.

**What situation is Paul in when he writes this letter to the Philippians?**

**What's Paul's attitude toward life, death, and suffering throughout these verses?**

### DISCUSS

Jo opened the video by reminding us of Paul's friendship with the Philippians. **What do you recall from last week's study about Paul's relationship with the Philippians?**

Paul cares about the Philippians – and their relationship will remain the backdrop of this letter. He writes out of love for them that's founded on God's grace.

**READ Philippians 1:12–18.**

As Jo explained, these verses show us that Paul was in prison at the time he composed Philippians. **What's Paul's attitude toward his circumstances?**

**What's been the result of Paul's imprisonment? Who has been influenced by his faithfulness to God?**

Even though Paul's in prison, suffering for Christ, God's using him. Not only are people coming to Christ, but other Christians are also boldly sharing the gospel, inspired by Paul's words and actions. **But what issue does Paul surface in 1:15–17 about some of these preachers?**

On top of being in prison, Paul has heard account of people preaching the gospel out of envy. **What do you think your response would be if you heard about someone's selfish motives for sharing the gospel? What was Paul's point of view?**

Similar to his mindset towards prison, Paul sees the greater purpose behind the envious preachers. All he cares about is Christ being preached, so he rejoices.

Suffering can serve many purposes, and here we see how God uses Paul's imprisonment to help the church and reach the lost. **When have you seen someone handle suffering with the same approach as Paul? What was the impact on non-Christians? Christians?**

Our attitude towards suffering can make a difference not only in our personal walk with God, but also in the lives of the people around us. **If you reflect on the ways you've handled suffering in the past, would you say your attitude has been like Paul's? Where do you see room for growth?**

Paul has the privilege of seeing God's purpose for his suffering. That's not always the case for Christians – we may never know the reason we experience suffering. Paul's words in the next section remind us why we can persist through suffering, even when we don't know why it's happening.

**READ Philippians 1:18–26.**

**What reason does Paul give for his continual rejoicing in verse 19?**

Paul knows – because people have been praying for him and the Holy Spirit has reassured him – that, though he's in prison, he will eventually experience deliverance. **Looking at verses 20 and 21, what kind of deliverance does Paul expect?**

Paul says he will be delivered no matter what the outcome is – whether he lives or dies. What do you think Paul means when he says, "to live is Christ and to die is gain"? **According to 1:22– 26, what advantage is there if Paul remains alive? What does he gain if he dies?**

No matter what happens to him, Paul sees a greater purpose. If he lives, he gets to obey Christ by serving his church. If he dies, he's with Jesus. **Why do you think Paul is able to keep this perspective? What about his outlook on his life and death resonates with you?**

As Jo mentioned in the video, we can learn a lot about from Paul's example in these verses. It's tempting to believe the Christian life is supposed to be easy – or that it's supposed to be about us. Paul demonstrates a different approach: Our lives as Christians are for Jesus and his people, not ourselves.

**What expectations did you have for the Christian life when you first believed in Jesus? How have those expectations played out? What about your perspective has changed?**

Think about your week ahead – your job, your family, your spare time, your chores, your worries. **What could it look like for you to have Paul's perspective on life this week? What would be different? What would be the same?**

## LAST WORD

Despite what we might hear in popular Christian culture, following Jesus is hard. We were never promised an easy life. Jesus even promised trouble – he warned his disciples of persecution and hatred and death. But even in the grim reality of life, we can have the same attitude as Paul did when he was in prison.

When we focus entirely on Jesus – who he is, his presence with us through the Holy Spirit, and his return – he reshapes our perspective. As with Paul, we can see purpose in our pain. We can learn to cherish Jesus above all else. We can choose joy.

This week, let's choose to see our day-to-day troubles with the same eyes as Paul did – filtered with the light of Christ

---

## GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. But you can also use these sections as short devotionals before your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book of Philippians.

### 1. *Paul's Imprisonment*

Read Philippians 1:7, 12–14, 17.

**What is Paul's situation based on these verses?**

We can surmise that Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians. Commentators debate over where Paul was during his imprisonment – some say Ephesus, others say Corinth, while others argue for Rome. Because of the language and context clues in the text, the most likely explanation is that Paul is in Rome.

But prison during this time was much different than what we understand prison to be today. **What is your cultural understanding of prison? What does it involve? What needs do prisoners have? How do they end up there?**

Prison under Roman rule could mean a variety of things. You could be thrown into an actual prison, which was often a crypt-like structure with bars and little sunlight. We see this kind of prison in Acts 16.



In this instance detailed in Philippians, Paul probably had some freedoms – he knew he'd have a trial, people could visit him, and he could communicate with people on the outside. We also know from the end of Philippians (4:14–18) that Paul had needs that weren't being met while he was in prison. He needed financial and physical gifts to keep going.

**What differences do you notice between our modern understanding of prison and what happened to Paul?**

We often breeze over the fact that Paul was in prison when he wrote a number of his letters. But the truth is he suffered – his words come from a person who is in the middle of living out what he's writing. **What about Paul's situation influences how you read Philippians 1?**

Reread Philippians 1:1–26 this week with Paul's imprisonment in mind. Pay specific attention to his attitude and ask God to show you how you can imitate Paul's perspective in your life this week.

## 2. God's Sovereignty in Philippians

One of the things Paul recognizes about God while he writes to the Philippians is God's sovereignty. We can see this truth surface throughout the letter.

Read Philippians 1:12–18.

**In verse 16, what kind of language does Paul use to describe his situation?**

Paul says he “was put here for the defense of the gospel.” By using passive language, he implies that God is the one who allowed him to be thrown in prison. **Why would God allow Paul to be in prison? What good does Paul see happening as a result of his imprisonment?**

Paul trusts that God put him in prison and he gets to see the fruit of his faithfulness – the whole palace guard knows he's there for Christ and Christians are boldly sharing the gospel. Even so, some are preaching the gospel out of rivalry. **What does Paul say about those who are preaching from false motives? Why doesn't he care?**

Paul sees God's sovereign hand over the envious preachers. He rejoices because the gospel is going out – it doesn't matter to him how it's happening. When is it hard for you to trust the sovereignty of God? **In what ways does Paul's example in these verses encourage you to trust God in those situations?**

**What could trust in God's sovereignty look like in your life this week?**

## 3. Peek at the Greek: Paul Will Not Be Ashamed

In Philippians 1:20, Paul explains that his expectation for being in prison is that he will not be put to shame. He uses the Greek word *aischynō*, which can either mean having shame for doing something wrong or for doing something beneath your status. We often associate the English word shame with a feeling of guilt as well. But is that really what Paul's getting at in this verse?

Read Romans 10:9–11.

**According to these verses, why are Christians not put to shame?**

Romans 10 provides a backdrop for us to understand what's happening in Philippians 1:20. Paul's talking about his belief in Jesus. He knows that believing in Jesus and proclaiming his gospel will prove to be worthwhile. He's saying he's made the right choice – the foundation and focus of his life is Jesus and that is not a shameful pursuit. Consider your walk with Christ. **What has made following Jesus worthwhile to you?**

Take a look back at Philippians 1:20. **What else does Paul hope for in this verse?**

Not only does Paul expect to avoid being ashamed, but he also hopes Christ will be glorified in him, whether he lives or dies. The Greek word is *megalynō*, which means to respect or honour someone because of their importance. Paul isn't concerned with getting out of prison. He just wants to exalt Jesus with his life. **What stands out to you about Paul's attitude toward his circumstances? What about toward Jesus?**

**What could it mean for you to have this kind of outlook on your life? What would change about your attitude towards comfort? Recognition? Your reputation? Suffering?**

**What's one way you could honour Jesus this week?**

#### **4. The Cost of Discipleship**

At the end of her teaching, Jo referenced a famous passage where Jesus talked about the cost of following him. In many ways, that passage relates to what we've studied in Philippians so far.

Read Philippians 1:21 and Luke 9:23–24.

**According to Jesus in Luke, what does it cost for someone to follow him? What must we do to gain life?**

Think about each aspect of the cost of discipleship for a moment. **In what ways does your life compare to the one Jesus describes of his followers? In what areas of your life is Jesus asking you to deny yourself? To put something to death? To follow him?**

Following Jesus means we put ourselves to death – our desires, our possessions, our will. But when we do, we gain the life of Jesus – both now and into eternity. **In what ways do Paul's words in Philippians 1 reflect what Jesus says in Luke 9?**

Paul got it. He understood that his life was for Jesus and that his death meant he would be with Jesus. **What's keeping you from having Paul's same attitude toward your life? What could you do today to choose to think of life and death as Paul does?**

As Paul shows us in the opening chapter of Philippians, following Jesus is difficult. It costs us everything: our reputations, our dreams, our career goals – it did for Paul. **Take a few moments to pray about the cost of following Jesus. Have you given your life to Christ? Or have you simply added him into your life?**

## Session 3: Philippians 1:27 – 2:11

### OPEN

**What's one of the most selfless things someone has ever done for you?  
What impact did his or her actions have on you?**

It's a great feeling when someone goes out of their way to love you. It can even bolster your relationship with that person. In today's session we'll examine the impact of selflessness in the church. We'll talk about how Jesus is the ultimate example of humility and putting others' needs first.

### WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jo Saxton's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Jo answers the following questions.

**What does it mean to pursue unity in the church?**

**Who is our example of humility? What has he done to be our example?**

### DISCUSS

As Jo talked about in the video, this section is about the unity we can find in the church when we imitate Jesus. Jo started off by reminding us that the Philippian church was full of people from all types of backgrounds. Unity wouldn't have been easy.

**READ Philippians 1:27-30.**

**Why is it important to Paul that the church stands together?  
What is the church facing?**

As we saw in Acts 16, and as is outlined in these verses, the church in Philippi faced opposition. We don't know if it was the same people who threw Paul in prison. But we do know it was serious enough to cause fear and for Paul to write to encourage the church to stand firm. **Why would unity in the face of opposition be helpful for Christians? In what ways does it honour God?**

In verse 29, Paul says it's been granted to the church to suffer for Jesus. **What's your reaction to his statement? What difference does it make to your walk with Jesus to know suffering is promised for his followers?**

Yes, we stand united as the church because we believe in Jesus. But we also stand united so that we can endure suffering for the sake of Christ together. God doesn't intend for us to suffer alone. **When have Christians helped you through suffering? What difference did it make to have them by your side?**

Paul moves on from describing what he wants the Philippians to do (stand firm together through suffering) to how he wants them to do it.

**READ Philippians 2:1–4.**

**Looking at verse 1, what unites the church?**

We stand on the love of Jesus – united in him through the Holy Spirit. From that foundation, we're able to pursue growing unity as the people of God. Paul goes on to encourage the Philippians to pursue unifying attributes like love, selflessness, and humility. **Which of the characteristics Paul lists stands out to you the most? Why? Where do you see room for your own growth?**

**In what ways could acting as Paul describes in these verses help the church be unified?**

Paul's encouragement can be boiled down to verse 4: Look to other people's interests above your own. **When is it difficult for you to put someone else's interests first?**

**When has someone valued you over themselves? What effect did their actions have on you?**

Paul wants the Philippians to be selfless. When they put each other first, they will meet each other's needs, love each other well, and achieve unity. Paul goes on to give the Philippians an example of selflessness for them to emulate.

**READ Philippians 2:5–11.**

Paul walks through Jesus's mindset in these verses. **What aspects of Jesus's character do you see? Which of these aspects stands out to you the most? Why?**

Jesus humbled himself in a way we cannot easily understand. He stepped down from glory as a human, yet still fully God. He had a scandal surrounding his birth, a small-town upbringing, and thirty years of obscurity. His short, three-year ministry ended in a cruel death. Jo reminded us that the cross was a scandalous image in the first century – it was a death reserved for thieves and rebels. **With all of Jesus's life and death in mind, what do you think it looks like for you to have the mindset of Jesus?**

Because Jesus was faithful to the Father even unto death, the Father has glorified him to the highest place. We, his people, represent and follow him until he returns. Paul encourages the Philippians to be like Jesus not only for their personal growth, but also for the sake of the church and for the glory of God. **What difference do you think it would make in your life if you had Jesus’s mindset? What kind of an impact could having this mindset have on the unity of your church?**

Think of one relationship with another Christian in your life – maybe with someone you have a difficult time getting along with. **What could you do to be like Jesus to that person this week?**

## LAST WORD

Unity is difficult. We have to work at it. As Jo talked about in the video, when we come into the family of God, we join with people from all kinds of backgrounds. It’s likely we’ll clash with other Christians. But as we saw in the session, to live worthy of the gospel of Christ means we put other people – and their interests – first.

Jesus is our perfect example of selflessness. He is God and he stooped to earth as a human – the lowliest position. Even more, he laid down his life for us in the most humiliating way. We as his followers are called to imitate him. We can put other Christians first for the sake of unity and for the sake of Christ.

**This week, what could you do to promote unity in your church?**

---

## GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. But you can also use these sections as short devotionals before your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book of Philippians.

### **1. Peek at the Greek: Worthy of the Gospel**

Paul urges the Philippians to live lives “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” But what does a “worthy” life look like? Paul uses the word *axiōs* several times throughout his letters to describe the way Christians should live.

Read Ephesians 4:1–3; Colossians 1:9–12; 1 Thessalonians 2:6–12.

Go back through each passage and write down the attributes of a worthy life. **With each of these passages in mind, what does a worthy life look like?**

To live a worthy life is to be like Jesus – patient, servant-hearted, humble, and so on. **Who is someone who has shown you what it looks like to live a worthy life? What stands out to you about that person?**

It can be tempting to read passages like these and create a to-do list to become “worthy.” But in reality, walking in obedience to God – or living a worthy life – isn’t fueled by us. Re-read Colossians 1:9–10. **Who is the one who enables us to live a worthy life? What difference does it make to you to know that the Spirit is with you and enables you to live this way?**

Look back on your list from earlier. Circle one or two things you see as areas in your life that need growth. Take those areas to God in prayer. Ask him to give you opportunities to grow in living a life worthy of the gospel.

## ***2. Paul’s Unity Illustration***

Unity is a common topic in Paul’s letters. He writes to churches that threaten to split, that disagree about theology, or that won’t mix because of social status. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he uses a metaphor of a body to illustrate why unity is crucial to the church.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.

**In what ways does Paul’s metaphor of a body show the importance of unity?**

**In what ways does Paul’s metaphor impact your understanding of the church and how it should function?**

**When have you seen the church operate like a unified body?**

**In what ways can you contribute to the unity of the church this week? What could you do to encourage another Christian about his or her role in the body of Christ?**

## ***3. Jesus’ Prayer for the Church***

We’ve talked a lot about unity in this session. Paul is adamant throughout his letters to the early churches that they remain unified. The push for unity among God’s people goes back to Jesus.

Read John 17:20–23.

For context, Jesus prayed that prayer before going to the cross. In some of his final words before his death, he prayed for those who would believe in him because of the message of the apostles – the church. **What all does Jesus pray for the church?**

**What does Jesus pray will happen because of the church’s unity? What kind of a witness does a unified church give to the world?**

**Why do you think Jesus chose to pray for unity as one of his final acts before going to his death? Why would unity be important to him?**

Unity gives weight to the gospel message. It shows that what we believe actually makes a difference in our lives and the lives of the Christians around us. It testifies to God's power and love.

**What could it look like to value unity as Jesus did?**

**Where do you see disunity among the Christians in your life? What could you do this week to promote unity instead of division?**

#### *4. Pause and Reflect: Lectio Divina*

We can sometimes breeze over familiar passages of Scripture instead of letting the words set in. Lectio Divina, or prayerful reading, is a way to pause and reflect on a passage.

Below are the four steps of Lectio Divina, which will help you pray and think deeply about Philippians 2:6–11. Carve out some time this week to go through this exercise. Take your time for each step. This isn't something to rush through, so make sure you have plenty of time before you start.

**Lectio (read):** Remove all distractions and quiet your mind before God. Now read Philippians 2:6–11 three times slowly. If you can, read it out loud to yourself. Let the message hit you. After reading it three times, find one verse or phrase that stands out to you the most. Re-read it a couple more times and place emphasis on different words as you read.

**Meditatio (meditate):** Think about the phrase or verse that stood out to you. What does it mean? What does it say about God? Humans? How does it contribute to the big idea we've talked about in Philippians?

**Oratio (pray):** Pray through your verse or phrase. Ask God to show you what he's saying through this verse. Take your verse and turn it into a prayer. For example, if you chose verse 7, you could pray, "Thank you, Jesus, for humbling yourself to come to this world," or, "Teach me to be a servant like Jesus."

**Contemplatio (contemplate):** Now that you've read, thought, and prayed through the text, finish off your time in silence. Ask God to speak to you. Pray he'd show you one practical thing you could apply to your life from this passage. Then listen. Write down what he says and then do it.

## Session 4: Philippians 2:12-20

### OPEN

**If you could be one person for a day, who would you pick? Why?**

It's fun to think about adopting someone's life for a day. We could experience new habits, enjoy extravagant luxuries, or exercise that person's power. But after living that person's life for a day, we'd be back to our old selves – nothing would have really changed. What does it look like to change the way we live now? Last week we talked about how Jesus is our example to follow. We can imitate his humility, obedience, and faithfulness. We'll see in this session what it looks like practically to live like Jesus did.

### WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jo Saxton's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Jo answers the following questions.

**What does Paul mean when he talks about shining like stars?**

**Who does Paul use as examples of what it means to follow Jesus?**

### DISCUSS

In the last session, we talked about unity. When we choose selflessness and humility, unity isn't far behind. As we saw earlier in chapter 2, Jesus is our perfect example of how to live this way. **What do you recall from last week's discussion of Jesus and his character?**

This week's section of verses starts with a "therefore" (NIV), which shows us that it's closely connected to the ideas set up in the earlier parts of chapter 2. We could almost read "therefore" as, "Since Jesus is our example..."

**Read Philippians 2:12-13.**

**In light of what we've talked about in chapter 2, what do you think it mean to "work out your salvation"? In what ways is it connected to what we talked about last week?**

As Jo mentioned in the video, working out our salvation doesn't mean we're earning our salvation. Rather, Paul is calling the Philippians to persist in obeying God and following Jesus. Paul reminds the Philippians in verse 13 that it's God who's doing the work in them. **In what ways does knowing God's the one working in you reassure you about the way you work out your salvation?**



One of the greatest hopes we have as Christians is that God is with us and working in us always. The Holy Spirit lives in us as our helper as we follow Jesus in obedience to God.

**READ Philippians 2:14–18.**

Paul tells the Philippians to do everything without complaining or arguing. **When is it difficult for you to avoid complaining and arguing? What helps you prevent them from happening altogether?**

Paul’s goal for the Philippians is that they will become “blameless and pure” so that they can shine like stars in the darkness of the world. **Why do you think our obedience to God can impact the lost world around us? What do our actions say about the church? About God?**

When we’re obedient to God, not only do we experience unity like we talked about last week, but we also show the world who God is and what it’s like to be a part of his family. **When have you seen God use your obedience to him as a witness to people outside the church?**

Jo encouraged us to shine – not just as individuals, but as a community of believers. **What actions “shine” the truth to the outside world? What could it look like for your church to “shine” in your town or city?**

Our obedience affects us personally and it also impacts the people around us—believers and nonbelievers alike. For Paul, he knows their obedience will be worth it to him both in the future when Jesus returns and in the present as he rejoices in their faithfulness. Paul then goes on to talk about two people who have modelled obedience.

**READ Philippians 2:19–30.**

Skim back through the passage. **What words does Paul use to describe Timothy? Epaphroditus?**

Paul praises Timothy and Epaphroditus for their faithfulness to God and their service to the people of God. **Which of these two men stands out to you the most? What could it look like for you to imitate him in your walk with Jesus?**

**Who are the people in your life whose faith you look up to? What’s one thing about them that you want to emulate in your life?**

Jo said, “We might never claim to be perfect examples of following Jesus, but we are living ones. Therefore, what you and I say and think and do matters. It matters to God. It matters to our faith community. It matters to our wider community.” **What does it mean to you that you’re a “living example” of following Jesus? What kind of example are you setting?**

**What could you do this week to remind yourself that you're setting an example for other Christians to follow?**

**What's one way you could walk in obedience to God with your thoughts, words, or actions this week?**

## LAST WORD

Paul always has a reason behind his advice or commands in his letters. We've seen over the past couple weeks how he wanted the church in Philippi to be unified, to imitate Jesus, to obey God. The reason was not only for the good of each individual's growth as believers, but also for the sake of the church and its witness to the world.

Our actions, thoughts, and words matter to God. He cares about us, wants us to be holy, and works in us to make us more like Jesus. He also cares about the church and her witness to the world. When we're obedient to God – when we follow the commandments laid out in Scripture, put other people's interests firsts, and avoid grumbling and complaining – we grow, we benefit the church, and we witness to the world about our God.

This week let's remember that people are observing our lives. Other Christians look up to us as examples of what it means to walk with Jesus. Non-Christians watch to see how we act because of our faith. Let's choose to be obedient.

---

## GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. But you can also use these sections as short devotionals before your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book of Philippians.

### ***1. Peek at the Greek: Work Out Your Salvation***

In verse 12, Paul tells the Philippians to “continue to work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling.” At first, these words seem to contradict other passages of Scripture that talk about how we cannot earn our salvation. But that's not what Paul's getting at.

Read Philippians 1:27–2:13 straight through.

Paul talks a lot about what the Philippians' lives should look like – especially when it comes to each other. Skim back through the verses and write down all the commands Paul gives to the Philippians.

**Looking at your list, what does Paul want for the Philippian church? In what ways does his vision for the church relate to what Jesus has done for them?**

As we saw last week, Paul ultimately wants the Philippians to look to Jesus as the example of how to treat each other. So when he talks about working out their salvation, he's referring to how they live as followers of Jesus – especially around other Christians. **When you consider your Christian relationships, where do you see areas you're becoming more like Jesus? Where do you see room for growth?**

Paul says to work out salvation with fear and trembling – not the first words we might bring to mind. He uses the Greek words *phobos* (fear) and *tomos* (trembling), which each carry the connotations of both being afraid and being in awe. Paul wants the Philippians to see the gravity of their actions. **How they treat each other should not be taken lightly. What could it look like for you to approach Jesus with awe? In what ways could awe for Jesus fuel the way you treat other Christians?**

Paul closes this section by reminding us that it's God who works in us for his purpose. When loving other Christians is difficult, he's there working in us. Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to refresh your awe for him and what he's done for you. Then ask him how he wants you to love another Christian in your life this week.

## 2. Children of God

In Philippians 2:15, Paul calls the Philippians “children of God.” It seems like a simple phrase, but it's packed with meaning. We can breeze over familiar statements like this one without pausing to consider their significance.

Read John 1:11–13; Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 3:26–29; 1 John 3:1–3, 10.

**With these passages in mind, what does it mean for us to be children of God? What benefits do the children of God receive?**

It's clear across these passages that we become children of God by faith in Jesus. Before we believe in him, we are enemies of God, separated from him by our sin. But God in his grace brings us into his family through faith in Jesus. **What difference does it make to you to know that you've been brought into God's family?**

Being children of God also means we have hope. We look forward to Jesus's return. The Romans passage says we'll be his co-heirs and the 1 John passage talks about us being like him. **In what ways does the inheritance that comes with being God's children offer you hope?**

In 1 John 3:10, John explains the identifiers of the children of God: obedience and love for one another. **In what ways does this verse in 1 John relate to what we're studying in Philippians this week?**

Being part of the children of God means we take care of each other. As Paul outlined earlier in Philippians 2, it means we are selfless, humble, and obedient to God—we imitate Jesus. **What's one way you could obey God today? Who is one Christian you could love this week?**

## 3. A Drink Offering

Paul says in Philippians 2:14–18 that he is “being poured out like a drink offering.” Let's look at what Paul means by “drink offering” and why he chose it as an illustration.

Read Numbers 15:1–12; 28:6–8.

**According to these verses, what was a drink offering? What would the Israelites do with it?**

The Israelites sacrificed for many reasons – to atone for sin, to give thanks, to worship God. But it's important to know that drink offerings never stood on their own – they always accompanied another sacrifice. **In what ways does Paul comparing himself to a drink offering show his humility?**

Paul saw the sacrifices he made in his life as secondary to the sacrifice of the Philippians, which, as we learn in 2:25 and 4:14–18, came in the form of a financial gift for Paul. The Philippians were obedient to God by sending the gift, which enabled Paul to do his work while in prison. So Paul rejoices and invites the Philippians to rejoice too. **What stands out to you about Paul's attitude toward the Philippians and their gift?**

**What could it look like this week to see your life as Paul saw his – as a sacrifice, as secondary to others', and with joy? In what ways could adopting his attitude influence the way you see other Christians?**

#### **4. Who is Timothy?**

Paul gives us a little bit of information about Timothy in Philippians 2. Paul sent him to Philippi to bring back a report, Timothy showed genuine care for people, and Timothy served Paul well. But there's more to know about Timothy.

Read Acts 16:1–5; 17:13–15; 19:21–22; 1 Timothy 1:1–2; 1 Corinthians 4:14–17.

**What all do we learn about Timothy from these passages? What was his relationship with Paul like?**

Timothy was Paul's right-hand man. Paul trusted him to visit churches, to carry messages for him, and he even considered Timothy a son. **When have you seen a relationship like Paul and Timothy's between two Christians? What was appealing about their friendship?**

**What do you think made Paul and Timothy's relationship possible? What would it take to have a relationship like theirs in your own life?**

We also know that Timothy was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. In the Acts 16 passage, Luke explains that Timothy was circumcised for the sake of the Jewish people he'd be ministering to. Paul also describes Timothy as giving of himself to serve Paul and the church. **What could it look like in your life to have the same attitude toward sacrifice as Timothy did?**

Consider the week ahead and the people you'll encounter. **What's one thing God could be asking you to sacrifice for the sake of another person this week?**

**NEXT TIME (3 OCTOBER) WE HOPE YOU CAN JOIN US FOR COFFEE & CAKE  
BEFORE WE RESUME PART 2 OF PHILIPPIANS ON 17 OCTOBER**