



Bible study questions: Philippians

Formation groups exist to encourage and enable us as disciples together. They lead to transformation, to growth together and in Christ. There is no more powerful way to see this in action than engaging together with God's word, so these Bible studies are written to provide material for a 30-40 minute Bible study as a group, aiming to help deepen our understanding, to prompt reflection and to encourage personal application.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11



Philippians

The short letter of Paul to the Christians of Philippi is passionate, personal and deeply pastoral. It gives a joyful dose of encouragement to live the Christian life, with practical wisdom too, all rooted in a clear view of Christ. Paul has been transformed by seeing Christ at work and enjoying him. Being in prison only seems to sharpen his vision and deepen that appreciation. His great joy overflows through the letter as he prays for and exhorts the church to shape their lives around Christ Jesus.

This letter has some of the most well-known words of the whole New Testament. Philippians gives us the 'hymn' to Christ who took on the nature of a man, a slave, and was obedient to death, even death on a cross, then exalted, glorified to the highest place where we confess him now as Lord of all. Paul tells us everything else is 'rubbish' (in our polite translations) compared to knowing the fullness of Christ. We are told here to keep our eyes on 'the prize', to press on to the goal. To the Philippians, Paul speaks of Christ our peace, 'which transcends all understanding', guarding our hearts and minds, and an antidote to anxiety.

This letter has been medicine for the soul, food for the spiritually hungry, a means of grace to the church for over 2000 years, and it still speaks to us today. In particular, it offers a view and encounter with Christ that is practical, powerful and personal – as Paul had found. May we seek that too.

These six studies consider the whole of the letter, seeking to deepen understanding and offer prompts for application. Take time before each session to read the text, praying for God to speak, noting questions, and preparing to encourage one another as you open up scripture together.

We have encouraged groups to start with the Philippians studies as they are relatively short, it is a short letter in itself, it is familiar to many Christians, and it has a clear focus on the gospel and on Christ. It is a letter full of joy!

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Psalm 119:105

Session 1

Philippians 1:1-11

*... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 1:6***

What do you thank God for most 'deeply' in your prayers? (v.3)

Paul's abundant joy comes from reflecting on and sharing in a 'partnership in the gospel' (v.5) with others. How do we see our connection with Jesus and with his people? How is it a blessing to us?

How do we understand the 'good work' which God began in us? (v.6) Having begun it, how do we expect God's help and presence to 'complete' it?

(vv.9-11) What would be your hopes and prayers for your Christian growth – in this group, over the next few months? How would you apply vv.9-11 to your hopes?

End this session with prayer for each other.

Session 2

Philippians 1:12-29

*... I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. **Philippians 1:20***

How do you relate to Paul's sense of confidence and even boldness in being a Christian (**vv.12-15**)?

Paul has confidence in Christ even when circumstances are difficult, rejoicing in Christ (**v.16, 30**, also **2:17** - Paul in chains). Have we experienced this? How can we grow in expectation?

Paul 'eagerly expects' God's welcome, affirmation, rescue, new life. What is his attitude to life and death (**v.20**)?

(**v.27**) 'Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.' 'stand firm ... believe ... suffer ... struggle'. How does such a life look distinctive, different, compared to the world's values? How can we live like this?

End this session with prayer for each other.

Session 3

Philippians 2:1-18

*... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. **Philippians 2:12-13***

Notice the sense of unity with other Christians (**vv.1-2**) – 'united with Christ', 'fellowship with the Spirit', 'one in spirit and purpose'. In which relationships or context do you rejoice in this sense of unity? How are you encouraged? Where are you contributing to this?

The example and role of Jesus is so clear (**vv.5-11**) – his humility, his selfless sacrifice, his greatness and honour in God's eyes despite the shame in the world's eyes, his glory and authority at the judgement. How do these speak to us today?

(**vv.12-13**) We are to 'work out our salvation', while 'God works in you'. How can we be more intentional to let Him work in us?

(**vv.17-18**) Where are you encouraged by the witness, service, example or inspiration of other Christians you know?

End this session with prayer for each other.

Session 4

Philippians 2:19-30

*I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. **Philippians 2:20-21***

(v.19) How does Christian friendship keep you going and growing as a Christian?

(v.21) What does it mean to 'look out for the interests of Christ Jesus' in the spiritual welfare of others? How can we do that, in practical terms?

How can we minister to other Christian friends? What stops us or holds us back from being more open or more involved in talking of spiritual matters?

Take a moment to share and give thanks for those who have been a 'Timothy' or an 'Epaphroditus' for you (v.25), a 'brother or sister, co-worker, fellow soldier, a messenger of the good news', used by the Lord to bless you.

End this session with prayer for each other.

Session 5

Philippians 3:1 – 4:1

*... I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. ... I want to know Christ **Philippians 3:8,10***

(vv.7-8) Paul is consumed with knowing Christ, and considers all else 'rubbish' by comparison. Discuss! What has been the best thing this past month about knowing Christ? How might we have we under-valued Christ, or over-valued other things?

(v.9) We belong to Christ - accepted, loved, and righteous – by faith in Christ. This righteousness is a gift, not based on our performance. How does this put our failings into perspective? How can this make us more confident Christians?

(vv.13-14) We are on a journey, in a race, in a fight, to reach the goal, to win the prize. How can we be encouraged by the example of Jesus (e.g. **Phil. 2:5-11**)? What other, lesser 'prize' might we strive to win?

(vv.16-17) How can we encourage one another to more godly living, as citizens of heaven (v.20) whilst living on earth?

End this session with prayer for each other.

Session 6

Philippians 4:2-23

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Philippians 4:4-5

Every Christian has their name in the 'book of life', yet they don't always behave well or get on together. How do you personally cope with conflict with Christians?

'Rejoice ... The Lord is near.' (vv.4-5) Are there times when you have particularly needed to know or wanted to know that 'the Lord is near'?

(v.7) God's peace (both from God, and the peace that only He gives) guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, as we take matters to Him in prayer, as we open ourselves to His nearness and presence, and move from anxiety to trust. How have you experienced this? Why do we get anxious at times?

Our minds are easily distracted, even polluted, hence Paul's command (vv.8-9). How can we enable ourselves, and encourage others, to seek this renewed thinking?

The Philippians were generous to Paul, to one another and to the needy in financial support and in other ways. How should we apply this to ourselves, in general and in practical ways?

End this session with prayer for each other.