

Philippians

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A Discover Together Bible Study

Philippians

Discovering Joy Through Relationship

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Kregel Publications

Philippians: Discovering Joy Through Relationship
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How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study

Women today need Bible study to keep balanced, focused, and Christ-centered in their busy worlds. The tiered questions in *Philippians: Discovering Joy Through Relationship* allow you to choose a depth of study that fits your lifestyle, which may even vary from week to week, depending on your schedule.

Just completing the basic questions will require about one and a half hours per lesson, and will provide a basic overview of the text. For busy women, this level offers in-depth Bible study with a minimum time commitment.

“Digging Deeper” questions are for those who want to, and make time to, probe the text even more deeply. Answering these questions may require outside resources such as an atlas, Bible dictionary, or concordance; you may be asked to look up parallel passages for additional insight; or you may be encouraged to investigate the passage using an interlinear Greek-English text or *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. This deeper study will challenge you to learn more about the history, culture, and geography related to the Bible, and to grapple with complex theological issues and differing views. Some with teaching gifts and an interest in advanced academics will enjoy exploring the depths of a passage, and might even find themselves creating outlines and charts and writing essays worthy of seminarians!

This inductive Bible study is designed for both individual and group discovery. You will benefit most if you tackle each week’s lesson on your own, and then meet with other women to share insights, struggles, and aha moments. Bible study leaders will find free, downloadable leader’s guides for each study, along with general tips for leading small groups, at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

Through short video clips, Sue Edwards shares personal insights to enrich your Bible study experience. You can watch these as you work through each lesson on your own, or your Bible study leader may want your whole study group to view them when you meet together. For ease of individual viewing, a QR code, which you can simply scan with your smartphone, is provided in each lesson. Or you can go to www.discovertogetherseries.com and easily navigate until you find the corresponding video title. Woman-to-woman, these clips are meant to bless, encourage, and challenge you in your daily walk.

Choose a realistic level of Bible study that fits your schedule. You may want to finish the basic questions first, and then “dig deeper” as time permits. Take time to savor the questions, and don’t rush through the application. Watch the videos. Read the sidebars for additional insight to enrich the experience. Note the optional passage to memorize and determine if this discipline would be helpful for you. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by women who have more time or who are gifted differently.

Make your Bible study—whatever level you choose—top priority. Consider spacing your study throughout the week so that you can take time to ponder and meditate on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you. Do not make other appointments during the group Bible study. Ask God to enable you to attend faithfully. Come with an excitement to learn from others and a desire to share yourself and your journey. Give it your best, and God promises to join you on this adventure that can change your life.

Why Study Philippians?

Most studies on the Philippian letter emphasize Paul's remarkable joy ballooning from almost every verse, remarkable because he penned the letter while confined under house arrest in Rome. Certainly a noteworthy observation, especially in light of Paul's adventurous life. Now this type A energizer was forced to carry on his missionary work chained to a Roman guard. But as I devoured the letter in my personal study, I also saw two powerful resources enabling Paul to bear fruit in chains: first, of course, his robust relationship with God, but second, and less often considered, his staunch friendships with the Philippians. In our study, we'll focus on both Paul's ability to rise above his circumstances *and* the part friends played in his success.

Paul was relational and he's modeling the beauty and power of authentic Christian community, something most of us crave, especially in our networked lives. Today, many of us are more connected superficially through technology, but less connected in "keep it real," face-to-face relationships. The Bible assumes, however, that Christians will support one another through good times and bad. The Philippian letter illustrates this assumption. We were all made for community and we cannot thrive without it.

The letter is jam-packed with plural pronouns and statements like, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. . . . It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3–5, 7–8). Paul knew how to encourage and exhort his friends, and God wants us to learn how too. Studying this little letter will show us ways to love our friends well.

These tender connections began on Paul's second missionary journey when God called him to plant the first church on the European continent. The place was Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city in the region. In lesson 1, we'll meet the unique characters who became some of Paul's dearest friends.

As you work through the lessons, look for this constant communal theme and Paul's resulting joy, even in tough times. Being anchored in healthy community will also help us through tough times. How would your life be different if you lived in Philippi where tight-knit, supportive community was the norm? What are you missing out on today because you are failing to invest in the life of the church? How might you create a place where you don't think in terms of "me" but in terms of "we"? Welcome to the little letter that just might make a big difference in your life.



Introduction to Studying Philippians (0:00 minutes).

LESSON 1

Beloved Friendships**Optional****Memorize Philippians 1:3–6**

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

I love people, but that hasn't always been true. If people hurt us, we often struggle to trust them. That's what happened to me. But when I was in my mid-twenties, a neighbor invited me to a women's Bible study where a team of godly Christian women introduced me to Jesus. They also loved me and taught me what true friendships look like. Those relationships changed my life. And ever since, God has blessed me with dear friends who point me to the Lord and make me better than I could ever be without their prayers, encouragement, and guidance. The letter we are about to study was written by a man who loved and valued his friends too. Paul was relational.

I've heard several pastors define what's really important in life this way: only two things on earth will last for eternity, the truth of God's word and people. I think Paul would agree. Most of us desire enriching relationships in which we can be real and give others the same freedom. Do you want to experience those kinds of relationships? Watch Paul and the Philippians. As we dig into the Philippian letter, we will observe beautiful friendships, up close and personal. Those relationships model how intimate, authentic friends treat one another, even when relationships turn messy and complicated.

 **Joy Through Relationship** (0:00 minutes).

But before we dig into the letter, I want you to see how God sovereignly connected Paul with his friends in Philippi. These people worked with Paul to birth the church there. How did God supernaturally bring them together? What kinds of people were they? How did Paul woo and win them to Jesus? What experiences gave them a common history that made their lives together richer, more productive, and sweet? Our story begins in Acts 16:6–40.

Read Acts 16:6–10.**Traveling to Troas**

Paul, Silas, and Timothy are revisiting churches that Paul planted on his first mission trip. His desire was to encourage them and to see how they were progressing. Many of the churches Paul planted on his first missionary journey were in Asia Minor, now Turkey.

1. Their plan was to visit churches in that region, but why did they abandon their original itinerary (16:6–7)?

A tragic thing happens to us when we outplan God and resist his interventions because they were not on our carefully calculated agendas.

—Lloyd John Ogilve (*Drumbeat of Love*, 201)

2. Name some ways God redirects people today. Can you think of specific examples? (No names, please.)

3. Has “the Holy Spirit” or “the Spirit of Jesus” ever rerouted your own journey? How did you know it was God guiding you in a different direction?

4. Where did Paul go instead (16:8)? Who sought his help? How (16:9)? What was Paul’s response (16:10)?

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

—Isaiah 43:19

5. To guide Paul into Europe (Macedonia), God had to close a door to the south and to the north. Has God ever closed doors for you? If so, when? How did you feel? What did God have planned instead?

digging deeper

Who has joined Paul’s group? How do you know (16:10)?

digging deeper

Why might one argue that the Trinity was involved in guiding these missionaries to the continent of Europe?

Authentic turning points in history are few. But surely among them that of the Macedonian vision ranks high. Because of Paul’s obedience at this point, the gospel went westward; and ultimately Europe and the Western world were evangelized. Christian response to the call of God is never a trivial thing. Indeed, as in this instance, great issues and untold blessings may depend on it.

—Richard N. Longenecker (“Acts,” 458)

If you travel to the ancient ruins of Philippi, you can stand on a bridge that overlooks a stream outside the ancient city gate where many believe Paul and his fellow travelers first met Lydia and the other women “God worshippers.” When I was there, I sensed God’s presence in a special way. I remember peering into the bubbling crystal clear stream as it rushed by us while our seminary president read of the account. We took communion there to celebrate what Jesus did to bring salvation to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. I can’t wait to meet Lydia, the first convert from Europe. Paul is often characterized as a woman-hater, but if he was, he would not have ministered to these women beside the river. But he did. He ministered to them by the river during a time in history when women were seen as inferior and personal contact with them was sometimes suspect. We have no evidence that other men from the city were present. Jesus’s care and concern for women must have rubbed off on this former Pharisee, and as a result, Paul introduced the women to Jesus. As a result, Lydia became an influential and founding member of the Philippian church. What an encouragement to Christian women everywhere! —Sue

Because no husband is mentioned, we can speculate that Lydia was a widow. We can also surmise that as a dealer in purple cloth, she was probably quite wealthy. During the Roman era, only the rich and privileged were allowed to wear the color purple. Purple dye was collected drop by drop from a certain shellfish. Lydia’s business catered to well-to-do customers. And her home was large enough to accommodate Paul and the others in their party while they were in Philippi, and may have been the meeting place for the infant church after Paul left. Women in the first century often used their influence and wealth to serve as patronesses, and it’s likely that Lydia used her influence to help the new church “find its feet.”

Read Acts 16:16–40.

8. Who made ministry in Philippi difficult for Paul? How? (16:16–17)

Today, sex traffickers enslave adolescents and adults, using and abusing them to earn money for themselves. These abominable practices occur all over the world, including within the United States. To learn about some ministries that work to end trafficking and exploitation as well as minister to victims and raise awareness, see www.love146.org, www.newfriendsnewlife.org, or www.freethecaptiveshouston.com.

9. According to verse 18, what did she do that caused Paul to stop ignoring her? How did Paul respond?