

Small Group or Devotional Guide: Philippians Summer Series

Introduction

Philippians is one of the books written by Paul as an encouragement to believers who might have become discouraged by looking at circumstances around them. This kind of encouragement to focus on the joy of knowing Christ is just as timely today, as we find ourselves dismayed or discouraged by personal struggles or alarming social trends and national events. What can we learn from God's heart, as expressed through Paul, that allows us to truly echo his refrain of, "Rejoice always!"?

Each week as Pastor Joshua preaches from the book of Philippians we'll take the opportunity to spend more time studying and meditating on some of the key truths from the passage that we heard about in the sermon. You can use the material in this guide to read and discuss some of the related questions either in a group setting or on your own over a few days of the week. We pray that a richer understanding of some of the key passages will further illuminate the teaching from the book of Philippians this summer, and your walk with Christ.

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

1. How does God begin this work in me?

✓ Please read Romans 10:14-21.

- What is the first thing that someone needs to do in v. 10 and again in v. 11 to begin this relationship with God?
- Faith, belief with the heart, and trust are the really the same thing. According to v. 17, how does someone come to faith?
- How is God pictured in v. 21 to those that He wants to hear and believe the good news of the gospel? How does this make you feel about God who patiently waits with open arms-- do you need to listen and go to Him, or turn back to Him again?

✓ Please read 1 Corinthians 3:3-7

- In these verses Paul is scolding the Corinthians because they are not allowing God to work in them. What is causing division among them according to v. 4-5?
- God uses preachers and teachers, like Paul and Apollos, to bring us the word of God, but look in v. 6-7! What really causes His word to be at work in us?
- What are the pitfalls in relying *too* much on human leaders or teachers? Have you ever experienced or witnessed Christians putting their faith in charismatic or wise people to grow them spiritually rather than God?

The transformation that God can do in us begins when we hear and believe God's word, both the first time we repent and believe in Jesus as our savior, and every time we are listening to His truth. Other people may be used by God to help us along, but they can't change us from the inside -- we need to rely on God the Holy Spirit to do this good work and grow us into people who are like Jesus.

2. Nobody's perfect, we all know that...so why even try?

✓ The books of the New Testament were written in Greek, and the Greek word that Paul used in our key truth of Philippians 1:6 was "telios." This is translated into English Bibles as "perfection" or "completion." Another way to think about that word is "lacking nothing" — we may see life in Christ as *lacking nothing* because God is caring for us and willing to keep changing us for the better!

✓ Please read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

- What does it say God chose us for in v. 13?
- When we look in v. 14 we can see that the true reward God has in mind is in the future – what is it?
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✓ Please look ahead in Philippians and read Phil. 3:12-14

- These words are from the example of the apostle Paul's own life. Was he living as a perfect Christian?
- What does his example call us to do? We can see from these verses that God's will is to sanctify us, or bring us to maturity as fully formed followers of Christ. The promises don't say that we should be perfect already, but that God wants to take us on the journey to Christ-likeness and sharing in His glory.

3. So if I am trying to follow Jesus and seem to take two steps forward and one step back, does this mean I am not really a part of this process of sanctification?

✓ Please read Romans 7:15-20

- What does the writer, Paul, say he keeps on doing in v. 15?
- Is there some habit or behavior that you have told yourself you would not do again, and then found yourself in the same position again and again with frustration?
- What does Paul say is responsible for this ongoing struggle? Look in v. 17 and 20.

✓ So are things hopeless for me to be like God wants me to be?

✓ Please read Romans 7:24-8:5.

- Who can set us free from this conflict inside ourselves because of the sinful desires that we all experience?
- How do we need to take our steps each day according to v.4 and 5?

Paul was an incredible teacher and leader who performed many miracles and led many to salvation. And even he lived with the struggle of sin and temptation to follow the desires of his flesh! We have already seen that God wants to work in us to make us complete and lacking in nothing, like Jesus, and it is the Holy Spirit that will lead us in His will and give us the power over all the things we try to overcome on our own.

4. What can I do to work with the Holy Spirit to become more like Jesus?

✓ Please read James 1:19-25

- What did James think about people who are always hearing the Word of God and good teachings but never do anything about what they heard?
- If hearing God's word is like looking in a mirror, what are some ways you could remember what your life is supposed to look like even when you are not in church or small group?

✓ Please read Romans 12:1-2

o What are we told to break free from in v. 2?

o How is the Holy Spirit going to start changing us?

o What kinds of real influences do you have from the world that you should test against God's good will for you?

The Holy Spirit becomes active in us when we hear the word of God and respond by changing the way we think, which will change the way we act. To become the person God wants to make us – a reflection of Christ – it requires a real knowledge of the truth, as Paul prays in Philippians 1:9- 11.

To close this week, pray that God would increase your understanding so that you would seek the things that are best and be filled with His righteousness.