

LEADER GUIDE



Week 1

Philippians 1 – The Struggle is real.

Text: The opening verses of Philippians weave together the language of deeply affectionate relationship, and Christian maturity. Paul writes of the Philippians partnership with him in the Gospel, of their being partakers of grace with him in suffering, and of the deep affection he has for them. In the same sequence he writes about their anticipated completion in Christ and prays through the steps by which they will move on to maturity. A study of the intertwining of these ideas will highlight the close relationship between Christian community and spiritual growth.

Big Idea: Moving on in Christ happens in community with God and others.

God will complete what he has begun in us, and the context in which he does this is in community with others.

Question: Why do we need others to grow towards maturity?

Gospel Component: Growing in Christ is not a personal accomplishment any more than being forgiven of our sins is a personal accomplishment. God is the one who is bringing our lives to completion. He is the source of the love that will produce maturity. (Philippians 1:6)

PowerPoint Bullets: The path to maturity (Philippians 1:9-11) ...

- Love leads to...
- Knowledge/discernment leads to...
- Right choices/approving what is excellent leads to...
- Blamelessness before Judgement because we are...
- Filled with the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
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Key question: If love is the beginning point and key to maturity, what does this love look like? A love that abounds increasingly in knowledge and depth of insights. (Philippians 1:9) Love that is fed/enriched/abounding in truth. True Love is love in truth. We can't separate emotions from mind. Not just rational, but understanding, insightful, discerning. Truth with practical insight/wisdom.

True Love ...

- Loves the truth
- Lives the truth

This is why you cannot grow in isolation ... growth requires love, which requires others.

LEADER GUIDE



Week 2

Philippians 2 - Getting the right people on the bus and in the right seat.

Text: This text may well be the heart of the epistle to the Philippians. Many scholars see “Christian Unity” as the unifying theme of the book, and this is where the theme finds its most profound development. Careful study of the text yields exegetical details that enrich our understanding. The overall flow of thought is as follows:

- Paul appeals to the Philippians, based on their shared experience in Christ, to have the same mind and love. (v. 1-2)
- As a foundation for unity, he calls them to humility. (v. 3-4)
- As a foundation for humility, he points them to the example of Jesus. (v. 5-11)

Be sure to note the important details. For example, Paul uses the same word for the attitude that Christians are to have toward one another (count/consider one another more important (v. 3), and the attitude that Jesus demonstrated when he did not count/consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. Also, pay attention to the chiasmic structure of the hymn in v. 5-11. If we see the steps of Jesus’ descent (v. 6-8a) as parallel to the steps in his glorification (v. 9-11), the turning point and central image is the cross (v. 8b). This indicates the centrality of the cross of Jesus as the only true foundation for Christian unity.

Big Idea: There’s no real life without community. There is no real community without humility and self-denial.

The Goal: Unity founded in God’s grace ... same mind, same love. If there is any consolation in Christ, participation in the Spirit, comfort in love ... this is what it will look like, and it is not an option for God’s people!

Gospel Component: The structure of this passage (particularly the chiasm in Philippians 2:5-11) places the cross at the very center of our path to real community. The key to community in our lives is not just getting along, being nice, staying in the room, etc., but experiencing the transforming work of the Cross of Jesus, as we die with Him there.

PowerPoint Bullets: Habits of a spirit-formed community (application):

- Humility-Considering others more important vs. rivalry/conceit.
- Care for others-Looking out for others’ interests more than just my interests/your interests, but our interests ... we are together, working toward the same end. Having a passion for moving forward in togetherness. Demonstrate to the world that Christ is sufficient. In our weakness we are strong.
- *Following the example of Christ-Taking a downward path and leaving exaltation to God.*

LEADER GUIDE



Week 3

Philippians 3 – Break downs that lead to break throughs.

Text: When we see this passage in light of its context in Philippians, we can see that Paul is doing two things. First, he is taking an opportunity to reaffirm the Gospel, that salvation does not come by works. Second, he is advancing the cause of community through humility in the church. The conflicts in Philippi, and the conflicts in just about any church fight, revolve around people trying to gain special privilege, influence, recognition, or power based on their own achievement. This impulse of fallen humanity creates havoc disguised as piety in the life of the church. The Judaizers Paul warned against hid their ambition and self-promotion under the pretext of theological purity. Their theology was actually in error, but they couldn't let go of it, because to do so would be to surrender their superiority over others. The result was not only doctrinal confusion, but discord and disunity in the body of Christ. Paul's answer was to take their eyes off human achievement and put them on the one goal that they could never achieve on their own: knowing Christ.

Big Idea: True humility (and true serenity) comes when you come to grips with the fact that the only accomplishment in life that matters is simply knowing Christ.

Gospel Focus: Living is Knowing Christ. All of our efforts count for nothing; it's His work that matters. Joy comes from letting God be God, rather than trying to be God ourselves. We can safeguard our hearts when we choose joy in Christ over achievement apart from Christ.

Bullets: Knowing Christ ... really knowing him ... (Philippians 3:7-11)

- Power of his resurrection
- Fellowship (koinonia ... sharing, participating) of his suffering – How can we see suffering as an opportunity to live in fellowship with Christ.
- Like him in his death
- Like him in his resurrection

LEADER GUIDE



Week 4

Philippians 4 – Peace and gratitude begins where entitlement ends.

Text: In this final chapter of his epistle, Paul begins with a section addressed in a very personal way to his dearly loved brothers in Philippi. The opening verses of Philippians 4 (v. 2-9) are bound together by the common theme of “peace.” Sandwiched between verses on either side that address the issue of peace among the brothers are two verses (6-7) that address the issue of peace within ourselves. Paul contrasts the inner peace of Christ guarding our hearts and minds with its opposite: anxiety.

Big Idea: Real peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of God.

Gospel Focus: In our brokenness, we try to “fix” our anxieties and look for an escape. We numb our fear through food or alcohol, pills and thrills. All of these are merely attempting to cope with our stress by masking its symptoms. The Gospel of Jesus means that we can enter freely into the presence of God, where we find a supernatural, irrational peace in the midst of any trial.

Additional Thoughts:

God is greater than all our fears. We can live in peace when we give our burdens to Him.

This peace is not a freedom from turmoil or conflict, but an all-encompassing shalom. Shalom is a spiritual, total, complete well-being in God, covering every aspect of life.

Our typical ways of dealing with anxiety when we mask its symptoms have one thing in common: a total lack of acknowledging the spiritual component. The root of our anxiety is the belief that we must bear our burdens ourselves. Anxiety is a spiritual problem with a spiritual solution.

Notice the ways Paul talks about peace ... “Peace guards our hearts and minds” ... “The God of peace will be with you” ... these all point to the fact that living in God’s presence is the foundation for peace.

Bullet Points: Prayer leading to peace will have these components (Philippians 4:6-7)

- Prayer ...
- Thanksgiving...
- Requests...
- Petition/Supplication...

This is the prayer that leads to peace, guarding our hearts and minds. Anxiety is a habit of the heart and the mind. Another possibility would be to explore heart and mind as the source of anxiety, and how God’s peace guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.