



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Philippians Lesson 4: Philippians 1:1-11

Today is the day! We are finally going to start diving into the verse-by-verse portion of our study. This is one of the most powerfully practical books in all of Scripture and is definitely one that will step all over your toes if you let it...be sure to let it! We don't come to Scripture to simply learn new things or to feel warm and fuzzy; we come to Scripture to move us and challenge us to grow into the image of Christ. Philippians is one of those books that can cause a profound shift in the way you think and act. All that being said, we will spend a significant amount of time in self-reflection, don't skip these sections, they are important! Be sure you are allowing yourself to be challenged by the text.

Before we begin say a prayer that God will soften your heart and allow this study to mold you more into the image of Christ. (I prayed this for all of us too as I was writing!)

Read Philippians 1:1-2.

How does describe he and Timothy in verse 1?

Who is this letter addressed to?

The word translated "bond-servant" here (I'm using the NASB in case you were wondering) is the Greek word DOULOS and it literally means slave. These men considered themselves subservient to the will of Christ in every way. Their whole lives were devoted to serving Him just as a slave.

Many of our New Testament letters start in this very powerful way. The apostles and other New Testament writers would have been held in high regard by all those around, yet they all considered themselves nothing more than slaves. They lived lives completely subservient to Christ and sometimes paid a high cost for that. This is an especially potent way to start a book that is going to focus on attitude and humility.

What does it look like for us to be a slave of Christ today?



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What two things did Paul wish for the apostles in verse 2?

This is another very typical inclusion in the opening of New Testament letters. Grace was the typical Greek greeting and Peace was the typical Jewish greeting. We know that the early church in Philippi had both Jews and Greeks from our background study.

Read Philippians 1:3-6

How does Paul describe his prayers about the Philippians?

Joy will be a central focus of this letter, but don't miss the fact that when joy is mentioned it is specifically joy towards the accomplishment of God's purpose. In Philippians the words joy and gospel are linked together. The source and focus of our joy should be on the forefront of our minds throughout this study. As we will see throughout this study, having a mind focused in the right direction will do amazing things when it comes to avoiding and resolving conflict.

Why does Paul thank God for his brothers and sisters in Philippi?

Thinking back to our background study, how did the Philippians participate in the gospel on Paul's initial visit to Philippi?

How did the Philippians continue to participate in the gospel being spread?

The Philippian church loved and supported Paul. While he was in Philippi they took care of him and made sure he had a place to stay both before and after he was in prison. Once he left Philippi, they continued to financially support him in his work. These men and women cared deeply for accomplishing the mission of Christ. And this is the case for many of us, if you are reading this there is a pretty good chance you are one of those who are devoted to God and have given and served in order for His will to be done.

Even the most devoted servants of God can have issues arise, and we see this with the Philippian church. They were letting division and discord seep into their congregation and Paul is trying to shift their focus back to what is important.



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How can reminding ourselves of the true focus on our mission help resolve some of the conflict that can arise when serving God?

I don't think most people set out to start conflict, but over time, we develop habits and ways of doing things and we get protective of those. I know of congregations where ladies have wanted to put together a ladies' day but cannot agree on anything long enough to actually plan it. I have seen a sweet young preachers wife terrified to walk into the kitchen to help because there were ladies who would belittle if something wasn't cleaned a particular way or food served just right (I've actually seen this more than once or even twice sadly). I have seen a young lady who was excited to teach Bible class get scolded by the teacher she looked up to so very much because she asked to help and the older teacher was insulted that she wanted to steal her class.

Ladies! This is not okay! Our whole purpose should be to further the kingdom of God and do His will. I should never cause strife about something that is so insignificant. Can God's will be done whether we have a ladies day and decorate with anchors or whether we decorate with flowers? Can God's will be done even if the dinner rolls get put on a different side of the buffet line at the potluck? Can God's will be done even if we swallow our pride and let someone else help in our class or even teach

it for a while? I hope you see the answer to all of these is a resounding YES! The focus for all of us should be on our participation and advancement of the gospel and if that is happening, the rest is just icing on the cake.

How have you seen division occur while people are trying to serve God?

Have you ever been the target of behavior like this? How did it make you feel? Were you inspired to keep working toward the goal or discouraged?

This is a tough one, be honest though. Have you ever contributed to a situation like this? Causing strife or even causing someone to feel bad over something that really didn't matter in the grand scheme of things?

Read Philippians 1:7-11

Where is Paul when he writes this?

This letter was most likely written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, we will see more evidence for that in our next



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lesson. One of the primary focuses of this whole first chapter though is that while he is in prison he is still thankful and joyful. His circumstances don't matter, but the cause of Christ does.

What does Paul pray for on behalf of the Philippians?

How can increasing in these things help them deal with the problem at hand?

Paul prays for them to have “real knowledge” and “all discernment.” The word for “real knowledge” here is EPIGNOSIS and it is literally experiential knowledge towards something. They were to use their knowledge to know how to act, our word for this would be wisdom. Discernment describes our ability to understand a given situation and all the nuance involved.

These two characteristics are not easy to develop but are of the utmost importance when learning to deal with people. It is easy to just fly by the seat of our pants and act however our emotions lead us, but Paul is praying for something different for them. He wants them to truly think through their responses to others and control what comes out of their mouth and how they act toward others.

Is responding to people with wisdom and discernment something that comes naturally to you or do you find it difficult at times?

What are some practical ways that we can develop these skills specifically in our relationships with others?

According to verse 10, why did Paul pray these things for them?

This phrase “so that you may approve the things that are excellent” can be a little confusing. In the original language, the implication here is that they will continually examine the things that are worthy. This is very reminiscent of the admonition Paul will make later in Philippians 4:8. We will discuss this concept much more when we get there, but the basic idea in this prayer is that our knowledge and discernment will allow us to really examine the right and good things in any given situation.

How does Paul use to describe those who are filled with knowledge and discernment in verse 11?



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What is the ultimate outcome of this type of behavior according to verse 11?

When we shift our perspective and start to use a mind focused in the right direction to look at each situation, our lives become filled with the fruit of righteousness. Just like a tree bears fruit that feeds all those around, this fruit that is produced by our submission to Christ will bless all those who come into contact with us. The ultimate result is that God is praised and glorified through our actions.

Do my actions toward others demonstrate the fruit of righteousness?

Is God praised and glorified as a result of my encounters with others?

How can I improve in this area?

Are your toes sore yet? Mine definitely are! These things are not easy to accomplish, thankfully, Paul does not leave us high and dry. He will walk through some

very practical ways to become this person who is conformed to the very image of Christ. It is not easy to change our hearts and to shift our thinking. We live in a very self-centered world, and it is impossible to be here without that rubbing off on us in some way. I challenge you this week to read through Philippians again and this time pray earnestly that your heart be softened to the message.