

Philippians

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Study 1 **Acts 16:11-40, WELCOME TO PHILIPPI**

Warm-Up

1. In this passage we will see how God worked in the lives of three different people (A rich merchant trader, a poor slave girl, and a Roman prison officer). Perhaps the leader of the Bible-study might arrange for someone from the group to share their story of conversion.

Bible Study (Read Acts 16:11-40)

2. Paul has just set out on his second missionary journey. Who is accompanying him? (See 15:40, 16:1-3, 16:11)
What is the likely significance of the change from 'we' in chapter 16 to 'they' in 17:1? (You will find a hint in 20:5-6)
3. What do you learn about the city of Philippi from this passage? (You may also want to refer to a Bible Dictionary if you are keen!)

4. *Describe the events of the night that led up to the jailor's question "What must I do to be saved?"*

5. *What was Paul's answer to the jailer's question? How would you answer this question if someone asked you?*

6. *Compare and contrast the conversion of Lydia with the conversion of the jailer. What does it tell us about the way God works?*

Discussion

7. *Paul & Silas speak the truth of the gospel as well as living it out. Can you think of specific situations where this is a real challenge for you?*

Study 2**Philippians 1:1-11, PARTNERS IN CHRIST'S GOSPEL****Warm-Up**

1. When you care for someone, are you more likely to send a funny card, or a touching one? Why?

Bible Study

2. Why does Paul refer to the Philippian church members as "saints"? Do you feel comfortable being referred to as a saint?
3. How does Paul's greeting ("grace and peace", v.2) sum up the gospel? Is this more than "just a greeting"?
4. What is Paul feeling for this church? What does this suggest about his leadership style?
5. What is "the work" referred to in verse 6, and whose "work" is it?
(See also 1:10-11; 2:15-16; 1 Cor 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 1:12-14).
6. What qualities does Paul indicate are really important in a fellowship (verses 8-11)? To what extent do we try to promote (or pray for) these qualities in our fellowship?

Discussion

7. Would "grace and peace" or "guilt and pressure" be a better description of your experience with Christ at present? Why?
8. What are the things we (you) thank God for most? How would you describe your prayer life?
9. Paul expresses a great deal of emotion in these verses. How free are we in expressing our emotions to God, and/or to each other?

10. How can we encourage the “abounding” of love, knowledge, depth of insight, etc.

a) in our own lives?

b) in our small group?

c) in our church?

STUDY 2 Philippians 1:1-11, LEADERS’ NOTES

Warm-Up

1. In a simple way, this question raises one of the main issues of this passage - the intense feeling of Paul for the Philippian Christians. What is our response when we feel that way about someone? Sometimes humour covers up our embarrassment at expressing our true feelings - no such embarrassment for Paul!

Bible Study

2. The Greek word translated “saint” has the same root as the word for “holy” – i.e., a saint is someone who is made holy, which means being set apart from unrighteousness and sin, and to God and his character and purpose. This is actually a description of every Christian person, so if we are “in Christ”, we are saints, according to the New Testament definition. The only reason we may feel uncomfortable is that we have become used to a different scale of meaning for the word, where it describes only the very best and most worthy - and we know we are not classed among those! But, in fact, God has made us worthy (no-one is worthy of themselves), so we are saints.
3. “Grace” is the free gift of God’s love, extended to us, though totally undeserved on our part (see above). It is God’s grace which stands at the heart of the gospel (see Ephesians 2:8,9), and without it we would all remain condemned. “Peace” speaks of the reconciliation which we have with God in Christ - and the implication of that peace, found in the gospel, is that we then strive for peace (reconciliation) with others (see Col. 1:20, 2 Cor. 5:18-21, Eph. 2:14-18).
4. Clearly, Paul’s feelings for the Philippians ran very deep - verses 3,4,7& 8. He was deeply committed to this small group of Christians, and felt strongly for them, seeking to inspire them to greater godliness (part of the overall purpose of this letter). Considering the relatively brief contact with this community, it would seem that his leadership style was one of standing with people and sharing their sorrows and joys in partnership. Following the example of Jesus, his desire was to serve, rather than to be served, and to enter into the experience of those whom he led. This same style is reflected in his “instructions” to the Philippians (e.g. 2:1-4).
5. The “work” is the effecting of salvation - ensuring that a right relationship with God is achieved and maintained. It is always God’s work - primarily - though to some extent we are drawn into it ourselves, as we respond to God’s grace in our experience. But the responsibility rests with God, and Paul is convinced that’s where its safest anyway - there is no doubt that God will deliver!
6. The specific qualities listed here are things like love, knowledge, depth of insight, discernment, pure and blameless living, being “filled with the fruit of righteousness” (could this be a reference to other qualities, such as those listed in Galatians 5:22,23?), etc. To be like this is a big ask! But ask we must if we are going to be effective as Christians - these are the characteristics which reflect the character of God, and we must seek to encourage them in the experience of our daily lives and relationships.

Discussion

These questions are designed to give your group opportunity to discuss the issues freely, especially as they relate to us, and our experience. Encourage practical discussion and suggestions (where appropriate) - there may well be undertakings made to try to be different, or to take on different priorities - perhaps you could encourage specific prayer for one another, and create time next week, in the group, to “report back” on how your resolves were achieved.

Study 3**Philippians 1:12-30, SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE****Warm-Up**

1. Would you describe yourself as primarily an optimist or a pessimist? Why?

Bible Study

(Note: There are three main possibilities with regards to the location of Paul's imprisonment at the time of writing this letter: Rome, Caesarea or Ephesus. The traditional view and the one I have assumed for this study is that Paul is in Rome.)

2. What was Paul's situation in Rome? (You may like to refer to Acts 28:16-30). How did Paul's adversity allow the gospel to advance?

3. Do you think that preaching out of evil motives can effectively spread the gospel?

4. What does it mean when Paul says:

(a) "For me to live is Christ"? (v21)

(b) "... Christ will be exalted in my body in life or death"? (v20)

5. What is the difference between Paul's desire for death and someone with thoughts of suicide?

6. What do we learn from this passage about the relationship between Paul and the Christians at Philippi?

Discussion

7. When have you seen a bad situation in your life used for good?

How do you cope in hard times when you don't see any evidence of anything good coming out of the situation?

8. Can you identify with Paul's struggle in verse 23? Why or why not?

9. What do you most look forward to about heaven?

What motivates you most to live?

How do these two things affect your life?

STUDY 3 Philippians 1:12-30, LEADERS' NOTES

Warm-Up

1. The question can be used for a bit of fun. It may also tie in later on in the study as we see Paul faced with real adversity and how he evaluates his situation and how he views his future.

Bible Study

2. If you want to follow the events leading up to Paul's arrival in Rome you might like to quickly read from Acts 21 to the end of Acts. This will give you the details of what happened in Jerusalem. You will see the accusations levelled against Paul from the Jews, the unrest that grew into a riot in the city, his arrest, transfer to Caesarea where he spent 2 years in prison, 3 trials and then off to Rome to face trial before the Caesar. Throw in a shipwreck along the way and you can see Paul was having a pretty torrid time of it. Acts 28:16-30 may or may not need to be read during the Bible Study but it does tell of Paul's situation having arrived in Rome. He was under house arrest which meant that people were free to come and go to the house but he was constantly guarded by the palace guard. He was awaiting further trial which would determine his future so he was living with uncertainty.

His situation advanced the gospel in two main ways

- (i) The impact on the whole of the palace guard
- (ii) The impact on the church in Rome - igniting their witness.

3. If they are preaching Christ then the gospel can spread. It will not spread effectively because of the double messages. e.g. pride in the preacher/ humility of the gospel, rivalry of the preacher/ unity of the gospel. It will spread because of the grace of God and despite the sinfulness of the human mouthpiece. Preaching from false motives can also be incredibly damaging to the growth of the church and is obviously not God's desire. Paul focuses his delight in the fact that the gospel is being preached and people being saved. The criticism, divisiveness & selfish ambition would have pained him greatly but this is far surpassed by the fact that the gospel is going forward.

4. You may like to have a general discussion which incorporates both (a) & (b) because (b) is really part of the answer to (a). In verse 20 Paul's goal in living is, as the NIV puts it **"that Christ would be exalted in his body"**. Another way of putting it is - 'whether in life or death I want to honour Christ. I want to exalt or honour Christ'.

For Paul life is all about Jesus Christ. Jesus pervades every aspect of his existence. His desire is to more fully know and love and serve him each day.

Another insight into what it means for Paul to say "to live is Christ" is found in verse 25. Here Paul expresses that his purpose his motive for life is to see others grow and progress in the Christian life. This is his deepest desire for the Christians at Philippi. He wants them to know the overwhelming joy of living in Christ, that no matter what the circumstances that they might conduct themselves in ways that are worthy of the gospel. That they will stand firm, in unity & in the sure knowledge of their salvation.

5. The suicidal person because of their state of mind and situation is contemplating escaping from the reality of this world. Paul's desire to depart is not based on his current situation but on the riches of what he knows awaits him in heaven.
6. You see a great love and commitment flowing both ways in this relationship. Paul acknowledges the importance of their prayers for him. In the last three verse he expresses his deep desire for them to stand firm, unified and sure of their salvation. Perhaps the greatest expression comes in verse 25 where Paul states that his purpose in living is to see them grow and progress in the christian life.

Study 4**Philippians 2:1-11, IMITATING CHRIST'S HUMILITY****Warm-Up**

1. Who in your family eats the last piece of cake? Offers it to someone else? Cleans the toilet? Tracks mud on the floor? Cleans it up?

Bible Study

2. Reading between the lines, what do you think was one of the problems of the church at Philippi? Was this likely to have been an unusual problem then? What about now?
3. What are four motives for living in unity? Are they still applicable to us?
4. How are humility and unity related? How can a person look after his/her own interests **and** the interests of others?
5. How is Jesus' life an example of what Paul means in verses 3 & 4? What stories from the gospels can you think of where Jesus showed humility?
6. What else stands out about Jesus from this passage (verses 6-11; see also Isaiah 45:23)? How does his greatness and uniqueness (vs 9-11) emphasise his humility?

Discussion

7. "Humility is to live as close to the truth as possible: the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, the truth about the world in which we live"
Is this a good definition of humility? Why or why not?

8. What does it mean to "consider others better than yourselves"? What does it **not** mean? What is the difference between humility and being a "doormat"? How can you be humble and confident at the same time?

9. *How would things change if you consistently applied verses 3-8 in your family? In the church? At work? Would the change be for the better? Why not do it?*

STUDY 4 Philippians 2:1-11, LEADERS' NOTES

Bible Study

2. The most obvious problem is that of a lack of humility, with selfishness, or self-promotion, being the major symptom of that. Hence Paul's exhortation to unity and humility, both qualities combining to emphasise the importance of the other persons interests, as well as your own.

3. The four motives are given in verse 1 -

- (i) encouragement from unity with Christ (and unity with others)
- (ii) comfort from being loved by him (and being loved by others)
- (iii) fellowship with him (and others) through his Spirit
- (iv) tenderness and compassion, both in relation to Christ and others.

These are all things we should be praying for & working at. They quite clearly are qualities we would both benefit from and enjoy.

4. "Unity" is expressed in verse 2 - like-minded, same love, one in spirit and purpose. If you are seeking this kind of unity, it follows that you are going to act with humility toward one another, because the other's welfare and best interest is, in fact, consistent with your own best interest as well. You will want to serve others with humility, offering your assistance and strength to help meet their need, as this will also serve your purpose of being part of the community of love, and receiving the rewards ("motives") from verse 1.

5. Jesus' pre-existent life within the Godhead is referred to by Paul in this "hymn", highlighting the humility of his action in putting aside the glory of God to become a man. Jesus was "in very nature God" – i.e. his unalterable, essential nature was that of God. Yet he chose to become a man - by comparison, a temporary, alterable state. During his earthly life, Jesus was thus both fully divine and fully human - uniquely able to fulfil the role he came to achieve. But Paul deliberately focusses, not on the achievement, but on the attitude which led to it - that of willing, self-sacrificing humility and service.

It will be interesting to see what examples of Jesus' humility are brought up by the group, but one or two for starters could be - washing the disciples' feet (John 13); his self-effacing manner in the performance of certain healing miracles (e.g. Mark 1:43,44; 5:43; 7:36; etc.); his "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34) etc.

6. The other major point of the "hymn" is the glory to which Jesus returns, and his exaltation to the highest place, the name above all names, etc. This is the glory from which he came, and the glory which is restored. To focus on this glory only helps to increase the incredible sense of humility which he has portrayed in his incarnation.

Discussion

The discussion questions are intended to keep exploring the attitude of humility and service as exemplified by Jesus, and to try to tease out the practical implications of putting this into practice. Encourage discussion, and perhaps even, in Question 3, obtain some commitment to new ways of approaching situations which members could encourage one another in, and undertake to pray for one another, and to "check up" on how it has gone when the group meets next time.

Study 5**Philippians 2:12-30, EXAMPLES OF CHRIST'S SERVICE****Warm-Up**

1. What do you enjoy most and least about serving others?
2. If you had to turn over the running of your life to someone else, what characteristics would you look for in the person you would choose?

Bible Study (Read Philippians 2:12-30)

2. In verses 12-13, Paul says to "work out your salvation." What part is up to God and what part is up to you?
3. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are." What answers are given for us "stars" in verses 14-16?
4. Why will Paul be glad and rejoice, even if he has to die (verses 16-18)?
5. Why do you think people like Timothy (verses 19-24) are so rare?
6. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to help Paul. Why is Paul sending him back (verses 25-30)?

7. Give a character reference for Timothy (verses 19-24) and Epaphroditus (verses 25-30).
Perhaps the group could divide in two to work on one each.

Discussion

8. How is Jesus' attitude (discussed last week) seen in the relationships among Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus and the Philippians?
9. If Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus came to our church, what might they be able to do to help us?
10. Since they won't be coming, what are some practical ways we can follow their example?

Study 6**Philippians 3:1-11, CONFIDENCE IN KNOWING CHRIST****Warm-Up**

1. If you had to 'brag' about one thing you could do better than most other people, what would it be?

Bible Study

2. What does Paul mean by this repeated call to "rejoice in the Lord"? How can he rejoice in the Lord in the midst of so many problems – e.g. imprisonment, enemies, illness, possible execution, etc.?
3. Why does Paul warn against "those mutilators of the flesh"? What is he talking about, and why do you think he speaks so strongly?
4. Examine the three "marks" of those who are "the circumcision" (verse 3). How do these things contrast with "the dogs" of verse 2?
5. How does Paul view his privileged background? Why? Why is "privilege" sometimes a curse?
6. What did it cost Paul to shift the basis of his confidence before God from his performance and status to Christ's grace? What did he gain?

7. *How does Paul say he achieved righteousness? Explain, using the ideas of this passage, how a person can be right with God.*

Discussion

8. *In what context do you find it most difficult to rejoice? What ideas from this study can help you to rejoice when you feel least like rejoicing?*

9. *Do we have any “dogs” around today? Who, or what, would you describe as “dogs”, and why should we be warned against them?*

10. *What are some of the “confidences in the flesh” which can divert your attention away from trusting God? Are these things advantages or disadvantages? What would happen to you if they were suddenly all taken away?*

11. *Why do you think so many people persist in wanting to hold onto their own “confidence”? Why is the gospel so confusing and difficult for many to understand and respond to?*

STUDY 6**Philippians 3:1-11, LEADERS' NOTES****Warm Up**

1. Some group members may find it hard to find something to brag about - be sensitive to the possibility of low self-esteem - this question is supposed to be just light-hearted, and not intended to raise serious issues of personal difficulty. Generally, most people can find something, even if it is very small, and of little "value" - but encourage those kind of things. Hopefully, this discussion will raise the issue of "confidence in the flesh" in a way that will allow everyone to have a say, without feeling any "threat".

Bible Study

2. Paul himself recognises the repetitious nature of this call to rejoice - yet it is the continuing theme of this letter. The word "finally" probably means more "to proceed, then ...", as he returns to his theme from where he seemed to divert at 2:19. So this verse links back to 2:18, then provides the connection with what follows, as he describes the basis of his own rejoicing, which has nothing whatsoever to do with his physical circumstances.
3. The "dogs" are the "circumcision party", teaching that it is OK to become a christian, but you must still be consistent with the law - ie, you need to be circumcised (and, presumably, be consistent at all other levels too. They "do evil" - i.e. their evil is bound up in their "doing" - they insist that salvation depends on "doing" (works) and that is the basis of their evil! Their "gospel" is Christ plus ...! Paul vigorously opposes them, because it is a denial of grace, and leads to lack of assurance, doubt and uncertainty - and lack of rejoicing!
4. "Worship by the Spirit of God" - ie, we are the people of God, marked by the presence and power of his Spirit, the worshipping (God honouring) community of faith. "You are my people and I am your God."
 "Glory in Christ Jesus" - we are the Christocentric community -i.e, Christ alone is at the centre of who we are and what we do. The centrality of Christ is developed in the following verses, as we shall see.
 "Put no confidence in the flesh" - The other side of the "Christ-centred" coin is the refusal to gain confidence from our own works - all our righteousness is "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), no cause for confidence there! The combined effect of all this is to totally reject the claims of the Judaising party - the "dogs".
5. Clearly, Paul has rejected any claim at all to personal righteousness, based on his impressive record as one of the more "proper" people amongst the so-called "people of God" - he regards the whole thing as utter garbage. He was "lucky", because God had clearly shown him the new and better way - but for many, such privileges continue to be a block to recognising the gospel - "I've done it all - what more do I need?"
6. Paul had to let go any personal claim he had to any standing before God. This could not have been easy, as all his life he had been taught how important all that stuff was! Now he was stripped bare - with nothing to claim - and having to throw himself fully onto the mercy of God. But, of course, in so doing, he was to discover far greater value in "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord", so that his "profit and loss account" was well and truly in credit.
7. It is important to see the contrast between "righteousness that comes from the law" and "righteousness that comes from God" (verse 9). God requires absolute perfection (eg Matthew 5:19,20; 48), but this cannot be achieved, no matter how "righteous" we may consider ourselves to be! Consequently, the only righteousness that can possibly be of any value is that which is come from God - nothing else will work. So the only way to be right with God is to receive, as a free gift, the offer of righteousness to be found in Christ, through his death and resurrection.

Discussion

8. Depends on personal response from group members, but the point of Questions 1 & 2 above is that "rejoicing" does not depend on physical (or emotional) circumstances.
9. "Dogs" could be any person, group, or philosophy which puts emphasis on achievements or works which must be done to please or impress God
10. Could be anything - church attendance, baptism/confirmation, giving to charities, born in christian family, even involvement in ministry, attending bible study, receiving communion, reputation, religious traditions...
11. Everything in our culture "costs" - there are no free lunches! We learn quickly that we must pay our way - and it doesn't seem right to get something for nothing - even when you know you've been forgiven, you still feel guilty, until you DO SOMETHING to "pay" for it! But the gospel offers us something that is genuinely free - and often our human nature and essential pride will not let us accept that.

Study 7

Philippians 3:12-4:1, PURSUING CHRIST'S CALL

Warm-Up

1. Reaching a goal, whether it's paying off a house or running a half marathon takes
2. Sometimes people look back at the excitement of their early Christian days and wonder whether there is room to grow further now - it's all so familiar, and they feel a bit stagnant. Have you ever felt this way?

Bible Study

Read Philippians 3:1-11 to determine the context / setting - then the passage for today Philippians 3:12-4:1.

3. *What is it that Paul has not yet obtained (v. 12, 13cf 3:7-11)?*
4. *Some associated with the Philippian church claimed it was possible to be 'perfect' in a final sense here and now. How do the mature view things? (3:15 in the light of v. 12-14)*
5. *Explore the two uses of take hold (take hold, took hold) in v. 12.*
6. *V. 13 Pressing on involves two things: one to do with the past, one to do with the future. What are they? (NB Forgetting is not a memory lapse, but a present verb of action that is ongoing. Past attainments of any sort cannot be the reason for our confidence (3:4-7).)*

7. *What is behind?* (v.7-8) *What is ahead?* (v.10,20,21)

Discussion

8. *What are the implications of pressing on with Christ, in terms of attitude and lifestyle?* (3:17-21)

9. *Summarize what this passage 3:12-4:1 suggests regarding how we can stand firm.* (4:1)

10. *In tough times, sometimes we feel like we can't press on very far with Jesus.
What is our comfort in these times?* (3:13,20,21)

7. Discuss the relationship between giving and receiving which Paul reflects on in verses 14-19. Is it better to give than to receive? Why, or why not?
8. Could there be any significance in the fact that there were saints in Caesar's household? Who may have witnessed to them, or been responsible for their conversion (see 1:12-18)?

Discussion

9. How do we deal with (or DO we deal with) conflict in the church? What principles can we find here to help us tackle conflict more honestly? Is there an issue, or a person, we could apply these principles to this week?
10. If "peace" is the opposite to "anxiety", how would you rate your "stress level" right now - how "anxious" do you feel? What is there in this passage to help us reduce anxiety, and experience peace?
11. Which is harder (for you) - living in plenty, or in want? How can having more than enough sometimes be as much a problem as having less than enough?
12. How can Paul's attitude towards giving and receiving enable you to be a better giver? Or, a better receiver? What implications does this have for the pastoral care within your church?

(Exercise, for those who would like to ... Take turns having one person sit quietly, while the others share one thing they are thankful to have received from that person during these study sessions. Reflect on how it feels to both give and receive.)