

PHILIPPIANS

LIFE IN CHRIST

STUDY GUIDE

SAMPLE



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Currently Under Review

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Writers: Ashley Crane, Kris Gray, Cathy Loh

Media: Steve Flanigan, Justin Leddick, Kevin Mallory, Ted Mast, Jon Ervin, Matthew Krekeler

Print Production/Graphic Design: Jeff Cole, Brenda Kraft, Jane Myers, Christina Gray, Ann Diaz, Julia DeLapp

Augustine Institute

6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310

Greenwood Village, CO 80111

www.augustineinstitute.org/programs

(866) 767-3155

augustineinstitute.org/lectio

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SESSION 1

PAUL AND THE PHILIPPIANS



OPENING PRAYER

Glorious Saint Paul,
Most zealous apostle,
Martyr for the love of Christ,
Give us a deep faith,
A steadfast hope,
A burning love for our Lord,
So that we can proclaim with you,
“It is no longer I who live,
But Christ who lives in me.”

Help us to become apostles,
Serving the Church with a pure heart,
Witnesses to her truth and beauty
Amidst the darkness of our days.
With you we praise God our Father:
“To him be the glory, in the Church
And in Christ,
Now and forever.”
Amen.

—Prayer to the Apostle St. Paul,
for the Jubilee Year of St. Paul (2008–2009)

INTRODUCTION

St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians may be short, but it packs a powerful punch. Many may already be familiar with its popular verses such as “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4) and “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). But other treasures of this epistle include the model it provides for working together in partnership to advance the Gospel, the beautiful relationship of mutual love that unites Paul and the church in Philippi, and Paul’s great hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:6–11. This first session begins by looking at the town of Philippi, its first converts, and Paul’s opening words to them in his epistle.



*St. Paul the apostle writing an epistle by P. Sacchi.
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CONNECT

How often do you think about your citizenship? How important is it to you?

Which sounds like a stronger statement: “I feel like this is important” or “I think that this is important”? Why?



VIDEO

Watch the video segment. Use the outline below to follow along and take notes.

I. Paul's Letter to the Philippians

- A. Short, tightly written gem
- B. Written toward end of Paul's life
- C. Philippi
 - 1. Macedonian Roman colony
 - 2. Via Egnatia (Roman road)
 - 3. Philippians support Paul in prison
 - 4. Close relationship between Paul and Philippians

D. Themes in letter

- 1. Joy and friendship
- 2. Citizenship—privileges and rights; key to identity
- 3. Paul redirects Greek ideals in light of Christ
- 4. Poem/hymn for Christ

II. Greeting—Philippians 1:1–2

- A. Letter writer(s): Paul and Timothy
- B. Servants (*douloi*)—slaves
- C. To the saints (*hagioi*) in Christ Jesus
- D. With bishops (*episkopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*)
- E. Grace and Peace
 - 1. Peace (*shalom*)—fruit of God's blessing; fruit of Holy Spirit
 - 2. Grace—Paul changes *chairein* (health and well-being) to *charis* (grace)

III. Opening Prayer of Thanksgiving—Philippians 1:3–11

- A. Takes up Paul's hope and concerns for this community
- B. Thanks (*eucharistein*)
- C. Joy used throughout the letter
- D. Partnership (*koinonia*)
- E. Greek *phronein* (to "think"); separation/distinction of head and heart is not current in Paul's day/thought

DISCUSS



1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an "aha" moment for you?

2. What does Paul's greeting to the Philippians tell us about his relationship with them? How does this greeting prepare us to better understand the rest of the letter?

3. What is different about Paul's use of common words and ideas like *citizenship*, *peace*, *grace*, and *friendship*? What does his particular use of these words accomplish in his letter?

MEMORY VERSE

“I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

—Philippians 1:6



CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father,
we thank you for the gift of your grace and peace.
Give us the strength to be faithful to the Gospel
with which you have entrusted us.
May we persevere in joy and obedience,
confident that you will bring to completion your good work in us.
All glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Dennis Hamm, SJ, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Baker Academic: 2013)

COMMIT—DAY 1

PHILIPPI



Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony.

—Acts 16:11–12a



Map of Greece © pavalena / shutterstock.com



Ancient amphitheater in the archeological area of Philippi, Eastern Macedonia © stoyanh / shutterstock.com

Philippi was a Roman colony in eastern Macedonia (northern Greece), situated about ten miles inland from the seaport of Neapolis (modern Kavala). Philippi was founded by colonists from the island of Thasos around 360 BC and originally named Krenides (from the Greek word for “spring”) because of the abundant sources of fresh water. A few years later the city was conquered by Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Philip fortified the city, added additional settlers, and renamed it after himself. Today it is still possible to view the remains of city walls built by Philip II, a theatre likely built by Philip and renovated in the second and third centuries AD, remains of two Roman bathhouses, the agora or Roman forum, a temple dedicated to the cult of the emperor, and an aqueduct.

Running through Philippi was the Via Egnatia, a road constructed by the Roman senator Gnaeus Egnatius in the mid-second century BC. It stretched almost 700 miles from Dyrrhachium (modern Durrës) on the Adriatic Sea in the west to Byzantium (later called Constantinople, now Istanbul) in the east. It ran through parts of what is now Albania, the Republic of Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey.



Roman road Egnatia, near Kavala, Greece © vlas200 / shutterstock.com

The Via Egnatia, like other Roman roads, was about six meters (almost twenty feet) wide and paved with large stone slabs or covered with packed sand. These major arteries stretched from one end of the empire to the other and allowed the transport of trade goods, armies, officials, civilians, and postal communication. As part of this system, the Via Egnatia was essentially a

continuation of the Via Appia, the road to Rome—the Via Appia ended on the west coast of the Adriatic Sea at Brundisium, and directly across the sea the Via Egnatia began at Dyrrhachium and continued east. Because of Philippi’s location on the Via Egnatia, the second-century historian Appian of Alexandria called it “the gate from Europe to Asia.”

St. Paul travels the Via Egnatia from Philippi to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (see Acts 17:1). Other famous travelers of the road include the armies of Julius Caesar and Pompey during Caesar’s civil war, Mark Antony, Octavian, Cassius, and Brutus prior to the Battle of Philippi, and emperor Trajan and his armies in his campaign against the Parthians in the early second century AD. By the fifth century AD, the road saw decreased use, due in large part to the growing violence and instability in the region.

In 42 BC, Philippi was the site of the decisive Roman civil war battle between Brutus and Cassius (the assassins of Julius Caesar) and Mark Antony and Octavian (better known by his later title of Caesar Augustus). Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius on the plains west of the city. After the Battle of Philippi, the city was elevated to the rank of Roman colony, and many Roman army veterans were settled there. As a colony, Philippi was considered a satellite city of Rome. Colonies were subject to the imperial laws of Rome rather than their own local laws; they had a particular duty to behave like a loyal outpost of Rome and possessed special privileges that other cities and territories did not. The residents of Philippi associated very closely with Rome—they were not Philippians living under Roman rule; they were Romans living in Philippi.

Read Philippians 3:20. In light of Philippi’s status as a Roman colony and the large population of Roman citizens living there, what is the significance of Paul reminding the Christians that their “commonwealth” (or citizenship) is in Heaven?

We too often need to hear Paul’s reminder in our own lives. How does the world distract us from the truth that our commonwealth and citizenship is first and foremost in Heaven?

Writing to the Colossians, Paul exhorts, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2). At various moments during the liturgical year, the Church echoes this exhortation in her prayers, reminding us that, as we walk amid passing things, our participation in the sacramental mysteries, especially the Eucharist, teaches us to love the things of Heaven and hold fast to what endures. Participating often in the sacraments is one way to keep our focus on our heavenly citizenship.

COMMIT—DAY 2

PAUL AND THE PHILIPPIANS



Paul first visits Philippi in AD 49 or 50 during his second missionary journey. Philippi is not Paul's first choice of destination—from Phrygia and Galatia he originally tries to enter the province of Asia, but the Holy Spirit had other plans. When Paul arrives at the Aegean port of Troas, he has a dream in which he sees a man pleading with him to come to Macedonia (see Acts 16:6–10).

Paul and his companions (Silas—Acts 15:40; Timothy—Acts 16:3; and Luke—Acts 16:10) sail to Neapolis and travel from there to Philippi along the Via Egnatia. Paul's strategy in each new city is to start in the synagogue and preach the Gospel to the Jewish community (see Acts 17:1–2, 18:1–4, for example). However, since there is not a large Jewish community in Philippi, there is no synagogue. As a result, Paul goes to the river outside the city on the Sabbath (see Acts 16:13). Running water was considered clean, and so in the absence of a synagogue Jews would gather by a river or stream as a place for prayer and worship.

At the river, Paul finds a group of women, including Lydia, a righteous Gentile. When Lydia hears the message of the Gospel, she immediately asks to be baptized, and she welcomes Paul and his companions into her home. She is Paul's first European convert to Christianity, and her house becomes the home of the church in Philippi.



St. Lydia, the first documented convert to Christianity, and it was by St. Paul © Restored Traditions. Used by permission.

God-fearer

Acts 16:14 describes Lydia as “a worshiper of God” or a God-fearer. This title was used for Gentiles who embraced Judaism and followed many of its moral laws. They believed in the one true God and prayed and worshipped with the Jewish community, but they were not full converts to Judaism because they did not receive circumcision. Another prominent God-fearer in the early Church was the centurion Cornelius, “a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God” (Acts 10:2). The Holy Spirit sent Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and his household, and these God-fearers were the first Gentile converts to Christianity.

Unfortunately, not everyone in Philippi responds well to Paul's work there. Read Acts 16:16–34. How do Paul and Silas end up in trouble in Philippi? How are they rescued?

Now compare the arrest of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:20–24 with their release in 16:35–39. Why do you think Paul says nothing about their citizenship when they are accused, but brings it up when they are released?

In hindsight, it seems that Paul and Silas could have avoided a great deal of suffering if they had only claimed the protection of their Roman citizenship when they were first accused before the magistrates. They didn't use their citizenship to avoid their own suffering, but Paul demanded a public apology so that there would be no scandal surrounding him to cast a shadow over the new church in Philippi.

After their release, Paul and Silas leave Philippi and continue on to Thessalonica, apparently leaving Luke behind with the new Philippian converts (compare the “we” in Acts 16:10–17 with the “they” in Acts 16:40 and 17:1). Paul visits Philippi again during his third missionary journey, where Luke rejoins him in his travels (see Acts 20:3–6).



Greece, archeological area of ancient Philippi © fritz16 / shutterstock.com

In his letter Paul calls the Philippians his “joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1). The converts who so readily welcomed the message of the Gospel would continue to “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

Troas and the New Empire of Rome

The Roman poet Virgil's masterpiece the *Aeneid* tells the epic legend of Aeneas, who fled the ruined city of Troy and traveled west to establish his family in Italy, becoming the ancestor of Romulus and Remus—the founders of the city of Rome. Written early in the reign of Caesar Augustus, the *Aeneid* provided a masterful narrative supporting the legitimacy of Augustus's rule and his vision of renewing the greatness of Rome.

Acts 16:11 states that Paul and his companions sailed from Troas, a seaport only miles from ancient Troy, to travel west bearing the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Eventually both Peter and Paul travel to, and are martyred in, Rome and, as a result, come to be seen as the twin founders of a new Christian Rome. When writing The Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke, an educated Greek physician familiar with Greco-Roman history and literature, includes the seemingly trivial detail about Paul's point of departure for his journey to the Roman colony of Philippi and in doing so begins the reworking of the defining narrative about Roman identity so as to point to the universal sovereignty of the Gospel.

COMMIT—DAY 3

LECTIO: PHILIPPIANS 1:1–2



Nearly all ancient Greco-Roman letters followed a standard structure. The opening of a letter often consisted of a simple identification and greeting: “Writer, to recipient, greetings.” This would be followed by a brief wish or prayer for the well-being of the recipient. Paul follows this basic structure in his letters, but he makes it uniquely his own—his combination of traditional Greek and Hebrew greetings carry the added weight of the divine subject matter and eternal significance of his correspondence.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture, *lectio divina*, begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

—Philippians 1:1–2

Who is writing? How are they described?

To whom is the letter addressed? How are they described?

What does the author wish for the recipients of the letter?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading of Scripture, is followed by *meditatio*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage, and to ponder the reason for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to mediate on the above verse.

From the Second Vatican Council document, *Lumen Gentium*, speaking about the universal call to holiness:

The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life: 'Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength and that they might love each other as Christ loves them. The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints" and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience," and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness. Since truly we all offend in many things we all need God's mercies continually and we all must daily pray: "Forgive us our debts."

Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.

—*Lumen Gentium*, 40

What does it mean for Paul and Timothy to identify themselves as servants or slaves (*duloi*) of Christ Jesus? Can we use that term to describe ourselves?

How does Paul's use of "all" when addressing the saints (*hagioi*) point to the universal call to holiness?

What does Paul's use of "our" in "God our Father" tell us about how we can answer the call to holiness?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditated on today's Scripture passage, take some time to bring your thoughts to God (*oratio*) and engage God in silence (*contemplatio*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolutio*) to respond to God's prompting of your heart in today's prayer.



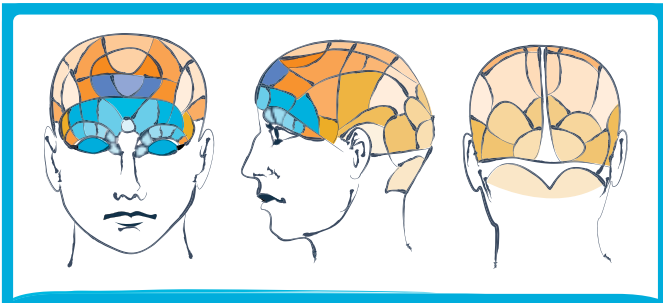
Meditative Paul at a table in his prison cell, holding a writing quill by Rembrandt
© Everett-Art / shutterstock.com

COMMIT—DAY 4

MIND AND HEART



What would you say is more important: how you feel about something or what you think about it? Modern western society largely takes the distinction between the mind and the heart for granted. And when the two are pitted against each other, emotions often come out as the winner in the modern view: “Follow your heart. Don’t overthink things,” is common advice. If someone simply *thinks* something is true, you can try to talk him or her out of it. But if that person *feels* very strongly about something, that’s likely to be the end of the conversation.



Phrenology. Head brain map. Infographic.(c) Polina Kudelkina / shutterstock.com

The eighteenth-century intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment was characterized by a focus on the supremacy of reason. This led to a distinction between the rational mind as the seat of thought and decision and the irrational heart as the source of emotion. There can be a wide chasm between thinking and feeling, and although this

separation originally grew out of an emphasis on the mind, it has turned upside down and often results in a tyranny of feelings over reason.

In what ways have you witnessed the separation of mind and heart play out in your own life? In society? What potential consequences does this tyranny of feelings have?

But for most of history, this was not the case. Many ancient cultures—including those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Babylon, and India—considered the heart to be the seat not only of emotion but of reason. And so for Paul, writing from his Hebrew theological background as well as the first-century Greco-Roman culture in which he lived, our modern separation between the head and the heart did not exist.

Phronein

The Greek word *phronein* means “to have a certain mindset.” It is often translated “to think,” but it refers to an entire attitude or outlook, not just to a single thought. This is the verb Paul uses in Philippians 1:7 when he is talking about being thankful for the partnership of the Philippians (verse 5) and his confidence that God will complete his good work in them (verse 6). The RSV translates *phronein* in verse 7 as “It is right for me to *feel* this way about you all” (emphasis added), but Paul is talking about his mindset toward the Philippians, not his emotions about them.

Paul doesn’t just feel happy about the Philippians, as some modern translations might lead us to think. In the original Greek he says that he thinks (*phronein*) joyfully about them (see Philippians 1:7). When he goes on to say that he holds them in his heart, he is not talking about a mere feeling of love and friendship—although the letter makes it clear that he holds great affection for the Philippians—but rather about the depth and intimacy of his relationship with them.

Look up the following verses. What do they say about the heart?

Deuteronomy 6:4–7 _____

Jeremiah 31:33 _____

Ezekiel 36:26–27 _____

Matthew 6:19–21 _____

Luke 8:15 _____

Romans 5:5 _____

Based on these verses, how would you describe the biblical understanding of the heart?
Considering St. Paul’s background as a scholar of the Law and Scriptures, what do you think he means when he says he holds the Philippians in his heart?

“Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.”

—Proverbs 4:23

COMMIT—DAY 5

TRUTH AND BEAUTY

St. Paul Writing – Pier Francesco Sacchi, c. 1520, National Gallery, London



St. Paul the apostle writing an epistle by P. Sacchi. © Restored Traditions. Used by permission.

Pier Francesco Sacchi was a painter of the Genoese guild during the early sixteenth century. While only a few paintings can be attributed to him, they are all of religious subjects, such as his *Parting of St. John the Baptist from his Parents* (Oratory of St. Maria at Genoa), *Crucifixion with Saints* (Berlin Museum), and *The Four Doctors of the Church* (Louvre Museum). In *St. Paul Writing*, Sacchi depicts Paul writing one of his many letters recorded for us in the New Testament.

As a painter, Sacchi has been described as having a lively interest in accessories, landscape, costume, and details, sometimes to the point of excess. We see such details here, but each is put to good use. Paul's small table, supported by a scrolled pedestal, is crowded with a few necessary items, including his ink well, prayer book, and crucifix. But these few items are finely detailed—the prayer book with its closing strap and markers, the crucifix with its base relief, and the shapely ink well. At the heart of these items, Paul writes on a slanted easel whose sides display an ornately carved scene of playful cherubs. Paul holds a reed pen in one hand, ready to begin his next sentence. In the other hand, he holds his knife, ready for trimming his reed or cutting the paper when his letter is complete. Leaning against the writing desk is a sword, its long handle beautifully decorated and engraved. St. Paul is depicted with his characteristic long beard. His trimmed blue tunic is overlaid with a vibrant red cloak, its color, along with the sword, a reminder of the death he will suffer for his witness to Christ.

If we look out the room's rear window, we see a detailed landscape with a city sitting along a hillside. Nearby are a river and woods, with mountains in the distance. In this scene is a solitary traveler walking along a path, knapsack over his shoulder, approaching a bridge by which he can make his way to the town and its people. The scene reminds the viewer of the many miles that St. Paul traveled on his various missionary journeys throughout Asian minor, Macedonia, and Greece. Like the traveler, Paul walked countless miles in order to preach the Gospel, and then to later return and strengthen the Christian communities that developed among those who heard his preaching and believed in Jesus Christ.

But these many details and accessories cannot keep the viewer from the central focus of the painting: Paul's intense gaze upon the Cross of Christ. Look up the following verses. What does Paul have to say about the Cross of Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:17–23 _____

1 Corinthians 2:2 _____

Galatians 2:20 _____

Galatians 6:14 _____

Ephesians 2:13–18 _____

Benedict XVI, in one of his General Audiences during the Pauline Jubilee Year, beautifully describes this focus of St. Paul:

In [Paul's] encounter with Jesus the central significance of the Cross had been made clear to him: he understood that Jesus *had died and rose for all* and for himself [Paul]. Both these things were important; universality: Jesus really died for all, and subjectivity: he also died for me. Thus God's freely given and merciful love had been made manifest in the Cross. Paul experienced this love in himself first of all (cf. Gal 2:20) and from being a sinner he became a believer, from a persecutor an apostle. Day after day, in his new life, he experienced that salvation was "grace", that everything derived from the death of Christ and not from his own merit, which moreover did not exist. The "Gospel of grace" thus

became for him the only way of understanding the Cross, not only the criterion of his new existence but also his response to those who questioned him . . . For St Paul the Cross has a fundamental primacy in the history of humanity; it represents the focal point of his theology because to say “Cross” is to say *salvation* as grace given to every creature.

—Benedict XVI, General Audience, October 29, 2008

Interestingly, Sacchi's painting show Paul as he writes the beautiful chapter on love from his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Sacchi gives us the moment just after Paul writes, "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful . . ." (1 Corinthians 13:4). The Apostle who desired to boast in nothing but the Cross of our Lord Jesus pauses, his eyes fixed on him who is the model of the love he is describing. Paul gazes upon the crucifix, upon him who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8), all so that Paul (and each of us) might be reconciled to God (see Romans 5:1-10) and spend eternity in the embrace of this love.

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or the discussion questions. List any personal applications you got from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?

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