

PHILIPPIANS

LIFE IN CHRIST

LEADER'S RESOURCE
GUIDE

SAMPLE



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Currently Under Review

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SESSION 1

PAUL AND THE PHILIPPIANS

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

Written toward the end of St. Paul's life, Philippians is a short, tightly written letter overflowing with treasures. This study will unpack those treasures, highlighting the rich teaching and pastoral care that Paul offers his beloved Philippians.

This first session begins by looking at the original audience. Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia (northern Greece), situated on the Via Egnatia, one of the Roman roads that stretched across the empire allowing the transport of people, armies, communication, and trade goods. Starting with the city's first convert, Lydia (see Acts 16:14), the Faith quickly won many converts. These men and women shared a close relationship with St. Paul, supporting him during his Roman imprisonment, and Paul expresses his gratitude, speaking of holding them in his heart (see Philippians 1:7) and yearning for them with the affection of Christ (see Philippians 1:8).

As a Roman colony, Philippi's inhabitants were steeped in Greco-Roman culture. Paul's letter will redirect numerous Greek ideals (friendship, citizenship, honor, partnership, etc.) in light of Christ in order to root their identity first and foremost in the Person and Gospel of Jesus Christ. At the center of the letter is a poem or hymn written for Christ, the model that Paul wants the Philippians to always have in mind (see Philippians 2:6–11). And imbuing the entire letter is the theme of joy, a joy only to be found in Christ.

In its opening greeting and prayer we already see Paul directing the Philippians closer to Christ, by, for example, transforming the traditional greeting wish for health and well-being to a prayer for grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul refers to himself as a slave, the lowest among the classes of people, and to the Philippians as holy ones. As he greets the Philippians, he specifically mentions the bishops and deacons in their community—a reminder for us that these offices are not later inventions but already appear in the early Church. The opening verses of the letter, although few in number, tell us a great deal about Paul and the Philippians and give a preview of the topics Paul will explore in his letter.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide on page 3.*

Welcome participants to the study and lead the group in brief introductions before engaging in the following conversation. Use the italicized comments following each question to guide or enhance the discussion as necessary.

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

Many of us probably take our citizenship for granted and don't think about it very often. Certain events, such as an election, might remind us of the rights and duties that are part of our citizenship and remind us to be thankful for the privileges we have and to strive to perfect the virtues of being a good citizen. But someone who has immigrated to a new country and had to go through the process of becoming a citizen of that country is much less likely to take citizenship for granted. It's something they worked for, not something they received as a birthright. Many of the residents of Philippi (a Roman colony) were proud Roman citizens. But as important and privileged as this citizenship was, Paul reminds them that their citizenship in Heaven is infinitely more important.

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

It is very common to use our strong feelings about something as an argument or a reason, while saying that we think someone's logic sounds more like opinion—not as strong or important as feelings. Other participants may have the opposite experience, recognizing the strength of an intellectual argument over an appeal to emotion. It may be helpful to provide a specific example, such as "I feel like Philippians is a very important letter to study" versus "I think that Philippians is a very important letter to study." In this session we will look at the way that the heart and mind are connected for Paul, although they are often distinct from one another in modern thought.



Play the video segment, which will last for about 26 minutes. Encourage participants to follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the video teachings. Then lead the discussion using the questions below.



DISCUSS

Following each question are possible responses and comments to guide you in the group conversation.

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

Some new things might include the importance of Philippi's status as a Roman colony, the importance of its location along the Via Egnatia, Paul's identifying himself as a "slave" (in contrast to the common translation of "servant") of Christ, Timothy's role in writing the letter, or the lack of distinction between head and heart for Paul.

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?

It demonstrates the close, affectionate relationship between Paul and the Philippians, as well as Paul's high opinion of the Philippians. He rejoices in them and thanks God for them, and he is confident that God will complete his good work in them. Unlike many of his other letters, Paul doesn't have any major concerns or rebukes for the Philippians. Understanding Paul's relationship with the Philippians and the overall good state of the church there prepares us for a letter that praises the Philippians for what they do well and encourages them to persevere. We can take the model of the Philippians as our own guide for living as saints in Christ Jesus (1:1) and partners of the Gospel (1:5).

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?

When Paul uses these words, he isn't just referring to the common, secular meaning that the Philippians were familiar with because of their Greco-Roman culture. He is taking those images and ideas and going a step above to communicate something about life in Christ. Each of these ideas is good and noble on a natural level, but they are raised to a higher level in the context of the Christian life. When Paul uses these words in new ways, he is helping the Philippians understand the Christian life in terms of what is familiar, but he is also warning them that sometimes there may be a conflict between the natural meaning and the Christian meaning—particularly with citizenship.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*



DAY 1 – PHILIPPI

Participants will learn about the ancient city of 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?

Philippi's status as a Roman colony is a major point of prestige, and there is a high concentration of Roman citizens among the residents of Philippi. Many of them are veterans of the Roman army. The combination of being a Roman citizen living in a Roman colony would have resulted in many privileges and advantages, as well as the duty to live up to such a status—to be a good citizen. But if the Philippians' true citizenship is in Heaven, then that is more important than their Roman citizenship and their residence in a Roman colony. The earthly privileges of citizenship are nothing compared to the privileges and responsibilities of being a citizen of Heaven. One's first responsibility and first loyalty must be to Christ, not to the temporal emperor.

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?

It is easy to let temporal realities consume us. Daily routines such as work/school, promotions/grades, putting food on the table, keeping a clean house, laundry, etc., keep us busy and can keep our focus on passing things. In the midst of these temporal activities, keeping a presence of God, doing these things with love and for God's glory, and offering up daily activities and sacrifices for others, are all ways to turn our focus toward the things of Heaven and our heavenly citizenship.



DAY 2 – PAUL AND THE PHILIPPIANS

Participants will follow Paul on his second missionary journey as he visits Philippi for the first time and establishes the church there.

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?

Paul casts out a spirit of divination (a demon) from a slave girl, and her owners are upset because they can no longer make money from her fortune-telling. They bring Paul and Silas before the city magistrates and accuse them of being troublemakers and acting contrary to Roman law and morals. The crowd beats Paul and Silas, and the magistrates throw them in prison. While Paul and Silas are singing praises to God in prison, there is an earthquake, the prison doors are thrown open, and the prisoners' chains unfastened. The jailer assumes that his prisoners have escaped. Jail keepers were responsible for their prisoners with their own lives (often executed if prisoners under their watch escaped), so the jailer picks up his sword to take his own life. Instead of escaping, Paul and Silas stay and share the Gospel with the jailer, who converts and is baptized along with his whole family and brings Paul and Silas to his home.

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?

Paul and Silas are given no chance to defend themselves against their accusers. Paul plays his "citizen card," so to speak, after the magistrates try to get Paul and Silas to leave Philippi quietly. There is a big fuss about their citizenship afterward, but nothing is said about it before. It is possible that initially Paul and Silas did not have a chance to speak of their citizenship. Or they chose not to speak of their citizenship, instead willing to witness to the Gospel in their suffering and reach others in the town in this way. Later, however, we see Paul using his citizenship to make sure his name isn't tarnished by the scandal of public beating and imprisonment, which would affect his friends in Philippi.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: PHILIPPIANS 1:1–2

Participants will pray through Philippians 1:1–2 and reflect on our universal call to holiness.

LECTIO

Who is writing? How are they described?

*Paul and Timothy are writing. They are described as *duloi*, "slaves" or "servants" of Christ Jesus.*

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

*It's addressed to all the members of the church in Philippi. They are described as *hagioi*, "saints" or literally "holy ones," and they are also described as being "in" Christ Jesus. The leaders of the church, the bishops and deacons, are specifically addressed as well.*

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

Paul wishes them grace and peace. These both come from God.

MEDITATIO

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?

They are totally devoted to doing the will of God. They are not their own—they belong totally to Jesus. It shows humility, especially when writing to a community where so many of the audience would have a much higher social status than slaves/servants. We too, like Paul and Timothy, are to be totally devoted to the will of God.

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

It is not just the clergy—the bishops and deacons—who are addressed as saints. This indicates that both clergy and laity are called to holiness. Everyone in the Church is called a "holy one," and Paul says a few verses later that he is confident God will complete this work (1:6). The Church reiterates the truth of this universal call to holiness in her writings from the Second Vatican Council, from which our meditation was taken: "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" (LG 40).

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

Holiness isn't something we can do on our own. As Vatican II reminds us, "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.'" We can be holy because of our Baptism, which cleanses us from sin and makes us children of the all-holy God. The Father, "our" Father by Baptism, gives us the Spirit through the Son—it is the Spirit who makes us holy and enables us to live holy lives.



DAY 4 – MIND AND HEART

Participants will explore the connection between the mind and the heart in Scripture.

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?

A personal experience of the separation of mind and heart might be something very big, like having negative or mixed feelings about a Church teaching while still choosing to have faith and be obedient. Or it might be something seemingly trivial, like knowing rationally that divorce is wrong but wanting the heroine of the romantic comedy to leave her annoying husband and run off with the dashing hero who really appreciates her. We see this separation in many ways in society. One of the clearest is the lack of logical debate about many modern issues. Instead of trying to understand another person's point of view and reasonably explaining one's own point of view, our modern discourse often consists of nothing more than explaining how we feel and how no one has the right to try to change how we feel—or even to hurt our feelings. This tyranny of emotion makes it nearly impossible to actually discuss issues with any hope of understanding or persuasion. It can even make it difficult to express an alternate viewpoint, because that might offend people or hurt their feelings.

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

Deuteronomy 6:4–7—*We are to love the Lord with all our heart and all our soul; the words of the Lord are to be upon our heart, and we are to teach these words/commands of the Lord to our children. In order for the words of the Lord to be on our hearts, this must be referring to more than just the place of a person's emotions.*

Jeremiah 31:33—*God will make a new covenant and write his law on our hearts. The heart thus is to be used to both understand the law, and to love and obey the law.*

Ezekiel 36:26–27—God will give us a new heart; he will put his Spirit in us and cause us to walk in his statutes (in order to do this there must also be understanding).

Matthew 6:19–21—“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. One has to also decide where to lay up their treasure.”

Luke 8:15—The seed falling on good soil refers to those who hear the word and hold it in their heart, where it bears fruit. Again, the heart is used for understanding as well as emotion and decision.

Romans 5:5—“God pours his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

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?

The Scriptures paint a picture of the heart as the center of the human person. It is the source of all thought, the source of all our choices, the source of all our actions. It is the place where God meets us, the place of covenant and prayer and obedience. God dwells in our hearts. When Paul says that he holds the Philippians in his heart, he is saying that they are united in Christ Jesus, that he loves them with the love of God but also that he knows them and understands their needs. And Paul’s holding of them in his heart also includes his prayers for them and their needs.



DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on St. Paul Writing by Pier Francesco Sacchi, c. 1520, National Gallery, London

Look up the following verses. What does Paul have to say about the Cross of Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:17–23—“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . but we preach Christ crucified.”

1 Corinthians 2:2—“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Galatians 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 6:14—“But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Ephesians 2:13–18—Christ reconciles us “to God in one body through the cross.”