

Paul's Prison Epistles

Lesson 5

Paul and the Philippians

Lesson Guide



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read the book of Philippians.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:19)

II. Background (1:54)

A. Relationship (3:10)

Philippi was in the Roman province of Macedonia, along the *Via Egnatia*, and possessed a special status within the Roman Empire.

Paul planted the church in Philippi during his second missionary journey, around the year A.D. 49 or 50.

In Philippi, Paul (Acts 16:12-40):

- gained his first European convert, Lydia.
- was jailed for an exorcism.
- led the Philippian jailer to a profession of faith in Christ.

The church in Philippi was poor and not always able to help Paul financially. But when they had opportunity, they gave to him generously (4:10, 18; 4:15-16).

Paul referred to the Philippians as his “beloved” — *agapētos* (2:12, 4:1) — meaning they were his closest coworkers and dear friends.

B. Suffering in Prison (9:24)

Throughout his long ministry, Paul often suffered greatly on many occasions (whipped, beaten, hunted, imprisoned, stoned and left for dead).

Paul described himself as being under such a heavy burden that he had no strength to endure it, and even despaired of life itself (2 Corinthians 1:8).

Paul spoke frequently of death as a welcome relief from his suffering. (3:10).

He expressed his hope that he would gain courage as he suffered. His concern was to honor Christ, without shame, whether he lived or died (1:20-23).

Paul’s circumstances were so oppressive that the benefits of being with Christ outweighed his desire to continue in ministry, and even his hatred for death itself.

Christians should look forward to what is beyond the grave for us, yet, the Scriptures teach that long life is God's blessing.

Paul himself called death an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Paul's state of mind was deeply troubled in his letter to the Philippians (2:27-28).

Paul seems to have wrestled with the real possibility that, although he wanted to live for Christ, he might soon die for him (1:20, 22; 2:17; 3:10).

C. Conditions in Philippi (19:25)

1. Concern for Paul (19:44)

The Philippians sent a financial gift to Paul for his needs as well as Epaphroditus to minister to him in prison (4:18).

The Philippians were not wealthy, so their gift was a significant sacrifice, but one they sent eagerly out of concern for Paul.

Epaphroditus reported the church's concern that Paul was being persecuted, and was under a threat of death, both of which Paul confirmed to them (1:15-17; 2:21).

The Philippians worried that Paul might be assassinated or executed, so they devoted themselves to prayer on Paul's behalf (1:19-20).

2. Problems for the Church (23:57)

- Persecution

After Paul planted the church in Philippi, he encountered great resistance from Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-13).

It's reasonable to think that these same Jews, or others like them, also troubled the church in Philippi.

- False Teachings

Paul warn the Philippians to reject any false teaching that might reach their city.

Paul warned against false teachers who advocated for circumcision (3:1-3) and other false teachings (3:18-19).

Paul specifically addressed false teachings which mixed Christian practice with elements of Greek philosophy:

- abusive use of circumcision (Colossians 2:11, 12)
- dietary asceticism (Colossians 2:20-23)

Paul was also concerned about “Christian Judaizers” from Jerusalem (Galatians 2:11-21; Romans 4:9-17).

These Judaizers tried to force Gentile believers to adhere to certain Jewish traditions contrary to the Christian faith.

- Conflicts

Paul exhorted two women in the Philippian church to resolve their conflict (2:1-3; 4:2).

Paul spent a substantial amount of his letter emphasizing the importance of unity and love in the church.

III. Structure and Content (33:17)

A. Salutation, 1:1-2 (34:07)

The letter identifies Paul as the primary author of the letter with a note that it came from Timothy also.

Philippians is Paul's only letter that never calls explicit attention to his apostolic authority.

B. Thanksgiving, 1:3-8 (35:35)

Paul expressed his thanks for the Philippians (1:3-6):

- joy the Philippians have brought to him
- expectations for their ultimate salvation

Paul's thanksgiving uniquely emphasizes his depth of love for the Philippians (1:7-8).

C. Prayer, 1:9-11 (36:41)

Paul prayed that the Philippians would express their Christian love by living in ways that honored God:

- discernment
- good works and perseverance
- glory and praise to God

D. Body, 1:12-4:20 (37:29)**1. Paul's Perseverance, 1:12-26 (38:29)**

Paul persevered by finding reasons to be joyful despite his suffering.

- Present Ministry, 1:12-18a

Even though Paul was suffering in prison, he was happy that his present ministry continued to thrive.

Paul suffered because of the actions of selfish evangelists yet he rejoiced that they preached the true gospel (1:17-18).

- Future Deliverance, 1:18b-21

Paul found joy in his hope for future deliverance and that he might eventually be released from prison.

Paul's death would mean the end of his service to Christ on earth but he envisioned the joy that would be his in the presence of Christ in heaven.

- Future Ministry, 1:22-26

Paul found joy in the possibility of a future ministry to the Philippians.

2. Exhortations to Persevere, 1:27-4:9 (44:34)

Paul instructed the Philippians to remain faithful to Christ and to live exemplary lives even in the midst of distressing circumstances.

- Importance of Perseverance, 1:27-2:18

God had ordained their suffering on Christ's behalf as means of blessing them so it was vital that they persevere.

We are in union with Christ, so when we suffer, Jesus suffers, and completing Christ's appointed sufferings is a badge of honor for every Christian.

Jesus willingly suffered for God's kingdom, and his reward is immeasurably great (2:5-9).

Paul wanted the Philippians to rejoice in his and their appointed sufferings because of the blessings it produces in this life and the next.

Paul encouraged the Philippian believers, as they suffered in this life, to focus on God's rewards for their suffering.

- Help for Perseverance, 2:19-30

The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul.

The church was worried about him because he had fallen ill, so Paul sent him back in order to ease their minds.

Though Timothy ministered to him, Paul expected to be able to send him to help the Philippians in the near future.

Paul "trusted" (*pepoitha*) that he would be released from prison, and would be able to minister to the Philippians.

- Examples of Perseverance, 3:1-16

When Paul came to faith in Christ, he ceased to rely on earthly standards to gain God's favor, and instead relied solely on Christ (3:4-6).

Paul refused to rely on his earthly merits but depended only on Christ's merit, which God credited to him by means of faith.

All who claim to have faith in Christ must persevere in the faith to obtain eternal life, living holy lives (3:12-16).

If we do not persevere to the end by maintaining our faith in Christ for salvation and by godly living, we prove that our faith was false.

- Challenges to Perseverance, 3:17-4:9

Paul encouraged the Philippians not to allow false teachers, conflicts or hardships to cause them to falter in their faithfulness to God.

Paul insisted that true believers must reject the false teachers, and persevere in Christian faith and practice.

Even true believers within the church could present challenges to the perseverance of their fellow believers.

He encouraged them to adopt a joyful perspective, and not to allow anxiety to discourage them (4:4-7).

3. Affirmation of Perseverance, 4:10-20 (1:01:19)

Paul thanked the Philippians for sending money to relieve his suffering, but the real value of these funds was in touching Paul's heart (4:12-14).

E. Final Greetings, 4:21-23 (1:03:30)

Paul sent greetings to the Philippian church from the saints who belonged to Caesar's household (4:22).

The mention of believers within Caesar's household was a subtle, encouraging way for Paul to show that his imprisonment had not hindered his gospel ministry.

IV. Modern Application (1:06:07)

A. Nature of Perseverance (1:07:02)

1. Definition (1:07:32)

Paul conceived of perseverance in terms of true faith and righteous living (1:27).

We must remain steadfast in our commitment to the gospel, never giving up our belief that our salvation has been won Christ.

The only thing that could gain salvation for Paul was the righteousness of Christ, applied to Paul by means of faith (3:8-9).

Paul also spoke of perseverance as righteous living, as persistence in faithfully doing good and praiseworthy works (2:12-13).

We'll never reach perfection in this life, but we persevere in good works when we keep striving to obey Christ faithfully.

2. Necessity (1:12:29)

If we fail to maintain true faith:

- we will not be found in Christ on the day of judgment.
- we will not be resurrected to a life of eternal glory.

If we do not persevere in righteous living, we prove ourselves to be unbelievers, and we will not be saved.

3. Assurance (1:15:08)

Every true believer will certainly persevere in both faith and righteous living, so that our salvation is guaranteed.

Those whose faith is true possess the Holy Spirit, who works in them to guarantee their perseverance (1:6).

If we truly believe, there is no way that we can fall from faith or from grace (2:12-13).

B. Mindset of Perseverance (1:17:37)

1. Humility (1:17:56)

Paul knew he had every reason to be humble before God and by accepting this, he prepared himself to be built up by God, and to persevere through the hardships he faced.

Paul patterned his mindset after Jesus, who willingly humbled himself in order to obtain God's blessings for himself and for us.

Paul's "Christ hymn" describes Christ during three stages of history (2:6-11):

- Pre-incarnate state – Christ's condition prior to his incarnation: existing as God the Son, in perfect union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, equal to them in power and glory.

- Glorious

Christ was glorious — in the "nature" or "form" of God (*morphē*).

- Humble

Christ demonstrated his humility by his willingness to take on the form or nature of our humanity.

Christ's "form" (*isos*) was the same Father's but he let go of his rightful glory to please the Father and purchase our salvation (2:6).

- Humiliation — Christ's earthly life from his conception to his death on the cross.

- Inglorious

The Son of God put aside his divine glory to take the nature or form (*morphē*) of a human being.

Christ did not give up any divine attributes but added a human nature to his divine nature.

- Humble

He permitted himself to be murdered by those whose form he had taken (2:7-8).

- Exaltation — The period beginning with Christ's resurrection and ascension that continues now in his rule over creation.

- Glorious

Christ regained his glorious form, being exalted as the ruler of the universe, to whom every creature bowed in submission and worship.

- Humble

Christ continues to be humble, even in this exalted, glorious state — his rule over creation is intended to glorify the Father.

Humility is essential to persevering in righteous living and in faith:

- enables us to love and honor others, and to minister to their needs
- reminds us that the Father deserves our trust and loyalty

2. Optimism (1:29:29)

Paul chose to focus on the blessing that Christ was being preached, even though these preachers had evil motives (1:17-18).

Choosing to focus on the good things helped him endure the sufferings of prison (4:6-8).

3. Joy (1:32:51)

Paul concentrated on finding joy in order to persevere through his distressing circumstances (1:18-20).

Paul's joy was not a denial of pain and suffering, rather he was able to look at the good things in life and rejoice over them.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to be joyful because the Lord was:

- their help in time of need.
- the king who would return to bring his reign of peace to all the earth.

C. Ministry of Perseverance (1:36:30)

Through their ministry, the Philippians bolstered Paul's spirits, and empowered him to persevere (4:13-14).

The Philippians' gift somewhat alleviated Paul's suffering, so that persevering became a bit easier.

Paul intended his ministry to help the Philippians persevere through their own trials (1:3-4).

We can learn from the way the Philippians ministered to Paul:

- meeting material needs
- providing encouragement
- being physically present

We can also learn from the ways Paul ministered to the Philippians:

- prayer
- encouraging perseverance through sound doctrine and practical advice
- godly leadership

V. Conclusion (1:42:33)

Review Questions

1. Describe Paul's relationship with the Philippian church.
2. Summarize Paul's previous and current suffering at the time he wrote this letter.

3. What were the conditions in Philippi when Paul wrote to them?
4. How does knowing the background of Philippians help you understand why Paul wrote what he did?

5. In what areas did Paul persevered? By what means did he persevere?
6. What types of exhortations to persevere did Paul offer to the Philippians?

7. In what ways did Paul affirm the Philippians in their perseverance?
8. Summarize the overall structure and content of Philippians, highlighting the key points within each section.

9. Summarize three aspects of the nature of perseverance mentioned in this lesson.

10. Explain three characteristics of the proper mindset of perseverance.

11. In what ways does the church express the ministry of perseverance?
12. How should the modern church apply Paul's teachings about perseverance?

Application Questions

1. Paul wrestled between his desire to depart and be with Christ, and his continued usefulness in ministry on this earth. How can knowing that God has a purpose for each of us on this earth help you to persevere?
2. Paul had many friends in Philippi who ministered to him, which brought him great encouragement. Has anyone ministered to you in a time of need? What impact did that have, and how did it help you persevere?
3. How can our salvation be both secure in Christ (John 3:36; John 17:3; Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 3:22-24), yet still depend upon our perseverance in faith?
4. Paul's optimism in the midst of discouragement and suffering helped him to persevere. How does the cultivation of a thankful heart to God help in perseverance?
5. How can rejoicing in the Lord and praying about our anxieties bring us peace and help us persevere?
6. How can pride hinder our perseverance?
7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

Glossary

agapētos – Greek term (transliteration) meaning “beloved”; commonly used by the apostle Paul to describe his closest coworkers and dearest friends

asceticism – The improper avoidance of physical pleasure

Caesarea Maritima – Capital city of the Roman province of Judea on the coast of Samaria where Paul was imprisoned after his trial in Jerusalem; also known as “Caesarea by the Sea”

Christ hymn – The apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 2:6-11 that may have been from an existing hymn or that Paul may have written specifically for the Philippians; extolled Jesus’ humility and called believers to follow Christ’s example

circumcision – The Jewish tradition of excising the foreskin of the male penis instituted by God as a sign and seal for his covenant people in Genesis 17:10-14

Epaphras – Fellow laborer with the apostle Paul and founder of the church in Colossae who was sent by the churches of the Lycus Valley to minister to Paul in prison

Epaphroditus – Messenger sent from the Philippians to deliver gifts to Paul and to minister to him in prison; while with Paul, he became seriously ill but recovered and was sent back to Philippi, most likely carrying Paul’s letter to the Philippians

Euodia – Woman from Philippi who had worked closely with Paul and was entreated by Paul to end her conflict with Syntyche, another worker in the church (Philippians 4:2)

exaltation – In theology, the period of Jesus’ life that began with his resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, and continues now in his rule over creation; Christ’s resumption of his glorious form as the ruler of the universe

Gentile – Non-Jewish person

humiliation – In theology, the period of Jesus’ earthly life, that began with his conception in Mary’s womb and extended to his death on the cross; Christ’s willingness to put aside his divine glory in order to take the form of a human being

incarnation – Term that refers to Jesus’ permanent assumption of a human nature

isos – Greek term (transliteration) meaning “equal”

Judaizers – False teachers in the early Christian church who tried to force Gentile believers to adhere to Jewish traditions that were contrary to the Christian faith

Luke – Author of the third gospel and the book of Acts; a Gentile convert to Christianity and one of Paul’s co-workers; believed to have been a physician

Lycus Valley – An area defined by the Lycus River in the ancient Roman province of Asia Minor where Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea were located

Lydia – Merchant woman from Philippi; first known convert to the Christian faith in Europe

Macedonia – Name of an ancient Roman province located in and to the north of present-day Greece; region where Paul was told in a vision to go and share the gospel during his second missionary journey

morphē – Greek word (transliteration) meaning "form" or "outward shape"

Onesimus – Philemon's run-away slave from Colossae who appealed to the apostle Paul while Paul was in prison and who became very dear to Paul

pepoitha – Greek term (transliteration) meaning "to trust" or "to be persuaded"

Philemon – One of Paul's close friends from Colossae who labored alongside Paul in gospel ministry; master of the run-away slave Onesimus

Philippi – Important city in the Roman province of Macedonia, located on the main road that connected Rome to the eastern provinces; city where Paul planted a church during his second missionary journey

Syntyche – Woman from Philippi who had worked closely with Paul and was entreated by Paul to end her conflict with Euodia, another worker in the church (Philippians 4:2)

Timothy – Paul's young protégé and companion on his second missionary journey who brought Paul news from the church in Thessalonica; mentioned, along with Silas, as coauthor of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians

Tychicus – One of Paul's close friends from Asia Minor who accompanied Paul during part of his missionary journeys and who brought messages to and from Paul during Paul's imprisonment

Via Egnatia – The main road built by the Romans in the second century BC that connected the city of Rome to the eastern provinces of Illyricum, Macedonia, and Thrace (approx. 695 miles long)