

Holy Trinity Claygate



Small Group Study Material

Summer 2018

Study 1: A life worth living: New heart – Philippians 1:1-11

Introducing the Series

The letter of Philippians is packed full of incredible wisdom and love from Paul, encouraging the church in Philippi to stand firm in their faith in Jesus and to live it out in their daily lives. Paul's motivation for writing was in part to thank them for the gift they had sent him and for their concern after they heard Paul was suffering persecution and was under house arrest. In the letter Paul is encouraging the Philippians to stand firm and rejoice in the face of the persecution that they were also facing in their lives.

Philippians is a great letter for us to read today because it reminds us of the joy that is only found through being united in Jesus (joy is mentioned 16 times in the four chapters), and also what it means to be a Christian community. We live in a world where so many things are advertised as bringing joy or fulfilment, and yet the world and societies are just as divided as ever, and more people in the west say they are unhappy than has ever been known before. These words of Scripture will bring encouragement and wisdom for us to follow in our lives today, help us know joy, and unite us together in Christ.

It may be helpful to watch this good 10-minute overview of the book of Philippians here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE9qqW1-BkU>

Way in

- Have you ever been part of a project that unexpectedly took a lot longer to complete than you thought? How did your emotions fluctuate during the project? Share your story with the group.

Opening the Bible

Read Philippians 1:1-11 – remembering that Paul is writing while imprisoned.

1. When Paul prays for the church in Philippi, where does he say that his joy comes from? How do you think the Philippian Christians would have felt when reading these words from Paul?

2. How easy do you find it to have joy for others and confidence in God when your personal circumstances are difficult? Can you think of an example to share from your experience?

3. Are there any clues in these verses as to how Paul can have joy during his imprisonment?

4. Looking at v6, Paul is confident that God will carry on and complete the good work that He started in the Philippian Christians. Can we be confident that this promise is also true for us? What might this promise look like in your day-to-day life?

5. What would you say to a Christian friend who is going through a tough time, and doesn't feel confident that God loves them or is at work in them? Is there anything in these verses that will encourage them?

6. In vv9-11 Paul makes known his prayer request for the Philippian church: make a list of his prayer requests. Discuss how these qualities link with Paul's confidence that God will complete the good work that He has started.

Small group reflection and prayer

- These opening verses in Philippians talk about a continuing transformation that happens in the lives of all those who are in Christ. Share with one another, and give thanks for a time when God has been at work in you and brought about a change in you.

- Be brave and also share with one another a place in your own life (not someone else's!!) where you struggle or would like to see God bring further transformation. Spend time encouraging and praying for one another and these situations.

- Personal prayer: using verses 9-11 as a guide, pray for your small group members each day. Pray that they may grow in joy, love, knowledge and depth of insight as they go about their lives this week.

Study 2: A life worth living: New purpose – Philippians 1:12-18a

Way in

- What would you say is your purpose in life? Has this changed over the years or remained the same?

Opening the Bible

In this passage Paul writes about his imprisonment in Rome and the impact it has had on his witness for Christ.

Read Philippians 1:12-18a

1. What is Paul's attitude to his imprisonment? (vv12-14) Why does he see it in a positive light?
2. 'What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.' (v12) What does Paul mean by 'advance the gospel'? In what ways do we see this happening in today's world?
3. Compare the motives of the two groups described in vv15-18. What is Paul's attitude to them both?
4. Think of a time when you have been critical of the motives or methods of other Christians. What advice would Paul give you about this?
5. How would you describe Paul's purpose in life from these verses? In what ways does this challenge you personally?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Share with the group situations in which you have opportunities to 'advance the gospel' in your daily life (everyone has some opportunity to do this!) and pray for one another to make the most of these opportunities.

- Reflect on any situations or relationships in your own life where you feel that others are setting out to make life more difficult for you in some way. How does this passage help us deal with these situations? You might like to also read Genesis 50:20 in the context of the story of Joseph.

- Personal prayer: Spend time in prayer this week reflecting on your own purpose in life, and your own priorities, and how they relate to Paul's single-minded approach to sharing the gospel. Commit to God any ways in which you have been challenged to make changes as a result of this study.

Study 3: A life worth living: New attitude – Philippians 2:1-11

Way in

- Can you think of a time or an event that caused you to be ‘humbled’? How did you feel at the time? Do you feel any different about the experience now?

Opening the Bible

1. Before you read Philippians 2 together, discuss how you think most people would define what true humility is.

Read Philippians 2:1-11

2. Now focussing on vv1-4, how does Paul define humility in these verses? Does this differ from your answer to the question above? If so, what are the major differences and why do think this is?
3. Do you think what Paul says in v3 is really possible? What would the benefits be to a church community if everybody had this attitude that Paul is commanding?
4. Paul challenges us to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus, who (v6) ‘did not consider equality with God something to be grasped’. What do you think Paul means by this phrase? (cf vv6-8) What would ‘having this attitude’ look like practically in our lives? Is it possible?
5. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to seek honour and selfish ambition? How does Jesus’ example help us to respond to those temptations?

6. Focussing on vv9-11, describe in your own words God's response to Jesus' humility. What does this tell us about their relationship and the attitude that God desires for us to grow in?

Small group reflection and prayer

- The main challenge of this passage is to live each day following the example of Christ's attitude and humility in thoughts, words and actions. In what area(s) of your life has God been challenging you to have a more servant-hearted attitude? Share and pray for one another, both for the areas in which you are tempted to be selfish, and for opportunities to serve others this week.
- Personal prayer: at the start of each day this week, thank God for the example of Jesus, and ask God to give you greater opportunities to serve throughout the day.

Study 4: A life worth living: New power – Acts 2:1-21

Way in

- Go around the group and share an example of a time when you have seen or experienced something that was incredible and left you totally surprised. It could be something you did yourself or saw happen in someone else.

Opening the Bible

This week we take a break from our walk through Paul's letter to the Philippians to remember the day of Pentecost. Pentecost marked a day of transformation for the Christian church, it was the day when the Holy Spirit finally came in a new way on all Christians as had long ago been prophesied (Joel 2:28-30), and also promised by Jesus (Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:4-5) shortly before his ascension.

1. What do think of when you hear the words 'Holy Spirit'?

Read Acts 2:1-21

2. The disciples had remained in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them (Acts 1:4) until the Holy Spirit came. Describe in your own words what was seen, heard and experienced by the disciples when the Holy Spirit came. Does any of this particularly surprise or challenge you?
3. One of the first gifts that the Holy Spirit enabled in the disciples was the ability for people from all the different nations present to hear and understand each other. What does this tell us about one of the main purposes of the Holy Spirit? (cf Acts 2:21, Phil 2:1-2)
4. Although the early disciples all received the ability at Pentecost to speak and understand different languages, the Bible does not promise this ability to everyone. However, the Bible is clear that *all* who repent and believe in Jesus will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (read Acts 2:38-39). What do you think about the promise of the Holy Spirit living in you? What difference does this make in your day-to-day life?

5. The Holy Spirit causes good transformations in people; in Galatians 5:22 we are told that the fruit (i.e. the result of the Holy Spirit at work in us) is growth in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Share with one another in the group examples and times where you have seen or experienced the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work either in you or in those close to you.

6. In the Acts 2 passage, what was the reaction by those who witnessed the Holy Spirit at work in the disciples? Thinking of the answers you gave to the previous questions: What was the reaction to the work of the Holy Spirit in those who witnessed it in your own life?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Although when we repent and believe we all receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5:18 tells us to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Are there parts of your life where you would like to see further transformation happen? Share with one another and also ask and pray for each other to continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

- Personal prayer: there are many different spiritual gifts (some are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and Romans 12:6-8). If there is a particular gift that you would like, why not spend time in prayer asking for God to give it to you.

Study 5: A life worth living: New responsibilities – Philippians 2:12-18

Way in

- How would your life be different if you were not a Christian? (or, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian now, how would your life be different if you became a Christian?)

Opening the Bible

This passage follows on from Paul's wonderful description of Christ's attitude of humility and service in 2:1-11 – so if you haven't read these verses recently please do so before beginning today's study.

Read Philippians 2:12-18

1. In v12, Paul says we are to 'work out' our salvation because God 'works in' us. How are these two ideas related? Why is it important that he tells us to 'work out' our salvation **not** 'work for' it?
2. Based on these verses, how would you answer someone who says, "Jesus has forgiven all my sin – past, present and future – so it doesn't really matter how I live"?
3. 'Do everything without complaining or arguing' (v14) ... in what areas do you find this a challenge? What is our motivation for seeking to grow in this area?
4. What is it that enables us to 'shine like stars in the universe' (vv14-16)? What might this look like in practice in today's world?

5. Today's study is entitled 'New responsibilities'. How would you describe the responsibility that we have as Christians i) to God; ii) to ourselves; and iii) to others?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Looking back over your own life, in what ways have you 'worked out' your own salvation since you became a Christian? How have you changed during this time? Share with the group how others can pray for you on the next stage of your journey.
- How easy or difficult do you find it to accept that you are saved by grace, as a gift of love from God, irrespective of anything you have done or can ever do? Are there ways in which you are tempted to try hard to obey – not as a response to His love, but as an attempt to 'earn' your salvation? How can you help one another to keep a check on your motives for seeking to grow in discipleship and obedience?
- Personal prayer: Identify one situation or relationship in your life where you do not live in a way that honours God, as described in today's study. Come before God in repentance and pray for His grace to change you, as you continue to work out your salvation with God working in you.

Study 6: A life worth living: New confidence – Philippians 3:1-9

Way in

- What are you most proud of in your life (or on your CV) – and why? (perhaps an achievement, a skill, or something in your family tree or heritage)

Opening the Bible

In this passage Paul describes how the grounds of his confidence in life have been completely transformed as a result of his faith in Jesus.

Read Philippians 3:1-9

1. How would you describe the things that used to give Paul confidence in his former life (vv4-6)? What similar things do people put confidence in today that they think will make them acceptable to God?
2. What is Paul's view of these qualifications now (vv7-8)?
3. What does Paul now place his confidence in, and why (vv8-9)?
4. What does it mean for us as followers of Jesus to 'consider everything a loss' compared to knowing Christ? What impact does this have on the choices we make in our lives?
5. What do you understand by the word 'righteousness'? What does Paul mean when he says he has gained 'the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith'? How does this relate to your own experience?

Small group reflection and prayer

- How has today's study challenged your own grounds for confidence in your life and faith? Share with the group any ways in which God has spoken to you about your own priorities, and pray for one another in this.
- Are there any ways in which you, or others you know, are tempted to have a 'Jesus plus' mentality? – are there ways in which you think (consciously or subconsciously) that in order to be acceptable to God, you need faith in Jesus **and** something else, perhaps something external, or a certain sort of behaviour? How does this passage challenge that thinking?
- Personal prayer: Read, or sing, the words of the song 'All I once held dear' (see below), and let them lead you into making your own response to God in prayer.

1. All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres
and wars to own;
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss -
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.

*Knowing You, Jesus,
knowing You,
there is no greater thing:
You're my all, You're the best,
You're my joy,
my righteousness;
and I love You, Lord*

2. Now my heart's desire
is to know You more,
to be found in You
and known as Yours;
to possess by faith
what I could not earn -
all surpassing gift
of righteousness

3. Oh to know the power
of Your risen life,
and to know You in
Your sufferings;
to become like You
in Your death, my Lord,
so with You to live
and never die!

Study 7: A life worth living: New ambition– Philippians 3:10-16

Way in

- What is your greatest ambition in life?

Opening the Bible

In this passage Paul likens the Christian life to a race, and his ultimate ambition is to win the prize on offer.

Read Philippians 3:10-16

1. What one thing does Paul want above everything else (v10)? Does this surprise you?

2. How have you experienced in your own life i) the power of the resurrection; and ii) sharing in Christ's sufferings? To what extent is the hope of future resurrection a reality for you?

3. What similarities does Paul draw out between the Christian life and a race? What is the ultimate goal and prize?

4. How can looking back distract us from running the Christian race? Are there ways in which you have experienced this for yourself, or seen it in others?

5. What has helped you in the past to keep on pressing on with the race? How can we encourage each other to keep going?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Following Jesus in the way of the cross means that we will almost certainly experience suffering at points along the journey. Reflect together on the place of suffering in your Christian life. Has it drawn you closer to God, or made it more difficult for you to continue the race? Pray for one another, particularly for those who are experiencing suffering at the moment and perhaps struggling to persevere.
- In light of this passage, discuss what place ambition has in our own lives. If our ultimate ambition is to know Christ, and to persevere in our Christian lives, can we also be ambitious for a better job, a better house, our children's education, or other things? Are there ways in which your own ambitions have been challenged as a result of today's study?
- Personal prayer: Spend time in silence, meditating on the verse 'I want to know Christ'. Allow God to reveal to you any ways in which He is calling you to enter more deeply into a knowledge and experience of Him, and how He is drawing you on to the next stage of your journey with Him.

Study 8: A life worth living: New generosity – Philippians 4:10-end

Way in

- If you were given a million pounds that you had to spend, what would you choose to spend it on and why?

Opening the Bible

Read Philippians 4:10-end

1. While Paul is undoubtedly thankful to the Philippians for their gifts to him, why do think he is careful to let them know that he is not dependent on their gifts?
2. Paul states that he has learned 'the secret of being content' (v12): what is this secret and how did Paul learn it?
3. If you're being honest, how would you finish this sentence: "I can be content, as long as _____". What are the particular situations that leave you least likely to feel content? How can Paul's secret be applied to those situations?
4. After Paul has spoken of his contentment in Christ, he returns to thanking and praising the Philippians for the gifts he received. What benefits does Paul expect the Philippians to receive for their acts of generosity (vv17-19)?
5. In this closing passage, Paul has reminded the Philippians to find their contentment in Christ and also praised them for their generosity. How are these two things linked?

6. What implications does this passage have for the way we live and how should it affect our giving?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Looking back over the studies this term, reflect and share with one another where you think God has been at work in you as you have explored these words of Paul. Are there any areas where you would still like to see God at work further?

- After sharing, spend time giving thanks to God and praying for one another. If you are having a break over the summer, why not organise a few socials to keep in touch (you could invite friends) and/or commit to staying in touch with prayer requests via email, phone or WhatsApp.

- Personal reflection: read through the book of Philippians again this week (a chapter a day) to remind yourself of its message and hear again what God has been saying to you through this study.