



10 Bible studies on Philippians...

‘friends for life’



getting a handle on 'friends for life'

How did you feel when you heard that this term in Church, right across all the services, right across all the small groups, we'd be focusing a lot on talking and sharing about Jesus— technically called 'evangelism'? Evangelism has suffered a lot of bad press in recent decades, whether from the seeming multitude of American 'tele evangelists', with more than a few particularly good at fleecing the vulnerable and gullible in order to keep their jet plane in the air, or that obnoxious Christian you know who seems to have missed out when they were handing out the social skills, who tries to ram Jesus down people's throats rather than helping them know God as He really is.

The Bible still is all about how God is saving a people from this lost world. The dust of sin had barely settled and God revealed he was going to do something about it, promising a saviour in Genesis 3:15, who we know eventually was Jesus. Throughout the Old Testament, God used a people, the Israelites to point people to Himself. No surprise that with Jesus, he too worked with a people, the disciples. If we know the Lord and His forgiveness, we too get to play a part in His plans to help others know Him. Peter said... **"But you are a chosen people...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness..."** (1 Peter 2:9) These studies are about taking this seriously...

Thanks

12 years ago, our Church, like many others, did a set of studies called 'Making Friends for Life', written by Dave Thurston, a Presbyterian Minister in Sydney. Back then we had 2 small groups who enjoyed the tasks that went with the studies. Unfortunately, they are no longer in print. But some of Dave's practical exercises have been adapted for these studies. Thanks Dave for still getting us thinking all these years later!

Hints for these studies

With each question, sometimes there's a follow up question or two included. This is just to help draw it out a bit more. You may get it with the first one so don't panic if you end up saying the same thing – just move on.

Also, don't panic if you can't quite see what a question might be driving at. These questions obviously are not the Bible. Feel free to move onto the next one. The questions are just an attempt to help us get into a particular part of the Bible or issue. Let the Bible drive things at the end of the day. The questions are of course still hoped to be helpful in leading in to what God is saying and what that might look like in our lives today (the ones in normal print are focused on the section of the Bible, the ones in italic are about thinking through what this means for us). So at least think about it before moving on. It might then become more obvious. Basically, have a go!

Listen to what everyone has to say in your small group. Our enthusiasm for the great things we can see God telling us can sometimes get in the way of others chipping in, especially if we're always beating them to the gun. Likewise, feel free to chip in if you're not an extrovert. You're amongst friends in Jesus. None of us have all the answers. Of course, feel free to still just quietly weigh up what others have to say if you don't feel ready to speak out loud too much. It's great you are there.

ABOVE ALL, PRAY FOR GOD TO SPEAK TO US AND HELP US ALL SEE JESUS...

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...and whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

(Colossians 3:16-17)

1

friends for life

- 'opting in?'

setting the scene...

It's amazing how if you have to 'opt in', far less end up getting involved than if you have to 'opt out'. If it's the latter, you're automatically included if you didn't get around to opting out. Basically, many of us are lazy and reluctant to be proactive!

When it comes to sharing our faith in Jesus and being a part of God's plan to help others know Jesus, to help others have a friendship that is for eternal life, it's easy to view this as an 'opt in' thing. We leave that to the keen ones or especially gifted ones (some of whom we might even see as a bit too keen or even fanatical for wanting to actually share the faith!). We might think we don't know enough about the faith or we think we're really shy or we don't have the sales pitch others can muster at the drop of a hat. So we pass up the option. The funny thing is that in God's eyes, we're actually 'opting out' when we think like that. Every Christian has a role to play in the sharing of the good news about Jesus. The Philippian Christians were told to **"shine like stars in the universe as (they held) out the word of life."** (Philippians 2:15-16) We all have a part to play in that. Some more explicitly than others. But there should be no opting out...

how it all began with these Philippians... read Acts 16:6-40

Paul and his companions had wanted to **"preach the word"** or share about Jesus (this was on Paul's second big trip for this). What do we learn about the dynamics of sharing the faith in terms of circumstances or opportunities when they had wanted to do this in Asia and Bythynia but had ended up doing it in Macedonia? (v6-10) *Can you share an example of this in your own life as a Christian?*

Why did they especially seem to want to stay in Philippi? (v11-12) *Are their places that are more strategic for us?*

Paul's normal approach was to check out the local synagogue first. The next best thing if there wasn't one was to go to a "place of prayer", where a small number of Jews and interested Gentiles/non-Jews might meet on the Sabbath (Saturday). Why do you think Paul had this strategy? (v13) *Similarly, are there situations or groups where we might be more likely to share the Gospel or open up leads for the sake of the Gospel?*

What does Luke crucially tell us that frees us from thinking it's all about how persuasive we can be? (v14-15) And yet Paul and co were still helpful with Lydia as a Gentile- see Acts 16:27-28.

The girl they met wasn't so encouraging, though accurate. How did Paul respond? (v16-18) *Is this the kind of tense situation that puts us off sharing our faith?*

There were drastic consequences as Paul and co talked about Jesus. (v19-24) *What might drastic consequences look like for us if we dare to talk about Jesus?*

And yet, these guys could still rejoice, even in jail. (v25) *Why?*

How did they back up their Gospel words with Gospel actions? (v26-28)

God used this to open up a wonderful opportunity for Paul and his Christian friends to share deeply about Jesus with the jailor. What were they keen to be very clear about? (v29-34)

How was Paul still thinking about how he could best keep sharing about Jesus (opting in) when he balked at getting out of jail as quickly as possible? (v35-40) Don't forget what it was like when Paul and co were first arrested. *How can we be smart for the sake of the Gospel?*

Technically, people becoming friends of Jesus has stages to it, which may overlap or merge, be brief, or go for a fair while. Note briefly how this worked out with the Philippians...

Raising awareness - people might notice a Christian say or do something, hear about a Church

Initial Contact - people meet a Christian, drop in on a Church event

Pre-evangelism - a positive friendship fostered/good connection/interaction with people at Church

Evangelism - people hearing clearly the need to turn to Jesus to be made right with God

Edification - following up those who accept Jesus' forgiveness and want to follow him, nurturing them in this, leading to training in and making friends for life themselves

This start of the Philippian Church gives us a lead into the mission we're all called to participate in, how there are more ways than we might have realised to be involved . If Jesus is your friend, someone must have done it for you! The rest of these studies look at Philippians and explore how this can work...

**Pray in light of above, to be open to how we can help others to be friends with Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 1:1-11)**

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2

friends for life

- 'I can't see them?'

setting the scene...

I remember as a kid travelling in the car on the highways on family holidays and mum and dad would break the monotony of the long journey with... 'Hey, there's a kangaroo!' or... 'there's an emu!' By the time you worked out where they were looking and focused your eyes, it was mostly too late with the car hurtling along at 100km/hr. Rarely did we sight the wild life. Years later, I found the same dynamic with my own kids... 'Oh kid's, you should have seen it!'

It's easy for Christians to think, especially when you've been one for a while, that you don't have any non-Christian contacts. There are none to see in your circles. Christian friends make up a big part of your life, which is very important—the 'edification' thing. But likewise, God has placed each of us in situations and circumstances where, if our eyes are ready and open, there are non-Christian people we can get alongside and help become friends of Jesus.

your story...

Fill in some brief notes on the technical process for where you're at in the process of knowing Jesus—how you became a Christian and growing in that, especially noting who 'spotted' you...

Raising awareness

Initial Contact

Pre-evangelism

Evangelism

Edification

Having thought through this might help you to have a bit of a story to tell someone when they ask you how you became a Christian, often called in Christian circles a 'testimony'.

read Philippians 1:1-11

Paul usually says 'hello' in his letters with more than just 'Hi'. How does he succinctly capture the essence of the great message from God to us, the Gospel in v1-2?

What gave Paul such a thrill when he remembered his time with these Philippians? (v3-8, thinking back to last wk with Acts 16:6-40 and also later on with Acts 20:1-6) *What about the Philippian memory? What about your memory for how you became a Christian and those who helped you?*

What does it mean to be “a partner in the Gospel”? (v5) See 1:7, 19, 29, 2:16, 4:18. *What kind of fond memories do you have in partnering in the Gospel?*

What’s the basis for Paul’s “confidence”? (v6) *How does this, again (from last wk), free us from thinking it’s all up to us in people becoming and staying Christians?*

How does Paul’s attitude match the Gospel? (v7-8) *How does this avoid ‘number games’?*

How does Paul’s prayer logically fit together/follow on from a Gospel point of view? (v9-11) *What’s the point of it all for the Christian?*

From this opening to this letter, what prayer points can you list for your prayers? Will this help you “discern” opportunities for the Gospel?

spotting the Gospel contacts in our lives...

Fill in your normal patterns of activity—where you go, what you do...

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
<u>Mon</u>			
<u>Tues</u>			
<u>Wed</u>			
<u>Thurs</u>			
<u>Fri</u>			
<u>Sat</u>			
<u>Sun</u>			

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translating our activity into people...

Now, identify any non-Christian people you bump into during your normal wk...

How RIFE are these contacts? In other words, where do they sit on the spectrum of getting to hear about Jesus?

R - raising awareness

I - initial contact

P - pre-evangelism

E - evangelism

Pray for God to guide you how these everyday relationships can be turned into Gospel relationships.

small groups in Gospel partnership...

Is there 1 or 2 that your small group can pray about over this term?

Brainstorm as a group something tangible you could do as a group evangelistically towards the end of this term - a real event or joint action, something where everyone can pitch in to help people hear about Jesus in some way, recognising how we all have different capacities and gifting (remember 1 Corinthians 12)...

Doing something together is a lot easier and less scary than plugging away on our own.

**Pray in light of above, to see those who we can help be friends with Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 1:12-26)**

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3

friends for life

- 'staying on task'

setting the scene...

Pre-evangelism is an important part of the process of people becoming Christians. It helps to back up the message we hopefully get to pass on. We're not about 'scalps' so we can boast like with how many fish we caught on a day out on the water. We actually care for people who don't know Jesus, just like God cared for us, well before we got to know Him. Every person is created in the image of God and are lost until they meet Jesus. So, we seek to relate genuinely with people, not to use them.

Having said that, for the same reasons, motivated by Gospel love, it is important to stay on task with this. The danger is when this relationship can become more valuable to us than the Gospel. And so we never get to talk about Jesus because we're afraid the relationship might end if we do.

But Gospel love knows that knowing Jesus is more important than people knowing us. If it means we lose something in the process, so be it...

read **Philippians 1:12-26**

How did Paul end up in "chains"? (v12-14) See Acts 28:16-30.

How could this "advance the Gospel" and have "encouraged" other Christians to evangelise or "speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly"? (v13-14) *How can this help us to stay on task and speak up even if it means we risk our freedom or a friendship?*

What are the motives Paul is aware of for talking about Jesus? (v15-17)

good

bad

What surprises you about Paul's response in v18 to the negative motivations? *What do you think enables him to be like this?*

What kind of "deliverance" is Paul talking about—deliverance from jail or being empowered to do something far greater and stay on task? (v19-20)

What's Paul's big dilemma? (v21-26) *Do you share it?*

What tempts you to want to hold onto this life the most, especially in a place like Australia?

What are you fearing you might lose? (sometimes, people are more open than we pessimistically assume)

How does Paul help us to stay on task and view our relationships from a Gospel perspective?

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians...

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

Talk about anything relevant you feel able to share with the small group in confidence about the 2 people you are focusing on as 'friends for life'. Pray about all of these. Jot down any relevant notes so you can pray for the contacts of the other members of your small group, again, confidentially. (remember who does the work of salvation - Philippians 1:6, we can't save a soul)

Small group member...

Friends...

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

staying on task with pre-evangelism...

One of the limitations for us getting past just being a friend, not necessarily a friend for life - eternal life in Jesus, is our level of conversation is so shallow. If we never talk about important things, how will we ever get to talk about Jesus? It will feel odd to bring that up after only ever talking about cosmetics, footie or our latest holiday. We need to deepen our relationships, ask questions to show we really care. Jot down what you already know about the 2 people your focusing on. It may help you to see an opening that might lead into talking about Jesus, certainly being aware of where they are at...

What are their likes/dislike?

Interests/hobbies?

Family background?

Religious background?

Schooling/training?

Work situation?

Hassles/worries in life?

Current knowledge of Christianity?

Current attitude towards Christianity?

Birthday?

Other relevant info?

**Pray in light of above, to know those who we can help be friends with Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 1:27-30)**

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4

friends for life

- 'to speak or not to speak?'

setting the scene...

It's easy for Christians to think, 'I'll just let my actions do the talking'. And it is true that a picture can paint a 1000 words! Jesus said, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) Our good deeds, showing practical Christian love are 'indeed', really important and helpful. But Jesus also said, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory..." (Luke 9:26) Peter didn't say for no reason... "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15) We need to speak up in some way. Otherwise we're like a sign with nothing written on it, pointing nowhere. Plenty of people who don't know Jesus can do kind and nice things. If we never somehow speak, we're probably pointing just to ourselves and building up our own glory. Maybe you think, 'I don't want to speak because my actions will give Jesus a bad name!' Please don't speak! Let the Gospel sort you out quick smart so you then can be a good sign for Jesus. It's so worth being up for this, as this next part of Philippians shows...

read Philippians 1:27-30

What's the undergirding principle Paul wants to guide these Philippians in their lives? (v27-28a) *How might this guide our decision making in whether to bring Jesus into the conversation - - to evangelise or not to evangelise?*

If the Philippians lived in a "manner worthy of the Gospel", how does this help at least communicate a clear Gospel message? (v28b) *Can you give an example?*

What might "frighten" the Philippians? *What might frighten us? (this may help answer the previous question) Explain how handling a tense situation in a Godly way shows we are saved.*

Why does Paul add in the qualification at the end of verse 28... "- and that by God."? *How do we show God's saving work in our lives that others might see and hear?*

What's getting in the way of you evangelising?

If someone asked you, 'how can I become a Christian', could you answer them? What would you want to try and get across?

What are the 2 things Paul's says are certain for these Philippian Christians—and he's not meaning death and taxes!? (v29) *How could "suffering" be a gift?*

Is there any way of telling the Gospel without any potential for conflict? (our recent look at John's Gospel might also come to mind eg John 6, 15)

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians. Do it, along with praying for the friends/contacts we're looking to God for opportunities to speak to about Jesus...

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

small groups in Gospel partnership...

Discuss a bit more what your group might be able to do as some kind of event or action. What is critical in this to make it a useful evangelistic effort?

Any outreach or evangelistic endeavour has to have in mind who (the people) we're hoping to reach, what we want them to know (the message), how we're going to do that or get to that (the method) and where that might lead to (the response). Discuss these 4 points bringing in what we've seen even in just this part of Philippians. For example, the difficulties of dealing with people, the essential Gospel points to help someone get it, what kind of responses we might get?

**Pray in light of above, to know when to speak about Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 2:1-4)**

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5

friends for life

- 'united we stand'

setting the scene...

In politics, they say 'disunity is death'. The whole 'united we stand, divided we fall' thing. Not many will vote for a party that can't get its own act together. Right across every endeavour of life, any nation, family, business, sporting team, musical production etc, etc, etc will be far less effective if that group is not working together, getting on with whatever they're supposed to be on about. It's hardly rocket science. And yet political parties can't help themselves, knowing the pitfalls of disunity but so easily stumbling head first into them. Churches are so prone to this as well. How many Churches have split over the years? How many have limped along, not having actually split, but they might as well have, with not a lot of purpose and harmony?

This is so sad when in Christ, we actually can be different to everyone else! We have every reason and the means in Christ to buck this trend. This next part of Philippians gets us thinking about this. It helps us to take seriously the challenge in our small groups to do something of an evangelistic nature in a month or so...

read Philippians 2:1-4

What great things do we share in as Christians? (v1) Note, the word for "encouragement" here is from the same word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel when he was preparing the apostles for their foundational role in spreading the Gospel (15:26) - the "counsellor" or "helper"/"advocate" in other translations. *How special is it for or any Christian to be a part of God's plans in passing on what they have seen in knowing Jesus?*

What does it mean to experience "comfort" from Christ's love? (v1)

"Fellowship with the (Holy) Spirit"? (v1)

To know the "tenderness and compassion" of Jesus? (v1)

What will give Paul great "joy"? (v2) *Why do we then think it's OK for Jesus to be tender and compassionate with us, but we can quickly forget that in our interactions with others?*

How deep is this unity meant to be? (v2) *What are some of the common things that lead to our forsaking the unity we have in Christ?*

What very practical tips does Paul put his finger on in the first part of v3? *How have you seen these destroy Christian unity?*

What does it mean to “consider others better than yourself”? (v3b) *Does it mean lying?*

Does v4 remind you of anyone and therefore help us to treasure unity? See Colossians 3:13, 1 John 4:9-12.

Why is it necessary for Paul to be so upfront about all of this in v4? See Romans 7:18-19, 24-25a.

Are there any legitimate reasons for breaking unity? If we didn't on legitimate occasions, would it make evangelism pointless?

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians. Do it, along with praying again for the friends/contacts we are looking to God for opportunities to speak to about Jesus...

1)

2)

3)

4)

some suggestions for expressing Gospel unity in the small group venture...

Dialogue evangelism meeting—inviting contacts to a meal/avo tea/supper with a 7-10 minute Gospel talk putting Jesus on the agenda in some meaningful way. You can then open it up for questions or at least there might be discussion over desert/coffee. Guests need to have been invited knowing that there will be a short presentation about Jesus. We don't need to trick them into coming! We do more damage if we do. Better to have no one come and be honest than have a lot there and they feel they were duped, or just as bad, there was no Gospel input at all. An invitation can be as simple as, *'A few of us from Church are getting together over a meal. One of us is giving a short talk about Jesus. Would love it if you could come.'*

This kind of event easily involves everyone in some way, depending on the skills mix, from welcoming people to cooking to doing the talk to leading the occasion so it doesn't drag on and so on. All can have a go at inviting. All can certainly pray and bring something to contribute to the material sustenance side of the occasion. Some will feel more able to chip in helpfully to any discussion than others. Some will need to mind their 'p's and 'q's. This is not the time to bring up some deep controversial obscure pet theological question! This is not the time, come to think of it, it never really is, to come across as weird, fanatical and self-righteously religious, showing off how much you reckon you know about the Bible. We are simply people who used to be beggars telling other beggars where they can get food for the soul.

The talk is obviously not everyone's cup of tea. But you don't need to be Billy Graham either. It's good to pick some angle or poignant point of interest that leads to explaining how we need Jesus, who alone can bring us to God as a friend, not a foe, using a relevant part of the Bible. It won't explain everything. But getting across our need and how Jesus meets that through the cross is the goal. Our ministers would only be too glad to help someone give it a go. It's likely there will be someone in the group who has had some experience at this anyway, from maybe being on a Beach Mission or being a youth group leader or doing a spot at a Church event. It can be good to include in the preparation an inexperienced person with the more experienced one so they can get to see how it can be put together.

Just having a **testimony** on the night can be a good variation, especially if no one's maybe up for a short talk. But to talk helpfully about how you came to know Jesus can be very engaging. It's a real life example. It may be an easier thing to invite contacts to... 'One of our group will be briefly sharing their story how they became a Christian', or 'the difference Jesus has made to their life' etc.

Other variations can be doing a theme night that can lead to an even softer landing in bringing Jesus to the fore, like a '**Christmas in July**' night, which can lead into a short talk about the real Christmas.

Alternatively, you could show a **DVD** like the Jesus Video, or a documentary talking about the validity of Jesus (John Dickson has produced some good documentaries that can be good discussion starters or thought provokers). You might know of others that could be helpful.

If you're still scratching, maybe not yet up for anything like the above, maybe your group could **piggy back** on an existing outreach at Church, like help run a nursing home service/visit some shut ins, or do something with the outreach cafe or even with regular things like KFC/youth—talk to the appropriate leaders and see how your group could help out. Maybe your group could help with the logistics one time? Maybe one of you could do a testimony? You just might get to encourage an old person to look to Jesus when they are literally knocking on Heaven's door at a nursing home, or show a child that it's not just their family who love Jesus.

Worth chewing it over as a group don't you think, putting Philippians 2:1-4 into practice? Jot down your group's current thinking...

**Pray in light of above, to work together in spreading the good news about Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 2:5-11)**

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6

friends for life - 'communication breakdown'

setting the scene...

Communication, rather ironically, is something we talk a lot about, but aren't necessarily that good at. It's more than just talking or giving someone a pamphlet and thinking that's mission accomplished, though sometimes it could be. Successful communication is when the other party or person actually understands what you're trying to show or say. They get it. Though that doesn't necessarily mean they agree with whatever you might be putting to them. But at least they are clear about what they are disagreeing with!

Evangelism or the key mission God has for us as His people on this planet to help others know how they can know Him too is hugely about good communication. We have a wonderful message to pass on, good news about Jesus. But lots can get in the way of that, even things like our Church meetings where it's most obviously meant to be about Jesus, or key things we might not get across in our personal evangelistic conversations. As Paul now shows us in Philippians, Jesus went to a fair bit of effort to communicate the Gospel. So should we...

read Philippians 2:5-11

Talk about the amazing contrasts Paul presents in v6-11 of the massive highs and lows for Jesus.

Why did Jesus...

"not consider equality with God something to be grasped"? (v6)

"(take) on the nature of a servant"? (v7)

"(be) made in human flesh/found in appearance as a man"? (v7/8)

"(be) obedient, even to death on a cross"? (v8)

For what ultimate purpose?

What does it mean that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"? (v10) See Exodus 3:15.

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How does this crucially define the message we should be sharing if we want to give "glory to God" (v11)?

What happens if we lose the LORDship of Christ, only seeing him as Saviour?

Knowing every one will have to face Jesus one day, whether they like it or not - "every tongue (will) confess that Jesus is LORD" (v11), how should this motivate us in our efforts to evangelise?

What about in our relationship with fellow believers at Church, given Paul had just been talking about this at the start of the chapter? (v1-4) We all need to be ready to bow the knee before Jesus.

If Jesus went to extraordinary efforts to communicate to us, how much effort should we make so we don't give mixed messages to each other and those who come amongst us? What are some classic hiccups? See 1 Corinthians 14:20-25.

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians...

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

the importance of Church...

Church has become more and more a strange experience for your average Aussie. That we sing songs is enough. Even more strange when they might sound obscure old worldly, or even if more modern, still nothing like what you hear on the radio. There can be so many books in people's faces just as you come in - quite confronting if you're not a bookworm - and a real problem when we are people of the book. And when we try and explain what it all means in the preaching, the poor old preacher has to try and engage with those of us who know so much, often at the expense of those who know so little, let alone getting lost in his own pontification about the latest theories doing the rounds of academia. A visitor can also easily feel pressured at a Church meeting into giving money without any explanation of what it's for, let alone that they have permission to let the plate pass them by. We can easily look nothing like the God who humbly dressed himself in humanity!

Our Church meetings need to be clear and comprehensible. How do you think we're going? Give an indication with a tick of where you think our various activities might sit...

Activity Raising awareness Initial contact Pre-evangelism Evangelism Edification

Where are we light on at Church? How RIPE are we as a Church?

outreach update...

Where are you up to with your 2 contacts? Are they getting riper? Give an indication with a tick where you think things are at...

contact 1

Activity Raising awareness Initial contact Pre-evangelism Evangelism Edification

contact 2

Activity Raising awareness Initial contact Pre-evangelism Evangelism Edification

How could the group help in this with the planned upcoming activity?

Share with the group any relevant info re your contacts and get praying!

**Pray in light of above, to be clear in spreading the good news about Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 2:12-30)**

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7

friends for life

- 'shoulders to the wheel'

setting the scene...

One of the reasons God wants us to be a part of Church is that we can do so much more than just plugging away on our own. Apart from reflecting something of the image of God we've been created and recreated in (where relationships matter—think 'Trinity'), He has gifted each of us so we can compliment the way we care for each other (the 'edification') and reach out (the 'evangelism'). It's the whole 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts' thing. We mightn't feel we're great at explaining the Gospel say in a conversation. But we can take someone along to where someone else can do that well. There can be a wonderful Gospel synergy as we work together.

It's hardly surprising Paul returns to this teamwork idea again (remember the unity emphasised at the beginning of chapter 2), now urging the Philippians to get involved in the mission, giving some great examples of how the Gospel is advanced when we all play our part. And he's urging us too - another prompt for our small group to think through how to do something together evangelistically...

read Philippians 2:12-30

What does it mean to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling"? (v12-13) *Is this works salvation?*

What's the great work Paul has in mind? (v14-16) Is it easy? Just for some? *Can you think of situations where this great task could be fertile ground for "complaining" and "arguing"?*

Does Paul practice what he preaches? (v17-18) *Does he remind you of anyone? (last wk might help)*
Are there people at Church who fit this same bill?

Why is Timothy also such a helpful example? (v19-24) How did he contribute to the Gospel team effort?

What about Epaphroditus? (v25-30) Why was Paul so keen to call him a "fellow worker"?

From your experience as a Christian taking part in God's mission, can you see why Paul thinks of "workers", "soldiers" and "messengers"?

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians...

(remember our contacts too)

1)

2)

3)

4)

getting down to tick tacks... who's on what?

It's time to start getting serious about whatever your small group is going to have a crack at evangelistically. The group needs to work out the practical details. *Who's* going to do what in the lead up and on the day or night so you give it a good go, involving everyone in some meaningful way. Do you want to prepare some invites or just go with word of mouth? *Who's* organising that? How's the food/drink being organised if that's part of the event? *Where? When? RSVP's? Who's* giving some kind of brief Gospel talk or angle? *Who's* comparing or the 'MC'? *Who's* free to just welcome/chat with guests? *Who's* setting up/cleaning up? Make sure you think through how it will practically happen. Jot down below the nuts and bolts...

What

Who

When

**Pray in light of above, to play a part in spreading the good news about Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 3:1-11)**

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

8

friends for life

- 'never ending story'

setting the scene...

You might have seen the add about getting a loan to buy a house where the excited young couple are in a pleasant office, with a helpful, smiling manager who asks them to sign on the dotted line to secure the loan. The couple gladly oblige. And then instantaneously—their hands have hardly left the page—and the manager grasps the contract, leaves the room without a word as the walls of the fancy office fold down and disappear. The couple are left wondering what's gone on—they thought the manager really cared? The add then spruiks the wares of the bank that's supposedly not like that - they're in it for the long haul, to help manage your loan over time through changing circumstances.

True evangelism is about the long haul, helping people to not just know Jesus but stick with Jesus. We've already given it the technical name of 'edification' in thinking about the process of friendship with Jesus. It's following up on someone who's responded to the evangelistic call. It's nurturing them in the faith, building them up, training them so they too can help others be friends of Jesus. It's why Paul could write to the Roman Christians saying he was "eager to preach the Gospel to (them)" (Romans 1:15). It's why Paul had a long term outlook with these Philippians, why he wanted to write to them as well, to also encourage them in their ongoing friendship with Jesus...

read Philippians 3:1-11

Why would Paul need to encourage the Philippian Christians to "rejoice in the Lord"? (v1) Didn't they already have that in Christ? *What kind of things spring to mind for you where as Christians we lose our joy in the Lord?*

What is Paul concerned about that could take away the joy in the Lord for these Phillipians? (v2-3)

Why would Paul call these people who potentially could derail the Philippians "dogs"? (he's not thinking of football teams) How were they "mutilating the flesh"? See Galatians 6:12-15, thinking through how circumcision was only ever meant to be a sign of something more important for Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:1-14) and how Jesus has fulfilled this.

How does Paul's example help us think through where our "confidence" should lie? (v4-7) *What ways we are tempted to put confidence in or mutilate flesh?*

What is the essence of Paul's confidence? (v8-9) How is this the essence of the Gospel? *Why then are we so vulnerable to trying to make ourselves look good? To become a Christian is to accept we can't.*

How does Paul show the Gospel is an ongoing reality for the believer? (v10-11) Explain why Paul isn't thinking here he himself can "somehow... attain the resurrection from the dead".

It's easy to think the longer we are Christians, the more intricate and clever things we will know. Is it more about understanding the basic things better?

What basic beliefs do you think every Christian needs to be grounded in?

What basic tools do they need to be helped to use?

What kind of basic support is helpful? How might this vary depending on circumstances?

What kind of ways do we have as a Church to try and care for each other long term? How are you involved in this longer term outlook for the preaching of the Gospel? Who are you helping? Who's helping you?

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians...

(keeping contacts in mind/prayer)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

touch base... (update how the plans for the group's evangelistic effort is going)

**Pray in light of above, to keep playing a part in spreading the good news about Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 3:12-4:1)**

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

9

friends for life

- 'get real'

setting the scene...

When we talk about Jesus with those who don't know him, on occasions it can seem like they're on another planet. Likewise, they can think that's the case for us! Not always. Some are primed by the Spirit and they lap up the truth. It's like they were just waiting for us to open our mouths. Others are not yet at that point. They can't imagine God caring about us that much, if He exists. They can't see Him. It all sounds too good to be true. They see the ongoing mess in this world. And so they raise their eyebrows, convinced we're living in fantasy land.

But Christians are realists. Jesus has confronted us with the reality of sin. He paid a real price for it to reopen friendship with God. We get a real taste of that now. But we're also not yet in Heaven either. We need not pretend we are. We need to help each other and those who don't know Jesus to be clear about what the state of play in reality is, not holding out false hope that everything will just be rosy when we become a Christian. And yet, there is still a real relationship with Jesus that can be ours in this present life...

read Philippians 3:12-4:1

How does Paul reveal he's realistic about the circumstances of this life? (v12-14) Does he have it all now? What does he have?

Aren't we saved by Jesus' victory on the cross? What then are Christians trying to win? Is this similar to how Jesus talked about "rewards" in Heaven? (the Sermon on the Mount has a lot of this talk in Matthew 5-6)

Why is it a "mature" outlook Paul is encouraging here? (v15-16) *Can you think of immature behaviour and understanding that manifests in Christians when we don't understand the present reality? Do we end up being like unbelievers when we do?*

When you realise like Paul the obvious that you haven't made it yet in terms of being perfect within yourself—only perfectly forgiven in Christ, pride is nipped in the bud, humility should flourish, realising we're still learning to trust Jesus, that we don't understand every finer "point" about Jesus. But is Paul contradicting himself when he then encourages the Philippians to follow his example? (v17)

Why are our “stomachs” and “glory” so dangerous, able to turn us into “enemies of the cross”? (v18-19)
Is it the same problem that Paul was so careful to steer the Philippians away from earlier in this chapter?
(3:3)

Paul makes a lot of “citizenship” at the end of this section (v20-21) Think about how the Philippians were to behave as Roman citizens, even though they were a long way from Rome. Does that help us get Paul’s point?

Explain your own example of how this plays out practically in our Christian lives, knowing that we won’t be perfect till we’re in Heaven, and yet we are to still to “stand firm” in this present life (4:1).

Can you see how this makes it hard for the unbeliever watching on, how we have some explaining to do? (some may remember the old bumper sticker—‘Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven’)

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians...

(and for contacts to come to the event?)

1)

2)

3)

4)

be polite...

Having a go at helping others to be friends with Jesus will inevitably lead to us to needing to explain some things. Technically, this is called ‘apologetics’. It’s not apologising for our faith. Jesus doesn’t like it if we are “ashamed of his words” (Luke 9:26). The term is more embedded in the Greek word ‘apologia’ which means a reasoned defence. It’s not about getting into arguments, but helping our friends think it through, explaining like Paul was to the Philippians how we are saved by Jesus but still have to live in this present world. Jot down some of the questions you think people might ask about Jesus?

Sometimes people just ask questions to have a go at us or they just enjoy a robust discussion, but aren't interested in real answers. Others are genuinely searching. The Holy Spirit can use our answers if they are grounded in the Bible and the Gospel thrust God gives us there—never when we are arguing about those finer “points” Paul mentioned to the Philippians in this section. Sometimes a person may start out with ‘mischievous’ questions, but the Spirit intervenes and they get far more than they bargained for. ‘The Case for Christ’ and ‘Who Moved the Stone?’ are books that were written after a journalist and a lawyer respectively set out to actually disprove Jesus, and ended up writing their own reasoned defences for the Gospel!

Below are some common questions people might ask either genuinely or in jest. You've probably jotted down earlier many of these or questions to that effect. Jot down a couple of points you think might be helpful in answering them—maybe a key verse of the Bible. Your small group would get a lot out of discussing possible approaches to these questions. It will help you for when someone brings one of them up or something similar in a conversation, bearing in mind the earlier parts of Philippians and these studies where we are taught that it is only God who can soften a person's heart to be open to a good answer. It's crucial to remember as well that there are some questions we don't have the answer to. God hasn't revealed everything to us. We're not God. But He has revealed more than enough for us to go on. We're not expected to be walking 'spiritual encyclopaedias' or 'google'! In some ways, we're like the blind man healed who responded to intense questioning about Jesus... “One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25) And yet, this man went on to grow in his understanding of Jesus as well.

- 1) If God exists, how can he allow suffering?
- 2) How do you know God exists?
- 3) Aren't all religions just as valid?
- 4) How reliable is the Bible?
- 5) Doesn't Science prove the Bible is wrong even if it has been accurately passed down?
- 6) You don't need to go to Church?
- 7) All good people go to Heaven?
- 8) What about those who never get to hear about Jesus?

**Pray in light of above, to be realistic in spreading the good news about Jesus
(during wk—read Philippians 4:2-23)**

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *

10

friends for life

- 'a lifestyle'

setting the scene...

The temptation when you've had a go at something evangelistic, whether with your small group (ideally, be great to have done this by now or very soon), or whether it's a big effort at Church like a mission week, or maybe you finally pluck up the courage to bring up Jesus with a friend, or invite them to something to do with Jesus, we can want to breath a huge sigh of relief... 'Phew! I've got that monkey off my back. I've fulfilled all righteousness. Now I can go back to enjoying my personal faith.'

But as we hopefully saw right at the start of these studies, this is about more than just opting in once. This is about not opting out. It's a lifestyle. Following Jesus isn't part time or a one off exercise. It's our whole life. Our whole life should continue with the goal of loving Jesus, giving Him the glory—remember Philippians 2:10-11. And helping others be friends with Jesus, to see how great Jesus is, this should be tightly bound up in all of this.

Paul signs off his letter with this parting challenge...

read Philippians 4:2-23

It was alluded to back at the start of chapter 2. How does a similar problem rear it's head again? (v2-5)

Why would Paul be worried about it? How could this undo the good work that had been going on?

How have you seen personal clashes undo Gospel work? On the other hand, how have you seen Christians deal with these well so the opposite happens and the truth and power of the Gospel is revealed?

Often, it's anxiety in other areas, like to do with work or at home, that manifest in letting our Gospel guard down at Church. How does Paul help us nip this in the bud? (v6-7) See Matthew 6:25-27.

Why is "prayer" so helpful in this, especially when it's not like things are always resolved the way we might have hoped or we don't "understand" why they're not?

How does the way we handle anxiety in our personal lives help in our Gospel witness to our friends?

Paul knows we can easily trip ourselves up with our thinking (v8-9). What sort of thinking has this letter to the Philippians been on about?

Being 'mission minded' is a way of putting it. Do you agree? How does being focused on God's agenda for this world help us avoid dead ends in our lives?

What are some of the ways our thinking can subtly be shifted in other directions, where our concern for real friendships, helping others to know Jesus wanes significantly?

Paul talks about a wonderful spin off from getting our thinking where it should be (v10-13) What is it? Do you have it? How does our society at large sadly reveal it's thinking doesn't lead to it? Is this a good lead in to talk about Jesus with our friends? Compare Acts 17:16-34.

How did the Philippians put their 'money where their mouth was', so to speak? (v14-23) Was it easy? See 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

How do you decide what you'll do with your \$? How does what Paul's been talking about help us make these decisions, both in our personal budgets and as a Church?

prayer...

Try and identify 4 things to pray about from this part of Philippians...

(remembering where our contacts are up to)

1)

2)

3)

4)

feedback... (talk about how the groups effort went if you've done it)

**Pray in light of above, to live a life spreading the good news about Jesus
(during wk—revisit a part of Philippians that really hit home)**

* * * Ordinary people following an extraordinary God * * *