

# THE JESUS SHAPED LIFE

**9 STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS**

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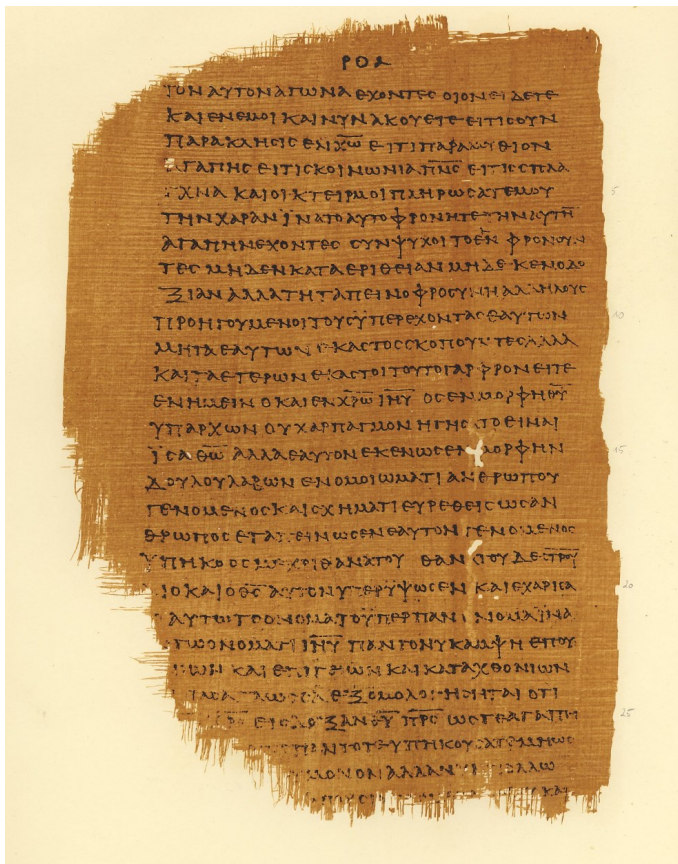
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# Introduction



While it is difficult to date documents from ancient history with absolute accuracy, it is likely that the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians was written some time around 60 to 63 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome toward the end of his life. By the grace of God, Paul had planted the Philippian church around a dozen years earlier in 50 AD when he met Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). There is no serious doubt among academics that the letter was genuinely authored by Paul and written to the church in Philippi. This is a real bit of history. The earliest copy of Philippians that we have dug up is in the picture to the left. It is called 'Papyrus 46'. It dates to somewhere around 175-225 AD. It is difficult to know the precise dates of these documents—they often do it by comparing hand writing styles to other documents from the period, obviously that can't be too specific. In terms of historical documents of any kind, this is in excellent condition and very close proximity to the time the original was written (around the same amount of time between when the Australian constitution was written and today). We can have lots of confidence in the historical reliability of the text of the Bible. The bit in the picture is Philippians 1:30 to 2:12.

According to academics, the city of Philippi was a Roman city on Greek soil. Even though it was in Northeastern Macedonia (1300kms from Rome) all of the land in the city was owned by the Romans. Roman citizens probably made up less than 40% of the population but they held all the land and most of the wealth. Best estimates are that it was around the same size as Mudgee (10,000—15,000). The majority of the population were probably Greek speaking, even though Roman/Latin was the language of the elite and on most of the inscriptions on buildings we have dug up. It was a very agricultural area, so there were many peasant farmers, it was a former military outpost so there were veterans, it was on a major highway (the Via Egnatia) so there were merchants, and it was the first century so there were former and current slaves. Outside of citizenship, it seems like there were lots of reasons for socio-economic division in Philippi. In Roman cities, status mattered (see Acts 16:38 for example). Status wasn't just connected with how much money/property you had, but which societies/temples/cults you were part of, what your title was, who you associated with. Can you imagine living in a place where people spent their time aspiring to be, and shaping their lives to be part of the elite? The truth is, it is not so hard for us to imagine living in a place like that.

This letter is written to Christians living in that place. And to them Paul says, don't pursue an 'elite' shaped life, but a 'Jesus' shaped life. It is a call to be counter cultural. It is a call to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. Are you ready to hear that call? Are you ready to pursue the Jesus shaped life?



# 1 Thankful and prayerful

## Philippians 1:1-11

### Getting started

What is your most successful gardening story?

### Explore

#### Read Acts 16:9-15

1. Here we see the small beginnings of the church in Philippi. We learn that there either weren't enough Jews to warrant the establishment of a synagogue in Philippi, or the Jewish religion wasn't formally recognized by the Roman colony (or both), because they had to meet in a place of prayer outside the city. Despite the small beginnings, Lydia – a dealer in purple cloth – believed. What led her to believe?

2. What happened immediately after Lydia responded to Paul's message?

#### Read Acts 16:16-40

3. In the introduction we talked about the socio-economic/class divisions in Philippi. Here we have Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, likely well connected and affluent. But we also have the Philippian jailer. He was likely a former slave, now freed, who was able to support his family through his work. Look again at verses 29 to 34. Despite the difference in their economic status, what do the jailer and Lydia have in common?

4. What do we learn here about who God works with? What do we learn about his people?

5. Consider the diverse people that you know in your local community. Which class of people do you feel would struggle to engage with the gospel? How might you be able to point them to Jesus (knowing that it is well within the Lord's capabilities (and experience!) to open their hearts)?

**Read Philippians 1:1-2**

6. In Acts 16 we heard about a small handful of people believing. This letter is written around a dozen years after Acts 16. What do these verses imply has happened with the size of the church?

7. How can this help us when we are feeling discouraged by the seemingly insignificant number of Christians in our gatherings or in our lives?

**Read Philippians 1:3-8**

8. Paul is thankful for the Philippians. Here he talks about the joy their 'partnership in the gospel' brings. What are some of the ways they have expressed that partnership from the first day until the day of Paul's letter (see for example Acts 16:15, 34 and Philippians 4:15-16)?

9. What is Paul confident of regarding the Philippians?

10. What does Paul say that he and the Philippians share in? What does he mean by this?

11. Explain the ways that we partner in the gospel with Paul, and with each other.

12. What impact might partnership in the gospel have on those we partner with?

13. Reflect for a moment on the way the Lord has worked in your life to bring you to faith and to keep you in the faith. What confidence does this give you that he will carry this work on to completion?

### **Read Philippians 1:9-11**

14. We have seen so far in this chapter that Paul is filled with joy because of how Jesus has shaped the lives of the Philippians over the last dozen years. Rather than saying 'it has been a good journey, you should be content with your level of Christian maturity', what does Paul pray?

15. Paul prays that the Philippians love would grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that they live fruitful lives. This is in contrast to elsewhere in his letters where Paul makes the claim that 'knowledge puffs up, but love builds up' (1 Cor 8:1). As we learn more and more how can we make sure our knowledge is 'fruity' and not 'puffy'?

16. Many of us have been Christian for a long time, some for only a little while. Are you content with how your Christian life is going? Are you tired of growing? Or do you want to grow more and more in your knowledge and depth of insight so that you become more like Jesus? It is easy to get tired of leaning into growth. I think Paul knows that and I think that's why he prays for the Philippians. Have an honest conversation with each other about how you are feeling about wanting to grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. Try to encourage one another and then pray for each other and the church.

### **Pray**

# 2 A life shaped by Christ

## Philippians 1:12-26

### Getting started

Share an example of a time you had a minor accident and over-reacted (kicked your toe etc).

### Explore

#### Read Philippians 1:12-14

1. We learn here that as Paul writes this letter he is a prisoner, under palace guard (v 13). We also learn from verse 12 that Paul is aware that the Philippians know about his situation and may be worried about him. As they worry for him and his imprisonment, what does Paul want them to know?

2. Paul says that he is 'in chains for Christ' in verse 13. What do you think he means by this (see Acts 24:17-21 for some context)? Do you think he means he is in chains *for getting caught preaching Christ*? Or do you think he means he is in chains *for the purpose of preaching Christ*?

3. According to verses 12 to 14, how has Paul's suffering served to advance the gospel?

4. We learn later in chapters 2 and 3 that there is something very Jesus shaped about suffering for the gospel. Have you ever suffered (greatly or even a little) for Christ? Why or why not?

5. Think about times you have suffered for any reason (you may be suffering at this point in your life). How could/can your suffering serve to advance the gospel?

**Read Philippians 1:15-18a**

6. What are the two motivations Paul says people can have for preaching Christ?

7. Unfortunately, rivalry and envy can often be the motivation behind church growth and the driving force for us in doing the ministry we do. Knowing this is happening, what does Paul rejoice in? What is he not endorsing here?

8. Often we are critical of other Christians for the things they say and do in the world, even if they believe in, and preach, the same gospel. How can we have a more joyous and less critical response to these brothers and sisters?

9. When is it okay *not* to rejoice in someone preaching the gospel (see Galatians 1:8-9)?

**Read Philippians 1:18b-26**

10. Which two things give Paul confidence that his suffering will turn out for his deliverance?

11. What can deliverance look like according to verse 20 and chapter 2 verse 8 and 9?



12. What do you think Paul means in verse 21 (he gives the answer in verses 22 to 24)?
13. What is Paul's conclusion? Is it better for him to die and be with Christ? Or to remain and live for Christ?
14. Verse 19 reminds us of the importance of praying for Christians who are suffering. How can we get in the habit of doing that?
15. Think about your personal circumstances. What could it look like for you to remain and live for Christ this year? Who might benefit from it?
16. Suicide is a sensitive topic—Christians certainly are not immune to it—and in a sense this passage speaks to the topic. When our brains are telling us to give up and go to be with Christ, the truth of this passage tells us it is more necessary for us to stay, even through our suffering, and live for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ. How could your life help others to follow Jesus? If your mind won't allow you to give an answer to that, ask someone in the group to remind you of your great value to the church.

**Pray**

# 3 A manner worthy

## Philippians 1:27-30

### Getting Started

Reflect on a time when you've seen a Christian brother or sister suffering. What impact did it have on your faith?

### Explore

#### Read Philippians 1:27-28

1. The NIV begins this verse by saying 'Whatever happens,'. But it could be 'Only', or 'Just one thing'. They are all okay ways to translate the Greek word (which is *monon*, as in one or alone or only) . Paul is basically saying, 'Now that I've said all that stuff up to verse 26, there's *one* thing you must do...'. And then he gives them the first instruction and major theme of the book. What response does Paul want the Philippians to make to his letter?

2. Most of the people of Philippi would have been trying to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of Roman citizenship—the pinnacle of the social ladder (see Acts 16:38-39)! What kind of life do you think the general population of Bathurst are aspiring to (you have to generalise here)? How does that aspiration shape the way they conduct themselves in their day to day life?

3. How *are* your aspirations and day to day conduct different to what you described in question 3 (be honest—it's not *how should they be different*)?

4. What are the things Paul says he will know about the Philippians in v 27 and v 28 if they are conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel?

5. Do you think there is a difference between standing firm and striving/contending for the gospel? Explain your answer.

6. What kind of sign will the Philippians be to their opponents? How does that work?

7. What does it mean to contend as 'one for the faith of the gospel'?

8. Is it possible to be united in the gospel without organisational unity? Explain your answer.

**Read Philippians 1:29-30**

9. In Romans 8:32 Paul talks about how God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, also graciously giving us all things. According to Philippians chapter 1 verse 29, what are two of the things God freely gives his people?

10. Explain how suffering could possibly be a free gift/favour to us from God?

11. What kind of suffering did Paul go through (see Acts 16:16-24 and Philippians 2:25)?

12. Think back over 1:12-26. Are there any hints as to how Paul conducted himself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in his suffering?

13. How can suffering:

- stop you from standing firm?

- bring disunity?

- stop you from striving/contending for the gospel?

14. What would it look like for us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in our suffering?

**Pray**

# 4 Shaped like Jesus

## Philippians 2:1-11

### Getting Started

Who is the most humble living celebrity you can think of? What makes them seem humble?

### Explore

#### Read Philippians 2:1-4

1. Here in Philippians 2:1, Paul alludes to the blessings Christians receive as the trinity works intimately together (i.e. union with Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit). If we benefit from the intimately united work of God—how does Paul say we ought to respond in verse 2?
2. According to verses 3 and 4, what is the opposite of being like God?
3. According to verses 3 and 4, what impact should experiencing God's love have on what we value and what we are interested in?
4. Think about the people that you know at church. Do you value them more than yourself? Do you see them as more significant than yourself? Whether you answered yes or no, how does this show in the way you act toward them?
5. How much do you know about the interests of others at church? What are some practical ways you can find out more about them?



## **Read Philippians 2:5-8**

6. Paul has already flagged in chapter 1 verse 27 that he wants the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Here he gives them a tangible picture of what that looks like. What shape is their life to take?

7. Jesus was in the form/nature of God, yet did not consider equality with God something to be grasped/used to his advantage. How is this the opposite of the way the first humans conducted themselves in Genesis 3:4-6 (and all humans after that!)?

8. Instead of using his form/nature to his own advantage, what did Jesus do according to verse 7?

9. Jesus didn't just empty himself of his divine nature/form, but in taking on human nature he took another step down the ladder. What does verse 8 say that he did, and who did he do this for?

10. How did Jesus taking on human flesh and dying serve us (see Hebrews 2:14-15)?

11. Consider your own station/position/status in the community. What are some practical ways you might empty/humble yourself/step down the ladder to serve your brothers and sisters at church?

**Read Philippians 2:9-11**

12. What was the end result of Jesus' humility and suffering?

13. What does Jesus' exaltation mean for us (see also 2 Tim 2:11-12)?

14. What does Jesus' exaltation mean for the way we can best serve people inside and outside the church?

15. How likely is it that you will try to humble yourself as a result of considering what Jesus has done for you? Be honest with your group as you discuss your answer.

16. What are some specific practical steps you can take to be more like Jesus in your relationships with one another?

**Pray**

# 5 Shining like stars

## Philippians 2:12-30

### Getting Started

Who is someone you look up to in the Bathurst community?

### Explore

#### Read Philippians 2:12-18

1. We've just been told in verses 9 to 11 that Jesus has been exalted and that his Lordship will be acknowledged. In view of all this, how does verse 12 tell us we are to respond?

2. In the Old Testament when God performed his mighty deeds the people responded with fear and trembling (see Exodus 14:31) Paul says here that we are to continue to work out (as in 'live out') our salvation with fear and trembling. What reason does he give for living out our salvation with fear and trembling in verse 13?

3. As you live out your salvation do you think of it as God's mighty power at work in you? How can we remind ourselves that it is God who works in us?

4. Sometimes people will give us compliments for the good things we do. Often our response is to dismiss it by saying, 'it was nothing', or something similar. If it is God who works in us to will and to work for his good pleasure, and someone thanks or compliments us for something good we do, how should we respond?

5. How are chapter 2 verse 13 and chapter 1 verse 6 similar?

6. In verse 14 Paul warns against grumbling. When we grumble and complain, who are we like (see Psalm 106:24-27 for example)?

7. When we don't grumble and complain, how will we be perceived by the world? And who will we be like (see verses 17 and 18 and also 1 Peter 2:21-23)?

**Read Philippians 2:19-24**

8. Paul says he has no one else like Timothy. According to this passage, how is Timothy different to others?

9. Consider the Jesus shaped life we looked at in Philippians 2:1-8. How is Timothy going at modelling this?

10. There is a noticeable intimacy between Paul, Timothy and the Philippians. This is an expression of the kind of unity Paul was talking about in chapter 1 verse 27 and chapter 2 verse 2. How would you describe your sense of intimacy and partnership with other Christians at church? How can you deepen this?

11. Consider the statement in verse 21: 'everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ'. How true is this for you? What are some things you could change to be someone who looks out for the interests of Jesus Christ?

## **Read Philippians 2:25-30**

12. What practical expression of their partnership in the gospel have the Philippians shown Paul?

13. What do we learn in verses 26 and 27 about the partnership between Paul, Epaphroditus and the Philippians?

14. How could we grow in our heartfelt concern for each other at church?

15. Paul said to honour people like Epaphroditus (v 29). Are there people like him at our church? How could we honour them?

16. Timothy and Ephaphroditus are two really great examples of people conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. What changes may you be able to make to your life to be more like them?

## **Pray**



# 6 Trash and treasure

## Philippians 3:1-11

### Getting Started

What material object in your house would be the first you would grab if there was a fire?

### Explore

#### Read Philippians 3:1-11

1. Paul uses the word 'rejoice' seven times in this letter. Here he is urging the Philippians to rejoice. What reasons do they have for rejoicing according to this passage (see particularly verses 7 to 11)?

2. Sometimes as Christians we can be discouraged rather than rejoice. What things discourage us, and how can we replace that discouragement with rejoicing?

3. In verse 2 Paul urges the Philippians to watch out for the mutilators of the flesh. The mutilators of the flesh are those who taught that physical circumcision was the marker that you belong to the people of God. According to verse 3, what is the marker of being part of the true people of God ('the circumcision')?

4. How does Paul now regard all of the things, in verses 4 to 7, that once gave him confidence he was one of God's people?

5. How does Paul determine what is trash and what is treasure in his life now?

6. When Paul talks about somehow, or by any means attaining the resurrection of the dead (verse 11), he's not talking about earning it. He's talking about holding on to Jesus – continuing to follow him through suffering and death to life. What rubbish is there in your life that might be hindering you from holding on to Jesus to the very end?

7. How much do you value doing things and keeping things that help you to live for and hold onto Jesus? How is this expressed in how you prioritise your time and your money?

8. If you don't find yourself 'rejoicing' in the Lord, and you often feel discouraged and disconnected it may be that you're holding on to rubbish and not valuing things that help you to live for and hold on to Jesus. How could you change things in your life to lose things that take you away from Christ and value things that help you to hold on to him?

**Pray**

# 7 Stand firm

Philippians 3:12-4:1

## Getting Started

What's something you are looking forward to this year?

## Explore

### Read Philippians 3:12-16

1. What is Paul's attitude/outlook with regard to his salvation?
2. Does Paul think he has not yet done enough to be right with God? Or does he think he is right with God, but just focused on persevering (see Philippians 2:12-13)?
3. It is clear from verse 16 that Paul is confident his place in God's kingdom has already been attained through faith in Jesus. He is simply saying that he wants to live up to what he has in Christ – or in other words, he wants to conduct himself in a manner worthy of Christ. How much are you straining toward/pressing on with/living up to what you have in Christ Jesus? What does this straining look like in your life at the moment?
4. Could you press on/strain/live up to Christ any more than you already are? How would you do that?
5. How can we help one another to strain toward/press on with Christ?

### Read Philippians 3:17-4:1

6. What very concrete advice does Paul give his readers in verse 17? How can we do this today?
7. What do those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ look like according to verse 19?
8. As you read this passage, are you concerned at all that this is describing you as an enemy of the cross of Christ? Is your mind on earthly things? Is your God your stomach? In what ways do you see yourself being ruled by your stomach or your desire for earthly things?
9. Many of the people in Philippi were infatuated with the worldly status of becoming a Roman citizen. Instead of worldly citizenship and worldly things, where ought the minds of Christians be focused (see v 20-21)?
10. How can we help ourselves to shift our focus from earthly things to heaven, the coming of the Lord and the glorious bodies that we have in store in Christ?
11. In your own words, write down how it is that we should stand firm in the Lord.

**Pray**



# Put it into practice

Philippians 4:2-9

## Getting Started

Have you ever met a Christian whose peace seemed evident to the world around them? Share with the group.

## Explore

### Read Philippians 4:2-3

1. Here we see there is a bit of conflict happening in the Philippian church between Euodia and Syntyche. What has Paul had to say about arguing and unity already in this letter (see 1:27; 2:1-8, 14)?

2. What reasons does verse 3 give for these two women to be united?

3. Are you in conflict with any other believers? What steps can you take to bring about reconciliation?

### Read Philippians 4:4-9

4. How does knowing Paul's context (1:13) help us to understand why he's so fixated on rejoicing?



5. When you are surrounded by the brokenness of this world it is incredibly difficult to rejoice. What instructions and reminders does Paul give his readers in verses 5 to 7 to ensure they can lift their eyes above their present suffering and rejoice in the Lord?

6. When we're going through a hard time, it can be difficult to be gentle. Usually we're aggravated and impatient in those times. In verse 5 Paul stresses the need to let our gentleness be evident to all. This is what Christ did, even when he was on the cross (see for example Acts 8:32-35). How are you at letting your gentleness be evident when things are tough? What are some practical steps you can take to help with your gentleness?

7. When things are hard, they consume our thoughts. Instead of being mentally consumed by our hardship Paul says in verse 6 we ought to, by prayer and petition, present our requests to God. How can we get into the practice of doing this?

8. Paul is literally in chains under palace guard (1:13). Yet, he doesn't dwell on his chains or his suffering, and in verse 8 he encourages the Philippians to do the same. What are they to dwell on?

9. When we are suffering, what steps can we take to help think about such things as those listed in verse 8 and to do such things as mentioned in verse 9?

**Pray**

# 9 The secret of contentment

## Philippians 4:10-23

### Getting Started

Can you think of one particular thing that would make you feel content? What is it?

### Explore

#### Read Philippians 4:10-20

1. Paul rejoiced in the Philippians 'renewing their concern' for him (verse 10). In what tangible way did the Philippians renew their concern for Paul?
2. Paul makes the famous statement in verse 13 that 'I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength' (NIV). What is the 'all this' that Christ gives Paul strength to do?
3. Paul's ability to endure without much stuff is a good application of his instruction to the Philippians in chapter 2 verse 14 to do everything without complaining. How content are you/would you be with not much stuff? Do/would you complain? Or are you/would you be content?
4. Paul says in verse 12 that he has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. How might chapter 3 verses 17 to 21 and chapter 4 verse 8 help us to also learn the secret of how to be content?

5. What does it mean for more to be *credited* to the Philippians *account* in verse 17 (see Philippians 1:11)?

6. It seems from verse 14 to 18 that the Philippians have been very generous in their partnership with Paul. People often go from that to verse 19 and say that Paul then tells the Philippians because they gave sacrificially God will make sure all their financial needs are met. Do you think Paul is actually saying that? Why or why not?

7. How do you feel about giving sacrificially to support gospel work knowing that it may leave you in want physically, but that through faith you have all your needs met according to God's glorious riches in Christ (even if not financially in this life)?

8. Paul praised the generosity of the Philippians in their gospel partnership. How generous are you in your partnership in the gospel? What steps could you take to be more like the Philippians?

### **Read Philippians 4:21-23**

9. These are Paul's parting words to the Philippians in the midst of his suffering and their suffering. He finishes with 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit'. The Lord has bestowed great grace upon us through the Lord Jesus. It gives us peace that transcends all understanding. The idea of it resting upon our spirits as we go about our lives reminds us of the promise of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28 when he tells them he will be with them always to the very end of the age. How can you remind yourself that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with your spirit as you go out into your week?

### **Pray**

