



# THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS – STUDY GUIDE

## LESSON 1 INTRODUCTION

### What is the book about?

Paul's letter to the Philippians is a wonderfully warm and encouraging piece of writing. It tells us of the strong bond of affection which linked Paul and the believers in Philippi, a town in what was called Macedonia and is now called northern Greece.

### Inspired Writing

Paul was an apostle (one who was specially sent by Jesus) and his epistles (an old word for letters) are part of the inspired writings of the Bible. This means he was not simply writing his own ideas as a man, even though he had a brilliant mind and was an outstanding example of a believer in Christ. He wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This was promised to the apostles by Jesus so that they could establish groups of believers based on the true teaching of the Gospel (see John 14:26; Acts 2:2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

### Living Faith

Through reading and understanding this letter we gain an insight into the living faith of believers in the First Century of the Christian era, those who were closest to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. God wants people like us today to believe just as they believed. The Bible tells us He will send Jesus again to our world to change it completely to a world of right living, with peace and happiness for all people. This is what the good news, or Gospel, of the Kingdom of God is all about. It is what Jesus came to make possible. The whole of the Bible was written to prepare us for it. The Letter to the Philippians plays its part in telling us how to be ready for it.

### What do we find in the Letter?

Philippi was the first ecclesia, or body of believers, that Paul established in Europe. After he left Philippi to continue his missionary activity, he maintained contact with the ecclesia. The letter was written when Paul had been arrested and imprisoned and it contains:

1. News about Paul's imprisonment, with encouragement from the apostle to the believers to hold fast to their faith in the face of opposition.
2. News about Timothy, who had become Paul's assistant, and about Epaphroditus, who was sent by the Philippians to cheer Paul in his trials.
3. Thanks for their gifts to support his preaching work.
4. Strong reminders of the need for unity in the ecclesia.
5. Warnings not to be influenced by the Judaizers, who wanted to push believers back into the practices of the Jewish religion.
6. Many passages setting out the lovely qualities of lives influenced by the teaching of the Bible, specially the joy which comes from faith in Christ.

## Finding your way

The chapters in the Bible divide the letter up into four parts; but we can break it down into smaller sections and get a feeling for the overall development of Paul's thoughts. It will help to read the letter through at least twice in a modern version. The version used in these lessons is the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

- 1: 1-2      **Opening Greetings**  
My dear Philippians...
- 1: 3-11      **Paul's prayer for the ecclesia**  
I am so grateful to God for your practical help. May God richly bless you.
- 1:1 2-26      **Personal news about his imprisonment**  
You will be delighted to know that in spite of my imprisonment the Gospel is being preached. I can face anything, even death, knowing that I shall soon see Christ. But if I am released, I shall have the joy of coming to see you all again.
- 1:27-30      **Stand up for the Truth**  
In the meantime stand together by the truth of the Gospel, whatever happens to you
- 2:1-2:11      **Christ is the Supreme Example**  
Try to agree with each other, even though some of you may have to give way. Remember how Christ showed perfect humility and is now Lord of all.
- 2:12-18      **Work out your Salvation**  
Our aim is to be shining examples of true believers, ready for the day of Christ's appearing.
- 2:19-30      **News about Timothy and Epaphroditus and their plans**  
I hope dear Timothy will be coming to you soon. Epaphroditus has been really helpful to me, but he has been so ill and missed you so much I have decided to send him home again. Give him a big welcome.
- 3:1-15      **Do not give way to the Judaizers**  
Rejoice in the wonderful hope of the Gospel. Do not be influenced by any false teachers trying to make you observe Jewish practices like circumcision. I was once a strict Jew, but I have gained everything by coming to Christ.
- 3:12-21      **Paul's living faith and hope**  
Christ has made it possible for us to look forward to the glorious day of resurrection. Follow me in pressing forward to him; the false teachers are heading for destruction.
- 4:1-9      **Getting your priorities right**  
Settle any differences among you and by prayer put all your concerns in the Lord's hands. The more you think about the qualities of the Lord's character, the less you will worry about trivial things.
- 4:10-20      **Thank you for so much practical help**  
In spite of all the problems I have had to face, I have learnt to be content by trusting God. But I really appreciated your gifts to me, as much as anything because they spoke of your love in Christ. May God richly reward you.
- 4:21-23      **Paul signs off**  
All the brethren and sisters here send our love in the Lord to every one of you.  
Your brother by grace, Paul.
- Activity:**      Read through the Letter to the Philippians in your Bible and see how these sections are developed.