The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians

Introduction to the Text

Gospel Partnership and Courageous Faith



For to me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21 • KJV

Men’s Bible Study

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About This Introduction

This guide introduces the whole letter. The chapter studies continue with Scripture read-throughs, Biblical Observations, Personal Application, reflection, and prayer. Scripture quotations use the King James Version.

Reading Philippians as a Letter

Philippians is Paul's letter to a congregation he knows and loves. Written during his confinement, it brings together gratitude, personal news, prayer, encouragement, and instruction. This introduction places the letter in its historical setting and helps us follow its message as a whole. Our aim is to understand Paul's words and let the truth shape our life together in Christ.

The Movement of the Letter

Paul begins with a greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer (1:1–11), then reports how his imprisonment has advanced the gospel (1:12–26). His appeal for worthy conduct and unity leads into Christ's example of humility (1:27–2:18). Plans for Timothy and Epaphroditus follow (2:19–30). Paul then warns against error and describes the pursuit of Christ (3:1–21), before closing with practical appeals, thanks for the church's gift, greetings, and a blessing (4:1–23).

Themes across the Whole Book

Joy, gospel partnership, humility, unity, knowing Christ, endurance, peace, and contentment recur throughout the letter. The theme pages help us recognize these connections. The outline shows the order in which Paul develops his message. Read across chapter breaks when a thought continues, especially from 1:27 into chapter 2.

The Companion Bible Structure

The Companion Bible presents another way to see the letter's relationships: a pattern of corresponding sections arranged as A B C D / D C B A. The opening and closing grace surround Paul's care for the church, the church's care for Paul, and examples of faithful service. Its structural labels help us compare related passages while keeping their place in the letter clear.

As you begin, notice how Paul connects the church's life together with the person and work of Jesus Christ.

How to Use This Study

Begin with the background, maps, themes, and outlines. They introduce the people, places, circumstances, and movement of the letter. The maps pair ancient names with present-day countries and locations, distinguishing inhabited cities and islands from surviving archaeological sites.

Truth in Action

The Truth–Text–Action charts provide a practical reading framework. Truth summarizes a teaching; Text identifies the passage to read; Action suggests a response to practice. These charts gather passages around four areas of growth: godliness, devotion, holiness, and the walk of faith. Read each passage in context before considering its application.

The Chapter Study

1. Read the Scripture. Read the KJV passage aloud. Pause at its natural phrases and notice repeated words, contrasts, and connections.

2. Consider Biblical Observations. Return to the focused verses above each observation. Follow the explanation from the words of the passage and use the charts and prompts for discussion.

3. Make a Personal Application. Identify one response the passage calls for in your thoughts, relationships, decisions, or service. Make it specific enough to practice during the week.

4. Review and Pray. Use the chapter summary and key movements to recall its message. Reflect on the questions, learn the memory verse, and bring your response to God in prayer.

What does the passage teach, and what faithful response will you put into practice?

Introduction to the Epistle of Philippians



Central Burden

Christ is the center of a life marked by joy, humble service, and courageous faith. Paul calls a beloved church to share in the gospel, stand together under pressure, and keep growing in love until the day of Jesus Christ.

Why Philippians Matters

This personal pastoral letter comes from Paul's confinement. His circumstances bring the church's questions close to our own. How do we remain joyful under pressure? How do men serve together without rivalry? What gives life its purpose when the future is uncertain? Philippians answers these questions through Christ's example and Paul's lived partnership with the church.

Background at a Glance

Field	Study Overview
Author	Paul, with Timothy named in the greeting (1:1).
Audience	All the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (1:1).
Place and date	Rome is the setting favored by the supplied sources. MacArthur dates the letter about AD 61, Companion about AD 62, and Dake about AD 64.
Occasion	The Philippians sent help through Epaphroditus. Paul responds with thanks, news, and pastoral instruction (2:25–30; 4:10–18).
Purpose	Strengthen gospel partnership, unity, endurance, and growth in Christ.
Key passages	1:21; 2:5–11; 3:7–14; 4:4–9, 11–13.

Scripture quotations use the King James Version.

Where Paul Was When He Wrote

Paul wrote as a prisoner, probably in Rome, Italy. This traditional setting fits Acts 28:16–31 and the references to the guard and Caesar's household (Philippians 1:13; 4:22). The letter does not name his location; Ephesus and Caesarea have also been proposed.

Each place is labeled for both periods. "Then" gives the ancient name; "Today" gives its present name or surviving site. Teal rings identify ancient places with a present-day city or island. Uppercase labels identify all modern countries; italic names identify ancient regions.

Philippi in the Ancient Biblical World



The letter was sent to believers in Philippi, a Roman city whose ruins are near Krinides in northeastern Greece today.

The same places then and today

Paul's probable writing location and the church that received his letter



Ancient place with a present-day city or island

Ancient place preserved as an archaeological site

UPPERCASE: present-day countries

Italics: ancient regions

Modern land borders

Areas of today's Greece lay in Macedonia and Achaia; ancient boundaries differed.

How does the distance between Paul and the church deepen our understanding of their partnership?

Paul and the Believers at Philippi



A Church Born amid Prayer and Pressure

Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia. Its civic identity gives added force to Paul's language about gospel-worthy conduct and heavenly citizenship (1:27; 3:20). Acts 16:12–40 records the church's beginnings during Paul's second missionary journey.

At a riverside place of prayer, the Lord opened Lydia's heart to Paul's message. After Paul delivered a slave girl from an evil spirit, her owners brought Paul and Silas before the authorities. They were beaten and imprisoned. Their prayers and hymns, the earthquake, and their witness to the jailer formed part of the church's earliest experience of the gospel.

Paul and the Believers — Continued

A Partnership That Continued

The Philippians repeatedly supported Paul's ministry. Their recent gift came through Epaphroditus, whose serious illness and recovery explain Paul's concern to send him home with honor (2:25–30; 4:15–18). This letter grows out of years of shared service and affection.

Person	Place in the Story
Paul	Founding missionary, imprisoned apostle, and affectionate teacher. He seeks the church's progress and joy (1:25).
Timothy	Named in the greeting. Paul commends his sincere concern for the believers and hopes to send him (2:19–24).
Epaphroditus	The church's messenger and Paul's fellow worker. He risked his life in service and is to be welcomed with joy (2:25–30).
Lydia and the jailer	Their households appear in Acts 16. Lydia's hospitality and the jailer's care show the gospel taking root in daily life.

Purpose and Central Themes



Why Paul Wrote

Paul thanks the church for its gift, explains Epaphroditus's return, reports how his imprisonment has advanced the gospel, calls the believers to unity, and warns them against teaching and conduct that draw them away from Christ.

See 1:12–26; 2:1–2, 25–30; 3:1–4:1; 4:2, 10–18.

Purpose and Central Themes — Continued

Themes to Follow through the Letter

Theme	Importance for Our Study
Gospel partnership	Prayer, giving, and shared labor join the church to Paul's work (1:3–7; 4:14–18).
Joy in the Lord	Joy accompanies hardship, service, faith, and generosity because Christ remains central (1:18; 2:17–18; 3:1; 4:4).
Humility and unity	Christ's self-giving example shapes how believers regard and serve one another (2:1–11; 4:2–3).
Knowing Christ	Paul counts his former advantages as loss and presses toward the goal of God's call in Christ (3:7–14).
Faithful endurance	Believers stand together, resist fear, and share in suffering for Christ (1:27–30).
Peace and contentment	Prayer, disciplined thinking, obedient practice, and Christ's strength shape life in changing circumstances (4:6–13).

Which of these stands out or speaks to you most?

Truth in Action through Philippians



Receiving the truth and putting it into practice

The following charts connect what Philippians teaches with a response in daily life. Follow four areas through the letter: growing in godliness, cultivating devotion, pursuing holiness, and walking in faith.

Read the passage, consider the truth, and choose one action to practice.

Truth in Action through Philippians

Receiving the truth and putting it into practice

TRUTH	TEXT	ACTION
1 Growing in Godliness Jesus shapes the life of His disciples. He took the servant's place, humbled Himself, and obeyed the Father to the point of death. Following Him changes how we regard others, use our freedom, and direct our thoughts. God works within us as we learn to serve and obey.	2:1–4	Seek unity with other believers. Listen to their concerns and place their good alongside your own.
	2:5–11	Follow Christ's humility. Serve without demanding recognition, and surrender personal advantage when love requires it.
	2:12–13	Respond to God's work in you with reverent obedience. Depend on Him for both the desire and the strength to obey.
	2:20–21	Show sincere concern for others. Let the interests of Jesus Christ shape your priorities.
	4:8–9	Give attention to what is true, pure, and worthy of praise. Put the teaching you have received into daily practice.

Adapted from the NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible. Summaries and applications are written for this study.

Where can you practice Christ's humility in a relationship this week?

Truth in Action through Philippians

Receiving the truth and putting it into practice

TRUTH	TEXT	ACTION
2 Cultivating Dynamic Devotion Knowing Christ becomes the believer's greatest pursuit. Paul gives up confidence in his former advantages and keeps pressing toward God's call. Mature faith continues to seek Christ with a focused heart.	3:7–11	Value knowing Christ above status or achievement. Seek to know His resurrection power and share faithfully in His sufferings.
	3:12–14	Keep moving toward Christ. Do not let past success or failure replace the pursuit of God's call.
	3:15	Develop the outlook of a growing disciple. Stay teachable as God brings your thinking into line with His truth.

TRUTH	TEXT	ACTION
3 Pursuing Holiness Believers share God's grace. Paul seeks the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. We place our confidence in Him, rather than in our own religious achievements.	1:7	Recognize fellow believers as partners in grace. Share their burdens and stand with them in the work of the gospel.
	3:9	Rest your standing before God on Christ. Turn from self-righteousness and trust the righteousness God gives through faith.

Adapted from the NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible. Summaries and applications are written for this study.

How do knowing Christ and sharing His grace shape your daily choices?

Truth in Action through Philippians

Receiving the truth and putting it into practice

TRUTH	TEXT	ACTION
4 The Walk of Faith Faith views present circumstances in light of God's work and Christ's promised future. Paul can face uncertainty, suffering, plenty, and need because Christ remains the center of his life. We learn to pray, rejoice, and serve with confidence in Him.	1:6	Trust God to complete the good work He has begun. Let His faithfulness strengthen your perseverance.
	1:21–24	Make Christ the purpose of your life. Serve others fruitfully while holding to the hope of being with Him.
	1:29–30	Expect that faithfulness may bring suffering. Stand alongside believers who face hardship for Christ.
	4:4–7	Rejoice in the Lord and bring your concerns to God with thanksgiving. Entrust your heart and mind to His peace.
	4:11–12	Practice contentment in both abundance and need. Let changing circumstances teach you deeper dependence on Christ.
	4:13	Depend on Christ's strength to remain faithful in every circumstance, including the plenty and hunger described in the preceding verses.

Adapted from the NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible. Summaries and applications are written for this study.

Which present circumstance calls you to depend more fully on Christ?

Philippians at a Glance

Life Application Chapter Emphases

Ch.	Source Heading	Focus for Our Group
1	Joy in suffering	Gospel partnership and courageous faith.
2	Joy in serving	The mind of Christ in humility, service, and obedience.
3	Joy in believing	Knowing Christ and pressing toward the prize.
4	Joy in giving	Joy, peace, contentment, and steadfastness.

Chapter headings from the Life Application Study Bible. The final column is our teaching summary.

The Movement of the Letter

Chapter 1 shows Paul's gratitude, prayer, and confidence as the gospel advances through hardship. Chapter 2 turns the church toward Christ's humility and the faithful service of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Chapter 3 calls believers to know Christ and pursue the heavenly goal. Chapter 4 brings the appeal into relationships, prayer, thought, contentment, and generous partnership.

Dake's Emphasis on Rejoicing

Dake's summary follows rejoicing through fellowship, affliction, ministry, faithful coworkers, life in the Lord, unity, and the circumstances of daily life. This helps us trace joy as a response to Christ throughout the letter.

Where do you most need to grow in joy, service, faith, or generosity?

Outline of Philippians

The NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible presents the letter in six major sections. Its divisions help us follow Paul's argument from greeting to final blessing.

Part	Passage	Outline and Main Content
I	1:1–11	Introduction Salutation 1:1–2; thanksgiving 1:3–8; prayer 1:9–11.
II	1:12–26	Circumstances of Paul's Imprisonment Gospel advance 1:12–18; assurance of blessing 1:19–21; Paul's dilemma 1:22–26.
III	1:27–2:18	Exhortations Live worthily 1:27–2:4; the mind of Christ 2:5–11; spiritual life 2:12–13; cease murmuring and questioning 2:14–18.
IV	2:19–30	Commendation of and Plans for Paul's Companions Timothy 2:19–24; Epaphroditus 2:25–30.
V	3:1–21	Warnings against Error Against the Judaizers 3:1–16; against sensualism 3:17–21.
VI	4:1–23	Conclusion Final appeals 4:1–9; acknowledgment of the gift 4:10–20; greetings 4:21–22; benediction 4:23.

Outline from the NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible, with condensed subheadings.

Reading across the Chapter Break

The appeal beginning at 1:27 continues into chapter 2. Read the call to stand together alongside the call to humility and Christ's example. The chapter numbers help us locate a passage, while the argument carries us from courage into shared service.

How does Christ's example in chapter 2 shape the courage called for in 1:27–30?

Companion Bible Structure

The Companion Bible calls this pattern “Introversion.” Matching letters show related themes in reverse order—A B C D / D C B A.

Label	Passage	Companion Bible Heading
A	1:1–2	Epistolary, and Salutation. “Grace” to Them.
B	1:3–26	Paul’s Solicitude for the Philippians.
C	1:27–2:18	Exhortation, and Example of CHRIST.
D	2:19–24	The Example of TIMOTHY.
D	2:25–30	The Example of EPAPHRODITUS.
C	3:1–4:9	Exhortation and Example of PAUL.
B	4:10–20	The Philippians’ Solicitude for PAUL.
A	4:21–23	Epistolary, and Doxology. “Grace” to Them.

Companion Bible structure. The explanations below are written for our study.

The Labels in Plain Language

Epistolary refers to a letter. Salutation means greeting. Solicitude means loving concern. Exhortation means an appeal to faithful living. Doxology means praise to God. The letter closes with greetings and a grace blessing.

The opening and closing grace frame reciprocal care. Paul’s concern for the church answers the church’s concern for him. Christ’s example and Paul’s example surround the faithful service of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

How does this structure help us see partnership throughout the letter?