



Summary of the Letter to the Philippians

When you read a good book, watch a film or go to the theatre, do you identify yourself with a particular character in the storyline?

Do you relate to what they are going through in their personal life and the circumstances unfolding? Do you feel empathy for them, and find the story so engaging, that you sit on the edge of your seat or you can't put the book down?

Maybe you just watch the plot unfold, without feeling for any of the characters, or perhaps you are unable or unwilling to identify with their difficulty or dilemma?

We will look at some of the people named in Paul's letter to the Philippians later on, but first let me ask you 3 questions:

1. What have you learned from the 14 bible studies we have made in the letter to the Philippians?
2. What difference have they made to your life?
3. What will you remember from our studies a year from now?

You may say, 'I can't even remember what we studied last Sunday, never mind this time next year!' Well, don't feel too bad, as scripture proclaims that 'one plants the seed, another waters it but only God can make it grow - It always takes time to bear fruit but it must be watered to break its dormancy!'

Remember what we studied in **(1:6)** *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* And also in **(2:13)** *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* So, expect to see your love for the Lord and for your neighbour blossom and bear fruit as **(3:14)** *we press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus!*

This personal letter giving thanks for a gift, was sent while Paul was under house arrest in Rome; it is filled with affection and encouragement for all the believers in Philippi.

The primary theme is one of joy, regardless of circumstance.

Joy is central to the Christian experience and the Apostle made it clear that true joy can only be appropriated through **(3:10)** *knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection...*

it is received by faith through a living relationship with Jesus, the source of joy in all things – even under trial and through suffering.

In his letter Paul doesn't quote the Old Testament to prove Christ, nor does he correct theological errors in their teaching but remains intimate, personal and edifying, even mentioning several people by name.

He does warn against putting confidence in the flesh and calls out those who preach Christ from envy and rivalry; however, the Apostle appeals for unity amongst believers, to stand firm in one spirit for the faith of the gospel.

We can appreciate Paul's love for those he calls dear friends; brothers and sisters; saints in Christ; partners in the gospel, and children of God.

Even though he is not sure whether he will live or die in defence of the gospel, he continues to pour out his love and counsel, to those who shine like stars in a crooked and depraved generation, holding fast to the word of life.

I wonder how many times this letter has been read over the centuries since it was written, and the comfort and counsel it must have brought to thousands, if not millions of believers over the whole world.

The Apostle Paul focuses the reader's attention on having the same attitude as Christ Jesus, to be like-minded, to be tender and compassionate, having the same love, and being one in spirit and purpose.

Paul encourages believers to follow his example of what they have learned, received or seen in him, by putting it into practice and the God of peace will be with them. What a promise for us this morning, the transcendent peace of God!

One final question to ask you this morning: with whom did you identify whilst studying this letter?

There are several names mentioned by Paul and if you were to put yourself in the picture, who would you most be like or put another way, who would you most like to become?

Let's look at a few of the people mentioned, other than Paul and Jesus:

1. The first mentioned is Timothy (*his name means to honour God*), he is called a servant of Christ Jesus. We know from letters Paul later wrote to Timothy, that he was young and timid but neither characteristic seemed to prevent him from serving with all his heart and proving his love for God and all the saints.

Paul considered Timothy to be like a son: **2:20-22** *I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.*

Can you identify with Timothy this morning, are you young (perhaps young in the faith if not in years)? Are you timid, not confident to confront difficult people or difficult situations?

Take comfort for the Lord is near... (**Philippians 4:13**) *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

2. Next mentioned by name is Epaphroditus (*which means fair or graceful – full of grace*), perhaps you are more like him. He is called a brother, a fellow-worker, a fellow-soldier and a messenger from the church in Philippi. He sounds tougher than Timothy but he took ill and almost died while visiting Paul in Rome.

Paul said he is to be honoured for risking his life. Is that you, are you risking all for the sake of the gospel?

Philippians 2:27 *For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him...* may the Lord protect you and have mercy on your mission in life.

3. Next to be mentioned are two ladies: Euodia (*meaning prosperous journey*) and Syntyche (*meaning fortunate or affable*). Perhaps you are like them, serving wholeheartedly in the church, but perhaps struggling to get along with someone else in the body. Paul offers counsel in (**Philippians 2:3b**) *...but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

The verses following Paul's plea for unity between the two ladies are well known, and may I suggest Paul is counselling them to

pray for transcendent peace in their relationship – it is always the first response, not a last resort!

(Philippians 4:7) *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

4. The next mentioned, actually not by name, but Paul calls this person a ‘loyal yoke-fellow’ or ‘true companion’. He must be someone well known in the church.

Many commentators believe it could be the Apostle Luke, who was part of the ministry team when the Philippian church began 10 years earlier. Are you well known but never seem to get a mention?

5. Clement (*meaning mildness of temper*) is also recorded but like Euodia and Syntyche, cannot be found anywhere else in scripture. However, and more importantly, their names are written in the book of life.

6. Others not mentioned by name, but perhaps you may identify with, are the Overseers and Deacons (these are the church leaders in the now well established church); also Caesar’s household (perhaps these could represent Christians in the workplace).

It is interesting which names are in the bible and the meanings they hold. Names meant much more in their day than they do in ours.

In my last 20 years working in golf, I managed very large teams over multiple locations and it was always a challenge to remember everyone’s name, plus their families! The first names I learned were always the ones which stood out – both for good reasons and for less than good!

Looking around the room I see several people whose names are mentioned in the bible: *Daniel, Deborah, Ruth, Davi, João, Mary, Rhoda, Elizabeth, Kezia, Susanne* and my own name *Stephen* – he is recorded in the book of Acts as preaching a very long sermon to 72 religious men, who immediately took him outside and stoned him to death!

Don't be disappointed if your parents didn't give you a name from scripture; if you have received Jesus in your heart, your names are written in the book of life and that's the most important book to have your name written in!

So, to conclude: has studying the letter to the Philippians put you in the picture and will it bring forth fruit to the glory and praise of God?

These studies are all posted on our YouTube page and I would like to thank Les, Mary, Grazianne, Daniel and Natasha for bringing them to us over the last 4 months.

Let's bow our hearts in prayer.