



Thank you for your interest in the series In the Meantime—a six-week study of the book of Philippians.

The pages which follow include:

- An overview of this series (7 pages)
- A sample sermon/class outline (6 pages)
- A sample handout (4 pages)

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Julie and I dedicate this series to

**David and Rebecca Bristol**

true friends who have lived "between the times" with us.

Their support, encouragement, love and wisdom

have nurtured us through good and bad.

Every preacher and his wife should enjoy

the camaraderie this couple has extended to us.

Alas, it requires rare people to offer

such a rare friendship.

Tim Woodroof  
Hillsboro, OR.  
December 17, 1996

## **In the Meantime:**

### **A Study of Philippians**

Paul's letter to the Philippian church is certainly the most personal of his letters to churches and probably the most popular. It is also, unfortunately, much misunderstood.

Because of the frequent occurrences of words such as "joy," "rejoice," and "be glad," this book is widely known as the "Epistle of Joy." Most readers take their cue from these "warm words" and see only sweetness and light at Philippi. Ignoring the troubling issues that are addressed by Paul and the clear textual indications of real problems at Philippi, they cut Philippians up into cheery sound bites and miss much of the power of this epistle.

Paul does speak of "joy" in Philippians, but it is not giddiness he means or a natural reaction to pleasant circumstances. The joy and peace Paul talks about transcend circumstances and can be experienced even in darkest times. He stresses joy with the Philippians precisely because they are "suffering" through difficult trials. There are "opponents" who are threatening the unity and faith of the Philippian church. People in the church are "arguing and complaining," behaving selfishly, reacting out of fear and anxiety. Paul is afraid the church is about to come apart. He writes to people who have largely lost their joy to show them how to find it again.

As you will see from the sermon outlines, there are three dominant themes which shape this letter. First is the reality of Paul's absence from the Philippians and its effect on both Paul and the church. Paul misses these people and they are missing him. Paul tells them he plans to visit soon, but writes this letter to instruct them on behavior "in the meantime"—hence the title to this series. Craddock, in his commentary on Philippians, alerted me to the importance of this theme. You will enjoy reading his observations.

The second theme which dominates this letter is the presence of "opponents." If Paul is far away, there are some troubling people who are all too near. The Philippians are under attack from the "theological right." My reading of Philippians leads me to believe that there is only one group of opponents named in this letter (Craddock, for instance, sees two distinct groups) and that they are Jewish Christians who are advocating both allegiance to Christ and obedience to Moses. Their standards are stricter, their ethics are more complicated, their demands are harsher than anything which flows from the cross. It is against this backdrop that Paul speaks to the heart of the gospel and the role of "faith in Christ" in transforming Christians and shaping behavior.

The third theme is related. The Philippians have reacted to these opponents with fear and anxiety. As is so often the case, in their confusion, the Philippians had turned on each other. Their fellowship was fracturing. They had lost sight of that noble “community ethic” which taught them to be humble, to serve, to think about others first. Instead, there was fighting and self-seeking and general distrust. Paul’s admonitions to the Philippians about how to treat each other are powerful.

There is, perhaps, a certain comfort to ignoring all this “grittiness” in Philippians. But to the degree that we face some hard things in the church today, perhaps a letter that deals realistically with real problems will be more helpful to us.

## Bibliography

### Commentaries

Craddock, Fred. *Philippians*. Interpretation Series. Atlanta: John Knox Press. 1985. 84 pgs. A short, homiletical commentary which provides rich insights. Heavy on the “big picture” and light on detail, this commentary is quite helpful as an overview of Philippians. I appreciated Craddock’s outline of Philippians and his understanding of what was critical to the letter, what was illustrative, and what was peripheral. Craddock is always a pleasure to read. As a preacher, he always has one eye on us as he writes.

Hawthorne, Gerald. *Philippians*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43. Waco: Word Books, Publisher. 1983. 232 pgs. This has long been one of my favorite commentaries. I love the Word Commentary format in general, and Hawthorne puts it to good (and serviceable) use here. His introductory material is excellent and you will appreciate many of his exegetical insights. I disagree with his views on who the “opponents” are (he thinks they are Jews, not Jewish Christians), but he deals fairly with all options in the discussion. Although you do not need Greek to take advantage of this commentary, a little of the language would help.

Woodroof, Tim. *A Distant Presence*. Colorado Springs: NavPress (*in press*). A soon-to-be-published volume in the new Narrative Commentary Series. This innovative approach to biblical texts uses an historical fiction format to lead readers into a more intimate relationship with the characters and events of the Bible.

## General Works

Bruce, F.F. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing Company. 1977. 510 pgs. Good background reading for any of Paul's letters.

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1982. 237 pgs. An excellent reminder of some principles for interpretation. Review esp. chapters 3-4 on the epistles as you begin your work in Philippians.

Greidanus, Sidney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing Company. 1988. 374 pgs. This entire book deserves a good reading by all preachers. But Greidanus' comments on preaching from the Epistles will be especially helpful for you (pgs. 311-341).

Sampley, J. Paul. *Walking Between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1991. 122 pgs. This wonderful little book will be helpful as you think about how Paul thinks about morality and how living "in the meantime" affects his thinking.

## Outline of Philippians

Philippians presents us with material that has widely different functions and importance. Not everything in this book is central to the message. Thinking about what is central and what is not will be critical as you make preaching decisions.

For instance, there is much “biographical” material in Philippians. Paul discusses his situation, talks about co-workers, and recounts some of the history between himself and this church. This is important as “background” but is not the heart of Philippians. The Christ-hymn (2:5-11—to use another example) is beautifully worded but is not the main point Paul is making. It illustrates the point.

In the outline below, I indicate centrality by indentation. The closer a section is to the left margin, the more central it is to the message of this book.

Introduction .....	1:1-11
Paul offers a prayer and speaks of his love for the Philippians.	
Autobiography .....	1:12-26
Paul speaks of his imprisonment, the opposition he has experienced, and how everything has turned out for the good of the gospel. He shares his uncertainty about the future, but is confident that God will work things out for the best.	
Standing Firm in Unity .....	1:27-2:18
Here, Paul speaks for the first time of the opposition faced by the Philippians—and it’s effect on their fellowship. The Philippians must protect their “oneness” if they are to hang on in the meantime. Paul points to the example of Jesus as the guiding principle the Philippians should follow in their own relationships.	
Biography 2:19-30	
Timothy and Epaphroditus also exemplify the kind of self-sacrificing, genuinely interested spirit that the Philippians should emulate.	
Standing Firm in the Faith .....	3:1-4:1
Paul returns to the subject of opposition, discussing the second threat posed by these outsiders to the Philippians—they are undermining the faith of the Philippian church. Is Christ enough? Is the pursuit of Christ sufficient for righteousness? Paul thinks so. The Philippians must focus on Christ if they are to stay faithful in the meantime.	
Words for the Meantime .....	4:2-9
The Philippians are hurting. They are in trouble. Can they be fixed? Paul recommends, in this closing segment, a recipe for church healing that the Philippians can follow: reconcile, rejoice, refocus.	
Autobiography.....	4:10-20
Remembering the history between Paul and Philippi.	
Conclusion .....	4:21-23

## Sermon Summaries

There are six lessons on *Philippians*, most of which are based on units of text that assume a structure for *Philippians* as outlined above. I have included two forms of support for your preaching. The first is a weekly handout for your congregation, which is closely tied to the sermon outlines. Any changes you might make to the sermons may require you to make changes to the handouts as well.

Then there are the sermon outlines themselves. Each outline is 6 pages in length—a lot of information! I tend, however, to speak quickly and for about 30 minutes. You may want to use these outlines verbatim, modify them to your own style and situation, or throw them out entirely. I hope they can at least serve as a starting point for your own preparation.

Sermon Title	Text	Page #s Outline	Page #s Handout
<b>1. A Distant Presence</b>	<b>Overview</b>	<b>1-6</b>	<b>1-4</b>
<p>This overview of Philippians covers some of the background material on Paul and the Philippians—when the church was first established, the length of Paul’s first stay there, subsequent visits, etc. Paul is lonely, imprisoned, tired. He is missing these people. But the Philippians are missing Paul as well. They are in trouble and could use the steadying hand of an apostle at the moment. The Philippian letter serves as Paul’s “distant presence.” He cannot be with them in the flesh. But he can draw near them through the word.</p>			
<b>2. Dealing with the Enemy</b>	<b>Php 1:27-30; 3:2-3</b>	<b>7-12</b>	<b>5-8</b>
<p>Just as Paul faces enemies, rejection and persecution, so the Philippians are dealing with some of the same. Only the Philippians have a hard time labeling what they are going through as “persecution” or their opponents as “enemies of the cross.” As a result, they are allowing their enemies to divide and conquer them . . . and to cause them to doubt the core of their faith.</p>			
<b>3. Hang Together or Fall Apart</b>	<b>Php 1:27-2:18</b>	<b>13-18</b>	<b>9-12</b>
<p>Paul admonishes the Philippians to live in a manner that is “worthy of the gospel—not at all meaning that they need to adjust their morality or tighten up on their lifestyles. “Worthiness” involves unity . . . standing together in one spirit . . . fighting as one man. The Philippians were allowing the stress of opposition to break down their fellowship. They were starting to act in selfish, proud, and anxious ways. Paul recommends that they “take the cure,” a radical procedure involving bathing in oneness, taking mega-doses of humility, undergoing a mind transplant, and swallowing a purgative.</p>			

- 4. Jesus: First, Last and Always** **Php 3:1-11** **19-24** **13-16**  
 Perhaps the most dangerous thing the opponents are doing to the Philippians is causing them to doubt the sufficiency of Christ. They are trying to convince the Philippians that commitment to Jesus is good, but not good enough. Paul admits that he once followed the way of law—attempting to become righteous through his own efforts rather than through faith in Jesus Christ. He has learned, though, that—compared with the pursuit of Christ—all else is “rubbish.” He wants the Philippians to recognize the same reality. If they are to hold onto their faith, they must protect the “sacred middle ground” of the gospel.
- 5. The Things We Do for Jesus** **Php 3:1-14** **25-30** **17-20**  
 Paul knows that the struggle to live up to the gospel will keep the Philippians hopping. He knows just how high the standard is. But he will not lower the standard so that it can be reached more easily. Nor will he recommend jumping higher and working harder as a solution to living up to the Christian standard. Instead, he insists that—by grasping Jesus—the Philippians are following the only path that leads to true righteousness. Once you have Jesus, you have the righteousness that comes only through faith in him. Even the apostle is not there yet. But the passionate pursuit of Christ keeps Paul jumping . . . and allows him hope that he will win the prize.
- 6. Therapy for a Church** **Php 4:2-9** **31-36** **21-24**  
 When a church stumbles on hard times, when it threatens to break, can a church be fixed? In this final section of Philippians, Paul urges his readers to Reconcile, Rejoice, and Refocus. Healing begins when Christians determine to act like Christ even in hard times. By determining to be peacemakers, by learning to rejoice in dark days by remembering God is still in charge, and by disciplining themselves to focus on what is good and healthy and wholesome, churches can ensure that they bounce rather than break—that hard times result in a stronger, not a broken church.

## A Distant Presence

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. (Phil 1:27)

### **Move One: Background of Paul and the Philippians**

When Paul writes to the Philippians, he has known them for over a decade.

#### **“You know . . .”—The familiar history of Paul and the Philippians:**

1. He established the church there sometime around A.D. 50—near the start of what we call his second missionary journey.
2. We know the name of his first convert in Philippi from Acts 16—Lydia, a Gentile, a woman who sold purple cloth to very wealthy customers.
3. It took Paul less than a day to win that first soul to Christ. And others followed. A woman named Euodia. A fellow named Clement. Another woman named Syntyche. Perhaps a young man named Epaphroditus.
4. We don’t know how long Paul stayed in Philippi—Luke tells us it was “many days.” But Paul baptized enough people to leave behind a functioning church when finally he was forced to move on.
5. And he did move on. You remember that he was thrown in jail, there was an earthquake, he converted the jailer, and was asked to leave the city.

#### **“Perhaps you didn’t know . . .”—The rest of the story.**

1. When Paul moved on to Thessalonica and then to Corinth, the Philippians didn’t forget him. On several occasions, they sent financial support, paying Paul’s expenses so that he could devote himself to preaching.
2. We know of at least two times when Paul sent representatives like Timothy to visit the Philippians and encourage them.
3. Six or seven years later, at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul made a couple of visits to the Philippian church.
4. But, then, a long period when Paul and the Philippians lost touch.
  - a. Paul went to Jerusalem, was arrested, and spent two years in prison.
  - b. He was put on a ship and sent to Rome—about six months.
  - c. At Rome, he was kept under house arrest for another two years.
5. It was during this time that the Philippians found out where Paul was and sent one of their number—Epaphroditus—to Rome
  - a. One day, Epaphroditus walked past the Roman guards and into Paul’s house. We can only imagine the scene—joy and hugs!
  - b. He brought gifts from the Philippians, expressions of their love.
  - c. Over the next few weeks, the story of the church spilled out.
  - d. And then, Epaphroditus got deathly ill. The man who came to help Paul became the invalid that Paul had to nurse back to health.
  - e. On his recovery, Paul put a letter in his hand and sent him home.

Over 10 years had passed since Paul first came to Philippi. He had spent perhaps three months with them in the beginning. There had been a couple of quick visits years later. But Paul had been absent far more than he had been present.

## **Move Two: Paul misses the Philippians**

We have Paul's letter—the NT book we call Philippians—and it makes clear that Paul is missing this church and these people. He has a relationship with the Philippians like no other church with which he has been associated.

1. He and the church at Jerusalem have been butting heads for years.
  - a. Many of the Christians there are sure Paul is selling out the gospel in order to make it more palatable to Gentiles.
  - b. They don't like the fact that Paul doesn't make Gentiles accept Moses along with Christ.
  - c. People from the Jerusalem church have done their best to make life miserable for Paul and for the churches he established among the Gentiles.
2. And Paul seems to be in constant conflict with the church at Corinth.
  - a. Some of those people don't believe he is really an apostle.
  - b. They reject his authority and complain about his speaking style.
  - c. They buck every time Paul tries to ride herd on them.
3. But the Philippians—oh, they are a different matter entirely.
  - a. These people love Paul and he knows it.
  - b. They have bent over backwards to take care of him and encourage him in his work.
  - c. If there was any place that Paul could call "home," any place he could go and know he would be among friends, it would be Philippi.

### **These people are special to Paul. You see it clearly in this letter.**

1. He calls them "dear friends" (twice!), his "partners" in the gospel, his "joy and crown."
2. He tells them that he "longs for" them (twice!), that he has them in his heart, that he loves them and feels affection for them.
3. He tells them how much it means to him that they are willing to share in his troubles and in his suffering.

### **Paul is missing these people.**

1. Imprisoned, lonely, rejected, tired—Paul hears from the Philippians and yearns to be with them once again.
2. He would leave immediately if he could, but there is the little matter of being on trial for his life.
3. In fact, Paul fears that an even greater absence may be required. The Romans may kill him.
4. So in the meantime, Paul has to be content with their "distant presence."
  - a. He is grateful that they still love and honor him.
  - b. He is thankful for the support they have sent.
  - c. And he can dream of being with them again in the future.

### **Move Three: The Philippians are missing Paul**

But there is more to this letter than Paul's yearning to be with the Philippians. They are missing him as well. They want to see him again. They need him to come home, to help them sort through things they are not sure they can handle.

**Not all the news that Epaphroditus brought to Paul was good.**

**Epaphroditus tells Paul about opponents who are troubling the church.**

1. For some time, the Philippians have been under attack from a group of Jewish Christians who believe the Philippians have gotten it all wrong.
  - a. Paul knows these people well! They are the same bunch who have dogged his steps throughout his ministry to the gentiles.
  - b. They are teaching that Jesus is not enough, that gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law to be saved.
  - c. They claim that *they* are the true worshippers, that *they* are the ones who really understand Christ, that *they* are God's legitimate church.
2. Epaphroditus tells Paul how the Philippians are suffering at their hands.
  - a. Don't misunderstand. There is no indication that the Philippians are being thrown into jail or flogged or burned at the stake. This isn't physical persecution that the Philippians are facing.
  - b. Rather, the Philippians are being frightened and discouraged. They are growing more and more anxious and insecure. They don't know what to say to these very knowledgeable and very worrisome critics.
3. They need Paul to come home. They need him to speak up for them. They need him to debate the issues and answer the charges.

**But Epaphroditus have even worse news.**

1. It isn't just that these opponents have caused the Philippian church to worry . . . they've caused the Philippian church to *fracture*. These Christians are bleeding all right, but not from their bodies—their bleeding from their fellowship!
    - a. All this external pressure is causing an internal split.
    - b. People in the church are grumbling and complaining.
    - c. Anxiety is running high, and they are taking it out on each other.
    - d. It's every man for himself now at Philippi. They're being divided and conquered. They're letting these critics get to them in the one way that can be fatal—they are failing to stand together and, as a result, are in danger of falling apart.
  2. They need Paul to come home. They need him to make peace. They need him to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.
- Paul has been gone a long time. But they need him back now. They know Paul is in prison, but they need him to be with them! Paul has been absent for most of their spiritual lives, but oh they need his presence at the moment.

## Move Four: Exhortations for the Meantime

But Paul can't be there.

- He'll try to come soon, but he can't come now.
- He'll send Timothy, but he can't be there himself just yet.
- If he can get out of prison, then he'll be there.
- If he survives the trial, then he'll be there. But he can't be there now.
- He is with them at a distance, but that's as close as he can get at the moment.

The question is, "Will that be enough?" Caught between the need for his presence and the reality of his absence, can the Philippians survive with Paul's "distant presence"?

Paul believes they can.

1. With a little guidance, Paul believes that they have the strength to stand up to their opponents and "contend for the faith of the gospel."
2. With a bit of encouragement, Paul believes that they can reconcile with each other, rebuild their fellowship and "stand firm as one man."
3. Paul believes that, whether he is present with them or absent from them, they have a responsibility to "conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."
  - a. He knows they would rather have him there. But he knows too that they can work out their own salvation if only they will.
  - b. He knows it would be easier on them if he could be with them. But he knows also that, easy or hard, they have what it takes to "stand firm."

That's why he writes this letter.

1. He can't be with them in the flesh. But he can be with them at a distance.
2. He can't hold their hands physically. But he can hold them from afar.
  - "I'll be there as soon as I can. But in the meantime . . ."
  - "I'll get to you as quickly as possible. But in the meantime . . ."
  - "I long to be with you in person. But in the meantime . . ."

This letter is Paul's distant presence. It tells the Philippians how to conduct themselves until he can return. It tells them how to hang on until he can be with them once again. It tells them how to stand firm until he can stand beside them once more.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

**Move Five: That's why Paul wrote this letter. But let me tell you why God preserved this letter and made it available to us today.**

It seems to me that we find ourselves in the same place as the Philippian church.

**These too are difficult days for the church of Jesus Christ.**

1. We have enough external pressure on us to kill a Philippian!
  - We live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christian faith.
  - We face temptations and dangers the Philippians could not imagine.
  - Although we are not being thrown into jail or flogged or burned at the stake, we can honestly say that we are suffering and struggling to live out our Christian commitment in an antagonistic world.
  - I don't know about you, but I know what it means to be frightened and discouraged. I know all about being anxious and insecure. There are times when I just don't know what to say to the critics of my faith.
2. But there is more, isn't there? It isn't just that these pressures have caused the church to worry . . . they've caused the church to *fracture*. We are bleeding all right, but not from our bodies—we are bleeding from our fellowship!
  - a. We are only too familiar with grumbling and complaining.
  - b. We have our share of anxiety and confess that, too often, we take it out on each other.
  - c. Too frequently, it's every man for himself in today's church. We are being divided and conquered. We're letting our critics get to us in the one way that can be fatal—when we fail to stand together, we find ourselves in danger of falling apart.

We are missing our Lord. We want to see him again. We need him to come home, to help us sort through some things we are not sure we can handle on our own. Jesus has been gone a long time. We need him to come back now. We know he is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, but oh we need his tangible presence with us at the moment.

But Jesus can't be with us right now . . . not in the way we want.

- He's promised to come to us soon, but he can't come now.
- He sends us his Spirit, but he can't be here in the flesh just yet.
- He is with us at a distance, but that's as close as he can get at the moment.

The question for us is, "Will that be enough?" Caught between the need for Christ's living, breathing, tangible presence and the reality of his absence, can we survive with a "distant presence"?

Jesus believes we can.

1. With a little guidance, Christ believes that we have the strength to stand up to our opponents and “contend for the faith of the gospel.”
2. With a bit of encouragement, Christ believes that we can reconcile with each other, rebuild our fractured fellowship, and “stand firm as one man.”
3. Jesus insists that we have a responsibility to “conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel” even while he is away.
  - a. He knows we would rather have him here. But he knows too that we can work out our own salvation if only we will.
  - b. He knows it would be easier on us if he could be with us. But he knows also that, easy or hard, we have what it takes to “stand firm.”

And that, I believe, is why Jesus preserved this letter.

1. He can't be with us in the flesh. But he can be with us at a distance.
2. He can't hold our hands physically. But he can hold us from afar.
  - “I'll be there as soon as I can. But in the meantime . . .”
  - “I'll get to you as quickly as possible. But in the meantime . . .”
  - “I long to be with you in person. But in the meantime . . .”

This letter is Christ's distant presence. It tells us how to conduct ourselves until the Lord can return. It tells us how to hang on until he can be with us once again. It tells us how to stand firm until he can stand beside us once more.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

**Prayer to listen . . . and stand firm.**



In the  
Meantime

# A Distant Presence

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Paul has been involved with the Philippian church for over a decade when he writes this letter. He founded this congregation, baptizing Lydia, the Jailer, and a number of people in between. They have loved Paul like no other congregation he established, sending him financial support and encouragement for his missionary efforts.

As he writes this letter, Paul is clearly missing the Philippians. He loves them and longs for them. He calls them his “joy and crown” and his “dear friends.” Locked away in prison, lonely and worried about his fate, Paul remembers them fondly and writes to affirm his affections for them.

But he writes also because he knows the Philippians are missing him. These are difficult days for the Philippian church. They are facing strong opposition which is frightening them and fracturing their fellowship. Unsure what to do with their critics, and increasingly unable to treat each other in a loving manner, these people are foundering, badly in need of Paul’s stabilizing and confident presence.

Paul tells them he hopes to come to them soon. He wishes he could be there to help them face their detractors and encourage them to treat one another in loving, Christ-like ways. But he is absent, and they must learn how to “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel” whether he is with them or not. Their faith does not depend on Paul’s presence. Their responsibility to love each other does not go away simply because Paul is not there.

In the meantime—stuck between Paul’s absence and his promised return—these Christians have to learn how to “stand firm.” It’s not a complicated task. Paul tells them it is simply a matter of hanging on to each other and hanging on to Christ. If they can protect their unity and understand the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus,” then God will be present with them, even when Paul cannot.

The Philippians remind me of us. We also live “in the meantime.” We also are stuck between an absence and an anticipated return. We struggle with how to conduct ourselves in difficult days. We find our faith challenged and our fellowship fractured. Is there a message in this book that will help us “stand firm”?

*Whatever happens,  
conduct yourselves in a manner  
worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

*Then,  
whether I come and see you or only  
hear about you in my absence,  
I will know that you stand firm in  
one spirit,  
contending as one man  
for the faith of the gospel*

*Philippians 1:27*



S E R M O N  
S Y N O P S I S

# Study Guide

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Today, we begin a study of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This book, long loved by Christian readers, is the most intimate of Paul's letters to early churches. Though brief (it only takes about 10 minutes to read through), Philippians is full of emotion and drama. In our study this week, we want to think about several things: What was Paul's history with the Philippian church? How is this book structured? And what are the major themes which Paul addresses with these Christians?

## Monday

- Read Philippians
- Now read Acts 16:6-40. Why did Paul go to Philippi to begin with?

It is curious that Paul did not follow his custom of going to the synagogue (see Acts 17:1-2). What might this say about the size or importance of the Jewish community in Philippi?

How long did Paul stay there? It only takes Luke about 28 verses to describe Paul's ministry in this place. Yet there are indications that Paul stayed in Philippi longer than you might assume. Note vs 16-18 and vs 40 (the presence of other "brothers").

- Read Acts 20:1-6. About five years later, Paul visits these Christians again and spends Passover with them.
- Read 2Cor 11:7-9 and Php 4:14-16. Were the "brothers from Macedonia" emissaries from the Philippian church?

## Tuesday

- Read Philippians
- We talked Sunday about the "presence/absence" theme in Philippians. Let's look at this idea more closely.

1:3-11—Paul recalls his "past" presence with the Philippians. What does he feel about them?

1:12-18—Paul describes what life is like for him now that he is "absent" from them. What are his circumstances?

1:19-27—Paul fears an even greater absence from them in the future. What is it?

1:28ff; 2:12ff—The Philippians have a responsibility to live "worthy of the gospel" whether or not Paul is there.

2:19-24—In the meantime, Timothy's presence will have to suffice as a substitute.

4:10-20—Their financial support of Paul is a cheering reminder of their "distant presence" with him.

## Wednesday

- Read Philippians
- One of the most important tools we bring to the study of a book like Philippians is an ability to trace Paul's reasoning, to see his point, to grasp how Paul organizes his argument. **Outlining** is the best way to do this.
- Let me suggest the following outline for your consideration:

### **1:1-11 Introduction:**

Prayer and overview

### **1:12-26 Autobiography:**

News about Paul.

### **1:27-2:18 Standing Firm in Unity:**

The importance of protecting "oneness" for hanging on in the meantime.

### **2:19-30 Autobiography:**

An exchange of people, news, and presence.

### **3:1-4:1 Standing Firm in Faith:**

The importance of focusing on Christ for staying faithful in the meantime.

### **4:2-9 Words for the Meantime:**

Reconcile, Rejoice, Refocus.

### **4:10-20 Autobiography:**

Gifts—tokens of presence.

### **4:21-23 Conclusion**

- You may want to mark these divisions in your Bible.

## Thursday

- Read Philippians
- In preparation for this Sunday, we need to recognize that teaching about the "opponents" comprises a major portion of this book. Paul knows what it means to face opposition and persecution. He mentions his own "struggles" with opponents as he opens this book:

Read Php 1:12-14—Paul is in "chains." If, in fact, he writes from Rome in the circumstances described in Ac 28, who are his jailers? But who is primarily responsible for putting him in jail (scan Ac 21:27-23:35; 25:1-12)?

Read Php 1:15-18—Not all of Paul's opponents are outside the "church." Some people have been encouraged by Paul's imprisonment to "preach Christ" from bad motive. Does this imply that some of his opponents were "Christians?" Who might these people be?

## Friday

- We see three types of relationship in this book: Who is the Philippians' absent friend? \_\_\_\_\_ Who are their present friends? \_\_\_\_\_ Who are their present enemies? \_\_\_\_\_
- Our relationships fall into the same groupings. Name: A present friend \_\_\_\_\_ (Someone close by you trust) An absent friend \_\_\_\_\_ (Someone far away you miss) A present enemy \_\_\_\_\_ (Someone close by who causes you suffering)
- Ever wish all your enemies would go away and all your friends come home? Think the Philippians might have felt that way?
- Handling each of these relationships is important. Each has its unique challenges, pitfalls, and blessings. Pray this week that God will give you strength and wisdom to handle your relationships well.



# Ok . . . What do I do now?

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**Rosy:** Psssst . . . JB. Have you read the first page of the handout?

**JB:** No, and if you were doing what you're supposed to be doing now, you wouldn't have either.

**Rosy:** Oh, but its beautiful, JB. He says Philippians is a "love letter." I just love "love letters." What a wonderful way to express how you feel about someone. Don't you know they must have treasured this letter from Paul? How rich and comforted they would have felt to have his love.

**JB:** Good grief . . . what rot! I'm sure Paul did love them and, no doubt, they loved him too; but Philippians is exactly what all the rest of Scripture is—directions about how to live properly. I'm sure Paul didn't have time to waste on being sentimental.

**Rosy:** *Waste on being sentimental!* Is that what an expression of love is to you, JB? I guess that would sure explain the lack of love letters from you. You know, you haven't written me a love letter since before we were married!

**JB:** Hooboy . . . silly me, I thought this was about Philippians. Not that it's pertinent to the subject, but I write you notes all the time!

**Rosy:** Memos, JB . . . you write me memos! Not love letters. You write when there is something I need to do. Ohhhhh . . . I get it! That's really what you think Scripture is, isn't it? Its just memos from God! *Do this, don't do that, see you in heaven!*

**JB:** Good grief, I'm sitting here in church minding my own business, trying to listen to the sermon . . . and now I'm in a fight with my wife! Well, isn't that what Scripture is? I've never thought about it as "memos" before, but why not? There are things he wants us to do . . . so he told us.

**Rosy:** True . . . but maybe there were also things he simply wanted us to know. Like how much he loves us. And how excited he is about our love for him. Scripture is a love letter from God, JB. Try reading Philippians that way. I'll send you a memo on it.

## Here's Your To Do List:

- Love letters or memos? How do you read Scripture? Is it a long list of *do's and don'ts* or is it an outpouring of love...and a plea for love in return? What do you imagine Paul thought he was writing when he penned Philippians?
- As we're thinking about that...let's also think about the relationships we sustain with those we love. How do we tend to communicate with them? Are we sending them *memos*? Is our interaction with them primarily focused on what needs doing...or not doing? Or are we sending them *love letters*? Is our conversation filled with expressions of the joy of a loving relationship? Remember...memos are easier, safer, less personal. And we always face the powerful temptation to take the easy route. Love letters demand far more of us...just as they do of God.

## Let the Spirit Help

Father, thank you for constant expressions of love . . . especially I thank you for your word of love that is Scripture. Help me to write love letters with my life, Father—and save the memos for the office. Amen.

