

**Unified | Week 1**  
**Small Group Discussion Guide**

## Background

### Author, Date, and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians in the city of Philippi around 61AD while he was in prison in Rome (1:12–18, 4:22).<sup>1</sup>

### Background and Setting

Originally known as Krenides (*The Little Fountains*) because of the numerous nearby springs, Philippi (*city of Philip*) received its name from Philip II of Macedonia—the father of Alexander the Great. Attracted by the nearby gold mines, Philip conquered the region during the 4th century B.C.<sup>2</sup>

Being a Roman colony was a great source of pride for the Philippians, who adopted Roman customs for themselves. “Paul’s description of Christians as citizens of heaven (3:20) was appropriate, since the Philippians prided themselves on being citizens of Rome (c.f. Acts 16:21).”<sup>3</sup>

In the book of Acts, Luke tells us he and Paul visited Philippi and described it as “a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia” (Acts 16:12). Luke says he and Paul stayed there “for several days” (Acts 16:12) and eventually planted the church there (Acts 16:12–40).

Some key events during this time were:

- Lydia’s conversion (Acts 16:14–15)
- Paul and Silas were in-prisoned (Acts 16:16–24).
- Paul and Silas were miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 16:25–30)
- Paul and Silas lead their prison guard and his whole family to saving faith (Acts 16:29–34).

### Major Themes in Philippians

- **Chapter 1:** Paul primarily deals with the subjects of **hope** and **identity**, calling the believers in Philippi to remember what Christ has done for them and to live in a way that honors His name.
- **Chapter 2:** Paul exhorts the believers to live a life of **humility**. He reminds them of Jesus’ life and how it modeled humility in the most beautiful and perfect ways. He then gives them practical instruction for how to follow Jesus in a life of humility.
- **Chapter 3:** Paul reminds the believers why their only source of **boasting** before God is Christ and Christ alone. He lists his religious resume and declares that it means nothing in terms of his righteousness before God. The same is true for us today. If we call ourselves by the name of Christ, then we should live a life that demonstrates Him as our only source of righteousness.
- **Chapter 4:** To conclude his letter, Paul gives some very practical instruction for how the believers ought to approach such matters as **endurance**, **worry**, **prayer**, and **thinking**. He concludes by declaring that God will supply all of their needs if they will be a people who proactively center their lives on Him in these specific areas of life.

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, *The John MacArthur Whole Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1709.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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**Main Point: Collective *Identity* Fuels Collective *Unity***

## Main Reading

### Philippians 1:6, 9–12, 21 CSB

**6** am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus...**9** And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, **10** so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.**12** Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel...**21** For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

### Philippians 1:27–30 CSB

**27** Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel, **28** not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God. **29** For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, **30** since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

### Optional Extra Reading:

- John 17:20–23
- Ephesians 4:1–6
- Colossians 3:12–17

## Discussion Questions

1. In general, what stands out to you in these verses? Why that specifically?
2. What do you think of Paul's prayer in v. 9–11?
  - Why do you think he prayed this way?
  - Notice: Paul didn't pray for a change of *circumstances*, but for a growth of *character*
3. When you read the phrase "live worthy of the gospel of Christ," what ideas come to mind?
  - Do you think Paul is telling us that we have to earn our salvation?
  - Why or why not?
  - Hint: he's not talking about *salvation*, but about *identity*.
4. What are some practical challenges you face in everyday life to living in a way "worthy of the gospel"? What are some of the challenges you face to following Jesus everyday?
5. When it comes to unity in the church (or our small group):
  - What are some things that *hinder* unity?
  - What are some things that *promote* unity?