

# Philippians

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The letter to the Philippians is full of joy and hope. In Acts 16, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke arrive in Philippi for the first time and meet a woman named Lydia. She believed the good news about Jesus, and she and her family were baptized (Acts 16:13-15). That was the beginning of the church in Philippi. Sometime later, Paul and Silas cast a demon out of a slave girl who was a fortune teller and angered her owners. As a result, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. While they were singing and praising God in prison, a big earthquake shook the prison, and the doors flew open. The jailer woke up and thought all the prisoners had run away. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself, but Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" That night the jailer and his whole family were baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:16-40). When Paul writes this letter to the Philippians, he is in another city and again in prison. However, Paul is filled with thankfulness and joy and wants the Philippians to be filled with joy.

**Writer:** The Apostle Paul and Timothy

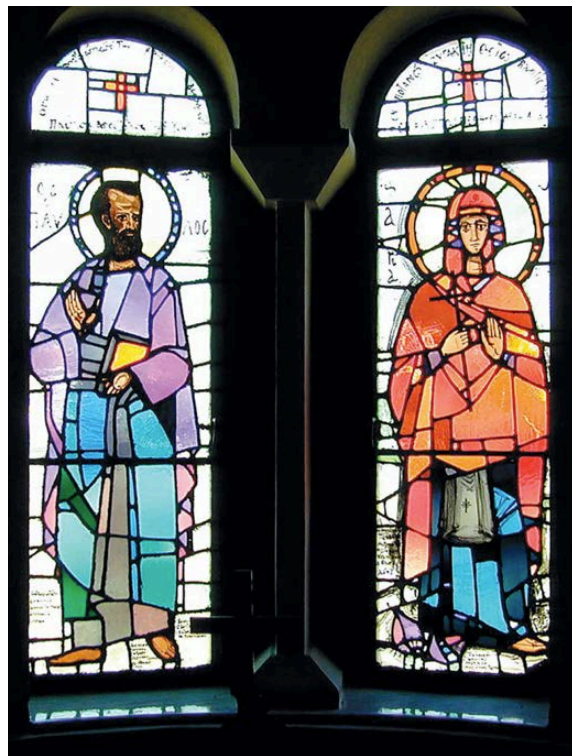
**Date of writing:** Between 50-60 AD.

**Original Audience:** Followers of Jesus in the city of Philippi. Philippi was a famous city in Macedonia that is in modern-day northern Greece. Most of the believers in Philippi were not from a Jewish background.

**The Reason for the Letter:** Paul is in prison for spreading the Good News about Jesus. He is most likely in prison in Ephesus or maybe in Rome. The Philippian church had sent a messenger named Epaphroditus to help Paul while he was in prison. While there, Epaphroditus became very ill and almost died. Now Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippian church with a letter to thank them for their help and encourage them.

**The Main Message of the Letter:** After the opening greetings (1:1-2), Paul thanks God for the Philippians and prays for them (1:3-11). He says that his imprisonment has advanced the gospel (1:12-18) and that he looks forward to being set free by their prayers (1:19-26). He says believers will suffer for Jesus (1:27-30). Believers must follow Jesus' perfect example and be humble. That means they should not think of their own interests but think of the interests of others (2:1-11).

He warns the believers in Philippi to watch out for people teaching circumcision. Paul says that when we rely on our heritage or follow the ceremonial religious laws, we rely on the flesh. However, Paul says all of those things are like garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (3:1-11). Paul pleads for unity in the church (4:2-3) and tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, pray without anxiety, and practice Christian virtues wholeheartedly (4:4-9). Finally, he thanks them for sending him gifts in his troubles (4:10-20) and closes with greetings (4:21-23).



Paul and Lydia

## Humility

In all of his letters, Paul writes that followers of Jesus must be humble. Paul gives special attention to humility in his letter to the Philippians. To be humble is to place the interests and needs of others above your own interests (2:3-4). This understanding of humility is very close to how Paul defines “love.” For examples of this, see Romans 12:10, 14:15, 1 Corinthians 14:4-7, and Galatians 5:13.

Paul tells the Corinthians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). He then tells them how to conduct themselves by saying, “make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (2:2-4).

Then, Paul shows the Philippians the perfect example in Jesus Christ in the Song of Christ.

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to  
be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (2:5-11).*

In this short beautiful song, we learn many things about Jesus, God, and what will happen in the future. We also find the perfect example of humility to follow. Reread those verses two or three more times. Read slowly, word by word, thinking about the meaning. Then answer these questions:

1. What do you learn about God the Father?
2. What do you learn about Jesus?
3. What did Jesus do?
4. How can you follow his example?

## Partnership

Paul has a close relationship with the believers in Philippi and considers them partners in taking the Good News to all places. In letters to the churches he started, Paul refers to the believers as his children (1 Corinthians 4:14, Galatians 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 2:11, Philemon 1:10). However, in his letter to the Philippians, he calls them his “brothers and sisters” (1:12, 14; 2:25; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21). Paul says that they have been his partners in the Gospel from the beginning (1:5). There seems to be maturity in the Philippian church. The believers in Philippi are not only continuing on the right path, but they also are helping Paul take the Good News to new cities and countries. This is one of the reasons why the letter to the Philippians is filled with joy.

