



Philippians

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky

SHINING LIKE STARS

(6 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION APPLICATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation – Passage-based studies

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book.. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING PHILIPPIANS

The letter to the Philippians displays all the hallmarks of coming from the pen of the Apostle Paul. He wrote the letter from prison (1:13-14) but there is much debate about where this might have been (options are Philippi, Jerusalem/Caesarea, Ephesus or Rome). Most seem to go with the time that he was in Rome under house arrest, in approx. 61AD (see Acts 28:14-31). However because of the harshness of the conditions described others argue for a prior imprisonment in Ephesus (probably around 54AD and not recorded in Acts).

Philippi is described by Luke (Acts 16:12) as the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. Philippi was populated by Tracians, Greeks, Romans and some Jews. It appears that there were insufficient Jews (traditionally 10) to have a Synagogue. Luke refers to a *place of prayer* in Acts 16:13 rather than a synagogue! It is noteworthy that there are few references to the Old Testament suggesting a largely Gentile audience. Philippi has been described as "Rome in miniature" (or little Rome) and its inhabitants were Roman citizens.

It was strategically located for trade because it was located on a major Roman Road called the Egnation Way. The church in Philippi was founded around 50AD during Paul's second missionary Journey (Acts 16:12-40) but was now facing quite a few challenges especially in the areas of suffering, the danger of division and the threat from false teachers. The following are some of the key threads that run through this fantastic letter:

- (1) **Thank you:** It seems that his primary purpose was to thank them for the gifts they had sent him (see 1:5, 4:10-19). Early on they had been the only church who had financially supported him when he had set out from Macedonia (4:14-16). Now he says that he is *amply supplied* having received their recent gift through Ephaphroditus (4:17-18). He also wants to inform them of his own situation about his imprisonment (see 1:12-26). More personally Paul also commends Timothy and Ephaphroditus to them (2:19-30).
- (2) **Be Encouraged:** We see the word joy (16 times) often in Philippians. That in itself is fascinating given it was written from prison but it seems that Paul's hope was not based on earthy things! In fact despite his chains Paul is eager to point out that what had happened to him had actually served to advance the gospel (1:12-14). Paul also wants to encourage them in the face of their own suffering: he wants them to stand firm (1:27, 4:1). There was also conflict within the church (4:2-3) and Paul writes to urge them towards humility (2:1-11) and unity (4:2-5).
- (3) **Refute False Teaching:** False teaching is clearly a challenge for the church (3:2, 18-19) perhaps in a similar way to the churches of Galatia, who were facing the so-called Judaisers (e.g. Acts 15). They insisted that one had to become a Jew before one could be a Christian. Paul therefore writes to encourage them to hold onto the gospel.

What a great encouragement this letter is to live the kind of life worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). We see the love, passion and concern Paul has for his dear friends in this church. At the forefront of all that he says is Jesus Christ Himself (He is mentioned 51 times in 104 verses). We see his desire that they press on toward the goal (3:13-14) and live as citizens of Heaven (3:20). My prayer is that this would also be a real encouragement to you to follow Christ whatever life brings your way. Before getting into the studies I encourage you to read the background in Acts 16:11-40 (printed overleaf).

STUDY 1 – PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18 – PARTNERING IN THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION: Writing from Prison, Paul seeks here to encourage this young church in Philippi. In the first half of the chapter we see much of Paul's heart for the Philippians. Then in the second half we see how God has advanced the gospel in spite of Paul's chains and some interesting motivators.

SETTING THE SCENE (ACTS 16:11-25): What do we learn from these verses (esp. v11-15 and v40) about how the church began in Philippi? Why was meeting Lydia in Philippi so strategically important? What impact do you think the encounter with the slave girl would have had on this early church?

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SERVANT, SAINT AND SAVIOUR (v1-2): What do you understand by how Paul describes himself and Timothy, the church in Philippi and the Lord they served? Why does Paul not describe himself as an apostle (as in Ephesians, Galatians and Colossians) and what *tone* does he set here?

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PRAYER AND PARTNERSHIP (v3-6): What is Paul's motivation for prayer and what do you think he was thanking God for in his prayers for the Philippians? What are you like at thanking God for people and remembering them in your prayers?

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What do you understand about what Paul means about being a partner (v5) in the gospel? Why do you think Paul uses this word? Why do you think Paul was so confident that God would carry onto completion the work that had begun in them (v6)? What work has God begun in you and how confident are you about God finishing this work? Why is this verse so important to this passage?

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PAUL'S PASSION (v7-11): What do we learn here about Paul and his love for the Philippians? What does Paul mean when he says that he has them in his heart (v7)? Why do you think Paul says he longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus (v8)?

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How do you understand the things Paul prays for these Christians in Philippi (v9-11)? How do the things that Paul prays for here compare to your own prayers? How do we get the balance right between praying for immediate needs and the kind of things Paul has in mind here?

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ADVANCING THE GOSPEL (v12-14): How has the situation Paul has faced served to advance the gospel? Why did Paul view his situation so differently to how others may have seen it? What do we see of Paul's understanding of God's Sovereignty? What situations have you faced, that through hindsight, you can see how God has used to further the gospel?

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MOTIVATIONS (v15-18): Paul seems to imply that our motivation for sharing the gospel does not matter as long as Christ is preached: why or why not might this be the case? What would be examples of motivations for us that would fit with Paul's distinction between 'love / goodwill' and 'envy / rivalry'?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How can we learn from Paul's example and develop such a passion, concern and love for those around us? Discuss together what it is going to mean for us as a group to be partners in the gospel?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray for one another some of the big prayers that Paul prays for the Philippians here. Share together about how this passage has encouraged you and ask God to continue to work to bring to completion the work that He has started in you.

MEMORY VERSES: PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6

STUDY 2 – PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30 – TO LIVE IS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: In today's study we continue to learn about how Paul sees the world. In the midst of opposition, false teaching and internal conflict Paul is clear about his love for, and eagerness to be with Jesus, and his desire to faithfully live and serve him in all that he does.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do you observe that people in your spheres of influence are living for? How does this manifest itself and what are the consequences on how they live out their lives? What would you say are *you* living for (would others or indeed your bank balance back that up)?

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TRUSTING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (v19-20): What was Paul's perspective towards his situation (i.e. his chains) and what he wanted God to do in his life? What might Paul mean by *deliverance* (v19) in this context? How does Paul understand the tension between their prayers and God's Sovereignty?

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What might it look like for us to imitate Paul's desire to see Christ exalted in his life (either in life or in death)? What practical steps can we take to develop a courageous and expectant hope in Christ that will in no way be ashamed?

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A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH (v21-24): How do you understand Paul's dilemma Paul between life and death? What might it mean for us to treasure Christ in this way? What kinds of earthly things do we find ourselves treasuring in the place of God (see also 3:19)? To what extent could you say that desire to depart to be with Christ and why? Do you really believe it to be *better by far*?

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How might such an attitude of treasuring Christ help grow our desire to see the Kingdom of God advancing all around us? What hinders us from speaking to our friends about Christ and helping them to walk with Jesus?

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FRUITFUL LABOUR (v25-26): How does all of this help Paul establish his purpose in remaining for their sake? What might it look like to work in such a way to see the *progress and joy in the faith* of others (v25)? What has been your experience of such fruitful labour?

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LIVES WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL (v27-28): What does it mean to *conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ* (v27)? How could not living worthily actually hinder the gospel? How might living such lives help us to stand firm together and be a witness to those who oppose us?

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SUFFERING FOR THE GOSPEL (v29-30): What does Paul mean when he says that it has been *granted to us to suffer*? What experience have you had of that call to suffer for Christ? To what extent do you see such suffering as a privilege (see also v19 & 3:10)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How would you sum up Paul's perceptive on life and his passion and heart for others? What practical steps can we take to imitate Paul in these things?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Ask God to give you a greater longing to be with Christ and a passion to see the Kingdom of God advancing. Talk together about what it might mean for you to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ and share some of the challenges you currently face in this respect.

MEMORY VERSES: PHILIPPIANS 1:19-20

STUDY 3 – PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18 – IMITATING CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: Paul's encouragement that the Philippian Christians need to stand firm is further developed here as Paul urges them to be united (v1-4). To this end Paul points them to the example of Christ's humility (v5-11), before turning to some implications of how this is to be worked out (v12-18).

SETTING THE SCENE: What are the dynamics of pride and humility at work in the relationships you rub shoulders with each day? How do they present themselves both in motivation and in their outworking, and what are their consequences?

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STANDING TOGETHER IN HUMILITY (v1-4): Remembering to take note of why the *therefore* is there (v1), how does Paul define humility in these verses? What does it look like in practice? Why does Paul think that unity with Christ makes unity with one another so vital? What do you understand of the distinction Paul makes here between humility and selfish ambition (or vain conceit)?

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THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST (v5-11): Some have described these verses using the picture of going up and down a ladder: how does this illustration help you understand the incredible humility of Christ who in humility made Himself nothing before being exalted back to the highest place?

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What do these verses reveal about Jesus' mindset, His priorities and the basis of His choices? How might the example Jesus gave us encourage us towards unity? What exactly is and isn't genuine humility? Where does humility begin?

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GOD'S ROLE & OURS (v12-13): What does Paul mean (and not mean) when he says we must *work out our salvation*? What advice can you give to help find the right balance in our understanding between our responsibility and God's Sovereignty?

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SHINING LIKE STARS (v14-16): What kinds of things do you think that Christians grumble and argue about and why do you think this is the case? Why do you think that Paul mentions these as things to avoid for those who should instead be shining like *stars in the sky* (v15)?

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What does it mean to hold firmly to the *word of life*? How do you understand Paul's concern that he might have run or laboured in vain (v16)?

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SACRIFICE & SERVICE (v17-18): What do you think Paul uses the metaphor of being "poured out like a drink offering" (v17 and also Numbers 15)? How do we develop this radical perspective Paul demonstrates in our own lives and ministries?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What is it that Paul is so desperate for his readers to learn from in this section? In what ways will imitating Christ in this way, and living out our lives in humility, help us to be fruitful as we seek to shine among the people around us as stars in the sky?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk together about areas of false humility or pride in your own lives and reflect on how these things impact those around you. Ask God to help you to imitate Christ and live out a life of humble service. Pray that your group would be united in standing together for Christ.

MEMORY VERSES: PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

STUDY 4 – PHILIPPIANS 2:19-3:11 – KNOWING CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: Paul introduces Timothy (who he meets Paul in Acts 16:1-5 and is mentioned extensively in Paul’s letters) and Epaphroditus (only mentioned in this letter) as great examples of faithful service. Then Paul turns to his own story and shows us why knowing Christ trumps all things.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do we know about how Paul operated amongst the early churches with a team of faithful people? Who are the humble servants who have made sacrifices to invest in your own lives? Why do you think Paul mentions Timothy and Epaphroditus at this stage of his letter?

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HUMBLE TIMOTHY (2:19-24): What do we learn about Timothy here and in particular how does he imitate the Christlikeness we talked about earlier in the chapter? What do you think it would look like to be more other-person-centred like Timothy is described here? How might we grow to be more genuinely concerned about the welfare of others?

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HUMBLE EPAPHRODITUS (2:25-30): What are the factors involved in Paul’s decision to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi? What do we learn here about him and his great concern for the Philippians? Why are people like him to be welcomed and honoured (v29)?

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REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE (3:1-6): When do you find it hardest to rejoice in the Lord (v1)? What does Paul mean when he says that *we are the circumcision* (v3)? Who were these *dogs and mutilators of the flesh* which Paul told them to watch out for?

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What does Paul mean by the *flesh*? What reasons did he have for putting his trust in the *flesh* and why did he refuse to do so? What kind of things do you find yourself putting your trust in rather than Christ?

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EVERYTHING A LOSS (v7-9): How do you respond to Paul's testimony of how he now regards all that he had previously placed his confidence in? What might it look like in practice to regard everything else as *garbage* and a *loss* (v7-8) compared to knowing Jesus?

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Why does Paul distinguish between a *righteous of our own* and a *righteousness that comes from God* (v9)? What does it mean for this righteousness to come from the *basis of faith* rather than the *law*?

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SHARING IN HIS SUFFERINGS (v10-11): How hungry are you to know Jesus more and more? How do you respond to Paul's desire to not only know Jesus but to also share in His sufferings? In what ways might *becoming like Him in His death* allow us to attain to the *resurrection from the dead*?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How do each of these men in their own way point us to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ? What steps do you need to take in order to begin cultivating such a heart for people and Christ-like perspective on life?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share about how you've been challenged by the humble examples of these 3 men, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Ask God to help you imitate their Christlikeness. Pray together that each of you would desire to know Jesus better and cause all things to fade in comparison.

MEMORY VERSES: PHILIPPIANS 3:7-8a

STUDY 5 – PHILIPPIANS 3:12-4:1 – PRESSING ON TOWARDS THE GOAL

INTRODUCTION: Paul now introduces the idea of an athlete running a race to describe the commitment required to reach our destination, Heaven. Paul takes the role of a coach setting us goals and encouraging us to follow His example and wait patiently for Jesus to return.

SETTING THE SCENE: What kind of ambitions and / or goals do we (or people around us) tend to set for ourselves in life? How are they expressed in how we live (consider your diaries, bank accounts or social media accounts)? What do these things tell about what is most important for people?

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LOOKING BACK (v12-14): What are the similarities and differences between a race and the Christian life? In terms of an athlete running a race, is looking back a good and / or bad thing?

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In terms of our faith, in what sense should we (or shouldn't we) *forget what is behind* (v13)? What are the things that you need to let go of in order to press on (see also the reasons for confidence Paul mentioned earlier in the chapter (v1-5)?

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LOOKING FORWARD (v12-14): How do you understand Paul's instructions here to press on, take hold of and strain toward? What is this goal to win the prize for which Jesus called us heavenwards (v14)? To what extent do you think that we live this way and why?

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FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE (v15-17): What do you think is Paul's view of Christian maturity (v15-16), and how does it relate to the previous verses? How do you respond to Paul's encouragement to follow his example (v17)? Should we encourage others to follow our example either by word or by action?

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ENEMIES OF THE CROSS (v18-19): What do you think was going on in the church to cause Paul to say that many (not mere a few) were living as *enemies of the cross of Christ* (v18)? What might these earthly things Paul mentions have been and what would be they be for us (v19)?

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AWAITING A SAVIOUR (v20-21): What do you think would distinguish someone who is residing in a country which is not their own (v20)? It is not easy to live in the light of eternity: why do you think this might be? If we truly believed that we were citizens of heaven what difference would it make?

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What do you think it looks like to eagerly await our Saviour (v20)? What implications arise from this idea of our *lowly bodies* being transformed into Christ's *glorious body*?

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STANDING FIRM (4:1): How do the various aspects of this passage serve as an encouragement for us (and Paul's original readers), to stand firm in the Lord? In what sense do you understand Paul's description of the Philippians here as family, friends, those he loves and his joy and crown?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Thinking back over the past few months what are the things that have you done (or not done) that matter (or don't matter) in the light of eternity?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Reflect prayerfully together on the thing or things that have really stood out for you from this study. Pray that God would plant in each of you a desire to press on to win the prize and live in the light of eternity. Pray into the things that tend to hold you back from moving forward.

MEMORY VERSES: PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

STUDY 6 – PHILIPPIANS 4:2-23 – PEACE AND CONTENTMENT

INTRODUCTION: Paul finishes his letter with some instructions about conflict (v2-3), guarding our minds (v4-9) and contentment and giving (v10-23). In doing so Paul continues to describe and define the radical life of discipleship that Jesus has called us to.

SETTING THE SCENE: How would you distinguish what it means to live under stress and anxiety with what it means to live under a sense peace and contentment? What are the key drivers to create stress and anxiety both for you and society more generally

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RELATIONAL CONFLICT (v2-3): In light of what Paul has said throughout the letter (e.g. 1:27, 2:2), why do you think Paul is so passionate in pleading for agreement between Euodia & Syntyche (see also Matt 18)? What role does Paul hope that his true companion (Epaphroditus?) would play in this situation? Why is settling such conflict so important for the effectiveness of the church?

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REJOICE IN THE LORD (v4-5): What does it look like to rejoice in the LORD and what kind of impact does it have on how we think about the world around us? Specifically how might it help us to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and find new perspective on relational conflict?

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DON'T BE ANXIOUS (v6-7): Why do you think it is so natural to feel anxious and what is your experience of struggling in this way? How might presenting our requests by prayer, petition and with thanks giving help us? What is the *peace of God* and how can it help turn things around for us (v7)?

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TRAINING OUR MINDS (v8-9): How might training our minds to focus on thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy help us to find greater inner peace and contentment? What practically helps you to control (or at least influence) your thoughts? How might this also help with relational conflict (v2-3) and anxiety (v6-7)?

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THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT (v10-13): What do you think Paul is trying to say about the secret of contentment? How is it that Paul can manage to be content even in difficulties (esp. v13)? Why is it so hard for us to be content today? How can we encourage each other to be content?

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PARTNERING TOGETHER (v14-19): Why was Paul so concerned about giving the Philippians an opportunity (v10) to show their concern for him? In what sense was the Philippians gift *credited to their account*? How important is giving when we don't have much to give (see also 2 Cor 8:1-5)? In what ways does the promise of v19 encourage you to be a generous giver?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Reflecting on the passage (and also the letter as a whole) what have been the biggest challenges and encouragements for you in your daily walk with Jesus? What will be the practical steps that you plan to take as a result of these studies?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray that God would work to transform your hearts and minds as you deal with conflict, anxiety and discontentment. Pray that instead God would help you to pray, to rejoice, to set your hearts and minds firmly on Him, and to take opportunities to give generously.

MEMORY VERSES: PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1 – PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18 – PARTNERING IN THE GOSPEL

“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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.”

Philippians 1:4-6

STUDY 2 – PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30 – TO LIVE IS CHRIST

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Philippians 1:20-21

STUDY 3 – PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18 – IMITATING CHRIST

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.”

Philippians 2:12-13

STUDY 4 – PHILIPPIANS 3:7-8a – KNOWING CHRIST

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things...”

Philippians 3:7-8a

STUDY 5 – PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21 – PRESSING ON TOWARDS THE GOAL

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Philippians 3:20-21

STUDY 6 – PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 – PEACE AND CONTENTMENT

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7