



Overview

This study is designed for young adults and campus ministry in particular. The goal is for participants grow in their understanding of living in Christian friendship by looking through the book of Philippians.

There is both a leaders guide and student guide with handouts for each week.

Objectives: To help the participants grow in their understanding of Philippians
To help the participants see Paul's example of life as a Christian friend
To help the participants recognize different aspects/responsibilities of Christian friendship
To help the participants realize the foundation and security that is inherent in Christian friendship

Lessons

Introduction: Provide in narrative the basic background for the city of Philippians and the argument that Philippians is a letter of friendship.

Week 1: Foundations of Friendship [Philippians 1:1-11]

Week 2: A Living Witness (using your example to communicate and teach) [Philippians 1:12-26]

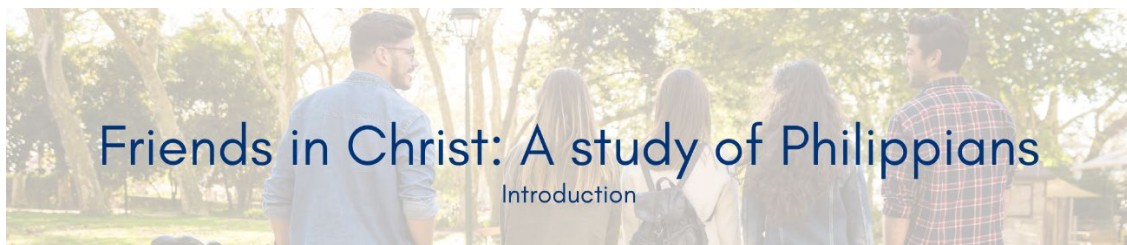
Week 3: True Partnership (No room for jealousy) [Philippians 1:27-2:18]

Week 4: There for you (caring enough to help) [Philippians 2:19-30]

Week 5: Speaking Up [Philippians 3:1-11]

Week 6: Striving towards the same goal [Philippians 3:12-4:3]

Week 7: The Joy of Friendship in Christ [Philippians 4:4-23]



Leader Guide

Introduction

Throughout life we find ourselves in relationship with various people: classmates and colleagues; parents and children; bosses and teachers; etc. In the midst of all of these relationships, we have friends. Friendships differ from the other groups because we enter into and maintain friendships by choice. We aren't born with certain friends; work does not demand our connection to them. They are the people we choose to be around, spend time with, and enjoy life with. This distinction makes a significant difference in what the relationship looks like. It frees us to be less burdened by externally imposed expectations; the relationship is yours through and through.

We see a great distinction between friendship and other relationships in life, and we also recognize differences in relationships within different friends. Just as the voluntary nature of the relationship frees friends to enjoy their relationship, let them end, or grow more deeply in them, so too friendships are colored, shaped, and enhanced by the various factors experienced during the lifespan of the relationship. For us Christians, one of these significant factors is the influence of Christ. We can see this in our current friendships. Most of us have friends who are both Christian and non-Christian or at the very least friends with an active faith and those with a dormant faith. In many respects these friendships look very similar; in many other respects, the different friendships are worlds apart.

This study asks the basic question of what does it look like to be friends in Christ. As we ask this question we will investigate several aspects of it. Each week we will focus on a basic question of Christian friendship. The initial questions presented in relation to their week are:

1. What are the foundations of Christian friendship?
2. How does your Christian life relate to your friendship?
3. How do friends deal with issues of disparity?
4. How do friends care for one another in life?
5. How do friends address matters of faith?
6. How do the life goals of friends intersect and diverge?
7. How do friends maintain their foundation?

To facilitate the answer of these and related questions, we look at Paul's letter to the Philippians. This letter, written with many of the characteristics of a letter of friendship, reveals much about Christian friendship as we take the relationship between Paul and the church at Philippi as an example of a Christian relationship. Each week we will focus on a different unit of the text from Philippians and grow in our understanding of three key points: 1. Paul's words to the Philippians; 2. Paul's relationship with the Philippians revealed by the text; 3. General points of Christian friendship gleaned from points 1 and 2.

Why Philippians?

Before we utilize Philippians it is first important to understand the grounds by which we approach Philippians in this light.

Letter of Friendship:

In the Hellenistic era, there were many different forms of letters. The form of the letter related to the nature of the letter. We see a similar reality in today's communication. Letters, e-mails and

just about any other type of messaging are all communicated in a manner fitting the relationship between the sender and the recipient. An e-mail from a friend may not have a line of address, e.g., Dear John, and it may not have a signature, e.g., Jane Doe. But an e-mail from a boss may be written with a very clear line of address and a clear signature that communicates not only the name of the sender but also the relationship held between recipient and sender. Internally, the content of the e-mail communicates much about the relationship of sender to recipient. While we may not have the same formal rubrics they had, we can certainly relate to distinctions in letter forms.

Paul's letter to the Philippians bears many of the marks of a letter of friendship.¹ The following list illustrates this point. The different parts of the letter are highlighted by corresponding verses in the text.

1. The address and greeting [1:1-2]
2. Prayer for the recipients [1:3-11]
3. Reassurance about the sender (=my affairs) [1:12-26]
4. Request for reassurance about the recipients (=your affairs) [1:27-2:18; 3:1-4:3]
5. Information about movements of intermediaries [2:19-30]
6. Exchange of greetings with third parties [4:21-22]
7. Closing wish for health [4:23]

Background information for reading Philippians

As we read Philippians, it is beneficial for us to consider the context in which Paul writes. Three aspects provide specific background for our study: 1. the understanding of friendship in Paul's culture; 2. the historical and cultural background for Philippi; 3. the establishment of the congregation at Philippi.

Three types of Friendship between equals

As you look at your life, you may recognize different levels and types of friendships. Some people you may consider friends but are more on the level of acquaintances; others friends are people with whom you share everything. Some people you have a friendly relationship with for practical purposes, e.g., your roommate during your freshmen year. Recognizing Philippians as a letter of friendship, it is also beneficial to note that in Paul's day there were similar distinctions in friendships. Aristotle delineated three types of relationships that fell under the category of 'friendship between equals'. These were:

1. based on goodwill and loyalty
2. of pleasure: people holding common interest
3. utilitarian (i.e. a friendship centered on usefulness or mutual benefit)

In all of these relationships mutuality and reciprocity are present. This connection extends even into sharing mutual enemies. You mess with her, you mess with me. In addition, it would be appropriate for each of these types of relationships to utilize a letter of friendship for communication.

Relevance

Consider your life. What different types of friendships do you see? Especially consider your friendships outside of this small group.

[Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to help the participants recognize the reality of different levels of friendships. You might want to provide examples of such things that range from friendships in elementary school to friendships now or your RA compared to someone from home or your best friend. Another avenue would be to use Aristotle's delineation as a starting point.]

How does the type of friendship influence your interaction within the relationship?

[Answers will vary. This question focuses on the implications of those different levels of friendship. Answers should reflect the reality that the deeper the friendship the more that is shared. It may also demonstrate that there are some relationships that are more pragmatic in nature; these relationships certainly would look different than connections with a best friend. Again, the key is to convey the importance of recognizing the affect of the nature of the relationship on the interactions within that relationship.]

Why might it be significant to understand possible categories of friendship that might produce a letter of

¹ For a more complete argument of why Philippians can be considered a letter of friendship consult Gordon Fee's *Philippians* the 11th volume in the IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Fee's commentary also provides support for most of the background information provided in this study.

friendship?

[Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to bring the discussion back to the reality that in reading Philippians it is beneficial to ask what type of friendship Paul has with the Philippians. The answer to this question influences the discussion greatly.]

Philippi

The Philippi of Paul's day was a town on the edge of a fertile plain in Central Macedonia. The Egnatian Way, a major route in the Roman Empire, ran through the town on its way to the port of Neapolis. The original colony was taken over and renamed after Philip of Macedon (the person who conquered it), Alexander the Great's father. It was next to Mount Pangaion, rich in mineral deposits. It was strategic in its location; it was able to be a sentinel for the large fertile plain and it was well protected.

In 42 B.C. Cassius and Brutus (assassins of Julius Caesar) fought Octavian and Mark Antony on the nearby plain. Octavian and Mark Antony were victorious and 'refounded' the city as a Roman colony. The city thus had rights of Roman citizenship. The town was also populated by Octavian with veterans from the war to improve allegiance to Rome. The repopulation again occurred as he defeated Antony at Actium and he repopulated the city with veterans from Antony's army. The city had a mixed population of both Roman and Greek affiliation.

Relevance

What does the background information tell us about the social, economic, and political background of Philippi?

[Answers will vary. Some points that should be recognized are: 1. the city would have distinctive Hellenistic and Roman influence; 2. the economic potential for Philippi since it is on a fertile plain and a major route of travel; 3. Philippi's loyalty to Rome and the significance of citizenship.]

Why would this background matter in our understanding of Philippians? How might this context affect the lives and perspectives of the Philippians?

[Answers will vary. Try and get the participants to brainstorm the significance through possible connections of today. For example, consider how citizenship in the U.S. affects the perspective of U.S. citizens; consider how a metropolitan area is shaped by its commerce compared to the life of a rural town; consider the collage of cultures found on the university and how that affects student's perspectives.]

The Church at Philippi

The records of the church's [note that church and congregation are used interchangeably; the emphasis is on the people not a building] founding are limited but much is articulated Acts 16:11-40. Take some time to read the account.

Relevance

What do you learn about the establishment of the congregation at Philippi?

[The congregation was started by Paul. Women were its first converts. A jailer also was converted. Entire families were baptized. Etc.]

How was the congregation established? What is accented in Acts?

[The congregation was established by God's activity. The women's hearts were opened; the earthquake produced a situation for the jailer to see God's love.]

How might this formative experience affect the culture of the congregation?

[Answers may vary. Accent should be given to the reality that the congregation knew God's work. The jailer was all but dead and God raised him to life by Paul's words. This type of experience provides a new freedom in the gospel and a new freedom in relationship; it is no longer about me, but about God.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 2: Foundations of Friendship

Leaders Guide

Goal: That the participants (Ttp) would recognize the foundation of Christian friendships and live in the strength of that foundation.

Objectives: Ttp would recognize the importance and function of the foundation in a friendship
Ttp would note the foundation laid for Christian friendships
Ttp would understand Philippians 1:1-11
Ttp would be freed to live with that foundation in day to day interaction with Christian friends

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

Think back through your life and consider your different friendships. What friendships have been your strongest? What friendships were your weakest? Why were some friendships stronger than others? Why did some of the friendships last longer than others?

These questions seek to introduce the reality that relationships differ based upon the foundation of the friendship. Stronger bonds and connections tend to lend themselves to better and longer friendships. The loss of the common bond leads to the loss of the friendship. Even friendships that persist just because you have always been friends carry the bond of always being friends. Take that bond away, and the friendship dissipates.

Note that the goal is not to get into an incredibly deep discussion on the matter; rather the goal is to get the participants to be thinking along those lines.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 1:1-2

Read Philippians 1:1-2. Cf. also Romans 1:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2; Galatians 1:1-5; Ephesians 1:1-2; Colossians 1:1-2.

What stands out about the greeting of Philippians? Why would Paul do this?

Paul's apostleship is not mentioned. Rather he is listed as a slave/servant of Christ Jesus. Paul wants to retain the mutuality. His goal is not to say that he is over them. This does not negate the fact that Paul is over them; he just is not conveying that here.

To whom is the letter addressed? How does this (nomenclature) inform us about Paul's view of the church in Philippi?

Here it is important to address what it means to be a saint. Someone is a saint because they have been set apart by God. They have been clothed with Christ Jesus; they have his white robes of righteousness. Thus a saint, including his status, is seen through the lens of Christ's righteousness.

What would this greeting look like today? What would a comparable scenario and expression of greeting be today?

Answers will vary. Recognize the situation of Paul, the planter of the church in Philippi and apostle, expressing greeting to a people as the servant he has been called to be. Paul refers to the people as saints; would a similar term be colleagues or brothers and sisters? Work through the details and try to find comparison.

Philippians 1:3-11

In the greeting we see relationship expressed through the style of address used by Paul. It expresses an attempt to emphasize a relationship between equals. As we move forward into the Thanksgiving we see this relationship illustrated in more detail. Read the text; reflect upon how Paul presents that relationship in these verses.

How would you describe the relationship Paul's words express? What parts of the text lead you to your conclusion?

Highlight how much this relationship is repeated, i.e., the fact that he illustrates it a lot.

One of mutual love and joy; friendship in Christ

1. v. 4 making prayers with joy
2. v. 5 your participation/fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now
3. v. 6 work begun in Christ; God has begun the work in Christ, I am connected to Christ and God's work is my joy as well, ergo I care about the Philippians.
4. v. 7 share in grace of God
5. v. 8 in affection of Christ Jesus

As you read the text, what is not an issue for the relationship? Consider Paul's current situation, the account of the formation of the church in Philippi in Acts, the people's current situation, etc.

The point intended here is to highlight that Paul's feeling for the people remains positive in spite of two factors:

1. whether Paul is suffering more than they
2. how much or how little they know or understand

Paul is not hindered by the fact that he suffers, even as he did for them, and they do not. He does not demonstrate frustration over their need of further growth, but encourages them. This seems to be a contrast in today's relationships where jealousy and covetousness often run rampant.

Why is this unselfishness and lack of pride possible? Cf. Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 2:11-22.

This question is the key point of the lesson. This is where the connection is intended to be made that Paul recognizes the foundation for their relationship. This foundation frees the relationship to focus on the other people involved and not on oneself. As discussed in the introductory questions, the foundation of a friendship determines its strength and longevity. For non-Christian friendships friends are based on mutual interests, common enemies, personalities that mesh, etc.; for Christian friendships the friendship should be based upon the connection we have in Christ. This foundation is unshakeable and freeing. If the Philippians are having an easier go of things, Paul rejoices; in the face of his suffering, he encourages them to rejoice, etc.

We see this in the other texts: In Christ, there is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28). This passage from Galatians is not saying that people are no longer Jew or Greek, etc. rather it reminds us that in Christ we all are connected equally to the forgiveness of God [cf. also Ephesians 2:11-22 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26]. One is not better than another. We may have different roles, but these roles do not lead to jealousy or disdain; they do not lead to inferiority or inadequacy. We want what is best for each other because Christ is our sufficiency. He is our head; he is our bond.

In short: We are clothed with Christ. He is what matters: his desires, his purposes, etc. We are fellow servants looking not to our own good but to that of our God. This foundation shapes and defines our friendships in Him.

Relevance

Paul's relationship teaches us much about Christian friendship. With Christ as our foundation we are freed to be true and good friends. This certainty gives us great joy, but it also challenges us. Consider the following aspects and the implications this teaching has on the living out of our Christian friendship.

1. Foundation

We have already recognized the foundation for our Christian friendships. How does this foundation affect the relationship itself? What implications are there with respect to how you treat your friends?

Answers will vary. The intended emphasis here is on treating each other as equally forgiven in Christ. Condescending behavior is eliminated; care and respect are insured; repentance and forgiveness are freely interchanged.

2. Breadth

Recognizing the foundation for the Christian friendship who is your Christian friend? Cf. Philippians 1:3-4.

All those who are connected to Christ are our friends. Yes, all of them. We need to treat and care for all believers in recognition of the foundation laid for us in Christ.

How does this play out in your life?

Answers will vary. The anticipated answer would be that we have difficulties with this reality. Consider the following question.

What difficulties are present with this reality? How do we address those challenges?

Answers will vary. Some of the challenges present are differences in personalities, interests, history, lack of exposure to people (you just don't know them), etc.

Addressing the challenge is inherently difficult. You will never know everyone. You cannot be close in the same way to everyone. Nonetheless, recognizing the relationship given in Christ calls us to live caring for our friends in Christ and treating them as friends. We may not spend the same amount of time with everyone or know everyone equally, but we should be able to express concerns with them and to forgive them.

Are you ready to have an issue addressed by a fellow Christian you don't really know? Should you be? Why or why not? Are you ready to address a fellow Christian's issue? How should you approach that? How should you not approach that?

Answers will vary. Ultimately, we should be ready to have a fellow Christian correct us. We should be confident in the foundation we have in Christ and recognize that we live under forgiveness. Thus we can ask for forgiveness and receive absolution within our relationships because Christ has first done this for us.

As we address others issues, we need to address them recognizing that Christ died for them just as equally as he died for us and our failures. In no way should the issue be addressed as if you were better than they.

3. Endurance and longevity

The foundation we have in Christ gives our Christian friendship longevity. How does this reality free you in your Christian relationships?

It frees us to be open and honest in our relationships caring about the other and not worried about ourselves and the loss of friendship that might ensue.

4. Prayer

For what does Paul pray? Cf. Philippians 1:3-11.

1. For the completion of the good work begun in them, i.e., for growth in their faith.
2. Gives thanks for them and their partnership.
3. For the abundance of their love with knowledge and discernment
4. That they may be pure and blameless at the coming of Christ
5. That they may be filled with the fruit of righteousness
6. That they may be to the glory and praise of God

How does Paul's prayer encourage us to pray in our Christian friendships?

Answers will vary. Some key points that stem from Paul's prayer are:

1. We should pray for our Christian Friends
2. We should not be jealous as we pray
3. We always keep in mind the work of Christ in them as we pray
4. It is all for the glory of God

Concluding thoughts

We have been given a great foundation in Jesus Christ. This foundation changes everything in our friendships. It frees us and emboldens us.

Throughout the week pay attention to your friendships. Ask what the true foundation of your friendship currently is. Consider how you can make the friendship an enduring one. Pray that your friendships might find their grounding in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the needs of the group and certainly highlight the need for help in recognizing the foundation laid for us in Christian friendships.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 3: A Living Witness

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants (Ttp) would recognize and utilize their exemplary role in Christian friendship to encourage and support their friends in spite of their circumstances.

Objectives: Ttp would recognize the usual intent of the "my affairs" section of a friendship letter
Ttp would recognize how Paul uses this section of the letter
Ttp would learn from Paul's example of setting an example in Christian friendship
Ttp would remember the foundation that frees us to live and communicate as

examples

Ttp would consider how we can provide a living example for our friends in life
Ttp would understand better the words of Philippians 1:12-26

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

Consider your best summer break ever. When was it? As you got back to school/college after the break, how did you communicate that summer to your friends? What did you tell them?

The goal of these questions is to introduce the notion that generally when we tell people about our affairs we communicate to them what we did and how we felt. The story is often more about us, the people we met, and other details relating to *our* story.

Today we begin the next portion of the letter of friendship. Following the "Thanksgiving" and/or prayer for the recipients the writer communicates to the friend "my affairs". This section lets the friend know about 'summer break' to update them on how they are doing and the happenings of life.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 1:12-26

This unit of text is delineated by two phrases in the Greek. In Philippians 1:12 we hear "And I want you to know, brothers, that *the things with respect to me* have come for the greater advancement of the good news." In Philippians 1:27 we hear "Only be a citizen worthy of the good news of Christ in order that whether I come and see you or being absent I hear *the things concerning you*, that you stand in one spirit, in one life, struggling along with the faith of the good news." While the English versions generally smooth over the two italicized phrases (and thus sound better in English), the two phrases demarcate two different sections of the letter: 'my affairs' and 'your affairs'. This delineation is further accented by the repetition of a distinct term 'advancement' in Philippians 1:12, 25.

The term 'advancement' is translated as 'progress' in verse 25 in both the ESV and the NIV. In both verse 12 and verse 25 the Greek word προκοπή (pro-ko-pey) is used.

General Content

Read Philippians 1:12-26.

How would you present the content of these verses? How are they organized? What are they conveying?

Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to help the participants think about content and structure. Paul is known to have sentences that never end and thoughts that are fluid moving from one idea to the next. Nonetheless, there is generally a clear movement being made and a reason for that movement. Struggling with that is good and beneficial to growing in one's ability to understand the text. Cop-out answers that use the headings as guides should be mocked and chastised (if such will be appropriately received; otherwise gently guide them to further thought).

A quick overview (this does not all need to be drawn out here): The passage begins with recognition of Paul's situation in prison and a report of the good that has happened because of it. Paul then recognizes that there are some issues present while he is in prison. In spite of people's efforts to proclaim Christ for what seems to be improper reasons, Paul puts things into a proper perspective by focusing on the proclamation of Christ. Finally, he reasserts his joy in spite of his afflictions. He knows that in the midst of all of these trials, Christ can be glorified and he trusts that that will be the case. He focuses on the work of Christ in them as his motivating factor in this struggle.

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 1:12-14

What does Paul present in these verses? What is Paul's tone? What is Paul's concern?

Paul presents the good that has come out of his current situation. 1. He highlights that the imperial guard who is responsible for him realizes that he is imprisoned for Christ. 2. He also recognizes that people have been emboldened to speak the Word without fear.

The tone is positive; Paul's concern is the spread of the good news.

How easy is it for you to take this perspective when talking with your friends? When you are faced with similar situations, what does your conversation highlight?

Philippians 1:15-18a

What issue does Paul recognize here? What do you think is going on?

There is significant speculation involved here. As a result, answers will vary. Nonetheless, it does seem reasonable to surmise that there is an issue dealing with people utilizing Paul's imprisonment for their own gain. The gain may be making Paul's imprisonment worse (their preaching makes Paul's actual punishment more severe) or it could be making Paul's time in prison more challenging (their preaching is seeking to gain advantage in reputation on the mission field).

Does Paul take the bait? Why not?

No. Paul is content in the proclamation of Christ.

In life, do you approach relationships and people with this mind? Why/why not? Why is it difficult sometimes?

Answers will vary. The basic goal of the questions is to get people thinking about their perspectives in life's interactions and how empowering/freeing Paul's perspective is.

Philippians 1:18b-26

What struggle does Paul face in prison? What does this struggle suggest about his situation in prison?

Paul faces the reality that he could be executed. It seems that he may be facing a tribunal soon (thus the desire to honor Christ and not be ashamed of the faith in 1:20) where execution is a possible outcome. He sees this possibility as a blessed release through which he could be with the Lord; he sees deliverance from execution as an opportunity to continue to be of service to the good news. The one is easier for him; the other is more necessary. Ultimately, Paul seeks the 'advancement' of the good news among them.

How is the possibility of execution a choice? Well, the expression may be more of a hypothetical discussion revealing Paul's concern. Even if there is an option as to what punishment he is to receive, Paul's decision-making process is not really a choice; Paul would need to do what is right.

Can you relate to Paul? Have you faced a situation in life that you thought that to die would be far better for you? Have you faced similar situations that did not quite bring you to that point but did make you want to escape?

Answers will vary. This question just seeks to provide opportunity to relate to Paul's statements. It is possible that a participant could share a very intense and personal time. Be sure to thank them for sharing. If this question reveals some ongoing struggle with mental health, it is recommended to follow up and ensure the participant is safe and receiving the help they need.

Implications on Christian Friendship

Consider the verses again. Remember that this section informs the people about how Paul is doing in life; it tells the Philippians his affairs while he has been distant from them. Compare Paul's presentation of his affairs to the telling of your friends about your summer break. What is significant about Paul's presentation?

Paul focuses on God's activity and the 'advancement' of the good news. He really does not get into how he is doing. Paul is communicating how the good news is doing.

What would your knee-jerk presentation of your affairs be if you were in Paul's shoes? How does Paul make this kind of presentation? Cf. Philippians 1:1-11 and Romans 6:1-11.

Paul is a servant of Christ. He is a partaker in the grace of God. This reality is foundational for Paul and his relationship to the church at Philippi. As Paul says in Romans, he has been united to Christ. For this reason Paul recognizes that his affairs revolve around what God is doing accomplishing through his life; his affairs are about Christ and his affairs.

What is Paul doing by presenting his affairs in this light? How is God teaching/encouraging his friends through these words?

Paul here uses his life as an example for the people. Paul in effect is putting himself out there as a living example of how God works through his people.

Elsewhere we hear Paul expressing himself as an example more explicitly: 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:1. These are bold statements. Can you say the same? Should you be able to say the same? Why?

We can and should be able to do the same. Christ frees us to be concerned for Christ and live united to him. As Baptized Children of God, He is our identity. As a result, we should be able to say imitate what God is doing through me. Unfortunately, this reality does not always illustrate itself in our lives. Nonetheless, it is not something we throw up our hands to and say well I just won't try. Rather, we look back to Christ, rejoice in his grace and again go forward as imitators.

Relevance

Do you find that other people's living witness provides an example (whether positive or negative) that influences your life?

Answers will vary. Ultimately though the reality is that, whether good or bad, people's lives are influences. This is one reason choosing friends wisely is so important.

What role does being a living witness play in Christian friendships? How does this look in practice?

Answers will vary. The role is a persistent reality. It is not always an overt reality; but it is always there. Harnessing this reality is a beneficial tool for encouraging and building up our Christian friends. How we do this depends on people's personalities and where they are in life. But regardless of the variance in how we do it, it is part of what we do.

How does this reality encourage you in your living? How can you provide a better living witness in your life?

Answers will vary. The general thought is that it encourages us to recognize that our presentation

of our life provides a witness that can either encourage or discourage our Christian friends.

What is the key to maintaining a proper perspective on your life?

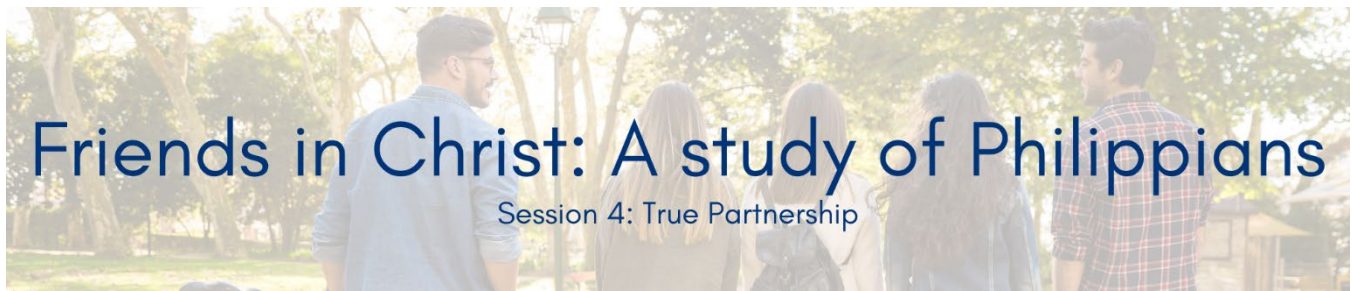
We need to remember the foundation we have in Christ. We are partakers in God's grace and servants united to Christ.

Concluding thoughts

We daily find ourselves in the midst of friendships. Our actions and words, our responses to life's situations, and our perspective on our interactions all provide a living witness to our friends.

Throughout the week pay attention to your friendships. Think about the influence that your friends' lives have upon you and vice versa. Evaluate the strength and weakness of this reality. Consider how you can improve to make your living witness a stronger witness in your friendships. Pray that your life would reflect these efforts and more significantly reflect the fact that you are a partaker in the grace of God and a servant of the Lord.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the needs of the group and certainly highlight the need for help in recognizing the effect of our living witness in Christian friendships and providing a positive living witness.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 4: True Partnership

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants (Ttp) would rejoice with and for one another, their partners in Christ, even when it means suffering and especially when it means the spread of the Gospel.

Objectives: Ttp would recognize the usual intent of the "your affairs" section of a friendship letter
Ttp would recognize how Paul uses this section of the letter
Ttp would learn from Paul's and Christ's example of humility in Christian friendship
Ttp would remember the foundation that frees us to humility
Ttp would consider how we can act this out in life
Ttp would understand better the words of Philippians 1:27-2:18
Ttp would recognize the challenge posed by the call to humility

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

"There ain't no I in team." Have you ever heard this phrase? What does this phrase seek to teach? In your experience is it a true statement?

This question seeks to prime the pump to get everyone thinking about what it means to truly be friends/partners/sharers (Philippians 1:4) in Christ. Answers will vary.

Today we begin the next portion of the letter of friendship. Following the "my affairs" section is the "your affairs". This section is generally used by the writer to express the desire to know how things are going for the recipient(s). As we see in today's text, Paul's concern extends far beyond health and pleasantries; Paul's concern demonstrates what it means to be true partners.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 1:27-2:18

General Content

Read Philippians 1:27-2:18.

How would you present the content of these verses? How are they organized? How do they flow out of the preceding verses? What are they conveying?

Again, the goal is to keep in mind that generally in Scripture there is a greater structure present.

This structure helps the reader follow; it is something that is beneficial for understanding the flow of the argument in the midst of the specifics that may distract if the whole is not kept in mind.

General comments on these verses: The verses flow out of the example that Paul's life conveys and exhorts the people to having the same mind and desire. This perspective is encouraged not only by Paul's example, but by that of Christ. In this example we see not only the struggle but the victory won as well. Given these two examples, Paul exhorts them to press on with the work of God even in the face of suffering.

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 1:27-30

As you read the text, recognize that the Greek word being translated by the ESV "let your manner of life" is greatly tied into being a citizen. The noun that is related to this word is found in Philippians 3:20: "But our *citizenship* is in heaven..." (ESV). While "let your manner of life" is a fine translation, it is important to recognize that the activity is one that is about carrying out your responsibility as a citizen.

Another note on the language of the text: In verse 29, the verb translated "granted" in the (ESV) is a 'gracious giving'. Two nouns connected to this word are 'grace' and 'gift'.

What seems to be the current Philippian context? What gift has been given to the church there?

The people are facing opposition and suffering. Two contexts are possible: 1. the people are facing opposition from their society as their citizenship connected to the gospel of Christ comes in conflict with Roman citizenship; 2. the people could be facing internal strife where individuals are not taking into consideration the good of the whole, i.e., they are not willing to take one for the team. The use of citizenship in Philippians 3:20 suggests that the likely context is the former. The mention of the gift of suffering for Christ and its connection to Paul's suffering, the reference to not being frightened by opponents, and the call to stand together against the opposition, all seem to suggest externally imposed suffering. The latter suggestion cannot be ruled out though when Paul's mention of motives in Philippians 1:15-18 is considered.

Regardless of the context, the gift given to the church is suffering for the sake of Christ.

How easy is it to see suffering as a gift? Why would it be a gift?

Answers will vary and should draw both on the text and personal experience. From the text, one can see that the confidence, i.e., not being frightened, expressed bears witness to our salvation. One also sees that the suffering is part of the partnership we have with Paul and we will soon see with Christ. Thus, the suffering is a gift because it is for the sake of Christ and for the salvation he brings to the world; it serves to help the team. In this be careful not to make God is the cause of suffering, but rather one who can work good through it.

Philippians 2:1-11

How does Paul instruct the Philippians to rejoice with him in their sufferings?

Verses 1-3

Paul encourages them by reminding them of their relationship with the Triune God: "any encouragement in Christ"-the Son, "any comfort from love"-the Father [note that the NIV adds his (his love), this is not in the text], "any participation in the Spirit"-the Holy Spirit.

Paul also reminds them what it is to be part of a team: "Count others as more significant than yourself."

Verses 4-11

Paul encourages them by reminding them that they are connected to Christ Jesus. Here it is significant to recognize that "in Christ Jesus" is often used as a shorthand way of saying "baptized". This people have been united to Christ.

Paul holds up Christ's perfect example of humility. This encourages by example but also reminds the people of their source of strength and confidence even in our sinful nature.

Paul holds up Christ's victory. Here it might be noted that the statement "Jesus Christ is Lord" stands in the face of the expectations of the emperor who expected people to call him Lord. This could be related to the persecution the people faced and provide a reminder that the Philippians Lord, even if they are suffering, is the Lord.

What role does unity play in Paul's exhortation? Why does he emphasize this? Cf. also Philippians 1:27-30.

Paul calls them to be of one mind, to share in the same mind, to have the same love, etc. The emphasis directs the Philippians away from individual suffering to the concern of the team/whole. As the team works together, some people might be playing hurt, others might be sitting on the

bench, etc., but all work together to win. Likewise, the goal of the church is one even in the face of individual and collective suffering.

Philippians 2:12-18

As this section comes to a close, how does Paul wrap up his words of encouragement?

Paul exhorts them to continue the work God has begun and is completing in them. Cf. Philippians 1:6. He reminds them that it is God who is working in them.

What does Paul hold up as the Philippians role in the partnership? What are his instructions for them in that role? Cf. Exodus 16:6-12 and Isaiah 42:6.

Paul makes allusions to their role as the new Israel, as children of God. He calls them to go about their task without grumbling or questioning (as the people in the wilderness); he calls them to shine like stars, i.e., to be a light to the world (Cf. Isaiah 42:6). In such a role, he encourages them to stick fast to their source of strength, the Word of Life.

Implications on Christian Friendship

Consider the verses again. How do these verses encourage you in your Christian friendships?

What do they teach you? What does true partnership look like? Consider especially 1:27 and 2:18.

Answers will vary. But the thrust of this question gets at the call of friends to be able to rejoice with one another even when things are not going well for you. Friends see beyond the struggles of the individual and look towards the goal of the whole. This may mean humiliation to stand firm with a friend or suffering to do what is right.

What role does Christ play in the living out of Christian friendships? Cf. Habakkuk 3:17-19.

Answers will vary. Answers should hit upon the confidence and security we have in our identity in Christ and the humiliation and victory Christ has accomplished in his life.

Relevance

In your experience, do you find that friends suffer with one another? What permits this loyalty?

What inhibits it?

Answers will vary. The expectation is that some will say that they have had friends really help them through difficult times and others will say that friends have deserted them (although they are probably not friends anymore). The question concerning permission and inhibition would get at issues of trust, personal security, e.g., are people okay with who they are, are people okay with where they are in life, etc., etc.

How well do people do seeing their friend have everything going well while they suffer throughout life?

Answers will vary. Goal of this question is to recognize that even in the face of a 'my friends all support me' answer to the preceding question friends bail on us and we bail on them.

What makes a Christian friendship different? How can Christian friends truly suffer in joy? How can we rejoice, as Paul exhorts, even in suffering.

Here the focus is on who we are and the foundations of our friendship. Because God has given us total and utter security, we are free to selflessly approach our friendships. Our struggles and difficulties don't really matter. We are secure. Because of our gift of faith in Jesus, we are able to look out for the needs and the good of the other rather than our own need. We see this confidence in the victory won by Christ, cf. Philippians 2:9-11.

What does this look like in your life?

Answers will vary.

What is the key to maintaining a proper perspective on your life?

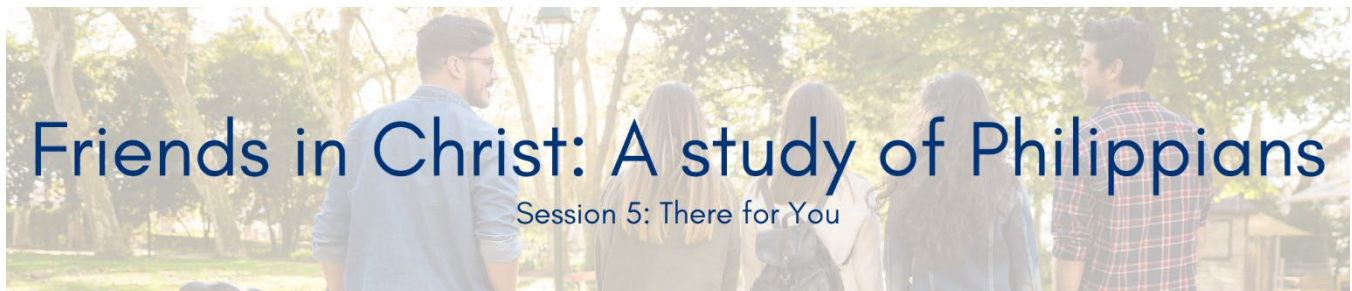
We need to remember and remind people of the humility to which we have been called and the security we have in the face of that humility. We are friends not just with friends but connected to Christ.

Concluding thoughts

Throughout our lives bad things happen. We face challenges that stretch us; we face challenges by which we suffer. How we face those challenges is greatly related to our perspective on life and our role as partners. How we shine like stars to our friends and to the world provides a great witness to the joy we have in Christ Jesus.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. How do people relate to their difficulties and suffering? How do people respond to other people's successes? Think about the message their actions communicate to you and the message you communicate to others. Consider how you can improve your perspective on your situation and your interaction with others in theirs. Daily remind yourself of the humility and victory of Christ through it all. Pray that your life would reflect this victory so that you may reflect the fact that you are a partaker in the grace of God and a servant of the Lord.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the needs of the group and certainly highlight the need for help in recognizing the partnership Christ has shown to us and the resulting partnership we live out in our daily lives.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 5: There for You

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants (Ttp) would be empowered to be there for their fellow Christians even when it means personal sacrifice.

Objectives:

- Ttp would learn from Paul's care/sacrifice for the Philippians
- Ttp would remember the foundation that frees us to be concerned for each other
- Ttp would consider how this looks in their lives
- Ttp would recognize the challenge of being there for others
- Ttp would understand better the words of Philippians 2:19-30

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

Judy, a second grader, sat in school working on her math problems. Her next-door neighbor, Frank, sat in the desk just behind her. They had been friends for as long as they could remember and they were extremely close. As she was working, she heard a rising whimper. Frank's pencil lead had just broken. It was his best pencil, and he needed it to finish his problems. He wasn't the best at math and the pencil was his magic feather. Unfortunately, their teacher Miss Helga Kranawetter permitting no sharpening except at appointed times. Recognizing the problem, Judy turned around and handed him her favorite pencil. Taking the pencil, he was able to finish his math problems.

The scenario seems a bit juvenile, but it illustrates something about friendship. Consider the situation: What did Judy risk by letting 'pressure writing Frank' use her favorite pencil? Why did Judy take this risk? What does Judy demonstrate about her care for Frank? What does Judy demonstrate about her relationship with Frank?

Judy risked losing the use of the pencil; Frank might have broken it. Judy took the risk because she cared about Frank; she cared enough to give up something very important to her.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 2:19-30

General Content

Read Philippians 2:19-30. These verses present the portion of the letter in which a friend presents the movement of intermediaries. It might be similar to expressing to a friend on the phone that you saw a mutual friend and the providing information about the interaction to the friend who is on the phone.

Summarize the content of these verses. Who is doing what? Why?

Paul is sending Timothy and Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus is going first; Timothy will follow; Paul hopes to come shortly thereafter. Epaphroditus is being sent, presumably with the letter, because of their concern for them. Timothy is being sent so that Paul is cheered by news of them. Both people are highly respected by Paul.

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 2:19-24

What does it mean to Paul to send Timothy? How would Timothy's departure affect Paul's life? Consider also Timothy's character and service in Acts 16:1-5; 17:14-15.

Timothy is a great asset to Paul. His departure would make life much less convenient. Paul trusts Timothy (something that would be beneficial to have while you were in prison). Paul knows Timothy's care for the gospel; he cares enough to be circumcised as an adult (keep in mind that this act was done for the sake of others; it was not because he thought he needed to be circumcised for religious purposes). Both of these attributes will be missed by Paul.

Why then does Paul send Timothy?

Paul knows that Timothy would do the job appropriately.

Why is Timothy concerned for the Philippians? What does this teach us about our concern for others?

Timothy cares about what God cares about. God cares about the Philippians; Timothy cares about the Philippians. Cf. Philippians 2:20-21. Likewise, we are concerned about others because God is.

Philippians 2:25-30

What is Epaphroditus' story? Consider also Philippians 4:18.

Epaphroditus was someone the Philippians sent to Paul to bring their gifts to him. These gifts were probably physical support of some form or another. It was probably accompanied by some communication. Epaphroditus was an official emissary to Paul for the Philippians [the term used is 'apostle', i.e., someone sent with the authority of the one sending]. On the journey, Epaphroditus fell ill and almost died. Nonetheless, he continued in his service; he served the work of Christ in the face of death. The Philippians heard about Epaphroditus' struggles, but had not heard about his recovery. As a result, Epaphroditus desired to see them and let them know that he was okay.

What is Paul sending Epaphroditus to do?

Paul is sending Epaphroditus to ease their concerns and to bring his letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 2:19-30

Why then does Paul need to send Timothy? Consider 1 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-7.

The following is an educated stab at the answer to this question. Ultimately, we can only answer the question with the clues provided in the text; Paul's purpose can only be known to Paul (and God).

With this question we realize that while this may be a letter of friendship, there is significant instruction and exhortation involved with the letter [this exhortation will be seen with greater clarity in chapter 3; similar uses of Timothy are found in the additional passages]. Paul trusts Timothy to be able to provide an objective and theologically sound perspective on how the people are responding to his letter. For this reason, Paul sends Timothy to bring him good news. Timothy will be going after Epaphroditus; this delay allows some time for the exhortation of the letter to sink in and to be put into practice.

How does Paul describe Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians? Why does he accent what he accents? What function does it serve?

Timothy demonstrates faithfulness to the gospel; his concern is for others and not himself. This provides a good example for the people. It also provides rationale for his sending of Timothy; this rationale helps downplay the reality that Timothy is going to check up on the Philippians. Epaphroditus provides a helpful example of a sacrificial mindset. He is willing to suffer/die for others and the gospel. This mindset is one that Paul has been encouraging throughout this letter.

Implications on Christian Friendship

How do these verses encourage you in your Christian friendships? What do they teach you?

What does being 'there for' each other look like?

Answers will vary. Students who are away from home may understand the difficulties of encouraging and being there for friends who are not physically close. Ultimately the discussion should reach a recognition of how Paul is concerned for the Philippians; he cannot be with them at present; he sends the next best thing to a personal visit. While he is not there for them he is 'there

for' them. Even though it will inconvenience his life, even though there is risk involved, he sends his best pencil to listen to the people and help the people in their need.

It can also be highlighted that the Philippians demonstrated their desire to be 'there for' Paul via the gifts they sent with Epaphroditus.

To what extent does Paul give up his best pencil? What does this teach us about being 'there for' you?

Answers will vary. This question seeks to recognize the qualification of verse 23. While this delayed sending of Timothy could solely be an attempt to mask the real purpose of Paul's sending of Timothy, taken at face value it demonstrates stewardship. The need for Timothy to stay just a little longer would suggest that Paul saw a greater need for Timothy with him at the present time. This scenario would teach us that sometimes it is a better decision in the big picture not to be immediately 'there for' someone. A comparable scenario would be the airplane emergency. If the oxygen masks come down, you are to put yours on first before you help your child. It may seem like you are making a selfish decision, but it is a better decision for all involved; it is good stewardship.

What does Paul's careful description of the rationale behind sending Epaphroditus and Timothy teach us about being 'there for' people? What two key components need to happen for us to be 'there for' people? Consider the problem in James 2:15-16.

First Paul takes the time to listen and learn what needs are present and need to be addressed. Now, in the present context, Paul, having recognized the Philippians' need is acting upon it. In James 2 we see the first step happening without the second step.

Relevance

In your experience, what are some situations where you would need to be 'there for' a friend?

Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to brainstorm the breadth of scenarios in which there is need to be there for a friend. Some possible situations: Friend does something stupid, e.g., drinking too much, failure to study, sexual behavior, etc., and realizes it or the consequences of it; has been hurt by someone else, e.g., break-ups, assault, cheated on, etc.; family problems, e.g., death, overbearing parents, lack of support, etc.; lack of friends; just plain living; etc.

What limitations inhibit you from being 'there for' them? How do you address these challenges?

Answers will vary. The goal is for participants to recognize various limitations such as inability to recognize the need, time restraints, physical limitations, ability levels [sometimes the needed help is professional], etc. Our sinful nature can also limit how we are there for friends. Addressing the challenges might mean sacrifice on your part, referral to the appropriate people, etc.

What sentiments inhibit you from being 'there for' you'?

Answers will vary. Possible answers may include jealousy, 'they got what they deserved', annoyance because you did what was right, I don't have time (that is, I don't want to spend the time), I don't want to sacrifice, etc.

What sacrifices are required for us to be 'there for' people?

Answers will vary. Some possibilities: Schedule adjustments, loss of free time, emotional taxation, monetary loss, etc.. Sometimes we have to ask for forgiveness for being selfish or judgmental rather than offering God's grace and love.

How do Christians overcome these obstacles?

We recall why we are doing all these things, namely, for the gospel. Our concern ultimately is for them and their need rather than the inconvenience of losing our special pencil. As we are concerned for the gospel we are reminded of the certainty we have in it; we see the sacrificial level of care our God has already shown us in Jesus Christ. This relationship encourages us and gives us confidence in the face of sacrifice.

What does this look like in your life?

Answers will vary.

What is the key to maintaining a perspective that allows you to be there? What is helpful towards

this end?

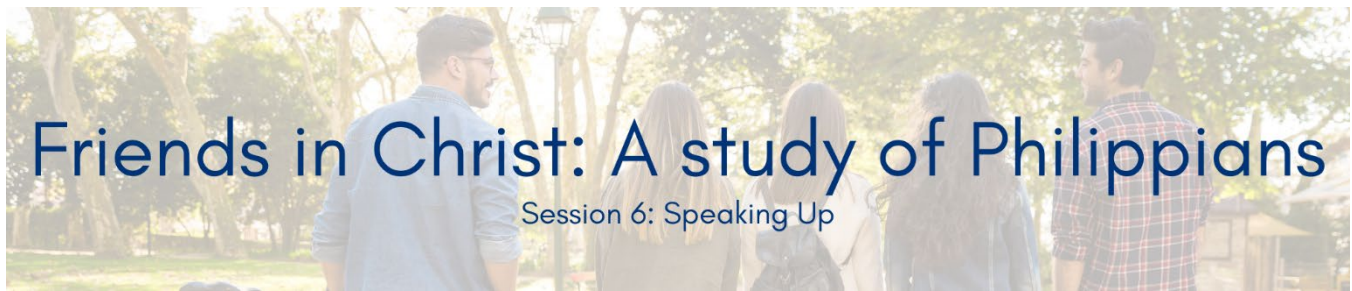
We need to be reminded of the gospel that drives us. We are reminded by those who have set good examples for us, e.g., Timothy and Epaphroditus; those who have been driven by the gospel. We are reminded by friends who are 'there for' us. We are reminded by receiving the gifts of God again and again.

Concluding thoughts

In friendships we often are called to be 'there for' others. Being 'there for' looks different in different situations. It requires listening, assessing, and acting appropriately. Often it requires our giving up of our prized pencil.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. Keep your eyes open for situations in which you can be 'there for' friends. Look beyond the immediate needs and seek to recognize the underlying needs. Consider how you can best be 'there for' them recognizing both sets of needs. Recognize also how frequently your friends are there for you. Note how you respond to these opportunities and these gifts.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the needs of the group and certainly highlight the need for help in recognizing the needs of others and how we have been empowered to help them in those needs.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 6: Speaking Up

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants (Ttp) would be able to speak up with their friends.

Objectives: Ttp would learn from Paul's concern for the Philippians
Ttp would recognize that sometimes we need to address issues with friends
Ttp would consider the challenges of addressing issues with friends
Ttp would rejoice in the power to address issues without fear
Ttp would understand better the words of Philippians 3:1-11

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

Think back through your life and consider your friendships. What was the best news you got to share with a friend? How did sharing that news make you feel? Why was it so good to share that news with your friend?

These questions are preliminary and provide contrast to the following questions.

Now consider your life and friendships again. What was the hardest thing you ever had to communicate to a friend? How long did it take for you to share it with your friend? What thoughts went through your head before you shared it? After you shared it? Why was it so difficult?

These questions begin to address the difficulty in addressing difficult issues with friends. This challenge and need, is the focus of this study on Christian friendship.

Today we recognize that being friends in Christ means that we get to share good news with our friends and we have the responsibility of sharing the more difficult words with our friends.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 3:1-11

General Content

Read Philippians 3:1-11. These verses transition out of the matters of visitation and well wishes and address an area of concern Paul had with the Philippians.

Specific Content/Message and Implications on Christian Friendship

Philippians 3:1

In these verses, Paul expresses joy to write 'the same things' to the Philippians. Why does Paul find this act a cause for rejoicing?

The letter is in the best interest of the Philippians. For this reason Paul rejoices. It is not as if he enjoys repeating himself; he does not enjoy having to deal with this issue. Paul sees the benefit for the Philippians and thus rejoices.

How does this attitude encourage you in your Christian friendships? Is this perspective difficult to hold?

This attitude encourages us to evaluate the task not based upon our benefit but rather the benefit of others. This perspective is a challenge because it is difficult for us to consider the other person's place in life when we are so entrenched in our own life, its struggles and complexities.

Philippians 3:2-11

What problem did Paul see facing the Philippians? What type of language does Paul use to communicate his concern?

Quite simply he recognized the influence of Judaizers among the Philippians. Judaizers were those who insisted on maintaining practices such as circumcision to continue to meet the expectations of the law. The influence of Judaizers is seen most vividly in Galatians 3. These people's emphasis on the law negates the gracious nature of the gospel. For this reason Paul calls the people dogs (dogs were detested by Greco-Roman society and were unclean to Jews. Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs; Paul here reverses this connection and labels the Judaizers dogs.), evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh (the word for mutilate has the same base as circumcision).

What does this problem look like today? Do we see this problem in today's church culture?

This issue is certainly still present today. While circumcision is not the expectation, we recognize other expectations. For example, sometimes people say that you have to be able to speak in tongues to be a true Christian; others suggest that if you are truly a faithful Christian you will be blessed with health, wealth, and happiness; etc.

Why does Paul bring up his personal life? What is he illustrating?

Paul highlights the value he puts on knowing Christ Jesus his Lord by comparing it to all the 'accomplishments' of his life. Most of these 'accomplishments' would have been held up by the Judaizers. Most of these 'accomplishments' are good things (observing God's teachings generally are). Paul recognizes that in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus these 'accomplishments' are equivalent to trash. There is no comparison between the two. Ultimately it is not about fulfilling the Law, it is about living in the relationship we have with God through Jesus. To be certain this includes listening to and doing God's will, but its goal is not specific actions but rather the reality of the relationship given.

How does Paul's recognition of the value of knowing Jesus Christ encourage him to write to the Philippians? How does it affect his confidence in bringing up this issue? How does it affect his motivation to address the issue?

The value of knowing Jesus Christ motivates Paul to write. He cares deeply for these brothers and sisters in Christ. Recognizing the surpassing value of knowing Jesus, he wants these beloved brothers and sisters to share in this gift.

The value also gives Paul confidence to write. He knows that the value he has and he is reminding the Philippians of is far more valuable than any loss of relationship that telling the Philippians might produce.

Why would Paul need to tell these people about the value of knowing Jesus? Aren't these people believers? Do you find the same need to be true in your life or in your friend's life?

Sometimes people get distracted and their perspectives hazy; sometimes people forget the joy and value of knowing Jesus. In these times it is easy for our sinful nature to get caught up in other things. The Philippians were facing that real possibility and danger and Paul was refocusing them. God was helping them remove the haziness.

The same holds true in our lives sometimes. We lose perspective and need some help seeing past the misperceptions and haziness in our lives.

Relevance

Paul addresses a significant issue; are we called to do that today? Why would a friend do that for another friend? Consider Matthew 18:15.

Answers will vary. We are certainly called to address significant issues with our friends today. We

need to address issues out of care for our friends. When people are in a haze, they need help seeing beyond the haze. If people are ignorant, it is helpful to encourage them to knowing. [The passage illustrates the importance of addressing the issue; while it specifically addresses sin issues between the fellow believer, the same principle can be recognized if the issue is not between the two.]

What fears/dangers are present for the one speaking-up? Consider Matthew 10:37.

The friend may decide to take their ball and go home. They might determine that they cannot believe you would try to change them and call you judgmental, hypocritical, or not accepting. They might renounce your friendship. [The passage highlights the willingness to lose family members (a higher loss than even losing a friend) in the face of discipleship.]

What happens if the friend does not speak up?

People die. It sounds like an overreaction, but with matters of such great value it is true. It may not be a physical death, but it could be a spiritual death. Little issues can turn big; this is why Paul is needing to address the Philippians about the Judaizers. Sometimes, it is more of a physical issue. In these situations physical and emotional consequences result.

How can you address such issues with friends? What confidence do you hold that frees you to do so? How does the foundation of your friendship relate to this question? What wisdom is there in Proverbs 27:6.

We have the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord. This knowing gives us identity and security even in the face of the difficult thought of losing a friend. It encourages us and strengthens us to face the fear of their reaction so that they might benefit from important information, from life itself.

We also should be able to trust the foundation of our friendships, at least our Christian friendships. Trusting the intentions of our friends we receive wounds from them more than pleasantries from a relation that does not bear that same foundation.

Are their times when you need to hear the words of a friend speaking up? How do you respond? How does your consideration of the need for you to speak up affect your response to their concern?

Answers will vary. The correct answer though is "yes, there are times when we need to hear the words of a friend speaking up." Responses will vary; most will reflect the challenge of pride we face in receiving correction, rebuke, or advice.

How does your reception of a friend's speaking up instruct your speaking up?

We should recognize the obstacles and try and address those obstacles in our speaking up.

Concluding thoughts

Life brings many difficult situations and confusing times. It is easy for us to have our judgment clouded by the events of our life; it is easy for us to fail to see the truth. In these times we give thanks for friends who help us to see more clearly, for friends who share the Word with us in our need. Recognizing this great gift given to us, we also share that gift with others. We speak up even when we are afraid to do so; we speak up so that others might hear what they need to hear. We speak up so that they might have the haze in their life removed that they may see clearly.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. Keep your eyes open for situations where you should speak up. Consider how you can best speak up so that they can be benefited. Also seek to recognize better the times when you need to hear the words of a friend. Pray for God's guidance in both situations.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the needs of the group and certainly highlight the need for help in knowing when and how to speak up to address issues; also knowing when not to speak.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 7: Striving Towards the Goal

Goal: That the participants (Ttp) would be recognize their common goal and see how that shapes their friendship.

Objectives: Ttp would understand better the words of Philippians 3:12-4:3
Ttp would recognize the common goal of Christians
Ttp would consider the implications of goals
Ttp would rejoice in the unity and freedom a common goal provides

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

What are your goals in life?

This question is intended to be simple with the goal of highlighting particular goals in life so that the participants can have something concrete with which to consider the following question.

How do your goals influence what you do in life? How do they influence how you interact with other people? Consider implications for interactions with classmates, friends (some of which may be classmates), professors, employers, etc.

Answers will vary. Hopefully participants will recognize that the goal affects the relationships. If a classmate is vying for the same internship, the relationship can be strained. If you are working on a project together, and you have the same goal (namely doing well; if only one is a slacker or an achiever, the goal is not the same) the relationship may be better.

Today we ask the question of what the goal is in a Christian friendship and how that influences those relationships.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 3:12-4:3

General Content

Read Philippians 3:12-4:3.

Outline these verses to highlight Paul's argument.

A goal of this exercise is to further develop the ability to read the text. It is one thing to read the verses; it is another thing to follow the flow of what they are saying. Developing this skill is essential in studying the text. Below is a rough outline that can be used as a guide.

1. Paul's focus is on the future. The goal is there and the present reality is driven by it.
2. Directs focus of thinking towards this goal. God will reveal if someone has a different perspective.
3. Be imitators and notice also the others who walk in the same way
4. There are many who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ
 - a. they have a different end—destruction
 - b. they have a different glory—the present reality which is truly their shame
 - c. they have their mind on earthly things
5. We are different
 - a. our citizenship is in heaven

- b. our Savior and Lord will endure—he will put all things under subjection to him, even Caesar
- c. we have a glory that reflects his
- 6. Relationship one of love and joy
 - a. beloved: twice; also used: longed for
 - b. joy and crown: shows future connotation, the hope Paul has
- 7. Encourage Euodia and Syntyche to think the same in the Lord
 - a. Yoke fellow help them
 - b. They have labored by me; positive words

How do these verses flow out of the preceding verses? What is their primary thrust?

These verses contrast the distracting goals that drive the mutilators of the flesh. They flow out of and further illustrate Paul's willingness to forget his success of the past in deference to the future goal of the resurrection and knowing Christ.

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 3:12-4:1

The notion of striving forward toward the goal dominates this section. With this reality in mind it is helpful to note that the word often translated 'perfect' should not be understood to emphasize 'not doing anything wrong' but rather 'having reached the goal'. The verb used in verse twelve (not that already 'I am perfect') is reflected in the adjective 'mature', i.e., at the point of ripeness/at the goal. [This note does not need to be shared unless someone tries to use the word perfect to connect to 'we are not perfect yet', i.e., we still sin.]

What is the goal for which Paul is striving? What has he attained? What has he not attained?

Paul was striving toward the resurrection from the dead, 3:11 and (although these two are intimately connected if not all but the same realities) knowing Jesus Christ his Lord, 3:8. He has not already attained the final resurrection. Nonetheless, he clings to that which he has already attained, i.e., Jesus' resurrection. It was given to him through faith. In this faith he has already begun to know Jesus Christ and is being conformed to him. He is conformed in his suffering; he will be conformed in his resurrection.

What is the call of verse 15? Consider 2:1-5.

The call to think towards the goal of the resurrection of the dead and knowing Jesus Christ our Lord fully reflects the call to have the same mind as Christ in 2:1-5. We are being conformed to his mind and life. His suffering and death reflects our suffering and death; his resurrection reflects our resurrection.

What exhortation does Paul put forth again in 3:17-4:1? What are the 'enemies' doing/promoting?

Paul's exhortation is to 'stand firm' and to imitate him and those who are driven by the end goal. The enemies in contrast are driven by their stomachs, i.e., their own pleasure. They desire present gratification rather than God's goal.

Why should the people 'stand firm'?

The goal, their citizenship, (something that has been attained through Christ but still awaits them) is in heaven. Their hope is not in the present; the present struggles should not distract them. Their motivation is not for the goals of the world; they are driven by the goals of Christ. Like Paul, they should be driven forward by their goal.

It can be noted that the point of citizenship is an important one for the people of Philippi. Going back to the background information, this status for those living in the city is one that the people strove hard to achieve; it was valued highly.

Philippians 4:2-3

These verses encourage two specific people to 'think the same in the Lord'. The verb continues the exhortation of 2:1-5 and at 3:15.

Relevance—Implications on Christian Friendship

Who all should carry this same mind and have this same goal?

Ultimately, everyone should have it; but specifically all believers should have it.

If Christians all are to have the same goal, what does that mean for friendships among them?

Christian friendships should be moving in the same direction. When there is a difficulty it should be able to be addressed easily because the parties involved with the dispute hold the same goal. If they have different perspectives on how to accomplish the goal, they should be able to talk without the flavor of personal attacks; after all, the people involved are on the same team.

Does the same hold true with your friendships that are with non-Christians? How does this affect your friendships?

It does not hold true. Ultimately, the goals of the people involved are going to conflict. This may or may not be a source of tension, but it does remove a specific unity of purpose that Christians, by nature of their call, have.

What reality about Christian friendships is present in the present? Consider 4:2-3.

Christians still get distracted and need help remembering to have the same mind. We need to be called back from our agendas and be reminded once again of God's agenda, God's goal.

In verse 13 Paul says that he forgets what lies behind, i.e., all that he has done worthy of merit, and strives forward towards the goal. How does this happen in friendships? What might this look like in conflicts? How does this relate to grudges?

Answers will vary. The idea of forgetting the past is definitely a useful tool in friendships. Even when two people are striving for the same goal, the past can get in the way. It can distract them with hurt feelings and grudges. Paul provides the example of leaving the past behind and moving forward looking towards the goal.

With all of this being said, it is important to recognize that forgetting the past does not mean that we do not learn from the past. If a friend steals from you, betrays you, etc., you want to learn from that. You still leave the past behind, but you learn from it to facilitate your striving forward together towards the goal.

How often does Paul's focus come into view in your Christian friendships? When is the last time the goal has entered into your mindset in relationship to your Christian friendships?

Answers will vary. The goal of the question is to realize that we often do not think about this goal. It does not play as driving of a role as it should play in life.

How does this affect the friendship's dynamics? What freedom does it provide? What focus does it give?

Answers will vary. If the goal is not kept in mind in these friendships it could lead to greater misunderstandings and unnecessary tension. It also can undermine the trust level that should be there when friends share the same foundation and direction, i.e., Christ.

How does the focus on the goal that we have in Christ strengthen or fade in your life? What characterizes the times of strength? of fading?

Answers will vary. Some influences may include times of stress, loss, success, etc. These different life experiences will influence people differently, but most will either have a positive or negative affect on the strength of focus.

How can we better keep the goal in mind? Consider 2 Timothy 4:5-8 and Acts 2:42-47.

Answers will vary. Given the readings, answers may include talking about our goal, reading the Scriptures, being fed and nourished in the Sacrament, hearing the preached Word, etc. The Acts passage highlights the centrality of the faith in the life of the Christian friends.

Concluding thoughts

The present and past often play significant roles in our relationships, but God calls us to look forward and strive towards the goal he has set before us. God has made us for relationship and the completion of that relationship on the last day should propel us forward. The greatness of that goal should far exceed the present and the past.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. Recognize the implications of the goal on your relationships. Consider how the common goal is expressed; consider how the common goal is forgotten. Pray for God's guidance that his goal may guide you.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the need for focus on the goal God has given us in the midst of the craziness of life.]



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 8: The Joy of Friendship in Christ

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the joy of life in Christ would permeate the participants' friendships.

Objectives: Ttp would understand better the words of Philippians 4:4-23
Ttp would recognize the foundation of their joy
Ttp would consider the expression of that joy among their friends in Christ
Ttp would live according to this joy

[Opening Prayer should give thanks for the opportunity to study the word and grow in understanding of what it means to be friends in Christ. Request for clarity in understanding God's word and its relevance is also appropriate.]

Introduction

What was the most exciting/joyous thing that has happened in your life?

Answers will vary. The goal of the question is to get some examples of joyous events in your mind so that the following question is more accessible.

When it happened how did you share it? How did the joy and excitement from that event come out?

This question aims at helping the participant see the pervasiveness of joy. When something really positive happens in someone's life it exudes out of their entire being. Their face is brighter; their carriage is more confident; their words are more joyful. Everyone knows when someone is having a great day because of exceeding joy.

Today we see a joy that permeates relationships and instructs our Christian friendships.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 4:4-23

General Content

Read Philippians 4:4-23.

How does Paul conclude his letter?

Paul reminds the people of the joy that is foundational in their lives; he gives thanks for their gift; and he concludes with greetings and well wishes.

Do you notice some themes from elsewhere in the book? What are these themes and where do you see them?

Paul certainly reiterates some of his points found previously in the letter. Here we see a reminder of our foundation, i.e. we are in the Lord; we see a call to imitate Paul, cf. Phil 4:8-9; we see the mutual care between the two in word and deed, cf. Phil 4:10-19; we see a recognition of the end goal, cf. Phil 4:5.

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 4:4-9

By now you may have noticed that Paul's letter to the Philippians is one that is filled with much joy. The noun for 'joy' and the related verb is found in no fewer than twelve verses of Philippians: Cf. Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10. What produces such joy in Paul and encourages such joy in the Philippians?

Paul finds joy in being in the Lord, i.e., being connected to Christ and having the relationship with God that connection provides. Paul also, although this reason cannot be separated from the first reason, finds joy in bringing and enhancing this relationship to the Philippians and others, cf. Phil 1:18, 2:2, 17-18; 4:1. This joy that Paul has should also be the Philippians since they have been given the same gift of relationship with Christ in which Paul rejoices. This relationship provides peace and security that eliminates the need for anxiety or fear; it frees the people to do what is beneficial and proper.

How should this joy translate in actions for the Philippians? What does Paul's instruction suggest?

The joy we have in the Lord should produce courtesy (the word translated gentleness/reasonableness generally, in the LXX and contemporaneous literature, refers to God, gods, or nobles when they do not insist on every right of the letter of the law but show some understanding/tolerance/gentle forbearance in its implementation).

The joy removes anxiety and directs you to the proper outlet for your concern, namely prayer to God.

Do you have this same joy? Does it permeate your life? How does that look?

Answers will vary. Some answers might address the contentment the joy brings; this contentment then is reflected in more positive interactions with others, even others who are annoying and adversarial. Most, however, probably recognize that they have room for improvement in having joy centered in the Lord [note well, joy in the Lord is different than just being pleased and joyous about how life is going].

How easy is it for you to listen to the exhortation of Paul in verse 6? How do verses 4 and 7 encourage us to heed the instruction of this passage?

Answers will vary. Most likely some/many people will recognize that anxieties often affect their lives personally. It is easy to get trapped in the mindset of "all the problems that I have to deal with". Verses 4 and 7, however, remind us that we are in the Lord. In the Lord, in Christ Jesus, we have joy and peace that surpasses all our understanding.

Verses 8 and 9 introduce a concluding instruction. It calls us to consider what is good and consider those who set examples of godly living and thought. In our world today, it is easy for us to get wrapped up in considering things that are not good and idolize examples that are far from godly. Consider the top five things and people that fall into this category of not good/ungodly. Consider also the top five good things and people that you find in your life that would fall under the category of things upon which we should think. How do you combat the tendency to focus on the bad things and entities and focus on the good? What does the text provide by way of help?

[Note the irony that we are called not to consider and yet here you are considering such things. If someone begins listing five you can say "see how hard that is, you are already doing it". Or if no one notices the irony, or if you do not want to sound that cheesy, you can proceed with the questions.] Answers will obviously vary, but most likely the bad things will be easier to come up with than the good. If this occurs, it provides a good illustration of how much easier it is to think on the bad examples and things than the good.

Paul reminds the people of the encouragement and strength we have to do so in verse 9: "And the God of peace will be with you."

Philippians 4:10-20

In verse 10, the verb translated 'revived' (ESV/NASB/NRSV) and 'renewed' (NIV) is a botanical term referring to a plant and the revival of its blooming, i.e., 'blooming again' or 'causing to bloom again'.

Why does Paul rejoice greatly in the Lord?

Paul rejoices that the joy of Christ has spread into the lives of the Philippians, has permeated their lives, and has overflowed out of their lives. Their concern for Paul has blossomed, a sign of the joy they have in the relationship present. Their joy extends even to suffering with and for Paul.

This response of the Philippians evidences their confidence in the God who will provide for their needs; it shows that the Philippians are filled to such an extent (with joy/peace/contentment in the Lord, i.e., not earthly wealth) that they can give of themselves for Paul. More than receiving the gift itself, Paul rejoices in the opportunity to let them display this fullness, cf. Philippians 4:17.

What is the secret of contentment?

God provides the strength. When one recognizes the care that is given by the Father, even to the extent of the gift of his Son, we can trust Him in whatever situation we face.

Do you find joy in letting others give gifts to you? Why/why not? How does this compare to Paul's joy?

Answers will vary. Most likely people will recognize the joy that comes from receiving a gift, but often the joy of receiving a gift, e.g., at a special occasion, transcends the notion that it is a blessing for the one giving the gift and we fail to recognize the true joy of their giving, i.e., we focus on our joy of receiving rather than their joy of giving. Sometimes, we do not even want to receive the gifts because of pride. Once the gift is given because we are lacking, i.e., we have true need, it can be hard to receive the gift because we often do not want to admit we have need. Our pride gets in the way of joyful receiving. Paul demonstrates that in Christ our concern is not in our getting something or in our pride but rather it is with the good of the other. We need not be concerned about ourselves because we have God who gives us strength and supplies our needs "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:21-23

The final verses conveys greetings to the saints from Paul, the brothers, even Caesar's household. This greeting is fairly standard letter format. The final farewell takes a distinctively Christian form and reminds the Philippians of the grace that is central to their relationship and their life.

How do you close your correspondences with fellow Christians? Why? Do your farewells convey the heart of your relationship? Why/why not?

Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to help people think about their farewells and hellos as reflecting the relationship they have in Christ. It is an easy time to remind each other of that relationship, but we often just say goodbye. We fail to take advantage of an opportunity to remind ourselves of the very foundation of our relationships.

Relevance—Implications on Christian Friendship

These closing verses of Philippians highlight the joy that overflows throughout the relationship between Paul and the Philippians. Joy is a significant part of friendships. It is contagious and it enhances the relationship.

How is the joy you have in Christ Jesus reflected in your Christian friendships? How is it not? Why/why not? How can this be improved?

[Part of this question was asked with respect to all of life before. If addressed sufficiently you may summarize the responses and move on to the rest of the question.] Answers will vary. This question should get people reflecting on the reality of their lives and the implications of that reality. It is very easy for us to lose sight of the joy we have in Christ so that it does not exude out of our daily lives. If this failure is the case, it is important for us to be reminded of the joy we have again and again. We daily need to know the forgiveness and healing we have in Christ; we daily need to know the contentment that God's provision brings.

Think of five specific areas/things you can improve on in your life by purposefully injecting and highlighting the joy you have because of Christ into those things.

Answers will vary. People can share as they feel comfortable. Try and have at least everyone share something.

How can you encourage each other and other friends to joyous living? Consider specific situations in your life.

Answers will vary. People can share as they feel comfortable. Try and have at least everyone share something.

Concluding thoughts

We have been given confidence, security, and peace in Christ Jesus. These gifts give us great joy in the Lord. This joy we have in Christ Jesus in turn permeates our lives and our friendships. It leads us to a freedom to love and care for each other being secure in the foundation we have in Christ. It enables us to put ourselves forth as an example and speak the hard words to people who need to hear them. It enables us to give of ourselves freely knowing that God will take care of us and give us strength. It propels us forward as partners with the same goal rejoicing in and sharing the gifts we have been given.

As you go throughout this week and your lives, continue to recognize the relationship you have with all those in Christ. Look for opportunities to share the joy you have in the Lord. And be empowered to be true friends in Christ.

[Concluding prayer should reflect the need for seeing joy and sharing joy throughout our lives and the concluding call to be friends in Christ.]