



by Sue Edwards

Philippians

Discovering Joy Through Relationship



LEADER'S GUIDE

Philippians: Discovering Joy Through Relationship
Leader's Guide
©2015 Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

I'm delighted you've chosen *Philippians: Discovering Joy Through Relationship* to enrich your understanding of God's Word. Use the material by yourself, or, for even greater enjoyment, invite others to join you. If you use this curriculum with one or more small groups, be sure to familiarize yourself with this overview as you prepare to lead the study.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your students with the resources available to enhance your study experience:

- *Videos.* Supplemental teaching videos of various lengths are available for individual or group use at www.discovertogetherseries.com. For quick access with your smart phone or other handheld device, QR codes within each lesson correspond to these videos. These videos contain personal testimonies, related stories, and historical background. The introductory video can be used in your initial gathering to excite and inform your students as they embark on this adventure together.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to work the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a particular Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

In addition, there is a "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders" available at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians is one of the most beloved and studied letters in the New Testament. It's full of quotable quotes



and it doesn't contain difficult passages that stump novices and require scholars' commentaries to understand. Its theme is timeless; Christians can live a joyful life with God and with others regardless of difficult circumstances. As Paul writes his Philippian friends, he's modeling an abiding joy in the midst of his own tough circumstances. He's chained to a Roman guard under house arrest with a trial looming over his head and the real possibility that he will be executed or imprisoned for the rest of his life. Yet his pen portrays an outlook that transforms misery into melody. Because we live in a fallen world and experience trials and challenges from time to time, we can all relate to Paul's situation, thus the universal appeal of this refreshing little letter.

This study guide will walk you through the epistle verse by verse so that you don't miss any of its treasures. Encourage women in your group to set aside quality time during the week to work through each lesson. Promise them rich rewards if they do.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Some books of the Bible are divided up into obvious sections. For example, many of Paul's letters begin by showing what God has done for us. This doctrinal portion of the letter is followed by how we should live as a result of the marvelous redemption that Christ has provided. But Philippians doesn't fall neatly into those two divisions. This letter flows more like a natural letter between close friends. It contains updates on what's going on in Paul's life, reports on mutual friends, includes words of encouragement, and even has a little exhortation. It's like peeking over the recipient's shoulder and reading the words of an endearing father figure who misses his children and wants them to know his heart.

EMPHASIS ON THE POSITIVE

The Philippian letter begins with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. That spirit of rejoicing permeates the manuscript to the very end, even though Paul has every reason to complain. He's locked up. He's lost his freedom to travel, preach, and plant churches. He's probably uncomfortable and hungry much of the time. He likely faces execution without a fair trial, representation, or much notice. He's nearing the end of his life without the comforts and joys one might expect at that age. Some of his friends have abandoned him. Others are preaching a "false gospel." Yet, he remains steadfast and positive about God's work in the world. He proclaims Christ has risen and is victorious. He expresses deep love for his long-time friends in Philippi and thanks them for their support through the years. This upbeat little letter despite negativity all around serves to light up our hearts and show us how to focus on what's really important—our relationship with God and with one another. As long as those

two are intact and thriving, we have every reason to rejoice. As you lead women through the lessons, note this theme.

HOW TO INCLUDE THE FREE VIDEO CLIPS EMBEDDED IN THE LESSONS

The video clips that accompany this A Discover Together Bible Study are longer than those in previous studies. They could be used in place of a teaching component to complement your home study and group discussion. Unlike previous clips that simply highlighted a quick story or background fact, these videos pertain to the overall lesson. I've made them longer and more general on purpose. You can use them to top off or introduce your time together. However, I'd love to see you supplement these video clips with input of your own. Here are a few options that might enhance your study and make it more personal.

- After viewing the video, create and ask several related discussion questions. Then talk together about what you heard.
- Ask a woman in the study to share her own related story to enrich your time together.
- Ask a woman to teach a related biblical concept that might deepen the insight provided in the video or the lesson.

Consider ways to let women in your study share their own experiences or insights. Make space for a woman with a teaching gift to use it. Challenge everyone to grow spiritually by stepping out and using their gifts and voices.

In 2012, Sarah Bessey, a young Canadian author, wrote a blog entitled, "*Why We Don't Need 'Women's' Ministry.*" Her words rocked the women's ministry world. She wasn't blasting all ministries to women—just ones that she and her young friends deemed frivolous, full of "safe lady topics" and lacking vulnerability and authenticity. Concerning Bible study teachers, she wrote, "I would have liked the women of the church to share their stories or wisdom with one another, no more celebrity speakers, please just hand the microphone to that lady over there that brought the apples."

In your midst sits a lady who brought the apples, and she has helpful and possibly profound words to say about her walk with Jesus and what she's learned from God's Word and from life. Create opportunities for women to add to your time together. God has gifted some of them with the gift of teaching, and who knows, maybe by opening opportunities for her, even short ones, she may gain the courage to develop those gifts and bless everyone. And her courage may spur others on to develop their gifts, whatever they are. The end result will revolutionize your studies environment,

call women out of their shells, and encourage everyone to use the gifts and talents that God has given them for the edification of everyone else. Give it a try and you may see the Lord show up in ways you never expected.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. Make sure that when you wear your small-group leader's hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher's hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth in addition to the videos provided (on the Discover Together website or through the QR codes).

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a forty-five minute formal lecture, more like a pastor's message on Sunday. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you're meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. If you believe that God may want *you* to teach the Bible, step out and try.

Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD or over the Internet. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts, too. So, if something in you says, "teach!"—then go for it!

AN INTRODUCTORY LECTURE IDEA

If you plan to include lectures in your format, the first week you meet you may want to familiarize the women with the founding of the Philippian church in Acts 16:6–40. Lesson One focuses on these events. The setting of the book is critical in understanding Paul's relationships with Christians in Philippi.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in their thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a "time hog," group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Stanley, Andy and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Swindoll, Charles R. *Touching Others With Your Words: The Art and Practice of Successful Speaking*. New York: Faith Words, 2012.
- Wilkin, Jen. *Women of the Word*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- Willhite, Keith and Scott Gibson, ed. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

An excellent resource to aid your grasp of any text is *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* by Walvoord and Zuck. This comes in New Testament and Old Testament editions and includes chapters written by different scholars, known for their expertise in that book of the Bible.

For a superb online resource, see www.soniclight.com for seminary notes by my friend and colleague Dr. Tom Constable. On this site, there are study notes for all sixty-six books of the Bible. His notes are thorough but readable. See his Copyright

Policy for instructions on how you may use this resource in your personal study or teaching.

In addition, see the list of reliable commentaries below.

Bentley, Michael. *Shining in the Darkness: Philippians Simply Explained*. Grange Close, England: Evangelical Press, 1997.

Bruce, F.F. *Philippians: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.

Fee, Gordon D. *Philippians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999.

Melick, Richard R., Jr. *Philippians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991.

———. *Colossians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991.

———. *Philemon: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991.

Wright, N.T. *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

LESSON 1

Beloved Friendships

GET ACQUAINTED

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray. Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by sharing something about her family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or icebreaker games.

For an extended community builder, ask participants to create a list of words that they think describes the qualities of a good friend. After they have compiled and shared their lists, explain that this study centers on building thriving relationships, first with God and then with others. Keep their lists and ask them to complete this exercise again after you finish *Philippians: Discovering Joy Through Relationship*. You may find it enlightening to compare the two lists as a way to measure what you learned.

GET FOCUSED

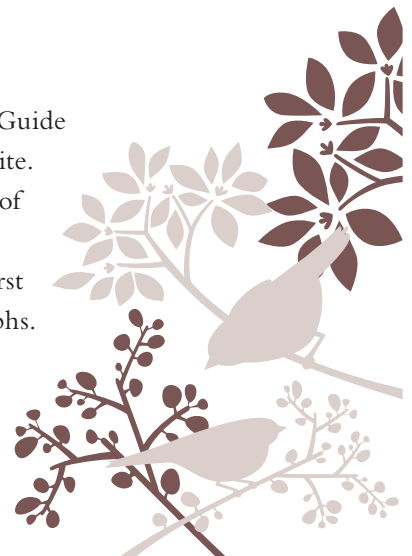
Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

DISCUSS LESSON 1

To enhance your small-group leading skills, study the "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders" available on the Discover Together website. Leading a small group is a complex competence, requiring lots of practice. Be patient and reread the Training Guide often.

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, begin with a brief synopsis of the opening paragraphs.



For example, you might say something like, “Before we dig into the Philippian letter, we’re going to see how God sovereignly brought Paul to Philippi in the book of Acts. God, led him there to plant a church, and God connected him with a group of people who became his dear friends. They were the original recipients of the letter. Here’s how it happened: Paul, Silas, and Timothy were revisiting churches that Paul planted on his first mission trip.” Then read question 1 and the discussion is launched.

LESSON CONTENT

Before we study any book of the Bible, we need to learn all we can about the context. If the book is a letter, we want to answer all kinds of questions to help us interpret the letter correctly. We do this by carefully observing the letter, like a detective. Here are sample questions:

- Who wrote the letter?
- Who were the original recipients of the letter?
- What was going on at the time in the lives of both the author and the recipients?
- Where were the author and the recipients at the time?
- Is the author writing the letter in response to questions from the recipients?
- Is the letter related to what’s going on there?
- Can you discern anything about the relationship between the author and the recipients?
- Can you tell if the author was irritated with the recipients or did they enjoy a close affectionate friendship?
- What do you think was the author’s purpose for writing this letter?

You can probably think of additional questions that will help you discern important truths and principles that we can apply to our lives. It’s critical that we don’t try to apply what we think the Bible is teaching us before we observe the text in light of what the author was saying to the original recipients. After we carefully observe what was going on, then we consider what the author meant by what he wrote, and finally we see how we might apply what we learn to our lives today. Understanding this process: observation = interpretation = application makes us all better small group leaders and teachers.

Lesson 1 provides the context for our study of the Philippian letter. We learn how God directed Paul and his companions to Philippi. We see how God used Paul to birth the first church on the European continent, leading to the spread of Chris-

tianity throughout the West and later to the Americas. We meet the first converts to the church there, and what a diverse group. They were: a stately widow who owned a thriving business, a slave girl trafficked for money, a hardened Roman jailor—whose life almost ended that night—and his family, and probably many of the prisoners the jailor was guarding.

The prisoners had the opportunity to escape in the night when an earthquake jarred open their cell doors, but they didn't run. We are left wondering why? Was the experience with Paul and Silas that night so profound that they decided to stick around and find out what in the world was going on?

The text describes an incredible supernatural account that led to the founding of one of the healthiest early churches, full of some of Paul's closest friends. We think that Paul wrote the Philippian letter about ten years after the events in Acts 16.

Imagine the conversations when the congregation received Paul's letter. Often these letters were read aloud to the entire congregation. They were probably gathered in Lydia's home when they heard that Paul is in jail again. Some of them may be thinking, "Oh, my, those Roman jailors don't know what they are in for."

And they remember the night when Paul and Silas, bruised and bleeding, came to their jail, and how they lit up the night with their songs of praise to the Lord. They remember a terrible earthquake that loosed their chains and opened a way of escape, but they also remember Paul and Silas's words of joy about this Messiah Jesus, so they stuck around to find out more.

The jailer remembers thinking that he would surely be executed for letting his prisoners escape. Yet, amazingly, no one ran away. He remembers how he and his family put their faith in Jesus that night.

The slave girl remembers how she was set free after years of demon possession to follow the love of her life—the One Paul declared had the power to heal her. And how her life had been miraculously different since.

As the congregation at Lydia's heard the letter read, each must have remembered the events of Acts 16 with wonder, gratitude, and probably some tears.

As you lead this lesson, remember that you are laying the foundation and the context for the study of the letter that follows. These events and relationships are key to understanding the marvelous truths that you'll unearth in the weeks ahead. Lead your group with excitement and anticipation, and your exuberance will be contagious.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- Do you know anyone who ministers in local jails or prisons? If so, ask them to present an overview of what they do to reach prisoners with the Gospel or to

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encourage them in their faith. Follow up with a question and answer time. This presentation might lead someone in your group to begin regular jail or prison ministry.

LESSON 2

An Endearing Prayer

LESSON CONTENT

This lesson shows us the depth of Paul's love and affection for the Philippians through a thorough examination of the letter's greeting and his prayer life on their behalf. Paul doesn't mask his feelings for his friends. He admits that he has them "in his heart." He says he "longs for them." He talks about his consistent prayers for them, and he reveals that even though theirs is a long distance friendship, they bring him great joy.

Paul models one of the best ways Christians bond with one another—we pray for and with each other. And praying together for one another out loud serves to deepen the ties of our friendship. Yet many of us let our inadequacies shut down communal praying.

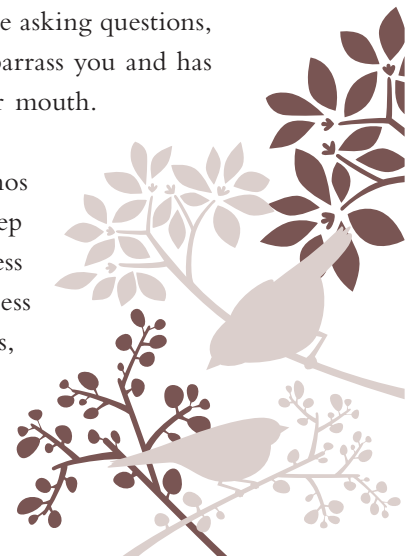
Before you lead this lesson, pray for your group. Pray that they may learn how to let go of any inadequacies that hinder them from a rich communal prayer life. You may also want to express a similar prayer as you start the lesson. Praying together and for one another, and watching God answer, brings women closer. It's no accident that Paul begins his letter revealing his prayer life on their behalf. If we want rich friendships, Paul is showing us an important component.

CREATE A POSITIVE GROUP ETHOS

Ethos (e-thas) is the distinguishing environment or atmosphere of a place. As the leader you set the ethos, and although you cannot see it, women respond or shut down in response. Every home has ethos. In some homes children experience unconditional love and fair discipline. As a result they usually grow up confident and secure. Other homes exude a chill—children walk on eggshells knowing that performance earns affection, easily withdrawn when they mess up.

Ethos impacts classrooms. In some classes, you are comfortable asking questions, even dumb ones. You know the teacher won't intentionally embarrass you and has your best interest at heart. In others, you don't dare open your mouth. Why? Ethos.

And women in your small group are influenced by the ethos you create. Will it be a place where women can voice their deep hurts and difficult questions? Can women be honest and do business with God in your group? Only then can the process of forgiveness and healing take root. To learn how to create positive group ethos,



review the “Training Guide for Small- Group Leaders” and focus on the importance of affirmation and controlling your own talking. Remember the group time is not about you! It’s about giving them a safe place to discuss what *they* learned, try out *their* new ideas, and articulate *their* convictions.

TROUBLESHOOTING

In question 6, women are asked to define the term “gospel.” The gospel simply means *good news*. The gospel is the good news that God has come down to rescue us from sin and shame through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and through his resurrection. As we place our faith in Christ alone, we are accepted into God’s forever family through grace—God’s unmerited favor. As a result we have the power to live for him here and for eternity.

WILL YOU PRAY TOGETHER AS A GROUP?

Lesson 2 might be a good catalyst to discuss whether or not your group wants to pray together. Encourage them to make prayer a regular part of their gathering, since a key goal of this study is to deepen our relationship with God and with each other. But give them the freedom to decide either way. If they desire to spend time in conversational prayer, see the last page of the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” for suggestions.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- Have you observed women in your study that God has gifted with creativity and a desire to bless others with their gift? If so, identify these women and invite them to partner together to create small giveaway gifts that complement some of the lessons. For example, they might want to create a bookmark about prayer as a reminder of this week’s lesson. They could include art and/or verses on the topic.

RESOURCE

Dean, Jennifer Kennedy, *Heart’s Cry, Principles of Prayer*. Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1992.

LESSON 3

Sacred Perspectives

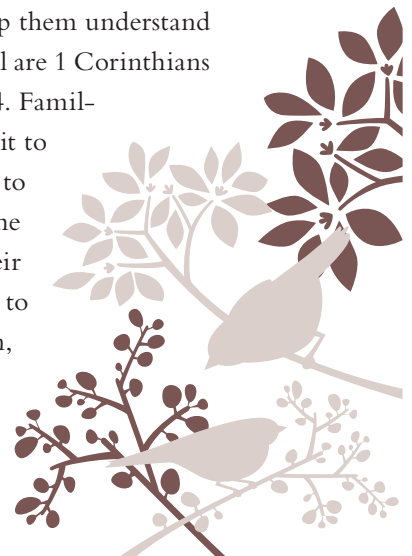
LESSON CONTENT

In Lesson 3 Paul shares his heart with his friends. He writes about his situation, and his determination and refusal to let those circumstances rob him of joy. His perspectives show us how to maintain unity in our communities, even when people disappoint us. Paul's imprisonment has freed up others to "proclaim the gospel without fear." Some are friends and others are rivals. The rivals minister out of impure motives, hoping to overtake Paul's influential place in the churches. These envious Christians aren't teaching false doctrine. If they were, Paul would condemn them as he had other false teachers. No—these are rivals who are glad Paul is locked up, giving them the opportunity to shine. But Paul doesn't care. He entrusts them to the Lord, believing that God will deal with them in time. He won't get caught up in petty skirmishes. He won't let them poison his joyful heart.

Paul also speaks to his friends about a topic that is probably causing them much anguish: his possible impending execution. Kindly, he attempts to set their hearts at ease. He's ready to die because he knows where he's going. He's also willing to keep serving if that's what God wants. He's content with either outcome. What thoughtful tender words from a dear friend who wants to calm their fears! He's showing us what real friendship looks like.

INVITE WOMEN TO EXPERIENCE AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Are there women in your small group who may not be Christians? Pray that God will identify these women, help you discern their readiness, and show you how to encourage them toward a relationship with Jesus. Women who thought they were Christians may realize that they are not, and may need you to help them understand how to come to authentic faith. Other passages clarifying the gospel are 1 Corinthians 15:3, 5 (the gospel in a nutshell); Romans 3:23; 6:23; and John 5:24. Familiarize yourself with these verses in preparation. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your words and enable you to know what to say and when to say it. You may want to discuss how to become a Christian with the whole group and then challenge women to make a decision on their own or with you later. Tell them you would love to talk privately to anyone who would like to discuss salvation further. Use discretion,



remembering salvation is the Spirit's work, and that you must trust his leading as you carry out his work of evangelism.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- Locate a film clip that depicts two people displaying envy, rivalry, or jealousy. Play the clip, create discussion questions about the scene, and then talk about the questions in your time together. Use good judgment on your choice of films. For example, be careful with R-rated films or films that you could not recommend. Don't assume everyone has seen the film; set it up for those who have not.

LESSON 4

An Inspiring Example

LESSON CONTENT

Lasting relationships with others require humility, self-sacrifice, and putting the needs of others before our own. Not in the sense that we are doormats or we don't practice self-care, but in the sense that we are not self-absorbed and we care deeply about the needs of our friends. However, relationships are messy. People—even good people—let us down, and we let them down. We disappoint one another. We wound one another. We are all sinners. But maintaining authentic connections requires that after we fail, we continue to ask God to help us love and serve our friends well. Only then can we experience the unity God desires and the joy of true Christian companionship. None of us do this perfectly—but Jesus does! And he's our model. As we continue to keep our eyes on Jesus, his attitudes, and his character, we can become more and more like him, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

For these reasons, Paul provides an inspiring example of humility and self-sacrifice for the Philippians and for us today. Verses 5–11 are known as the Kenosis, the Emptying. This text informs Christology, the study of the Christ, who he is, what he did, and what he will do in the future. Listen carefully to the video for more insight on this astonishing and beautiful passage. If we truly want to learn to love others well and enjoy the rich dividends of close relationships, we must take this lesson to heart and make it our goal to become more Christ-like in the way we treat others.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Understanding the Person of Jesus Christ is like trying to understand the Trinity. It's a mystery. Yet in our attempted explanations, it's imperative that we align our views with Scripture. When Christ came to earth as the God/Man, he was 100 percent God and 100 percent man. We call this the hypostatic union, and it's caused no end of disagreements and confusion. Through the ages, differences of opinion on this topic have divided Christians and caused some to embrace heresy. For clarity on this text, read and digest Dr. Tom Constable's notes on www.soniclight.com. You may run off a portion of his notes on this topic and hand them out to women in the study as long as you don't charge any more than the cost of running off the copies.



CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Create and then laminate a bookmark or picture with verses that express who Christ is and what he has done for us. You might consider including a portion of the Kenosis passage or another text that describes Jesus. For example:
 - John 1:1–3, 14
 - Colossians 1:15–19
 - Hebrews 1:1–3
 - Hebrews 4:14
 - Revelation 1:12–16
 - Revelation 19:11–16
- End the study by showing the inspirational video clip *“That’s My King”* (3:32) by the late S.M. Lockridge. Order from www.ignitervideos.com (1-866-340-1826).

LESSON 5

More Inspiring Examples and a Warning

LESSON CONTENT

In Lesson 4, we observed the perfect picture of humility, self-sacrifice, and putting others before ourselves. None of us can live up to Christ's perfection. So now Paul paints three more examples of these attributes lived out by flesh and blood people like us. The examples in this lesson are Paul himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

We might think that when Paul uses himself as an example, he is no longer exhibiting humility. But the way in which Paul describes himself does not seem prideful. He says, "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me." (2:17–18). In the Hebrew sacrificial system, one could pour out a drink offering either before or after offering the sacrifice itself. We aren't sure exactly what Paul meant by his being poured out. It could refer to impending martyrdom or the sacrifices he made during his missionary service, which often involved suffering. Whatever his exact meaning, his sacrifice is in tandem with theirs, and Paul praised them for the way they lived and treated one another.

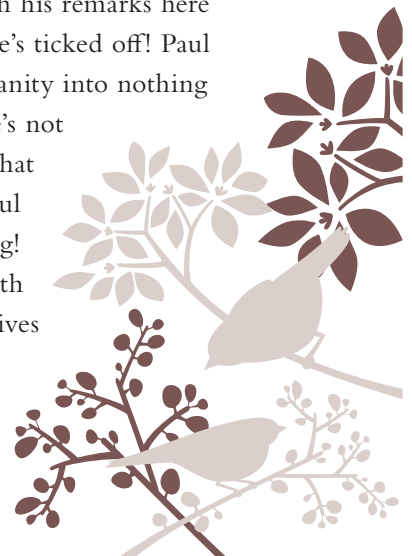
We might even include the Philippians as a fourth example of humility and self-sacrifice.

Paul goes on to laud the actions and attitudes of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Both exhibit unselfish love toward Paul and others. They show us what a good friend looks like. We would all do well to pattern our lives after theirs.

In 3:1–11, Paul cautions them to watch out for legalists known as Judaizers. These are Jewish believers who are infiltrating the church in an attempt to tack on additional requirements before anyone can become a Christian. Likely, they insisted that in addition to trusting in Christ for their salvation, the men must also be circumcised.

Compare Paul's attitude toward rival teachers in 1:12–18 with his remarks here about Judaizers. Paul's words here in 3:1–3 boil with emotion. He's ticked off! Paul knows that if the Judaizers have their way, they will turn Christianity into nothing more than a sect of Judaism. Paul calls these legalists "dogs." He's not referring to groomed house pets but to mangy vicious wild dogs that roamed the streets causing trouble. These are false teachers and Paul is clear—do not give them a platform or tolerate their false teaching!

Help women in your study differentiate between teachers with impure motives and false teachers. We all struggle with impure motives



from time to time. But we must not allow false teachers to bring a heretical message that counters the message of salvation through faith by grace alone in Christ alone. We must continue to heed Paul's warning, because people today still attempt to add works to faith in a variety of subtle ways. Paul is adamant—do not tack on works to the message of the gospel.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Invite a panel of women who lead ministries that require humility and self-sacrifice to join you after the discussion. For example, ministry to the homeless, the mentally ill, or prison ministry. Learn all you can about these kinds of ministries and consider volunteering your time and services by adding a service day to your Bible study calendar.
- Show a film clip of someone “pouring themselves out” for someone else. Follow up with a related discussion.
- Finish your study either by singing a hymn or contemporary song about humility and self-sacrifice or ask a vocalist or musician to perform it. Asking someone who knows how to sign the words for the deaf adds a nice touch.
- At the end of the study, play some soft music without words for several minutes, lower the lights if you can, and ask women to simply sit in silence and ask God what he wants them to take away from the study that week.

LESSON 6

The Courageous Pursuit

LESSON CONTENT

In 3:12–16, Paul compares the spiritual life to running a race. Numerous analogies should help women apply the truths set forth in these verses.

In 3:18, Paul describes another group of people who grieve him—not rival Bible teachers, not legalist Judaizers, but now he warns against people who are prisoners of their own flesh. They live for earthly pleasures, and Paul warns the Philippians and us not to be influenced by their licentious lifestyle.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- View the video clip “The Dick and Rick Hoyt Story” showing a devoted father competing in the Ironman Triathlon World Championship carrying his disable son.
- Host a run or walk and use the proceeds to help others.
- Suggest that women attend this lesson in running attire to add to the ambiance, but make it optional.



LESSON 7

A Harmonious Peace

LESSON CONTENT

Conflict is inevitable, even among good friends. If you want the rewards of close relationships, you must become a skilled peacemaker. Lesson 7 begins with Paul pleading with two women leaders to work through their conflict and then to the male leaders to help them. What follows are some of the most well known passages in the New Testament. But seldom are these passages interpreted in light of their context—learning to make peace with fellow believers. Of course, these passages can be used in other situations but we can learn so much by considering how to live them out in our conflicts with others.

I've also included questions on Mathew 18:15–17 because these are Jesus' words pertaining to peacemaking. Too often we ignore his counsel. The lesson contains many share and opinion questions, so take that into account as you lead the lesson. If you can't cover all the questions, pick out the ones you believe will best suit your group and discuss those.

For an in depth treatment of the topic, read my book, coauthored with Kelley Mathews, *Leading Women Who Wound*.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- How might you illustrate conflict resolution and peacemaking to enhance the principles in the lesson? Do any of the women enjoy playwriting or acting? Challenge them to write and produce a skit on the topic or Google skits, choose one, and act it out for the other women.
- Consider drafting a panel of expert peacemakers and listen to their wisdom.
- Find a good story, film clip, or song to illustrate the lesson. When using music, print out the words and discuss them.
- Create or find a case study related to conflict and discuss it as part of the lesson or in place of a teaching time.



LESSON 8

A Contented Generosity

LESSON CONTENT

In Lesson 8, we learn one of the reasons why Paul and the Philippians have remained so close over the years. The Philippians have been faithful supporters of Paul’s ministry—doing without to be sure Paul was well taken care of. Paul, no doubt, reciprocated in many ways. We explore the topics of generosity and contentment to see how we can apply what Paul and the Philippians illustrate by their example. We learn that true friendship reaches out with generous help when it’s needed—and it’s reciprocal. Knowing that we will take care of one another should we need that kind of help adds to the security and joy believers can experience as they journey through life together.

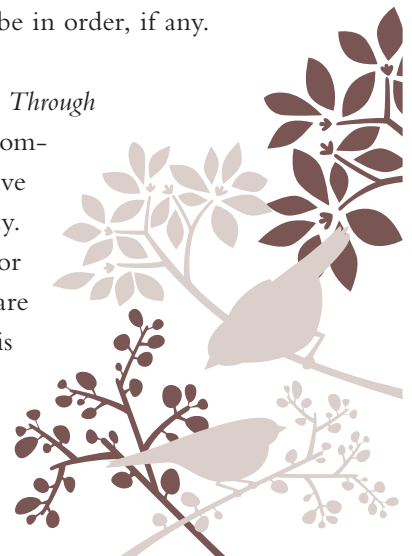
The lesson ends with ample opportunity to review the study, consider the characters in the letter, and encourage the people we’ve learned to love along the way. Be sure to allow time to cover these “Summary Review Questions” and think about future plans.

WILL YOU SAY GOOD-BYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don’t be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you’re excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any. Investigate other studies at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

Either way, use this last gathering of *Philippians: Discovering Joy Through Relationship* to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. An example of an activity might be writing a psalm of praise or listing benefits in the lives of women as a result of the study. Share changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this



PHILIPPIANS: *Discovering Joy Throough Relationship*—Leader's Guide

study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what He has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say good-bye and pray for them.