

M A R K S   O F   A   D I S C I P L E

GROWTH GROUP STUDY GUIDE

# Session 1: Prayer

Background:

*This will help the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

The congregation of Philippi had recently sent Paul a financial gift to help his efforts to spread the gospel. Paul's response is beginning his letter with a prayer of gratitude to God for the Philippian church. Paul says he thanks God every time he remembers them, grateful for their partnership in the gospel and confident that God continues to work in them even now. Despite hardship and persecution in their city, the Philippian church remains committed to the work of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, even beyond their own community.

Paul gives a powerful example of the importance of gratitude in prayer and recognition for what God is doing in his life and the lives of the Philippians. All the emotion of Paul's thanksgiving is directed toward the work of God through the Philippians. His prayers of joy are a result of the Philippians' partnership in the gospel. His confidence is in God's faithfulness to continue good work in their lives. His affection toward them is the 'affection of Jesus Christ'. Paul's example show us that living a life of prayer must be marked by recognition and gratitude of what God is doing in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Scripture: **Philippians 1:3-8**

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon? Was there anything you felt like you needed to rethink or something you were called to do?
3. How did this message change the way you think about being a disciple?

Questions from the Bible:

*I thank my God every time I remember you. (verse 3)*

1. To whom is Paul's gratitude directed toward? Why is this detail important?



PRAYERS

**Listen  
and  
Speak to  
God**

*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (verse 4, 5)*

2. Read Philippians 4:14-16 for additional context on the Philippian partnership. What are some of the things that Paul is grateful for about the Philippians?

*It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. (verse 7)*

3. What does Paul mean by partnership in the gospel?
4. How does gratitude factor into the relationship between Paul and the Philippians?

### Questions for Growth

1. How often do you pray in gratitude to God?
2. What keeps you from practicing gratitude in prayer more often?
3. What do you think would change about your life if you were better able to live in gratitude?
4. How do you actively express gratitude to others in your life?
5. What are some things you can do to practice gratitude in your prayer life this week?

Resources *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/16746-practicing-gratitude>

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/28351-cultivating-gratitude>

1. Question for Discussion – what are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge

- Establish a prayer rhythm of gratitude in your life this week by doing the following:
  1. Morning - Begin your day with a prayer of gratitude – let it be the first thing you do. Thank God for the wonder of your life and the opportunity to live for Jesus today.
  2. Noon – Claim three things, people, or circumstances you are grateful for and give thanks to God. Consider how you might express this gratitude today.
  3. Night – Reflect on the events of the day and pray your gratitude. Express regret for where you messed up and surrender any burdens to Jesus so you can rest peacefully.
- Strategize with your group about how to implement this prayer rhythm into your life (phone alarms, post-it note reminders, prayer partners, etc.)

## Session 2: Presence

### Background:

*This will help the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Throughout the letter to the Philippians, Paul writes about the importance of imitation in Christian life. As followers of Jesus, Paul encourages them to imitate Christ – to be ‘like-minded’ with Jesus. In this passage, Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate him and others who live like him. This highlights one of the powerful aspects of Christian presence – imitation. Every time Christians gather, there is opportunity to learn from the faithful lives of others and grow in the imitation of Christ. Christian presence makes us more like Jesus through imitation.

Paul also compares the Christian life to citizenship of heaven. The Greek word he uses (*politeuma*) conveys both belonging to a particular state/commonwealth and the privileges or duties that come with it. This word would have meant something to the Philippians because Philippi was a Roman colony. This meant citizens of Philippi could also claim citizenship in Rome which afforded them protections and privileges. In a similar way, those who claim Christ are citizens of heaven – they belong to Jesus and his church and claim the duties and privileges that come with it. Demonstrating faithful Christian presence exercises our ‘citizens’ rights’ to claim our place in the church community and our share of the benefits and responsibilities.

### Scripture: **Philippians 3:15-21**

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud.*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon? Was there anything you felt like you needed to rethink or something you were called to do?
3. How did this message change the way you think about being a disciple?

### Questions from the Bible:

*Join together in following my example brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. (verse 17)*

1. Why is Paul recommending imitation of himself? Is this conceited? Why or why not?
2. What do you think Paul means by ‘keep your eyes on those who live as we do’?

*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. (verse 20)*



**Be with  
God  
and his  
people**

3. What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?
4. What privileges and/or duties come with being a citizen of heaven?

*By the power that enables him (Jesus) to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (verse 21).*

5. What is the end result/goal of our imitation and citizenship?

#### Questions for Growth

1. Who have been some faithful influences in your life that you have tried to imitate?
2. What do you admire in others' practice of faith that you would like to incorporate in your life?
3. How have you been transformed by your practice of presence with other Christians?
4. What in your life demonstrates your belonging as a 'citizen of heaven'?
5. What duties/privileges can you more actively take hold of as someone who belongs to the Christian community?

Resources *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/27908-smelling-like-jesus>

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/24376-the-love-offering-challenge-5-days-of-outward>

1. Question for Discussion – what are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

#### Growth Challenge

- As a group, list some of the benefits and responsibilities that come with belonging to the Christian community.
  - In your own booklet, evaluate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 of how much you share in each listed benefit/responsibility.
  - Share with your group to celebrate your high areas and how you can grow in your low areas.

## Session 3: Gifts

### Background:

*This will help the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

At the time he was writing this letter to the Philippians, Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial for accusations made while he was preaching the gospel. Even in his house arrest, Paul continues to preach the gospel with those he has contact with, even to the guards assigned to him. Paul would have been responsible for his own food and clothing during his house arrest, and the Philippian church sent him a financial gift to help supply him during his imprisonment. This was not the first gift they had given him – each to help his ministry to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even amidst hardship and struggle within their own city, they sent financial offerings to help Paul's continued work for the gospel.

In many places throughout the letter, Paul describes the Philippians as partners or co-workers with him in the gospel. Through their giving, they shared in Paul's mission to spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the known world. Paul describes the gifts as a fragrant offering and a pleasing sacrifice to God. Christian giving is partnering with God to share the good news throughout the world. When we give sacrificially, we become partners and co-workers in God's ongoing mission to save the world through Jesus Christ.

### Scripture: **Philippians 4:10-20**

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon? Was there anything you felt like you needed to rethink or something you were called to do?
3. How did this message change the way you think about being a disciple?

### Questions from the Bible:

*I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. (verse 10)*

1. What does this hint at about the Philippian church's circumstances? (see background for help)

*Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. (verses 15-16)*

2. How does this passage show the history of Paul's partnership with the Philippian church?



GIFTS

**Joyfully  
offer our  
financial  
resources**



3. What adjectives would you use to describe the generosity of the Philippian church based on these accounts?

*They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. (verse 18)*

4. How does God see our offerings? What do you think determines whether an offering is acceptable or not?

*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. (verse 19)*

5. What does Paul say is God's response to the Philippians' generosity and giving?

## Questions for Growth

1. In your work and/or personal lives, can you describe some good partnerships you have?
2. What makes a partner/partnership good?
3. Do you see yourself as a partner with God in advancing the gospel? Why or why not?
4. Does your giving reflect your desire to partner with God in advancing His kingdom?
5. What holds you back from being a more active partner in the gospel?

Resources *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/26050-a-giving-god-a-giving-person>

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/3647-next-steps-give>

1. Question for Discussion – what are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

## Growth Challenge

- Take time this week as a household and review your giving to ministry from the previous year. Decide if this reflects your heart for gospel partnership for this year.

## Session 4: Witness

### Background:

*This will help the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

As a prisoner writing to the Philippians, Paul was convinced that even his own setbacks were advances for the gospel. In his house arrest, Paul was guarded in rotations around the clock by the Roman Imperial guard (headquartered in Rome). In a way, Paul had them as a captive audience – they had to stay with him. Paul's sharing of the gospel with them meant that the good news of Jesus Christ was working its way into the Roman establishment. In addition, the spreading knowledge of the cause for Paul's imprisonment (spreading the gospel) was actually encouraging other Christians in Rome to share the gospel more boldly. Paul said some did so out of good motives of obedience and love, while others who saw Paul as a rival did so out of selfish ambition since Paul was 'out of the way'. Either way, Paul sees how God is using his circumstances to advance the good news of Jesus.

Even so, Paul's fate was still very much in the balance. The upcoming trial would result in his release or his death. Despite this, Paul shares his resolve to let his entire life be a witness to Christ saying, "to live is Christ and to die is gain". No matter his own circumstances, Paul was determined to let them give witness to Christ. This determination is at the heart of Christian witness. No matter what circumstances we encounter, everything can be used to exalt Christ and give witness to the salvation he offers. Anything that happens, good or bad – even to imprisonment and death – can be used to further the gospel and give glory to God.

Scripture: **Philippians 1:12-21**

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon? Was there anything you felt like you needed to rethink or something you were called to do?
3. How did this message change the way you think about being a disciple?

### Questions from the Bible:

*Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear to throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone that I am in chains for Christ. (verses 12-13)*

1. How does Paul claim his difficult circumstances have advanced the gospel?
2. How might Paul have used his circumstances as an opportunity to share his faith in Jesus?

*And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. (verse 14)*



WITNESS

**Share  
your  
story**



3. How would Paul's example have inspired others to be even more bold in their sharing of the gospel?
4. How does imitation and closeness affect people over time?

*I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (verse 20-21)*

5. What does this say about Paul's mindset about his precarious future?
6. What does Paul mean by 'to live is Christ and to die is gain'?

### Questions for Growth

1. How have you seen God act through good/bad circumstances in your life?
2. Have you ever shared this with someone who doesn't believe in Jesus? Why or why not?
3. What sources of courage can you find to help enhance your willingness to witness?
4. Are there circumstances in your life right now that could be used as a witness to others?
5. Who are the people that you feel you would be best situated to reach for Christ right now?

Resources *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/18855-real>

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/2311-authentic-witnessing-in-todays-world>

1. Question for Discussion – what are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge

- In a journal or notebook, list out some of the circumstances (good or bad) you are experiencing in your life right now.
- Reflect on how you could give witness to God's power in your life even in these circumstances to those around you.
- List some ways you can prepare yourself to share or demonstrate your faith in these circumstances.
- Pray for God to reveal to you further opportunities to advance the gospel.

## Session 5: Service

### Background:

*This will help the context of the session if someone from your group reads this aloud.*

Throughout the letter to the Philippians, Paul is encouraging the Philippian church to be unified in their mindset – to share the same attitude as Christ. Paul points to the servanthood shown in Jesus Christ to be a distinguishing mark of the Christian community. The unity that Paul is encouraging is not unity of intellectual thought but a shared attitude in Christ. Christians are to have the same love that Jesus Christ demonstrated in his life and ministry.

Paul is specific about how this attitude is embodied. Instead of acting out of selfish ambition, Christians should act out of humility. This would have been a counter-cultural command at the time. Humility was not considered a virtue in the ancient cultures; it was a sign of servility only appropriate in lower classes. The humility Paul pointed to is not one of false modesty or low self-esteem. Instead, it encourages the recognition of the rights and value of others. The second way this shared attitude of Christ would work its way out in life was through service – looking to the needs of others rather than your own. The strength of Paul's words here indicates that the Christian life is defined by service – no one can claim to have the same mindset as Christ without engaging in service to others.

Scripture: **Philippians 2:1-4**

*Before engaging in the questions, have someone in your group read the Scripture passage aloud*

### Sermon Reflection:

1. What was something you want to make sure you remember that came from the sermon this week?
2. What challenged you about this sermon? Was there anything you felt like you needed to rethink or something you were called to do?
3. How did this message change the way you think about being a disciple?

### Questions from the Bible:

*Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. (verses 1-2)*

1. What is Paul asking the Philippians to do in this passage?
2. Why should being united with Christ lead to a shared attitude or like-mindedness?



SERVICE

**Join  
God in  
building  
up others**

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (verses 3-4)*

3. Read Philippians 2: 6-11. Why does Paul say humility is crucial for Christian living?
4. What belief about others is necessary to serve as Christ served?
5. What does this passage say service is?

### Questions for Growth

1. Can you think of people in your life that demonstrated humility? What made them humble?
2. How is humility different from false modesty or low self-esteem? How can you tell the difference between these in peoples' lives?
3. Can you identify areas of your life that are defined by selfish ambition or vain conceit?
4. What are ways you can work toward a shared attitude of love and service with others?
5. What are some tangible ways you can look to serve the needs of others above your own this week?

Resources *Consider starting one of these Bible reading plans to go deeper on this topic*

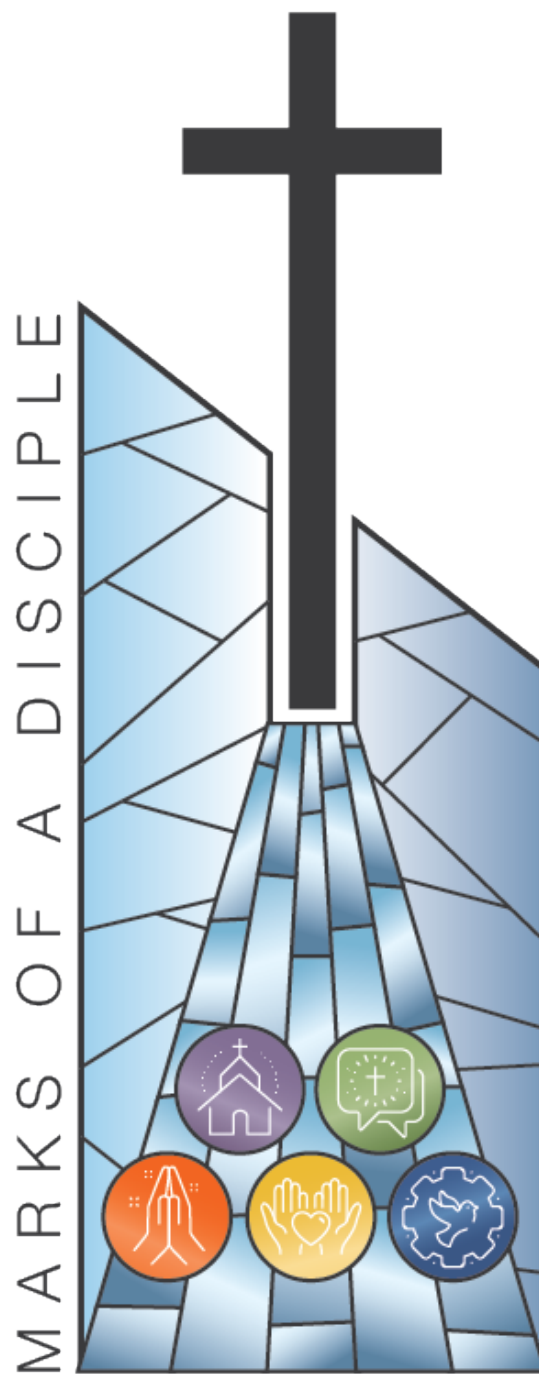
<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/25013-christian-foundations-4-service>

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/25067-real-hope-a-heart-of-service>

1. Question for Discussion – what are you reading in the Word this week?
2. How is your reading growing you in the Marks of Discipleship - prayers, presence, gifts, witness, service?

### Growth Challenge

- Brainstorm ways that your growth group could serve others together.
- Follow through with one of these possibilities by planning and scheduling it in your group members' calendars.
- Pray that God would shape your mindset to one of humility and service in preparation for this plan.



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