To Live is Christ

A Core Group Study Guide on the Book of Philippians

This six-week Bible study is intended for use in core groups, or as a personal Bible study. It is also designed to work in conjunction with the MNL Sermon series on Philippians, “To Live is Christ,” should you desire to follow along week by week.

The study will not be all encompassing, but will be a jumping off point for further understanding of Paul’s letter to the Church in Philippi. Each week will focus on a different lesson, but all will stem out of the heart message of the letter: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Overview

Context for Paul’s Letter to the Church in Philippi:
   Historical Background

Week One: Philippians 1:12-26
   To Live is Christ: Transforms Everything

Week Two: Philippians 2:1-30
   To Live is Christ: Transforms our Relationships

Week Three: Philippians 1:27-30, 3:17-21
   To Live is Christ: Transforms our Convictions

Week Four: Philippians 3:1-16
   To Live is Christ: Transforms our Walk with God

Week Five: Philippians 4:1-13
   To Live is Christ: Transforms our Inner Life

Week Six: Philippians 1:1-11, 4:14-23
   To Live is Christ: Transforms our Priorities
Context for Paul’s Letter to the Church in Philippi

Philippi, an urban political center and Roman colony located at the eastern end of central Macedonia (currently Greece). Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled there after Paul’s divine vision of the Macedonian man begging him to “come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Upon arriving in Philippi, they looked for ways to share the Gospel. One Sabbath, they went to a place of prayer and met Lydia, a worshiper of God and a wealthy cloth merchant. She responded to their message on Christ, as did the rest of her household! She would end up hosting the first house-church in Philippi. Later, they freed a slave girl from demonic oppression and were imprisoned as a result. Despite abuse and captivity, God used the situation for the salvation of their jailer and his family. The Philippian church was beginning.

Although the length of their stay is unknown, the visit (in addition to a few subsequent visits) was long enough to establish a close spiritual friendship. It is on the basis of this friendship that we find the foundation for Philippians. There were two major reasons for Paul’s writing. First, the Philippian church was in the midst of persecution of Roman citizens who were fiercely allegiance to their emperor. They viewed the emperor as their “Lord and Savior”, whereas believers in Christ could not. Hence, their rejection from Roman approval. Paul wanted to encourage them to hold strong to joy despite this persecution. In addition, Paul wrote because of internal unrest and conflict within their church. He was concerned that this could prevent their unification in the face of persecution, and diminish their witness.

Ultimately, as always, Paul’s main purpose in penning the letter was to draw their attention to the Gospel. He was always guiding and leading believers back to the importance of Christ in all situations. Jesus Christ was the answer to facing persecution, embracing humility in all relationships, and rejoicing always.
To Live is Christ: Transforms Everything
Philippians 1:12-26

Objective:
This week introduces us to the phrase “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” When living for Christ, your outlook on every area of life is transformed! Specifically, this week’s text explores how Paul had a life of joy in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Opening Questions:
1. Was there ever a period in your life that felt like it was bad, but turned out to be good in some way?

Body of this Week’s Study:
Paul is clearly imprisoned while writing this epistle. But instead of harping on his hardships and difficulties, he finds the strength to rejoice! How? Because his joy comes from his relationship to Christ, not from earthly circumstance. He explains it this way: to live is Christ, and to die is gain. In life, he could serve Jesus, and in death, he would get to be with Him — either way Paul’s source of joy was secure! When you live for anything other than Christ (success, comfort, romance), your joy is dependent on if you have that thing at that time. And if you live for anything other than Christ, death is always a loss because that thing is gone.

Paul also had joy because he realized that when living for Christ, what appears to be a setback may really be a divine set-up! Consider: the palace guards responsible for Paul were the emperor’s private bodyguard. This guard was incredibly influential in the Roman Empire, and likely difficult to reach. As a prisoner, a different palace guard would have been chained to Paul every four hours for their shift. So every four hours, Paul got to share the message of Christ. Later he mentions that “the saints in Caesar’s household send their greetings.” The point? People were coming to faith in the most hard-to-reach and influential places! God was using Paul’s imprisonment to change the face of the Roman world.

Read: Philippians 1:12-18

Text Questions: feel free to shape any questions according to the needs of your group.
1. What is happening to Paul at the time of his writing this letter?

2. Why does Paul say it is actually beneficial for him to be suffering in prison (v12)?

3. Why would Paul’s “brothers in the Lord” have been made more confident by his imprisonment (v14)? (They saw God using it for good.)

4. How do you think most people would likely feel if they were imprisoned by the Roman guard? What emotion is Paul experiencing (v18)? Why?
Application Questions:
1. Paul’s joy was not rooted in his circumstances or his life compared to others. Where did it come from? (ex. relationship with Christ)

2. If God used Paul’s imprisonment for good, what are ways he could potentially use your hardships for His glory? Give concrete examples.

Read: Philippians 1:19-26

Text Questions:
1. What do you think “to live is Christ” means?

2. Why would Paul consider dying to be more desirable (v23)?
   
   Important to note: Paul saying he prefers death is not referring to suicidal thinking. Rather, he’s using a literary device to emphasize that being with Christ is the best possible thing. The point is that death is no longer something to be feared. If needed, show how Paul’s main emotion in this text is joy (v18).

3. Why would Paul consider living to be more necessary (v24)?

4. What choice does Paul make?

Application Questions:
1. Paul presents us with an equation: If “to live is ________,” then “to die is ________.” How do others at UVA fill in the blank: “To live is ________”? 

2. When Paul fills in the first blank of the equation with Christ, the second blank becomes gain. When you fill in the first blank with any of the above answers, what does the second blank become? (If life is money/fame/comfort, then death is loss.)

3. What do you find yourself tempted to replace “Christ” with?

4. Discuss as a group: How can we grow in living for Christ? (ex. devo life, lordship)

Creative Implementation for the Week/Spiritual Exercise:
Since it is early in the semester, break into lunch buddies to reconnect!

Memory Verse:
“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (1:21)