

Paul's Prison Epistles

Lesson Guide

LESSON
FIVE

PAUL AND THE
PHILIPPIANS



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CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE	3
PREPARATION	4
NOTES.....	5
I. INTRODUCTION (0:26)	5
II. BACKGROUND (2:22)	5
A. Relationship (3:33)	5
B. Suffering in Prison (8:41)	6
C. Conditions in Philippi (17:11)	7
1. Concern for Paul (17:49)	7
2. Problems for the Church (22:03)	8
III. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT (28:53)	9
A. Salutation, 1:1-2 (29:43)	9
B. Thanksgiving, 1:3-8 (31:10)	9
C. Prayer, 1:9-11 (32:22)	9
D. Body, 1:12-4:20 (33:12)	10
1. Paul's Perseverance, 1:12-26 (34:55)	10
2. Exhortations to Persevere, 1:27-4:9 (39:14)	11
3. Affirmation of Perseverance, 4:10-20 (53:23)	13
E. Final Greetings, 4:21-23 (55:34)	13
IV. MODERN APPLICATION (57:01)	13
A. Nature of Perseverance (58:17)	13
1. Definition (58:40)	13
2. Necessity (1:02:11)	14
3. Assurance (1:04:15)	14
B. Mindset of Perseverance (1:06:49)	15
1. Humility (1:07:16)	15
2. Optimism (1:16:49)	17
3. Joy (1:20:06)	17
C. Ministry of Perseverance (1:24:00)	18
V. CONCLUSION (1:29:44)	19
REVIEW QUESTIONS	20
APPLICATION QUESTIONS	26

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read the book of Philippians.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:26)

II. Background (2:22)

A. Relationship (3:33)

Paul had planted the church in Philippi during his second missionary journey, around the year A.D. 49 or 50.

In Philippi, Paul (Acts 16:12-40):

- gained his first European convert.
- was jailed for an exorcism.
- led the Philippian jailer to a profession of faith in Christ.

The church in Philippi was poor and not always able to help Paul financially. But when they had opportunity, they gave to him generously (4:10, 18; 4:15-16).

Paul referred to the Philippians as his “dear friends” — *agapētos* (2:12, 4:1).

B. Suffering in Prison (8:41)

Throughout his long ministry, Paul often suffered greatly. He was:

- whipped, beaten with rods
- hunted by assassins
- imprisoned many times
- stoned and left for dead

At times, he was depressed, even despairing (2 Corinthians 1:8).

Paul's theology encouraged him that God was working for good, even through suffering but his heart was still heavy, and his sorrow was profound.

Paul spoke frequently of death as a welcome relief from his suffering. (1:20-23; 3:10).

Paul's circumstances were so oppressive that the benefits of being with Christ outweighed his desire to continue in ministry, and even his hatred for death itself.

Paul knew that his death was a real possibility, and so he tried to prepare his friends in Philippi for the worst, but also encouraged them to hope for the best.

C. Conditions in Philippi (17:11)

1. Concern for Paul (17:49)

The Philippians demonstrated their concern by sending:

- a gift to meet Paul's earthly needs (4:18).
- Epaphroditus to deliver the gift and minister to Paul (2:25).

Epaphroditus delivered a report to Paul expressing the Philippians' fear that:

- Paul was being persecuted by other believers.
- a threat of death hung over his head.

The Philippians were worried that Paul might die, whether through assassination or public execution.

2. Problems for the Church (22:03)

a. Persecution

After Paul planted the church in Philippi, he encountered great resistance from Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-13).

It's reasonable to think that these same Jews, or others like them, also troubled the church in Philippi.

b. False Teachings

Paul prepared the Philippians to reject false teaching.

Paul may have been concerned about:

- heresies that had threatened the churches in Colosse and the other cities of the Lycus Valley.
- Christian Judaizers from Jerusalem (see Gal.2:11-21; Rom. 4:9-17).

c. Conflicts

The Philippians struggled with conflicts among believers within the church (2:1-3; 4:2).

Paul spent a substantial amount of his letter emphasizing the importance of unity and love in the church.

III. Structure and Content (28:53)

A. Salutation, 1:1-2 (29:43)

Paul is the primary author of the letter. The letter also comes from Timothy.

Philippians is Paul's only letter that never calls explicit attention to his apostolic authority.

B. Thanksgiving, 1:3-8 (31:10)

Paul begins with a fairly standard statement of thanks, speaking of (1:3-6):

- The joy the Philippians have brought to him
- His expectations for their ultimate salvation

Paul's thanksgiving uniquely emphasizes his depth of love for the Philippians (1:7-8).

C. Prayer, 1:9-11 (32:22)

Paul's prayer is packed with statements that reflect the emphasis of the entire letter:

- Make proper judgments
- Perform good works
- Persevere in faith and practice
- Bring glory and praise to God

D. Body, 1:12-4:20 (33:12)

Paul let the Philippians know how much he loved them and how thankful he was for their friendship and ministry.

1. Paul's Perseverance, 1:12-26 (34:55)

Paul persevered by finding reasons to be joyful despite his suffering.

a. Present Ministry, 1:12-18a

Even though Paul was suffering in prison, he was happy that his present ministry continued to thrive (1:17-18).

b. Future Deliverance, 1:18b-21

Paul focused on the possibility that he might eventually be released from prison.

c. Future Ministry, 1:22-26

Paul looked to the possibility of a future ministry to the Philippians as a source of joy.

2. **Exhortations to Persevere, 1:27-4:9 (39:14)**

Paul instructed the Philippians to remain faithful to Christ and to live exemplary lives even in the midst of distressing circumstances.

a. **Importance of Perseverance, 1:27-2:18**

God had planned the Philippians' sufferings as a means of blessing them.

Paul wanted the Philippians to rejoice in the midst of suffering because of the blessings it produces.

b. **Help for Perseverance, 2:19-30**

Paul determined that, along with his letter, he would send friends to minister to the Philippians in their time of need:

- Paul sent Epaphroditus back to them in order to ease their minds as well as to minister to them.
- Paul planned to send Timothy to Philippi.
- Paul hoped that he would be released from prison, and would come to minister to the Philippians.

c. Examples of Perseverance, 3:1-16

Paul was a positive example of perseverance in the faith:

- Mindset
- Behavior

Paul refused to rely on his earthly merits but depended only on Christ's merit, which God credited to him by means of faith.

We must maintain our faith and live holy lives, or else we prove our faith to be false.

Professing faith is not enough — we must prove our faith by persevering.

d. Challenges to Perseverance, 3:17-4:9

Paul encouraged the Philippians not to falter in their faithfulness to God despite:

- false teachers
- conflict within the church
- personal hardship

True believers within the church could present challenges to the perseverance of other believers.

Believers should ask God to relieve their anxieties.

3. Affirmation of Perseverance, 4:10-20 (53:23)

Paul closed the body of this letter affirming the Philippians' perseverance in faith and Christian living.

Paul thanked the Philippians for sending money to relieve his suffering, but the real value of these funds was in touching Paul's heart (4:12-14).

E. Final Greetings, 4:21-23 (55:34)

The mention of believers within Caesar's household demonstrates that Paul's imprisonment had not hindered his gospel ministry.

IV. Modern Application (57:01)

A. Nature of Perseverance (58:17)

1. Definition (58:40)

Paul conceived of perseverance in terms of true faith and righteous living (1:27).

All Paul's human status and good works were useless for obtaining true righteousness and salvation (3:8-9).

As long as we continue to rely solely upon Christ's merit for our righteousness, we are persevering, standing firm in our faith.

2. Necessity (1:02:11)

If we fail to maintain true faith:

- we will not be found in Christ.
- we will not be resurrected to a life of eternal glory.

If we do not persevere in righteous living, we prove ourselves to be unbelievers, and we will not be saved.

3. Assurance (1:04:15)

Every true believer will certainly persevere in both faith and righteous living, so that our salvation is guaranteed.

If we truly believe, there is no way that we can fall from faith or from grace (1:6; 2:12-13).

B. Mindset of Perseverance (1:06:49)**1. Humility (1:07:16)**

Paul knew he had every reason to be humble before God. By accepting this reality, he prepared himself to be built up by God.

Paul patterned his mindset after Jesus, who willingly humbled himself in order to obtain God's blessings for himself and for us.

In support of his exhortations to be humble, Paul included his "Christ hymn" (2:6-11) describing Christ during three stages of history:

- Pre-incarnate state – Christ's condition before he took on flesh

- Glorious

Before he became a human being, Christ was glorious — in the "nature" or "form" of God (*morphē*).

- Humble

The pre-existent Son made his humility known by his willingness to take on the form or nature of our humanity.

- Humiliation — the period of Christ's earthly life from his conception to his death on the cross

- Inglorious

The Son of God put aside his divine glory in order to take the nature or form of a human being.

Christ did not give up any divine attributes but added a complete human nature to his complete divine nature.

- Humble

His humility was so extreme that he permitted himself to be murdered by the very creatures whose form he had taken as his own (2:7-8).

- Exaltation — The period beginning with Christ's resurrection and ascension that continues now in his rule over creation

- Glorious

Christ regained his glorious form, being exalted as the ruler of the universe, to whom every creature bowed in submission and worship. Second,

- Humble

Christ continues to be humble, even in this exalted, glorious state of universal sovereignty — his rule over creation is intended to glorify the Father.

Humility helps us persevere in righteous living and in faith.

2. **Optimism (1:16:49)**

Paul's optimism was a conscious decision to focus his attention on those things that were truly good instead of those things that were truly bad.

Focusing on the good and fighting anxiety and discouragement is a means of calling on God to guard our hearts and minds (4:6-8).

3. **Joy (1:20:06)**

Paul concentrated on finding joy in order to persevere through his distressing circumstances (1:18-20).

Paul's joy was not a denial of pain and suffering, but despite his troubles, he was able to look at the good things in life and rejoice over them.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to be joyful because the Lord was:

- their help in time of need.
- the king who would return to bring his reign of peace to all the earth.

By patterning our mindset after Paul's, we can strengthen ourselves against anxiety and despair.

C. Ministry of Perseverance (1:24:00)

The Philippians' ministry to Paul helped him to persevere at many stages of his ministry. They provided:

- material support
- encouragement
- physical presence

The Philippians' gift somewhat alleviated Paul's suffering, so that persevering became a bit easier.

Paul intended his ministry to help the Philippians persevere through their own trials (1:3-4).

We can learn much from the way the Philippians ministered to Paul by providing:

- material support
- encouragement
- physical presence

We can teach others how to persevere through sound doctrine and practical advice.

V. Conclusion (1:29:44)

5. In what areas did Paul persevere? By what means did he persevere?

6. What types of exhortations to persevere did Paul offer to the Philippians?

9. Summarize three aspects of the nature of perseverance mentioned in this lesson.

10. Explain three characteristics of the proper mindset of perseverance.

11. In what ways does the church express the ministry of perseverance?

12. How should the modern church apply Paul's teachings about perseverance?

Application Questions

1. Paul wrestled between his desire to depart and be with Christ, and his continued usefulness in ministry on this earth. How can knowing that God has a purpose for each of us on this earth help you to persevere?
2. Paul had many friends in Philippi who ministered to him, which brought him great encouragement. Has anyone ministered to you in a time of need? What impact did that have, and how did it help you persevere?
3. How can our salvation be both secure in Christ (John 3:36; John 17:3; Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 3:22-24), yet still depend upon our perseverance in faith?
4. Paul's optimism in the midst of discouragement and suffering helped him to persevere. How does the cultivation of a thankful heart to God help in perseverance?
5. How can rejoicing in the Lord and praying about our anxieties bring us peace and help us persevere?
6. How can pride hinder our perseverance?
7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?