



GOALS

As students experience Philippians 1, they will. . .

- find out about Paul's life situation when he wrote Philippians.
- learn how to pray more powerfully for each other.
- get a handle on how God can help them stop the "commit-fail cycle."

MATERIALS: Group

- Optional: Colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- To make it fun, you may want to reward the students who correctly answer the "Bonus" review question (see below). If so, you'll want to pick up an inexpensive gift such as candy or a \$5 gift card from iTunes or the coffee house where you meet.

MATERIALS: Each Student

- A Bible
- A pen
- Student Pages
- Scripture sheets for Philippians 1

SESSION INTRO

Prayer

After everyone has their coffee or coffee drink, pray for your group in the same way Epaphras prayed for his friends in Colossians 4:12—that they "may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."

Review

Help your students stay connected to the big themes of this study by asking the following questions:

- **Who wrote Philippians? What kind of book is it?**
- **Who did God use (besides Paul) to start the church in Philippi?**
- **Bonus Question: What was Lydia's occupation? (You may want to give a prize to the student who can come up with the answer to this one!)**

DIGGING IN

After you've settled into your table with your coffee, remind your students that since Philippians is a letter from Paul (with help from Timothy) to Christians in Philippi, studying Philippians is going to be a lot like reading someone else's mail. One of the best ways to understand the letter is to find out as much as possible about both the writer and the people he wrote it to.

Have your students read Philippians 1 using their Scripture sheets. As they read, have them mark every mention of the writer, Paul. They should look for words like "I," "me," and "my"—in addition to the name "Paul."

When most of your students have finished, discuss Paul's situation as a group. Ask your group to condense Paul's circumstances into a few words. Ask students to answer the questions about Paul's life situation on their journal pages with one-ish word answers. After a minute ask students to share their responses.

Paul's Life Situation:

What's one word that describes Paul's journey?	<i>Rough</i>
Where is he apparently writing from?	<i>Prison (in chains)</i>
Near the end of the passage, what seems to be occupying his mind?	<i>Death</i>
What can you deduce about Paul's age?	<i>He's old</i>
Does it seem that Paul's rough journey is getting the best of him?	<i>No; not even close</i>

Then ask:

What type of relationship did Paul have with the Philippians?

- It appears to have been a very close, "soul-mate" type of relationship.
- Paul is grateful for them and interested in their spiritual growth.

At one point Paul wrote that he was praying for the Philippians. What was he praying for?

- That their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

Why was Paul praying for that?

Some students may venture a guess on that last question, but be sure to explain that we don't have to guess why Paul was praying this—he told them why. Tell your group about terms of conclusion such as "therefore," "so that," and "that." Then ask them to look for a concluding phrase in Philippians 1:9–11. Once they've found this, they should be able to tell you why Paul is praying that the Philippians' love will abound. Direct students to record these three reasons on their journal pages in the spaces provided. They'll see that we've supplied a head start.

Why Paul Is Praying:

1. That they can discern what is best.
2. That they may be pure and blameless.
3. That they may be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ.

TAKING IT INWARD

Share that when we see a prayer like this recorded in God's Word, we should always take note; it's guaranteed to be a prayer that's pleasing to God. Ask your group to think for a minute about these three elements of Paul's prayer, and then choose one of the elements that they need help with right now. After a couple of minutes, ask volunteers to share what they chose and why.

(NOTE: You may need to explain what *righteousness* means in the context of Philippians 1:11. A simplified definition of *righteousness* is "a right relationship with God." Another definition is "freedom from guilt or sin.")

As each student shares, have the students write that student's name beside the item he or she needs prayer for. This week, their assignment is to pray for one another as Paul prayed for his friends. You may want to take time here to allow your students to pray for each other—or leave time for this at the close of the session.

DIGGING DEEPER

It's time to go a level deeper in Philippians 1. Have your students reread Philippians 1:1–8, using their Scripture sheets. This time, they should mark every mention of God. (Ask your group what they think a good symbol might be for marking "God"—or suggest something simple like a cloud.) Remind them to watch for pronouns like "He."

When most have finished, ask the group to look at the symbols they drew for God on their Scripture sheet and to tell you the trait or action of God that strikes them the most. Here are some possible responses:

God:

- Gives grace and peace (v. 2).
- Is our Father (v. 2).
- Should be thanked (v. 3).
- Began a good work in the Philippians (v. 6).
- Will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ (v. 6).
- Can testify how much Paul longs for the Philippians (v. 8).

Then ask:

Which of these tell us something about what God is doing in the lives of the Philippians?

-God began a good work in them

AND

-God is carrying it on to completion until the day of Christ (the day when Christ returns)!

Draw your students' attention to this truth by asking the following questions:

Who is the subject of this verse (the one doing the action)?

-God

Who is being acted upon?

-the Philippians (and us—Christians reading this passage today)

What is God doing?

-beginning and finishing His work in the Philippians (and us)

What do you think that "work" might be?

-saving us, teaching us, making us more like Jesus, helping us "grow up" from baby Christians to solid, mature Christians!

What is our job in this process?

-just let God do it!

TAKING IT INWARD

Talk with your students about the fact that Christians often reverse this process. We often make ourselves the subject of our relationship with God! We set up all kinds of rules and tasks to do in order to grow as Christians. We try to do the "inside work" ourselves.

If applicable, you may want to share a few examples from your own life. Perhaps there was a time when you got too busy "working for God"—rather than giving God time to "do His work" in you. Perhaps there was a temptation you struggled to overcome. Every day, you recommitted not to do this thing again— and then tried in your own power not to do it. Every time, you failed. Philippians 1:6 teaches that God, who began a good work in us, will complete the work if we will only let Him. Our job is to draw near to Him—to tap into His strength, His power, and His ability to do in us what we cannot do in and of ourselves.

This principle may be tough for students to grasp, but your personal illustrations will help. They may also have examples to share.

The passages below will help students build some muscle for placing confidence in God. Direct your students to read from their Bibles the following verses which are noted on their journal pages. As they read, have them write down anything they learn about the work God wants to do in them. When they've finished, they should do the exercise entitled "My Part of the Process" which they'll find on their journal pages.

Philippians 2:12–13	Hebrews 13:20–21
Titus 3:4–7	Ephesians 2:4–10

After your group has completed the exercise “My Part of the Process,” use these discussion-starter questions to, well, get discussion started:

How is God active in *initiating* our relationship with Him?

How have you (personally) allowed God to begin His work in you?

How is God active in *continuing* our relationship with Him?

What do you have going on in your life right now that’s evidence of the fact that God is working in you?

Look at Hebrews 13:20–21 again. How does this promise affect your search for God’s will in your life?

This is huge! Help your group understand that if we allow Him to, God will work His will IN us. He will equip us and work in us the things that are pleasing to Him. It’s almost like the teacher taking the test for us. We shouldn’t pray “God, what is your will?” but rather, “God, work your will in me.”

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Help your students apply the truth of this session by giving them a couple of minutes to do the “Putting Into Practice” exercise on their journal pages (also printed below). Suggest that your students tear off this portion of the journal page and keep it in a prominent place this week—used as a bookmark, taped to a bathroom mirror, or stuck inside a locker.

What adjustments can I make to allow God to complete His work in me? To allow God to work in me, I will . . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

After a few minutes, ask your students to think about what they learned about God through Christ in this session. They should boil this down to a simple statement and record it under the heading “What I Learned about Following Christ.”

Close the session by asking students to pray—aloud or silently—about the fact that God wants to begin and complete His work in them. Encourage them to make any changes they need to make in order to listen to God and allow Him to work in their lives. Also, remind them to pray the Philippians 1:9–11 prayer for one another this week!