

PHILIPPIANS

PHILIPPIANS

PARTNERS FOR LIFE



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

TIM THORBURN



INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES

PARTNERS FOR LIFE



The apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians is a favourite Christian letter, with its commands for us to rejoice in the Lord, to live in peace, to seek unity and to imitate the humility of our Saviour. Philippians also encourages us to be partners in the gospel—partners with Christ in the work of salvation, and partners with each other in giving, praying and serving the household of God. We are also warned not to be partners with those who oppose a life worthy of the gospel. In short, Philippians teaches us partnership for life.

In these eight interactive studies, we explore the meaning of this partnership, the threats to it, and the means by which we can persevere, knowing that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain".

Ideal for both individuals and groups.

 **matthiasmedia**
your partner in making disciples

ISBN 978-1-921896-18-7



9 781921 896187

» CONTENTS

How to make the most of these studies	5
STUDY 1: Partners in the gospel <i>[Philippians 1:1-8]</i>	9
STUDY 2: Praying for partners <i>[Philippians 1:9-11]</i>	17
STUDY 3: Finding freedom <i>[Philippians 1:12-30]</i>	23
STUDY 4: Jesus on unity <i>[Philippians 1:27-2:11]</i>	29
STUDY 5: Meeting the challenge <i>[Philippians 2:12-30]</i>	37
STUDY 6: True confidence <i>[Philippians 3:1-11]</i>	45
STUDY 7: Going for glory <i>[Philippians 3:10-4:1]</i>	53
STUDY 8: Standing firm <i>[Philippians 4:1-23]</i>	61

Partners for Life

Second edition

First published 2002

© Matthias Media 2011. This resource may only be used under a valid licence purchased from the publisher. Please familiarize yourself with and respect the licence conditions, which can be found at www.matthiasmedia.com.au/download_licence.

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God’s word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain four main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous studies in our Interactive Bible Study series have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. For this reason, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

[PHILIPPIANS 1:1-8]

Overview of Philippians

THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE THIS Bible letter to the church in Philippi. It is relatively short, which gives us the opportunity to begin these studies with a bird's-eye view of it.

Read through the entire letter and answer the following questions. If you are part of a study group, you might like to do this section *before* your first gathering.

1. What do we learn about the relationship between Paul and the Philippian Christians?

2. What major difficulties are the Philippian church facing?

3. Why has Paul written this letter?

4. What are the main topics of the letter? What and who is it about?

-
5. One of the key phrases in the letter is “the gospel”. What role does the gospel play in Paul’s life? What role does/should it play in the Philippians’ lives?
6. Although Paul talks about himself quite a lot, the central person in the letter is Christ. What does Christ mean to Paul, and which verse best captures this?

A shared identity and purpose

IN THESE DAYS OF INTERNET BUSINESS, international companies and jet travel, it is not unusual for people to be partners in business while living on opposite sides of the world. The manager may work from Tokyo while the sales staff operate out of New York. Regardless of location, they are all still held together in partnership by their common goal: to serve the good of their company or product.

The apostle Paul uses the word

“partnership” to describe his relationship with the Philippians (1:5). He also uses a similar idea in 1:7 (“partakers”). The biblical word is usually used of business partnerships—the relationship that develops from being partners in a particular enterprise or property. Some kind of shared endeavour holds the two parties together. Even when separated by imprisonment, Paul and the Philippians have a shared identity and purpose.

Read Philippians 1:1-8.

7. How does Paul feel about the Philippian Christians? Why does he feel like this about them?

8. In what are Paul and the Philippians partners? What do they share in common? (Also read Philippians 4:10-19.)

9. "Partnership" is mentioned in verse 5. What does this section teach us about why Paul wrote this letter?

10. How have the Philippians expressed their partnership with Paul? What do you think motivated them to do this?

11. When did their partnership start? How long has it been going? Did it stop when Paul left Philippi?

12. How do you think such a positive and warm relationship has developed between Paul and the Philippians?

13. What light does this shed on:

- the cause of Paul's joy (1:4)?

- Paul's confidence (1:6)?

- Paul's affection for the Philippians (1:7-8)?

THE WORD ‘PARTNERSHIP’ IS OFTEN correctly translated as ‘fellowship’. But ‘fellowship’ is a word Christians throw around with happy abandon. We have ‘fellowship’ after the service, where food and drinks are served in a comfortable atmosphere, and we report that “the fellowship was great” (even if the rest was lousy). We rightly think fellowship has something to do with warm relationships with others. Yet we are often disappointed with what passes for fellowship in the normal course of events.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians teaches a lot about genuine Christian fellowship. Fellowship is something we can have even when we aren’t in each other’s company, although it usually makes us long for that company (see 1:8). It is the relationship created by having a stake in a common property or enterprise. And Christians have some very significant common property—we are “partakers/sharers” in God’s grace (Phil 1:7). We each benefit enormously from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in forgiveness and hope and in the new life of God’s Spirit. Despite differences in race, gender and economic affluence (and hair style), what we share in common is far more significant

than these differences. (The disappointing thing is that we so rarely experience the fellowship Christ has created. It is easier and more comfortable to experience “weather fellowship” or “football fellowship” than Christian fellowship.)

And we can be partners in the cause of the gospel, as we work together to see the lost won to Christ and the won strengthened in faith, hope and love. Our roles may vary greatly—someone puts out chairs, another flicks switches on the PA system, someone else proclaims Christ through that PA system to those sitting on the chairs, another foots the bill, and all of us pray like crazy for God to be merciful to the hearers. But our common purpose creates a rich and energetic fellowship. In fact, for many of us the richest experiences of fellowship have been as part of a team working intensely in the cause of the gospel—on a beach mission, or a camp, or at a church outreach event.

The paradoxical thing about fellowship is that if we focus on *trying* to have fellowship, it usually falls flat. Fellowship is a by-product of focusing on the thing we hold in common. And what a terrific by-product it is!

-
- with people in your church?

- with people you know who are serving Jesus in other parts of the world?

» Give thanks and pray

- Give joyful thanks to God for the grace in which you share—for the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price for our sins.
- Thank God for those with whom you are partners in the gospel—both near and far—and ask God to give you “the affection of Christ Jesus” for them.