

## Welcome to the Calvin University Fall 2020 Bible Study!

Here are some ideas for leading, co-leading, or attending a study!

- ANYONE can lead a study! The leader sets the day, time, and place of the meeting and walks the group through the conversation sheet for each week. The leader can open and close in prayer, or ask someone else to do so. You are also welcome to find a co-leader.
- EVERYONE is welcome! If you've never been part of a bible study before or if you've led a bunch, you are welcome. This study is written to promote good conversation about things that matter. It's not a bible trivia game or a test to get your theology right. If you are curious about the bible or just want to be with a small group, you are welcome!
- There is a guide for each week that contains opening conversation prompts, the scripture passage of the week, and some prompts to talk about the passage. Copies can be made for each participant.
- We encourage you to gather joys and concerns from the group to include in the closing prayer. You may want to use a notebook to record the items and see how God answers prayer over the course of 6 weeks.
- You may want to provide snacks and/or beverages for your group, or meet over a meal. For example, some hosts ask each participant to bring a mug, and they use an electric kettle, tea bags and hot cocoa mix to provide warm drinks for their group. Other groups find that meeting over a meal once/week is a great way to fit the study into a full schedule.
- Honor the time! Each study is designed to be completed in 60 minutes. Leaders will need to keep an eye on the clock. You do not need to have every person answer every question.
- Pray before your group meets. Whether you are a leader or a participant, ask the Holy Spirit to gather with you when you meet. Ask to be attentive to what God wants to say to you and to the others as you meet.
- Acts 16:11-40 tells the fascinating story of how the church in Philippi began. Give it a read or a listen!

**Here's our line-up for the 6 week study:**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Passage</b>	<b>Memory verse</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1 – Sept 7-13	Phil. 1:1-11	v. 6; 9-11	Paul's prayer for us
2 – Sept 14-20	Phil. 2:1-11	v. 3	Jesus' example for us
3 – Sept 21-27	Phil. 3:4b-16	v. 13-14	Forgetting the past
4 – Sept 28-Oct 4	Phil. 3:17-4:1	v. 20-21	Where do we live?
5 – Oct 5-11	Phil. 4:4-9	v. 6, 8	Don't worry, think rightly
6 – Oct 12-18	Phil. 4:10-14	v. 12-13	Learning contentment

## Week one:

**Getting Settled:** Invite everyone take a deep breath and hold for 4 seconds, release for 4 seconds, inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, release for 4 seconds.

**Opening prayer:** As we gather, God, we pray for you to speak to us through the passage we read. Open our minds to understand, our hearts to believe, and our wills to act. Turn us away from distractions and call us to be here now, with you and our friends. Thank you for your word. Guide us as we read it together. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Warm-up question:** What do you hope to gain from the bible study?

Some possible answers: What I hope to gain from this bible study is....

To learn something about the bible  
To get to know new people  
To enjoy time with others  
To take a break from homework

To learn more about Jesus  
To be encouraged in my faith  
Other answers.....?

**Read the brief background and then passage aloud** (or listen to it<sup>1</sup>). Can have one person read the passage or have each person take a verse.

**Brief Background of Philippians:** Paul and Timothy are writing a letter to a church that Paul started in the city of Philippi. The book of Acts 16:11-40 tells the fascinating story of how this church began on the shores of a river, and how Paul and his companion got into a lot of trouble in Philippi and were thrown into jail. An earthquake shook the jail doors open, and the jailer himself was converted! Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome.

### **Philippians 1** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup> to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup> having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

1. Which verse caught your attention and why?
2. Paul writes about God completing the work in us. What would that look like in your life? Maybe a way to get an answer is to finish this statement: "I wish God would...."
3. How do you see God doing a good work in your life/ floor/ home/ friends/ family?

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<sup>1</sup> Check out Dwell, the Bible Experience, the Public Reading of Scripture or other apps for audio versions of the bible.

4. What would change in your life if your “love overflowed with knowledge and insight to help you determine what is best”?

**Closing prayer:** What joys, thanksgivings, or concerns would you like the group to pray about this week?

This is our prayer, Jesus: that our love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help us to determine what is best. On the day of Christ we want to be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. Help us this week to overflow with your love and to see how your love is at work in our lives.

Especially we pray for ..... *(add specific joys and concerns from your group)*

Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

### Week two:

**Getting Settled:** Invite everyone take a deep breath and hold for 4 seconds, release for 4 seconds, inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, release for 4 seconds.

**Opening prayer:** Thanks for bringing us back together, God. We are grateful for this letter that Paul wrote so long ago, and how your Spirit can use these old words to teach us new things. As we learn more about Jesus and his sacrifice for us, call us to places in our lives that need “emptying.” We pray this through Jesus, Amen.

**Warm-up question:** What makes us feel empty?

**Read the passage aloud** (or listen to it). Can have one reader or have each person take a verse.

Philippians 2:1-11:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the  
earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

**Fun fact:** this passage is often referred to as the “kenosis hymn,” from the Greek work kenosis which means “to empty.”

1. What difference does being “in person” make? (Think of all the online connections we have. What do you miss?)
2. In world religions, Christianity is unique in that a God became a human. Why does that matter?
3. As a group, name some specific things that Jesus gave up (“emptied himself of”) to become human.
4. What specific thing in your life can Jesus relate to because he is fully human?
5. How does Jesus’ humanity help you today?

**Closing prayer:**

What joys, thanksgivings, or concerns would you like the group to pray about this week?

Jesus, thank you for emptying yourself for us. You left the majesty of heaven for the dirt of a manger and the wood of a cross. You know what it feels like to be one of us and you know how each of us is feeling right now. Thank you for loving us. Show us what we need to empty ourselves of in order to love you more.

Especially we pray for ..... *(add specific joys and concerns from your group)*

**Week Three:**

**Getting Settled:** Invite everyone to close their eyes and be silent for 30 seconds.

**Opening prayer:** You are with us, Lord, in this place. Open up your word to use today. Show us the things we hold on to and the things we need to let go of. Set us free from a past we cannot change, and open us to a future in which we can be changed.<sup>2</sup> Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Warm-up question:** What qualities or achievements make a person “successful”?

**Read the passage aloud** (or listen to it). Can have one reader or have each person take a verse.

**Philippians 3:2-16:**

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

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<sup>2</sup> This line is from a prayer in the *PCUSA Book of Common Worship* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993; p. 88

<sup>7</sup>Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. <sup>16</sup>Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

1. Paul had an amazing pedigree as a well-educated Jewish man. This allowed him access, privilege, and power. But he calls all of that garbage. What things do people strive for that may be garbage?
2. Reflection question (can say this out loud or keep it to yourself): What is one thing from your past that you would like to forget?
3. How does the enemy remind us of the mistakes of our past?
4. What could “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” look like for followers of Jesus?

**Closing Prayer:** What joys, thanksgivings, or concerns would you like the group to pray about this week?

God of grace and mercy, thank you that “as far as the east is from the west so far have you removed our sins from us” (Psalm 103:12). Our past sins are over and done, and you invite us to a new life of freedom and peace. Silence the voice of the enemy in our ears, and help us to hear your voice of truth. Especially we pray for ..... *(add specific joys and concerns from your group)*

Through Jesus we pray, Amen.

#### **Week Four:**

**Getting Settled:** Invite everyone to close their eyes and be silent for 30 seconds.

**Opening prayer:** Thank you, generous God, for the gift of this group, your Word, and this time we have all set aside. Attend to us as we attend to you, and help us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Amen.

**Warm-up question:** If everyone lived as you lived, would your dorm be better or worse? Your classes? Family? Planet?

**Read the passage aloud** (or listen to it). Can have one reader or have each person take a verse.

#### **Philippians 3:17-4:1**

<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

1. Paul invites his readers to imitate him. Is there anyone (other than Jesus) who is living life in a way that you would like to imitate? (Have you ever told them?)
2. In this season of an election in the United States, what could it mean that our citizenship is in heaven?
3. Paul writes that our bodies will be conformed to the body of Jesus' glory when we are resurrected. This means that our bodies matter to God! How do people treat their bodies as if they matter to God? How don't they?
4. What is one thing you can do this week to live as if your body matters to God?

**Closing Prayer:** What joys, thanksgivings, or concerns would you like the group to pray about this week?

Thank you for creating us as people with bodies. Thank you that the resurrection of Jesus means that our bodies matter to you, and that we will someday be raised just as he was. Remind us that our citizenship is in heaven, no matter where our bodies live. Help us to care for our bodies as a gift from you. Especially we pray for ..... *(add specific joys and concerns from your group)*  
Through Jesus we pray, Amen.

## Week Five:

**Getting Settled:** Invite everyone to take two deep breaths.

**Opening prayer:** Your word, O Lord, speaks today of joys and worries, of peace and prayer. Help us to listen to the comfort you want to give us today. Through Jesus we pray, Amen.

**Warm-up question:** Name one thing that worries you.

**Read the passage aloud** (or listen to it). Can have one reader or have each person take a verse.

### **Philippians 4:4-9**

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

**Paul reminds his readers of two core things: 1) the Lord is near and 2) prayer is how we lay out our lives to the God who loves us.**

1. How do people/How have you experienced God's nearness?
2. If someone doesn't "feel" God, is that a problem in their faith life, or a pretty normal occurrence?
3. What true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent or praise worthy things can we think about this week?
4. What untrue, dishonorable, unjust, impure, or not commendable, excellent or praise-worthy things can we avoid, and how?
5. Prayer involves listening as well as speaking. How often do we speak in prayer compared with how much we listen?

**Closing Prayer:** What joys, thanksgivings, or concerns would you like the group to pray about this week?

We are grateful for this invitation to turn our worries into prayer. We are grateful for this invitation to turn our thoughts toward truth and honor. Thank you that you are a Lord who is always near, always listening. Help us to listen to you in all the ways you speak—through words, images, music, art, or friends. Thank you that you love us. Especially we pray for ..... *(add specific joys and concerns from your group)*  
Through Jesus we pray, Amen.

## Week Six:

**Getting Settled:** Invite everyone to hold their hands open on their laps and to close their eyes. Then offer the prayer.

**Opening prayer:** Meet us in this moment, O Lord, that we may listen to you and to each other. (Silence) Our open hands are a sign of our open minds and hearts. (Silence) Fill our hands, our hearts, our minds with just what we need today. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Warm-up question:** What is a food that you find very filling?

**Read the passage aloud** (or listen to it). Can have one reader or have each person take a verse.

### **Philippians 4:10-14**

<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

1. Paul say that he “learned to be content with whatever I have”. How do people learn to be content?
2. What draws us away from contentment?
3. What is Paul’s secret for contentment?
4. How could that secret shape our lives?

Finish this statement: I can do \_\_\_\_\_ through him who strengthens me.

**Closing Prayer:** What joys, thanksgivings, or concerns would you like the group to pray about this week?

Jesus forgive us for confusing our wants and our needs. We want so much, but we need so little. Continue to teach us contentment as we learn to rely on you alone. Strengthen us for the challenges of this season of life. Especially we pray for ..... *(add specific joys and concerns from your group)*  
We ask this in your name, Amen.