

For the first few months of 2020, we are working on a new format for Life Group discussion guides. These new guides will still use the Bible passages and topics from the weekend message, but they will also be designed to help your Life Group members learn how to study the Bible on their own. We will be using the acronym HEAR as a way to teach people to read the Bible and to organize these discussion guides. HEAR stands for **H**ighlight the passage, **E**xplain the passage, **A**pply the passage, and **R**espond to the passage.

Each week, there will be a page to print off for each member of your group. The printed sheet will have the Bible passage you'll discuss and some questions in the margins to guide them in examining those verses.

Additionally, there will be a leader's guide that will give you helpful notes on the passage (i.e. background information and definitions) as well as discussion questions to lead your group. These don't need to be printed for each member of your group.

These guides are designed to be discussed BEFORE the sermon, so the group can discuss the passage before the pastor shares his insights. However, they can just as easily be used after the weekend message.

Our hope is these tools will (a) help your group members learn to study/read their Bibles outside of the group and (b) give you a helpful outline for facilitating the group discussion. If you have comments or questions about the new format, we'd love to hear your constructive feedback. Send your feedback to me at

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In the months of January and February, we will be looking at making first and next steps towards true change in the areas of purpose, mental health, finances, and relationships.

### *How to Use This Discussion Guide*

- Use the summary statement for each week to quickly understand the text's theme. You can use that as a reference point to help guide your discussion or bring it back if your group begins to get off topic.
- Use the prayer prompt at the end of each guide to help you close in prayer.

Additionally, here are some tips and guidelines to help you lead these discussions:

1. **Choose the questions that best fit your group and your time constraints.** There are a lot of questions in this guide and your group may not be able to discuss them all. That's okay! You don't have to ask all of them. Before your group begins, choose the questions that are most likely to help your group understand what God is saying in the text and how to apply it to their lives.
2. **Prepare for your group time by reading the passages and the notes in a study Bible.** A good study Bible can give you some insights into the passages and how they connect to the whole book or the whole story of the Bible.
3. **Begin every group meeting with prayer.** We can only understand and apply God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, invite the Spirit to open your hearts and minds to what He says to His people.
4. **Keep the conversation focused on Scripture as much as possible.** Some people may want to bring in their opinions or continually refer to what the teaching pastor said during his message. This is helpful in small doses, but the goal of this discussion guide is to help you determine what God is saying in His Word. Encourage the group to continue to return to the Scripture. One way to do that is by saying, "That's a great insight! Where do you see that in the Scripture we're studying?"
5. **Encourage participation, but don't let anyone dominate.** Encourage everyone to share insights, ask questions, and read aloud. But don't allow any one person – even yourself, the leader – to monopolize the time. Some people are just unaware of themselves and how much they speak, so gently encourage them to listen and make space for others to talk.
6. **Help your group members to be specific in the application of Scripture.** It is easy to generalize when we talk about the Bible and how to apply it. So ask your group members specific questions – for example, "What part of the world do you sense God wants you to pray for? How will you do that? How will you make that a habit?"

We pray that you will hear God speak through His Word and that His Spirit will move you to obey Him. The Word of God – the Bible – lets us know the God who loves us and saves us. May this discussion guide help you and your Life Group to become more immersed in His story.

**Date of Sermon:** January 25-26 2020

**Topic of Sermon:** Moving from independence to connectedness

**Main Passage:** Philippians 1:1-6

**BEFORE your group meeting:**

- Look up the main passage in a study Bible and read the study notes
- Print off or send the “Group Member Guide” (page 4) for your group members
- Review the “Group Member Guide” for yourself
- Have enough pens for each group member.

**Topic of Life Group Meeting:** We can accomplish God’s will more effectively together rather than on our own.

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**Icebreakers (optional)**

- Do you prefer working with a team or working by yourself more? Explain.
- What is an example of a project that would work better if you worked with others?

Leader’s Note: Introduce the next part of the group meeting. You can read this introduction or put it in your own words:

*“Today, we’re going to spend a few minutes studying the focal passage on our own before we discuss it as a group. I’ve printed out a copy of the Bible passage for you. There are some questions in the margins to help you. Spend most of your time on the Highlight and Explain questions. Feel free to mark up, underline or highlight the passage. I’m going to give us about 5 minutes to do this. Let me begin by praying that God will open our minds and hearts to His Word.”*

When you come back together, use the questions below to guide the discussion.

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**HIGHLIGHT the Passage**

- What key ideas, words or phrases stood out to you from the passage today? What is the significance of those?
- Did this passage raise any questions for you?
- How would you summarize this passage in your own words? Would anyone else add or emphasize something to that summary?

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**EXPLAIN the Passage**

- What are some things this passage revealed about people?
- How are the Philippians described in verse 1? Why is that significant?
- How did Paul describe himself and Timothy in verse 1? What did this title imply?
- Paul often greeted churches with “grace and peace to you.” How would you define these terms – grace and peace?
- Why are grace and peace so important in church community?
- In what did the Philippian believers “partner” (v. 5) with Paul? Why can we do more for God by joining with others?
- What are some things this passage revealed about God? His nature, His work, or His character?
- Who does the work of completing the work in verse 6? Why is this an important verse in this passage?

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**APPLY the Passage**

- What truth from this passage do you need to cling to? What makes that truth significant to you?
- By God’s power, what is God calling you to change in how you think, speak, or act?
- What would our church be like if Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was fulfilled in our church? What could be the impact on our community?
- How can we – as a group – partner with each other for the sake of the gospel?
- How has the Holy Spirit gifted you to serve the church? How are you using this gift to serve?

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**RESPOND to the Passage**

- Finish your time in prayer, thanking God for drawing us together as a group and church. Pray for the leaders of our church and the churches around your location – that we would unite around the spread of the gospel.

## COMMENTARY NOTES ON THE MAIN PASSAGE

**1:1-2.** Paul was in prison in Rome, probably about A.D. 63. The Philippian believers had learned of his location and had sent a church member, Epaphroditus, to deliver a gift to him and to stay with him. Epaphroditus had become gravely ill but had recovered, so Paul sent him back with a letter that explained Epaphroditus's early return and gave information about his situation, addressed problems in the church, and expressed appreciation for the Philippian believers' support.

Paul identified himself and greeted the Philippian believers. His including Timothy in the greeting does not indicate Timothy co-wrote the letter; rather, Timothy was Paul's valued coworker who had been with the apostle in Philippi on the second missionary journey (see Acts 16:1-12). The Philippian Christians knew and respected Timothy (see Phil. 2:22). With genuine humility, Paul described himself and Timothy as slaves (servants) of Christ Jesus. The Greek word translated slaves literally means "bondslaves." The noun probably comes from a verb that means "to tie" or "to bind." A bondslave was totally subservient to his master's will. Paul and Timothy were at their Lord's disposal. The phrase Christ Jesus identified Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Savior.

Paul's letter was addressed to all the Philippian believers. He used the word "all" nine times in his letter—perhaps to stress that he excluded no one from his deep love or from his gratitude for the church's expression of care for him. He also may have wanted to underscore at the letter's beginning that the congregation was to be united. The word "saints" should be understood as a synonym for Christians. All Christians are in Christ Jesus—they live in the sphere of His lordship. Paul's phrase in Christ was another way to designate people committed to Christ.

Paul included the church's "overseers and deacons" in his greeting. At this time in church history, these terms primarily designated functions, not offices. Overseers probably were elders—older men with leadership responsibilities. Deacons were involved in ministering to church members' needs. Paul may have mentioned these church leaders in particular because they had recommended and supervised the collection of the church's gift to him.

Paul's consistent prayer for recipients of his letters was "grace and peace." As Christians' Father in the best possible sense, God provides grace and peace. Through faith in Christ, we become members of His family—His children. We live in His compassionate care. Paul's full designation the Lord (Deity) Jesus (which literally means "Savior") Christ (which means "Messiah or King") emphasized the Son's role in supplying grace and peace.

**1:3-6.** In his conversations with God, Paul remembered his positive, productive experiences with the Philippian Christians. The word "praying" conveys *continuous* action and has the idea of asking God to meet a need. In particular, Paul's petitions for the Philippian believers were infused with joy because of their partnership in the gospel. The term "partnership" or "fellowship" translates the Greek word *koinonia*, which comes from a verb meaning "to share," "to associate oneself with," "to be made a partner." This word connoted joining together as in a business venture, not the social connotations it has today.

Paul expressed his confidence in the Philippian Christians' continued spiritual growth. His certainty was not based on his ability or on their efforts but on God, who had started a good work in them. The beginning of God's good work occurred when the believers placed their faith in Christ. By His grace, God would carry their salvation on to completion (fully finish it). Paul and the Philippian believers shared in a common enterprise: spreading the gospel. They were joint participants in God's redemptive purpose. Here, the term "grace" referred to Paul's missionary ministry. With a solemn oath, Paul declared his intense, eager yearning to be reunited with his friends. Christ Jesus was the Source of Paul's deep desire. Through Paul, Christ's love reached out to his friends.

Life Group Member Guide

**Focal Passage:** Philippians 1:1-6 (ESV)

**Passage in Context:** Philippians 1:1-11 (ESV)



**Bible-Reading Tip:** Begin by asking God to open your eyes and hearts to His Word. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul writes that the Spirit – who lives inside everyone who believes in Jesus – knows the depths of God and reveals Him to those who follow Jesus. So, always begin your time of reading the Bible with a prayer for Him to open your eyes and ears to what He will reveal. This doesn't mean that you will always have an emotional encounter or a special revelation, but you are acknowledging that He is that One through whom all wisdom is revealed.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers 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 in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

**HEAR Bible Reading Method**

**HIGHLIGHT the passage**

- Underline any repeated words or key ideas you see.
- Note any questions you have about what you read.
- In 2-3 sentences, summarize what was said or what happened.

**EXPLAIN the passage**

- What was revealed about God? His character, desires, and/or actions?
- What was revealed about people? What we are/do or what we should be/do?

**APPLY the passage**

- From this reading, what truth do you need to embrace?
- By God's power, how will you THINK, SPEAK, or ACT differently based on what you read?

**RESPOND to the passage**

- Talk to God about what you've seen and learned in this passage.
- Ask Him to help you apply the truth to your life.