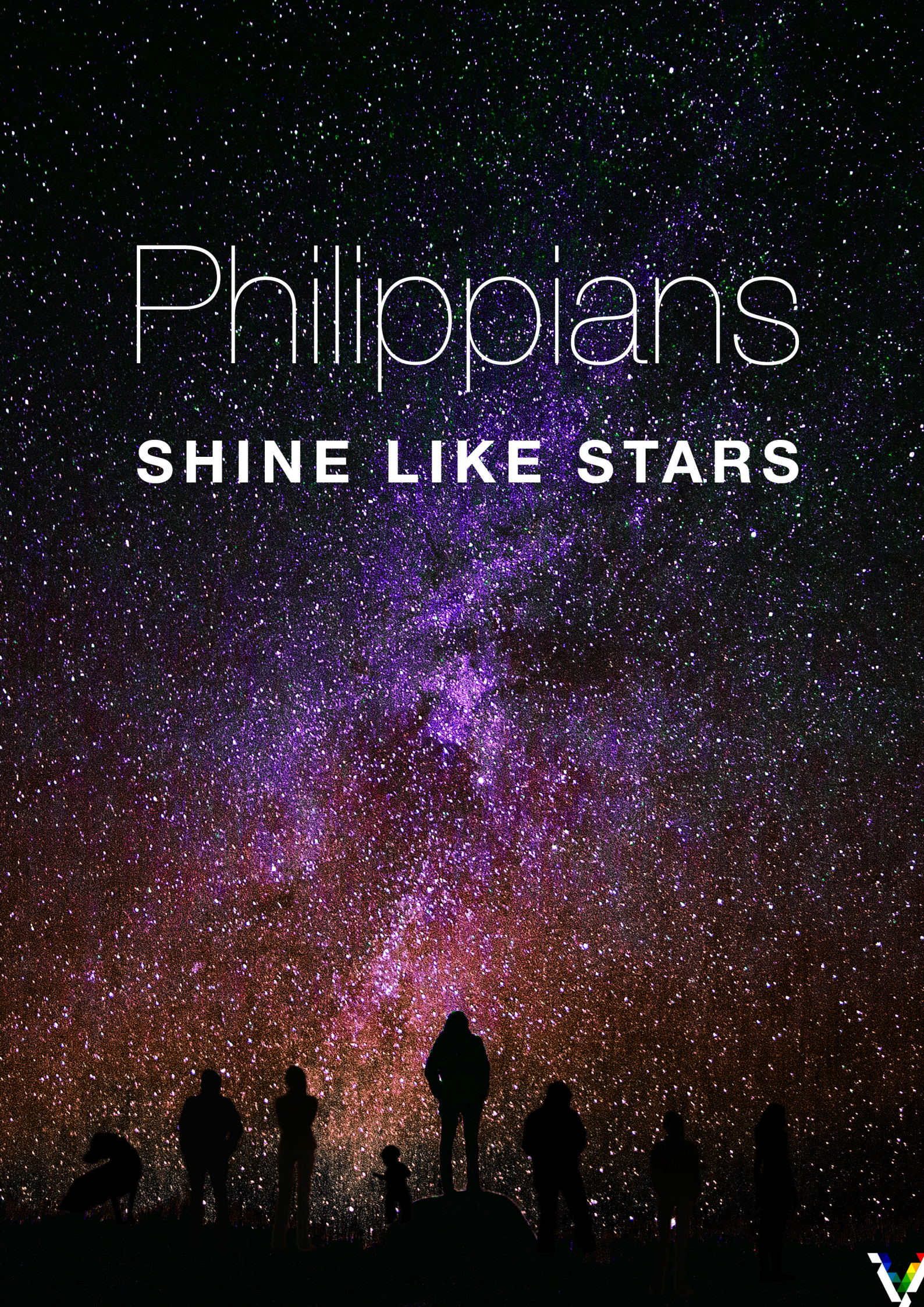
Philippians

SHINE LIKE STARS



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INTRODUCTION

WHO WROTE PHILIPPIANS?

The apostle Paul wrote Philippians, while bound in chains. We don't know exactly where his prison was—probably in Caesarea or Rome—but the location isn't too important to the the letter. The church at Philippi had a special place in Paul's heart, being the first church he founded in Europe. Paul was called to Macedonia because of a vision of a Macedonian man calling to him (Acts 16:6-10). While he had to defend his apostleship against false apostles in the Corinthian letters, and had to contend with agitators who preached a perverted gospel in Galatians, the church at Philippi were generous gospel partners. There was disunity and there were "enemies" to the church (1:28, 3:18), but Paul's warning is less dire and full of warmth.

WHY WAS PHILIPPIANS WRITTEN?

The letter was written to tell the Philippians (and us!) many things. After Paul's initial visit the church members maintained ties by sending gifts, and Paul is writing to thank them for their support. Epaphroditus brought Paul his latest gift, and almost died in doing so. Paul wanted to inform the church that Epaphroditus had recovered from a serious illness, and that he was planning to send Timothy to them soon (2:19), and offer them both as examples of Christ-centered, gospel-focused lives that Paul was encouraging the Philippians to live. But the letter is far more than an extended thank-you note. The letter was also a letter of encouragement, to express heartfelt gratitude for the many ways they support his ministry.

WHAT'S PHILIPPIANS ABOUT?

Philippians is a letter about knowing, feeling and acting in line with the greater things we have in Christ. It's a letter about joy, unity, humility, peace, growth in the gospel, and living for Christ in a dark world. No book of the Bible could be more suitable for our current season at Village Church as Philippians. Overflowing with joy and thanksgiving, Paul writes to the Philippians to encourage them to continue committing to one another as they follow Christ.

The ultimate focus of the book is Christ, who is the source of joy, the point for unity, the example of humility, the guarder of peace, and the hope of life. Philippians is unified by its joy; by the strong personal relationship between its author and its recipients; and by the many connections Paul draws between the saving work of Jesus Christ and the servant ministry of his followers. Followers who are called to live and die according to the pattern of the sufferings, death, resurrection, and glorious exaltation of Jesus himself.

It's also the only letter we have in the New Testament where Paul isn't trying to correct bad teaching or rebuke bad behaviour. It would seem that this is the best picture we have in the New Testament of what it looks like to be a mature man or woman in Christ. We see what it looks like to be someone who's growing as a follower of Jesus even here today in Brisbane city. And we see what it looks like when God creates communities that shine like stars.

Study One: Partners in Grace

As you go through the studies, use this space to jot down points for prayer:

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

1 Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus:

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in
Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, **4** always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **7** It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, **10** so that you can approve the things that are superior and can be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

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Philippians 1:1-11

Big idea: Jesus works in his people to make communities of grace, where hearts, minds and actions become like his.

1. Unlike other epistles Paul doesn't identify himself as an apostle in his greeting, but as a slave. Why do you think that is? (Hint: 2:5-7.)

2. Paul's opening prayers often introduce themes that will be fleshed out later in the letter. From this prayer, which themes would you expect to follow?

3. What do you think Paul has in mind when he talks about 'gospel partnership' (verses 3-5)? Do you find joy in gospel partnership like Paul does?

4. Read verse 6, and then verses 9-11. What does the future hold for the faith of the Philippians?

5. From verses 7-8 what does love for other believers look like?

6. In your own life experience, has there ever been anyone you could say these verses of? What was that like?

7. What holds us back from loving one another the way Paul and the Philippians loved each other?

8. From verses 9-11 what does a mature love of God look like?

Study Two: Living in Chains

As you go through the studies, use this space to jot down points for prayer:

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-30

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has actually resulted in the advance of the gospel, **13** so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard, and to everyone else, that my imprisonment is in the cause of Christ. **14** Most of the brothers in the Lord have gained confidence from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the message fearlessly. **15** To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and strife, but others out of good will. **16** These do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; **17** the others proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, seeking to cause me anxiety in my imprisonment. **18** What does it matter? Just that in every way, whether out of false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed. And in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice **19** because I know this will lead to my deliverance through your prayers and help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ. **20** My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now as always, with all boldness, Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. **22** Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. **23** I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ—which is far better— **24** but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. **25** Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, **26** so that, because of me, your confidence may grow in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

27 Just one thing: Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith that comes from the gospel, **28** not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your deliverance—and this is from God. **29** For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him, **30** having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

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Philippians 1:12-30

Big idea: Live for Christ, even amidst chains, evil and brokenness.

1. These verses talk a lot about motivation and confidence. Which different kinds of motivation and confidence are spoken of?

2. Why is confidence/boldness so important to Paul (verses 14, 20, 26, 28)?

3. From verses 12-14, how is the gospel working in Paul's situation?

4. Verse 21 says that death will be a "gain," and verse 29 says that it has been "granted to us" that we should suffer for the sake of Christ. Do you think Paul has an unhealthy view of pain and suffering? Why or why not?

5. It seems like every kind of pressure and suffering are facing Paul and his gospel work. Which pressures and/or sufferings are facing you, as you try to live and share the gospel?

6. What joy can you find in these challenges?

7. What does it look like to live for Christ, from verses 21-30?

8. What's one way that this passage calls you to live differently for Christ?

Study Three: The Heartbeat of Humility

As you go through the studies, use this space to jot down points for prayer:

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, **2** fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. **3** Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. **4** Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

5 Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus,
6 who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be used for His own advantage.
7 Instead He emptied Himself
by assuming the form of a slave,
taking on the likeness of men.
And when He had come as a man
in His external form,
8 He humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.
9 For this reason God highly exalted Him
and gave Him the name
that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
of those who are in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

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Philippians 2:1-11

Big idea: Because of the love and humility we've been shown, ultimately in Jesus, we should love humbly.

1. How does this passage follow on from chapter one?

2. What does unity look like in the first two verses?

3. Why is there such an emphasis on the Philippians' mind in this passage?

4. What would a Christian community look like if they listened to verses 3-4?

5. The hymn of verses 4-10 has quite an arc. Trace the humility and exaltation in the passage. What stands out to you?

6. What's the significance of the servant imagery in the passage?

7. Why did God exalt Jesus?

8. How have you been going at living out the calling of verse 5?

Study Four: The Honour of Humility

As you go through the studies, use this space to jot down points for prayer:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-3:1

12 So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. **13** For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose. **14** Do everything without grumbling and arguing, **15** so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world. **16** Hold firmly to the message of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run or labor for nothing. **17** But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. **18** In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.

19 Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I also may be encouraged when I hear news about you. **20** For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; **21** all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. **22** But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father. **23** Therefore, I hope to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. **24** I am convinced in the Lord that I myself will also come quickly.

25 But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus—my brother, coworker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need— **26** since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. **27** Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another. **28** For this reason, I am very eager to send him so that you may rejoice when you see him again and I may be less anxious. **29** Therefore, welcome him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in honor, **30** because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up what was lacking in your ministry to me.

3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a protection for you.

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Philippians 2:12-3:1

Big idea: Sincere, humble service for Christ is something to honour and to work for.

1. Who is working in verses 12-13? (See also 1 Corinthians 3.)

2. Verses 14-16 are full of contrast, culminating in the church shining like stars. What are the things of light? What are the things of dark?

3. How does Paul summarise his work in verse 17? (See Numbers 28:7.)

4. In verses 20-21, what does Paul commend in Timothy? How do you personally feel you're going with this?

5. From his description in 2:26, how well does Epaphroditus exemplify Paul's command in 2:4?

6. How much joy does Paul gather from having co-workers (including God!) in the gospel?

7. When have you found encouragement in your gospel co-workers?