

How to Study the Bible

by Nigel Lee

Bible study is an exercise of faith that requires perseverance and effort to understand the book and the picture of God in it.

Duration: 1:16:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Philippians 1:27 - 2:11

Topics: "Bible Study"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of tailoring one's testimony to different audiences and situations. He uses the example of Paul's testimony in 1 Timothy chapter one to demonstrate how different lessons can be drawn from one's personal experiences. The speaker then delves into the book of Philippians, encouraging listeners to read it repeatedly and seek understanding of God's character. He advises not to be discouraged by initial confusion and to take notes while studying the Bible. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God is always watching.

Transcript

Let me throw out, first of all, five simple principles, and then we'll see how we get on applying them as we go. And as I say, what I'm going to pass on is what I have learnt, what others have taught me, and there's no monopoly on its rightness or truth. But my own approach to any book of scripture is to begin usually by taking the whole book as a book.

To read the whole book through. Very often, in our Bible study, we read a few verses from the first chapter and then we try and squeeze some meaning out of that, and then we go on the next day and squeeze a bit more. It's sort of a toothpaste approach to Bible study.

You sort of squeeze a little bit out for each day. Would you apply that principle to the reading of almost any other piece of literature? An example I sometimes use is Shakespeare's play, Macbeth. Known well to you all, I'm absolutely sure.

You remember how it starts with those three witches? Just three old hags on the stage at the beginning of the play. And they're talking to each other. When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain? And if you were reading the play, you wouldn't say, now stop, let me just meditate deeply on this.

What is Shakespeare really trying to say? How is he trying to communicate? No, you'd wait to see. What are they up to? Why are they plotting? How do they drip poison into Macbeth's mind? How does that destroy his family, first of all? His close friends and associates, through jealousy and so on. And eventually the state, and cause the whole of Scotland to be carried into bloody war with England.

You don't understand that until you've read the whole thing. Now, it's the same with the Bible. Very often our approach to the Bible never gets beyond the daily word for me in a sort of present tense devotional, something to suck and meditate on during the day.

That's good. But it's not perhaps all that there is. Come Ray, you can sit here.

Your husband hasn't come, he's sent a tape recorder. Bye bye. The Lord gives, the Lord takes away.

So, read a whole book, right through, and read it again. If you were going to tackle something like Philippians, if you were thinking for your reading, your study, in the next two or three months, I would sit down and simply read the whole thing through. And at first sight, you don't know what it's about really.

It almost seems like chaos. And then read it right the way through again, from beginning to end. And don't stop to try and pick up all the jewels that you think are three inches under the surface on the way.

Again, read the whole thing right through again. And again. So that you get a sense, beginning to grow, of the purpose perhaps of the whole thing.

Secondly, a key question in Bible study is always, what is the picture of God himself that's emerging from this book? If our purpose in Bible study is to meet God, finally that must be it. Then you will notice, as you read around in the Bible, that God speaks of himself in quite different ways in different books of Scripture. For instance, the book of Daniel speaks of God as the Lord Most High.

Again and again that phrase comes. You get the impression that the Jews in exile are being reassured and taught by Daniel that God is sovereign. He's not limited to Israel.

He is also sovereign up in the refugee camps by the River Tiber, where they've been taken by the Babylonians. God Most High, it's a title for God. And it's a picture of God that comes again and again.

That doesn't come in Philippians at all. The picture of God in Philippians is quite different. We looked at perhaps the central passage this morning, very briefly, in our devotions.

It's a picture not of God Most High reigning in the affairs of men, but of a servant who humbles himself. No place is too low for him to come. Now, why not speak to the Philippians about God Most High? I mean, surely they need to know about God Most High, almighty, sovereign, reigning.

Why not speak to the Jews in exile about God in his humility? Why does God do that? Why in 2 Corinthians is Paul again and again reminding his readers that God is a God who comforts people. He's the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. You see, different books written for different reasons.

I mean, surely you're beginning to be aware of that in your own work using Scripture with people. If you were to be talking to someone who was a very able person from a Roman Catholic traditional background, what book of Scripture would you think might be most helpful to them? Zechariah? Jonah? What do you think? Is it the book of Judges that will really help them? Hebrews, somebody whispers in the front row. Yes, Hebrews.

If someone's got problems with the assurance of their salvation. One day they think they're in, the next day they think they're out. Is there a book of the Bible that has been designed to give God's final answer to that problem? Maybe there is.

What did you say? One John? Just John? Well, yes, these chaps have been reading the Bible in the front row. I want that idea to sink into your mind so that you begin to get used to the pastoral uses of book after book. I was sitting chatting with a friend of mine here yesterday at lunchtime.

It's one of those conversations that seem to be very beneficial and perhaps particularly belong to the Leadership Training Conference. And he has had training in psychiatry, psychology. And he was talking about the psychological need that some people have in any leadership situation to set up alternative leadership.

They just have a need to set up an alternative government. It's amazing how people do that. They wrap it up in theology very often, but it's a clearly observable psychological problem, need that some people have.

Is there a book of the Bible that will deal with that? Well, maybe, yes, there is. Perhaps 1 Samuel has something to do with it, 2 Samuel may have something to do with it. In other words, what I'm saying is that as you identify problems in your church life or your team life, you may find that there is a particular passage or book of scripture that you're drawn to study.

And often the answer to the thing you're grappling with will lie in God's own character. God is multi-personal. Can I say that and you not misunderstand me? He is so personal, so much a person, that he is expressed in three persons while being one God.

And there are different facets to God's amazing character. And we need to look, as we study through scripture, for the picture of God that emerges from the book. Because it will vary a little bit, book by book by book.

That's the second thing. The third thing is that very often in Bible study your first experience is of chaos in your thinking. You read through a book and then you read it again because the man told you, and then you read it a third time and it's still, you don't know what it's all about.

It's just a mess. You can see little bits and you don't know how it fits together and why does he put that chapter after the first chapter and so on. Don't be discouraged at that point.

Because Bible study I find is somewhat like cooking a good meal. There are meals that you can get out of a tin. Baked beans, cups of soup, you just add boiling water and that's it.

But if you're going to cook a really, a really splendid meal, you're going to go into the kitchen and that meal is going to go through various stages. There's going to be potato peelings on the floor, there's going to be bits of meat and blood lying around on the top of the work area, there's going to be splashes down your front, there's going to be stages when what you're cooking is inedible. Some of you want, you see, to get food five minutes after you've started.

You want to eat the potato before it's even got the peel taken off. You open the Bible and you want something to zap you within two minutes of starting. Well God in his mercy does often give us zappy things occasionally.

But actually the best meals take some time to cook, don't they? And you're going to have to work your way through the chaos stage in your thinking. And that leads me on to two other things quickly. Don't be afraid to use paper and plenty of it.

We're lucky we've got blackboard. Some friends of mine sometimes when we get together to do a bit of Bible study we'll use wallpaper. The back of wallpaper.

You can buy large quantities of it and write things up and then tear it up and burn it if it's all wrong. Don't be afraid to use paper to put down questions, ideas, outlines, things that you can scrap. God will keep the Swedish forests growing if it's to provide paper for Bible study.

You don't have to get all ecological and worry about using paper. Write. I don't see how you can do proper Bible study without paper and pencil beside you.

And the final thing, and it is the second most important principle, is that Bible study like everything else in Christian life is a matter of faith. And God watches you from the moment you open the book. And he is actually concerned in the process of Bible study to develop your character as you do it.

That involves not giving you everything easily on a plate the first moment. It's the same as bringing up kids, isn't it? You don't make everything totally easy for them. You let them learn and work and struggle.

And God himself wants to see whether you really believe that this was written by him, whether it really is his answer to the world's needs, and whether you are prepared to work at it a bit. What do you expect? Do you think the Bible is going to be easy like some little Red Riding Hood story? Some television jingle advertising something? This is God expressing himself. We have the written word, the living word, God communicating.

And what is in here is not always easy and rewards hard work. I often go to the Bible and I read something and I think about it and the worst thing possible is if I've got to preach tomorrow on it. Because then I've got to get something out and you sort of squeeze out the old bits of dry juice and so on.

But many, many times I've read in the Bible and I've not really understood why it's there, what's going on. And I have to wait and come back and read tomorrow and puzzle it over, think and read a bit more and then get a few ideas and then find they're all wrong. But in that process my diligence of character, my willingness to live by faith, to say yes, God did write this, this is worth persevering with, that is growing.

You remember the old story of a roof gleaner in the fields. Come back with her mother-in-law, gone to get work in the field of a man she didn't even know. And she was trying to pick up little grains of corn, little stalks and strands, day by day, in the burning sunshine, to get a little something to feed herself.

She was a widow and she was trying to look after one other person. And so day after day she went to get a little bit, just to feed herself. She didn't realise that she was being watched by, shall we call him the Lord of the Harvest? And after some days of watching this girl coming back again and again, he said, who is she? And they told him.

And then he commanded his executive servants that in future they leave in front of this girl great armfuls of corn. And so there came a day when she came back and she was going along picking up a little bit here and she came round the corner and, oh! And she picked up this stuff. She thought she'd got it, you know.

She thought she'd discovered it. Not a bit of it. The Lord of the Harvest, who'd been watching her for days, had deliberately left it there for her, in her path, and caused her to find it.

Now there are times, and it doesn't happen every day, when you're studying God's Word and suddenly whole new windows open up. You see things that you, oh, you never dreamed were there. How on earth can I be so stupid to read this thing again and again and not? See this.

See why it's written. How it's working. See how it applies to me.

And you think, you know, perhaps, that your hard work has finally prized open the door. No. God is involved in your Bible study.

And God will cause you to have revelation of Himself and of His Word. As He sees you persisting in faith with it. The rewards are tremendous.

Not every day do you get these things, but often enough in God's timing. As He sees your faith and your character developing as you approach the thing. So there's five sort of ideas at the start that I'd like you to ponder on and seek application in your own experience.

Now let's turn to Philippians. Yeah, very quickly. Read it again and again and again.

Secondly, what is the book or the chapter, if you're just focusing on chapter, what is it centrally showing me of God's character? Thirdly, don't be put off by chaos to start with in your thinking. Don't expect it to be easy. Fourthly, use plenty of paper and fifthly, God is watching and the very process of Bible study is an exercise of faith in which your character is developed.

Okay? Happy? Yeah, Sean? No, that's what I said. But you'll be amazed to know I did once have a real bash at Ezekiel. And I have discovered some things about Ezekiel which I could preach.

Almost from memory. But I only understand about the first 20 chapters. There's a lot that hasn't come yet.

You'll find that too. You'll get somewhere with a book and then circumstances become too busy or you put a thing on the back burner for a while and let it simmer away. But God knows how far you've got with it.

I would still say it's worth sitting, reading, trying to get an overview. Questions will be posed at the beginning of a book that are answered at the end. The start of Exodus.

They're all in Egypt. Slavery, drudgery. They want to be free.

What are they doing at the end of the book of Exodus? Are they sitting around at some holiday camp getting a suntan, free, not working anymore? Is that what freedom is? Well, the book will pose the question at the start. What is the nature of real freedom? Perhaps. I'm suggesting.

There's a possibility. By the end of the book you've begun to get some ideas on that. And so on, you see.

So even with the big books I would urge you to be willing to give them time. I would think if a person's just beginning to say to God Lord, I really don't want to come to the end of my life and have vast areas of the scriptures that are completely foreign and closed to me. I do now want to give significant honour to you in the fact that you've written this book for my learning by giving time to study.

I would start perhaps with easier books. I look back at my own. For years now I've been taking different books.

I remember when Galatians came to me in a very real way followed by Hebrews. There are huge areas that I haven't got the slightest idea about. There are other books I could almost preach from memory.

I have a friend who's influenced me tremendously in this. He's a single man. Maybe that's significant.

I don't know. But I've learnt a great deal from him and I remember one night very vividly on my memory where we'd been studying together something. I can't remember what it was now.

Genesis, I think. And I kept pestering him to tell me something about the epistle to the Romans. And he's a night bird.

He comes home from his work, gets home at six. We start Bible study at 7.30. We go through to about two or three in the morning. One night about midnight I was due to leave his home where I'd been staying the next day.

Midnight I said, What about Romans? I find Romans a very puzzling book. Heavy. I'm intimidated by it.

Can you tell me anything about Romans? So we wandered through into his kitchen and made a cup of tea. And then he sat down on a sort of a sofa thing that he kept in his kitchen. He put his feet up.

He'd left his Bible in the other room. And he expounded to me as I sat at the kitchen table the first eight chapters of Romans verse by verse from memory. He's an unusual man.

I've often thought that if ever I got locked up in a prison somewhere I'd like to be in the same cell as him. That is the result of years. Probably on average about four hours a day of Bible study.

That's in addition to a full-time teaching career at a university and quite often three or four nights a week preaching. He doesn't go to bed terribly early. But very often between ten and one in the morning ten and two he's reading, studying the Bible.

And the thing gets into you. Don't you find this? If you give time to something it does begin to sink into you. I am hopeless at Bible memorization.

Let me confess it. I mean, I see little people sitting around learning the cards, you know. The navigator cards.

I almost feel I'm unworthy to wash their shoes. I can't do that. It doesn't work for me.

But the thing that makes Bible stick in my mind is having understood it in its context. So I've probably got hundreds of verses actually word perfect in there but only because they've been studied in context and I know where they are. That has been the value of the reading and pondering and, yeah, start with the small smaller stuff maybe.

But I would apply the same methods to the longer books but not expect to necessarily feel I'd mastered a book if you can ever say that. You know what I mean. Feel you've got the thrust of it very quickly if it's one of the longer ones.

Ben. You have to speak up because they can't hear. Is the question being answered by saying that if you have a book like this As far as reading is concerned possibly yes.

You could do it mathematically and say 65 chapters let me take 10 a day and you know just over about a week I've done it. Or you could read it through a few times and decide how the book itself breaks itself up because you may well find that the first 12 chapters are a unit shall we say for instance. And then it goes from 13 to 24 or something.

I mean I don't know. I'm just playing with numbers. And you could read it that way.

Are we happy? Can we turn you've got some of the general ideas can we turn back now to Philippians. Dennis do you want a seat? There's a beer box over here. You prefer Uticus to beer box do you? Empty beer box is that.

Alter it. What do you know about the founding of the church in Philippi? That's a good question to ask yourself. Do I know anything about the background of this book? Let me just assemble my ideas.

Where are we going to look? Where are we going to look for the the origins of the church in Philippi? Acts chapter 16 It was actually quite an important point wasn't it? It was a turning point in the history of the development of the church. Because instead of working east Paul now was guided by a vision and went west went into Europe. Very significant stage in the unfolding guidance of the spirit of God.

There was a vision from a man of Macedonia we're told no more about him. But the result of that vision was an electric response. Paul he crossed the water he came into Europe and I presume he started to look around to find the man from Macedonia who said come over and help us.

And Paul never found him. At least there's no record of finding him. I imagine him wandering around Philippi for a day or two looking for this man.

And he finished up in a ladies meeting down by the river. And they were gracious enough to give him five minutes and he preached a little bit and Lydia was very interested. And within probably less than a week Paul was imprisoned.

This is the start of the European evangelistic campaign. He has come to this important city it was a trading centre it was on a major crossroads it was a Roman colony significant tactical strategic reasons for going there but almost the entire work was done in a prison. Interesting isn't it? As you reflect on the origins of that church all the human reasons that we might think out as to why it would be good for there to be an evangelistic campaign there actually God within a very short time has his servant in a prison locked up and then the prison gets destroyed.

It's an example of one of the many surprises that the church in Europe is to begin to think about as being implicit in its growth and development from the very beginnings. God's ways are not always clever, thought out, computerised, strategic ways. God took his servant into the prison and then smashed the prison.

When you think of what did the church consist of when Paul left? It was about three people well maybe a few more if you count the jailer's family. There was Lydia what do you know about her? She was a seller of purple that may not even have been her name or a description of her trade. She seems to have been an oriental, Asiatic kind of lady and probably pretty well to do.

Fairly well off. There's a converted Greek slave girl demon possessed up until the time Paul ministered to her. A demented slave girl socially at the absolute bottom.

I mean the Greeks prized freedom above everything and they despised the slave the bond servant the *doulos* we'll come back to that in a minute. And then there was the Philippian jailer member of the sturdy Roman middle class.

This town was a was a colony they used to send out from the Roman army after people had worked in most cases 20 years of service they would send parties of 300 veterans military men absolutely soaked in a military way of thinking send them with their wives and kids and a cash grant of about 250 pounds and they would send them to key places all over the empire and they acted as centres of stability centres of Roman culture and life and they placed these colonies technical term at key trade posts or near strategic fortresses or barriers or rivers it was part of the Roman peace that was spread out around the Mediterranean so Paul has come to this Roman colony interestingly enough he says to the Philippians in chapter 3 verse 20 that you are a colony of heaven your citizenship you believers

is in heaven from where we await a saviour who is Christ the Lord Paul comes to this group and after a very short time he is thrown out of town and the church consists of three nationalities three different classes the possibilities for division are enormous the wealthy Asiatic lady she's got more money than the rest of them combined the converted slave girl interesting that two out of the three of the first church in Europe were women and this middle class Roman ex-soldier and you could hardly imagine a more uncomfortably awkwardly put together team could you if you were thinking of a church you'd wonder how on earth God would put them all together I mean what that does to the concept of homogeneity I don't know but God's done it anyway and we can't say anything about it because God gave

the vision God took him into Philippi God allowed him to be locked up God smashed the prison God caused the jailer's heart to be absolutely prepared but what you've got left is the most ill-assorted group of Europeans different on national and class background now all that with a little bit of background reading we can work out an imagination from the text of Acts 16 so that'll give you some idea of perhaps a question of unity is going to be there in the background I mean it doesn't take very much does it to imagine that situation and say well how on earth are those people going to get on you look at a team I look at teams setting off from the summer campaign you know in the back of some battered old Dutch van you've got half a dozen assorted nationalities like licorice all sorts led by a

person who's never led a team in their life they don't speak the language they don't know each other half of them find difficulty communicating how are they going to manage they all believe roughly the same things well maybe Philippians would have something of a message for that situation as well I think of my own church back in England it's a very interesting church 10 years ago there on a Sunday morning there would have been less than 10 people now well we have 200 seats and they're all full and people have to stand at the back and we've got a complete mixture of people we've got refugees from local Anglican churches Christodelfins, Roman Catholic we've got the people who like to leap and dance we've got the people who don't like to leap and dance we've got very traditional brethren,

elders we've got other kinds of people all mixed up now is this the book in scripture which is going to tell an OM team it's going to speak into an OM conference it's going to talk to a church like that where we are fundamentally sound I mean we all believe the Bible is the word of God we're not in doubt about the deity of Christ and the resurrection and second coming but the difficulties are getting on together all rising out of

our heart attitudes need to be dealt with now let's move on a little bit we still haven't looked at the text you see have we but I'm slowly going through the kind of things that would govern my mind as I approach it I want to know something of the background and are there any issues that seem to emerge from what the New Testament elsewhere says about the

background of this epistle I'll give you another little thing you can think about if you were looking at Ephesians the previous letter and you were thinking well what do I know about Ephesus in the New Testament you're actually pretty well off because we know more about the church at Ephesus than any other church in the New Testament but the interesting thing is that as you look through a concordance all the different references to Ephesus historically through Acts and over in Revelation and so on the great majority have to do with fighting battle struggle conflict and you'll find as you study through Ephesians the things sort of naturally like a good sermon falls into three sections and each section concludes with an enormous battle the first two between God in Christ and that which is

opposed to the purposes of God and then the last section is all about how we are to be clothed in the armour and prepared for war see so looking through the concordance picking out the references background information to Ephesus will give you if you're alert the hint that perhaps there's something to do with fighting and struggle and warfare going to emerge from this epistle ok the idea floated around good now then as we read through the book let's ask ourselves does Paul say anywhere why he wrote it it's very helpful in Bible study if you know why the thing has been written well he does we can pick out a number of reasons possibly during the lunch break you might like to go away and read the epistle right through, it won't take you very long it's only four chapters he says in chapter 4

between verses 10 and 20 that it's a thank you letter for financial support in sending gifts but I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your thought for me wherein you did indeed take thought but you lacked opportunity not that I speak in respect of want don't misunderstand me I'm not sitting here broke and waiting for the post to drop at the letterbox I have learned in whatsoever state I am therein to be content I know how to be abased I know how also to abound in everything and in all things have I learned a secret both to be filled and to be hungry both to abound and to be in want I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me how be it you did well that you had fellowship with me that marvellous old word financial support you had fellowship with me in my

affliction and you yourselves also know you Philippians that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but only you there was a very special relationship between him and this first church in Europe they seemed to have been about the only one that he accepted financial support from on a more than occasional basis for even in Thessalonica you sent once and again unto my need more or less the next place he went to there in Greece you Philippians you had a collection and you sent it not that I seek for the gift but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account that I have all things and abound I am filled having received from the papaditus the things that came from you and so on so thanks dear

friends and prayer partners for what you sent me but he writes for a second reason and we can pick hints of that in chapter 2 verses 25 to 27 and it's to do with this character Epaphroditus I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier and your messenger and minister to my need that's quite a list of things that he's grateful to Epaphroditus for since he longed after you all and was sore troubled because you had heard that he was sick for indeed he was sick nigh unto death but God had mercy on him and not on him only but on me also that I might not have sorrow upon

sorrow I have sent him therefore the more diligently that when you see him again you may rejoice and that I may be the less sorrowful receive him therefore in the Lord with

all joy and hold such in honour because for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service towards me now what did you detect from that? he sent Epaphroditus back the Philippians had already heard that Epaphroditus was sick they had sent this chap and now the rumours come back that the fellow is sick and they think oh gross what a coward we send him to help Paul out and the first thing he does when he gets there is fall sick all over the place what a useless ambassador he is on our behalf sure he took the bit of money that we collected but he's sprawling about he's not able to help he's not able to do much prayer he's just a burden on Paul and Paul sends him home eventually to carry the letter but he also sends the letter in

order to introduce Epaphroditus and he's saying this look don't ever think of condemning Epaphroditus give him a hero's welcome I beseech you because he nearly lost his life in the service of Christ not me it was Christ that he was serving that idea getting it clear in your mind that you're not just serving people here's something we get brought back to and have to learn again and again people will hurt serve the Lord give him a hero's welcome because he nearly lost his life serving the Lord so that's the second reason why he's writing to make sure that they receive Epaphroditus not with grumbles and complaints and suggestions that he was a malingerer and he fell sick when he should have been working but there's a third reason why he sends and that I think comes more to the core of the

book it is because he wants to hear he wants to respond to the rumours that he's getting of their disunity chapter 4 verse 2 I exhort these two ladies Euodia and I exhort Sintike to be of the same mind in the Lord these two ladies obviously quarrel and it's spreading poison in the church he says in chapter 1 verse 27 I want to hear that you are standing fast with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel I want to hear of your unity like gladiators that in the combat arena you are shoulder to shoulder you're relying on the next person you're working with the next person you're fighting as one in chapter 2 verse 2 fulfill my joy that you be of the same mind you have the same love you be of one accord of one mind so as you read through the whole book on one of your various readings

it'll hit your head ah he does talk an awful lot about unity unity interesting feature isn't it here we have a church the same church committed to evangelism and yet there's many tensions it's often true isn't it that in a church that is the most committed to missionary endeavour or to evangelistic outreach in the area around people who have fellowship with Paul in his gospel work there you get the greatest divisions in a church that's asleep well people often are fairly united it's the unity of snoring together but he wants to deal with what I call a certain tendency to division beneath the surface hasn't broken out but it's there and it arises from the heart now some of you are taking notes I want to to give you now the fruits of my own read read read program four features that come out

of the book as I read through now first of this and if you're taking notes write down these words because I want you to to be able to go away and as you read through the book look for traces of teaching on these subjects the first is work the book tells us a lot about work Christian work you start at the beginning Paul says right from the start I am so grateful when I think I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel until now there's preaching going on if you go down to verse 12 he's again talking about the progress of the gospel gospel work, Christian work going on all the way through the chapter, Paul talks about his motives in his own work between

verses 21 and 24 I might get killed he says I'm about to come to court I might be sentenced to death what do I think about that I've still got work to do verse 22 if to live in the flesh, if that is the fruit of my work then what I shall choose whether to go or stay, I don't know perhaps to stay alive is more needful there's more work to be done he introduces Epaphroditus as a fellow worker it's a term that comes again and again he nearly died in the work verse 30 because for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death if you get a concordance and look up the frequency with which the word work quite apart from the idea of Christian work comes up a third thing a feature that's very strong in Philippians is, as I said this morning is always about the mind the way the mind works not so much

about your doctrines but how your mind actually is to think there's an awful lot about thoughts and attitudes Paul you see in the first chapter he's in prison, he's facing death and he's writing about how he thinks about that these are the consequences of Christian work in the first century somebody was telling me the other day they just came back from Rome they quoted some enormous figure humongous figure of millions of graves in the catacombs in Rome I can't remember but it ran into millions these people died the life expectancy of some of those early Christians in the early days hideous I stayed with Chris Short for a night in France a few days ago and he was telling me about the Camisades, have you ever heard of the Camisades in France 17th, 18th centuries in the mountains believers,

Louis XIV persecuting viciously if you became a Christian and you were caught in parts of France you were put to the galleys and the edict was passed that you were never to get off it's estimated by historians that the French church has suffered as much if not more than any other national church that there has ever been since the first century I'd hardly ever heard of them the life expectancy of some of those early Camisades preachers was reckoned to be of the order of two months they went to a bible school they committed themselves to learn they were sent out and they didn't expect to live now how do you think about such things how would a chap in the bible school as his graduation day is getting closer think about life, about marriage about persecutors about the people that he's going

to try and reach puts it in focus doesn't it and so there's an awful lot through the book about how you think about each other how you think about prosperity how you think about abasing yourself and our works and our thoughts are incredibly connected aren't they Stalin did what he did, Hitler did what he did Jack the Ripper did what he did because of the way they thought and how you think affects what you say and do to other people and therefore part of God's work is to shape your mind so chapter 2 verse 5 onwards have this mind in you Paul is writing about the way Christ's mind worked it made choices, it accepted consequences, it trusted the father and so on so as you read through the book look for that it comes again and again and again and fourthly, there's a lot about suffering these

are all sort of interwoven and they overlap and they're connected but the book is written from prison he says so in chapter 1 verses 12 and 13 he's remembering his previous time in prison how the church all started out of prison here we are as you see, dictating again back in prison you remember don't be put off by this prison's actually one of God's secret weapons do you remember how the church started in Philippi, says Paul well I'm back in, I'm great but you know it's amazing what's happening, absolutely amazing and then he goes on to talk about the way the gospel is spreading from the prison verses 19 to 21 in the first chapter he's talking about trial and death verses 28 and 29 of the first chapter he's talking about encouraging the Philippians in their suffering in chapter 2 you've

got the example of Christ in his suffering, you've got in chapter 3 verse 10, Paul's specific articulate prayer that he might know more of Christ in his suffering, quite extraordinary so chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3

we'll have a lot about suffering so is the picture beginning to clarify a little bit are you getting to the stage where you want to ask some more questions break it up a bit here you have a picture of God as a servant and you're dealing with a servant's problems how does he serve when he's not respected taken for granted treated badly, real suffering how does he think what is this process going to do for him and what happens when he disagrees with other servants, I believe the book has much to tell us about that, and about keeping these two different sides of our

experience, the outer work and the inner growth in harmony in intention and balance together what are Paul's tactics we've got them coming young two or three year old Paul's tactics well you tell me how does he approach, he's got this problem of disunity in the church, how is he going to deal with it because the way in which you deal with a problem can sometimes make it worse, can't it have you ever found that you know my kids at war in the bedroom at night supposed to go to sleep and mum put them to sleep and I come along later and there's trouble and I walk in and you know I'm at my most coordinatorial and it just creates hopeless confusion I bring things into a worse situation, how is Paul tactically going to approach this problem any suggestions he highlights with appreciation that

which they have obviously been in the past, and which is in danger of slipping away from them if they're not alerted to it that's important, it's very good for you to be reminded of your past because you've done great things you know, you've seen people converted you've weathered storms some of you have done tremendous things some of you have left impact on countries, on towns on university groups and it's good when we go through a real down patch to be reminded of what God has already been able to do yeah, there's encouragement what else, how else tactically is he going to approach this problem, because he's writing from a long way away you know, it would perhaps be easy if he were there and could take the two ladies to one side or could summon the elders try and understand the rights

and wrongs of it it is in fact the problem of a preacher who comes to a team or a situation that he doesn't know very much about but he knows something's wrong how is he going to set about dealing with it, well he talks about real life, real experiences, he talks about his own appreciation for them, yes he talks about his own sufferings, and he gives them an insight into the way he's thinking but supremely he talks about Jesus in such a way as we said at the beginning as to touch on their needs Jesus, the one who humbles himself, the one who serves the one who will become a servant, who will put aside glory, put aside status, majesty, respect be willing to put aside that, Jesus wept over Jerusalem and they didn't understand what he was doing Jesus right at the end of years of patience

with Judas knowing the betrayal in his heart knowing the lies, knowing the deceit, knowing that he'd been stealing from the bag all along still offered him friendship, love, actually the mark of greatest respect at that little feast still offered it to him they didn't know what was going on and Paul will try to make them think warmly of Christ if you're a Christian worker one of your needs is to see Christ at work, isn't it if you're a servant you need to see how Christ served and to read in scripture where the Holy Spirit has caused those descriptions to be placed so that's Paul's tactics to exalt Christ very often preachers can arrive in a situation and know that there's something wrong but they don't need to understand it, they just need to warm people towards Christ and then the

problems begin to get into right perspective, don't they have you noticed that even on teens so those are Paul's tactics right, how are we doing for time any more questions happy so far deeply disappointed anybody want to leave as always don't mind you can still get in the dancing seminar if you feel the need for a bit of now shall we write on the blackboard a bit he does, but not till the last chapter as you compare

his dealing with the doctrinal problem that undermines the whole gospel in Galatians you can almost feel him rolling up his sleeves you can't wait to start chopping these errors away from that are clinging on to the real tree he's got his axe out right at the start and he dives straight in, he's hardly got time for a compliment in Galatians, has he straight in, because he

bristles with passion when it concerns the gospel and Christ's glory but psychologically in his dealing with people, Paul was I believe very canny I cannot understand how people have this view of him as a ferocious, woman-hating militant fanatical sort of guy he had problems with people he had what the authorised version calls that sharp contention with Barnabas marvellous little description of two apostles squaring up to each other and he lost mark in the process, but if you trace little bits here and there you'll see that he gets mark back again it's useful to me for ministering marvellous character and I'm impressed by the way he will face the thing, he does mention the two ladies, but only after he's talked of Christ, he's talked of Epaphroditus he's talked of Timothy, he's given a

little bit of his own sufferings, I mean how can your heart stay not warmed after all that, and then in one little verse towards the end in the midst of a stack of rejoices rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, oh and dear sisters, you know I plead with you is she a girl?

I exhort you to be of the same mind in the Lord, yes I beseech thee also true yoke fellow, help these women immediately he's back to appreciation oh they were great, you know, when I was with you, they laboured with me in the gospel, with old Clement remember old Clement? and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life there's no question of condemnation or suggestion that this bit of quarrelling may have caused them to be booted out of the kingdom or anything like that, it's all wrapped up in so much appreciation, but can you imagine that letter coming with Epaphroditus to the church Paul can't leave the prison he slips it out with his friend who's now strong enough to go back, and the great day comes when Epaphroditus has been welcomed back and they're going to have the church service, probably one evening because the Romans worked on the ten day week and they would never have met Sunday mornings or very rarely one evening after work, they're all gathered together Paul sent the letter, and they all come and Jodie is sitting on one side and Cyndicae is sitting on the other side and they're all waiting, and a little bit hesitant because they know what's going to come out and the letter starts, and they get just entranced by what Paul is saying and what he's talking about Christ, and what Paul's been learning and seeing, in the jail and they're moved to pray, let's stop and have a time of prayer for Paul in the prison you see, oh it's great to see you back Epaphroditus, we'll have a lot of time to get to know you, and then that little bit slipped in about Euodia and Cyndicae but all wrapped up with so much love and affection and rejoicing what do you think happened at the end of that meeting?

I mean, I don't know I imagine those two ladies went and just got together and said well you know I'm sorry we've had problems but let's work them out together and not allow Satan to get in it worked you see now if he'd sent a special epistle flame and smoke coming off the envelope as it arrived, addressed to the wicked women the two witches yes they'd have got their you know how people get their defences up before you even get near them Christ was the same in John 13 he wanted to get a lesson across to these disciples, the same sort of a lesson actually, humbling themselves and so he went around and washed all their feet and then drew the truth out after he got under their defences I mean how do you how do you disagree with him once he's done that for you it's about the lowest thing, act

of service that can be done now I think it's right that we should see in Scripture the way that these great leaders worked psychologically to serve, to love to win pop a little bit of thing in the question is from Ben,

can we be sure that everything that he knows about the Philippians that he's addressing as he writes, has come to him from Epaphroditus, now I have no such assurance I imagine, I get the impression, as I sort of read around in the New Testament, that there was a certain amount of comings and goings, that these churches did stay in touch with each other people did travel, and there were journeys and he picked up rumours, and Epaphroditus probably told him a bit but Epaphroditus has been around some time, he's been time enough to be a fellow worker time enough to be sick,

time enough to recover, I imagine other messengers had come and the situation has got pretty clear that there is something that needs dealing with and it's just timely that Epaphroditus needs to go back with the letter they might have been resident members of Philippi I don't know converts of the initial group I think Luke probably stayed behind after the Acts 16 church, because it's interesting the term we that has come into the narrative, drops out for a little bit, and it talks about Paul, through until about chapter 20, middle of chapter 20, then the we comes in again, it's almost as if Luke is recording Paul's onward march in the third person singular, and he has perhaps stayed behind to nurture this young church, Clement may have been sent there, or he may have been a convert there,

I haven't a clue, but he seems to have been obviously a worker perhaps someone in leadership, someone maybe who Paul feels can get close to these women, maybe a relative I don't know, some of these closing chapters of the New Testament epistles are like a family photograph album of years ago, you can see family likenesses, you know where they went for holiday, but you don't know them, the end of Romans, Romans 16, has got about 35 to 40 different characters mentioned, and you know very little about them, some of them are Paul's relatives that have got converted a lot of them are women they're obviously at different social stages but they all belong to the Roman church and it is like flicking through an old photograph album and you don't know much about them and all you can do is imagine,

so you're asking me questions I have no answer to I'm afraid that's why you're asking you know the answer can I quickly scribble up on the blackboard for you, before lunch the beginnings of an outline of the epistle, this again is what I would do I've asked myself what do I know about the background I've read it through a few times it's at this stage as you're working through a book that you'll find ideas come and go so this isn't final, this is just suggestions, but you've obviously got 1 to 2, greetings after that it gets more difficult 3 to 11 Paul's prayer, we would call it break that up a bit, because strictly speaking 3 to 8 then the actual prayer, very short and then he speaks of what I might call the goal of all his ministry in their life and then you come through the rest of

chapter 1 really nearly to the end he gives his testimony 3 times in the New Testament as you look back over your history you give your testimony slightly differently if I'm giving my testimony at the teen camp it may be very different in a university Paul will draw, if you read 1 Timothy chapter 1, he gives a bit of his testimony, patience he gives it another couple of times in actual experience, he talks about the promise coming up different aspects of possibility let me give you the references 12 to 18, what did he do in chapter 2? or maybe I should let you go away shortly for lunch, and you tell me after lunch shall we do that? is that better? and I leave you to come with some suggestions for the broad outline structure of chapters 2, 3, 4 and we may have some marvellous disagreements

and that's really good, because then you have to listen to what the other person thinks and then you learn a little bit more so let's stop there and see you again before 3 we'll start at 3 if any folk want to come a little early we can just have a time of prayer together perhaps for 10 or 15 minutes but anyway we'll start at 3 thank you, enjoy your lunch I'm going to come later in the chapter because, let me suggest to you another

idea that governs my bible study I don't think when Paul sat down to write that he just lifted his pen and wrote a few blessed thoughts you know how you do when you help your wife with the shopping as you're coming out of Tesco's or whatever it is, St Chris you just shove everything in the bag, don't you? eggs at the bottom, bread tomatoes, tins everything all

shoved in together or do you pack it a little bit more carefully? do you try and put certain things at the top that they won't break? maybe he shoves things in his epistles any old how you know, he doesn't sort of as he sits dreaming, well what shall I write for these Philippians that I haven't found anything about so I'm going to ask, or in the middle death, yes at the start of chapter 2, that paragraph what are you encouraged by? all all of it if you missed out the example of Christ you'd feel the paragraph have this line in you which is also in Christ Jesus who so I would tend to look at the broad it's to do with the example of Christ now what else is coming in the chapter following the example of Christ in whose life which particular verses are you referring to?

I'm sorry that this isn't going to record very well yes so he's pictured Christ first of all, and now he's drawing out some implications, and it's becoming a question of my testimony before the unbeliever in my character, not just enough to stand on the street corner and preach the gospel it's now what I actually am in myself, in my character good so I'm beginning to see how the how the thought flows on sensibly logically I can understand the reason why he didn't put those two paragraphs round the other way that is a very important thing in bible study very often people don't understand why something is in the place it is you know, if you read Romans 8 you really won't grasp what it's about until you've understood chapter 7 but chapter 7 has caused controversy and confusion enormously because people just study chapter 7 it's not dependent on what they've grasped from chapter 6 but chapter 6 depends on chapter 5 in other words, Paul has written Romans in the pastoral order in which we need to understand it oh what a clever fellow and actually Paul is doing rather the same here so he's given us the example of Christ then we've got a paragraph you suggest, you may be wrong you may get a disagreement from the opposition benches over here in a minute that then he has a paragraph in which he's drawing out some implications from that.

Anybody want to argue against that? please do this is the great thing about bible study you seem to have triumphed on that what comes next? who is he talking about then? from verses 18, 19 19 it's about Timothy and what do we find out about Timothy? he's a what? so we might be tempted, I mean, to put down because Paul does seem to be holding up Timothy for them to look at, I've heard nobody like Timothy says Paul they all look for their own things, not the things of Christ you know the proof of that chap, that as a child served the father, so he served with me in furtherance of the gospel then what follows? uh-huh he talks quite a bit about Epaphroditus he says some very kind things about him, doesn't he? he's my brother he's a fellow worker, not all brothers are fellow workers, he's a real soldier he's your messenger, minister and he risks his life he was nearly dead, I sent him home so receive him with joy we might think he was commending the example of Epaphroditus to them, interesting character after character is being held up before them what is all the chapter about then? behaviour character, it's the other side of the outward work of gospel preaching yes, well, that is one way to view it, maybe someone else has another view you see, I want you to believe that you can take different views and then the real value starts, because if someone else comes up with a different view then I shall say, well show me that from scripture, and let's see which has the more weight to it you had your hand up you stopped in verse 12, just short of a key command which is to work out your salvation maybe he's talking about working out your salvation in the way you think so you're saved for all eternity, soul saved, but the work of your salvation carries on as well, doesn't it?

God hasn't done all he's going to do, mercifully he is continuing to save you in the way you think, the way you react and how is he going to do this, well by showing us Christ, by showing us other ministers, somebody could put the title, working out your salvation over the chapter, and I'd say, fine, that's interesting that's quite helpful obviously he's talking about the way you think, he's talked a little bit about the way he thinks about death and prison and so on and he's talking now about the way Christ thinks, and that follows on to the results in the way you live and he's giving a couple more quick examples from his fellow workers, interestingly enough who else has he called his fellow workers in this epistle oh, well, yes later he'll call them fellow workers but he's implied that the whole church of Philippi had been his fellow workers it's clever he pictures Christ where we might all be forgiven for feeling oh, I can never measure up to that I mean that's Christ but also Timothy and one of their own number, Epaphroditus example, piling on example of the way that right thinking leads to right living.

It's almost as if those last verses of chapter one are a bridge into chapter two twenty-seven to thirty and there's another thing I noticed in my readings through the book the word gospel comes six times in the first chapter and only three times in the rest of the book gospel work, gospel preaching, fellowship in the gospel there's a tremendous amount in chapter one of the hurly-burly of Christian work gospel work and there's courtroom scenes, there's the drama of Paul being about to stand before the emperor and get sentenced to death or not, he doesn't know which way there's people out in the streets preaching the gospel with every kind of false motive interestingly enough, let's talk about what that that means in a minute then in chapter two he switches to the other side doesn't he your hard attitude, why you're doing what you're doing and it is as if twenty-seven let your let the testimony of the way you live reflect the gospel that you're preaching I think you've hit on a very important thing, how those three, four verses are a bridge let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that I may hear that you're standing thus and thus with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel

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