

# **Joy!**

## *A Bible Study on Philippians for Women*

**Keri Folmar**

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To my husband:  
We may not do “light and funny” but marriage,  
family, and ministry with you is truly a joy.

To Ruth, Chloe, and Andrew:  
You are precious gifts from God. I love you.

To the ladies of the United Christian Church of Dubai:  
Studying the Bible and being in community with you  
has brought me great joy!

– Keri Folmar

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“This study points the way into the biblical text, offering a clear and effective guide in studying Paul’s letter to the Philippian church. Keri Folmar encourages her readers first and foremost to listen well to God’s inspired Word.” — **Kathleen Nielson\***

“Keri’s Bible study will not only bring the truths of Philippians to bear upon your life, but will also train you up for better, more effective study of any book of the Bible with her consistent use of the three questions needed in all good Bible study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application.” — **Connie Dever\***

“Keri lets the Scriptures do the talking! No cleverly invented stories, ancillary anecdotes, or emotional manipulation here. Keri takes us deeper into the text, deeper into the heart of Paul, deeper into the mind of Christ, and deeper into our own hearts as we pursue Christ for joy in all things. Each new week of study provides a review of the previous week, to help us keep in context what we’ve studied. The subsequent days are for gold digging, and there are rich treasures to discover as we unfold the truth that our joy ultimately comes from glorifying God in every sphere and circumstance of life. I highly commend this study for your pursuit of joy.” — **Kristie Anyabwile\***

“Keri Folmar is convinced that God is God-centered and that for the sake of our joy, we should be, too. This inductive study will increase your joy in a loving God who is sovereign over all things. I highly recommend that you embark on this study with some other ladies. Then you can all watch in amazement at how God gives you contentment in him as he shows you the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord.” — **Gloria Furman\***

\* See endorser bios at page 4.

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*Joy! - A Bible Study on Philippians for Women*

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**A**s we begin this study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians, we should think through why we are studying the Bible. Why not read some other book? Or why not just get together with some ladies and chat?

Well, have you heard about the kindergarten teacher who had her class paint pictures of anything they chose? One little girl was working intently on her painting. After observing the girl for a moment, the teacher asked, "What are you painting?" The girl responded, "It's a picture of God." Amused, the teacher informed her, "No one knows what God looks like." Without looking up from her painting the little girl responded, "They will in a minute."

This might be a cute example of a precocious child, but many people paint pictures in their own minds of how God looks and acts. They "know" that God is a certain way because they want him to be that way. However, God is transcendent. That means he is beyond our capacity to know. First Timothy 6:16 declares God to be unique, the one "who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see." God existed before time. He is the creator, and we are his creatures.

Thankfully, God has revealed himself and wants us, his creatures, to know him. Jeremiah 9:23-24 says:

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

How can we know this transcendent God? The only way is for him to reveal himself to us. He reveals his existence and power in creation (see Psalm 19 and Romans 1:18-21). However, if we want to truly know the God who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness, it must be through the Word of God. This is why we

study the Bible; it is God's revelation of himself to us. Second Peter 1:20-21 explains, "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Hebrews 1:1-3 describes God speaking to people:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power....

This Son is Jesus Christ, the Word of God in flesh. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6-7). So in a way, the teacher mentioned at the beginning was wrong. People have seen God. They have walked and talked with him. These eyewitnesses have written down their testimonies for us to read today. All of Scripture reveals God to us through his Son, Jesus (see John 5:39, Luke 24:25-27, 44).

So why study the Bible? Because we need to know who God truly is and guard against trying to paint our own fanciful picture of him. God has revealed himself to us not in paintings but through his Son by the words of the Scripture. God, the creator, has spoken, and we, his creation, should listen to his words as truth to our ears and rejoice. That is why we study the Bible—because it is the only way to truly know God.

The Bible study booklet you are holding is to assist you in studying Paul's letter to the Philippian Church in an **inductive** way. Inductive study happens when we read the passage in context and ask ourselves questions about the text with the purpose of deriving the meaning and significance from the text itself. We really do this every day with everything we read without realizing it. What we are after when we study the Bible inductively is the author's original intent; i.e., what the author meant when he wrote the passage. We figure out

the meaning by asking a series of questions of the text, paying close attention to the words and context to answer those questions.

The benefit of inductive study is that we learn how to study the Bible on our own—a tool which can serve us well every day of our lives as we grow in our relationship with God. We can discover for ourselves the depth of the riches of Scripture, thus remembering it better and applying it more directly to our lives.

The theme of the letter to the Philippians is joy. May the Lord bring joy to your heart as you dig deeply in the Word of God.

## How to Do Inductive Bible Study

**Step 1 – Begin with prayer.** “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18).

**Step 2 – Read the text.**

**Step 3 – Observation.** *The goal of this step is to figure out what the text is saying.* This is where you ask questions like: Who? When? Where? What? These questions should be answered from the very words of the text. Ask yourself if this passage reminds you of any other passages in Scripture. Write down any questions that arise in your mind.

**Step 4 – Interpretation.** *The goal of this step is to figure out what the text meant to the original hearers.* This most important step is often skipped, but a lack of correct interpretation leads to incorrect application. We cannot understand what God is saying to us if we don’t first understand what he was saying to his original audience, and why he was saying it.

Your job in interpretation is to figure out the main point of the passage and understand the arguments that support the main point. Your interpretation should flow out of your observations, so keep asking yourself, “Can I support this interpretation based on my observations?”

Following are some questions to ask yourself as you study:

- How does the surrounding context of the passage shed light on its meaning?

- Why did the author include this particular passage in his book?
- Do other passages of Scripture fill out my interpretation?
- Is my interpretation consistent with my overall observations or is it too dependent on a few details?
- How does this passage fit within the Bible's teaching as a whole? (The context of any passage is ultimately the Bible as a whole.)
- What is the main point of the passage?
- Can I summarize the passage in a few sentences?
- If an Old Testament passage: How does this passage relate to Christ and his work on the cross?

**Step 5 – Application.** *Prayerfully apply the passage to your own life.* The application should flow from the main point of the text.

Following are some questions to ask yourself in order to apply the text:

- Did I learn something new about God, his ways, his character, his plans, and his priorities? If so, how should I be living in light of this truth?
- Do I need to change my beliefs based on this passage, or is a truth reinforced?
- Is there a behavior I need to adopt or stop?
- Does this passage have implications for the way I should relate to the church?
- Does this passage have implications for the way I relate to or speak to my non-Christian friends?
- How should I pray based on this passage?
- Should I be praising God for something in this passage?
- Do I see a sin for which I need to repent?
- Is there an encouragement or promise on which I need to dwell?

## In Summary

Luke 24:44-47 says,

Then [Jesus] said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

This is why we study the Bible: so that we can know Christ, repent, be forgiven, and proclaim him to the nations. We must keep Jesus in mind when we study Scripture. Adrienne Lawrence writes, “God has one overarching redemptive plan—to glorify himself by creating and redeeming a people for himself through Christ. Christ is at the center of God’s plan. All of Scripture in some way speaks to that plan. Keep this in mind as you are doing your study of Scripture.”

*[Note: This “How to” has been adapted from Adrienne Lawrence’s pamphlet on Inductive Bible Study.]*

## Notes

The first day of this inductive study will be an overview of the letter to the Philippians. On the following days you will study smaller segments of the letter and answer observation, interpretation, and application questions. The questions were written based on language from the English Standard Version of the Bible. However, you are welcome to use any reliable translation to do the study.

To assist you in recognizing the different types of questions asked, the questions are set out with icons as indicated below.

-  **Observation:** Look closely in order to figure out what the text is saying. Get answers directly from the text, using the words of Scripture.
-  **Interpretation:** What's the "true north" for his verse? Figure out what the text meant to the original hearers by determining the author's intended meaning.
-  **Application:** Apply the passage to your own heart and life, concentrating on the author's intended meaning that you have already determined.

Because Scripture interprets Scripture, many of the questions cite passages in addition to the one you are studying in Philippians. If the question says, "Read..." you will need to read the additional verses cited to answer the question. If the question says, "See..." the verses help you answer the question but are not necessary. "See also..." signals you to read the verses if you would like to study the answer to the question further.

You only need your Bible to do this study of Paul's letter to the Philippians, and, in fact, I highly recommend first answering the questions directly from your Bible before looking at any other materials. That said, it may be helpful for you to confirm your answers, especially if you are leading others in a group study. To check your answers or for further study, Don Carson's *Basics for Believers: An Exposition on Philippians*, is excellent. Alec Motyer has written a more detailed commentary, *The Message of Philippians*, that is also helpful.

For more general help in knowing how to study the Bible, I highly recommend *Bible Study: Following the Ways of the Word*, by Kathleen Buswell Nielson and *Dig Deeper! Tools to Unearth the Bible's Treasure*, by Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach. Bible study teachers and students who want a closer look at New Testament theology that will also encourage your heart can read Thomas Schreiner's, *Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology*.

## **Notes for Leaders**

This Bible study can be done by individuals alone, but the best context for Bible study is in the local church. When small groups of women gather together to study the Scriptures, it promotes unity and ignites spiritual growth within the church.

The study was designed for ladies to complete five days of “homework,” and then come together to discuss their answers in a small group. The goal of gathering in small groups is to promote discussion among ladies to sharpen one another by making sure all understand the meaning of the text and can apply it to their lives. As ladies discuss, their eyes may be opened to applications of the text they didn't see while doing the individual study. Believers will encourage one another in their knowledge of the gospel, and unbelievers will hear the gospel clearly explained. As a result, ladies will learn from one another and come away from group Bible study with a deeper understanding of the text and a better knowledge of how to read the Bible on their own in their private times of study and prayer.

If you are leading a small group, you will have some extra homework to do. First, know what Bible study is and is not. Bible study is not primarily a place to meet felt needs, eat good food and chat, receive counseling or have a free-for-all discussion. All of these things tend to happen in a ladies' Bible study, but they should not take over the focus. Bible study is digging into the Scriptures to get the true meaning of the text and applying it to lives that change as a result.

Second, make sure you know the main points of the text before leading discussion by carefully studying the passage and checking

yourself using a good commentary, like one of those listed above. You may also find a Bible dictionary and concordance helpful. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man [or woman] of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” Scripture is powerful. That power comes through truth. Scripture is not like a magical incantation: We say the words and see the effect. We must know what the text of Scripture means before we apply it and see its work of transformation in our lives. Your job as a discussion leader is not to directly teach, nor to simply facilitate discussion, but rather to lead ladies in finding the meaning of the text and help them see how it is “profitable” and can make them “competent, equipped for every good work.”

Third, pray. Pray for the ladies in your group during the week while you prepare. Pray as you start your small group study, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scripture to your minds and apply it to your hearts. And encourage ladies to pray based on what they studied at the end of your small group time. Ask the Holy Spirit to use his sword, the Word of God, in the lives of your ladies.

Fourth, draw ladies out and keep your discussion organized. Choose what you determine are the most important questions from the study guide, focusing the bulk of your discussion on the interpretation and application questions. Ask a question, but don’t answer it! Be comfortable with long pauses or rephrase questions you think the group didn’t understand. Not answering the questions yourself may be a bit awkward at first, but it will promote discussion in the end because your ladies will know they have to do the answering. Feel free to affirm good answers or sum up after ladies have had time to discuss. This gives clarity to the discussion. However, don’t feel the need to fill in every detail and nuance you gleaned from your personal study. Your goal is to get your group talking.

Fifth, keep your focus on the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit uses them to change ladies’ hearts. Don’t be afraid of wrong answers. Gently use them to clarify and teach by directing attention back to

the Scriptures for the right answer. If ladies go off on unhelpful tangents, direct them back to the question and address the tangent later one on one or with reading material. However, if the tangent is on a vital question that goes to the gospel, take time to talk about it. These are God-given opportunities.

Sixth, be sure you focus on the gospel. In your prep time, be sure to ask yourself what the text has to do with the gospel and look for opportunities to ask questions to bring out the gospel. Hopefully, your church members will invite unbelievers to your study who will hear the glorious good news. But, even if your group is made up of all believers, we never get beyond our need to be reminded of Christ crucified and what that means for our lives.

Lastly, enjoy studying the Scriptures with your ladies. Your love for the Word of God will be contagious, and you will have the great joy of watching your ladies catch it and rejoice in the Word with you.

## **Paul and the Church at Philippi**

Paul identifies himself as the author of the letter to the Philippians. Paul was an apostle, which means he was an eyewitness of Jesus and was specially sent of Christ. You can read in Acts about how Paul (then called Saul) met the risen Lord Jesus in an extraordinary way while he was traveling throughout the region of Palestine persecuting the church. (Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1-22) After Paul's conversion, he traveled widely in Asia and Europe, proclaiming the Gospel he had once tried to destroy and planting churches. Philippians is one of thirteen New Testament letters he wrote.

Paul planted the church at Philippi. After receiving a vision of a man urging him to come to Macedonia, Paul set sail to preach the Gospel in the city of Philippi in the district of Macedonia. After hearing Paul preach, the Lord opened the heart of a prominent woman of the city, Lydia, and she became the first Philippian convert. More conversions followed, even (or perhaps, especially) after Paul and his companion Silas were thrown in jail. By the time Paul and Silas left Philippi, there was a Philippian church. Read Acts 16:6-40 for the account of Paul's first visit to Philippi. Paul returned to the city to encourage the church on at least one more occasion. (Acts 20:1-6)

## Day 1

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This first day we will do an overview of the entire letter. When the Philippian church received this letter from Paul it would have been read aloud to the entire congregation. They didn't have printing presses in the First Century, so a scribe would have to painstakingly copy every word. These letters were thus carefully preserved, and written copies would have been distributed to other churches to be read aloud to those congregations. Reading through the entire book in one sitting is valuable to us, not only because it gives us a feel for what happened in the First Century, but also because it gives us an overview of what the letter is about as we notice certain themes repeated throughout the letter.

Begin by praying, *Lord "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."* (Psalm 119:18)

Read through chapters 1-4 of the letter to the Philippians and do the following:

**Write down any repeated words, phrases, or ideas you notice:**

**Jot down any questions that arise in your mind for later study:**

### Answer the following questions:

What are the circumstances in Paul's life when he writes the letter?

What is going on in the lives of the saints of Philippi (the church) when Paul writes the letter?

What is the overall tone of the letter?

Why did Paul write this letter to the church at Philippi?

### Day 2

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#### **Remember:**

-  **Observation:** Figure out what the text is saying. Get the answer from the words of Scripture.
-  **Interpretation:** Figure out the meaning of the text. What did the writer intend to convey?
-  **Application:** Prayerfully apply the passage to your own life. The application should flow from the main point of the text.

**Pray that you would know the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Read Philippians 1:1-18.**

**Read verses 1-2.**

👁 1. Who wrote this letter?

👁 2. What do Paul and Timothy call themselves?

♥ 3. What does it mean to be “servants of Christ Jesus”?

✦ 4. Jesus had appeared in a vision and said, “[Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Why would these church leaders call themselves servants instead of asserting their impressive credentials?

♥ 5. What would be different in your interactions with others in your church if you thought of yourself, first and foremost, as a servant of Christ Jesus?

👁 6. To whom is the letter written?

- ✦ 7. (Saint means “holy one” or one who is set apart. It is a word the Bible commonly uses to describe those in the church. See Romans 1:7, Colossians 1:26, and Jude 3.) What does “in Christ Jesus” mean? Read John 17:20-26 and Galatians 2:20.
- ✦ 8. Who are overseers? Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7.
- ✦ 9. Who are deacons? Read Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.
- ✦ 10. Why do you think this letter is written to saints in Philippi as well as to the overseers and deacons? (It could have been only written to the leaders of the church.)
- ♥ 11. Do the truths in this letter only apply to the saints, overseers, and deacons in the First Century church in Philippi, or can and should Christians apply these truths to our lives today? See 2 Timothy 3:16.

👁 12. How does Paul greet the church at Philippi?

👁 13. From where do grace and peace come?

✦ 14. Grace means a gift that is not earned or deserved (see Romans 11:5-6). Peace occurs when two or more parties are reconciled to one another. What do you think it means for grace and peace to come from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”?

✦ 15. Why do you think Paul opens his letter with this greeting?

♥ 16. Have you received grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, what difference has it made in your life? If not, go back to the verses that explain what “in Christ Jesus” means and think through what it would mean in your life to accept grace and peace from God.

Pray that God would make you like a tree planted by streams of water—that your delight would be rooted in his law (Psalm 1:2-3).

Read **Philippians 1:1-18**.

Read verses 3-5.

- 👁 1. Having greeted the Philippians, how does Paul begin the rest of his letter?
  
- 👁 2. What is Paul thanking God for?
  
- 👁 3. How does Paul feel when he prays for the Philippian church?
  
- 👁 4. Why is Paul thankful for them?
  
- 👁 5. How is the Philippian church in partnership with Paul?
  
- 👁 6. How long has the Philippian church been in partnership with Paul?
  
- ✦ 7. What does it mean to be in “partnership in the gospel”?  
See Romans 10:12-15 and 1 Peter 2:9.

♥ 8. If you are a follower of Christ, describe the ways you partner with others in the gospel:

♥ 9. List some other ways you can partner with saints in your church in the gospel:

#### Day 4

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**Pray that God, who begins and completes his work in our hearts, will use this Bible study to work in your heart.**

**Read Philippians 1:1-11.**

**Read verse 6.**

👁 1. Of what is Paul sure?

👁 2. To whom does the word *he* refer?

👁 3. What did God begin?

👁 4. What will God do?

👁 5. When will God bring his work to completion?

✦ 6. What is the “good work” that God began? See Ephesians 2:4-6.

✦ 7. What does it mean for that “good work” to be completed?  
See 1 John 3:2-3.

✦ 8. Who is beginning, bringing along, and completing the “good work?” See also 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

✦ 9. What is “the day of Jesus Christ”? Read 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10.

✦ 10. What does verse 6 mean? Write it in your own words:

♥ 11. Do you ever despair over your own sin? Do you ever feel far from God? If you are a saint in Christ Jesus considering this verse, how should you handle these times and emotions?

**Read verses 7-8.**

👁 12. What feeling is right for Paul?

👁 13. Where does Paul hold the Philippians?

👁 14. Why does Paul hold the Philippians in his heart?

👁 15. How are the Philippians partakers of grace with Paul?

👁 16. How much does Paul yearn for the Philippians?

✦ 17. Why does Paul care so much for the Philippians?

♥ 18. The Greek noun rendered “affection” in English was used often of Jesus in the Gospels and indicates deep emotion. Paul writes of his joy in relationship with and having this affection for the saints at Philippi. What can you do to have more relationships like this in your church?

♥ 19. Pray for the Lord to increase your partnership in the gospel, your affection for sisters and brothers in Christ, and joy in relationships with others in the church.

## Day 5

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**Pray that your love would abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment as you study the Scriptures.**

**Read Philippians 1:1-11.**

**Read verse 9.**

👁 1. What is Paul’s prayer for the Philippians?

👁 2. With what does Paul pray for the Philippians’ love to abound?

✦ 3. For whom is this love?

✦ 4. What kind of knowledge is Paul writing about?

✦ 5. What do these verses tell you about the kind of knowledge about which Paul is writing: Jeremiah 9:23-24, John 17:3, Galatians 4:8-9, Colossians 1:9-10, 2 Timothy 1:12.

✦ 6. What is discernment? See Romans 12:2 and Hebrews 4:12-13 and 5:14.

♥ 7. How can you fuel your love to abound more and more in knowledge and discernment?

**Read verse 10a.**

👁️ 8. What will result from the Philippians' love abounding with knowledge and all discernment?

✦ 9. What does it mean to “approve what is excellent”?

✦ 10. How does knowledge and discernment affect one's ability to approve what is excellent?

♥️ 11. How would your life change if you only approved what is excellent? Consider the following things in your life...

♥️ Movies/TV/music:

♥️ Clothing:

♥ Speech/conversations:

♥ Reading/hobbies/activities:

♥ Use of time and money:

♥ 12. Can you think of any other areas in your life where you need to approve what is excellent?

**Read verses 10b-11.**

👁 13. What is the ultimate goal of the Philippians' love abounding with knowledge and discernment?

👁 14. Through whom does the fruit of righteousness come?

- 👁 15. What is the point of being pure, blameless, and filled with the fruit of righteousness?
- ✦ 16. What is the “day of Christ”? (It is also mentioned in verse 6. In addition, read Revelation 19:6-9.)
- ✦ 17. What is the “fruit of righteousness”? See Galatians 5:22-24.
- ✦ 18. How would you sum up Paul’s prayer in verses 9-11 in your own words?
- ♥ 19. Out of his great love for the saints of Philippi, Paul prays these God-honoring, powerful prayers of thanksgiving and supplication in verses 3-11. His prayers are targeted to encourage and build up the church. Examine the focus of your prayer life. How do you tend to pray for yourself and others? Use Paul’s prayers to shift your prayer focus from temporal desires to spiritual needs. Think through how you can pray for the saints in your church to have love that abounds more and more in knowledge and all discernment.

## Philippians 1:12-18

Week 2  
*Joy in the Advance of the Gospel*

### Day 1 - Review

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Pray that the Lord will make known to you the path of life and that he will fill you with joy in his presence, with eternal pleasures at his right hand. Psalm 16:11.

Begin the week by reading through Philippians chapter 1.

Review your notes from week 1.

✦ 1. Remind yourself of the main points of Philippians 1:1-11 and jot them down:

♥ 2. After studying the first 11 verses of Philippians, how should your prayer life be affected?

♥ 3. What relationships in the church can you focus on to increase your partnership in the gospel? What do you need to do to make sure that these relationships are characterized by affection and joy?