

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service At Home: Sunday 27 September 2026**

Prepared by Graham Hepburn

Bible Month - Philippians

During the four Sundays of October, Pat Fry and I will be preparing the four services at home, following the 2026 Bible Month theme, of Paul's letter to Philippians.

This week, I am giving an introduction to the book in preparation for the four services in October.

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Call to Worship

Let us offer to God the gifts of our hearts:
our longings, and our love;
the gifts of our souls:
our prayers and creativity;
the gifts of our minds:
our thoughts and decisions.
Let us offer to God the best of all we are.

Listen, read, pray or sing along

We begin with the hymn, 'Only by grace can we enter', (StF 565),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfsiunOpaBc>

Verse

Only by grace can we enter,
only by grace can we stand;
not by our human endeavour
but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
you call us to come,
into your presence you draw us
and now by your grace we come,
now by your grace we come.

Chorus

*Lord if you mark our transgressions
who will stand?*

*Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.*

(Repeat chorus)

(Repeat verse)

Gerrit Gustafson

© 1990 Integrity's Hosanna! Music

Adm. by kingswaysongs

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We give thanks for those
who have shared the gospel with us:
those who nurtured our early steps of faith;
those who gave us the freedom to ask
questions;
those who taught us to pray;
those we worship with week by week;
those who have gone ahead of us into your
kingdom.
As we have been blessed, so may we bless
others.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

A prayer of confession

When our sharing of the gospel has been
shallow:
Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.

When our words have been empty:
Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.

When we have given nothing of ourselves
and offered no kindness or depth of care:
Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.

When we have not lived what we have
preached:
**Jesus, Lord and Messiah, forgive us.
Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Reading - Acts 16, verses 6 to 15, telling us
of Paul's visit to Philippi**

Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia

6 Paul and his companions travelled
throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia,
having been kept by the Holy Spirit from
preaching the word in the province of Asia.
7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they

tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. **8** So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. **9** During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' **10** After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Lydia's conversion in Philippi

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. **12** From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. **15** When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us.

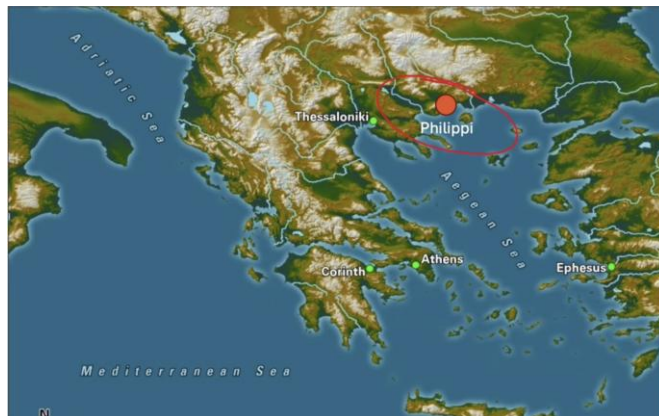
You may also like to read the four chapters of the letter to the Philippians at one sitting, in addition to the chapters week by week over the next four weeks.

The Methodist Church have also produced a daily reading guide, spreading the four chapters into 30 daily readings, along with questions to prompt further thought and prayer. You can download this at the following link -

https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/Bible_Month_2026_Reading_Guide_web.pdf

Introduction to Philippians

Philippi was a Roman colony, in Macedonia (northern Greece) occupied by Roman settlers.



The colonists were proud of their special Roman rights and privileges, and intensely loyal to Rome. As we learn from the story of Lydia in our lesson, women enjoyed high status and took an active part in public and business life, and this was reflected in the church in Philippi.

The church was founded during Paul's journey in CE 50 and the letter was written in the following ten years. Philippi was the first Christian church in Europe.

The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul, most likely from prison in Rome. As a prisoner, Paul had to rely on the generosity of others to survive. Despite being in prison, Paul's message exudes great joy.

It was written as a pastoral letter, by a grateful pastor to a generous congregation, rather than a letter that Paul wrote to address a particular issue of which he had become aware of in the church. However, as he develops his flow in writing to the Philippians, over the coming weeks we will read that Paul does address a couple of issues concerning him.

Over the coming weeks, we will explore the following themes:

- **Joy that endures** – Paul's call to rejoice, even in hardship, rooted in confidence in God's goodness.
- **Christ-like humility** – the famous "Christ hymn" in chapter 2, showing Jesus' self-giving love as our model.
- **Pressing on in faith** – discipleship as a lifelong journey of growth and perseverance.

- **Grace and peace** – learning contentment and generosity in every circumstance.

Reflection, Paul and Lydia

I do like the story of Paul and his meeting with Lydia in Philippi.

Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth, which in that society was a symbol of wealth. Purple is often associated with prestige, pomp, royalty. We know purple as the colour of Bishops. It is common now for our ministers to wear other colour shirts and blouses other than the traditional black, but I haven't seen anyone wearing purple - if they did I am sure we would joke with them if they were looking for a promotion! At the time of Lydia, purple cloth was more expensive to produce than gold cloth. The cloth that Jesus was mocked with, as the king of the Jews, after his arrest was a purple cloak. Purple represented royalty or the real upper class, and Lydia had the privilege of clothing them.

Clearly some of the wealth of her customers had filtered down to Lydia. Commentaries describe her as a 'successful businesswoman,' 'a rich businesswoman,' 'a wealthy woman and merchant.' Lydia is recorded for us for posterity by her profession, which is unusual for the women in the story of the gospel and the early church.

We know that there is a cost of living crisis in the UK. We hear a lot about poverty and the need for food banks, free school meals and other support as we see prices rising on essential items. We do though need to remember, on a global scale, that we are rich Christians living in a rich country in the rich western world. We need to remember to use our wealth and our resources accordingly for God.

Secondly, we are told that the meeting with Lydia took place outside the city by the river. Was Lydia there with her household, did the baptism take place at the same time, or was it shortly afterwards, when Lydia and all her

household are baptised by Paul? Whenever it happened, the first thing Lydia did, was to use her prosperity to offer hospitality to Paul and his entourage.

I like how down to earth this response is. So many of the stories in the gospel and the New Testament are about people choosing to give us their old life and begin an entirely different new one (as the hymn says, 'Turned from home and toil and kindred, leaving all for his dear sake'). They are inspiring stories, but do not reflect the situation for most of us, who continue in our life, our families, being Christians. Lydia remains where she is, but now is able to use her wealth for the church, initially by offering hospitality to the apostle who has brought her to faith.

I think it is helpful for us, as we go into Bible Month in these services during October, to be able to think about this story from Acts, and the earliest record we have of the church in Philippi. This passage gives us a lovely story in which we can easily relate to the characters like Lydia.

Listen, read, pray or sing along

We continue our service with the hymn, 'Teach me, my God and King', (StF 668), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGzxLDpRJg0>

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see;
And what I do in anything
To do it as for thee.

For those that looks on glass,
On it may stay the eye;
Or, if it pleases, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake;
Nothing can be so mean
Which, with this tincture, 'For thy sake'
Will not grow bright and clean.
A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.
George Herbert, (1593-1633)

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Gracious God, accept all our gifts, our money,
and all our offerings, and with them our lives,
to be used in mission and service through
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

God of all people and nations,
we pray for your Church throughout the world.
For those who face hardship and opposition:
strengthen them in heart and soul and mind.

For those who feel their ministry is bearing no fruit:
encourage them in heart and soul and mind.

For those divided among themselves:
unite them in heart and soul and mind.

For those facing great change:
support them in heart and soul and mind.

For those looking for fresh new ways
to reach out to their community:
inspire them in heart and soul and mind.

Upon all your people, Lord:
pour out your heart, your soul and your mind
through the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Listen, read, pray or sing along

Our final hymn is 'We have a gospel to
proclaim, (StF 418)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TVTmq7THU4>

We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth;

the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem,
not in a royal house or hall
but in a stable dark and dim:
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary,
hated by those he came to save;
in lonely suffering on the cross
for all he loved, his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free;
he broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand
by all creation glorified;
he sends his Spirit on his church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
this gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.
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A sending out prayer

Be willing to learn, willing to share
Be willing to learn, willing to share,
willing to love, willing to care.
And be blessed in your journey of faith today,
this coming week and always.
Amen.

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