

**AIM**

- To explain the word “disciple.”
- To explain that our confidence as Christians comes from the certainty that God always finishes the work He starts. But, in the meantime, if we’re to maintain that confidence, we must aim to live lives that are “to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11).

**EXPLORE**

- *What would you write to your friends if you were unfairly put in prison?*
- Each week, we’re going to progress through Paul’s letter to the Philippians, allowing this book of the Bible to answer some of our questions about what it means to follow Jesus as His disciple.
- On your notes, you’ll see four sections:
  - *Explore* – we will read the Bible together and talk about what we read
  - *Listen* – we will watch the DVD and make notes in our talk outline
  - *Discuss* – we’ll discuss some points from the DVD
  - *Follow up* – we’ll read Philippians for ourselves throughout the week, noting our questions
- If you don’t have a copy of the Bible, we can get one for you, or you can download a Bible on your phone or tablet. The DVD that we watch will be using the *New International Version*.

**LISTEN (DVD)**

*“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).*

Do you enjoy jigsaw puzzles? Have you ever stared at a pile of 1000 pieces poured out on the table in front of you, and wondered where to start? I gather what you have to do is find the corner pieces first; then the pieces with straight edges; then you put them together, so that you have a square frame into which you know everything else fits. You probably still have 874 pieces to fit – but, however confusing it seems, you know they’ll all fit into that square.

The same is going to be true for the questions that we have as we start *Discipleship Explored*. Even if we have 874 questions we want to ask about God, there are some things that are already in place. Paul makes this clear here in chapter 1: we know that God is sovereign and we know that he is working in us.

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians (“saints in Christ Jesus”) who lived at Philippi, which was the main city in Macedonia. This little group of believers were the first Europeans to respond to the good news about Jesus, and Paul wants to encourage them to keep going as Christians.

Paul went back to visit them several times after his first visit. But now he writes to them while under house arrest, probably in Rome, and he warns them about some serious dangers that could damage this community of young Christians.

The theme of Paul’s letter to the Philippians is given away in his very first sentence: he describes himself and his colleague, Timothy, as “servants of Christ” (v 1). Like the Philippians reading this letter for the first time 2000 years ago, we’re going to be exploring for ourselves exactly what it means to be “servants of Christ”. To be, in other words, a disciple.

## 1. True disciples have their confidence in God.

When someone becomes a Christian, we sometimes say that they have made a decision for Christ, or that someone has committed their life to God. In other words, we think that becoming a Christian is something that *we* have done. Paul sees it differently. The truth is that if you have made a response to God, it is because God has done something in you.

Paul was certain that God was working in the Philippians because of their “partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (v 5); because their lives have steadily demonstrated that the gospel has changed them. Their words, their actions, even their money (see Philippians 4:10, 15-16) had consistently revealed their love for Jesus Christ. So, they were not only believing the gospel; they were living out the gospel (i.e., Jesus’ priorities had become their priorities). This is how Paul knew that God had started and would continue his work in them.

And because Paul knew God was working in them, he could also be sure that God would complete the work he started in them (v 6). In other words, God finishes what he starts—we’re not holding God’s hand; he’s holding ours. Just considering the cross reminds us that God’s love is purposeful and unrelenting—what God starts he finishes.

**Application:** You may be feeling that since becoming a Christian you keep messing up. Sometimes you may even wonder if you really are a Christian. The word “disciple” simply means “learner” – in other words, in the Christian life, we can never say that we have arrived – we will always be learning. Paul’s words give us great confidence: he is saying that if God has begun a good work in you, he will finish it.

- *Add your own illustration here: if possible, a personal illustration of how others more readily saw the change in you than you did in yourself. Point out that the Holy Spirit, because he is holy, makes us feel bad about the wrong things that we do. But being sensitized to sin, and feeling guilty, is a sign that God is at work in us, not that God has abandoned us.*

## 2. True disciples grow in their understanding of God.

Paul tells the Philippian Christians that he is praying that they would have deeper knowledge and insight (v 9).

One of the effects of this growing knowledge of God (v 10) is that “you may be able to discern what is best”. In other words, that Christians will be increasingly wise about how to live – and be able to distinguish good from bad.

But knowledge and understanding are not an end in themselves. God does not want us to become merely experts in theology. Knowledge of God is something which gives rise to genuine, intelligent love in a Christian’s life: a love for God, for his people and for others.

**Application:** Are we growing in our knowledge of God, so that we will be able to know what’s best in our Christian lives? This is a balance to and a part of the solution to the problem of “messing up” that we considered above.

## 3. True disciples are fruitful.

In verse 10, Paul prays that these young Christians would be “pure” and “blameless”. Paul is saying that a true understanding of God will make us pure through and through.

But where does this goodness come from? Again, it is not from ourselves. Verse 11 tells us that this “fruit of righteousness” comes from Jesus Christ, and that it brings glory and praise to God.

**Application:** How “pure” are we? (Are we different on the inside than we are on the outside?) How “blameless” are we? (Do our lives make it easier or harder for other people to believe in Christ?)

## Conclusion

Growing as a Christian – being a disciple – is something that comes from God, and for which God gets the glory.

Our confidence as Christians comes from the certainty that God always finishes the work he starts. But we are not just to sit around waiting for it to happen to us. The sign that God is at work in us is that we actively take steps to be disciples – to grow in the knowledge of God.

## **DISCUSS**

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or struck you from the DVD?*
- *According to Philippians 1:6, what confidence should we have as Christians?*
- *In the middle of daily life, why is verse 6 sometimes so hard to believe?*
- *What can we hold on to when we lack confidence in our salvation?*
- *What difference should this confidence make in our lives?*
- *What is the result of God's "good work in you" and when will it be complete (vv. 6, 10, 11)?*

## **FOLLOW-UP**

See the document entitled "Session 1 Follow-Up." Please note that these follow-up questions differ from the ones in the *Discipleship Explored Handbook*.