

Small Groups

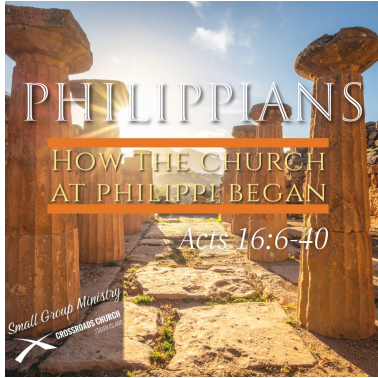
Fall Semester 2026



About Session 1:

Select a reader: →

Before we dive into the book of Philippians, it is necessary to grasp the story behind it. Philippians is not just a letter from Paul to a church; it represents a Gospel partnership that began when God redirected Paul to Macedonia. This led to the formation of a church composed of people from unlikely backgrounds, all centered on Jesus Christ. Today, we will explore the origins of the church at Philippi, and understanding its founding story will enhance our comprehension of the message of joy found in Philippians.



Acts 16:6–40 tells the story of a church that began with a closed door, a divine detour, and the transformation of three radically different individuals through the Gospel. What started with Paul being redirected by God ultimately led to the establishment of one of the most cherished churches in the New Testament.

Flow and foundation of the church of Philippi:

- God redirects Paul's plans — v. 6–10
- Arrival in Philippi — v. 11–15
- Lydia comes to faith in Christ — v. 13–15
- A slave girl is set free — v. 16–18
- Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned — v. 19–24
- Worship produces breakthrough — v. 25–26
- Roman jailer comes to faith in Christ — v. 27–34
- Paul and Silas are released from prison — v. 35–40

Key people:

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke — servants of God

Lydia — a wealthy businesswoman

The slave girl — exploited and powerless

The jailer — a Roman official

Focal Point: God builds His church through unexpected people and unexpected circumstances.

Acts 16:6-10 | The Macedonian Call

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **7** And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. **8** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. **9** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." **10** And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 16: 11-15 | The Conversion of Lydia

11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, **12** and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. **13** And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. **14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. **15** And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

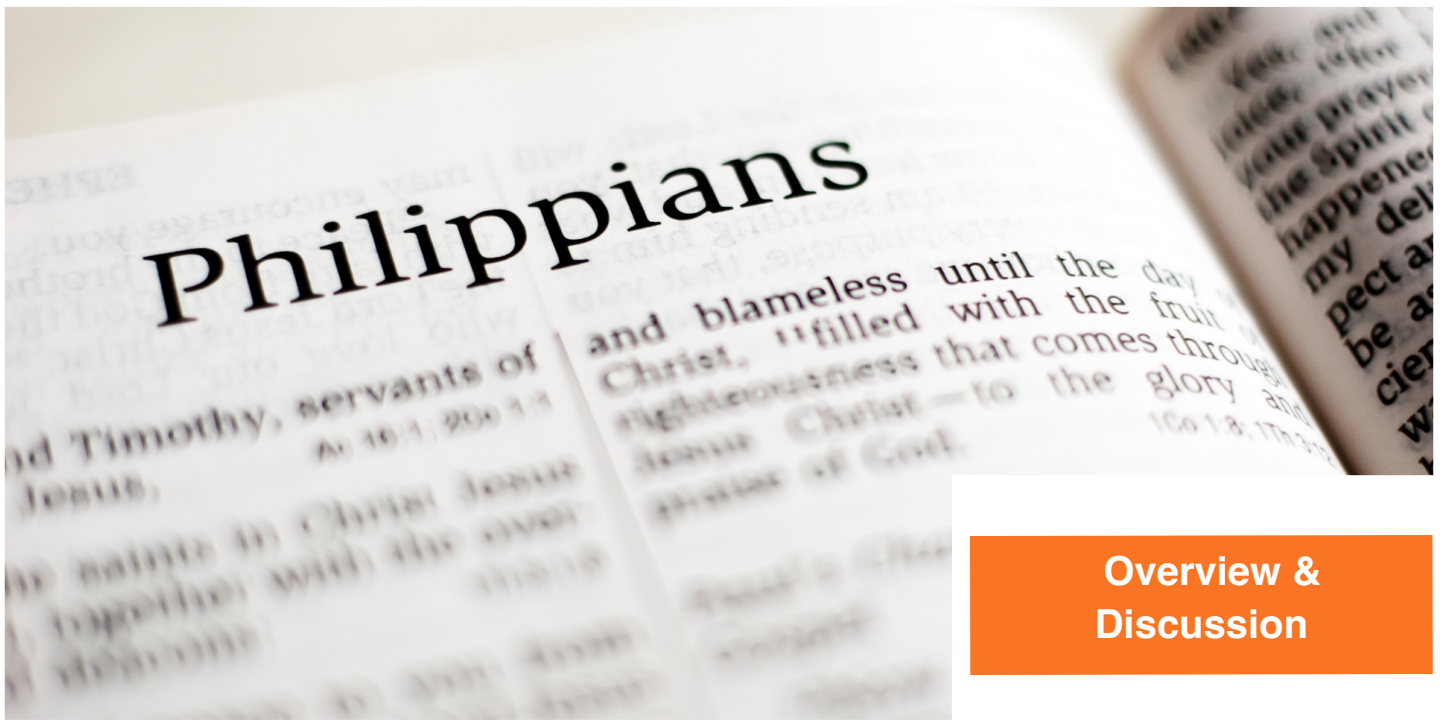
Acts 16:16-24 | Paul and Silas in Prison

16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. **17** She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." **18** And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. **20** And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. **21** They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." **22** The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. **23** And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. **24** Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Acts 16:25-40 | The Philippian Jailer Converted

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, **26** and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. **27** When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." **29** And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. **30** Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" **31** And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." **32** And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. **33** And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. **34** Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. **35** But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." **36** And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." **37** But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." **38** The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. **39** So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. **40** So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.



Overview & Discussion

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul, with Timothy mentioned in the opening greeting (Philippians 1:1)
- **Date:** Approximately **A.D. 60–62** (*written approximately 10 years after the birth of the church*)
- **Place of Writing:** **Rome**, while Paul was under house arrest (Acts 28:16, 30–31)
- **Audience:** The Christians in **Philippi**, a Roman colony in Macedonia
- **Chapters:** 4 / **Verses:** 104
- **Greek words:** Approximately **1,629 Greek words** in the standard critical Greek text
- **Main Theme:** Joy in Christ
- **Key Word: Joy / Rejoice** — forms of *chara* (“joy”) and *chairō* (“rejoice”) occur repeatedly throughout the letter.
- **Key Verse:** Philippians 4:4 — “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”

Application: *Biblical joy is a deep, abiding confidence in God that remains steady regardless of our circumstances.*

Discussion Questions — Acts 16:6–40

1. God redirected Paul when his original plans were blocked. What do we learn from Paul’s response about trusting God when He closes a door or changes our direction?
2. Lydia, the slave girl, and the Philippian jailer came from completely different backgrounds. What does their story teach us about whom God can reach and how the Gospel brings very different people together?
3. Paul and Silas worshiped God while imprisoned, and the jailer ultimately came to Christ. How should their response to suffering challenge the way we respond when our own circumstances don't go as planned?