

# N.T. WRIGHT

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RENEWING MINDS THROUGH BIBLICAL TEACHING

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### ***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians*** **Small Group Discussion Questions**

The purpose of these questions is to provide you with the opportunity to connect with other group members as you reflect on what you are learning. The questions are intended to help your group engage with one another as you process the lecture material, or consider new ideas as the Spirit leads.

#### **Session One: Overview of Philippians**

##### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What's your favorite letter of Paul's and why? Or, if you had a question you would like to ask the Apostle Paul, what would it be?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – What is the pervasive emotion of the letter to the Philippians and why?

3 – Why is Paul writing to the Philippians?

4 – What is Philippi, who lives there, and why does it matter for understanding this letter?

5 – Where is Paul when he is writing this letter and why does it matter?

6 – What are the main themes of this letter?

##### **APPLY**

6 – In the video, Prof. Wright talks about the challenge and tension of holding unity and holiness together. Where and how have you seen this tension at work?

7 – If unity-in-diversity is a sign of Christ's Lordship, how can we begin to practice it?

8 – How can the death and resurrection of the Messiah help you better endure your own seasons of suffering with hope and joy?

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#### **Session Two: Phil 1:1-11**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Who in your life are you thankful for right now and why?

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – How is “grace” a summary of the gospel?

3 – How was the Old Testament concept of “The Day of the Lord” transformed in the early church’s mind by the person of Jesus, and why does that matter?

4 – Why is the notion of “partnership” (Gk: “koinonia”) so crucial for the advance of the gospel?

5 – How is the work of the Holy Spirit implied throughout these verses?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – How does Paul’s concept of love challenge and transform how we normally think of love? How is this different from the norm of society?

7 – What would happen in our lives if we thought of “partnership/fellowship in the gospel” like Paul did?

8 – For Paul, prayer was a central way to experience a partnership in the gospel. How can your prayer life begin to more fully reflect that conviction? What are the obstacles to doing this?



***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***  
**Small Group Discussion Questions**

**Session Three: Phil 1:12-18**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – How did you first come to know Jesus? Who were the key people in your life who informed you of Jesus?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – What were Paul’s circumstances and how did he see them advancing the gospel?

3 – How did Paul utilize “the mind of the Messiah” to reframe his circumstances?

4 – According to Prof. Wright, who are the “others” who are preaching the gospel from bad motives, and how did that actually serve to advance the gospel?

5 – What other examples did Prof. Wright give of biblical characters unintentionally proclaiming the Messiah?

6 – According to Prof. Wright, how did the church defend the gospel in terms of its positive impact on society?

**APPLICATION**

7 – What are some difficult circumstances you are facing and how might God be using them to advance the gospel?

8 – How would reframing your circumstances the way Paul did help you see who God might be trying to reach through you?

9 – In what ways do we tend to leave ministry to “the professionals” rather than seeing our lives and circumstances as occasions for mission?

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#### **Session Four: Phil 1:18-26**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What loss have you grieved, either recent or from long ago, and how is God walking with you through it?

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – What Old Testament book does Paul quote from and how does he see it applying to his situation?

3 – How can Paul claim that his circumstance will turn out for his “salvation” even if he dies?

4 – As Paul wrestles with the possibility that he may die, how does his sense of kingdom-vocation shape his belief he will go on living?

5 – According to the New Testament, what happens after death? And what happens after that?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – What fruitful work does the Lord have for you to do? In your home, school, work, neighborhood, church, etc.?

7 – How does Paul’s outlook on life and death challenge our own sense of the value, dignity, and importance of life with Christ in body?

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### ***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians*** **Small Group Discussion Questions**

#### **Session Five: Phil 1:27-2:4**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What do you think your community might be saying about the Christians who live in it?

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – Why is it so important that Christians show unity in a pagan environment? What are evidences of a "pagan environment" that surrounds you?

3 – What are some of the essential elements, marks, or practices of Christian unity?

4 – Why, according to Paul, should believers living in the present age expect to experience suffering?

#### **APPLICATION**

5 – Where have you experienced opposition in your attempts to live your faith publicly?

6 – Paul's teaching challenges us fight for unity within the community faith. How can you personally contribute to unity within your community?

7 – What are some practical ways that you can love and prefer others in your home, work environment, or church above yourself? Think about those whom it is hard for you to love.



***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***  
**Small Group Discussion Questions**

**Session Six: Phil 2:5-11**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What’s your favorite poem, song, or work of art? *Why* is it your favorite?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – What “stories” does Prof. Wright say are wrapped up in this poem contained in Phil 2:6-11?

3 – What does it mean for Jesus to define our understanding of God? What does it mean for Jesus to define our understanding of being human?

4 – How does the story of Jesus represent a reversal of the story of Adam?

5 – What, according to Prof. Wright, does it mean for Jesus to not exploit the privileges of being God?

**APPLICATION**

6 – Where in your own life do you need to re-think your humanity around the story of Jesus?

7 – How does the story of Jesus reshape your personal understanding of God?

8 – How does the downward, cross-shaped journey of Jesus challenge modern notions of love?



***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***  
**Small Group Discussion Questions**

**Session Seven: Phil 2:9-11**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Who in your life has most clearly embodied the character of God?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – Explain what the word “therefore” is doing in the context of Phil 9-11.

3 – What is Paul doing theologically by utilizing Isaiah 45:23 in these verses?

4 – How does Philippians 2:9-11 contribute to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity?

5 – What does it mean for human beings to be made in the image of God and how does Jesus restore and fulfill that image?

**APPLICATION**

6 – If the character and rule of God are defined by self-sacrificial love, how can you embody that love for the people you lead?

7 – Where in your life do you value power or control more than love?

8 – What might the Lord be asking you to lay down for the sake of others?

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#### **Session Eight: Phil 2:12-18**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What is your favorite Old Testament story and why?

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – How did 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish people understand the Temple and how was that understanding reshaped by the early Christians?

3 – According to Prof. Wright, what does Paul mean when he tells the Philippians to work out their salvation? What is he asking them to do?

4 – Where does Paul think the motivational power for a life of holiness comes from and why does it matter?

5 – When Paul encourages the church to live “pure and spotless in the middle of a twisted and depraved generation”, what does he mean?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – Where do you need to experience the empowering presence of God in a fresh way?

7 – In a culture that values vulnerability and honesty, how do we avoid falling into “grumbling and complaining”?

8 – A drink offering was a gift given to God that was poured out but not *wasted*. What can you do this week to make your life that kind of a gift to God and others?





***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***  
**Small Group Discussion Questions**

**Session Nine: Phil 2:19-30**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Tell us about someone in your life who you trust. Why do you trust him or her?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – Why, practically and theologically, does Paul single out Timothy and Epaphroditus?

3 – What does it mean when Paul says that Timothy has “proved himself”?

4 – Why does Paul say God spared Epaphroditus? What does that teach us about God’s character and the way he relates to us in our humanity?

5 – What is the significance of Paul calling Epaphroditus a “fellow soldier”?

**APPLICATION**

6 – Are you being nurtured in the faith by someone? Are you nurturing anyone personally? Why or why not?

7 – Where do you need to experience God’s mercy?

8 – God is calling for allegiance in every area of our lives. What do you need surrender to him?

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#### **Session Ten: Phil 3:1-6**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Name a group or organization you are part of. How does that group define “membership”?

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – Who are the people that Paul is warning the Philippians against and why is he warning them?

3 – What does Paul mean when he says that the Church is “the circumcision”?

4 – Describe the relationship between Israel and the Church according to Prof. Wright.

5 – Why is it important for Paul to describe the quality of Jew he was under the Law?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – Where in your life are you tempted to define yourself by something other than Jesus?

7 – Where have you seen your pre-Jesus way of life trying to reclaim you?

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#### **Session Eleven: Phil 3:7-11**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Describe something in your life that is valuable to you. Why is it so valuable?

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – How does Paul draw on the Christ-hymn of 2:6-11 to shape his understanding of what it means to be the Church?

3 – What does Paul say he has to give up in order to “know Christ Jesus my Lord?”

4 – How does Paul describe the relationship between faith and faithfulness?

5 – What does Paul say is the “badge” of the believer and why does it matter?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – What do you need to “count as loss” in order to grow in your friendship with Jesus?

7 – How does Paul’s idea of sharing in Christ’s sufferings challenge you?

8 – What would mean for your life to be more fully defined by Christ’s faithfulness?



***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***  
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**Session Twelve: Phil 3:12-16**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Tell the group the story of your baptism. What does it mean for your ongoing walk with Jesus? If you were baptized as an infant, how does that story carry through to your adult life?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – When Prof. Wright refers to the “interval”, what is he talking about and why does it matter?

3 – Describe Paul’s understanding of the “work” Christians are to be doing in “the interval.”

4 – What, according to Prof. Wright, is the difference between Aristotle and Paul’s understanding of virtue?

5 – In this passage and throughout Philippians, what is the relationship between the “mental” and the “moral” work of faith?

**APPLICATION**

6 – Give the group an example from your own life of when transformed thinking led to transformed action.

7 – What are some things we can do as a group to help one another attain to the goal of Christlikeness?

8 – What are some things you personally need to “forget” as you strain towards what is ahead?



## ***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***

### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

#### **Session Thirteen: Phil 3:17-4:1**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – Tell the group about a time when it cost you something to stand for your faith or for a godly principle.

#### **ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – How does Prof. Wright describe the unique relationship the Philippian Christians have to carve out for themselves with respect to the Jewish and Greco-Roman communities?

3 – Why might this result in conflict?

4 – How has Paul's personal encounter with the Messiah, Jesus, reshaped his understanding of what others might see as "ordinary behavior"?

5 – How does Paul's image of believers having their citizenship in heaven function in this passage, and how does it relate to Paul's picture of Jesus as a humble, suffering servant (Phil 2:6-11)?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – How might "thinking with the mind of the Messiah" reshape your perception of what is considered "ordinary behavior" in our culture? Give some examples.

7 – Where are some places right now where you feel your faith is in conflict with what the world considers ordinary? What might Christ be calling you to?

8 – How might your citizenship in heaven change, recondition, or create tension with your earthly citizenship?

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### ***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians*** **Small Group Discussion Questions**

#### **Session Fourteen: Phil 4:2-9**

#### **INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What brought you joy this week? Why was this so joyful?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – How does Paul’s theology of unity come to bear practically in this passage?

3 – What does Prof. Wright speculate might be the background of Paul’s encouragement to “celebrate” and how does he suggest that background might be lived out by the Philippian believers?

4 – What does Paul suggest we do with our worry and what is the result?

5 – What did physician and philosopher Galen say was odd about the Christian community and how does that speak to how the early church thought about bodily life?

#### **APPLICATION**

6 – Throughout this epistle we see Paul leveraging his influence for the sake of unity. How can you leverage your own influence to bring greater unity to the people in your world?

7 – What causes you anxiety and how do you typically respond? How might Paul’s instructions change how you handle anxiety?

8 – What can you do to help the world see the inherent winsomeness of Christianity’s vision of bodily life?

9 – Christians sometimes are cynical about the presence of virtue outside of the Church. Paul is not. Where do you see signs of God’s character at work beyond the Church?



***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians***  
**Small Group Discussion Questions**

**Session Fifteen: Phil 4:10-23**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What causes do you financially support and why do you support them?

**ANALYZE – Start with: What are your initial thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind after hearing what Prof. Wright taught?**

2 – How does Prof. Wright describe the financial relationship between Paul and the Philippians and why does this matter?

3 – How, according to Paul, does the use of our financial resources represent a genuine “sharing” in the sufferings of the gospel?

4 – Describe how the Stoics and Epicureans each thought about contentment and how Paul’s own Messiah-shaped view of contentment differed from theirs.

5 – What is the significance of Paul sending the Philippians greetings “from Caesar’s household”?

**APPLICATION**

6 – How does Paul’s teaching on generosity challenge your current approach to financial stewardship?

7 – How might knowing that you live in a world in which the day of the Messiah is continually dawning strengthen you in your current circumstances, whether you are living “in plenty” or “in want”?

8 – In what ways have you privatized your faith at the expense of your public witness? How might the message of Philippians encourage you to lean into the tension of living for Jesus while Caesar is still in charge?

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## ***Paul and His Letter to the Philippians*** **Small Group Discussion Questions**

### **Session Sixteen: Q&A With Prof. Wright**

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE GROUP AND ANSWER THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1 – What did you enjoy most about this course?

### **RETROSPECTIVE**

2 – David asked Prof. Wright about five different themes related to Philippians: the life of the mind, zeal, rest, suffering, and celebration. Which of these themes resonated the most with you and why?

3 – Which of these themes challenged you the most and why?

4 – How will you think and live differently in light of this course?