

# Small Group Study Guide

## Sacrifice for What He's Doing

### Philippians 2:19-30

*March 14, 2010*

## Leader's Notes

**PLEASE NOTE:** These "Leader's Notes" are a resource to the Small Group Leader to help you in preparing for this study. They are meant to be supplemental. You do not need to cover all the information in these notes with your group. They are simply provided as a resource to you.

### **Welcome and Introduction:**

- Encourage group members to bring their study guide with them that they use on Sunday to take notes on the sermon, but also have extra copies available in case they forget.
- Open with prayer.

### **A Closer Look:**

The following notes are to help you better understand the passages you will be looking at in this study.

### **Notes from ESV Study Bible on Philippians 2:19-30:**

**Phil. 2:19–24** Timothy as an Example of a Service-centered Life. Paul's desire to send his protégé **Timothy** highlights the very personal nature of early church life. Timothy emulates Christ in that he is **concerned for** the Philippians' **welfare**; he does not look out for his own **interests**, but for those of **Christ**.

**Phil. 2:25–30** Epaphroditus as Another Example of Service. Epaphroditus, who is himself from Philippi, is another example of genuine Christian love. He has been longing for the Philippians just as Paul longs for them (1:8; 4:1), and has been eager to let them know that God has spared him from his severe illness.

**Phil. 2:27** To die and be with Christ is far better (1:21), and yet God shows **mercy** to Epaphroditus in sparing his life. Christians can be assured that a fellow Christian truly is in Christ's presence upon his or her death (see note on 1:23); even so, it is proper on such occasions to feel **sorrow upon sorrow**.

**Phil. 2:30** The Christlikeness of Epaphroditus is highlighted by Paul's careful use of words. Having said that Christ was obedient "to the point of death" (v. 8, Gk. *mechri thanatou*), Paul now says that Epaphroditus was "near to death" (v. 27) and that **he nearly died** (v. 30, also with Gk. *mechri thanatou*). Epaphroditus had faced this peril on behalf of the Philippians, who had desired to send gifts to support Paul but had not been able to do so (**what was lacking in your service to me**) until Epaphroditus made it possible (see 4:10, 18).

### **Notes from ESV Study Bible on John 15:1-11:**

**John 15:1** This is the last of Jesus' seven **I am** sayings in this Gospel (see note on 6:35). **True** contrasts Jesus with OT Israel (see previous note), reinforcing John's theme that Jesus is the true Israel. The **vinedresser** refers back to Isaiah's first vineyard song, where God is depicted as tending his vineyard, only to be rewarded with wild grapes (Isa. 5:1-7; cf. Ps. 80:8-9). The fruitfulness of those in Christ contrasts with the fruitlessness of Israel.

**John 15:2** The divine vinedresser does two things to ensure maximum fruit production: (1) he removes unfruitful branches, and (2) **he prunes** all the others (cf. Heb. 6:7-8). **Does not bear fruit** seems to indicate that the person symbolized by such a branch is not a true believer (see John 15:6, 8). In that case, **in me** is just a loose connection needed to make the metaphor of a vine work, reflecting a claim to be Christ's that is not genuine and not implying actual regeneration or true belief. This then would be one of several verses in John showing that not all who follow Jesus for a time and hear his teaching are genuine believers (cf. 6:66; also 13:10-11 on Judas). Others understand these branches to represent true believers who are "unfruitful" for various reasons. In favor of this view is the fact that Jesus says such branches are "in me," and that seems parallel to being "in Christ," as only believers are. However, these unfruitful branches appear to be the same branches that are "thrown away" and "burned" in 15:6, which seems clearly to be a picture of final judgment. **Fruit** is an image for good results coming from the life of a believer, probably in terms of bringing benefit to the lives of others and advancing the work of God in the world (see Matt. 13:8; cf. Gal. 5:22-23 for a different image of "fruit" as changed character). **he takes away**. The Greek verb *airō* can also mean "lifts up" in certain contexts, and some use this to argue that this means God "lifts up" unfruitful branches from the ground so that they will become more fruitful. This interpretation is taken by those who think the branches represent true believers who are not fruitful. But this sense seems less likely because the unfruitful branches in John 15:6 are "thrown into the fire, and burned," which is an image of final judgment. "He prunes" gives a picture of painful but necessary removal of some interests and activities in order that the remaining branches may bear even more fruit. The word translated "prunes" (Gk. *kathairō*) often means "to clean," and has the same root as the adjective *katharos*, translated "clean" in 15:3.

**John 15:3 clean.** See 13:10–11.

**John 15:4 Abide in me** means to continue in a daily, personal relationship with Jesus, characterized by trust, prayer, obedience (see v. 10), and joy. **And I in you** is a phrase without an explicit verb, but it probably is an abbreviated way of saying, “See that I abide in you”; that is, “Safeguard your relationship with me so that I continue to abide fully in you.” (See notes on 8:31; 1 John 2:6.) The “in” terminology in the present passage refers back to OT covenant theology, including prophetic texts regarding a future new covenant (see Ex. 25:8; 29:45; Lev. 26:11–12; Ezek. 37:27–28; 43:9). The repeated references to fruit bearing (also John 15:5, 8) underscore that this is God's primary purpose in creation (Gen. 1:11–12, 22, 28) and in redemption (cf. John 15:8, 16). The OT prophets envisioned a time when God's people would “blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit” (Isa. 27:6; cf. Hos. 14:4–8).

**John 15:5 Apart from me you can do nothing** does not mean “nothing at all,” for unbelievers of course carry on their ordinary activities of life apart from Christ. Rather, it means “nothing of eternal value,” or an inability to produce spiritual fruit.

**John 15:6** The person who **does not abide in me** is an unbeliever who does not have a personal faith in Christ (see note on v. 4). The verse echoes Ezek. 15:1–8, where a vine failing to produce fruit is said to be good for nothing but the fire (see Heb. 6:7–8). **Fire** is a common Jewish and biblical symbol for divine judgment (e.g., Isa. 30:27; Matt. 3:12 par.; 5:22; 18:8; 25:41). Some take this “fire” to imply loss of reward for true believers, not eternal judgment for unbelievers, but this does not fit as well with the image of branches being entirely burned up by a fire. See also note on John 15:2.

**John 15:7** Two conditions are given for answered prayer: abiding in Jesus, and his words abiding in believers (thus transforming their thinking). Elsewhere Jesus says that believers must ask in his name (i.e., in accord with his character and for his glory; see 14:13–14; 16:23–24). If God's people truly **abide in** Jesus (see note on 15:4), they will desire what he desires and will pray according to his words, and those prayers will be pleasing to him.

**John 15:8** God is **glorified** not by praise and worship alone but by his followers also bearing **much fruit** for the advancement of his kingdom on earth. Here again, fruit bearing is evidence of being true believers, or being Jesus' **disciples**.

**John 15:9 Abide in my love.** Mutual love between believers and Christ is another element of this “abiding” relationship (see note on v. 4).

**John 15:10–11** Obedience is not to be equated with drudgery; it is all about **joy**. The OT prophets envisioned a period of great end-time rejoicing (e.g., Isa. 25:9; 35:10; 51:3; 61:10; 66:10; Zeph. 3:14–17; Zech. 9:9). God threatened judgment if

his people would not serve him “with joyfulness and gladness of heart” (Deut. 28:47–48). **that my joy may be in you**. Just as Jesus had great joy in obeying his Father even in the midst of opposition, so Christians will have joy in obedience.

### **Notes from ESV Study Bible on Luke 9:23-25:**

**Luke 9:23** **Come after me** means to become a disciple (cf. 14:27) and requires that a disciple: (1) **deny himself** (not simply denying certain things but denying personal control of one's life); (2) **take up his cross** (cf. 14:27; notes on Matt. 10:38 and Mark 8:34; make a commitment that will lead to rejection and possibly even death); and (3) **follow me** (following the example and teachings of Jesus). In Jesus' day, “follow me” also meant joining the company of his disciples who traveled in ministry with Jesus around Palestine.

**Luke 9:24** **save his life . . . lose it**. See note on Mark 8:35.

**Luke 9:25** Gaining even the **whole world** is infinitely less valuable than one's eternal destiny in relation to God (see note on Mark 8:35).