As we spend time over the next few weeks studying the book of Philippians keep in mind the overarching theme of Scripture. God is a missionary God seeking to reveal His glory. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the means God uses to reveal His fame among every tribe, tongue and nation (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Paul wrote this letter to the Philippian believers to encourage them to continue in partnership with him in advancing the gospel (Phil. 1:3-6). Let’s take a moment to get acquainted with the city of Philippi.

THE HISTORY OF PHILIPPI

The city inherited its name from Philip II, the king of Macedonia, when he enlarged the city in 356 B.C. with many new inhabitants and considerable construction (Expositor’s, 95). Centuries later in 42 B.C., after the victorious battle of Philippi lead by Octavian and Mark Anthony, the city became a Roman military colony. Residents were considered Roman citizens and given the same rights and privileges as cities in Italy. They were exempt from some taxes, not subjected to the authority of provincial government, and they adopted the constitution of a Roman colony.

PAUL’S INITIAL VISIT TO PHILIPPI (Acts 16:11-40)

Paul was on a mission to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in new Gentile cities. The Spirit of God directed Paul on his journey by forbidding him to speak in Asia (16:6) and preventing him from traveling to Bithynia (16:7). It was God’s desire to spread the gospel into the untouched territory of Macedonia (16:9-10). Philippi was the first city in Macedonia (southeastern Europe) in which Paul established a gospel ministry (refer to a Bible map to locate these cities).

Read Acts 16:11-18

What do we learn about the culture and economy of Philippi?

Paul would start his ministry in a new city by visiting the local synagogue on the Sabbath (14:1). The fact that there was no synagogue in Philippi probably means that there were not enough Jewish men in the city to form one (Expositor’s, 96). Despite the absence of a Jewish synagogue, describe the spiritual climate that Paul discovered in Philippi.

How did God direct Paul to begin establishing a gospel ministry in Philippi?
Read Acts 16:19-34

How did the people of Philippi respond to Paul’s first efforts of advancing the gospel?

What consequences did Paul and Silas have to endure for the sake of their ministry?

What was Paul and Silas’ response towards God after having been beaten and imprisoned for ministering in His name?

What supernatural works did God do in response to the faithfulness of His two servants?

Read Acts 16:35-40

Why did the city magistrates want to let Paul and Silas go?

In light of Paul’s desires for future ministry in Philippi, why was Paul opposed to being released from imprisonment secretly?

If Paul knew that disclosing his identity as a Roman citizen would have prevented him from being beaten and imprisoned why did he delay in making this information known to the city magistrates?

Describe the variety of ways in which the gospel was initially established among the believers and unbelievers in Philippi.
THE OCCASION FOR THE LETTER TO PHILIPPI

Philippi was a real city with real people and real issues. The believers in this city had partnered with Paul in spreading the gospel from the first day that they heard the message (1:3-6). Throughout his ministry the Philippians faithfully gave gifts (4:15-16; 2 Cor. 8:1-7, 11:8-9) to Paul and even sent one of their own members named Epaphroditus to minister to him during his imprisonment (2:25; 4:18). Paul writes this letter during his first Roman imprisonment (1:13; 4:22) to encourage the Philippians to continue laboring with him for the sake of the gospel (1:3-6; 1:27). He assures them that the gospel is still spreading despite the opposition he was experiencing from other leaders (1:12-18), his imprisonment, and possible death (1:19-26). Paul redirects their attention off of himself and encourages them to continue living in a manner worthy of the gospel (1:27-30). He illustrates this type of incarnational living through the lives of Jesus Christ (2:5-11), Timothy (2:19-24) and their own messenger Epaphroditus (2:25-30). He warns them to watch out for those who seek to derail them from a gospel-centered life (3:2-10) and exhorts them to press on toward maturity as citizens of heaven (3:12-21). Throughout the letter Paul reminds them to find joy—not in the uncertainty of life or the possibility of Paul’s release from prison—but rather in the reality that God is advancing the gospel (4:4).

GREETING TO THE PHILIPPIANS (Philippians 1:1-2)

Even though Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians he chose to include Timothy’s name in the introduction. What can we learn about Paul and Timothy’s ministry relationship (2:20-22; cf. Acts 16:1-3; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2)?

Paul had earned the right to identify himself with many honorable and well-respected titles (3:4-6; Col. 1:1), but he preferred the title bondservant. What gospel purposes did Paul have in mind for making this association?

Since Paul's first visit, what do we learn about the progress of the spiritual condition of the church at Philippi?

Paul’s greeting to the Philippians was a very common greeting. In light of Paul’s gospel agenda, why would he desire to extend grace and peace from God?
COMMUNITY APPLICATION

Paul was a missionary who traveled to each town with the intent of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit led Paul to the region of Macedonia and specifically to Philippi for the purpose of continuing to spread the gospel. Most of you probably did not have God’s gospel agenda on your mind when you moved to your particular city or neighborhood. Whether you realize it or not you are living exactly where God wants you for the purpose of ministering the gospel to your neighbors and other people within your community. You have been enlisted as His ambassadors to speak and incarnate His gospel message (2 Cor. 5:14-21). Allow these questions to guide you this week as you spend time prayerfully considering God’s agenda for your neighbors, co-workers, friends, children, and family.

Paul spent time evaluating the spiritual climate of Philippi. What is the spiritual climate of your city, neighborhood, work environment, home, etc.?

Describe aspects of the culture of your city that may negatively influence the advance of the gospel.

Paul was confidently aware of how God had equipped him for ministry. Evaluate how God has already prepared you to begin advancing the gospel in light of your passions, spiritual gifts, and relational connections. Consider walking your neighborhood or driving around your city, begging God to open your eyes to how He wants to use you.

Paul was not a maverick missionary in Philippi. During his first visit he partnered with Silas and then later ministered with Timothy. Why did he partner with others to accomplish this task? What like-minded believers has God placed around you to partner with for the gospel?

What was Paul’s purpose/objective in the city? What is yours?