

Study 1

Saints - God's holy people

General Eva Burrows said

'Holiness is not a special state for the few "saints" but the life to which God calls human beings. It is a quality of character to which God calls his people, and if he calls us to it, it must be possible.'
(in Shaw Clifton 2004 *New Love*: 125)

These Bible studies are designed to investigate, by looking at some selected passages in the book of Philippians, what it means to live a holy life.

Paul teaches the Christians in Philippi what their attitudes should be, how they should live, how they should treat each other and how they should be a holy witness to the world.

Before you begin your Bible studies, take time to listen as one person reads right through the book of Philippians. As you listen to Paul's words also listen to what God is saying to you through them.

Share with each other what God is saying to you.

Spend some time praying that God will help you listen to him through his word, and listen to each other as you share your thoughts.

The report of The Salvation Army International Spiritual Life Commission (1998) included a Call to Holiness, which says

'We call Salvationists worldwide to restate and live out the doctrine of holiness in all its dimensions- personal, relational, social and political- in the context of our cultures and in the idioms of our day while allowing for, and indeed prizing, such diversity of experience and expression as is in accord with the scriptures'.

As you read and discuss over the next few studies keep in mind this Salvationist call to holiness.

Paul's letter to the Philippians can help us to understand what God wants us to be and do.

Philippians 1:1 To all the saints who are in Christ Jesus

Paul often uses the word 'saints' to describe the Christians to whom he was writing (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:2). Sometimes the same Greek word *αγιος* – *hagios*, which means 'saints,' is translated as 'holy ones'.

We tend to think of saints either as the 'important' people of the church, for example Saint Paul or Saint Peter, or as people who are extra good and not 'ordinary' Christians. But this is not the Biblical meaning. Saints are people who belong God and are available for him to use. All Christians are called to be saints. All Christians are called to be God's holy people.

Name some people who might be thought to be 'saints'. They can be famous Christians or they can be people from your own community.

Why have you chosen these people? What is special about who they are and the way they live

*God has called **you** to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). He has also promised to make you holy (1 Thessalonians 4:24). How does that make you feel?*

Read again the statement from General Burrows. In your experience, do all Christians actually believe that that holiness is possible for them? If not, suggest some reasons.

Read 1 Peter 1:15-16 and 1 Thessalonians 4:24 to each other as a call to be God's holy people and a promise that God will help you to be what he commands.

Study 2

God and his holy people

God is a holy God

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

What does this story tell us about God? What does it tell us about human beings?

God's character is holy in two ways.

1. He is holy in some ways that we can never be holy.

He is all powerful (Psalm 68: 34), all knowing (Psalm 147:5), present everywhere (Jeremiah 23:24), eternal (Psalm 90:2).

Spend some time in prayers of adoration to our great and majestic holy God.

2. God is also a God of love (I John 4:8); he a God of justice and righteousness (Amos 5:24). This is God's moral holiness.

This is the holiness that God calls human beings to share, and to live out in their daily lives.

When we are living holy lives, we should be showing these qualities in our lives. We must be people who show love, work for justice and live in a right relationship with God.

How can you do this in your family and your community? What things are you already doing? What opportunities are there? What needs to change?

God has always called his people to holiness:

Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the Lord; I sanctify you. Leviticus 20:7-8 New Revised Standard Version

Being holy means being consecrated- being set apart for God's purposes. We can see in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, what this means.

God's holy people in The Old Testament:

Read Exodus 19: 5-6, Leviticus 11:44-45, Deuteronomy 7: 6-9, Psalm 34:9.

Notice that these texts refer to the nation of Israel. The whole nation is a community of saints, and the people, as a community, are called to be holy.

What are the signs of the special relationship between God and Israel?

What does God do? What should the people do?

What do these texts tell us about our relationship with God?

God's holy people in The New Testament:

In the New Testament Paul never talks of one saint, but always of more than one. The word is always 'saints.' Becoming holy is something that we do in the Christian community. We are saints together.

Phil Needham writes 'holiness must be seen as a personal journey only as part of a journey in fellowship with other believers. We are 'citizens with the saints... and members of the household of God' (Ephesians 2:19)....'

Holiness is partly about your own relationship with God - how you allow him to live his life in you and through you - but it is also about your relationships with other believers, and with the world.

This means that holiness is not only about how much you read your Bible, or how often you pray, but also about your life in your family, among your friends, at work, in your community and in your church.

We see in The New Testament that although the Christian communities are described as 'saints,' that does not mean that they are perfect or that nothing ever goes wrong.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 10, Romans 1:7 and 2:1 and Philippians 1:1 and 4:2.

These texts show us that God's 'saints', his holy ones are still learning what it means to be holy and how they are still struggling with human relationships.

Think of a community that you belong to. For example, it could be your family, the Home League, or your corps. Do you think of it as a holy community? If not, what are the reasons?

What are the good things about learning to be holy with other people? What might be some of the challenges?

Pray for your community. Ask God to make it holy.

Study 3

A holy example: Paul

We see from Philippians 1:13 that Paul wrote the letter when he was in prison. Although we cannot be certain, it is likely that he was writing from Rome (see Acts 28:30-31).

The letter is written to a church that Paul is familiar with; we sense that they are friends about whom he cares very deeply (Philippians 1:8).

As he writes, we learn something of Paul's own story. We see how he uses his own experience to teach and encourage them. He is an example of what a saint must be.

Read Philippians 3: 4-11, where Paul gives his testimony.

Look carefully at verses 4-6.

Paul says that he could claim to have confidence in his family heritage, his status in the Jewish religion, his attitude to the demands of his faith. None of these are bad or wrong, but he goes on to say that they are nothing compared with knowing Jesus.

Think about your family, your work, your place in the corps, your attitude to your tribe or your country.

What can these verses teach us about what is most important in our lives?

Philippians 3:8 says 'Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as rubbish'. (Contemporary English Version)

How do we know when something in our life is 'rubbish'?

What 'rubbish' do you still have that needs to go? Remember that it may not necessarily be a bad thing, it may be something that is good, but the time and energy you are giving to it distracts you from the plans that God has for your life.

Now read Philippians 3:12-16.

Paul is describing his own need to keep focused, to continue looking ahead to the 'prize.' He is presenting the Christian lifestyle as a race, or a journey, and looks forward to a time when it will be completed.

Philippians 1:6 reminds us that what God has begun in us, he will eventually finish.

Finally, read Philippians 1:19-23. Discuss Paul's attitude to his imprisonment.

Think of some challenges faced by you, and the people in your family, or community, that might be described as a 'prison'?

Some examples might be

- *People who are not supported in their faith by their husbands, or their families;*
- *People who are ridiculed or disadvantaged at work because they are Christians;*
- *People who are disadvantaged because of their gender, their financial status or their culture;*
- *People who do not have the resources that they need for living;*
- *People whose responsibilities in life cause anxiety and stress;*
- *People who do not have access to education;*
- *People who are literally in prison because they are a Christian;*
- *People who are 'imprisoned' by their own doubts and fears.*

Reflect upon what you have learned from Paul's life and experience.

In small groups pray

- *For people who need to learn how to be confident in God rather than in the world.*
- *For Christians who face difficult challenges which imprison them.*
- *That you will have the courage clear any 'rubbish' from your life in order to become the person that God wants you to be.*

Study 4

Holy people have the right attitude.

In The Old Testament the nation of Israel are called to be God's holy ones, his saints.

In The New Testament, the new Israel consists of those people who are 'in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 1:1).

The difference between The Old Testament and The New Testament is Jesus. New Testament saints are called and chosen *by* Jesus to live *for* Jesus. Paul reminds the Philippians that the privilege of knowing Jesus brings the responsibility to live differently.

Read Philippians 2:1-4 '...if Christ's love makes any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care....' (The Message)

Paul reminds the Philippians that *if* this is true, *then* they should be showing attitudes and qualities that reflect Jesus.

Look carefully at the qualities that Paul says the Philippians should show in their living.

In your experience, do Christians in your church always behave in this way? Can you suggest reasons why they may not do so?

Give practical examples of ways in which you can be like-minded, show love, be humble, and look to other people's interests. Do you always do this?

What can you do in your own Christian community to encourage each other to live with the right attitudes?

Read Philippians 1:9-11

Most saints live in the ordinary world amongst ordinary people, some of whom are also saints. Because they are God's holy ones, they belong to God and should reflect his values. They learn to see the world with the insight that God gives.

These verses are a prayer for deep integrity and purity of motives, so that our relationship with God will be seen in everything we do.

Look carefully at the things that Paul is praying for the Philippians:

- *Knowledge and depth of insight*

List the ways that are available to you to learn more about God. How can you make sure that your faith continues to grow deeper?

- *Discernment*

How does God help you to make good choices in your relationships, your work and your leisure time?

- *Be pure and blameless – a clear conscience and pure motives.*

What does this mean in your everyday life ? It will affect how you treat other people, what you do when faced with a problem, when you are buying and selling goods.....

Do people see God in everything that you do?

Do they hear God in everything you say?

It can happen when our lives are shaped completely by our relationship with Jesus (Philippians 1:9).

In the same way that Paul prayed for his friends pray for each other using Philippians 1:9-11.

Study 5

Holy People are like Jesus

Read Philippians 2:5-11

This is a beautiful description of Jesus; who he is, his attitude and his actions.

Verse 5 says that we should display the same attitude of mind. This is really a summary of the whole of Paul's argument, and of Christian holiness.

Holiness is.....

having the same attitude as Jesus; this means we will become like him.

Power and obedience:

Philippians 2:6 'Christ was truly God, but he did not try to remain equal with God' (Contemporary English Version).

This translation suggests that the verse is about not holding on to power or prestige, even if we are entitled to it.

Think about the power relationships in your family, or the community in which you live. Who holds the power? If they are like Jesus, how should they behave?

Think about the power relationships in your Salvation Army community. Who holds the power? If they are like Jesus, how should they behave?

Philippians 2:8. Jesus demonstrated his obedience by dying on the cross. This was something that he chose to do – he humbled himself.

Read Isaiah 53:7-9 and take time to reflect on these words, thinking of Jesus.

What are the things that you can do to show your humble obedience to God?

Slavery:

Philippians 2:7 'he gave up everything and became a slave' (Contemporary English Version).

Slaves belong to the master, they do what he commands. They have no rights, they cannot make their own choices.

How does this compare with the society in which you live? What rights do people expect to have? What choices do they make?

Who are the people in your community who are not able to make their own choices?

We saw that justice is part of God's holiness (Amos 5:24). Is there injustice in the way these people are treated?

What can Christians do to work for God's justice in your community?

Slaves of Jesus:

Read Philippians 1:1.

Paul and Timothy describe themselves as slaves of Christ Jesus. This is a different way of looking at slavery. As slaves of Christ Jesus the Bible tells us that we have been 'bought with a price' (1 Corinthians 6:20), we belong to him and have no rights of our own.

But

Slave owners have a duty to their slaves, to protect, feed and give them shelter. So the verse also reminds us that we are under the protection of God.

What does it mean to say that in order to live a holy life we must become a 'slave of Christ Jesus'? How can we show this in our living?

Discuss whether it is possible to use this image effectively in your culture? Would people understand what it really means? What misunderstandings might arise? Would this be helpful in their understanding of God? What other image or analogy might be appropriate?

Finish by reading Philippians 2: 9-11 and celebrate the Lord who is our slave-master. Pray about the issues you have discussed in this study.

Study 6

Work out your salvation

Read Philippians 2:12-18

Philippians 2:12 The word 'therefore' links this section to the verses before it. If Jesus is the model that we follow, if our attitude of mind is like his then we must behave in certain ways.

Philippians 2: 12-13 'work out your own salvation... for it is God who works in you..'

This is not about our Christian activity or 'works' (James 2:17) Paul is talking about the balance between taking responsibility for our own development and letting God do his work within us.

When God works in us, it is a gift of grace, according to his purpose. God's plan for our lives is to bring us to him.

Why is our spiritual life described as work?

What is the work we need to do?

What do we need to let God do in us, or through us (Read Ephesians 3:16-17)?

What can we do to help each other work out our salvation?

Read verse 14. 'Do everything without complaining or arguing. This is God's standard for his people'.

We can see that some people in Philippi struggled to achieve this. (Read Philippians 4:2-3)

We are not told why the women are quarrelling, but it is significant enough for Paul to mention it. Both women have worked with Paul in the mission but this behaviour is opposed to the qualities listed in Philippians 2:1-4.

The church is called to '*stand firm in the Lord*' (Philippians 4:1) but it can only do so if Christians are willing to give up their personal agendas and live in unity. The mission is more important than the individual.

In any church people have their own God-given personality and gifts.

How can people with different opinions be said to be like-minded (Philippians 2:2)? Think of some practical examples.

How can we guard against and discourage complaining or disunity in our own group?

What should we do when we are aware that it is happening?

In the first few verses of the chapter Paul had talked about the Philippians' attitude to one another, now he begins to look beyond the church to its relationships with the world.

The church is to be *blameless and pure* (Philippians 1:10, 2:15). This phrase speaks of a good character, a clear conscience, without mixed motives.

In a '*crooked and depraved generation.*' This is a reference to the culture in Philippi, which was a pagan city where Caesar was worshipped as Lord.

Spend some time discussing in detail how you would describe the place in which you live and your generation.

What are peoples' values, attitudes and actions? How do they live?

In small groups, pray that God will help you to reach out to people in your place and your generation who do not know him.

Study 7

Shine like stars

Then you will *shine like stars* (Philippians 2:15):

If our motives and actions show integrity and are 'without fault,' we will stand out as brightly as stars in the night sky.

Light contrasts with darkness but it also changes it. As saints who are 'in Christ Jesus' we must be different from the world around, but must also transform it.

'Responsibility for the world around, outreach, making an impact, telling others about Jesus- these thoughts are entertained only after any Christian has laid a foundation of Christian personal holiness. Like the light we must 'be' if we are to 'do' (Alec Motyer).

Discuss the qualities that help Christians to 'shine like stars' in their everyday lives. Compare your list with Galatians 5:22-23.

What practical things can you do in your community, individually and as a group, that will show that you are 'shining' for God?

Bringing Life:

Philippians 2:16 'As you hold out the word of life'

Our holiness must lead to mission.

.....Our mission must grow from our holiness.

They are so interconnected that they cannot be separated. Holiness leads to practical service which will show God to other people

Read Hebrews 12:14 and think about what this means in your life.

When we tell people about the word that gives life - Jesus - we must also be an example of what it means to live the life that he gives.

Holiness is not an option; it is a necessity if we are to obey Jesus' command to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19).

Where is the 'darkness' in your community? Think very carefully and name some specific situations.

What practical service can you give which will challenge and transform the darkness?

How can we as Christians make sure that our challenge does not condemn people, but offers them light and life?

Reflect upon John 1:4-5, and rejoice in the light that cannot be defeated by darkness.

Group Bible Studies
Studies in Holiness: Philippians
Karen Shakespeare

Study 8 Saints together

A summary of Christian qualities:

Read Philippians 4:4-7.

Sometimes it is hard to rejoice in our circumstances, but this passage tells us that the source of our joy is not what is happening to us, but God.

Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all.

This phrase is another way of returning to Paul's theme of 'having the same mind.' It is to do with being considerate towards other people, not always insisting on our own way or our rights but sometimes compromising for the sake of others.

Pray with thanksgiving.

Be content, Paul is an example. *Read Philippians 4: 10-13.*

Having done this, experience God's peace as a guard in your hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7).

As you look at the qualities listed in these verses and reflect upon your attitude to life. Does anything need to change?

How do you experience God's peace?

Holiness is not about what we *don't* do, say or think.... but about qualities of life that God will give us if we let him. He can't and won't make us holy if we consistently go against what he wants us to be.

Philippians 4:8 'Think about such things'

Paul is not talking about a casual thought which never goes deeper than the surface of our minds, but that deep consideration that results in acceptance and transformation. This kind of thinking changes who we are.

'We tend to become what we most often see' (John Hargreaves).

Do you agree? How can this statement be applied to the choices we make each day?

How do you balance spending time with people who help you to grow in holiness and with those to whom you want to be a witness, and an example of holy living ?

Paul the role-model:

Read Philippians 4:9

Paul sets himself as a role-model for the Philippians to follow (also in Philippians 3:17). Throughout the letter there is a sense of relationship between Paul and the Philippians (Philippians 1:8; 2:17-18; 4:1).

Paul takes advantage of this relationship to challenge them and encourage them to live more Christ-like lives.

Who are your role models? How do they challenge you to live a more holy life? What might be the dangers in following other people?

Who are the people who might see you as a role model? What responsibility does that place upon you?

A reason to be thankful ...

Philippians 4:19

And a reminder...

Philippians 1:6

What was true for the Philippians is true for us.

We are called to be saints – a community of God's holy people who demonstrate the qualities of Jesus in their relationships with each other and as they 'hold out' Jesus to the world.

Work with God to make it happen!

Look again at the report of The Salvation Army International Spiritual Life Commission

'We call Salvationists worldwide to restate and live out the doctrine of holiness in all its dimensions- personal, relational, social and political- in the context of our cultures and in the idioms of our day while allowing for, and indeed prizing, such diversity of experience and expression as is in accord with the scriptures'.

What have you learned from this series of studies that will help you 'restate and live out' holiness in your family, your church and your community?

Pray about this in small groups, and then promise to support each other, and challenge each other, as you continue to work with God who will make you his holy people.