

Synthetic Method - a Bible Study Outline
The broad, overall study of a book of the Bible.

(Please note - my notes are added at the end, but they are more extensive than what is necessary for this method. The amount of work you do in initial observations will be dependent upon the time you have available. The goal of this type of study is what is stated in Step 3 - to unravel the flow of the book and understand the author's theme, purpose and presentation / arguments)

Step One

Read through the entire book to get the overall flow of the text.

Step Two

Read through the entire book a second time listing observations, problems, cross references & possible applications as you read.

Observations: Include key thoughts, main arguments, important words, etc. - Who, What, When, Where, Why & How

Problems - list out what you don't understand that you want to explore more in depth later - words to look up, questions, etc.

Cross References - Note important events that are recorded in other scriptures; quotes of other scriptures, other scriptures dealing with the same subject.

Observations

Set the Context: What is the context & how does that effect my understanding of this passage

Who: _____

What: _____

When: _____

Where: _____

Why: _____

How: _____

Lexical: Word Definitions _____

Syntactical /Grammatical insights _____

Linking words: _____

Cause & Effect statements: _____

Commands: _____

Relevant information about history, geography, and culture: _____

Problems / Questions:

Step 5 - Summarize the historical background

Who, what, when, where, why, how

Author _____

Date of writing: _____

Location of writing _____

Circumstances of the author _____

To Whom was it Written? _____

Where are they? What is like there? _____

What are the circumstances of the recipients? _____

Why was the book written? What is the purpose of the author? _____

ADVANCED

Step 6 - What kind of literature is the book: History / Narrative? Poetic? Wisdom? Prophetic? Topical? Logical? Interrogative? Corrective? Apocalyptic? Etc. _____

Step 7 - Chart the Book

NOTE: A synthetic book study (overview/ survey) should be done prior to analytical studies (chapter or verse analysis) to set context. Without this it is very easy to take a passage out of context and interpret incorrectly. A synthetic study should also follow analytical studies to correct / add to the initial synthetic study. This will actually continue throughout life as greater in depth analysis of passages makes corrections to the overall understanding of a book.

Step 8

APPLICATION - pick out the most important applications in the book for you.

What commands do I need to fulfill? _____

Are there promises I should claim? _____

Are there sins I should avoid? _____

Are there examples I should follow? _____

Are there problems I need to solve? _____

What will I do now to obey what God is teaching me in this book ? _____

Synthetic Study of Philippians

Step One - Observations

Text	Observations
1:1-2	Introduction & Salutation
1:1	Paul & Timothy are together. Paul & Timothy consider themselves “bondservants” (δουλοῖ) of Jesus. They are writing to the “saints” - all the saved - at Philippi. A Roman city in Macedonia. Important in the trade routes. Paul was first there in Acts 15. One of his first stops in Europe and where the first convert - Lydia - was made. Paul also addresses those in holding two offices in the church - Overseers (ἐπισκοποῖς) and deacons (διακονοῖς) Verse two is a common salutation of Paul’s - desire for God’s grace and peace to be upon them.
1:2	
1:3-11	Paul expresses his thoughts and desires toward the Philippians and why he feels the way he does.
1:3	He thanks God for them
1:4	He prays for them with joy
1:5	He notes their continued participation in the gospel that began when they first heard it.
1:6	He is confident of God’s continued work in them
1:7	He notes their participation with him in the gospel even though Paul has been imprisoned and has had to defend the gospel, they stand with him.
1:8	He desires to be with them (vs. 8)
1:9-11	Paul’s prayer for them - their love will abound in real knowledge and discernment, they would approve what is excellent and thus be sincere and blameless when Christ comes and will bear the fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God Words to define: discernment; application: I should pray this way for people
1:12-26	Paul explains how God has used even his imprisonment for the proclamation of the gospel. He further explains how his life is centered around being Christ’s servant, so that living or dying is no longer a concern. Paul rejoices in all.
1:13	The whole praetorian guard (an elite guard of Caesar’s) and many others now knew Paul’s testimony because of being imprisoned.
1:14	Paul’s imprisonment encouraged others to boldly speak the Word of God.
1:15-18	Paul rejoiced that Christ was proclaimed, regardless of the motives (whether good or evil) of those preaching.
1:19-26	Paul was confident that their prayers would be answered. That Christ would be exalted and he would be delivered, whether by release or death. Yet, Paul was convinced he would be released so he could continue with them for their benefit, though personally, death and being with Christ was better for him.
1:27-30	Paul encourages them to continue in godly conduct and not be alarmed by the suffering they would experience in the future. Paul encouraged them to stand firm in unity - one spirit and one mind striving

- 1:27 for the faith of the gospel.
Paul encouraged them not be alarmed by their opponents (μηδενι), who were
- 1:28 heading for destruction, while they were heading to salvation.
God had granted them to believe in Christ, and also to suffer for His sake in the
- 1:29-30 same way that Paul had been suffering.
- 2:1-11 Paul tells them to be unified and unselfish pointing out the selfless example of
Jesus Christ in becoming and man and dying for them.
- 2:2 Paul's joy in them would be complete if they were of the same mind, maintained
the same love, were united in spirit and intent on one purpose.
- 2:3-4 The Christian must be humble and look out for the interests of fellow Christians
- 2:5-11 The "Kenosis" (κενοσις) Christ leaving heaven, becoming a man, paying for
our sins and eventually being exalted again.
- 2:5 A command to have the same attitude of humility displayed in Jesus
- 2:6 Jesus existed in the form of God, but did not regard equality with God as
something to be "grasped" (αρπαγμα). What does this mean?
- 2:7 What does it mean for Christ to have "emptied Himself" (εκενωσεν)? What
was emptied? What was not? Jesus became a bond-servant (δουλου), and
- 2:8 was made in the likeness (εν ομοιωματι) of man? What attributes of man did
He take on? What aspects of man did he not take on?
- 2:9 He was found in the appearance (σχηματι) of a man, and humbled Himself to
die even on a cross. Cross reference the significance of the cross - Deut.
21:23; Gal. 3:13.
- 2:10-11 God will exalt Him in the future above everything and all things will bow to
Him and confess (εξομολογησεται) that Jesus is Lord
- 2:12-18 Paul commands them to follow through in living godly lives with one another in
practical ways and thus prove Paul's labor among them was not in vain.
- 2:12 He commends them for their former obedience and exhorts them to continue.
Work out your salvation with fear and trembling - salvation is not by works, so
what does Paul mean here?
- 2:13 God is the one at work in man for His own good pleasure.
- 2:14 No grumbling (γογγυσμων) or complaining (διαλογισμων).
- 2:15 The right response proves a person to be a child of God in the midst of a wicked
world and a light shining to them.
- 2:16 As they hold fast to the word of life Paul has taught them, they prove he did not
minister to them in vain.
- 2:17-18 Paul rejoices regardless of what suffering he may endure for their sake and
invites them to rejoice with Him.
- 2:19-30 Timothy and Epaphroditus are good examples of humble service and living the
Christian life.
- 2:19-24 Timothy's example
- 2:19 Paul wanted to send Timothy in order to learn how they were doing
- 2:20 Timothy was of a kindred spirit to Paul, and would really care about them.
- 2:21-24 Most people seek after their own interests, but Timothy has proven himself as a
servant of the gospel in serving with Paul. That is why Paul wanted to send
Timothy, and then come himself too.

- 2:25-30 Epaphroditus' example and instructions concerning him.
- 2:25 Epaphroditus also was a co-worker of Paul's who had an outstanding character and Paul was going to send him instead of Timothy.
- 2:26 Epaphroditus desired to see the Philippians, especially since he had been sick.
- 2:27 His sickness had been very severe, but God was merciful to him and Paul.
- 2:28 Paul sent him that they may rejoice with him and Paul find out about them.
- 2:29-30 Paul instructs them to receive Epaphroditus with all joy and hold him and all like him in high regard because of his example of selfless service for Christ.
- 3:1-16 Paul calls them to rejoice in the Lord and follow his example
- 3:1 Paul does not mind reminding them of things he has said before
- 3:2 He warns them to beware of dogs, evil workers and the false circumcision (cross reference to find out the specific nature of each)
- 3:3 The true circumcision, as compared to the false, do not trust in their flesh (genetic heritage), but worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Jesus.
- 3:4-6 Paul would have bragging rights if trust was to be put in the flesh since he had the correct genealogy, training, zeal and dedication to keeping the law.
- 3:7-8 Paul counted all those things as rubbish in view of the value of knowing Jesus.
- 3:9 Paul's desire was to be found in Him with the righteousness of faith.
- 3:10-11 He desired to know Jesus fully - in the power of resurrection, the fellowship of suffering and be conformed to His death.
- 3:12-14 Paul did not view himself as having finished, but was pressing on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
- 3:15-16 Paul calls on the Philippians to have the same attitude and live to that standard.
- 3:17-21 Paul calls on the Philippians to follow the example of those like himself and warns them of the many are enemies of the cross.
- 3:17 Walk according to the pattern you have in us.
- 3:18 Many, as he had previously warned, are enemies of the cross
- 3:19 Their end is destruction, their god is their appetites, they glory in shameful things and their minds are worldly.
- 3:20-21 The Christian is a citizen of heaven from which Jesus will return for us and then transform us into something in keeping with His glory.
- 4:1 In view of these things, Paul exhorts them to stand firm in the Lord
- 4:2-3 Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche, who had been previously helpful to Paul, to live in harmony. He asks others to help them.
- 4:4-7 Paul sets forth his reason for being able to rejoice in all circumstances. The Lord is near and as proper prayer is made to God, He gives us peace beyond comprehension.
- 4:8-9 Peace is also gained by having our minds focused on the right things - that which is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent and praiseworthy. These same things they saw in Paul and what he did.
- 4:10-20 Paul thanks them for their generosity to him while explaining to them the secret of contentment.
- 4:10 Paul rejoiced in the Lord over their expression of concern for him

- 4:11-12 Paul had learned to be content in every circumstance - in need and in
4:13 abundance.
- 4:14-16 The secret was being able to do all things through Christ who strengthened him.
Paul rejoiced that they showed their concerned in sharing what they had with
4:17-18 him - as they had done previously.
He rejoiced more about what the gift demonstrated about them than for how it
would help him. God met Paul's needs and considered their gift a sacrifice on
4:19 their part in the worship of God.
Paul encouraged them that God would meet their needs too according to His
4:20 riches.
God is deserving of all glory.
- 4:21-22 A greeting to all the believers there and a greeting from all the believers with
him.
- 4:23 A concluding salutation repeating what he said in the beginning - that the grace
of the Lord Jesus would be with them.

Step Two - Main Themes

Section	Theme
1:1-2	Salutation
1:3-11	Thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians
1:12-18	Paul's joy in the midst of being in prison because the gospel was being preached
1:19-26	Paul's confidence in living for Christ alone.
1:27-30	Paul's call to the Philippians to live godly lives.
2:1-11	Paul's call to the Philippians to be unified, be humble and serve one another following Christ's example.
2:12-18	Paul's call to the Philippians to be godly in practical ways.
2:19-30	Paul sets Timothy and Epaphroditus before them as godly examples
3:1-16	Paul sets forth the foolishness of trusting the flesh (heritage) and the goal of trusting Christ and living for Him.
3:17-21	Paul calls on them to follow his example of not walking as a citizen of this world, but rather as a citizen of heaven.
4:1	Exhortation to stand firm in the Lord
4:2-3	Exhortation to former co-workers to live in harmony
4:4-7	Rejoicing over having peace through proper prayer
4:8-9	Gaining peace through a proper mindset

- 4:10-20 Rejoicing over the Philippians concern and gift - yet knowing the secret of contentment in all circumstances.
- 4:21-23 Final greetings and salutations

Step Three: Main Theme

Joy & Unity - Paul's heartfelt letter expressing joy in all circumstances, thankfulness, and encouragement to be unified in spirit, mind, purpose and love.

Step Four: Outline

- I Joy in Suffering (Chapter 1)
 - A. Salutation (1)
 - B. Thanksgiving and Prayer (2-11)
 - C. Joy & Suffering in Prison (12-18)
 - D. Confidence in Living for Christ Alone (19-26)
 - E. Exhortation to the Philippians
 - II Joy in Humble Submission (Chapter 2)
 - A. Unity from Humble Submission to One Another (1-4)
 - B. Humble Submission of Christ (5-11)
 - C. Humble Submission to God (12-18)
 - D. The Example of Humble Submission of Timothy & Epaphroditus (19-30)
 - III Joy in Salvation (Chapter 3)
 - A. Forgetting the past and pressing on for the prize in Christ Jesus (1-16)
 - B. Citizenship in Heaven (17-21)
 - IV Joy in Sanctification (Chapter 4)
 - A. Live in Sanctification (1-3)
 - B. Peace through Proper Prayer (4-7)
 - C. Peace through Proper Mindset (8-9)
 - D. Contentment in God's Provision (10-20)
- Final greetings and Salutations (21-23)

Step Five

Historical Background - Introduction to the Epistle to the Philippians -
http://gracebibleny.org/introduction_to_the_epistle_to_the_philippians .

Step Six

Philippians - Applications

- 1:1 A model of what I am to be myself since I am also a “bondservant.”
- 1:9-11 A Great model of prayer for me to follow in praying for others.
- 1:13 Is my testimony obvious enough and bold enough to affect others like Paul did?
- 1:27f A theme I need to be more bold about in seeing this church remain unified
- 2:2f I need to be careful in looking at “my” work / stuff to be more important than that of others.
- 2:5f Christ’s example of humility is humbling to me - what a way to live! Who am I to complain about what I may “give up” for the sake of the kingdom.
- 2:12f Living as a Christian is very practical!
- 2:19-30 Am I living as they did? Am I such an example to others? Am I training up others to be such examples?
- 3:12f I must not rest on work already done but press on toward the goal
- 3:17f I need to be able to call others to follow my example as I follow Christ. Would those following my current example be following Christ?
- 3:20 What a comfort to be a citizen of heaven!
- 4:4-7 I can rejoice in every circumstance because I can take all my worries to God and leave them with Him. That is the source of peace.
- 4:8-9 It seems like a struggle at times, but what a blessing to keep my mind set on what is pleasing to God and not on the stuff of this world.
- 4:11f Forgive me Lord for my discontent and help me continue to learn this important lesson. Thank you for providing for me in much the same way you do Paul.

Step Seven

Style of the writer:

This is a topical book written in a logical fashion. Paul introduces topics and then logically explains them with practical challenges to application.

Step Eight - CHART - See chart on next page.

Chart of Philippians

(1) Joy in Suffering				(2) Joy in Submission				(3) Joy in Salvation		(4) Joy in Sanctification				
Salutation (1)				Unity from Submission to One Another (1-4)				Forgetting the Past and Pressing on for the Prize in Christ Jesus (1:16)		Citizenship in Heaven (17-21)				
Thanksgiving and Prayer (2-11)				Humble Submission of Christ (5-11)							Live in Sanctification (1-3)			
Joy & Suffering in Prison (12-18)				Humble Submission to God (12-18)							Peace through Proper Prayer (4-7)			
Confidence in Living for Christ Alone (19-26)				Examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (19-30)							Peace through Proper Mindset (8-9)			
Exhortation to the Philippians (19-26)											Contentment in God's Provision (10-20)			
											Finale greetings and salutations (21-23)			

Step Nine: Place/contribution of the Book
(Unique contributions? / What would be missing?)

All elements appear in other books in some form. Philippians has one of the clearest presentations of the kenosis - Christ's humility in becoming a man and dying on the cross.

This book also makes one of the clearest presentations and expressions of the how and why of joy in all circumstances - the secret of being content in Christ.