

Unified | Week 3
Small Group Discussion Guide

Background

Author, Date, and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians in the city of Philippi around 61AD while he was in prison in Rome (1:12–18, 4:22).¹

Background and Setting

Originally known as Krenides (*The Little Fountains*) because of the numerous nearby springs, Philippi (*city of Philip*) received its name from Philip II of Macedonia—the father of Alexander the Great. Attracted by the nearby gold mines, Philip conquered the region during the 4th century B.C.²

Being a Roman colony was a great source of pride for the Philippians, who adopted Roman customs for themselves. “Paul’s description of Christians as citizens of heaven (3:20) was appropriate, since the Philippians prided themselves on being citizens of Rome (c.f. Acts 16:21).”³

In the book of Acts, Luke tells us he and Paul visited Philippi and described it as “a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia” (Acts 16:12). Luke says he and Paul stayed there “for several days” (Acts 16:12) and eventually planted the church there (Acts 16:12–40).

Some key events during this time were:

- Lydia’s conversion (Acts 16:14–15)
- Paul and Silas were in-prisoned (Acts 16:16–24).
- Paul and Silas were miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 16:25–30)
- Paul and Silas lead their prison guard and his whole family to saving faith (Acts 16:29–34).

Major Themes in Philippians

- **Chapter 1:** Paul primarily deals with the subjects of **hope** and **identity**, calling the believers in Philippi to remember what Christ has done for them and to live in a way that honors His name.
- **Chapter 2:** Paul exhorts the believers to live a life of **humility**. He reminds them of Jesus’ life and how it modeled humility in the most beautiful and perfect ways. He then gives them practical instruction for how to follow Jesus in a life of humility.
- **Chapter 3:** Paul reminds the believers why their only source of **boasting** before God is Christ and Christ alone. He lists his religious resume and declares that it means nothing in terms of his righteousness before God. The same is true for us today. If we call ourselves by the name of Christ, then we should live a life that demonstrates Him as our only source of righteousness.
- **Chapter 4:** To conclude his letter, Paul gives some very practical instruction for how the believers ought to approach such matters as **endurance**, **worry**, **prayer**, and **thinking**. He concludes by declaring that God will supply all of their needs if they will be a people who proactively center their lives on Him in these specific areas of life.

¹John MacArthur, *The John MacArthur Whole Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1709.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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Main Point: Boasting in Christ Fuels Collective Unity

Main Reading

Philippians 3:1–14 CSB

In addition, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a safeguard for you. **2** Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. **3** For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh — **4** although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5** circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; **6** regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

7 But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. **8** More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. **10** My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, **11** assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

12 Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. **13** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, **14** I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

Optional Extra Reading:

- Matthew 23:1–36
- Luke 15:11–31
- Titus 3:1–8

Discussion Questions

1. In general, what stands out to you in these verses? Why that specifically?
2. Would you say you struggle more with self-righteousness or with shame and guilt? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the ways we contribute to self-righteousness in our own lives?
4. What are some of the ways we contribute to shame & guilt in our own lives?
5. What are some practical things we can do to get our hearts and minds on Christ more consistently?
 - What are some challenges to this?
 - How can we help each other overcome them?