

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Keep Focused on Knowing Christ
Philippians 3:2-14

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Enlist two readers for "Words of Paul to the Philippians and to us." Give the reading which is found at the end of the Sharing Time to each reader ahead of time. Ask them to read with emotion and emphasis. They will read again at the end of Sharing Time. Use youth or older children if possible.

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

See plans for using “Words of Paul to the Philippians and to us.”

Music Sources:

We Have Come Into His House, *The Worship Hymnal* # 666; CCLI # 17212

Greater is He That is in Me, *The Baptist Hymnal*, 1991, # 437; CCLI # 6962

Great is the Lord, *The Worship Hymnal* #61; CCLI # 1149

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Keep Focused on Knowing Christ*****Focal Text**

Philippians 3:2-14

Background Text

Philippians 3:1-4:1

Main Idea

Living life the best way consists of valuing Christ supremely and engaging in the lifelong quest to know Christ fully.

Question to Explore

If you reached your goal in life, where would you be?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to commit or recommit themselves to valuing Christ supremely and seeking to know Christ fully.

Gathering together:

Sing

We Have Come Into His House, *The Worship Hymnal* # 666; CCLI # 17212

First thoughts:

Paul's words to the Philippians and to us:

Reader 1: I thank my God every time I remember you.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

Reader 2: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Reader 1: So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

Reader 2: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Today we continue our study of the book of Philippians. Paul continues to admonish this church which he established and loved to avoid a legalistic outlook on the Christian life and to embrace the grace of Christ wholeheartedly.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Keep Focused on Knowing Christ

Focal Text

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Introduction to your personal study:

Irene was recently widowed. She awoke early one snowy morning in May in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and made ready for her day. She had planned to take two buses to her hair appointment, but the dreary day led her to call a taxi instead. When the taxi was over an hour late, she cancelled her hair appointment. Most any one in their eighties and many younger people would have chosen to stay at home rather than go out into the raw day. Albertans are no fonder of a snow in May than anyone else in the world however much they may have learned to expect it. But it was English as a Second Language day at her church next door and she felt that she might be of help to the pastor's wife just beginning the program. So she made her way to the church and her presence was an encouragement both to the pastor's wife and to the four immigrants struggling to learn English. A young Japanese woman went home with Irene for lunch. No doubt both she and Irene were blessed by being together. Irene

exemplifies today's emphasis – keep focused on knowing Christ. Keep on keeping on; keep growing; keep sharing with others.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series of Bible Study and Worship sessions (Bible Teaching #.....). The person who downloaded this session should have that material for you, as well.

Focusing on the Meaning:

In Philippians 3:2-6 Paul contrasts his Christ faith and his former life in Judaism.

Paul uses very strong language in verse 2 to describe those who emphasize the importance of legalistic rituals as essential to faith. ***“Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.”***

Paul had argued this before. His letters to the Galatians and the Romans are here condensed in a deathbed declaration against the subtle deceitfulness and ultimate futility of a religion that puts the main emphasis on externals. (See **The Interpreter's Bible, Philippians**, p. 72).

The intensity of Paul's words here are surprising to us. The old Paul seems to be only a little below the surface. This may be comforting to us as we struggle with our own passions and anger. Paul, the great Christian hero, struggled as well. There will be times when our belief in the rightness of something causes us to speak strongly on its behalf. This has happened to Paul in this passage. Certain persons had tried to undermine his ministry and Paul had to counter them. The image of “dogs” here is not one of a cuddly house dog; it is one of packs of “scavenger” dogs – lean, hungry, and mean who look to take that which is not legitimately theirs. Paul sees these religious leaders who emphasize legalism as people who would take away the joy of Christian faith in favour of a set of rules.

A spiritual circumcision is always more important than a bodily circumcision. Old Testament passages which refer to this may be found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36: 26ff. The Jeremiah passage says ***“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”*** This ***“writing on the heart”*** is what a personal relationship with Christ accomplishes for us. It is the internalization of the values represented by the law – transforming them from a set of rules and regulations to a way of living in relationship with God.

Paul reminds the reader of his credentials. He was trained to be the leader of the legalistic arm of Judaism. He was ***“circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a***

Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

Paul's training at home and in the school of the Pharisees prepared him to be an extremist in his devotion to a legalistic religion. To a Pharisee, the law was the heart of religion. When that is true in any religious system, eternal observances inevitably gain the pre-eminence over a true spirituality because external acts can be performed whether or not there is any sincere spirit supplying the motive force. (**The Interpreter's Bible, Philippians**, p. 78).

Paul had not failed at being a Jew; he saw a better way and chose it.

Legalistic religion divides people into superior and inferior categories. Those who keep “all” of the laws, rules, and regulations are more spiritual than those who do not.

Paul points out the weakness of a legalistic approach to salvation and the joy of coming to God through Christ. One excludes the other. He had experienced both and he urges choosing life in Christ.

In comparison to his faith according to Judaic tradition, Paul speaks of the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Righteousness comes from God and is by faith.

Paul stresses the ongoing nature of this relationship with Christ. “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Remember that the words were probably written at the end of Paul's ministry. By any human standard, it was a successful missionary life. Many people had heard the gospel from Paul himself. Another large number heard from those Paul had won to faith. Churches were established and they planted other churches. Nonetheless, Paul is still saying, “I want to know Christ.”

True believers worship by the Spirit of God. True believers glory (boast) in Christ Jesus. True believers have no confidence in the flesh. To have confidence in the flesh is basic to human life. All people naturally trust in their own abilities. (See Richard R. Melick, Jr. **The New American Commentary**, Volume 32, 1991).

Chapter 3: 7-8 is Paul's theology in a brief statement. He sees the gains of the legalistic system as loss. He continues to affirm his decision about accepting Christ and speaks of the rubbish of his former life. (See Acts 9: 1ff to review Paul's conversion experience). Verse 9 indicates that being in Christ is the heart of Paul's theology. Being in Christ means being clothed in Christ's righteousness.

Grace freed Paul from self-effort to gain salvation and enabled him to devote himself to things that follow salvation. This includes coming to know Christ in a life-shaping way. At conversion believers experience a spiritual resurrection. A bodily resurrection is promised at death. As Paul approaches the end of his life, he remembers the power of the resurrection which so radically changed his life and he looks forward to the resurrection after his death.

Philippians 3:11 ties together the beginning point of the Christian experience of faith with the culminating point of leaving this life to enter into an ongoing relationship with Christ. We remember the words of John 3:16 ***“For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** The eternal life began at the moment of commitment to Christ – belief in Him as Saviour – and it will continue throughout eternity.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

Legalism is still a problem for Christians today. It is easier to measure our “Christianity” by tangible means – church attendance, money given, classes taught, souls won – than by examining our motives, attitudes, and relationship to Christ. It is still possible to live a good life based on external principles rather than internal commitment. As you teach today help your church understand that our deepening relationship to Christ will enable us to do the right things. Our actions may not change; our reason for doing them should.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Keep Focused on Knowing Christ

Focal Text

Philippians 3:2-14

Background Text

Philippians 3:1-4:1

Main Idea

Living life the best way consists of valuing Christ supremely and engaging in the lifelong quest to know Christ fully.

Question to Explore

If you reached your goal in life, where would you be?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to commit or recommit themselves to valuing Christ supremely and seeking to know Christ fully.

Connect with Life:

Gain the attention of the group by reading this: Think about the house, apartment, or room where you live. Do you have things that get in your way but have little use in your life? Do you have an inner need to hold onto things that have little sentimental value? Do you have so many sentimental photos or objects that you can't appreciate them all? Do you tend to keep things that you think you might use some day but never have?

Most of us like to hold onto things "just in case". We also have trouble letting go of things in our minds and hearts that tend to clutter up our service for the Lord. Some of these are so bad that we know without doubt that we should release. But we may not

see other things as bad. However, these things can spoil our devotion and service to Christ just because they take up so much time and space in our lives.

These may consist of too much reading of useless material, too much time spent in sports or other recreational activities; not controlling our time and money regarding social activities; serving on too many committees; and many other areas of life.

These things often make us feel safe and secure in our lives. Today we will focus on learning on how to focus on Christ.

Guide the Study:

Have someone read today's passage Philippians 3:2-14 In several different versions of the Bible

Explain Paul's contrasts in 3:2-6 of his Christian faith and his former life in Judaism.

Clarify the images. Be careful not to imply anti-Semitism. Paul was opposing bigotry and exclusiveness rather than promoting it. This bigotry and exclusiveness was represented by those –either Jews or Jewish Christians – who insisted that one had to become a Jew before becoming a Christian.

Comment on Paul's strong language.

Seek opinions: Why would Paul have spoken so strongly?

You may need to help them identify the reasons:

This group had continued to undermine the message of grace which Paul proclaimed.

Paul had dealt with this issue before.

Paul was speaking to his beloved Philippian church – he had a lot at stake in his desire for them to understand.

Have someone read 3:7-9 again.

Clarify Paul's contrasts between what he had gained in Christ and what he had lost.

Note that Paul was comparing the greatness of life in Christ to his former life.

If time allows, read Matthew 13:45-46 and discuss how the parable of the pearl of great price relates to what Paul is saying.

Verses 4b-11 all speak of the nature of Christian conversion. As is appropriate for your group discuss the conversion experience. There is repentance for sins, believing in Christ's death and resurrection and accepting the gift of salvation. Many other lessons have given the opportunity to share stories of conversion experiences, but it is always a blessing to hear the stories again.

Discuss with the group the need and expectation of continuing Christian growth in dealing with 3:12-14.

Ask what outer signs of Christian growth members have seen in themselves in recent months. Answers will be very specific to your group. They may include some of the things listed below, but they may include others as well. Do not try to force these ideas on your group. Help them learn to sense growth within themselves and to rejoice in it.

- ✓ Finding Bible study easier and more meaningful;
- ✓ Desiring to share Christ with neighbours;
- ✓ Finding comfort in a difficult situation;
- ✓ Enjoying a deeper prayer experience which includes intercession for others;
- ✓ Being angry less frequently;
- ✓ Being more patient;
- ✓ Thinking about heaven;
- ✓ Desiring fewer material things.

Encourage Application:

As you teach today help your church understand that our deepening relationship to Christ will enable us to do the right things. Our actions may not change; our reason for doing them should.

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Keep Focused on Knowing Christ

Philippians 3:2-14

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Legalism vs. Christ-shaped Compassion

Legalism is alive and well today and it is usually teens who see it for what it is. Keeping the rules but failing to nurture a compassion-based relationship with Christ may be a hindrance to others coming to know Christ. Discuss how you can keep this from happening in your life as you mature.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Keep Focused on Knowing Christ***
Philippians 3:2-14**Beginning the Service:**

Sing:

Greater is He That is in Me, *The Baptist Hymnal*, 1991, # 437; CCLI # 6962

Great is the Lord, *The Worship Hymnal* #61; CCLI # 1149

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Praise the Lord for his work among the Chinese in south Calgary, Alberta, Canada. A new church plant has grown into The Abundant Life Chinese Baptist Church. These new believers are maturing and seeing God do amazing things as He raises up a few families who are called to reach their own people in this area. They are also discovering their spiritual gifts and tasting the joy of serving the Lord, being used of God and seeing God's kingdom grow through their efforts. Pray that the small group of leaders will grow in their faith, will hear God's instructions, and will trust Him for the impossible. Ask God to call and equip them to be witnesses and to seek His will for the church instead of their own personal dreams and ambitions.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

I Press On

Paul's amazing words in Philippians 3:12 speak to us whenever we hear them regardless of how many times we may have heard them before. ***"Not as though I have already attained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Jesus Christ has made me his own. Brethren I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"*** (NIV).

Another modern translation may help us understand better. ***"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me"*** (The Message).

It had been a discouraging day for the editor of Home Church on Line materials. The same Scripture passage had been assigned to two different writers and those writers both completed their work on the first two of a series of five lessons. "How could we have made such a mistake?" the editor asked. Fortunately, it was not a mistake with any dire consequences and as one of the writers began to write again these words became a blessing – ***"I press on"***.

Paul could have easily become discouraged. The words of chapter three of Philippians repeat an emphasis Paul has made before. ***"Don't get caught up in the legalism of Judaism, but enjoy the freedom of your life in Christ."***

We ask ourselves why this is such a hard lesson to learn. What is it about rules and regulations that seem safer and more secure to us than the grace of Christ Jesus? Why do we so easily slip into a religion of "do's and don'ts" rather than living a life of accepting and enjoying the grace of Christ? Let us consider these points from today's Scripture.

- a. Jesus Christ has made us his own.
- b. We cannot attain goodness on our own.
- c. We need to forget what is behind.
- d. We press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Over and over Paul returns to the theme of our redemption being a free gift of God. In this verse he stresses that Jesus Christ made him his own. Believers who come to Christ as adults may find this concept easier to believe than those who "grew into faith" through the loving nurture of family and church. Perhaps it is easier for those believers to feel they have contributed to their own salvation by a worthy life.

But Paul emphasizes one more time that we cannot attain goodness on our own. Certainly, it is possible to live a moral life without Christ. Many good citizens have never committed a crime and have given generously of money and time for the good of the community. But for an abiding goodness to be the hallmark of our lives, we depend on God for his guidance and his strength. This goodness is more than morally right deeds – it is a holy life empowered by a holy God.

We need to forget what is behind. Daniel Aleshire in his excellent book called *FaithCare: Ministering to All God's People Through the Ages of Life* speaks of people who can “rationally accept that God chooses to relate to them in the way of grace. But they cannot emotionally receive the grace of God – they are incapable of feeling the reality of grace – and they walk in faith with a limp” (p. 56). To these people, Paul would say **“Forgetting what lies behind.”** Abuse, legalistic upbringings, failure to learn to express emotions adequately all contribute to our inability to forget what is behind. Paul indicates, however, that part of the gift of grace is the ability to “forget” and to walk in faith without a limp.

We press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Paul is not referring here to an attempt on our part to earn our salvation through our perfection. The high calling of God in Christ Jesus is already a reality in the believer's life. Nonetheless, we should desire to keep pressing forward toward the mark for the prize. The language encourages us to keep on growing.

We live in a culture in much of the world which encourages people to care for their bodies, eat healthily, run a marathon in your 70's, go back to school after retirement, travel the world. Though much of this is self-centered, there is also an environment of encouraging older people to use their later years for unselfish causes. Retired lay people build churches, camps and seminaries with joy. They are up early to begin work on such projects. Others have given their skills as doctors, business men and women, teachers etc. to help in less fortunate areas of the world. They are pressing on, not for the purposes of gaining salvation, but for the purpose of living life to the fullest under the grace of God.

Call to Commitment:

Sing “I want to know Him more”

Concluding the Service:

Conclude the service by having the reading of “Paul's Words to the Philippians and to Us” which was used in the Gathering Time.

Paul's words to the Philippians and to us:

Reader 1: I thank my God every time I remember you.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

Reader 2: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

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