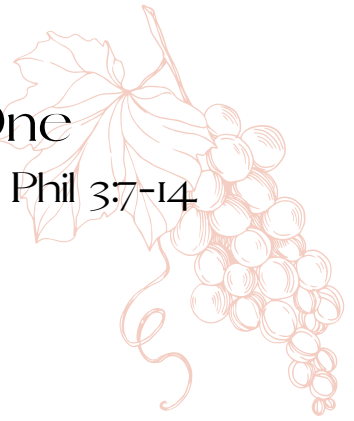


I Want to Know Him, Part One

An Overview of Philippians + Introduction to Phil 3:7-14

June 4, 2026



A WORD ABOUT BIBLE STUDY

We need to recognize that the Bible is an intentional act of communication, and to understand any book or passage within it we need to be willing to engage an ancient author, who has purposefully engaged a particular audience, by means of a recorded text. And because this is the Bible, a modern interpreter has to engage two authors—the human author who first put pen to parchment (or stylus to clay) and the divine Author whose ambition was to reveal himself to a present and future people.

We also must engage (at least) two audiences—the original and immediate audience and the intended future audience (our biblical authors were well aware that their act of communication was going to be preserved for future incarnations of the people of God). And as any act of successful communication requires that an author and his audience tap into a shared notion of the world, it is essential that the modern interpreter also tap into that shared notion, doing her best to understand what the shared world of her ancient author and audience looked like. And just like us, these writers communicated via their own language/vocabulary/idioms and their experienced social settings. So if we are going to understand them, we need to allow their words and cultural references to mean to us what they meant to them. -Dr. Sandra Richter

SCRIPTURE AS A MAP AND A MIRROR

A map shows you:

- Where you are (your current location)
- Where you're going (the destination)
- How to get there (the route)
- What to avoid (dangerous terrain, dead ends)

Scripture functions as a map by:

- Revealing God's character, His ways, and His will
- Showing you the path to life, wisdom, and intimacy with God
- Warning you about pitfalls, sin patterns, and destructive choices
- Guiding you toward truth and away from deception
- Providing direction when you're lost or confused

The map function is outward-focused: It points you toward God and shows you how to walk with Him.

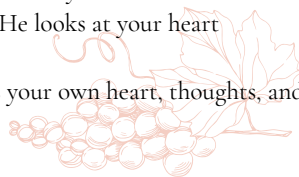
A mirror shows you:

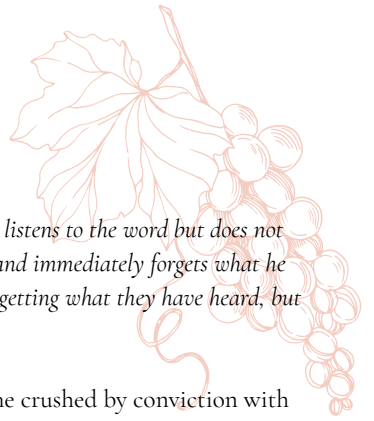
- What you actually look like
- What needs attention

Scripture functions as a mirror by:

- Revealing your true spiritual condition—not who you pretend to be, but who you actually are
- Exposing sin, pride, self-deception, and hidden motives
- Showing you where you fall short of God's standard
- Confronting you with uncomfortable truths about yourself
- Reflecting back to you what God sees when He looks at your heart

The mirror function is inward-focused: It reveals your own heart, thoughts, and character.





WHY BOTH MATTER

James 1:22-25 *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."*

The Mirror Without the Map = Condemnation If you only see Scripture as a mirror, you become crushed by conviction with no hope, no direction, no way forward. You see your sin clearly but don't know where to go from there.

The Map Without the Mirror = Self-Deception If you only see Scripture as a map, you become full of knowledge but lacking self-awareness. You can quote verses, teach Bible studies, and give others advice—while remaining blind to your own pride, hypocrisy, and spiritual condition.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN READING SCRIPTURE

MAP questions (looking outward toward God):

- What is this passage revealing about God's character?
- What truth is God calling me to believe?
- What direction is God giving me?
- How does this passage show me the way forward?

MIRROR questions (looking inward):

- What is this passage revealing about my heart?
- Where do I see myself in this story?
- What sin, blind spot, or false belief is God exposing in me?

MEET PAUL & THE PHILIPPIANS

Who Wrote This?

Paul — an apostle who planted churches across the Roman Empire and wrote letters back to encourage them. The New Testament is largely made up of these letters (or epistles). Paul wrote 13 of them. Biblical and historical evidence places the composition of these letters between the late 40s AD and mid-60s AD.

Philippians is one of Paul's late letters to churches, written around AD 60-62.

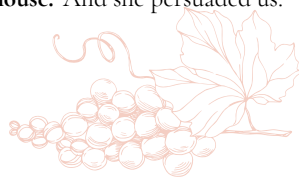
Who Received It?

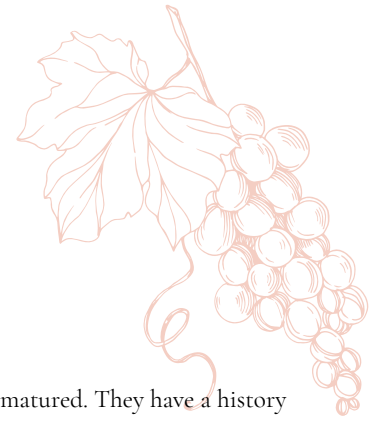
The church at Philippi — a prosperous Roman colony in Macedonia (modern-day Greece).

How Did the Church Start?

Acts 16:6-15 *"They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia; they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. Passing by Mysia they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, 'Cross over to Macedonia and help us!' After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for several days. On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us."





The Story:

- Paul had a vision: a Macedonian man pleading, "Come help us!"
- He obeyed and went to Philippi
- By a river, he met a group of women praying
- Lydia, a businesswoman, became the first convert
- She and her household were baptized, and the church was born in her home

This was around AD 50—so by the time Paul writes this letter 10-12 years later, this church has matured. They have a history together. He loves them. They love him.

Where Was Paul When He Wrote This?

In prison. Most likely in Rome, though possibly Ephesus.

He was a Roman citizen, so his conditions were slightly better than other prisoners—but he was still chained, still on trial, still facing possible execution for preaching about Jesus instead of Caesar.

And yet—this letter is one of the most joyful in the entire Bible.

THE THEME OF JOY

Philippians is often called Paul's "Hymn of Joy."

- The word "joy" appears 5 times
- The phrase "rejoice" appears 11 times

This isn't circumstantial happiness. Paul isn't joyful because life is easy. He's in chains. He's facing death. But his joy is rooted in something deeper—his relationship with Jesus.

Key principle: Joy isn't dependent on circumstances. It's the fruit of abiding in Christ.

WALKING THROUGH THE LETTER

Chapter 1 — Joy Even in Chains

Paul opens with gratitude and affection. Every time he thinks of the Philippians, he thanks God.

Then he shares something surprising: his imprisonment has actually helped spread the gospel. Guards have heard. People in Caesar's household have heard. What looked like a setback became an opportunity.

Key verse: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (1:21)

Translation: If I live, I get to keep serving Jesus. If I die, I get to be with Jesus. Either way, I win.

What this teaches us: When Christ is our supreme treasure, we can't lose.

Chapter 2 — Humility and the Mind of Christ

Paul shifts from his story to theirs. He urges them: stop competing with each other. Care for one another instead.

And the example he gives? Jesus.

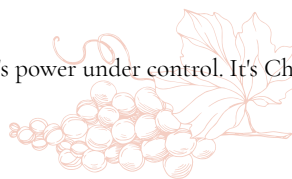
Even though Jesus was God, he didn't cling to status or power. He humbled himself. Became human. Went to the cross. And because of that, God exalted him above everything.

Key verse: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." (2:3)

Paul says: Have this same mindset.

Then he points to real people—Timothy and Epaphroditus—who embody this kind of selfless love. These aren't just ideals. They're lived realities.

What this teaches us: Humility isn't weakness. It's power under control. It's Christlikeness. And it's lived out in real relationships.





Chapter 3 — Pressing Forward, Not Looking Back

This is where our focus passage lives.

Paul gets personal. He had every religious credential you could imagine:

- Born into the right family
- Trained as a Pharisee
- Kept the law perfectly (outwardly)

But he says: I count all of that as garbage/dung/excrement compared to knowing Christ.

What matters isn't checking religious boxes. It's a genuine relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

Then he uses the image of a runner:

Key verse: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal." (3:13-14)

He's not looking back at past victories or failures. He's fixed on Jesus. He's moving forward.

What this teaches us: Knowing Christ is the prize. Everything else is secondary.

Chapter 4 — Peace, Contentment, and Gratitude

Paul closes with some of the most practical, quotable verses in the Bible.

On anxiety: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (4:6)

On our thought life: "Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable—think on these things." (4:8)

On contentment: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances... I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (4:11-13)

What this teaches us: Peace and contentment aren't found in circumstances. They're found in Christ.

ZOOMING IN ON PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

Philippians 3:7-14 (CSB)

"But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. 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 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.

My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

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. 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, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus."

The Flow of the Passage:

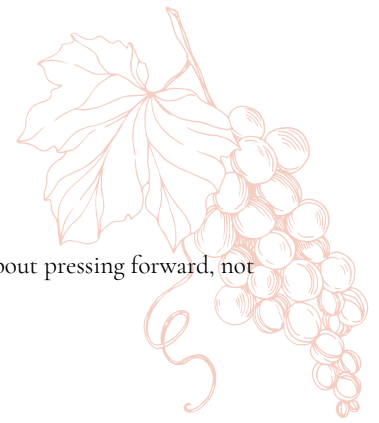
Verses 7-8: Everything I used to count as gain? I now count as loss. Knowing Christ is worth infinitely more.

Verse 9: I don't want a righteousness based on my performance. I want one that comes through faith in Jesus.

Verse 10: My goal is to know Him—not just facts about Him, but to truly know Him. To share in both His sufferings and His resurrection power.

Verses 12-14: I'm not there yet. I haven't arrived. But I'm pressing forward. Forgetting what's behind. Reaching for what's ahead.





Why This Passage Matters for Us:

This is Paul's answer to the question: What does it look like to abide in Christ?

It's not about religious achievement. It's about relationship. It's about knowing Him. And it's about pressing forward, not looking back at our past, but constantly growing and moving forward.

As you meditate on this passage, let these truths sink in:

- Knowing Christ is the treasure
- Righteousness comes through faith, not effort
- We're not perfect, but we press on
- We forget what's behind and reach for what's ahead

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Are you asking for the fruit without cultivating the root?

Philippians 1:9-11 "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."

The progression: Love → Knowledge → Depth of Insight → Discernment

The path to discernment isn't shortcuts or formulas. It's deep, abiding love for Christ that produces knowledge of Him, which leads to insight, which results in discernment.

Most of us pray for these things regularly:

- "God, give me wisdom for this decision."
- "God, give me peace about this situation."
- "God, help me discern Your will."

These aren't standalone gifts God drops into our laps. They're the byproducts of an intimate relationship with Him.

You don't get wisdom by asking for wisdom in a crisis moment. You get wisdom by spending sustained time in God's presence, learning His heart, His ways, His voice—so that when the crisis comes, you already know Him well enough to discern His leading.

You don't get peace by begging for peace when you're anxious. You get peace by abiding in the Prince of Peace—cultivating a relationship so deep that His presence steadies you even when circumstances don't.

Reflection Question: What would that actually require of me? Am I willing to pay that price?

Pray: "God, I want to know You so well that wisdom/peace/discernment flow naturally from our relationship. Show me what it means to abide in You in such a way that these become the fruit of my life with You."

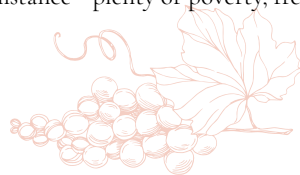
2. Are you waiting for perfect conditions to pursue God deeply?

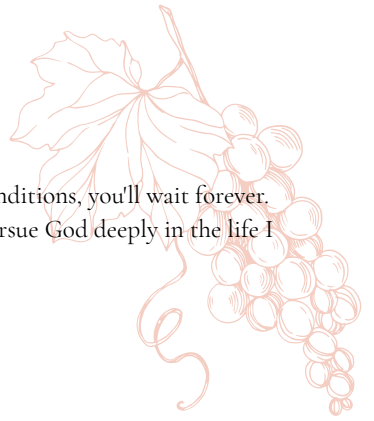
Many of us are waiting for ideal conditions to go deeper with God:

- "When the kids are older..."
- "When work slows down..."
- "When my schedule opens up..."
- "When I'm less distracted..."

But Paul pursued intimacy with Christ from a prison cell.

In Chapter 1, Paul is in chains—yet he's praying, teaching, writing Scripture, and leading people to Christ. In Chapter 4, he talks about learning contentment in every circumstance—plenty or poverty, freedom or imprisonment.





Truth: Life will never calm down. The chaos just changes forms. If you're waiting for perfect conditions, you'll wait forever. This week: Instead of asking, "When will I have time to pursue God deeply?" ask: "How can I pursue God deeply in the life I actually have right now?"

Reflection questions:

- What conditions am I waiting for before I'll prioritize deeper time with God?
- What's my "when life calms down" excuse?
- What if the chaos, the limitations, the constraints I'm experiencing right now aren't obstacles to knowing Christ—but the very conditions God wants to use to teach me to depend on Him more fully?

3. What would need to shift in your daily rhythms if "knowing Christ" truly became your one thing?

Philippians 3:13 "But one thing I do..."

Paul was a man of singular focus. One aim. One ambition. One driving pursuit.

Most of us are people of many things. We're trying to be good at everything, succeed at everything, balance everything perfectly. And in the process, we're scattered, exhausted, and spiritually shallow.

Be radically honest—what are the "things" competing for priority in your life right now?

- Your children's success and your reputation as a parent?
- Physical appearance and health?
- A thriving marriage?
- Ministry impact?
- Career advancement and financial security?

All of these can be good desires. But when you're pursuing ten things as if they're all "the one thing," you end up divided and depleted. Talk to God about shifting your priorities to make knowing Him your one thing.

Reflection question: What would it look like to make knowing Christ my "one thing" and let everything else serve that pursuit?

HOMEWORK FOR PART ONE:

1. Read the entire book of Philippians (it's only 4 chapters—you can do this in one sitting)
2. Optional: Watch [The Bible Project video on Philippians](#) (9 minutes)
3. Write out Philippians 3:7-14 every day using the translation of your choice
4. Begin memorizing the passage—use whatever method works for you, but let the daily writing anchor it.

Suggested memorization schedule:

- Week One: Phil 3:7-8
- Week Two: Phil 3:9-10
- Week Three: Phil 3:11-12
- Week Four: Phil 3:13-14

5. Optional: As you memorize, work through the **Optional Dig Deeper Study** (beginning on Page 14)

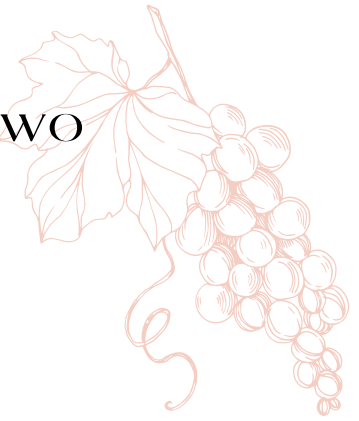
We'll meet again in two weeks on June 18 for Part Two, where we'll go line by line through this passage together.



I Want to Know Him, Part Two

Line-by-Line Through Phil 3:7-14

June 18, 2026



SETTING THE CONTEXT

Paul's Résumé (Verses 4-6)

Before our passage begins, Paul lists his credentials. This isn't him bragging—it's him saying, "If anyone had reason to trust in their religious performance, it was me."

Philippians 3:4-6 "Although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless."

Breaking Down Paul's Credentials:

- "Circumcised the eighth day" — He was born into the covenant, not a convert
- "Of the nation of Israel, tribe of Benjamin" — An aristocratic tribe that gave Israel its first king
- "A Hebrew of Hebrews" — He kept the language, customs, and traditions intact
- "A Pharisee" — The most orthodox sect, unlike the Sadducees who denied the resurrection
- "Persecuting the church" — He was so zealous he thought he was serving God by trying to eliminate Christians
- "Blameless under the law" — When he violated the law, he brought the required sacrifice. He was meticulous.

Important note: Paul is not saying his background was bad or that he perfectly kept the law. He's saying he was blameless, not sinless. When he failed, he followed the rules and brought the sacrifice. He was a stickler for observing Judaism to the letter. Paul was an outstanding man by every religious and cultural measure. Birth, pedigree, orthodoxy, zeal, personal righteousness—he had it all. Paul had great respect for the Law. His purpose is not to ridicule his background, but to show its insufficiency compared to Christ.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE (Verses 7-9)

Verse 7: "But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ."

Paul uses an accounting term here. Gain and loss. Profit and liability.

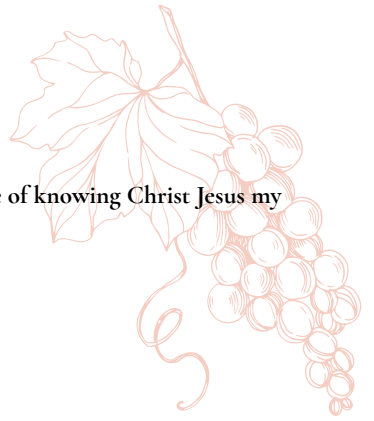
He's saying: "Everything I used to count in the 'asset' column? I've moved it to the 'liability' column."

Not because those things were evil—they weren't. But because compared to knowing Christ, they weren't just worthless—they were actual damage.

The Greek word for "loss" is *zēmia*—it's singular, meaning Paul masses everything together. His credentials weren't just valueless; they actually harmed him because with such a résumé, he had been a hater of Christ. His achievements fueled his pride and blinded him to Jesus.

After showing that he could beat the Judaizers at their own game (being proud of who they were and what they had done), Paul showed that it was the wrong game.





Verse 8a: "More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

Notice the progression:

- Verse 7: "I have considered" (past tense—when I met Jesus on the Damascus road)
- Verse 8: "I also consider" (present tense—I still count, after all the experience of the years)

This wasn't a one-time decision. Paul keeps choosing to count everything as loss.

"Everything" means everything. Past accomplishments. Present achievements. Future ambitions. Paul doesn't just count his religious résumé as loss—he counts everything as loss compared to knowing Christ.

And notice the phrase: "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." This is intensely personal. Not "Christ" in general. Not a theological concept. But my Lord. The one who apprehended him. The one he belongs to. This has become Paul's dearest ambition, his magnificent obsession.

The only way a person can view life from this perspective is to see how valuable Christ truly is.

Verse 8b: "Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ."

The Greek word for "dung" is skubala—it means garbage, refuse, excrement. This term was used in medical manuals for feces tossed in the trash. Some scholars think this might be Paul's version of profanity—like "crap" or something more vulgar.

But there's more to this imagery. When Paul used the term "dung," he was drawing on imagery from animal entrails—specifically, the parts of sacrificed animals deemed unfit for human consumption and cast to dogs. The term also carries connotations of meal leftovers—scraps a cook would remove after diners had eaten their fill.

What Paul is saying: Once Christ became his supreme satisfaction, everything else became surplus—worthless scraps he had no intention of reclaiming.

Paul borrowed a merchant's perspective: just as a trader willingly discards commodities and casts them overboard—valuing them as worthless refuse—to obtain treasure, Paul counted his former privileges as loss and was content to loathe them as dung in order to gain Christ.

The intensification created by using "dung" instead of mere "loss" emphasizes a resolute turning away from something abhorrent and worthless, with which one will have nothing further to do.

And here's what Paul is unmasking: The pursuit of self-righteousness through personal achievement is a carnal enterprise rooted in the flesh. To the extent the Law serves self-justification, it becomes not merely worthless but actively harmful and repugnant.

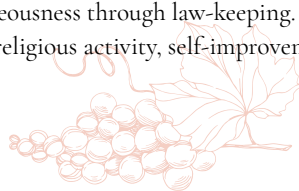
Matthew 13:44-46 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field."

Paul found the treasure. And he sold everything—and was content to loathe what he'd given up—to gain it.

Verse 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."

This is the heart of the gospel.

Paul had spent his entire life trying to earn righteousness through law-keeping. And by outward appearances, he was blameless. But he knew the truth: no amount of religious activity, self-improvement, discipline, or religious effort can make us right with God.





Righteousness comes only from God. Period.

- Not through our performance
- Not through our moral effort
- Not through checking religious boxes
- Not through our Pharisee-based law observance

But through faith in Christ.

This is the only way to be "found in Him."

Romans 10:3-4 "Because they were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, to bring righteousness to everyone who believes."

THE PURSUIT (Verses 10-11)

Verse 10a: "My goal is to know him..."

When Paul declared his goal was to know Christ, he was expressing far more than intellectual familiarity with Christian doctrine. The biblical concept of "knowing" encompasses two distinct meanings—knowing something as information, and knowing someone as a person.

Paul distinguished between knowing Christ and merely knowing about him, emphasizing that one can possess extensive theological knowledge without truly knowing God.

The Greek word *ginōskō* means experiential knowledge—"to be progressively and more intimately acquainted with the wonders of His person." The verb indicates knowledge gained through experience.

This understanding draws from Old Testament roots, where "knowing the Lord" characterizes covenant relationship—a bond expressed through God's grace and election on one side and human love and obedience on the other.

For Paul, this intimate relational knowledge was foundational to his understanding of the gospel, as the gospel introduces believers not merely to information about God but to God himself in Jesus Christ.

Different levels of knowing:

- We know someone because we recognize them
- We know someone because we're acquainted with what they do
- We know someone because we converse with them
- We know someone because we spend time in their home
- We know someone because we've committed our life to them—like in marriage

"They tell me he is a refiner—he has washed me in his blood, and I know him. They tell me he clothes the naked—he has covered me with righteousness, and I know him. They tell me he is a breaker—he has set my soul at liberty, and I know him. They tell me he is a king—he hath subdued my enemies, and I know him. They tell me he is a shepherd—I am his sheep, and I know him. They say he is a door—I have entered through him, and I know him. They say he is food—my spirit feeds on him, and I know him." -Charles Spurgeon

Genuine knowledge of another person requires authentic interest, quality time, and progressive self-revelation—a lifetime endeavor involving the disclosure of hopes, fears, thoughts, and feelings. This is Paul's magnificent obsession: knowing Christ.

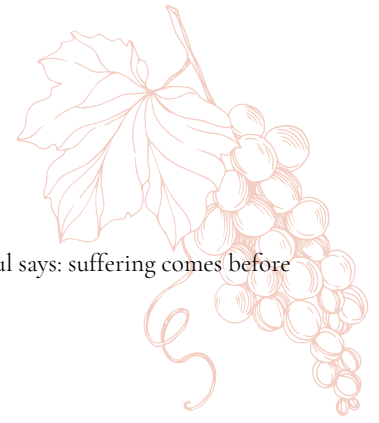
Verse 10b: "...and the power of his resurrection..."

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the greatest display of might the universe has ever seen (Ephesians 1:19-20). It would seem as if all the hosts of evil were determined to keep His body in the tomb. God's mighty power defeated this infernal army by raising the Lord Jesus from the dead on the third day.

This same power is placed at the disposal of all believers, to be appropriated by faith.

Paul wants to experience this power in his daily life—not just know about it, but walk in it.

It takes divine strength to suffer for Christ. That's why the power of the resurrection comes first.



Verse 10c: "...and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death..."

We want the power of the resurrection. We want the victory, the triumph, the miracles. But Paul says: suffering comes before glory.

Notice the order:

1. The power of His resurrection (God's strength to endure)
2. The fellowship of His sufferings (sharing in what Christ experienced)
3. Being conformed to His death (the ultimate sacrifice)

Crucially, knowing Christ encompasses participation in him—being empowered by his resurrection, suffering with him, and being progressively conformed to his likeness, even in his death.

Paul is being literal here, not just spiritual. He's saying: I want to live as Christ lived. Did Jesus suffer? Paul wants to suffer too. Did Jesus die? Then Paul wants to die by martyrdom in his service for Christ. Did Jesus rise from among the dead? Then Paul wishes to do the same.

Paul realized: In the life of the Lord, suffering preceded glory. So it must be in the life of Paul. He must share Christ's sufferings. He realized there would be nothing of an atoning value in his own sufferings as there was in Christ's, but he knew it would be inconsistent for him to live in luxury and ease in a world where his Lord was rejected, scourged, and crucified. Paul wanted to walk the same path Jesus walked: suffering, death, resurrection.

Verse 11: "...assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead."

Paul isn't doubting his salvation. He's expressing holy longing for the day when he will be fully with Christ—resurrected, glorified, complete.

The knowledge of Christ in glory was the supreme desire of Paul's heart, and this desire produced an intense longing to reach Him in the place where He is. The heart that longs after Him instinctively turns to the path by which He reached that place in glory, and earnestly desires to reach Him in that place by the very path which He trod.

It is the martyr spirit. Paul wanted to tread as a martyr the pathway of suffering and death, that he might reach resurrection and glory by the same path as the blessed One who had won his heart.

"Our natural tendency is to want to know Christ and the power of his signs and wonders... We'd most want to fellowship in his walking on the waves, multiplying bread, and making wine from water. But beware of falling into a misery gospel—framing this crucified life only in terms of agony and martyrdom. To interpret the entire path to glory as only joyless and gory is also distorting the gospel. We're called to daily dying to our flesh, but implicit in the dying is the rising." -Beth Moore



THE RACE (Verses 12-14)

Verse 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."

Paul is shockingly humble here.

After everything he's accomplished, after all his spiritual experiences, he says: "I haven't arrived. I'm not perfect yet."

But notice what he does say: "I make every effort to take hold of it."

The Greek word is *katalambanō*—it means to lay hold of, to seize upon, to possess as your own, to appropriate.

Here's what Paul understands:

Paul was "apprehended" by Christ on the road to Damascus. A divine grasp gripped him during his persecution campaign, and he yielded rather than resisting. But this divine initiative demands a human response.

Two forces operate within every believer:

1. Christ's power by which He apprehends us
2. The new life of God-given faith through which we seek to apprehend

The imagery is athletic and deliberate. Paul presses on to lay hold of what Christ has laid hold of him for, revealing an important element of serving God: receiving his strength. This involves living in a growing relationship with Jesus, experiencing in him a fountain of wisdom, understanding, and revelation concerning God and his ways.

Rather than passive reception, the divine hand is laid upon a person for a purpose, but that purpose requires the person to put out their own hand and grasp—this activity demands distinct effort and must continue throughout life, because our grasp remains incomplete.

While Christ's work for us is perfect, the Holy Spirit's work in us continues daily and will extend throughout our lives as we are conformed to Christ's image.

Key truth: We pursue Christ because Christ first pursued us. But our pursuit is not passive—it requires active, ongoing participation in what Christ has begun.

Verse 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..."

This man who had learned to be content with whatever material things he had (4:11) never could be content with his spiritual attainments. He did not count himself to have "arrived."

"But one thing I do." He was a man of single purpose. He had one aim and ambition. In this he resembled David, who said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord."

"Forgetting what is behind" doesn't mean erasing the memory. It means refusing to let the past absorb your attention and impede your progress.

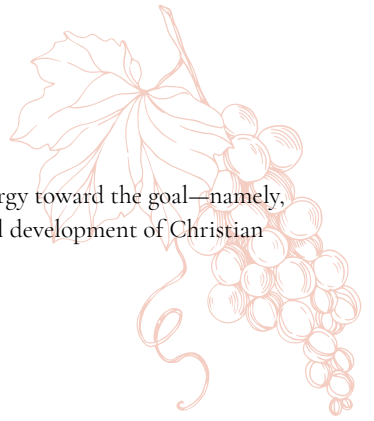
Using the metaphor of a footrace, "forgetting" was a conscious refusal to let it absorb his attention and impede his progress. He never allowed his Jewish heritage or his previous Christian attainments to obstruct his running of the race. No present attainment could lull him into thinking he already possessed all Christ desired for him.

What's behind?

- Sins and failures
- Religious credentials and achievements
- Natural privileges, attainments, and successes
- Spiritual triumphs



"Reaching forward to what is ahead" — Paul is stretching, straining, exerting every ounce of energy toward the goal—namely, the privileges and responsibilities of the Christian life, whether worship, service, or the personal development of Christian character.



Verse 14: "I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus."

The prize isn't a reward separate from Jesus. The prize IS Jesus.

The goal is to know Him fully, be with Him completely, and reflect Him perfectly.

Paul is running toward the day when he will be face-to-face with Christ, fully conformed to His image, fully experiencing the resurrection life.

And he won't stop running until he gets there.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Are you content to loathe what you've given up for Christ?

Paul didn't just count his credentials as "less important" than knowing Christ. He actively rejected them with revulsion, having no intention of reclaiming them. He was content to loathe them as dung to gain Christ. This is more than rearranging priorities. It's a resolute turning away from something you now see as abhorrent and worthless.

Reflection Questions:

You've given up things to follow Jesus—time, comfort, certain ambitions, relationships, the world's approval.

- But are you secretly resentful about what you've sacrificed?
- Do you look back longingly at what you left behind?
- What have you given up for Christ that you're still grieving, resenting, or secretly wishing you could reclaim?
- Are you content to count it as refuse—or are you still picking through the garbage, wondering if you made the right choice?

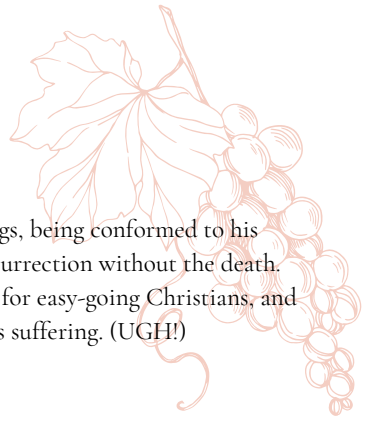
2. Are you pursuing Christ or just knowledge about Christ?

Paul distinguished between knowing Christ and merely knowing about him, emphasizing that one can possess extensive theological knowledge without truly knowing God. You've been in Bible studies—you're in one now! You've listened to podcasts. You've read the books. You know a lot about God. But do you actually know Him?

Reflection questions:

- If Jesus were a person you were dating or married to, would your current relationship patterns indicate you're interested in actually knowing Him—or just in knowing enough about Him to feel spiritually respectable?
- You make time for what matters to you. If knowing Christ is truly your goal, does your calendar reflect that?





3. What if your hardship isn't an obstacle to intimacy with Christ, but the very path to it?

Paul wanted to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. Most of us want the power without the suffering. The triumph without the cross. The resurrection without the death. Here's the uncomfortable truth: There are not two versions of Christianity—an easy-going path for easy-going Christians, and a suffering, toiling path for exceptional believers. There is only one path. And that path involves suffering. (UGH!)

Reflection questions:

- You pray for God's power to handle your circumstances. You ask for His strength to endure. But are you willing to suffer with Him? To be conformed to His death? (This is not an easy thing to say yes to—because pain is PAINFUL.)
- What are you asking God to change in your circumstances that He might actually be asking you to suffer through for the sake of knowing Him more deeply?

Prayer: "God, if this suffering is the path to knowing You more deeply, give me the strength to walk it. Help me fellowship with You in this."

TRUTHS TO CARRY WITH YOU

- Knowing Christ is the treasure—everything else is refuse worth loathing
- Righteousness comes through faith, not effort—stop trying to earn what's already been given
- Knowing Christ means participation—in His power, His suffering, and His death
- We pursue because we've been pursued—but our pursuit requires active, ongoing effort
- We're not perfect, but we press on—never content with spiritual attainments, always reaching forward

HOMEWORK FOR PART TWO and BEYOND

1. Continue writing out Philippians 3:7-14 daily
2. Work on memorizing the passage (use whatever method works for you)
3. Choose ONE of the application points per week and actively engage with it
4. Journal: What is God showing you through this passage? What's shifting in your heart as you meditate on it?
5. Optional Dig Deeper: Work through the cross-references beginning on Page 14

We'll be taking a July and August break and gathering again beginning in September for a new study on John 15: Abiding in Christ.



Optional Dig Deeper Study: Cross-References for Philippians 3:7-14



How to Use These Pages

As you write and memorize Philippians 3:7-14, you may want to dig deeper into this study between sessions.

So, I've given you passages for cross-reference and additional questions for reflection and journaling.





Week One: Philippians 3:7-9a

Theme: Counting everything as loss to gain Christ

Primary ideas:

- Christ as treasure
- Surrendering lesser gains
- Boasting only in Christ
- Revaluing everything in light of Him

Cross-references:

- Matthew 13:44-46
- Luke 14:33
- Matthew 16:26
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-10
- Hebrews 11:24-26
- Romans 8:18
- 2 Corinthians 11:23-28
- Colossians 3:11
- 1 Peter 1:7-9
- Galatians 6:14
- 1 Corinthians 2:2
- 2 Timothy 1:12
- Isaiah 53:3
- Jeremiah 9:23-24
- Psalm 73:25-26

MAP questions (looking outward toward God):

- What is this passage revealing about God's character?
- What truth is God calling me to believe?
- What direction is God giving me?
- How does this passage show me the way forward?

MIRROR questions (looking inward):

- What is this passage revealing about my heart?
- Where do I see myself in this story?
- What sin, blind spot, or false belief is God exposing in me?

Reflection prompts:

- What have I been treating as "gain" that may actually be competing with Christ?
- What earthly treasure, identity, achievement, or security feels hardest to release?
- What would it look like to treasure Christ above reputation, comfort, success, or control?





Week Two: Philippians 3:9b

Theme: Righteousness through faith, not performance

Primary ideas:

- Righteousness from God
- Faith rather than works
- Grace instead of self-justification
- Christ as our righteousness

Cross-references:

- Romans 3:21–22
- Romans 10:3–4
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 2:16
- Galatians 3:11
- Romans 1:17
- Ephesians 2:8–9
- Romans 4:5
- Romans 5:17
- Romans 9:30–32
- Isaiah 53:11
- Jeremiah 23:6
- Habakkuk 2:4
- Genesis 15:6
- Psalm 32:1–2

MAP questions (looking outward toward God):

- What is this passage revealing about God's character?
- What truth is God calling me to believe?
- What direction is God giving me?
- How does this passage show me the way forward?

MIRROR questions (looking inward):

- What is this passage revealing about my heart?
- Where do I see myself in this story?
- What sin, blind spot, or false belief is God exposing in me?

Reflection prompts:

- Where am I still trying to prove myself to God?
- What forms of religious performance make me feel “safe” or “acceptable”?
- How would my spiritual life change if I truly rested in the righteousness Christ gives?



Week 3: Philippians 3:10-11

Theme: Knowing Christ, His resurrection power, and the fellowship of His sufferings

Primary ideas:

- Knowing Christ personally
- Union with Christ
- Resurrection power
- Suffering with Christ
- Being conformed to Him

Cross-references:

- John 17:3
- Romans 6:5
- Romans 8:17
- Romans 8:36
- 2 Corinthians 1:5
- Galatians 6:17
- Ephesians 4:13
- Philippians 3:8
- 1 Peter 4:13
- 2 Peter 1:13

MAP questions (looking outward toward God):

- What is this passage revealing about God's character?
- What truth is God calling me to believe?
- What direction is God giving me?
- How does this passage show me the way forward?

MIRROR questions (looking inward):

- What is this passage revealing about my heart?
- Where do I see myself in this story?
- What sin, blind spot, or false belief is God exposing in me?

Reflection prompts:

- Do I mostly know about Christ, or am I growing in personal knowledge of Him?
- Where do I want resurrection power without surrender, suffering, or obedience?
- What would it mean to become more like Christ in the actual circumstances of my life right now?



Week Four: Philippians 3:12-14

Theme: Taking hold, pressing on, and pursuing the prize

Primary ideas:

- Christ has taken hold of us
- We actively pursue what He began
- Spiritual growth is ongoing
- We forget what is behind and reach forward

Cross-references:

- Jeremiah 9:23
- John 17:3
- Romans 6:5
- Romans 8:17
- Romans 8:36
- 2 Corinthians 1:5
- Galatians 6:17
- Ephesians 4:13
- Philippians 3:8
- 1 Peter 4:13
- 2 Peter 1:13

MAP questions (looking outward toward God):

- What is this passage revealing about God's character?
- What truth is God calling me to believe?
- What direction is God giving me?
- How does this passage show me the way forward?

MIRROR questions (looking inward):

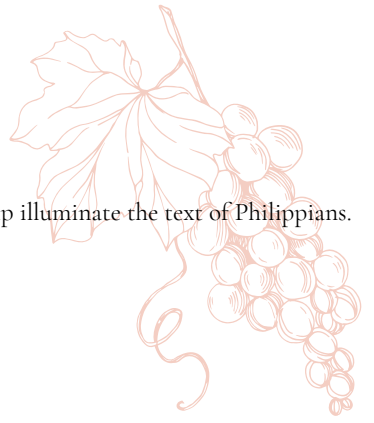
- What is this passage revealing about my heart?
- Where do I see myself in this story?
- What sin, blind spot, or false belief is God exposing in me?

Reflection prompts:

- What is behind me that still absorbs my attention?
- Am I more focused on past failures, past wounds, or past successes than on Christ?
- What would it look like this week to “press on” without striving in my own strength?



Sources & References



This study draws from a variety of trusted Bible commentaries, theological resources, and teachers to help illuminate the text of Philippians. All Scripture should be read prayerfully and in context.



Primary Biblical Text

- The Bible (CSB and other translations as noted)
- Cross-referenced passages throughout Scripture

Bible Study & Commentary Resources

- Blue Letter Bible
- Life Application Study Bible
- CSB Tony Evans Study Bible
- NIV Study Bible
- Asbury Bible Commentary
- Believer's Bible Commentary
- Expositor's Bible Commentary
- New International Bible Commentary
- Zondervan Bible Commentary
- Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Philippians
- Evangelical Exegetical Commentary: Philippians
- Philippians for Today: Priorities from Prison
- Exploring Ephesians & Philippians

Theological & Language Resources

- Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words
- Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

Classic & Historical Christian Writers

- Charles Spurgeon
- F.B. Meyer
- Hudson Taylor
- C.A. Coates
- Alexander MacLaren
- William Perkins

Contemporary Teachers & Authors

- Dr. Sandra Richter
- Joby Martin
- Beth Moore
- Greg Laurie

Additional Resources

- The Bible Project

How I Prepared this Study: I prayerfully and thoughtfully gathered and curated the content for this study using the resources listed above. I then used AI technology (Claude) to help organize the research, format materials, and create study handouts—much like using a highly capable assistant. All theological content has been carefully vetted, and every teaching application has been shaped by my own prayer, study, and understanding of God's Word and this community's needs.

