



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

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## Philippians Lesson 1: A Portrait of Paul

I am so thankful that you have chosen to embark on this study with me through the amazing book of Philippians. Throughout this study we will examine what it truly means to embody the attitude of Christ. We will see that Christian relationships are not always easy, but Paul's message to the church in Philippi gives us some very practical ways to navigate our interactions with our Christian brothers and sisters.

Before we look in-depth at this amazing letter, we should take a closer look at the man who penned them. Many of you could already fill a book with your knowledge of Paul, but I challenge you to make this more than an academic knowledge. As you read about Paul today, try to imagine how these events molded the man he would become. Think about how these things would come to influence his ministry in a major way.

**Read Philippians 3:5-6. What do these scriptures tell us about Saul's upbringing?**

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Much of what we know about Saul's childhood and younger days is found in these verses. Because of the way Jesus spoke to them, we tend to view Pharisee as a negative term. While the group as a whole

had some major heart problems, we must remember that a Pharisee was simply an expert in the law. It was pride in this position and lack of true love for God that caused Jesus to condemn the Pharisees.

F.B. Meyers said, "The word Pharisee is a synonym for religious pride and hypocrisy; but we must never forget that in those old Jewish days the Pharisee represented some of the noblest traditions of the Hebrew people. Amid prevailing indifference the Pharisees stood for a strict religious life...Amid the lax morals of the time, which infected Jerusalem almost as much as Rome, the Pharisee was austere in his ideals, and holy in life."

**How would the experience of living the life of a Pharisee have benefited Saul in his future ministry?**

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**Read Acts 22:3. What do we learn in this verse about Saul's training?**

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For a young boy from Tarsus, it would have been an immense honor to journey to Jerusalem to learn. It would have been an



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even greater accomplishment to study under Gamaliel, who in Jewish tradition is still held as one of the greatest Rabbis of all time.

**Read Acts 5:27-42 and summarize the events.**

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**What can we deduce about Gamaliel based on his response?**

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This answer seems like it could have come from Solomon himself. It was very self-controlled and full of wisdom. No doubt some of these qualities would have worked their way into the personality of young Saul. Like Moses learning to read and write in the palace, it seems that God was giving Saul the perfect background and training for the calling he was about to receive.

**God has a habit of using our imperfect pasts as a training ground for our service to Him. What are some ways God has done this in your life?**

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**Read Acts 8:1. How did Saul participate in the stoning of Stephan?**

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This is the first mention of Saul's name in scripture, and it's not a good one. At first glance it may appear that he is an innocent bystander; however, upon closer examination we see that he was in "hearty agreement." The Greek word used is SUNEUDOKEO meaning to take pleasure with others. It is often used in the context of those witnessing a marriage. Saul wasn't simply watching; he was taking utmost delight in one of the most tragic events in early church history.

**Read Acts 9:1-3. What was Paul doing to the early church?**

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**Now look at 1 Timothy 1:15-17. How do you think the events of his life before he knew Christ shaped Paul's message?**

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What a powerful testimony for his ministry! What an extreme 180 degree turn. Certainly this would have been a reason for people everywhere to stand up and take note of. If God had use for one of Christ's biggest enemies, certainly He could use anyone who was willing to accomplish His holy purpose.



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**Read Acts 9:1-9, 17-20 (Luke's account of Saul's conversion) and Acts 26:9-18 (Paul's account of his conversion). Describe these events in your own words.**

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**Now read Acts 9:22. How does this verse describe Saul?**

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This is one of my favorite tidbits from our study today. The word used for “increasing in strength,” ENDUNAMOO, is the same word used to describe Samson’s strength in the book of Hebrews. Think of Samson’s enormous physical strength and now equate that to the level of Paul’s spiritual strength; what an inspiring thought!

Not much is said about Saul’s name change to Paul. Luke mentions only briefly in Acts 13:9: “Saul, who was also known as Paul...” From this point on he is referred to as Paul. Even though not many words are given to denote this transformation, a name change in Hebrew culture was a very significant thing.

We aren’t told if it was God who changed Paul’s name or if he did this on his own; however, there are a few interesting things to note about this. Saul would have been a Hebrew name and Paul a Roman name. This change may have signified his

transformation from a Hebrew Pharisee to a gentile minister.

Another interesting point is that he was named after Saul the first king of Israel. This name would have been prestigious and something special. The name Paul means “little or small.” This name change could have signified his change in position and attitude from a great teacher and a prominent member of society to “the chief of sinners.” It may indicate the humbling process that took place.

While these probably played a part in the name change, I lean toward a third option. Most often when a Biblical name is changed it indicates that God is taking ownership of a person. We have many examples of this: Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter. These were all men that God was putting His stamp on. They would no longer be traveling the path they once did; they would now be traveling God’s path and working to accomplish His goals. This would now be true of Paul; he would be Christ’s companion as he worked to win souls for the Lord!

This week I challenge you to listen to or read through the book of Philippians every day. It only takes 15 minutes! As you read this week watch specifically for what this letter says about Paul himself. How have his experiences that we have learned about shaped him into the person that penned this amazingly powerful letter?