



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Philippians Lesson 3: The Purpose of Philippians

We have spent the last two weeks getting to know the author and audience of Philippians. As we begin to step into the text, I think you will see how it really makes this letter come to life. This week we are going to take some time to digest the reason for Paul’s writing. Understanding the purpose as a whole makes it much simpler to digest the little pieces and recognize how each verse fits into Paul’s greater purpose in writing. This is especially true in this little letter.

Let’s begin by writing what you think the purpose of Philippians is now, this will be fun to compare after we complete this study and see if you have learned anything new!

There are several ways to determine the purpose of the book. Denny Petrillo has a great method that I love to use, he calls it the four Ps: Purpose Statements, Prevalence, Petition Verbs, and Prayers. Examining each of these is a pretty fool-proof method in figuring out why a book was written. This week we are going to walk through each of these to determine why Paul wrote this letter.

First let’s look at purpose statements. This would be where an author point blank says: “I am writing this because _____.” When we study scripture it is always important to let the Bible explain itself, and when a writer tells us his purpose we need to listen. There aren’t any simple, point blank purpose statements in Philippians so we will move to the next item on our list, prevalence.

When we look at the idea of prevalence, we are looking for specific words or ideas that are repeated over and over again. Any time an author repeats something many times, it is clearly an important point. There are many such words in Philippians, sometimes you might hear us call them keywords.

Take some time to mark each of these keywords and their synonyms (I color them each in a different color of colored pencil, but do what works best for you!). Once you have marked them in the text describe what you learn about each throughout this letter:

- **Brother**



Finer Grounds Bible Study

- **Joy/Rejoice**

- **Mind/Attitude**

- **Gospel**

- **Fellowship**

- **Called**

- **Word/Message/Defense**

- **Glory**

Now that you have marked all these keywords, how has your idea of the purpose of this book developed?

Let's take a look at the next P on our list, petition verbs. In the Greek language one of the ways people highlighted the purpose of letters was to use the petition verb PARAKALEO. There is a complete list of these petition verbs on the Bear Valley website:

<https://www.wetrainpreachers.com/study-resources>. Whenever you see a petition verb used, it points toward the main idea of the whole letter. Philippians is one of the rare places where not just one, but three petition verbs are used in quick succession. It is as if Paul is hammering home a specific point.

These petition verbs are used in Philippians 4:2-3, "I **URGE** Euodia and I **URGE** Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I **ASK** you also to help these women..." At first glance the use of petition verbs in this passage is perplexing. This is one of those verses we might otherwise just blow past and chalk them up to some personal greetings. But, there is clearly something deeper at work here.

What issue is Paul highlighting with his use of petition verbs?



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Because Paul uses such emphatic language here, it is most likely that this is the main issue that caused him to write the whole letter. This can be tough to swallow because so often throughout our life we have been told that Philippians is the joy book, and that's not completely untrue...but this letter really at the heart was written because of a girl fight. There is not much that can tear a congregation apart faster than two women taking sides and digging their heels in.

As we examine the other markers of purpose, it will become more and more clear how this whole letter fits together with this bombshell as the climax. Can you imagine being one of these ladies sitting there listening as this letter was being read out loud? Pretty humbling!

The final P is prayer, this will be the final pillar to show us what Paul's purpose really is. When you go to God in petition for someone, it is usually to ask God to fill up something lacking in that person, whether it be a physical ailment or spiritual struggle. Even if it is a prayer of thanksgiving, it shows what exactly the person praying values. When an inspired writer mentions his prayer for the audience of the letter, it is important to take note.

Read each of these prayer sections and list what Paul is desiring for the Philippian church.

- **Philippians 1:3-5**

- **Philippians 1:9-10**

How do these fit in with the purpose of the book?

There are two major points Paul brings up in these prayers. First is a focus on the gospel of Christ above all else and the second is a focus on their love for one another through the lens of knowledge and discernment. These two things will become the focus of the letter as the solution for the specific problem the Philippian brethren were facing.

Now, with these things in mind, take some time to read through the whole letter in one sitting, how has your understanding of the purpose changed? What jumps out at you that didn't before?



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Hopefully now when you read this letter as a whole you can see how it all fits together. The Philippian church is having an issue with disunity at the hands of two contentious women, Euodia and Syntyche. We don't know what the exact issue was, but it was enough of a problem that Paul felt it necessary to write an entire letter and beg the others in the congregation to help achieve unity.

What did we learn about the initial makeup of the Philippian congregation that might be the catalyst for some of these issues?

If you think back to our lesson about the church in Philippi, you will remember that the initial converts there were women. These were devout Jews who were already meeting to worship God and pray. Unfortunately, sometimes when women are integral in organizing or starting something, we get territorial over it. We don't know if this is the issue with Euodia and Syntyche, but it's easy to see how this could have affected their relationship.

This happens so many times in our congregations today. One tiny scuffle between two ladies over things as silly as the color of carpet in the auditorium or who is going to teach a bible class can lead to major division. Thankfully, Paul doesn't leave us high and dry. He gives us some incredibly practical solutions throughout

this letter. I really think this is one of those letters we should all be forced to study every year of our lives to make sure our attitudes stay in check.

Think about some of the things we learned about the purpose this week, how does Paul use these things to give us a solution to this problem of disunity?

This letter is one that focuses on humility of mind and at the very core of all things and singular focus on the gospel. Paul understands that if we empty ourselves of self-centeredness and focus on what is truly important, the division and strife we face will melt away and seem silly. As you go throughout the week keep reading through this letter every day and be sure to keep your attitude in check. Next week we will get to dive into the verse-by-verse portion of our study!