



In Christ Alone

We Stand

LCMS YOUTH GATHERING
NEW ORLEANS • JULY 16–20, 2016

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2016 GATHERING INTRODUCTORY STUDY



Leader's Guide



In Christ Alone

We Stand

Introductory Bible Study

Leader's Note: Thank you for your service in preparing youth and adults to attend the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering, In Christ Alone. We give thanks to God for you and pray you may be blessed through this experience. This Bible study can be done as one, longer study or divided and used in three separate parts. We hope this allows you flexibility to meet the needs and setting of your group.

You will notice there are Leader Notes throughout this study. For more information including tips for leading a Bible study, please check out the Gathering Bible study video available at www.lcmsgathering.com/biblestudy.

For more background information on the book of Philippians and its key themes, please read *In Christ Alone: A Thematic Study of Paul's Letter to the Philippians* by Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, Gathering theological advisor, available on the Pre-Gathering DVD or online at www.lcmsgathering.com/biblestudy/.

Welcome to the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering!

That's right. You heard correctly. We aren't headed down to New Orleans just yet, but with this study the Gathering is officially underway!

There's quite a bit to do before leaving for New Orleans. During the next nine months youth groups around the country will spend lots of time and energy fundraising, group building, and finally, suit-case packing. They'll also be doing what you are doing right now--opening up the Scriptures to study what it means to stand "In Christ Alone."

As you participate in this Bible study you are joining a unique community. It is made up of thousands of fellow believers in Jesus. You'll get to know them a little better in New Orleans next summer, and you'll probably feel the strongest attachment to them at that time. But this community is actually taking shape right now. So, once again: Welcome to the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering!

This community begins now! #NYG2016

Leader's Note: Consider starting the Bible study with an ice breaker or group building activity to get youth moving and talking before the study begins. Find group building ideas online at <http://www.lcmsgathering.com/group-building-games/> or use an activity you already know.

To The Philippians . . . And You

The Bible studies at the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering will focus on Paul's letter to the Philippians. It's a short letter, but don't be fooled by its length. It proclaims a very important message. The great apostle Paul wrote this letter to a community of Christians in a distant town called Philippi. He wrote to encourage and strengthen them as they lived out their faith in Jesus.

But what if Paul had written the letter directly to you? What if it was addressed to your youth group? Or to the community that will gather next summer in New Orleans? It's not as far-fetched as it sounds because this letter to the Philippians is also God's written Word. It speaks directly into the lives of God's people across space and time.

Paul was pretty savvy. If he were around today, he probably would have kept up with the latest technology. So let's try this. Imagine you received this text from the apostle Paul:

To all the saints in Christ Jesus going to New Orleans for the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering, including the overseers and DCE's and adult volunteers:

Grace and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...



If this message appeared on your phone, how would you respond? What would you text back?

Leader's Note: This is an open-ended question, designed to initiate conversation. Encourage participants to notice that this message is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

Of course Paul didn't send a text, but through his letter to the Philippians, God continues to speak to us today. Throughout the Gathering we will be listening to Paul and speaking to one another about what he has said. These responses will be a big part of preparing our hearts and minds to participate in the Gathering.

We'd like to start that conversation right away. Tweet out your responses, post some photos, check in with #NYG2016.

As we listen and respond to Paul's message in Philippians, three important concepts are going to come up again and again. Each concept is grounded in the Gathering theme, "In Christ Alone," and affects every aspect of our lives as Christians. We're talking about identity, humility, and community. There's a lot packed into these concepts, so let's get started!

Identity...In Christ Alone

#identity

To live is Christ! - Phil. 1:21

Let's talk about identity. Begin by sharing your identity with the group. Who are you?

Leader's Note: Go around the room and ask people to answer this question. Depending on how comfortable the group is with each other, additional ice breaker games or questions might be helpful here. Adjust the question to fit your group's setting. If your group is large, ask 4–5 volunteers to respond, or divide into groups.

The following questions are designed to help your group reflect on their identity.

Sometimes we identify ourselves with our names.
What does your last name say about your identity?
If you have a nickname, what does that say about your identity?

Sometimes we identify ourselves by the things we do. In what sports/clubs do you participate? What does your participation in these activities say about your identity?

Sometimes we try to capture our identity with pictures. Take out your phone and scroll through your pictures. Notice especially your selfies. What do they say about your identity?

Sometimes we share pieces of our identity through our posts. Check out the last thing you posted. What does it say about your identity. #SelfieStick

We find and share our identity in many different ways. Our families help define us, as do our friends, our clubs, our teams, and our accomplishments. Through social media we share bits and pieces of ourselves, trying to craft the perfect identity to share with others. But where do we find our true identity? When you strip away the uniforms, the Twitter feeds, and Instagram shots, who are you?

Read Philippians 1:1

What did Paul and Timothy call themselves?

Leader's Note: Servants of Christ Jesus.

Describe the life of a servant.

Leader's Note: A servant does not live for himself. He obeys his master.

What did Paul and Timothy call the Philippians?

Leader's Note: Saints in Christ Jesus

What does it mean to be a "saint"?

Leader's Note: To be a saint is to be forgiven. It has nothing to do with our behavior or our actions. It is not something we earn. Notice that Paul calls them "saints in Christ Jesus." To be a saint is to have the righteousness of Christ, which comes through faith, as Paul writes in Philippians 3:9. See also Ephesians 2:8–9.

Saints and servants. We are saints, forgiven and free through faith in Jesus. And we are servants, called to serve the Lord Jesus by serving one another. That's a helpful summary of what it means to be a Christian, but Paul summarizes it even further in verse 21.

Read Philippians 1:21

Fill in the blank. For Paul, to live is _____.

Leader's Note: The answer is Christ.

What do you think he means by this?

Leader's Note: This is an open-ended question, designed to get the group thinking and talking. We'll return to this verse throughout the Bible studies before, during, and after the Gathering.

With this verse in mind, what do you think one of Paul's selfies would look like? If Paul were tweeting Philippians 1:21, what kind of picture would accompany it?

Leader's Note: Allow for responses.

Philippians 1:21 is a key verse. We'll return to it as the Gathering gets closer. For now, here's the key point: your identity as a Christian is a gift from God. It was given in your baptism, confirmed every time you receive forgiveness, and lived out in service to others.

When you think about it, this is very humbling.

Leader's Note: If using this study in three parts, stop here, closing in prayer.





Humility...In Christ Alone #humility

"In humility, count others more significant than yourselves." - Phil. 2:3



Humility is a key theme in the book of Philippians. But it's a difficult concept to grasp. Let's try to break it down. How would you define humility?

Leader's Note: Allow for responses.

Merriam-Webster dictionary provides the following definition: "the quality or state of not thinking you are better than other people."

Perhaps it would help to put a face with the concept. Who is the most humble person you know? What makes them humble?

Leader's Note: Encourage them to think of people in their schools or families or congregation.

According to our culture, is it good to be humble? Why or why not?

Leader's Note: Humility is not a sought-after character trait in our culture. In fact, it doesn't even seem to be on people's radar. Our culture tends to honor those who are confident, even arrogant. It values success and pride. It encourages us to do everything we can to get ahead.

As part of his encouragement in this letter, Paul calls Christians to live humbly. This is a challenge, especially because everything around us seems to encourage the opposite of humility. To help us out, Paul gives us a vivid image.

Read Philippians 2:1-11

#ChristHymn

In Philippians 2:3 Paul tells us to "count others as more significant than" ourselves. Why is this so difficult?

Leader's Note: Allow for responses.

Verses 5-11 are often called the "Christ hymn" because they summarize so well the life and work of Jesus. How did Jesus "count others as more significant than" Himself?

Leader's Note: The incarnation itself was an act of humility (Phil 2:6-7), but the fullest expression of Jesus' humility was seen as He gave himself up to death on a cross (Phil 2:8).

If you had to choose one word that best summarizes Jesus' humility, what would it be?

Leader's Note: There are a number of possible answers here. Words like love or sacrifice would be appropriate. Sticking with Paul's language, we could say "obedient" (Phil 2:8).

Jesus' obedience to God the Father led him to give up everything for us. Paul uses Jesus' humble obedience as an example for us to imitate in our lives as saints and servants. With this in mind, complete this sentence:

Jesus' humble obedience leads me to count others as more significant than myself by...

Leader's Note: If using this study in three parts, stop here, closing in prayer.



Community...In Christ Alone #community

"Look to the interests of others."
- Phil. 2:4

...

Each of us belongs to a variety of groups. We are part of teams and crews and squads of all shapes and sizes. Look through the pictures on your phone again. Based on your pictures, list the squads to which you belong. Who is part of your crew?

Leader's Note: Allow for responses.

Let's think about these groups of people.

What does it take to belong to a team or a club?

Leader's Note: Allow for responses.

How permanent are these communities? Will they continue after the final game or the final performance or graduation?

Leader's Note: Some of these groups may last a long time. Most probably will not. The idea here is not to be critical of these groups but to point out that many of our communities stay together for a very short amount of time.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he didn't write to a single individual. He wrote to a community of believers. The same is true of us. God's Word in Philippians addresses us as a squad—almost like a group text, awaiting our individual and collective response—and he has a lot to say about our life together.

Read again Phil 2:1–11

This time think about community. What do these verses say to your youth group? What do they say to your congregation? What do they say to the thousands of youth and adults who will gather in New Orleans next summer? #SquadGoals

Share your ideas with
the Gathering community!

Paul rejoices when Christians are "in full accord and of one mind." This is only possible when they live humbly, selflessly looking to the interests of others. Have you ever been part of a team or a club that lived in such a way?

Leader's Note: Invite youth to share stories and examples.

Read Philippians 1:3–7. In these verses Paul is talking about real community. What do you think it would be like when Paul gets together with the Philippians? Describe the scene. What would the Instagram posts look like? #PhilippianReunion

Leader's Note: Allow for responses.

Joy is a major theme in Philippians. We will also experience a lot of joy at the Gathering. Why do you think Paul was so joyful when he saw Christians living in together in humility and unity?

Leader's Note: Joy both builds up the community, and it is a result of living in true community.

Wrapping It Up...For Now

There's still a lot to talk about when it comes to identity, humility, and community. We've only begun to scratch the surface. And that's okay. We still have some time to prepare. For now, let's conclude with this: Our identity is found in Christ alone; this identity is lived out in true humility, which is on display in Christ alone. As followers of Jesus, we live at all times and in all places as part of an eternal community, which is found—you guessed it—in Christ alone.

Don't forget to check your
twitterfeed...#NYG2016

Closing Prayer