

SESSION 1

joyful connections

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 16:6–40; Phil. 1:1–8

BUILDUP THEME



UPLIFT OTHERS

God directs believers to make personal connections that give their lives purpose and joy.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will purpose to pray for and build relationships with the people God has brought into their lives.

MEMORY VERSE

“For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:8).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ What might the world say is the path to joy? Which of the world’s paths have you traveled? What happened? Did you find the joy you expected?
- ☐ Christ put others before Himself, looked out for their interests above His own, and served the world by dying on the cross for their sins. Jesus’ humility led to His genuine joy. No one should expect to find joy from things, privileges, or recognition. Joying like Jesus, then, means to live with the mind of Christ. It means to live humbly and sacrificially.
- ☐ Read Acts 16:1–40 and Philippians 1:1–8. Look for Paul’s humility and service in these passages. And make note of how his service of others led to his joy.
- ☐ As you prepare this session and study the passages, consider how your relationships affect your joy. Have you been conducting those relationships with the mind of Christ?

Session Summary

This session begins with Paul’s second missionary journey. After Paul revisited churches he planted on his first journey, the Holy Spirit forbade him from venturing into certain territories. Instead, the Spirit led Paul to cross over to Macedonia. There he met and ministered to people who became the foundation of the church in Philippi. Paul, moved by the love of Christ, kept the Philippians in his thoughts, prayers, and heart. As a result, they became one of his main sources of joy. Paul’s life demonstrates the vital role fellow believers play in knowing true joy in this life.

Session Starters

Option 1—Trading Places

Gather

- Resources 48-R1 and 48-R2.

Steps

1. Pose the following questions to get your students thinking about what they believe brings a person joy.

ASK: With whom would you enjoy trading places for one day? Perhaps a celebrity, politician, musician, or sports figure?

2. Display resources 48-R1 and 48-R2 as examples of luxuries the very rich get to enjoy.

ASK: What opportunities does that person have that you will likely never have?

ASK: What might that person discover from living a day in your shoes?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Seeing the luxuries the uber wealthy or insanely talented get to enjoy can make us envious and perhaps forlorn about our own lives. We might conclude we could never be truly happy in our present circumstances. This session will introduce us to the apostle Paul and his initial connections with the Philippians. Paul had a joying-like-Jesus kind of life. We will learn why he had joy and how we can too, even if we never own a luxury yacht or live in a sprawling mansion.

Option 2—Joying Like Jesus

Steps

1. Ask the following set of questions to introduce the theme of joying like Jesus.

ASK: What do you think “joying like Jesus” means?

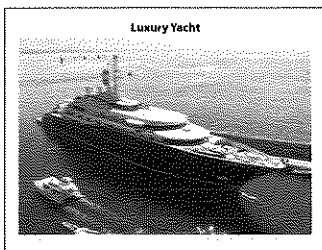
ASK: Why did Jesus know joy?

ASK: Can we joy like Jesus? Why?

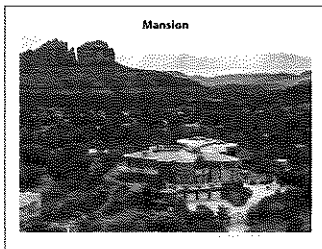
ASK: Suppose someone said they joyed like *you*. What would that look like?

2. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Visual resources are available as part of the PowerPoint presentations, or you can print them off to show in class. Access both options from the download page. See the digital access card included in your kit for instructions.



48-R1



48-R2

This session will introduce us to the apostle Paul and his initial connections with the Philippians. Paul had a joying-like-Jesus kind of life. We will learn why he had joy and how we can too. Paul's connections with the Philippians and Christ made all the difference.

Bible Study

I. Making Connections (Acts 16:6–40)

A. Following God to places (16:6–10)

Paul wrote Philippians to the church in Philippi, which was located in the region of Macedonia. Paul first visited the Roman colony about ten years earlier when he traveled there on his second missionary journey. Before reaching Philippi, Paul and Silas visited the churches Paul had started during his first trip. Along the way, a young man named Timothy joined them (Acts 16:1–3). All was going as planned before the Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his companions to preach the gospel in Asia and Bithynia (16:6–8).

READ: Acts 16:9.

Since Paul and Silas were on a missionary journey, they traveled with God's purpose and planning in mind. That God overtly led them to cross over to Macedonia to enter Europe with the gospel for the first time makes sense. That God leads our church's missionaries to travel overseas and enter towns and villages makes sense too. But should the rest of us think God doesn't care so much about where we end up?

ASK: Does God lead us to places (cities, houses, workplaces, groups) today? Explain. *Yes, though not quite as obviously as He led Paul. God plans for us to make vital connections with other believers and the lost in the places we go.*

ASK: Why are you where you are? Does God top your list of reasons?

No matter our location or vocation, gospel work is our primary work. We are commissioned to spread the gospel just as much as Paul and Silas were commissioned. Instead of saying, "I'll serve God wherever I go," we should say, "I'll serve God wherever He leads me."

ASK: What is the difference between serving God where we go and serving God where He leads? *Our primary direction for life comes from God. He has a work for us to accomplish.*

ASK: How can we be sure we are following God when we make decisions that move us to new neighborhoods, cities, states, or countries? *We must consult Him first and then wait for His leading. He will give us peace and open doors if we are following His direction.*

B. Following God to people (16:11–40)

Once Paul knew where to go, he turned his focus to individuals in Philippi. Luke recorded three specific examples of people to whom Paul went. One encounter was the result of Paul's God-given common sense while the other two were clearly the result of God's leading through unexpected means.

1. To religious people (16:11–15)

Philippi apparently had no synagogue, meaning the number of people practicing Judaism in the city must have been few. So Paul knew any Jewish activity would happen at the nearest river on the evening of the Sabbath. So that's where he took his team.

READ: Acts 16:11–13.

The women Paul and Silas encountered apparently understood the futility of pagan religion. They sought something else and must have been introduced to the God of Judaism. In their group was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. She settled in Philippi after coming from Thyatira in Asia, one of the regions into which God had forbid the missionaries to enter just days earlier.

READ: Acts 16:14, 15.

Of all the women who talked with Paul and Silas, it appears only Lydia responded to the gospel. She believed and then was instrumental in leading her household to the Lord. Lydia's former religion and recognition of God were commendable, but the religious are just as lost as the pagans. She wasn't saved until she put her faith in Christ.

ASK: Why might we be tempted to ignore the spiritual needs of those who are religious but lost? *They are good people; they mean well; they believe in God; they might be offended if confronted with the gospel.*

God won't accept well-meaning, religious unbelievers into His presence in eternity. Consider who are the religious unbelievers in your life. Ask God for the grace to help them see their need for salvation.

2. To desperate people (16:16–25)

Paul and Silas went throughout Philippi preaching the gospel. When a possessed girl started following them and proclaiming them as God's servants and the declarers of salvation, they became annoyed.

READ: Acts 16:16, 17.

The girl had a reputation of being controlled by a divining spirit. But Paul knew her predictions were empowered by an evil spirit. The demon didn't

use her verbal testimony to encourage people to believe in the gospel but to cause them to question its validity. The evil spirit sullied Paul's preaching by endorsing him and his message.

The girl following Paul and Silas was a toxic endorser. Her presence hurt Paul's message and damaged his credibility because it connected him with the demonic power controlling the girl. No doubt Paul and Silas had to repeatedly tell their audience, "She's not with us." When the annoyance reached a tipping point, Paul turned to the girl and dealt with the problem.

READ: Acts 16:18.

What happened to the slave girl after being delivered from her demon possession? Did she trust in Christ as her Savior? We don't know. Luke never mentions her again and the missionaries don't seem to engage her. Instead, Luke turns to a series of events that steer the reader to consider God's reason for the slave girl's deliverance.

READ: Acts 16:19–24.

The slave girl's owners were furious. They had made a lot of money from the girl's fortune-telling. So they appealed to the thoroughly pagan population by accusing the missionaries of putting the crowd in danger. The Philippians feared their pagan gods as well as Rome. The local magistrates, appointed by Rome to keep the city loyal, tore their robes at the thought of trouble. They had the missionaries beaten and then held in stocks in the grimmest and darkest part of the prison. By their actions, they communicated their intolerance of all potential threats to Rome's dominance in Philippi.

READ: Acts 16:25.

God had His own reason for working through a demon-possessed girl, slave-owning opportunists, and Roman-appointed magistrates to incarcerate Paul and Silas. In that prison were other people the magistrates considered threats to Rome. Paul and Silas brought them light and hope in a place of darkness and despair. The prisoners listened to the missionaries' prayers and hymns with rapt attention. They heard a message of true deliverance from guilt and shame—a deliverance that brought Paul and Silas true joy despite the missionaries' circumstances. God directed Paul and Silas to deliver their message of hope to their "captive" audience.

ASK: How might you expect someone to respond to being unjustly beaten and incarcerated? *By complaining and crying out for justice.*

The Romans didn't sentence people to prison terms. Those in prison were either condemned and awaiting their punishment or soon to be condemned. Furthermore, they were likely not Roman citizens and were

therefore at the mercy of the magistrates. For good reason, then, the prisoners listened intently to the missionaries' message of forgiveness and freedom.

ASK: In what sense is every unbeliever condemned? *They are under condemnation for their sins (John 3:17, 18). They are awaiting a future sentencing of eternity in the Lake of Fire.*

God directed Paul and Silas to the incarcerated and condemned—the most desperate to hear the gospel.

ASK: How has God directed you to encounter desperate people? How did you respond to the circumstances God used to lead you to them?

Paul and Silas understood that to whom God had led them was far more important than how God had led them. They resisted the urge to whine about the journey into the prison and carried out God's will instead. Their ministry had a tremendous impact. As we will learn in the next part of the story, when given a chance to flee, the prisoners stayed with Paul and Silas instead (Acts 16:28).

3. To troubled people (16:26–40)

The prisoners' chance to flee came when God caused an earthquake and supernaturally loosed all their chains and opened all the doors. When the jailer awoke, he panicked. Thinking the prisoners had fled, he drew his sword to kill himself. Paul called out to him to stop, for all the prisoners were still there.

READ: Acts 16:26–29.

The missionaries realized that God hadn't loosed their chains and opened the doors so they could escape the prison. They sat and waited for the "aftershock." For the God Who shook the jail also shook the jailer. The jailer grabbed a light and entered the deepest part of the prison to bring out Paul and Silas. Trembling, he asked the missionaries how to be freed from his captivity to sin.

READ: Acts 16:30. **ASK:** What could the jailer have learned from the missionaries' refusal to flee? *That they cared for his spiritual condition and wanted to share with him the freedom of trusting in Jesus for salvation.*

Paul and Silas told the man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The jailer and his household eagerly placed their faith in Jesus as Savior (16:29–32).

ASK: To what "trembling" unbelievers has God led you?

ASK: What were the circumstances that led you to them? How did you respond to those circumstances?

The next day, Paul and Silas revealed their Roman citizenship, meaning they had been beaten and imprisoned illegally. The magistrates were more than happy to release them. The missionaries returned to Lydia's house to strengthen the believers before moving on (16:33–40).

God led Paul and Silas to the religious, the desperate, and the troubled. In each case the missionaries trusted God and shared the gospel without hesitation. The missionaries looked for ways to help people even though the inroads into the unbelievers' lives were sometimes paved with hardships and pain.

II. Maintaining Connections (Phil. 1:1–8)

Paul wrote to the Philippians about ten years after he founded their church and about five years after his last visit to the city.

A. Keeping believers in our thoughts (1:1–3)

READ: Philippians 1:1–3.

Paul's "remembrance" of the Philippians wasn't an occasional reminiscence but an intentional recollection. "Remembrance" means "mention." Paul thought of the Philippians believers purposefully and thankfully. He wanted them to know he was glad he had led them to Christ and strengthened them spiritually. He identified them as the key to reaching their world with the gospel.

ASK: Do you purposefully think about fellow believers? What is your response? Do you have jealousy, hatred, and regret or thankfulness, concern, and joy?

ASK: What might we reveal about ourselves by rehearsing how we've been hurt by fellow believers? *It reveals a focus on ourselves and a high view of our importance.*

B. Keeping believers in our prayers (1:4–6)

When Paul thought about the Philippians, he naturally began to pray for them.

READ: Philippians 1:4–6. **ASK:** What characterized Paul's requests for the Philippians? *His concern for their continued growth in the Lord and His confidence in the Lord to faithfully complete His work in their lives.*

God's faithfulness is a given. He stands ready to help believers grow, and He will glorify all believers at Christ's return. It was for the Philippians' fellowship, or partnership, in the gospel that Paul prayed. The Christian life isn't an every-man-for-himself endeavor. Paul believed the Philippians needed his prayers if they were to succeed in carrying out the Great Commission in Philippi and beyond. Paul was right.

Keeping fellow believers in our prayers isn't just nice, it is necessary if they are to grow in the Lord and do His will.

C. Keeping believers in our hearts (1:7, 8)

Paul went on to write that thinking of and praying for the Philippians was part of his duty as their fellow believer. It was his moral obligation before God.

READ: Philippians 1:7.

Having thoughts and prayers toward our fellow believers isn't something we could do if we so choose; it is something we must do. Being in each other's thoughts and prayers is a vital part of our lives and ministries.

ASK: When have you experienced God's grace through the prayers of your fellow believers?

Beyond Paul's moral obligation to pray for the Philippians was his heartfelt love for them. He gladly performed his duty because he cared for them. The Philippians felt the same for Paul. While he confirmed and defended the gospel in his testimony before Roman officials, the Philippians upheld him with their thoughts and prayers, which became the avenue for God's sustaining and empowering grace in Paul's life.

READ: Philippians 1:8.

To be abundantly clear, Paul called on God as his witness to his affection for the Philippians. He even added that his affection for them came from Christ and was therefore modeled after Christ's type of affection.

ASK: What are some characteristics of Christ's affection for others?
It is sacrificial, genuine, selfless, and action oriented.

There was nothing fake or superficial about Paul's love for the Philippians. We are to have Paul's kind of Christ-originating, God-verifying love for others.

Bible Application

Steps

1. Discuss God's leading of believers to places.

ASK: What are your ambitions? To buy a bigger house? Get a better job? Retire in a dream location?

ASK: How does God fit into your planning to change locations? How should He fit into your planning?

2. Discuss God's leading of your learners to other people.

ASK: Name three people to whom God has led you. How have you and how will you minister to those people?

3. Discuss God's expectations concerning believers' relationships with each other and the lost.

ASK: What does your prayer list reveal about your love for your fellow believers?

ASK: What will loving others like Christ look like for you?

Joying like Jesus will always involve others. Paul will make that abundantly clear throughout his letter to the Philippians.

sharing Christ's love

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Phil. 1:9–11

BUILDUP THEME



UPLIFT OTHERS

God helps us abound in our love for Him and others to the praise of His glory.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate their growth in love for God and others.

MEMORY VERSE

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:9, 10).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ A typical prayer meeting will include many requests for people facing physical and financial hardships. The request is for God to relieve the person of the uncomfortable or discouraging circumstance. Such prayers seem to be asking God to prove His love for His own by making their lives more bearable. That simply isn't the pattern in Paul's epistles. He prayed for people to be transformed rather than for their circumstances to change for the better.
- ☐ What are the prayer requests like at the prayer meetings you've attended? What prayer requests do your learners make in class?
- ☐ Read Philippians 1:9–11. What characterizes the change Paul asked God to bring about in the Philippians lives? Have you made similar prayer requests?
- ☐ Challenge your students through this session to see the bigger picture of what God wants to accomplish in their lives. If they focus on becoming more comfortable, they will miss the true path to joy. Joy comes from spiritual growth in our love for God and others. God provides for such spiritual growth in our lives.

Session Summary

This session covers Paul's short but powerful prayer for the Philippians. He shared he is praying their love for God would abound within the guidelines of knowledge and discerning judgment. He also prayed they would love wisely and purely, choosing what is best for their church's spiritual growth and becoming a strong testimony for the Lord. He expected their abounding, pure, and wise love to bring spiritual fruit to their lives and ultimately their praise of God's glory.