

Session 2

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.

Session Starters

Option 1—Water Debate

Gather

- Video clip of a tsunami or flood waters bringing destruction.

Steps

1. Organize the learners into two groups. Assign one to come up with arguments that water is good and beneficial. Assign the other group to come up with arguments that water is bad and destructive.
2. Give each group a minute or two to present their cases.
3. Discuss the activity.

ASK: Who do you think won the argument?

ASK: What makes water good or bad? *Whether it is guided and controlled.*

4. Show the video clip of a destructive tsunami or flood.

Uncontrolled water is powerful and destructive. No one would say water in this instance is good. It destroys everything in its path.

5. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul understood that abounding love, like abounding water, must be guided and controlled if it is to be beneficial. Loving people without God's directions can bring rather unlovely results. This session examines Paul's prayer for the Philippians' growth in their love for God. It will challenge us to consider the depth and direction of our love for God and others.

Option 2—Water Gone Rogue

Steps

1. Learners share stories of when they experienced water damage or destruction.
2. Discuss the similarities between all the stories.

ASK: What is the common theme in each of your stories? *The water went out of control and became destructive.*

ASK: What corrective measures were taken to control the water and make sure it didn't get out of control again?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul understood that abounding love, like abounding water, must be guided and controlled if it is to be beneficial. Loving people without God's directions can bring rather unlovely results. This session examines Paul's prayer for the Philippians' growth in their love for God. It will challenge us to consider the depth and direction of our love for God and others.

Bible Study

Gather

- Picture frame or other wood or plastic item painted gold.

I. Love Increasingly (Phil. 1:9)

Paul's prayer requests for the Philippians applies to all believers. Its content helps us understand God's will for us. It also presents an example of the type of prayer requests we should have for each other.

A. Love directed toward God

READ: Philippians 1:9.

Paul began by praying that the Philippians' love would abound more and more. He had in mind primarily their love for God. The word "abound" means to superabound both in quality and quantity.

ASK: What does a greater love for God look like in a believer's life? *It involves a deeper trust in God, a stronger desire to know and do His will, and an abandonment of worldliness and competing pursuits.*

ASK: What happens to a believer's relationships when his or her love for God abounds? *The believer's relationships grow stronger because God's love motivates him or her to love others humbly and sacrificially.*

Abounding love for God naturally overflows our hearts, spreading to touch others. The Philippians had proved their love for God and others through the spreading of the gospel.

If we are having a tough time loving others, then we need to consider our love for God. John even went so far as to challenge us to consider whether we have truly trusted in Christ as our Savior if we aren't showing love for believers (1 John 3:10, 11).

B. Love directed by God

We want the love of God to spread from us to others. But that spreading love must be guided by boundaries. Misguided love can be damaging rather than helpful. Paul prayed the Philippians' love

would be guided by knowledge and discerning judgment (Phil. 1:9). Abounding love that is beneficial, then, has guiding banks like those running alongside a river. A river that overflows its boundaries becomes destructive rather than beneficial.

"Knowledge" informs our love so we don't love ignorantly or blindly. Such knowledge comes primarily from the Bible. A knowledgeable love, then, looks at relationships through the Bible's lens. That means true love won't excuse, overlook, or accept sin. God's truth guides true love.

Our love is also bounded by discerning judgment. The Bible provides us with moral principles to guide our love. A discerning person applies Biblical moral principles to specific life situations and has a sensitive moral perception. That doesn't mean we hate sinners. Rather we love sinners by helping them face and deal with their sin.

ASK: Name some biblical truths and principles that should guide our love for others. *God is holy and demands we be holy; God hates sin; sin is destructive; everyone is created in God's image and therefore has value; God provides the only solution to sin.*

Each time Paul mentioned love in Philippians, he used the word *agape*, meaning a self-sacrificing love that desires the best for others. Many people have excused wrong actions by claiming they are simply loving others. But *agape* love always flows within the confines of Biblical knowledge and discernment.

ASK: Name some instances when believers might accept or excuse a person's sin in the name of love. *When they don't want to offend a person or scare a person off. When they want a person to like them and be their friend.*

ASK: What harm could come from such a practice? *Such a practice leads to increased sin rather than increased love. The believers elevate their feelings and desires above God's Word, fail to help the person gain victory over his or her sin, and value earthly relationships as more important than their relationship with God.*

Since *agape* love wants God's best for someone, it can't affirm a person's sinful behavior. No sin is ever in a person's best interest. It is always harmful and destructive. True love for others reflects God's love for them and a desire for them to have a growing and right relationship with Him.

As you are aware, letting God's Word direct our love puts us at odds with current culture. Culture teaches a person's feelings and desires should be his or her guide, even if such feelings produce beliefs that run contrary to scientific facts. According to our culture, to love someone means to respect and celebrate the person's feelings and desires even if those desires and feelings are sinful in God's eyes. When believers

refuse to celebrate a person's sin, the world calls the believers bigots and haters. Perhaps the day is fast approaching when those who use the Bible to guide their love will be arrested for standing for the truth. The government may one day deny religious freedom and make criminal the refusal to recognize and celebrate what the Bible defines as sinful behavior.

II. Love Wisely (Phil. 1:10)

Paul also prayed that the Philippians would approve things that are excellent (Phil. 1:10). "Approve" means to evaluate or test before accepting. Things that are "excellent" are those things in life that have eternal consequences. Paul wanted his partners in the gospel to wisely choose the best in every area of life.

Sometimes the believers' choice is between good and bad or right and wrong. But the criterion believers should set for themselves is not only whether an action is right or wrong but also whether it will be of greatest benefit to their fellowship with Christ and their spiritual growth. The Christian life is full of good-better-best decisions, like how we spend our time, our choice of friends, or our plans and goals for the future. Paul prayed believers would have the discernment to choose what is excellent.

A church body full of people who seek to make the *best* decisions, not just *good* decisions, will be prayerful and purposeful. A church that approves what is excellent will find itself prioritizing the most important matters, such as spreading the gospel and building up believers. The church will consider whether their choices are helpful to the overall growth of the church. That means a church will have a balanced approach to ministry.

ASK: Name an example of a church choosing what is good to the neglect of choosing what is best. *Permanently replacing midweek prayer services with midweek game nights.*

God's Word guides churches to wisely discern what is best and balanced so the church grows in love for each other and the lost.

III. Love Purely (Phil. 1:10)

A. Love with pure intentions

READ: Philippians 1:10b.

Paul continued his prayer, asking God that the Philippians would be sincere, or pure, and without offense till the day of Christ.

ASK: How would you define "sincere"?

In Greek and Roman days, some potters covered cracks in pottery with

wax mixed with pottery dust. They tried to sell the pottery as flawless pieces. Buyers often held a bowl or pitcher up to the sunlight to tell if it had been patched. A wax patch created a dark shadow. A perfect pot with no patches was *sine cera*, a Latin phrase meaning “without wax.”

Paul prayed the Philippians’ character would be sincere—not put on or patched to appear intact. Sincere (pure) believers can be trusted because they don’t have hidden agendas. Their public persona matches their private persona. They live in a genuinely Christlike manner and thereby serve as examples for other believers.

ASK: Why does sincerity matter when serving God? *Insincere service is based on lies. God can’t accept anything driven by a lie. Nor will God bless insincere service.*

ASK: How might we know if our intentions for serving God are pure? *We give God the glory for our service, we praise God often, we serve sacrificially, we are okay if our service goes unrecognized.*

Believers who have nothing to hide can be trusted. A church composed of trustworthy believers is a place where love abounds, sin can be confessed, difficult issues can be discussed, and spiritual growth can occur.

B. Keep a pure testimony

When Paul prayed the Philippians’ conduct would be blameless and without offense, he didn’t expect the believers to become perfectly sinless in word and deed (Phil. 1:10). No one can live sinless in this life. Paul meant that he wanted the Philippians to live increasingly more like Christ so their actions would not cause believers to stumble or unbelievers to reject Christ.

ASK: Describe the testimony unbelievers might expect from those who witness to them. *That their lives match their message; that they are honest, kind, and forgiving; that they aren’t involved in obvious sins; that they admit when they are wrong and ask forgiveness for their sins.*

C. Prepare for the purity test

Paul made clear that he didn’t want the believers to remain pure and blameless for just a season. He prayed they would maintain this godly conduct until Christ’s return at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Believers should continually support and encourage each other with this glorious day in mind. They must live with an eye on eternity, knowing they will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of their lives (2 Cor. 5:10). Christ will evaluate believers’ good works to see if the works are worthy of reward.

DISPLAY: Show the gold-painted wood or plastic item you brought to class. Suggest that the item is made of pure gold. The class will obviously doubt you. **ASK:** What's the best way to test whether this is made of pure gold? *By throwing it in a fire and seeing whether the item burns up or remains.*

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:10–15.

Christ will reward only what we do in His power and for God's glory. All our insincere, selfishly motivated service will "burn up." Christ will deem it unworthy of reward. And we won't be able to pull a fast one on Christ. He always perceives all things as they are.

Conversely, Christ will reward us for our sincere works. Those rewards will come in the form of crowns, which we can then use to praise and glorify God.

ASK: How often do you think about the Judgment Seat of Christ?

ASK: How might you use the Judgment Seat of Christ as motivation to live purely and blamelessly?

IV. Love Effectively (Phil. 1:11)

A. Bear fruit through Christ

READ: Philippians 1:11.

Paul wanted the Philippians to be filled with the glorious fruits of righteousness. Loving others and God increasingly, wisely, and purely would make bearing glorious fruit possible. Paul listed the glorious fruits of righteousness in his letter to the Galatians. There he called them the fruit of the Spirit.

READ: Galatians 5:22–25. **ASK:** What does it take to engage the Spirit to produce fruit in our lives? *It takes walking in the Spirit, meaning submitting to Him and saying no to the fleshly desires to sin.*

Righteous living also comes from a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul said the fruit comes "by" Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:11). Disconnected from Jesus, all "righteousness" is ultimately self-serving.

READ: John 15:5.

Just as branches must be connected to the grapevine, so believers must stay connected to Christ. Jesus, our vine, provides the "nutrition" to produce righteous and glorious fruit in our lives. We are connected to Christ by virtue of being saved. We draw on His "nutrition" when we commune with Him through His Word and prayer and obey Him by faith.

B. Bring glory to God

Paul also identified the ultimate purpose of righteous fruit is “the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11). He didn’t pray that the believers would live righteously to gain honor and popularity for themselves. Rather he prayed they would live righteously so God would be glorified.

ASK: Why does God deserve the praise for the glorious spiritual fruit in our lives? *Without the work of the Spirit in us and our connection to Christ, none of us could produce glorious fruits of righteousness.*

God is the ultimate One responsible for our fruit. He made salvation possible and gave us the Spirit to empower change in our lives.

Session Application

Steps

1. Talk about your learners’ growth in their love for God and others.

ASK: What actions are you taking to grow your love for God?

ASK: How is your growing love for God evident in your life? Would those you love agree that they have benefited from your growing love for God? Explain.

2. Discuss your learners’ prayer requests for other believers.

ASK: What characterizes your prayer requests for your fellow believers?

ASK: What do your requests reveal about what you think will make people happier?

3. Spend some time praying for your class, asking God to make their love abound more and more in knowledge and discerning judgment so that they might be sincere and without offense until the day of Jesus Christ.

furthering the gospel

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 1:8–12

BUILDUP THEME



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

God makes joyous those who live to further the gospel.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate how God is working to further the gospel through them.

MEMORY VERSE

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:18).

Teacher Preparation

- Read Philippians 1:12–18. Paul identified his rivals in some of his epistles, focusing on those who tried to destroy the gospel’s message. Those rivals weren’t believers. In Rome a group of believers identified Paul as their rival, but the feeling wasn’t mutual. Paul saw fellow believers as team members rather than rivals. He concluded the gospel message is too important to worry about getting credit for converts. In the end, Paul rejoiced that those envious of him preached Christ with their lips even though their motives were impure.
- The previous session dealt with a believer’s love and sincerity. Those who serve God for selfish reasons serve Him insincerely. Their service may be effective, but they won’t get the credit for their success, at least not in the end while standing before Christ’s judgment seat. Their earthly recognition and self-congratulation will be their reward.
- Paul looked behind his long list of hardships and present imprisonment to see God’s hand at work. He trusted God’s goodness and sovereignty and adopted as his life’s ambition God’s goal to further the gospel. Consequently, God filled Paul with joy. Challenge your learners to see the opportunity of God’s furtherance of the gospel through them. Remind them that joining God in His gospel work is part of joying like Jesus. Jesus joyed when He voluntarily gave His life and endured the penalty for sin to make salvation possible (Heb. 12:1, 2).

Session Summary

Paul endured hardships on his journey from Jerusalem to Rome. Yet Paul didn’t fret or accuse God of being unloving. He accepted God’s will for his life because he believed God was working to further the gospel. He was right. Once he arrived in Rome and settled into his house arrest, he gained an opportunity to evangelize the Praetorium, Nero’s palace guard. His godly response to his chains persuaded the Roman believers to share Christ boldly. Some witnessed out of love for Paul and Christ while others witnessed for selfish reasons. Either way, Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached and souls were saved.