

SESSION 1

**CONNECTIONS
THAT
ENDEAR US**

Scripture Focus

Acts 16:6–40; Phil. 1:1–8

BuildUP Theme



UPLIFT OTHERS

God gives believers Christ's love for each other and for the lost.

Measurable Response

Students will prioritize relationships with believers by praying for them and spending time with them.

Memory Verse

"Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace" (Philippians 1:7). NKJV

"It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (Philippians 1:7). ESV

Teacher Preparation

- Have you ever met someone with similar interests with whom you immediately "clicked"? Common interests, commitments, and goals have a way of making fast friends out of strangers.
- When Paul arrived in Philippi, he found God was already at work there, preparing hearts to hear and readily accept the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul came to Philippi on Christ's mission. He left behind believers eager to continue that mission. Bound by a mutual relationship with Christ and a shared mission for the gospel, Paul and the Philippian believers stay connected over many miles and years.
- Read Acts 16:6–40 and Philippians 1:1–8. As you review the founding of the Philippian church and the opening to Paul's epistle to the beloved believers there, reflect on how your bonds with believers—both near and far—have influenced your Christian walk. Encourage your students to prize their bonds with each other in Christ and their shared mission to spread the gospel.

Cultural Barrier

This session addresses students' struggles with identity. Modern culture often suggests looking inward to find yourself, including your "true" identity and purpose in life. Yet it is only in Christ that we find our true identities. This lesson emphasizes the bond that all believers share in Christ. As we find connections and maintain relationships with other believers, we build on our understanding of who we are and who God intends for us to be. Our common bond with believers also gives us the shared goal of spreading the gospel to the lost so they can find their purpose in Christ. A Biblical understanding of their place in God's community and their bond with all believers will help teens see their true identity in Christ.

Session Starters

Option 1—Common Ties

Gather

- Large ball of yarn.

Steps

1. Ask a volunteer to come to the front of the room. Give the volunteer a large ball of yarn. The volunteer chooses another student and names something they have in common.
2. The second student comes to the front of the room, takes the ball of yarn, and walks across the room, unwinding the yarn as he or she goes so that the students are connected by the yarn.
3. The second student then chooses another classmate and names something they have in common. The third classmate comes to the front of the room and takes the ball of yarn, unwinding it so all three students are now connected by the yarn.
4. Continue until all students are connected by the yarn. The last student then names something he or she has in common with the first student, passing the yarn to the first student. All the students adjust to create a circle if they are not already in one.
5. As time allows, students may create a crisscross pattern by naming commonalities with classmates across the circle. Take the ball of yarn from student to student.
6. Discuss the activity.

ASK: How might focusing on commonalities affect a relationship? *It creates a stronger bond between two people.*

ASK: What do all believers have in common? *Among many commonalities, they have a common Savior, a common mission, and a common indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*

7. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Any two people can discover commonalities if they search long enough. Two believers, however, share special, endearing commonalities because they are both in Christ. In this session we will begin examining a personal letter from the apostle Paul to a group of believers whom he loved dearly for the things they had in common in Christ.

Option 2—Is It Worth It?

Gather

- Three advertisements that would appeal to teens, with the price included (e.g., meal deal from a pizza restaurant, the latest tech device, popular brand name clothing, a nice bike).
- Blank sheet of paper.
- Eight bowls.
- Self-stick notes.
- Dried beans.

Steps

1. Before class, draw two stick figures on a blank sheet of paper and label the picture “Friendship.” At the bottom of the sheet write, “Cost: Time, energy, affection.” Place the sheet of paper and the three chosen advertisements on a table. Beside each, place two bowls labeled with self-stick notes, one labeled “worth it” and the other “not worth it.”
2. Give each student four dried beans. Allow students to look at the advertisements on the table and cast a vote for each one by placing a bean in the “worth it” or “not worth it” bowl.
3. Discuss the results.

ASK: What do you think makes something worth the cost?

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

We generally only give up hard-earned money for things we think are worth it. The same is true for our time, energy, and affection. Today we will learn how the apostle Paul sacrificed for the sake of the gospel because he counted the outcome worth the cost.

Bible Study

Gather

- Resource 37-R1.

I. The Holy Spirit Created Connections (Acts 16:6–34)

A. Connection to a pleading Macedonian (Acts 16:6–9)

The book of Philippians is a letter written from the apostle Paul to the church in Philippi. Paul first visited the colony of Philippi years earlier when he traveled there on his second missionary journey. Before

reaching Philippi, Paul visited the churches he 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 companion to preach the gospel in Asia and Bithynia (16:6–8).

READ: Acts 16:9.

Paul understood God must have given him the vision of the Macedonian requesting his help. His missionary team immediately made plans to take the gospel to Macedonia.

ASK: How active is the Holy Spirit in directing us to meet unbelievers today? *The Holy Spirit still works in believers to direct their lives to meet people who need Christ.*

ASK: How can we keep our hearts open to the Holy Spirit's guidance? *Read the Bible, pray, talk to mature believers, obey known instructions.*

Paul counted on common sense and general understanding to make many of his decisions, but when the Holy Spirit interrupted his plans and asked him to do things that didn't always make sense, Paul was ready to obey. He knew God's leading is more trustworthy than one's own understanding. Paul's heart was aligned with God's heart to take the gospel where it would bear fruit.

ASK: What are some ways we can increase our compassion for the lost? *Pray for specific people; keep up to date with missionary work around the world; increase our understanding of Christ's compassion.*

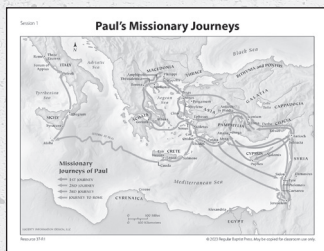
B. Connection to a religious businesswoman (Acts 16:10–15)

DISPLAY: Resource 37-R1. Use the map to trace Paul's travels from Troas to Philippi.

Paul's team set sail for Macedonia, eventually settling at Philippi, a Roman colony and the largest city in the area. After a few days of getting his bearings and observing the people's habits, Paul noticed that a group of women left the city to gather by the river for prayer on the Sabbath (Acts 16:13). One of these women was named Lydia, a notable woman from Thyatira whose work as a seller of purple earned her wealth and prestige. The rich businesswoman worshiped God but without a true relationship with Him. God burdened Paul to approach Lydia with the gospel.

READ: Acts 16:14.

Timothy later served as an important link between Paul and the Philippian church. He was present when Paul visited Philippi and was actively involved in the ministry there. Years later, Paul listed Timothy as one of the senders of the letter to the Philippians and wrote that he hoped to send Timothy to visit them soon so he could get a report on the church's health (Phil. 2:19).



37-R1

A colony was a military outpost that had been settled by army veterans. Residents of a colony received the rights of citizens. A colony functioned as a little Rome in a foreign land. Roman citizenship was a privilege for the Philippians.

God had been working in Lydia's heart prior to Paul's arrival. The Holy Spirit opened her heart to receive the news that Jesus had died for her sins. When Paul and Lydia ended up on the same riverbank that Sabbath day, she heard the truth about salvation through Jesus Christ. Lydia gladly believed the gospel and became the first recorded European convert to Christianity. Before long, the members of her household also chose to trust Christ as their Savior, and Lydia and her household were baptized (16:15).

ASK: Why should we share the gospel with religious unbelievers? *Their false or limited understanding of the gospel will do them no good in eternity.*

ASK: Who are some of the religious unbelievers in your life?

C. Connection to a possessed slave (Acts 16:16–21)

READ: Acts 16:16–18.

Though Paul's witness had an immediate effect, trouble soon followed. A demon-possessed slave girl who made predictions about the future began following Paul and his companions. She cried out that the men were servants of the most high God and that they were preaching salvation (16:17).

While the missionaries were indeed servants of the most high God, those listening to this girl's message would not necessarily have known which "god" she was referring to. Also, like Jesus, Paul refused the testimony of demons (Luke 4:41).

After several days, Paul grew greatly annoyed by the continued proclamation and cast the demon out of the girl (Acts 16:18). What happened to the girl is unknown. Certainly the missionaries or some of their converts ministered to her. It seems likely she would have responded positively to the gospel. God obviously worked to connect her with Paul and Silas.

ASK: What self-imposed guidelines might believers use to direct their witnessing practices? *The believers might witness only to friendly people, "normal" people, or people that look and sound like them.*

ASK: What unbelievers in your life might you be ignoring or overlooking?

The slave girl's owners were irate. They had used the little girl to make money from her fortune telling. With the demon gone, she stopped making her predictions and became useless to them (16:19). The girl's masters seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the city magistrates.

Before the judges, the owners brought two charges: Paul and Silas

stirred up trouble in the city, and they taught non-Roman customs. These charges had serious consequences in a Roman colony. The trouble Paul and Silas faced testifies to how deeply God valued the girl.

D. Connection to a shaken jailer (Acts 16:22–40)

READ: Acts 16:22–25.

When the crowd heard the charges against Paul and Silas, they revolted against the two men. The magistrates responded to the crowd's frenzy by stripping Paul and Silas and commanding that they be beaten. Paul and Silas were then thrown into prison, being placed in the innermost chamber with their feet secured in wooden stocks.

ASK: What might be considered a normal reaction to such unjust treatment? *Anger or a sense of helplessness.*

Paul and Silas trusted God with all their hearts. They spent their night in prison singing praises to God and praying. The prisoners around them heard their joy, and the gospel light shone unexpectedly.

ASK: How could Paul and Silas remain joyful while suffering in prison? *They had a deep love for Christ; they counted it an honor to suffer for the sake of the gospel.*

As Paul and Silas were singing and praying, an earthquake suddenly shook the prison doors open and loosed the prisoners' chains from the walls. 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 none of the prisoners had fled.

The missionaries knew running out of the prison wasn't God's will. They waited instead for the "aftershock." For the God Who shook the jail also shook the jailer. The jailer trembled and fell down before the missionaries, asking how he might be freed from his captivity to sin.

READ: Acts 16:28–30. **ASK:** What did the jailer learn 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: Do teens have enemies? Who are they?

ASK: What should be our goal in relation to our "enemies"? *To share the gospel with them and build a relationship with them through Christ.*

READ: Acts 16:33, 34. **ASK:** Describe the new relationship

between the jailer and the missionaries? *They had a bond in Christ that caused them to love each other. The jailer helped the missionaries by tending to their physical needs. The missionaries helped the jailer by voluntarily returning to prison.*

II. Christ Strengthened Connections (Acts 16:35–40; Phil. 1:1–8)

A. By His leaders (Acts 16:35–40)

The next day the magistrates decided to release Paul and Silas. They sent the same officers who had beaten the missionaries the previous day. The jailer told Paul and Silas they were free to go in peace. But the missionaries, being Roman citizens, had been beaten and imprisoned illegally. So Paul and Silas demanded the magistrates come and escort them from prison. When the magistrates heard Paul and Silas were Romans, they readily agreed to be present to keep the situation from escalating (16:35–39).

Paul's insistence on being treated like a Roman citizen no doubt caused the magistrates to exercise caution when dealing with the Philippian believers in the future. His boldness must have also challenged the believers to be bold when serving God and sharing the gospel.

READ: Acts 16:40. **ASK:** How do you think the missionaries' troubles in Philippi affected their relationships with the Philippian believers?

The missionaries returned to Lydia's house, the birthplace of the Philippian church, and ministered to the new believers. The verb used to describe the missionaries' ministry comes from the word used to describe the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is "called alongside" believers to help them live for God. That's what the missionaries did for the new believers.

The missionaries and new Philippian believers were all in Christ and all under the control of the Holy Spirit. Their spiritual connections as believers continued to build and strengthen even as the missionaries left to take the gospel to Thessalonica. Paul's love for the believers is obvious in his letter to them.

B. By His love (Phil. 1:1–8)

Paul kept in contact with the Philippian believers over the years. The Philippian church even sent him financial help when he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16).

READ: Philippians 1:1, 2.

Paul began his letter with his traditional greeting, naming Timothy as a

fellow servant of Christ and expressing his desire for the Philippians to know God's grace and peace.

READ: Philippians 1:3–5. **ASK:** How did Paul continue to build his spiritual connection to the Philippians? *By thanking God for them and praying for them.*

ASK: How has praying for others helped develop your spiritual connection to them?

READ: Philippians 1:6.

Paul expressed his confidence in God's continued work in each of the Philippian believers. The Lord Who saved the Philippians—and Who saves us—would complete the work He had begun (salvation) by teaching them to be like His Son (sanctification) and finally transforming them to live with Him forever in Heaven (glorification). Christians are God's "work in progress" now. One day He will complete His work in us.

READ: Philippians 1:7, 8.

Paul was imprisoned while writing Philippians. His defense of the gospel would help the Philippian believers in their interaction with the Roman government. Paul counted on God's grace to endure as he waited to give his defense. God's grace also sustained the Philippians in their daily trials.

Paul had the Philippians on his mind and in his heart, and he longed for them earnestly. Paul's love for the Philippians came from Christ in him.

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

Paul called on God as his witness to the genuineness of his love for the Philippians. There was nothing fake or superficial about it. We are to have the same Christ-originating, God-verifying love for others.

Memory Builder

Gather

- String.
- Printouts of Philippians 1:7.
- Scissors.
- Envelopes.
- Tape.
- Markers or colored pencils.

Steps

1. Before class, print out the words of Philippians 1:7 in a large font.

Cut apart the words and place them in an envelope with a length of string. Make several sets.

2. Explain the meaning of Philippians 1:7.

Though years had passed since Paul had seen the Philippian believers face-to-face, he still held them dear in his heart. Because of their shared bond in Christ and their same compassion for the lost, it seemed as if they were with him in his suffering. For this reason, it was fitting for Paul to think about them with thankfulness and confidence.

3. Organize students into small groups and give each group a prepared envelope. Students work in groups to tape the words in the correct order on the string. Then they choose and decorate three or four key words.
4. Recite the verse together. Allow groups to share which words they chose to highlight and explain why.

Session Application

Gather

- Note cards and pens.
- Connected poster.
- Permanent markers.

Steps

1. Review the lesson.

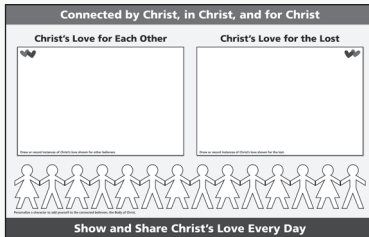
After his conversion, Paul devoted his life to following God's direction in sharing the gospel with unsaved people. Through a vision, the Holy Spirit led Paul and his fellow travelers to the city of Philippi, where God had prepared hearts to receive the good news about Jesus Christ. The church began there when Lydia, a jailer, and members of their households believed the gospel and were baptized. Years later, Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, expressing his love and thankfulness for them. Though Paul didn't have day-to-day personal contact with those believers, he held them dear in his heart because of their mutual commitment to the advancement of the gospel of Christ and because of the love of Christ they shared.

2. Discuss strengthening your students' spiritual connections.

ASK: How might we better connect to one another spiritually? *By spending time together, learning each other's needs, praying for each other, encouraging one another, and finding ways to do loving deeds for one another.*

ASK: How might we better connect to the lost in our communities?

3. Hand out note cards and have students write their names and prayer requests for the week on the cards. Collect the cards then hand them back out randomly. Challenge students to remember their classmates in prayer this week. If desired, continue this practice each week to keep students aware of and praying for each other's needs.
4. As time allows, give students an opportunity to personalize one of the paper doll figures along the bottom of the poster. Permanent markers work best on the slick paper.
5. Throughout the quarter, give students opportunities to draw or record instances of Christ's love shown for other believers and the lost.



Session Takeaways

Before dismissing the students, draw their attention to the Time with God page in their student books. Instruct them to complete the study on their own. The activity encourages them to value their connections with fellow believers and to share Christ's love with the lost.