

SESSION 2

**CONNECTIONS
THAT
TRANSFORM US**

Scripture Focus

Phil. 1:9–11

BuildUP Theme



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God spiritually connects us to each other in Christ so we might bear fruit.

Measurable Response

Students will identify ways in which God is prompting them to love abundantly, choose wisely, and live sincerely.

Memory Verse

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment . . . being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”
(Philippians 1:9, 11). NKJV

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment . . . filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”
(Philippians 1:9, 11). ESV

Teacher Preparation

- Paul’s prayers for the early churches provide rich instruction for the true goals of Christian living. His prayer for the Philippian church is no exception. It’s easy, though, to read these verses and forget that while he prayed these things for individuals, the original audience was a congregation of believers.
- As you study Philippians 1:9–11 this week, consider how Paul’s requests affect the church body and its testimony. Can you imagine a congregation that functions this way? Paul could!
- This lesson is a prime opportunity to model responsible Bible study. Since there are just a few verses covered, you can take time to focus on the meanings of words and the original context of Paul’s prayer.

Cultural Barrier

This session addresses the world’s hope in a social utopia. Those who place their hopes in a future society established by humans where all is fair and just will continue to be sadly disappointed. No human society can offer any level of utopia. God offers the only hope for perfection. As Christ’s representatives on earth, believers should point others to the hope of Heaven as they interact with each other and with unbelievers. This lesson presents Paul’s prayer and hope for the Philippians, outlining the picture of a loving, growing community of believers. Such a community on earth points toward a perfected community of believers in Heaven.

Session Starters

Option 1—Let Me Order for You

Gather

- Paper and pencils.

Steps

1. Have students choose partners.
2. Each pair chooses a restaurant they have visited many times. Students write what they would order at that restaurant as well as what they would order for their partners. Partners are not allowed to tell each other what they would like from the restaurant.
3. Partners compare their orders and discuss the activity.
 - ASK:** Which of you got your partner's order right?
 - ASK:** How did you decide what to order for your partner?
 - ASK:** When has someone bought you a meal or given you a gift that was not to your liking?

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Getting a free meal that isn't to your liking doesn't mean near as much as getting your favorite meal. A thoughtful action means a lot more when it is based on understanding and knowledge. Paul prayed the Philippians would base their love for each other on knowledge and discernment. We will study his prayer in this session so we might abound with love that pleases and glorifies God.

Option 2—Solo Toss Game

Gather

- Foam balls or other soft objects students can toss.
- Painter's tape.

Steps

1. Mark two lines on the floor with painter's tape—8 to 10 feet apart.
2. Give each student a foam ball or similar object. Students line up along one line. On your mark they toss the ball to the other line, racing to the other side to try to catch their own toss. Allow them a few tries. Anyone who drops his or her ball is out.

3. Have students pair up and have them conduct the toss game again by working together with a student on each line. Allow the students to complete several tosses. Any team that drops their ball is out.
4. Discuss the activity.

ASK: Describe the contrasting levels of work needed in each activity.

ASK: How might the contrast help us understand the difference between living the Christian life as a solo effort and living the Christian life in partnership with Christ?

5. Transition to the Bible lesson.

When reading Bible passages about Christian living, we might conclude the Christian life is a solo effort. Paul made clear it is a team effort. Christ is our primary teammate. We are all teammates too. Today we'll study Paul's prayer for the Philippians. He emphasized their need to be connected to Christ and to each other if they hoped to see their lives transformed.

Bible Study

Gather

- Pitcher of water.
- Cup.
- Tarp or plastic table cover (optional).
- Towels.
- One large bowl.
- Candy bars (2 bite-size of one kind; 3 sizes of a different kind).
- Two soup bowls, one of which has been broken then glued back together.
- Glue gun.

I. Love Aboundingly (Phil. 1:9)

Many of Paul's letters to churches included a prayer for the believers, detailing his heart's desire for their growth in the Lord. Philippians 1:9–11 is an example of one of those prayers.

A. Purpose to grow your love

READ: Philippians 1:9.

Paul began by praying the Philippians' love would abound more and more. A believer's greatest love should be primarily for God and should grow continually. Abounding love grows deeper and broader; it does not fade as time passes.

A thrift store is a good place to look for a bowl you don't mind breaking.

As love for God grows, love for others grows as well. Abounding love overflows, spreading out to touch more and more people, including fellow believers and the lost. The Philippians had proved their love for God and others through the spreading of the gospel, and Paul prayed this abounding love might continue in their lives.

B. Prepare to guide your love

ACTIVITY: Place a cup on the floor. You may wish to put down a tarp or plastic table cover first. Pour water from a pitcher into the cup until it overflows. Allow the water to spread.

We want the love of Christ in us to spread outward, reaching as many people as possible. But Paul also talked about boundaries.

ASK: What would happen if I kept pouring water, letting it flow unchecked? *It would make a big mess.*

ACTIVITY: Clean up the water. Place the cup of water inside a large bowl. Pour from the pitcher again so that the water overflows into the bowl.

In the illustration, the boundary below the cup prevented the mess. Water that overflows with no boundaries can cause damage. Misguided love, like spilled water, can also be damaging. Paul wrote that love should be guided by knowledge and judgment, or discernment. Abounding love that is beneficial, then, has guiding banks like those running alongside a river.

Knowledge informs our love so we don't love ignorantly or blindly. Our 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 even accept sin. Truth guides love.

Our love is also bounded by judgment, or discernment. 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.

Each time Paul mentioned love in Philippians, he used the word *agape*, which means 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: What harm can come from exercising abounding love without knowledge or discernment? *Seeking to please a person without consulting God can lead to sin. We may have good intentions by giving in to someone's desires, but those desires may not be the best for that person.*

If you don't have the means to complete this activity and the next in class, there are images in the PowerPoint to show a cup overflowing and a cup over a saucer.

Placing boundaries around abounding love does not mean excluding certain people. Rather, the boundaries ensure a true, Christ-like love. Since agape love wants God's best for someone, it cannot affirm sinful behavior. True love for others reflects God's love for them and a desire for them to have a right relationship with God.

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. **ASK:** How would a church congregation be different if its members were abounding in these characteristics of love? *Peace and unity would replace petty conflict. Members would consistently support each other in trials. The church would have a stronger influence in the community.*

It's easy to forget that Paul's prayer was not only for individual believers in Philippi but also for the Philippian church as a whole. Love is not just a feeling within a person's heart; it is action, and it requires recipients. As the believers' love abounded in knowledge and discernment, other believers around them benefited. Imagine the testimony and impact a group of abounding-love believers could have in their community!

II. Love Discerningly (Phil. 1:10)

READ: Philippians 1:10a.

ACTIVITY: Show two bite-size candy bars. Open one and "accidentally" drop and step on it. Offer the two candies to a student and have the student explain his or her choice.

ASK: What should we do with the squished candy bar?

Paul also prayed that the Philippians would approve things that are excellent. "Approve" means to evaluate or test before accepting. Things that are "excellent" are those things in life that really matter. Paul wanted his partners in the gospel to wisely choose the best in every area of life. Sometimes that decision looks like the choice between good and bad or right and wrong, like the intact candy bar and the stepped-on candy bar.

ACTIVITY: Show another bite-size candy bar alongside two increasing sizes of the same candy bar.

All these candy bars are good. We can't say that any of them are necessarily a bad choice.

ASK: What labels might we use instead of "good" and "bad" for the candy bars? *Good, better, and best with best being the biggest candy bar.*

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 by choosing what is best.

Again, Paul was praying for a group of believers, not just individuals. A church body full of people who seek to make the best decisions, not just good enough decisions, will be prayerful and purposeful. They will strive to know as much of a situation as possible before deciding, and they will aim to make the best decision for the congregation. 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: What might be some examples of a church choosing what is good to the neglect of choosing what is best? *Choosing to organize another fellowship event when the church has gone many months without an outreach event.*

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 Sincerely (Phil. 1:10)

A. Inwardly pure

READ: Philippians 1:10b.

Third, Paul prayed that the Philippians would be sincere, or pure, and without offense till the day of Christ.

ASK: How would you define "sincere"?

ACTIVITY: Show students the repaired bowl sitting beside the intact bowl.

ASK: Which of these bowls would you trust to hold your soup?

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, or pure, believers can be trusted because they don't have hidden agendas. What you see is what is true of them. They also can be emulated because their lives shine as an example of Christlikeness.

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 sin can be confessed, difficult issues can be discussed, and great spiritual growth can occur.

ASK: Who in your life is a shining example of sincere Christlikeness?

B. Outwardly blameless

Trustworthy believers also structure their lives for the good of others. When Paul prayed that the Philippians' conduct would be blameless and without offense, he didn't mean that the believers could live without sin. No human can achieve sinlessness in this life. Rather, 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: What do you think unbelievers look for in the life of the person witnessing to them? *That their lives match their message; that they are honest, kind, and forgiving; that they aren't involved in obvious sins.*

C. Upwardly motivated

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. 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 reward only what we do in His power and for God's glory. All insincere, selfishly motivated service will burn up and be deemed by Christ as unworthy of reward.

ASK: How often do you think about one day standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ?

ASK: How might you use that coming event to motivate you to live purely and blamelessly?

IV. Love Gloriously (Phil. 1:11)

A. Bear glorious fruit

READ: Philippians 1:11.

Philippians 1:11 summarizes Paul's desire for the Philippian believers. He wanted them to be filled with the glorious fruits of righteousness. Loving others and God aboundingly, wisely, and sincerely 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, 23. **ASK:** Why are there no excuses not bearing fruits of righteousness? *The Holy Spirit is in every believer and stands ready to produce the fruit.*

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, glorious fruit in our lives.

B. Give glorious praise

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? *None of us could produce glorious fruits of righteousness on our own. God is the ultimate One responsible for our fruit. He made salvation possible and gave us the Spirit.*

Memory Builder

Gather

- Bananas.
- Nontoxic markers.
- Resource 37-R2.

Steps

1. Review the meaning of Philippians 1:9 and 11.

Paul's desire for the Philippian believers—and for us—was that they would love God and others abundantly and in accordance with God's will in His Word. As they did, they would bear righteous fruit of Christlike character. Paul noted that true spiritual fruit comes only

through a right relationship with Jesus Christ and dependence on the Holy Spirit. As believers grow in Him, His power and character work to produce righteous actions and attitudes that will bring glory to God.

2. Show the picture of the banana tree on resource 37-R2.

ASK: How does the physical process of a tree growing bananas parallel the spiritual process of a believer producing fruit? *The fruit comes as the branch stays connected to the tree. Believers produce fruit as they stay connected to Christ and dependent on the Holy Spirit.*

3. Distribute a banana and a nontoxic marker to each student. Have students write out Philippians 1:11 on the peels of their bananas.

Session Application

Gather

- Resource 37-R3.

Steps

1. Review the lesson.

Paul's prayer for the Philippian believers reflected his desire for their Christian lives. He prayed that their love would overflow, but that it would be guided by the boundaries of knowledge and discernment. He asked God to help them choose what is best over what is merely good enough. And he prayed that their lives would be pure and blameless. He desired that the believers would be filled with righteous fruits so that as they lived, their actions and attitudes would bring glory and praise to God. Paul's appeal for the Philippian believers echoes down to us today. As believers in our church interact in these ways, God is glorified by our fruit.

2. Distribute resource 37-R3. Point out that Jesus is the thick vine across the top of the page and the believer is the branch, seen connecting the grapes to the vine. Give students several minutes to respond thoughtfully to the questions on the worksheet. The questions are included below.

ASK: Where is my loving lacking? How can I change that?

ASK: What "good" things do I need to lay aside for what's best?

ASK: What will help me to live sincerely before God and others?

3. Students read Galatians 5:22 and 23 and label three of the grapes with fruits of the Spirit they need to see developed in their lives.

Human nature sees a problem and immediately tries to fix it. Spiritual problems don't work that way. If fruit is only produced by the power of the Vine flowing through the believer, we need to stop and confess our sins. Then we need to ask for the Lord's help as we take responsibility in these areas.

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 reviews the session Bible passages and challenges the students to apply them.