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NT 4225: Genesis to Revelation
January 24, 2016

Bible Study Session Three: Philippians

Lesson Foundations

Context: Small group; Youth (middle school)

- This session is designed to be used with a small group of 6-8 youth who meet as a part of their Confirmation program. This session would be one in a year-long series about the Bible, and is designed to give them an overview of the prophets.

Text: Philippians 4:1-9

- This session will focus primarily on the text found in Philippians 4:1-9, with an emphasis on verses 4-7.

Duration of lesson: Approximately one hour

Lesson Theme: Joy

- This session will use a passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians to explore the theme of joy and what it means to rejoice in the Lord. Specifically, students will consider Philippians 4:4-7 and what it means to "rejoice in the Lord always."

Study Resources Used

1. Roetzel, C.J. "Philippians, Book of." *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. <http://www.ministrymatters.com.luthersem.idm.oclc.org/library/#/dbi/b75217c3a6295c53ecc2fe098faaae8c/philippians-letter-to-the.html>. Accessed Jan. 24, 2016. (The dictionary is a compilation of articles written by various contributors. This article gives an overview of the book of Philippians. Specifically, this article gives insights as to the date and location of composition and identifies issues with continuity and unity within the text of the letter.)
2. Meeks, Wayne A. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993. (Specifically, I have referenced the introduction to the book of Philippians, found on pages 2202 and 2203. This section was written by Ronald F. Hock. This introduction gives an overview of Paul and the recipients of this letter, along with notes on authorship, authenticity, and the content of the letter. In the "content" section, the author talks about how Paul remains joyful, even while he is imprisoned.)
3. Eberhart, Christian A. "Commentary on Philippians 4:1-9." Published October 22, 2014. Accessed January 24, 2016. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2148. (This page gives one theologian's perspective on Philippians 4:1-9. Specifically, the author encourages us to look at this text through the lens of joy, and use the example of Paul's joy as a way to

encourage our communities to rejoice because we are forever connected to God through Jesus Christ.)

4. "Philippians 4:2-23." *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. 11. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
<http://www.ministrymatters.com.luthersem.idm.oclc.org/library/#/tnib/0724708c4e8d5d1550404325f5595913/philippians-42-23.html>. (In describing the passage in chapter 4, the author of this commentary suggests that the Philippians are being encouraged to rejoice because God is near. Furthermore, the author says that this passage invites us to allow our hearts and minds to be guided by Christ, so that we don't have worry and so that we can live in accordance with the virtues of Christ.

Background Information for Leaders

What's the Story?

Today your group will explore a portion of Paul's letter to the Philippians. We know to whom this letter was written, but we do not know exactly where Paul was when he wrote it.

Furthermore, we know from Philippians 1:13 that this letter was written from prison, we just don't know where that prison was. Traditionally, we guess that this letter may have been written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

We know from this letter that the people of Philippi are aware of Paul's imprisonment, and that they have been supporting him through gifts and prayer. In today's passage, found in 4:1-9, Paul exhorts this community and provides them encouragement, telling them to remain faithful and to rejoice in the Lord.

Through his letter, Paul encourages the church in Philippi to remain constant in prayer and to continue focusing on Christ, imitating their lives on the values that Jesus exemplifies. Paul's letter also reminds them that rejoicing in God bring peace and joy, even in moments of difficulty.

What's the Theme?

This session is centered on the theme of *joy*. Paul's letter is a joyful one! He is consistently providing encouragement to the Philippians, and inviting them to rejoice in the Lord. Paul is providing this encouragement while writing from prison. While in a place where many people would find a lack of hope and peace, Paul still finds joy through the support of this community, and he invites them to find joy in their struggles, too.

Middle school can be a difficult time for many students. These years can be very formative ones. Furthermore, these are times when students are searching for meaning, and when they might face difficult transitions. Sometimes it might be tough to find joy in the midst of so much transition. It can also be difficult to find joy when faced with a difficult struggle. However, Paul reminds us that, when we rejoice, pray, and focus on Christ, we can find peace and joy, even in difficult moments.

The Lesson

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

Opening Prayer: Say: **Holy God, be present with us as we listen to your Word. Open our eyes and hearts to your love and faithfulness in our lives. Amen.**

Invite the group to share their highs and lows for the week.

Opening Activity: “Honey, If You Love Me...”

1. **Today we are going to read a passage that is about joy! Is it easy or hard for you to be joyful? Let’s find out.**
2. Invite students to stand in a circle. Ask one student to be “it.”
3. “It” should stand in the middle of the circle. When ready, they should approach one person standing in the outside of the circle.
4. “It” should look at the person and say, “Honey, if you love me, will you please, please smile?” While they say this, “it” should try to make the person laugh. “It” may do this in a variety of ways, but they may not touch the person.
5. If the person does not laugh, then “it” must approach another person in the circle. If the person does laugh, then they stand in the circle and become “it.”
6. “It” must continue trying to make people laugh until they are successful. “It” may leave the center of the circle only when they are successful in making someone laugh.
7. Play the game until time runs out. Then, discuss these questions:
 - **Was it easy or hard for you to be joyful? What made it easy or hard?**
 - **What are some things that bring you joy, or make you joyful?**

Exploring the Story (25 minutes)

Exploring the Story: Philippians¹

1. Ask students to open their Bibles to Philippians 4. Walk them through the process of finding the story, if needed.
2. **Today we are going to read a passage from Paul’s letter to the Philippians. In this passage, Paul encourages the people in Philippi to rejoice in God. This is significant because he is writing this letter from prison—a place where many people might not find joy. Let’s read this passage.**
3. Invite the group to sit in a circle. Light a candle and place it in the middle of the circle.
4. **In a moment, I am going to read the passage through once. As I read the passage, think of one word or phrase that catches your attention. Just remember this word—you don’t need to write it down.**
5. Begin by praying the following prayer: **O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and**

¹ The “Exploring the Story” activity is an adaptation of the African Bible Study method. This method is a form of *lectio divina* that was first introduced at the Lambeth Conference, a gathering of leaders in the Anglican Communion. Information about the African Bible Study method can be found at <http://www.takomaparkpc.org/AfricanBibleStudy.html>.

inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

6. Read Philippians 4:1-9 aloud, slowly.
7. Pause for one minute and allow students to identify the word or phrase that stood out to them while hearing the passage.
8. Go around the circle and invite each person to share their word or phrase. There should be no discussion.
9. Ask a volunteer to read Philippians 4:1-9 aloud a second time, again slowly.
10. Pause for one minute and allow students to identify the word or phrase that stood out to them while hearing the passage a second time.
11. Go around the circle and invite everyone to share their word or phrase. Again, there should be no discussion.
12. Ask another volunteer to read Philippians 4:1-9 aloud a final time, again slowly.
13. Pause for one minute and allow participants to think about how they would answer the following question: “What does this passage teach me about God, and what it means to be joyful?”
14. Ask each person to share their answer. There should be no discussion.
15. Pause for a minute of silence.
16. To process the experience, ask and discuss the following questions:
 - **What are some words of encouragement that Paul includes in this letter?**
 - **How do you think the Philippians felt when they received this encouragement? How do you feel when you receive encouragement?**
 - **Why do you think Paul would encourage the Philippians to rejoice?**
 - **Traditionally, we think that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. Yet, he still tells the Philippians to show joy! Is it easy or hard for you to find joy while you are in a difficult situation? Why?**

Applying the Story (15 minutes)

Finding Joy

1. Split students into pairs. Be sure that each pair has access to a camera, or a phone that can take pictures.
2. **In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he tells the community at Philippi (the community to which the letter is written) to rejoice in the Lord always! How can we find joy in God in our everyday lives? Let’s find out.**
3. Tell students that they are going to complete a photo scavenger hunt with their partner. They will have seven minutes to complete this challenge.
4. Students should work with their partner to take some photos of things that they see in the space around them that bring them joy. Invite students to get creative—they can take pictures of objects, pose, or look all around them! Ideally, groups should take at least three photos.
5. If you are in a space that requires it, set some boundaries.
6. Give pairs about seven minutes to work. Then, invite pairs to share their photos with the rest of the group.
7. Ask the following questions:
 - **Where are some of the places that our group finds joy?**

- **When are times in your life when it is easy to find joy?**
- **When are times in your life when it is difficult to find joy?**

Closing (10 minutes)

Putting it all Together

1. Invite each student to think of one encouraging thing they can say to another member of the group. Specifically, each student should think of one way that someone in the group brings them joy.
2. Ask each member of the group to share their thing with everyone else.
3. **What is one way you can rejoice this week? What can you do to show others the joy you find, even in difficult situations?**
4. Close in prayer: **God of wonders, you listen to our prayers and bring us peace and joy. Help us rejoice in you and show our joy to others. Amen.**
5. Thank students for their time, and let them know what they will be learning next week!