

Encouragement in Christ Philippians 2:1-8



Background for the Leader

May you experience encouragement in Christ as you prepare and lead this Bible study.

A Note to the Leader

The numbered planning steps correspond to the numbered activity suggestions below.

1. Be ready to read or have someone else read the suggested Scripture (Isaiah 40:11; John 10:2-4,11).
2. Make copies of the choral reading based on Philippians 2:1-8 in the second activity.
3. Print on index cards or small squares of paper the titles and Scripture references in the third activity. If possible gather pictures to accompany each Scripture reference and tape the title and reference at the bottom of the picture. (The preschool or children's Sunday School classes may have a teaching picture file where you can borrow these pictures. Or you might find the pictures in a large Bible, mark the pictures with tabs, and turn to them as a member tells about that example of Jesus.) Provide Bibles, a chalkboard, dry erase board, or large piece of paper and chalk or markers.
4. Print each scrambled word below on a strip of construction paper or cardboard. Do not print the solution (in brackets).

- mategrenneocu [*encouragement*]
- olincnotsao [*consolation*]
- rhisagn [*sharing*]
- spomsnocia [*compassion*]
- ymashytp [*sympathy*]
- voel [*love*]
- cardoc [*accord*]
- eon nmid [*one mind*]

5. Plan to post the unscrambled key words where everyone will be able to see them.
6. Prepare to guide the discussion of the ideas in the sixth activity.
7. As an alternate or additional activity you may choose to read and discuss Jan Karon's *The Trellis and the Seed*, which is a book of encouragement. [Jan Karon, *The Trellis and the Seed: A Book of Encouragement for all Ages*, New York: Viking, Penguin Group, 2003]
8. Decide how to use the words of the hymn *May the Mind of Christ My Savior* as a closing prayer. (*Note: Please be aware of copyright issues for all songs and hymns. Before you photocopy any song, make sure that your church has a license to copy. For more information contact Christian Copyright Licensing International, 17201 NE Sacramento St., Portland, OR 97230; 503/257-2230; 1-800-234-2446 or visit their website at www.ccli.com.*) You may choose to ask a soloist to sing the hymn or invite all members to sing or read the words of the hymn as a prayer. Provide the hymn words from the eighth activity or a hymnal such as *Sing Joyfully* that contains this hymn. Enlist an accompanist if needed.

Leading the Program

Activity One: Consider the Shepherd Image as A Source of Encouragement

Read or ask someone to read Isaiah 40:11 and John 10:2-4,11. Ask members to form pairs and talk about this question: “How do these verses and the image of Jesus as our shepherd offer you encouragement?” After time for discussion, invite pairs to share their responses with the larger group. *(Answers may include the following: Jesus cares about us and provides for all of our needs, Jesus gives us strength when we are weak and unable to carry on in our own strength, Jesus knows each one of us personally and calls us by our names, Jesus guides us and we can trust His guidance, Jesus gave His life for us.)*

Remind members that this year’s theme is “Be Shepherds of God’s Flock: Glorify the Lamb.” Even though Paul does not use the Shepherd image in Philippians 2:1-8, this passage offers encouragement as we glorify the Lamb and shepherd God’s flock.

Activity Two: Read Philippians 2:1-8 as A Choral Reading

Give each member a copy of the choral reading. Designate groups 1 and 2 for the reading and note that all are to read the last section. Guide members to participate by nodding toward each group for its turn.

Group 1: “If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete;

Group 2: Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Group 1: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

Group 2: Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Group 1: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Group 2: Who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

Group 1: But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

All: He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

After the reading, invite members to look through the choral reading and find words or phrases that are especially encouraging to them. Note that even though Philippians 2:1 begins, “If there is any encouragement in Christ,” Paul is actually saying, “Because there is encouragement in Christ,” or “Of course there is encouragement in Christ, so . . .” Offer a brief prayer thanking God for the encouragement we receive through God’s Word and Christ.

Activity Three: Discover Examples of the Mind of Christ

Suggest that since Paul asks his readers to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus we need to recall some examples of what Jesus was like. Hand out the titles and Scripture references (and pictures if available) to individuals or pairs.

- ☛ Jesus’ first bed was a manger (Luke 2:5-7)
- ☛ Jesus obeys God and parents (Luke 2:48-52)
- ☛ Jesus resists temptation (Matthew 4:8-10)

- ☛ Jesus announces His ministry (Luke 4:16-21)
- ☛ Jesus heals people (Matthew 15:29-31)
- ☛ Jesus feeds people (Matthew 15:32-38)
- ☛ Jesus teaches people (Luke 15:3-7)
- ☛ Jesus blesses children (Mark 10:13-16)
- ☛ Jesus answers questions (Mark 12:28-31)
- ☛ Jesus washes followers' feet (John 13:12-17)
- ☛ Jesus prays for followers (John 17:1,20-21)
- ☛ Jesus prays in garden (Luke 22:39-42)
- ☛ Jesus dies on cross (Mark 15:24,29-30,37)
- ☛ Jesus assures followers after His resurrection (Luke 24:36-49)
- ☛ Jesus sends out disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)

Make sure each individual or pair has a Bible. Ask members to read the assigned Scriptures and be ready to share with the group what the Bible passage tells us about the mind of Christ. List a brief summary of what each person shares on a chalkboard, dry erase board, or large piece of paper. Ask members if they have other favorite stories about Jesus that illustrate His example we should follow. If so add those summaries to your list.

Activity Four: Unscramble Key Words

Form eight groups and give each group one of the scrambled words. (Groups could be one or two persons or more depending on the number of members present). Ask each group to unscramble its word, talk about various meanings of the word, and print the key word and its meanings on the back of the strip of paper. If you notice as groups work that they are having trouble unscrambling their words, suggest that they look at the first two stanzas of the printed choral reading for clues.

Ask each group to show its unscrambled key word and some meanings of the word. Invite the whole group to look at the list of examples of the mind of Christ (third activity) to find examples from Christ's life that match the key words. Tape the key words near the summary list you made for the third activity.

Activity Five: Evaluate Ourselves Based on the Key Words

Suggest that from time to time we need to evaluate ourselves based on the example of Christ and the key words we unscrambled. Tell members that you will point to a key word and ask them to silently evaluate themselves on a scale from one to five. Ask each member to place one hand beside her with fingers and thumb folded under her palm where only she will be aware of her movement. Five will be the highest rating. For example, when you point to the word *encouragement* a member should extend her thumb and all four fingers if she feels that she is the very best encourager that she could possibly be at all times. If she feels that she does a fair job of encouraging others some of the time she should extend two fingers. If she feels that she never encourages anyone, she should keep her thumb and all the fingers folded. Make sure that each member understands that this is a time of private evaluation just between herself and God. Point to and say each key word, pausing to give members time for evaluation.

Activity Six: Talk About the Source of Our Encouragement and Strength

Suggest the following: "Self-evaluation could be discouraging because we do not

measure up to Christ's example. It's unlikely that any of us scored five on all of the key words. However, it may be encouraging to remember that Paul listed humility as one of the desired characteristics exemplified by Jesus. Paul said, 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves' (Philippians 2:3). A part of humility is realizing that we cannot live out the mind of Christ in our own strength, but this is possible because of the strength, encouragement, and love that Christ wants to give us. If we have any encouragement in Christ (and we do) then we can live out the characteristics named in Philippians 2:1-8."

Refer to the list of key words again and encourage members to discuss what difference it would make in our Women's Ministry, in our church, and in our world if we lived with Christ's help the qualities of encouragement, consolation, sharing, compassion, sympathy, love, accord, and one mind.

Activity Seven: Read *The Trellis and the Seed*

Read the book and show the illustrations. Use the following questions for discussion:

- What discouraged the little seed or caused it to doubt its ability to grow and flower?
- What are some factors that may discourage us and cause us to doubt our ability to blossom?
- What helped the little seed to fulfill its potential?
- What are some factors that encourage us and help us to fulfill our calling to have and live the mind of Christ?"

Activity Eight: Use A Hymn as a Closing Prayer

Use the words of the hymn *May the Mind of Christ My Savior* which is based on Philippians 2:1-8 as a closing prayer.

"May the mind of Christ my Savior/ Live in me from day to day,
By His love and pow'r controlling,/ All I do and say.
May the Word of God dwell richly/ In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph/ Only thru His power.
May I run the race before me,/ Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus/ As I onward go."

(*May the Mind of Christ My Savior*, Words by Kate B. Wilkinson, *Sing Joyfully*, Carol Stream, IL: Tabernacle Publishing Company, 1989, page 402)

About the Writer

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Encouragement In Christ

Philippians 2:1-8

Paul is writing to the Philippian Church from a prison cell. Rather than sitting there having a pity party for himself, Paul is thinking about his friends in the Church at Philippi. Realizing what we have in Christ gives us an internal strength to walk through any situation. We are united with Christ through His death on the cross when we accept Him. It is more than just a matter of being saved. It is the ability of living daily in an intimate personal relationship with Christ the Savior.

Having a relationship with Christ gives us particular benefits and fruits of salvation. We have encouragement to help us through our daily tasks. We have comfort in His love and assurance in the knowledge that through His death on the cross we are forgiven for our sins. We no longer have to walk burdened down with our sins and failures. We have fellowship with Him through the spirit, and with it we can know that we will never be alone. His word tells us that He will never leave us or forsake us. In Christ we have tenderness and compassion for our relationships with one another. Paul reminds us not to be selfish or conceited in things we do, but to look beyond ourselves and see the needs of others. We need to have the attitude of Jesus Christ. He did not exalt himself. He took the nature of a servant.

It is easier to focus on our needs than the needs of those around us. We were challenged in a Sunday School class some time ago to pray for others and not pray for ourselves for just one week. The results were amazing. We found it was hard to leave ourselves out of our prayers. As we focused on the needs of others in our class our problems seemed to become smaller. I feel sure that as Paul focused on the needs of his fellow Christians friends, his prison cell seemed to be less of an obstacle to his Christian faith. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (NIV) When we learn to walk daily in Christ we can do the same. We must remember to keep our focus on Christ, because no matter what the obstacle is in our life, if He can't take care of it, no one else can either. Nothing is impossible with God.

PRAYER:

Lord, help us to remember that you live in us, walk with us, and love us. Help us to keep looking up to you for encouragement to continue to live the Christian life that you have called us to. In Christ's name. Amen

Martha Chambers
Hands of Harvest Region