

THE INTERPRETATION BIBLE STUDIES LEADER HELPS

PHILIPPIANS AND GALATIANS

The IBS Leader Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process.

Each participant in the group should have a copy of IBS study book and should make a commitment to do advance preparation for each session.

The sessions are planned for one hour. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those which are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

Read Philippians and Galatians in their entirety before beginning to teach. It is important to familiarize yourself with the books' overall content, so you can see how the individual passages fit into the larger scope of the books.

Skim through the whole study book to discern its flow. This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next unit.

Prepare the room ahead of time. For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semi-circular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as "the authority."

Secure necessary teaching aids. A newsprint easel is an invaluable asset. Be sure to have markers and masking tape if you wish to display the sheets for future reference. A map of the Mediterranean world at the time of the early church is very helpful. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as hymnals, paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.

Prepare necessary handouts. A folder for each participant's handouts is helpful, but not essential.

Keep the key idea firmly in mind. Make sure all activities point participants towards this goal.

Pray for God's guidance. Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Unit 1: Joy and Thanksgiving for the Philippian Congregation (Philippians 1:1–11)

Key Idea: The introductory greetings of Paul’s letter to the Philippians alert us to the mood, purpose, and content of the whole letter, and his prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippians points to his strong commitment to the gospel.

Advance Preparation

Using the sidebar on p. 3 of the study book, make a timeline of Paul’s life to display. Print each event in Paul’s life on an index card and string a clothesline or a length of string or yarn across a bulletin board. Have available clothespins or paper clips to fasten the cards to the line.

Print Philippians 1:1–2 on poster board as it is written, but print each of the following phrases in a different color:

- Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus
- To all the saints
- in Christ Jesus
- who are in Philippi
- with the bishops and deacons
- Grace to you
- and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Locate several Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias for use in the exploration activity. You will also need hymnals for each participant.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Opening Words*

Use Philippians 1:2 as opening words of scripture: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. *Prayer*

Use the following prayer, or one of your own:

Gracious God, we give thanks for opportunities when we can encounter you through your Word. Surround us with your truth and fill us with your Spirit. For we ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Timeline and Map Study

Hand out the index cards that will make up the timeline. If your group has more than ten members, ask participants to form into ten small groups. Give each group a card. Then ask that the person or persons holding the card with the year “10” to read the timeline entry and attach it to the line. Continue in order until all events are in place on the timeline.

Call the attention of the participants to the map of the Mediterranean world in the time of the early church. Locate Philippi on the map.

4. Paul’s Context

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the sidebar on p. 2 of the study book with the quotation from Calvin J. Roetzel. Ask the participants to read the information on p. 3 about the apocalyptic traditions of ancient Israel. Then discuss question 4 under “Questions for Reflection” at the end of Unit 1.

5. Hearing a Portion of the Letter

Remind participants that most New Testament documents were intended for oral presentation in the midst of worshipping Christians. In earliest times these Christians met in private homes as house churches. An epistle would have been read in its entirety to such a group of Christians.

Using the material on p. 5 of the study book, ask participants to imagine they are members of a Christian community in Philippi. Then read aloud Philippians 1:1–11.

Exploration (25 minutes)

6. Examining the Salutation

Show participants the poster with the color-coded phrases from the salutation. Depending on the size of your group, assign phrases to individuals, pairs, or small groups. Ask them to quickly scan the portion of the text on pp. 6–9 of the study book that gives information about their phrases. Allow a few minutes for them to work, then ask each group to report out in order.

7. Examining the Prayer of Thanksgiving

Summarize briefly the content of this section, emphasizing the following points:

- Paul offers thanksgiving for the Philippians, begins to speak of his and their current circumstances, and names hope she has for them.
- He mention his imprisonment for the first time.
- It is a heartfelt prayer that shows his exuberance for the gospel and is driven by his strong eschatological convictions.

Ask participants to discuss questions 2 and 3 at the end of the unit. For both questions, they will need access to Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Response (10 minutes)

8. Challenges of Living the Christian Life in Our Town

Remind participants of some of the challenges the Philippians faced in the context of the Roman Empire. Print this question on newsprint and invite participants to respond “popcorn-style” (that is, whenever a thought occurs to them):

What unique challenges does our own cultural context here in [*insert the name of your town here*] present us as we seek to live faithfully?

Jot down responses on newsprint as they are given.

Closing (5 minutes)

9. Prayer

Read Philippians 1:9–11 as a prayer for the group.

10. Singing a Hymn

Sing “More Love to Thee, O Christ” or another hymn about living the Christian life.

11. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 2 and Philippians 1:27—2:16. As is suggested in question 2 under “Questions for Reflection” at the end of the unit, ask participants to select some of their favorite hymns and consider the practical implications of the theology expressed in them. Also ask that participants who have access to the Internet write down their e-mail addresses. Others can write down street addresses. Be prepared to compile this list to make it available for the next session.

Unit 2: Shaping Christian Community around the Story of Christ (Philippians 1:27—2:16)

Key Idea: The Christ Hymn both tells the story of our salvation and offers a model of the life we are called to follow.

Advance Preparation

You will need hymnals for each participant. Prepare copies of the list of participants' home addresses and e-mail addresses.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Again use Philippians 1:2 as opening words of scripture: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2. Prayer

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

Loving God, we give thanks for our Lord Jesus Christ, whose name is above every name. In Jesus' name we come together now, confident that your Spirit is present as you promised. Give us open hearts and minds as we encounter you through your word. Amen.

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. Paul's Imprisonment

Recall for participants that Paul first mentions his imprisonment in Philippians 1:7 and in vs. 12–26, he speaks more about it. Briefly summarize the information on pp. 13–14 of the study book. If you like, add the following:

References to the praetorian guard (1:13) and those of Caesar's household (4:22) tell us Paul is in the powerful hands of Roman authority. Paul is apparently being held in a barracks or guardhouse where Roman officials and supporting military are quartered. . . . Mention of the praetorium means Paul is in an imperial city, but which one is not known. Rome has been traditionally the favorite guess, but Caesarea and Ephesus were also imperial cities.

(From Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians*, Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985, p. 19.)

Exploration (30 minutes)

4. Listening to and Discussing Scripture

Remind participants that Paul's letter was written to be read to the believing community. Ask a volunteer to read aloud chapter 1:27–30. Discuss the following:

- What does the author mean when he says that Philippi was a “Rome away from Rome”?
- The text says that Paul understands the Christian calling as an alternative citizenship. What are the implications of such an understanding?
- Discuss question 3 at the end of this unit.

Continue by having another person read aloud Philippians 2:1–4. Call to the attention of the group what the text has to say about Paul's use of the word “if.” Reread vs. 1–2, inserting the words “and there is” after each of the phrases in v. 1. Then discuss question 1 at the end of the unit.

5. Listening to and Discussing the Christ Hymn

Recall for the group that the study book says on p. 19: “The whole Christ Hymn resonates deeply with language and imagery of Isaiah 40—55, especially with Isaiah's vision of the ‘suffering servant,’ whose suffering redeems others.” Then ask someone to read Isaiah 45:22–23 aloud.

Point out that in the Christ Hymn, “the name of Jesus” stands for the name of God, the holy name, Yahweh. Ask another person to read aloud the Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:1–11). Discuss question 4 at the end of the unit.

6. Listening to Scripture and Discussing Salvation

Have another volunteer read aloud vs. 12–18. Mention that the author of the study book comments that grace and works are not opposites in Paul's thinking. Ask: How does the author define salvation?

Response (10 minutes)

7. Discussing Favorite Hymns

Ask participants to name favorite hymns. As time allows, look together at the texts of some of those hymns that are in the hymnbook, and discuss the practical implications of the beliefs they express.

Closing (5 minutes)*8. Affirmation of Faith*

Tell the group that the text says that the story told in the “Christ Hymn” remains the most foundational—and provocative—confession of the Christian faith we possess, even after twenty centuries of Christian experience and reflection. Ask the group to read Philippians 2:5–11 in unison as an affirmation of faith.

9. Praying a Hymn

Sing “At the Name of Jesus” or “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” as a closing prayer.

10. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 3 and Philippians 3:1b–16. Also ask them to reflect on what they might put in a résumé. Hand out the list of e-mail addresses and home addresses. In contemporary society, e-mail is as common a form of communicating as letters were in Paul’s day. Encourage members of the group to e-mail each other in the course of the week with questions or comments about what they are reading in the text and in scripture. If anyone does not have access to e-mail, encourage group members to send a postcard to that person.

Unit 3: The Worth of Our Résumés (Philippians 3:1b-16)

Key Idea: Paul contrasts his values, focus, and means of defining his identity in terms of “before” and “after” his encounter with Christ, and he invites us to do the same.

Advance Preparation

Download and make two copies of the following blank résumé form for each participant. You will need hymnals for each person. Read Acts 10:1—11:18 and the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:1–35 to better understand the controversy over circumcision.

Résumé Form	
Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Background:	_____

Education:	_____

Employment:	_____

Awards/Accomplishments/Achievements:	_____

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Use these words to open the session: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Prayer

Invite participants to offer sentence prayers of concern. After each prayer, have the group respond: “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Then offer prayers of thanksgiving, having the group respond after each prayer with the words: “Rejoice in the Lord!”

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Discussion on Circumcision

Using the material on pp. 25–26 of the study book, present Paul’s contrast of the Spirit with circumcision, a form of putting on confidence in the flesh. If participants are not aware of the controversy in the early church over circumcision, briefly summarize the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10:1—11:18 and the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:1–35.

Note that the term “dogs” was derogatory in Paul’s time, as the study book indicates. Ask participants if they can think of a comparable term today.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Paul’s Résumé

Pass out copies of the blank résumé form. Ask participants to refer to Philippians 3:4b–6 to fill out a résumé for Paul. After giving them a few minutes to work, discuss the entries in the résumé, using the material on pp. 27–28 of the study book.

5. A New Résumé

Ask someone to read aloud Philippians 3:7–11. Ask:

- What does the author contend that Paul is contrasting here?
- What is righteousness?

Then discuss question 4 at the end of the unit.

6. Striving Toward the Goal

Ask the group to look at the image of the runner in vs. 12–16. If there are any runners in the group, ask them to comment on how the image strikes them. Would this race best be compared to a marathon? a charity run, where the goal is to raise awareness for a particular cause? some other kind of race?

Response (10 minutes)

7. Making a Personal Résumé

Hand out more blank copies of the résumé form. Ask participants to fill it out, listing the accomplishments and attributes that establish their own personal sense of security and status. Then discuss question 4 at the end of the unit.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. Praying a Hymn

Sing “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” as a closing prayer.

9. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 4 and Philippians 4:4–20. Ask them also to research the Pax Romana , the peace of Rome, on the Internet or in reference books. Also encourage them to continue to e-mail one other with questions or observations about their reading of the text or the scripture.

Unit 4: Participation with Paul in the Mission of God's Grace (Philippians 4:4–20)

Key Idea: Paul's admonition to joy offers the Philippians, and us, a model of one who presses on toward the goal no matter what, deeply enveloped in a sense of God's grace-full presence.

Advance Preparation

On a sheet of newsprint, print two headings: "Pax Romana" and "Peace of God." For the response activity, borrow an offering plate and obtain some index cards and pencils or pens. If you are sure no one in the group is overly sensitive to incense or scented candles, bring some to light.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin the session with these words:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

2. Litany

Tell participants their response is: "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!" Then take them through the following litany:

O Lord, you are righteous in all your ways,
and loving in all your works.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!

O Lord, you are near to those who call upon you,
to all who call upon your faithfully.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!

You fulfill the desire of all who fear you;
you hear their cry and help them.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!

My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord;
Let all flesh bless your holy name forever and ever.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!

Presentation/Exploration (35 minutes)

3. Pax Romana vs. Peace of God

Ask participants to report the information they found on the Pax Romana. Depending upon the information they found, supplement with the following:

Caesar Augustus thought of his rule over the Roman Empire as a time of peace: Pax Augusta/Pax Romana. “Peace” was indeed the key religious-political concept of the Roman caesars. In Rome, altars were erected for peace, for harmony, and for the well-being of the Romans (10B.C.; 11 B.C., Ara Pacis Augustae on Mars Hill). Coins imprinted with “peace” and “security” proclaimed the blessings of the government.

Pax Romana was defined by the rulers of the Roman Empire without any sentimental or humanistic facade. Peace and security meant the subjugation of and victory over other nations. It meant the suppression of even the mere hint of resistance. In such cases, crucifixion was the normal manner of imposing death. In this sense the cross served as guarantee of the Roman peace, as a deadly instrument for subjugation.

(From Luise Schottrof, “The Dual Concept of Peace,” in *The Meaning of Peace*, Perry B. Yoder and Willard M. Swartley, editors; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, p. 156.)

Jot down the information that participants report under the heading “Pax Romana” on the newsprint. Then ask participants to contrast the Pax Romana with the peace of God. List attributes of the peace of God under the respective heading. Make note of the fact that the author of the study book tells us that Paul uses a military metaphor (“guard”) to refer to God’s peace. Ask: Why?

4. Discussion on Partnership

Note that Paul says that the Philippians became co-partners with him. Ask: What does the phrase “the profit that accumulates in your account” mean? Then discuss questions 3 and 4 at the end of the unit, drawing on information in the study book.

Response (10 minutes)

5. Sharing Gifts

The author of the study book remarks on p. 37:

[Paul] shapes his own ministry and wants to shape the ministry of his congregations in such a way that it is clear that the gifts they share with one another are given in love (i.e., rooted in God’s love for us) rather than from any sense of obligation.

Light the candles or incense. Ask each participant to reflect on gifts he or she has to offer the community of faith, whether these are financial or otherwise tangible, or a gift like a particular

service, or constant prayer on behalf of someone. Give each person an index card on which to write the gifts he or she can offer in love, not out of obligation. Pass the offering plate around to receive these “gifts.” After you receive the full plate back, say: “May our gifts be a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Using Paul’s Closing Words as a Prayer

Use Philippians 4:8–9 and 23 as the basis of your closing prayer:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

7. Assignment

Tell the group that the next session begins the study of Galatians. Ask that they read Unit 5 and also the entire letter to the Galatians, paying special attention to Galatians 1:1–10.

Unit 5: Paul's Gospel under Threat (Galatians 1:1–10)

Key Idea: In response to agitators perverting the gospel message, Paul passionately affirms the authority of the gospel as foundational for all of Christian experience

Advance Preparation

Print the full text of Galatians 1:1–4 on poster board, but print each of the following phrases in a different color:

- Paul, an apostle, sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead
- And all the members of God's family, who are with me
- To the churches of Galatia
- Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ
- who gave himself for our sins
- to set us free from the present evil age
- according to the will of our God and Father.

On newsprint, copy the closing prayer (see step 6) and post it where it can be easily read.

Also, you will need a map of the Mediterranean world in the time of the early church, plus copies of the following Information Sheet for everyone.

Information Sheet: Background on the Agitators

[Paul's] initial stay in [Galatia] was in part connected with a physical ailment, the details of which are rather obscure. The Galatians received him warmly and were in no way put off by his difficulties. They accepted him "as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus" and were prepared to make great sacrifices to tend to his needs (4:13–15). He preached the gospel to them; they responded with much enthusiasm. Crucial to their experience of these early days in the faith was the active presence of the Spirit in the believing community, accompanied by the working of miracles. Paul could later appeal to the memory of their Christian beginnings in order to encourage their faithfulness to the call of grace (3:1–5; 1:6–9). Sometime after his first or perhaps second visit to Galatia other itinerant missionaries arrived and began to advocate a different message. In addition to preaching Christ, they urged that the predominantly Gentile congregations adopt the Jewish practice of circumcision in order to secure themselves a place among the people of God. Thereby the Christian experience could be brought to perfection. The Galatians, struggling with the demands of living our their calling in a pagan environment, were not doubt vulnerable to the security and guarantees offered in the message of circumcision. Most likely responded in a positive manner.

(From Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, p. 4.)

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Tell participants that these words are the salutation of Galatians:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2. Prayer

Use this prayer, or one of your own:

Gracious God, we give thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ, who came to set us free. We give thanks for the gift of our sisters and brothers in Christ. We give thanks for the gift of faith, and for your Word, where we may encounter our living Lord. Amen.

Presentation and Exploration (35 minutes)

3. Examining the Greeting and the Salutation

Show participants the poster with the color-coded phrases from both the greeting and the salutation. Remind them of session 1 when they examined the salutation of Philippians using the same method. Depending on the size of your group, assign phrases to individuals, pairs, or small groups. Ask them to quickly scan the portion of the study book (from p. 41 to the top of p. 44) that gives information about their phrases. Allow a few minutes for them to work, then ask each group to report out in order. Make use of the map at the appropriate time to locate Galatia.

4. Examining the Rebuke

Ask participants what is missing in Galatians after the address and the salutation. Note that the author tells us that Galatians is the only letter that does not move from the address to a statement, usually a prayer, of thanksgiving. In its place is a rebuke that states the major theme of the letter. Then call the participants' attention to the sidebar on p. 47 of the study book. Ask: Who might Paul's opponents have been? Discuss question 2 at the end of the unit.

Response (15 minutes)

5. Role Play

Divide the participants into two groups, the Agitators and the Galatians. Give each group copies of the Information Sheet with background on the agitators. Have the agitators read the sidebar on p. 47 of the study book (the Outsiders), and tell them that the second possibility is the most plausible. Give both groups a few minutes to prepare, then have them act out a possible meeting. When the role play is over, ask the following questions:

- Agitators, why do you feel so strongly about circumcision? What do you think is at stake?
- Galatians, how did you feel when you heard these outsiders? Why did you feel you had to succumb to their way of thinking?

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Prayer

Tell participants that you will use Galatians 6:10 and the closing of the letter as a prayer. Point out the newsprint that you have posted, and then start the prayer:

Leader: So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Group: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 6 and Galatians 1:11—2:10. Encourage them to continue to e-mail messages to each other, adding prayers of encouragement.

Unit 6: The Power of the Gospel in Paul's Life (Galatians 1:11—2:10)

Key Idea: Paul defends his claim that he and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem did not go their separate ways; rather they established and affirmed their unity through diverse ministries.

Advance Preparation

Provide hymnals for all participants, as well as paper and pens.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Opening Words*

Remind participants that these words are the salutation of Galatians:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2. *Prayer*

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

God of All that was and is and shall be, we understand all too clearly the power of the present evil age. We forget all too often that the Lord Jesus Christ died to set us free from its power. Set our sight on your kingdom, and our feet on the path of obedience. For we ask it in the name that is above all names. Amen.

Presentation and Exploration (40 minutes)

3. *Examining the Call of Paul*

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 1:13–17, Paul's account of his call. Then ask two other persons to read aloud Isaiah 49:1–6 and Jeremiah 1:4–5. Ask: How are these two calls to the prophets similar to Paul's account of his call? Note the sidebar on p. 52 of the study book, then discuss question 1 at the end of the unit.

4. *Examining Paul's Visits to Jerusalem*

Ask someone to read aloud Galatians 1:18–23, the account of Paul's first visit to Jerusalem. Make note of the fact that the author emphasizes that Paul calls this a "visit," not a "meeting."

Now ask participants to quickly scan Galatians 2:1–10 and the text in the study book describing the second visit (pp. 54–55). Ask the participants to name the four details the author elaborates on that make Paul's agenda clear. List these on newsprint. Then ask: Based on this, what is Paul's agenda? Discuss question 3 at the end of the unit.

Response (10 minutes)*5. Hymn Search*

Distribute hymnals to all participants. Ask them to look for hymns whose words would be especially applicable to times when members of the community of faith are struggling with a contentious issue that could divide them. Invite participants to write down the number of the hymn(s) they find for later reference. After five or six minutes, ask for volunteers to read aloud selected verses from the hymns they found. Ask: What guidance do you find in these words for the community of faith?

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Prayer*

Ask that participants use the phrase “Lord, make us instruments of your peace” as a breath prayer, keeping in mind that peacemaking can be hard work. (Urge those who prefer another prayer phrase to use it if they like). Ask them to find a comfortable position for sitting and to breathe deeply and evenly. Tell them to then repeat the prayer phrase over and over, timing its phrases with the rhythm of their breathing. Allow several minutes for prayer, then close by saying: “Lord, you have heard our prayer. For we ask it in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.”

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 7 and Galatians 2:11–21. Remind them to continue sending e-mail messages of encouragement to one another, as well as praying for one another.

Unit 7: Table Fellowship at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–21)

Key Idea: God’s grace does not leave us an isolated group of individuals, but rather reincorporates us into Christ as one new body, regardless of our divisions when we were living under the Law.

Advance Preparation

Prepare a simple meal for the table fellowship. Cut up some bread and prepare some fruit, such as grapes, apple slices, or orange sections. If you like, also provide some cheese and ice water. You will need cups, plates, and napkins. You will also need hymnals for each participant.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Opening Litany

Explain that you will open with a litany and that the group’s response is “God’s love is everlasting!” Then read the following:

Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good,

God’s love is everlasting!

Give thanks to the God of gods,

God’s love is everlasting!

Give thanks to the Lord of lords,

God’s love is everlasting!

2. Singing a Hymn

Sing “Alleluia! Alleluia! Give Thanks” or another hymn of praise.

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Presenting Paul’s Argument

Present the material from the study book found on pp. 59–60 that explains the structure and gist of Paul’s argument in the passage (Gal. 2:11–21).

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Examining Paul’s Position on Peter’s Actions

Divide into small groups to discuss question 1 at the end of the unit.

Point out to the small groups that, on p. 62, the author comments:

[Paul's] concern is not with "orthodoxy" ("right teaching") but rather with what he calls "orthopody" (ortho = right or correct, and pod = feet; thus "walking rightly" or "acting consistently"). . . . The truth of the gospel is threatened not only by wrong ideas, but by actions that deny it.

Have the small groups discuss the following: Would you agree or disagree with this statement for the issue facing Paul? What about for issues facing the church today? When small groups have had time to discuss these questions, gather the total group. Ask each small group to share two insights from their discussion.

5. Examining Christ and the Law

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 2:16–21. Then discuss the three points made by the author to clarify Paul's argument on pp. 66–67. End this step by discussing question 4 at the end of the unit.

Response (10 minutes)

6. Sharing Table Fellowship

Say a brief blessing and invite the participants to share the bread and fruit you brought.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Prayer and Singing

Close with a prayer thanking God for all good gifts to us, for the friendship we have in Christ, for communion we share with God and one another at the Table, and for the promise of the coming kingdom. Close by singing together the Doxology.

8. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 8 and Galatians 3:1–25. Also encourage them to reflect on questions 2 and 3 from Unit 7, perhaps making these questions the subject of some electronic discussions. Participants should also cut from newspapers or magazines examples of images from our culture that shape us. They could also keep an ongoing list of images they see on television, in movies or videos, or on the Internet.

Unit 8: The Gospel, the Spirit, and Christian Identity (Galatians 3:1–25)

Key Idea: Paul affirms for the Galatians and for us that it is the gift of God’s Spirit, not adherence to the Law, that shapes our Christian identity.

Advance Preparation

On newsprint, print the four aspects of the Spirit that emerge from these verses, according to Charles Cousar (see the sidebar on p. 71 of the study book). Gather poster board, glue, and markers to use in making a montage. You may also want to have some magazines and newspapers and scissors.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Opening Words*

Remind participants that these words are the salutation of Galatians:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2. *Prayer*

Use this prayer or one of your own:

We give thanks, O God, for the gift of faith. In baptism, long before we can say your name, or even know it, you claim us as your own and call us by name. By your Spirit we are shaped and formed. Forgive us when we look upon the seductive images of our culture and allow them to shape who we are. For we are yours! In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. *Points about the Spirit*

Using the prepared newsprint, present Charles Cousar’s four aspects of the Spirit from Galatians 3:1–5. Emphasize in particular the fourth point, that the Spirit comes to whole communities, not a few select individuals. On another sheet of newsprint, print the words “Spirit” and “Flesh.” Ask someone to read aloud the sidebar dealing with those terms on p. 72 of the study book. Also read the following quote from pp. 72–73:

Gifts are given to individuals not for their own personal edification, but to nurture the unity and witness of the church. . . . Whenever some form of spiritual elitism begins to manifest itself in congregations, we can be sure that the Spirit of Christ is being denied in favor of self-justification—or “works of law,” the designation Paul uses here in Galatians.

Ask participants to reflect on this quotation, considering where in the life of your own congregation they see gifts of individuals being used to build up the whole church, and where they might see evidence of gifts being used for self-justification.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Exploring Scripture

Tell participants that these next verses present a complex argument, the means by which Galatians became children of Abraham. Ask someone to read vs. 6–14 aloud. On the newsprint under “Spirit,” list the phrases “the ones who are from faith” and “the ones who trust God.” Note that these are phrases Paul uses to designate those who, like Abraham, relate to God through faith. On the newsprint under “Flesh” list the phrases “the ones who are from circumcision” (used in 2:12) and “the ones who are from the law.”

Ask volunteers to read Genesis 15:6, Deuteronomy 27:26, and Habakkuk 2:4. Ask: What is Paul’s logic in saying that the law puts us under a curse? Now ask someone to read Deuteronomy 21:23. Ask: What is Paul’s logic in saying that when Christ died on the cross, he stood under a curse?

5. Restating Paul’s Logic

Ask participants to take a few minutes to restate on paper Paul’s argument, using the system of logic. That is, ask them to write it down either using words or symbols (such as A = law; B = Spirit, and so on). Then ask for volunteers to share what they believe Paul’s argument to be here.

Response (15 minutes)

6. Questions for Reflection

Divide into two small groups (or four if your group is large). Ask Group 1 (or the first two groups) to discuss question 1 and to make a montage of these images. Ask Group 2 (or the second two groups) to discuss question 4 and to make a list of practices they identify. Allow ten minutes for discussion, then have each group report to the class as a whole.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Litany of Confession

Use the list and the montage from the step 6 in a closing litany. Tell participants their response will be: “O God, hear our prayer.” Then lead the group in the following prayer:

Gracious God, we confess that we lose sight of the fact that in Christ we are your children through faith. We forget in whose image we are made and by whom we are shaped. Forgive us when we use these influences in our culture as images by which to forge our identity.
(allow time for silent reflection on the images on the montage)

O God, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we confess that we try to replace faith with religiosity in a mistaken reliance on the law. Instead of living in Christ, we try to ensure salvation with practices like (*name the things on the list*).

O God, hear our prayer.

Help us to trust in the promise rather than in all these things. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

8. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 9 and Galatians 3:25—4:11, continuing the electronic dialogue.

**Unit 9: New Life in Christ versus Enslavement to the Powers
(Galatians 3:25—4:11)**

Key Idea: Without the faith of Christ, all human beings live as slaves to idolatrous powers.

Advance Preparation

If possible, get a copy of a church calendar from your pastor or church educator that shows special days of the Christian year. You will also need a copy of Charles Cousar’s volume on Galatians from the Interpretation commentary series (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Remind participants that these words are the salutation of Galatians:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2. Prayer

Use this prayer, or pray one of your own:

Thank you, God, for Jesus Christ, who did not call us slaves, but brothers and sisters. Help us, through Him, to truly become your heirs and children, doing all things according to your will. Amen.

Presentation and Exploration (30 minutes)

3. Listening to Scripture

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 3:25–29. On newsprint, print “disciplinarian” and “clothing yourself with Christ.” Using the information on pp. 78–79 of the study book, explore these images with the group.

Ask someone else to read Galatians 4:1–8. Add the following words to the newsprint: “heirs” and “adoption.” Again have participants refer to the study book as they explore these images.

4. Listening to Scripture Further

Ask a third volunteer to read aloud vs. 8–11. Discuss question 2 at the end of the unit.

Show participants the copy of the church calendar. Referring to question 3 at the end of the unit, ask: What do you think Paul would have to say about our calendar and its designated days? Then continue discussing the other parts of the question.

Response (15 minutes)

5. Substituting Contemporary Disparities

Read aloud Galatians 3:28. Then read the sidebar on p. 81 from Charles Cousar’s Interpretation commentary on Galatians. Ask participants to reflect on the implications of no more barriers between disparate groups. Now read the passage again, more slowly, pausing between the each pair. Ask: What did each of these pairs of terms signify in Paul’s day?

Give each participant an index card and a marker. Ask that they think about the cultural context in which we live today. What disparate groups exist? Invite them to print on their index card one such pair of “opposites.”

After allowing time for everyone to finish, read the passage again, this time asking each person in turn to read what he or she wrote in place of the pairs in the scripture.

Closing (10 minutes)

6. Singing a Hymn

Close by singing “In Christ There Is No East or West” or “We Are One In the Spirit.”

7. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 10 and Galatians 5:13—6:18. In particular, ask that they consider question 1 at the end of Unit 10. Also remind them to continue to use e-mail for discussion, words of encouragement, and prayer with and for one another.

**Unit 10: The Vocation of Freedom in the Daily Life of Congregations
(Galatians 5:13—6:18)**

Key Idea: Freedom in Christ, under attack at the time of the letter to the Galatians, continues to be an issue for the church today.

Advance Preparation

On newsprint, print the following quote from p. 85 of the study book:

Paul addresses fundamental human issues that take different shape in different times and settings. We must learn to read Paul's teachings fully within the context to which they were addressed, and then appropriate his teachings on terms of the issues and concerns facing us now.

Gather a variety of art materials to be used in the response activity, such as poster board, construction paper, markers, yarn, scissors, and glue.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Remind participants that these words are the salutation of Galatians:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2. Prayer

Ask participants to pray silently for each member of the group. Close with a brief prayer, such as the following:

You have heard the words of our hearts, offered for each of our brothers and sisters. And now we ask it in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Presentation (5 minutes)

3. Paul's Ethics in Our Context

Using the quote you prepared on newsprint and the information in the study book on pp. 84–85, briefly present the author's caveats on approaching this portion of the epistle, which contains the ethical component of Paul's argument.

4. Reflections on the Assignment from Last Session

Ask for any insights or reflections that participants may have on the first question at the end of the lesson in the study book.

Exploration (20 minutes)

5. Listening to and Discussing Scripture

Ask someone to read aloud Galatians 5:13—6:10. Discuss questions 2 and 3 at the end of the lesson in the study book. In particular, ask participants to try to think of other images besides the military ones for the relationship between the fruits of the Spirit and the fruits of the flesh.

6. Examining the Meaning of Freedom

Ask participants to respond to the following quote from p. 89 of the study book:

Freedom is not a matter of autonomy and absolute independence, as many in our culture think of it, but a question of whether one submits—consciously or not—to the fallen, enslaving, death-dealing powers of the world (“the flesh”) or to a merciful, loving God who has brought the Law to completion in the cross of the Christ.

Remind the group that in the last session, they considered images in contemporary culture that shape our identities. Ask: Do you believe we are enslaved to these images? How do you respond to the metaphor that in Christ’s death we become slaves to Christ?

Then ask: What does the author say are the marks of true human freedom? Given that some members of marginalized groups see the role of servanthood as a less than helpful one, how would you respond to them?

Response (20 minutes)

7. Visual Images for Scripture

Give participants the choice of using art materials to do one or more of the following:

- create a visual representation of the relationship between freedom, love, and mutual responsibility, *or*
- create a visual representation of the fruits of the Spirit.

These could be a diagram, a color-coded use of words, a montage, a mobile, or any other visual form. Then have the participants display their completed work around the room on wall, tables, or bulletin boards.

Closing (10 minutes)*8. Experiencing Visual Representations*

Allow a few minutes for participants to move around the room silently, experiencing the various creations.

9. Closing Words

Remind participants that they can continue to use e-mail for discussion, words of encouragement, and prayer with and for one another. Then ask the participants to join hands in a circle. Use the closing words of Galatians as a departing prayer: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen."