“PRESS ON”
Passionate
Relevant
Essential
Sincere Service
A Study for Teaching in the Church

A Discipleship Resource of the
Department of Christian Education and Formation

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

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The Department of Christian Education and Formation

Creating Events that Form and Transform
Pressing On through Passionate, Relevant, Essential, Sincere, Service

In February, 2019, Christian educators, pastors, young adults and youth met together in Greensboro, North Carolina, the site of the 2020 Connectional Youth and Young Adult Conference. The event was the Department of Christian Education and Formation’s Annual Christian Educator’s Retreat. Dr. Carmichael Crutchfield, General Secretary of Christian Education and Formation led the participants in a time of learning and sharing. This retreat also served as the launch for CYYAC20.

Participants met in small groups to discuss the work of Christian Education and Formation. During the first session participants were asked to discuss the meaning of Christian education, Discipleship and Salvation. In the second session, Dr. Crutchfield asked the groups to explore the selected scripture, Philippians 3:12-14 and to suggest possible themes for the conference. In addition, participants in each group were asked to offer suggestions and ideas for classes, events, worship, and mission/service opportunities.

Following the breakout sessions, the groups came back together to share their input. The groups represented were Christian educators, youth, young adults and Children’s Ministry. The youth group, which included Connectional Youth Vice-Presidents was passionate and sincere about the needs and expectations of youth. Their input along with that of the young adults will prove extremely beneficial in the planning and implementation of the Conference. The Young Adult Group provided the acronym "P.R.E.S.S." for the CYYAC20 Theme. The curriculum committee has taken into consideration the input from the three groups in the development of this Conference Pre-Study and the Conference Curriculum.

This guide is intended to assist Christian educators, pastors, young adults, youth leaders and youth not only in preparation for the conference but also as a Christian education and formation resource for local congregations, leadership training schools, district and annual conference sessions. We recognize that there are youth and young adults throughout our Connectional church who will not be attending the conferences and some who have never attended. Our prayer is that this study will provide a foundation and momentum for youth and young adults in local churches throughout the Connection to expound upon Holy Scripture and discern the Holy Spirit's calling in their lives to Press On with Passionate, Relevant, Essential, and Sincere Service.

The Curriculum Committee
Introduction

In considering the theme for the Connectional Youth and Young Adult Conference the Curriculum Committee examined the scriptural basis from different perspectives. We looked at several translations to discern what it is we want the youth and young adults to glean and take away from the Biblical message.

We then discussed the theme’s different characteristics or qualities within the acronym—P.R.E.S.S. We concurred that the first four letters described distinct qualities or characteristics of service that is an integral part of discipleship. Youth and Young adults are called to PRESS on in their love and service to God and to one another. Jesus came as a servant — Isaiah prophesied about the suffering servant who was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. (Isaiah 53:5.)

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:43-45

Youth and Young Adults are often reminded of their need to serve in the Church. So often they hear of roles of serving in the Church as if service is confined to roles within the church—ushers, choir members, Stewards, Stewardess, Trustees, Sunday school teachers. Each of these roles is important in that they help the Church to function and engage God’s people in welcoming people to know God and grow in God’s word. However, service extends beyond the walls of the Church, to our communities and the world.

Those who follow Christ are called to make disciples. Jesus instructs his disciples and instructs us specifically in the area of serving others. In Mark 10 he describes what this looks like. Each of us is to put our own interests behind the interests of others. In other words, we should daily be considering the needs of others before our own needs. “Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4)

This is hard for us to grasp. If anyone should expect to be served it is The Son of God. Yet, Jesus’ modeled during his earthly life what it meant to serve others. He provided specific instructions about how we were to follow his actions. We should always be looking for ways to meet the needs of the marginalized and the Other, by serving with our talents, gifts and abilities. It is a lifestyle of putting others first, not thinking about ourselves and our own desires.

We want youth to know that Sunday is not the only day they are called to serve God. We want to impress upon them the need to impact their community by PRESSing on through service to their community, school, family and organizations that serve and provide for others.

Service is any work done with the motivation of honoring Jesus. This might be something as simple as intentionally buying a cup of coffee for a coworker. Though, let us not neglect caring for those who have been marginalized by society and affected by injustice, and making provisions for those who are hurting spiritually and physically. We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ
to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

**Study Goals:**

The primary goal of this study is to help youth in the Church understand how their service to God is an important part of discipleship and provide examples of **Passionate, Relevant, Essential** and **Sincere, Service.** Paul spoke about Pressing On to the High Calling in Jesus Christ. Service grounded in love propels those who have accepted the call to follow Jesus to PRESS On in their calling.

This guide is designed to challenge youth as well as young adults to pursue ways in which they are called beyond their comfort zones to embody and exemplify their service that encompasses the basic tenets of their faith.

In developing the study, the committee considered the following:

- The theology of the curriculum
- The assumptions regarding the teacher/facilitator and the participants relation to God
- The educational praxis (mode of learning) basic to Christian formation
- The type of curriculum (thematic, lectionary, scriptural, story based, etc.)
- The end goal for the student. How is discipleship built through the curriculum (written and classes)?
- How does the content related to the daily life of the participants
- What is the expectation for teacher knowledge about youth development and learning? About Christian formation? (Worship and service)? About Scripture and use of the Bible? About the CME Church?
- How is Scripture presented? What translations, versions are being recommended?
- What is the language for God? Inclusive? Masculine/gender neutral?
- Do the lessons/classes, activities provide for student interaction in a variety of creative expressions, using different learning styles through music art, movement, drama, writing, storytelling, science, etc.?
- Are the different age levels comparable in format, content and theology?
- Is there a component for worship?
- How does the curriculum relate to the CME church, community and the world?

We encourage those who will be teaching/facilitating this study in the church as well as those who will serve as facilitators during CYYAC20 to review these guidelines in their planning and teaching strategies.
Design of the Study:

The intention of the Curriculum Committee is to provide lessons leading up to the Connectional Youth and Young Conferences in an effort to spiritually prepare leaders, young adults and youth and provide motivation for continued learning about discipleship. Although the study pertains to the Connectional Youth and Young Adult Conference and emphasizes the Conference theme and participation in the conference, it is not solely designed for this purpose. The intent is multi-purpose in that Christian Education and Formation is not confined to a single event. The goal in designing the study is that it can be used throughout the church on an on-going basis in the faith formation of young people. We have identified the monthly lessons based on the Conference Theme of P.R.E.S.S. (Passionate, Relevant, Essential, Sincere, Service) however the lessons are appropriate for learning throughout the Conference year and beyond in local churches, Presiding Elder Districts, Annual Conferences and Leadership Training Schools.

The study is divided into five units. For the purpose of preparation of CYYAC20 the following schedule of study is recommended:

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The lessons may be modified and adapted for the DNA and context of each local church. Implementation of the study should be done so with the approval of the Pastor in coordination with the Director of the Board of Christian Education and Formation. Questions and concerns regarding the study should be directed to the General Secretary of the Department of Christian Education and Formation, Dr. Carmichael Crutchfield.
Unpacking the Scripture

The Scriptural Reference for the Conference Theme P.R.E.S.S. is Philippians 3:4b-14, using verses 12-14 as the key verses. The Background text is Philippians 2:5-11 and the entire Chapter of Philippians 3. We strongly recommend the reading of Chapter 4 as well. Other supporting text are referenced throughout the study.

Chapter 2 of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi includes one of the best known and influential passages of the Pauline writings. Philippians 2:5-11. It should be noted that Philippians 2 is the so-called Servant Song of Isaiah 53. The parallels between Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2 have been found in the term "suffering." The passage falls into two main sections. The first dealing with Christ's voluntary humility and the second with his exaltation.

In v. 5 the Philippians are urged to have in themselves the mind or disposition that Christ showed. The implications of v. 6 is that God bestowed on him the status and honor he had not claimed for himself. Verses 7-8 provides a clear contrast between being in the form of God and taking the form of a slave. This process should not be perceived as some sort of exchange. Christ did not cease to be "in the form of God," when he took the form of a slave, any more than he ceased to be the Son of God when he was in the world. On the contrary, it is in his self-emptying and his humiliation that he reveals what God is like and it is through his taking the form of a slave that we see "the form of God." The mood changes at the conclusion of the passage (vs. 9-11). The triumphant, "Therefore," in v. 9 describes the action of God who now responds to Christ's self-emptying and humiliation. These verses emphasize the magnitude of the honor bestowed on Christ. To give someone a name is to give him or her status and power. The name bestowed on Jesus is "the name that is above every other name.

5-8 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

9-11 Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11) —The Message

As we seek to explore the Conference Theme, P.R.E.S.S, we must keep this passage from Philippians 2:5-11 before us. We will have to constantly come back to it during the course of the study to remind us and students of Jesus' humility and selflessness.
Paul’s primary purpose in writing to the Philippians was to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him upon learning of his detention at Rome (1:5; 4:10-19). However, he makes use of this occasion to fulfill several other desires: (1) to report on his own circumstances (1:12-26; 4:10-19); (2) to encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances (1:27-30; 4:4); (3) to exhort them to humility and unity (2:1-11; 4:2-5); (4) to commend Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church (2:19-30); and (5) to warn the Philippians against the Judaizers (legalists) and antinomians (libertines) among them (ch.3).

(Excerpted from Biblica-The International Bible Society)

Joy is the theme of Philippians as Paul writes from his prison cell in Rome. Paul rejoices as the Spirit of God helps and strengthens him during his hardships. (Phil. 1:18-20).

**Philippians 3:4b-14**

Philippians 3:4b-14 (our study text) is an extraordinary passage. In verses 4-6, we encounter Paul’s passion as he does his boasting while he declares that he is not boasting.

The familiar hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” contain these words, “My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. Paul proclaims, “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss.” When we sing this hymn or read these words, do we really grasp the depth of the sentiment expressed?

Paul’s counsel is Lose anything, everything, for “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” So often we think we can have our cake and eat it, too: we can keep all our stuff and also know Jesus. But there is inevitably a sacrifice, a loss, an emptying before Jesus can be known — and once he’s known, there is an emptying. Why? In Philippians 2:5, Paul spoke of having Christ’s mind, which was one of kenotic self-emptying.

In Francis Thompson, “Hounds of Heaven,” we read “We are lost, we are wanderers, we are all on the run.” Paul’s abiding goal is “to be found in him.” Paul was found by Jesus, interrupted on the road to Damascus. “Christ is no longer a commodity to be gained but a place where the lost Paul is found. (Stephen Fowl, New Testament Scholar) In a picturesque way, Paul conceives of this union with Jesus as a runner pressing hard toward the prize. “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me.”

In verse 2, Paul warns of the “dogs” and “evil workers . . . who mutilate the flesh” (Philippians 3:2), those who insist upon the requirement of circumcision for Gentile converts. In his response, he claims his own heritage as a member of the community of Israel. He reminds the Philippian Christians of his own “confidence in the flesh”—his circumcision as a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul asserts that he is “more” confident as one born into the Jewish community. His confidence goes beyond just his birth—in terms of adherence to the law, Paul was a Pharisee. He persecuted Christians with zeal. He was “blameless” under the law (3:4b-6).
In light of Christ, however, all these must be counted as “loss,” not as entitlement. The worth of Christ far outweighs the former glories of his standing within the Jewish community. These are mere “rubbish.” (Some scholars suggest that a more literal translation would be the more emphatic dung.) “Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung.” (The Message)

For Paul, the greatest danger was not the threat of death but the eve-present “false teachers,” who lay in wait until Paul had moved on to another town. These well-meaning teachers wanted folks to be good Hebrews before they could become Christians. Paul contended that salvation is available to all because of Christ’s work, and that no amount of work on our part can bring peace with God. If anyone qualified for salvation based upon heritage, Saul of Tarsus had the bloodline. But he refers to those Hebrew accolades as “loss” and garbage in comparison to the “surpassing value” of knowing Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:8).

Paul could live a life abandoned to Christ because he had come face-to-face with the profound power of the risen Christ. He calls us to the simplicity of surrender to Christ. To know Christ, to be in Christ, is what Paul is seeking. Righteousness is not living blamelessly under the law. Paul is seeking a righteousness that is not his own doing, but “one that comes through faith in Christ” (3:9). He strains toward the goal of participation in the “power of his resurrection.”

Somewhere between his conversion on the road to Damascus and his prison letter to the Philippian church, Paul faced his failures. Perhaps it was in those dark days after his ride to Damascus, or alone as an outcast from the infant church in the Syrian Desert that Paul came to grips with his failings and inadequacies and discovered true meaning and authentic humanity.
I grew up hearing several perseverance proverbs. Two of them stand out for me. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going" and "Quitters never win and winners never quit." I grew up in rural Northwest Tennessee where most African Americans had to work hard to make ends meet.

My father finished the 8th grade and then had to go work in the cotton fields. His mother died when he was a child and his grandmother kept him very busy. He married my mother in 1950 and they lived a sharecropper life up until I was 13 or 14. Persistence or perseverance was a hallmark of his life. He persisted or persevered until he was able to buy his own land and eventually build a house. Daddy was persistent as he worked hard to provide for his family. He was persistent in his pursuit of learning and education. After retiring from a 30-year career as a factory worker, he went back to school and earned his GED, went to vocational school, and learned how to work on small motor driven machines.

My father wanted his children to fulfill our potential and contribute to society. I appreciated his desire for his children to use their gifts, and I admired his accomplishments. Quitting has never really been an option for any of his seven children.

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, was just as insistent as my father that one can never give up but must press on. I know Paul would want for me what he clearly wanted for the Philippians—not a perseverance toward success, but a perseverance of the soul. He would want me to persevere in my walk with Christ. He is writing to the Philippians from prison. His physical movements are severely limited. He is certainly not engaged in any chariot races. Yet this is the metaphor he chooses to inspire the Philippians to press on. It is an athletic, physical, and forward-moving metaphor.

"I do not consider that I have made it on my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).
In Roman culture during Paul’s time the circus, with its chariot races, provided the most popular form of entertainment. The first and the greatest circus of all was the Circus Maximus in Rome. Philippians 3:13-14 describes the charioteer, intent on the race, his eyes fixed on the front, not daring to look behind lest the slightest pressure on the reins (wrapped around his body) produce a false move and cause him to lose the race and possibly his life. (Williams, Paul’s Metaphors, 262)

Persistence proverbs are a staple of self-help, achievement-oriented wisdom. We can find sections in bookstores on self-help. They all give messages that we persist so we can succeed in personal goals. Often, though not always, perseverance or persistence is not seen as a positive quality because it is a means of winning out over others. Persistence in and of itself is no real virtue at all. Jesus affirmed neither the persistence of the rich man who made a fortune and sought to build bigger barns, nor the persistent interference of the Pharisees. No, instead he affirmed persistence in a good cause. The persistence of the friends who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus; the persistence of the women who traveled with him; and the faithful, persistent prayer of the father of the demon-possessed boy. For Paul persistence is a way to get closer to Jesus. It means not looking back, but looking ahead toward Christ with single-minded purpose. One area of concern in CYYAC20 is to Press forward toward Jesus with a single-minded purpose. In the age of my father it might be said “with the mind stayed on Jesus.”

An important part of perseverance is not looking back. Jesus himself in Luke 9:62 says “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” The chariot metaphor is a perfect vehicle (pardon the pun!) for Paul to explain to his readers that those who long to be like Christ face danger in looking back. David Williams in his book Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character, points out that Paul knew the dangers of looking back. It was not a looking back that discards history, but a looking back that causes us to dwell or causes us to stay in the past. Dwelling in the past leads in two ways. Dwelling on past achievements brings complacency. Dwelling on past failures brings despondency. For Paul, both are best forgotten in the interest of pressing on toward the objective.

Our race is not yet finished. Our work is not yet done. There is still much to do for Christ, and much to be achieved in the quest to be like Christ. We must press to love God with our entire selves and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The CME Church has done good things with youth
conferences since 1939 and Young Adult Conferences since 1980, but we cannot dwell there because either complacency or despondency will set in on us.

At the Circus Maximus in ancient Rome there was an elevated cushioned throne called a *pulvinar* for the gods and the human sponsor of the event. From the *pulvinar*, the sponsor would give out the prize. The possibilities both of service and of sanctification are not exhausted until the Christian is summoned to Christ’s throne to receive from him the prize that awaits the victory. (Williams, p. 262)

Paul’s notion of perseverance and its goal are different from the secular success motivation of sayings like "See you at the top!" In contrast, Paul’s brand might be called a "perseverance of the soul." We see this perseverance of the soul in the African-based belief system, reflected both in the culture of the slave era and today, which places high value on patience and perseverance. A Yoruba proverb declares, "...the snail climbs the tree carefully and slowly." This statement is typical of a whole body of wisdom praising the virtues of making *steady progress toward a goal in contrast to haste*, which often fails. This is why we start Christian Education and Formation in the cradle and continue it to the grave. An often quoted biblical saying in African American communities is "The race is not to the swift but to him that endures to the end" (a collation of Ecclesiastes 9:11 and Matthew 24:13).

Other examples of perseverance sayings are "Keep your hand on the plow and hold on!" which is drawn from Jesus’ saying in Luke 9:62. "Cheer the weary traveler, along the heavenly way," "Keep inchin’ along, like an ol’ inchworm," and "Walk together children, don’t you get weary; There’s a great camp meetin’ in the Promised Land."

What do we want to place in the hands of the children, youth, young adults, Christian Educators and Clergy who come to Greensboro? I think Paul said it plainly, "...press on toward the goal...." (Phil. 3.13) Paul had a goal-oriented faith. That goal had three parts. **Step one: "Forget what lies behind."** (Phil. 3.13). Don’t be complacent with achievements or despondent with failures. Jesus has redeemed the past and bought us a future with his love. So, don’t get stuck on past achievements or failures. We are free. "Those whom the Son has set free are free indeed." (John 8.36) **Step two: "Strain forward."** (Phil. 3.13) Moving forward with Jesus takes some work. We
have to confront our fears. Christianity and discipleship is for the spiritually athletic. It stretches us exactly how we need to be stretched. We can trust the process. **Step three:** "...press on toward the goal of the heavenly calling." (Phil. 3.13) Followers of Jesus aren’t obsessed with being good people like so many people are nowadays. No, our goal is God, not good. We can’t make ourselves good. Obsession with our goodness is narcissism. The only good there is comes from pursuing God, so we press on toward our heavenly calling.

We have been called to release heaven wherever we are. And you and I have been given the capacity to release heaven wherever we find ourselves. And the more heaven gets released every day you and I **press on with Jesus. What are we releasing from heaven?** Forgiveness is from heaven. So is love, peace, joy, generosity and kindness. We’re pressing on toward that at home and at work, in the church house, in the schoolhouse, in the court house, at the Koury Convention Center Sheraton—wherever we find ourselves.

**Pressing on with Jesus is the only way to be right with God.** That’s the whole point. Pressing on with a God that is beyond our asking or imagining. A God who came among us gently, lived wonderfully, taught truthfully, died violently, was risen triumphantly, empowers generously and remains our companion steadfastly. No words can contain it. No effort can attain it. Shame on us if we constrain it. The best thing is to proclaim it. That’s the whole point. **Press on!**
Our Focus for CYYAC20
P.R.E.S.S.

The key verses for the CYYAC20 theme are Philippians 3:12-14. The lessons included in this study focus primarily on these two verses. Note the terminology used in each of the translations of Scripture. (Press on, well on my way, off and running, continue trying, keep trying). Paul was **passionate**, **relevant**, **essential**, and **sincere** in his service to God. He was determined to reach his goal as he continued to serve God in the midst of struggle and suffering. Nothing could get in his way of taking hold of the ministry to which Christ had called him to.

Paul had been converted for at least 25 years when he wrote Philippians. There is no question that he is one of the outstanding believers of all times. Yet over and over he reveals his mind-set, that he was still in the process: “Not that I have already obtained it” (3:12), meaning, “I have not yet come to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and conformity to His death in a complete and total way.” “I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet” (3:13). Twice he says, “I press on” (3:12, 14); the word literally means to pursue, and by way of extension, to persecute (Paul uses it of himself in this way in 3:6). He’s still “reaching forward” (3:13) as a runner stretches toward the finish line. He’s been at it for 25 years, but he doesn’t view himself as having arrived!

The Christian life isn’t a 100 yard dash; it’s a lifelong marathon. You need the mentality of a long-distance runner if you're going to make it. You may have been a Christian for 40 or 50 years, but you can’t start thinking, “I don’t need to grow any more” and stop running. Long distance runners have to complete the entire course; they can’t decide after many miles that they’ve run far enough.

**Philippians 3:12-14**

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already arrived at my goal, but I **press on** to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I **press on** toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

**Pressing toward the Goal**

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal;[a] but I **press on** to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved,[b] I do not consider that I have made it my own;[c] but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,[d] 14 I **press on** toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly[e] call of God in Christ Jesus. (NRSV)
12-14 I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. (The Message Bible)

Continuing Toward Our Goal

12 I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that. That is the reason Christ made me his. 13 Brothers, I know that I have not yet reached that goal. But there is one thing I always do: I forget the things that are past. I try as hard as I can to reach the goal that is before me. 14 I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize. That prize is mine because God called me through Christ to the life above.

Paul realizes that he hasn’t attained his potential in Christ, but he doesn’t excuse himself by the difficulty of the calling:

"... But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it." (3:12b-13a)

Two Greek verbs describe Paul’s unremitting quest for God:

The first verb is "press on" (NIV, NRSV) or "follow after" (KJV). Diōkō, is often translated "persecute." Here it means, "to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective, hasten, run, press on." The root idea of diōkō is "to chase." (Greek Lexicon)

In 2 Samuel, Abner, general for King Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth, loses many troops in a skirmish with David’s men. Then Asahel, brother of David’s general, "chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him." The Bible records, "Asahel refused to give up the pursuit." (2 Samuel 2:12-23) It is this kind of dogged determination that is the fire in Paul’s belly. With the same zeal that he once persecuted (diōkō) the church (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6), he now pursues (diōkō) Christ. He will not give up the pursuit of God or take his ease. He must know Christ in all his fullness! He presses on, because Christ "has made me his own" (3:12). Christ, in Paul’s understanding, “overtakes” or “seizes” the believer in an outpouring of grace. The only response is to continue striving toward the prize.

The second verb that describes Paul’s quest for Christ is "take hold of" (NIV), "apprehend" (KJV), and "make it my own" (NRSV). In other words this is Paul’s purpose. Paul presses in so that he might take hold. Katalambanō is an important word, since it occurs twice in verse 12b and again in verse 13b. The root idea is "to lay hold of." Here it means, "to lay hold of so as to make one’s own, win, attain."
"Not that I have already obtained (lambanō) all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of (katalambanō) that for which Christ Jesus took hold of (katalambanō) me. "Brothers and Sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of (katalambanō) it."

(3:12-13)

Years before, Jesus had laid hold of Paul on the Damascus road at his conversion. Now Paul longs to lay hold of the fullness of this life in Christ and is unsatisfied until he does. Paul has not obtained his spiritual goal yet, but he is not resting or turning back: "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (3:13b-14). The imagery is from a race, drawn from the key verb "I press on" (diōkō), "to chase, run after, pursue," that we just examined in verse 12. Paul is single-minded: "But one thing I do!" (3:13b)

A runner in a race doesn’t keep looking back at who is behind him, lest he trip and fall on his face. Instead, he is intent upon the goal up ahead. We cannot spend our lives looking backward. We are defeated when we look back at our losses, our regrets and our failures. In Christ, we can find forgiveness for our own failings. In Christ we can find the grace to forgive even the deepest hurts. So Paul doesn’t look back. "Forgetting" is the Greek verb epilanthanomai, "not to have remembrance of something, forget." This does not mean that our mind is wiped clean of any remembrance of past hurts and failures, but that we choose not to go there any longer. We choose not to remember. We choose instead to look forward. We can’t run the race looking backward. We must turn our minds and hearts to the present race and to our goal. Paul looks toward the goal line.

In many sports games, the player must keep his or her eye on the ball. A Christian must keep his or her eye on the goal -- fully surrender to and fellowship with Jesus Christ. If our eyes slip to the temporal world, we lose focus on the spiritual world and lose our bearings. Forget what lies behind. We must forget what lies behind and keep our eyes on the goal.

Another word in this imagery of a race is "straining toward" (NIV) or "forward" (NRSV) and "reaching forth" (KJV). It is the Greek verb epekteinomai, "to exert oneself to the uttermost, stretch out, strain toward something. If you watch the sprints and hurdles in any field event, you can see that as the leading runners reach the tape at the goal line, they will lean their body forward. In some of the heats, it is that extension of the body to its uttermost that wins the race. Paul is talking about his own flat out commitment to see this through to the end. No slacking off. No excuses. No laziness. Paul is serious about this, he is stretching all out to win the race.
In 1 Corinthians Paul switches from a racing imagery to a boxing analogy, but the idea is the same.

24 Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. 25 Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; 27 but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NRSV)

Paul is not fighting for his salvation. That has already been settled. But he is seeking Christ and his fullness. He is urgent and disciplines himself so that he will not miss out on the greatest prize of all -- knowing Christ.

Paul had to move past his memory of persecuting Christ and the church. Paul had experienced inexpressible spiritual visions and ecstasies. But he had to move past it. Paul was very well aware that we cannot keep chastising ourselves for past failings or keep patting ourselves on the back for past spiritual victories. They take our eyes off the goal, which is Christ himself.

The apostle Paul gave us the language of “pressing on” (NRSV). In Philippians 3:12, he tells us to “pursue” perfection. We are called to reach ahead, to pursue Christ, and to run to him. Seeking God and intentionally practicing our faith trains us spiritually. It may be grueling and difficult, but it will prepare us for the season ahead. Practicing spiritual disciplines can be a chore, but when we commit time to growing in faith, God will meet us with everything we need.
THE “NOT-HAVING-ARRIVED” ATTITUDE: CHRISTIAN GROWTH REQUIRES ALWAYS MOVING AHEAD.

If anyone could think he had arrived, it would have been Paul. But he always kept in mind that he wasn't there yet. He didn't want to rest on his laurels or to start coasting. Remember, this is a man who had had numerous visions of the Lord. He had been caught up into heaven and had seen things that no other living person had seen. He had written some of the most profound theology ever penned. But his attitude was, “I need to keep moving ahead.” You see this even in his final days, when he was in the dungeon in Rome, and he wrote to Timothy asking him to bring his coat, and then he adds, “and the books, especially the parchments” (2 Tim. 4:13). He was facing execution, but he wanted his books so he could keep growing!

In verse 13, notice that “I do” is in italics, meaning that it is not in the original. The brevity of Paul's phrase in Greek makes it more emphatic: “But one thing!” Paul's single attitude of always moving ahead has three ramifications: Forgetting the past, reaching forward to the future, and pressing on in the present.

(1) An attitude of moving ahead from the past: Leave it there! “Forgetting what lies behind.” Again, the picture is of a runner who does not make the mistake of looking over his shoulder. His eyes are fixed on the goal. If he made mistakes earlier in the race, he doesn't kick himself by replaying them in his mind. If he did well, he doesn't gloat about it. He leaves the past behind and keeps moving on toward the finish line.

Many Christians today are being told that to experience healing from their difficult pasts, they need to delve into their pasts and relive the hurtful things that happened to them. This approach has come into the church from the world, not from the Word. It would be wrong to say that verse 13 is all that the Bible says about the past. Even earlier in the chapter, Paul has mentioned his own past life in Judaism. It can be helpful to reflect on what happened to us in the past in order to understand where we're at in the present and where we need to grow. There is a biblical case for self-examination, which means evaluating things that have happened in the past, both good and bad, as a means of growing now.

But our text shows that there needs to be a balance. Paul means here that we should not be controlled by the past. Someone has used the analogy of a car’s rear view mirror. You don't drive by looking in the mirror. You drive by looking ahead out of the windshield. But it's helpful to take occasional glances in your mirror and use the information to make decisions about how to drive safely in the present and future. But if you spend too much time looking in your mirror, you'll probably crash because you're not paying attention to the present. In the same way, we need to take periodic glances backward, but we also need to put the past (good and bad) behind us, accept God's grace and enabling for the present, and move on with what He is calling us to do now.

(2) An attitude of moving ahead toward the future: Aim for the goal! “Reaching forward to what lies ahead” (3:13). Paul uses a term describing a runner who stretches and strains every muscle as he runs toward the finish line. “The upward call of God” is His call to salvation which culminates when we stand before Him to give an account and receive rewards for how we've run the race.
Will our work stand the test and receive His "Well done" because we did it out of love for Him and for His glory? Or, will it be burned up and we be saved, but as through fire (1 Cor. 3:14-15)? Everything we do—how we conduct ourselves in our families and in public; how we spend our time and money; how we serve the Lord—should all be done with the mind-set, "I'm going to stand before the Lord and give an account someday; I want to be pleasing unto Him."

(3) An attitude of moving ahead in the present: Keep moving! "I press on toward the goal" (3:13-14). Paul had a holy dissatisfaction with where he was at, so he kept pressing on. Yesterday’s blessings or experiences wouldn’t do for today. He walked daily with the Lord, always wanting more, always learning, always growing, never treading water or coasting.

In 3:12 Paul says that he is not perfect, but in 3:15 he implies that he and some of his readers are perfect. He isn’t contradicting himself within four verses. In 3:12, he means that absolute perfection is not attainable in this life. In 3:15, he uses the word in relative terms to mean "mature." We can become mature, and the mature Christian will share Paul’s view that he is setting forth here, that we haven’t arrived, but that we can and must keep growing.

But Paul recognizes that some will not share his attitude because they are not mature. To those who disagree with him, Paul says, "Stay teachable and God will show you where you need to grow" (see 3:15). He adds verse 16 so that no one will mistake him to mean that you can just kick back and not work at growing. He means that wherever you’re at, you need to keep living in obedience to the light God has shown you and keep seeking Him for more. If God has dealt with some sin in your life, don’t slip back into it again. If He has cleaned out a dirty closet of your life, don’t start throwing junk in there again.

If you want to grow in the Lord, it’s essential that you maintain a teachable heart. A teachable heart is humble, because it admits, "I may be wrong or lacking in understanding; I may need to repent and change." A teachable heart is submissive, ready to respond to new light God gives from His Word. A person with a teachable heart is not a know-it-all, refusing to learn from other Christians. With that kind of teachable heart, keep moving in the present.

Paul’s "one thing" (3:13) implies focused concentration and effort, that he sets aside distractions and works at keeping his mind on the goal of knowing Christ and becoming more like Him. A runner in a race can’t afford to admire the scenery or look at the people on the sidelines. An Olympic champion is not a person of many interests, who dabbles at his sport when it’s convenient. Every day he gets up and puts his mind on the goal, to win the gold. Everything else—his social life, his schedule, his diet—takes subservience to that overarching goal.

The question each of us needs to answer is, "Do I devote myself to knowing Christ and being like Him in the same way an athlete devotes himself to winning his event? Does knowing Christ and growing in Him consume me, or do I just dabble at it when it’s convenient?" If you want to grow, you’ve got to put your full effort into it—not just occasionally, but all the time.

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**Beginning the Study**

The leader/facilitator is encouraged to read the Biblical texts and commentaries included in the study. We strongly recommend using the translations included in the study in helping youth to comprehend the meaning of the text and its implication for their daily life.

Additional research is always helpful in preparing to teach and relating to the students. Consider the questions below in your preparation:

1. How do we help youth in our congregations relate to Paul’s experience and his desire to PRESS on?
2. How do youth understand their service to, Family, Church and Community as a calling on their life that moves beyond their past experiences and calls them to press on in discipleship?
3. How do youth connect Paul’s experience to their faith formation?

Although this study is designed primarily for leading youth in understanding the theme and focus for the conference from the biblical text, we encourage young adults to study the text to discern the meaning of the words of the text as it relates to their Pressing on in their daily lives, as well as in the context of the church and the community. To explore what Pressing On requires of them as they model discipleship for youth and other young adults.

Young Adults are encouraged to serve as leaders and mentors to youth in their spiritual formation and discipleship.

**The Challenge to Young Adults:**

Read Philippians 3:4b-14 and the commentary above.

- Develop a before-and-after description of Paul’s life in relation to his conversion experience.
- What did he give up in order to follow Christ? How did his value system change?
- How did his understanding of righteousness change? What did it mean for Paul to be “in Christ”?
- What does it mean for us? What does it mean to say that Christ has “taken hold” of or “seized” our lives?
- How is this “taking hold” a manifestation of grace? Does it pre-empt our freedom?
As you consider the text of Philippians 3:12-14,

How can the past get in the way of our quest to know Christ? What do you need to "forget" so that you may focus on Christ today and tomorrow? Is there forgiving you need to do so you can grow in Christ? (Phil. 3:13)

Barack Obama in his closing words to the Democratic Convention in 2012 stated the following:

...Yes, our path is harder, but it leads to a better place. Yes our road is longer, but we travel it together. We don't turn back. We leave no one behind. We pull each other up. We draw strength from our victories, and we learn from our mistakes, but we keep our eyes fixed on that distant horizon, knowing that Providence is with us, and that we are surely blessed to be citizens of the greatest nation on Earth. (2012)

Reflect on the above statement: Compare and discuss President Obama's words to the nation and consider its meaning for young adults and the church?

Think about your standing in the community and the church.

1. Has your experience of Christ rendered any of your former accomplishments as loss?
2. Has knowing Christ transformed your values?
January 2020: Introduction to P.R.E.S.S.

PASSIONATE, RELEVANT, ESSENTIAL, SINCERE, SERVICE

Intro Bible Study (suggested for Youth and Young Adult Week)

Begin the study with prayer. (Include church, students, leaders and CYYAC20 in the prayer)

Designate one student to read Philippians 2:5-11 and another to read Philippians 3:4b-14. (identify these students prior to the session so that they will be familiar with the text. It is preferable to have the readings from the CEV or Message Bible).

Share the theme of CYYAC20 and a brief commentary/narrative on the Scripture and plans for Bible Study leading up to the conference. (February—May)

Divide the larger group into 4 groups. Assign each group one of the 4 characteristics of the Conference Theme—Passionate Service—Relevant Service—Essential Service—Sincere Service. Each group needs to identify a specific service to the church or the community and depict how they would carry it out focusing on their particular description of service.

If your youth group consists of Junior and Senior High students, include both in each group.

Give each group 15 minutes to develop a skit based on their assigned characteristic.

Have the groups report back and present their skit before the larger group. You may want to video for later presentation to the congregation.

If time permits allow each group to comment and provide feedback on the other group’s activity.

(See the skit on page for possible inclusion in your Youth and Young Adult Week Celebration.)

NOTE: YOUNG ADULTS ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO BE PRESENT AND LEAD OR ASSIST IN THIS ACTIVITY.
February 2020: Passionate Service

Lesson Objectives

1. The learner will identify what it means to have passion when serving in the Kingdom of God.
2. The learner will understand four basic principles that are necessary for passion to exude from their service.
3. The learner will identify and learn scriptures that relate to passionate and how they can be actualized in their individual discipleship process.

Procedures & Activities

Upon entering the Bible study, students will engage in open conversation about their week and experiences throughout their day. Mentor/teacher should engage with students as they vent about problems or struggles they have experienced. This will help students to clear their minds of any frustrations that may prevent learning during the time of study. Mentor/teacher must give at least 2 minutes to each student to share before moving on to lesson.

The class will then transition to the topic for the month which is Passionate Service. Mentor/teacher will engage class with probing question about what students understand passion to be. After assessing their understanding, the mentor/teacher should open up with the reading of the foundational scripture in Philippians 3:12-14. Mentor/teacher should stress the meaning of the writer “pressing” towards the mark. There should be enough information given to help student to know that pressing deals with passion. Then questions should be asked about what the writer was passionate about. This will take students into the scripture and help them to begin thinking about what the text means to them. After short discussion about the initial text, mentor/teacher will introduce what subtopics will be discussed over the next four weeks which will be Desire, Determination, Destiny (Destination), and Direction. They must understand that these subtopics feed into what it means to have passion to serve God.

Week #1

Desire

- There must be a desire to want to serve God
- To move a person into service there needs to be a burning desire
- Desire is our reasoning behind our service
- Passion is desire on steroids
Week #2

Determination

- Determination is putting legs to your desire
- Determination is focus
- Determination comes with sacrifice and some suffering
- Determination is striving to reach the goal

Week #3

Destiny (destination)

- Our destiny is the goal of our determination
- Destiny is the end game
- Destiny is God's purpose for our lives
- Destiny is the “mark”

Week #4

Direction

- Direction is our guidance to our destination
- Our arrival at destiny is based on receiving guidance
- Mentorship/Discipleship by other leaders helps us to make it
- Must be willing to be lead

Note: Each time students meet the initial text should be revisited to keep them focused on the overall topic followed by introduction of the next topic for the week. Continue to make clear that passion is the overall focus.
WEEK # 1: DESIRE

Begin with prayer and reading of focus scripture.

Introduce sub-topics for the week:

Desire

- There must be a desire to want to serve God
- To move a person into service there needs to be a burning desire
- Desire is our reasoning behind our service
- Passion is desire on steroids

Guided Age Level Groups

Group #1 (12-14, Junior high school level)

Student session will begin with students being moved to a private class or area according to their ages. They will be seated in an intimate space with something desirable placed at each seat (Can be Skittles, Sour Patch Kids, Starburst, etc.). The objective is to give them access to something they desire without letting them have it. Mentor/teacher should ask youth if they have ever experienced tasting the candy. If response is positive continue on to explain that since they have experienced the satisfaction of tasting the candy, they now desire to have it again.

Group #2 (14-17, High school level)

The older group will go through the same activity but with something they desire such as money. Place $5, $10, $20 in front of each student (or in the middle of the table) and proceed with similar questions and discussion. Psalm 34:8 can be used and describe the experience of having enough money to enjoy. Session should end with taking the money back and explanation of Paul’s desire to serve God because of God’s goodness.

Mentor/teacher should then read supporting scripture, Psalm 34:8 and explain that tasting the goodness of the Lord produces desire to want more of God and to want to serve God because of God’s goodness. Continue discussion by allowing students to express how they have tasted God’s goodness. End session by taking the candy back and asking the students to reflect on other things they have experienced and now desire. Then explain how Paul experienced God and wanted to please God in our initial text. His desire drove his passion.

Assessment/Independent Practice

Before the closing prayer, ask students to take a moment to reflect on the activity and the lesson and how it applies to them personally.

Ask students to obtain index cards or sticky notes. Ask them to write on index cards daily one thing that they desire. Instruct them to read Psalm 34:8 after writing their desire. At the end of the week ask them to rate their level of passion in obtaining their desire and to compare it to their passion in their desire for serving God.
WEEK # 2: DETERMINATION

Begin with prayer and read focus Scripture (Philippians 3:12-14)

Introduce sub-topics for the week:

**Determination**
- Determination is putting legs to your desire
- Determination is focus
- Determination comes with sacrifice and some suffering
- Determination is striving to reach the goal

**Guided Age Level Groups**

The students can be separated into different age appropriate groups, 12-14 and 14-17.

**Guided Age Level Groups**

**Group #1** (12-14, Junior high school level)

Lay out a relay race (determine what space can be used in the church). Note: Participants should walk as opposed to running.

Cut out the letters P.R.E.S.S. on cardstock. Place letters in bucket or basket. Divide the students into two separate teams. The mentor/teacher stands on the sideline with the bucket containing the letters. The first runner on each team must find the letter P and carry and hand it off to the next runner — the next runner finds the letter R in the bucket and carries it along with the letter P to the next runner, the game continues until the word P.R.E.S.S. is spelled and taken to the finish line. The last runner should have word P.R.E.S.S. in his or her hand as they she cross the finish line.

Depending on the number students the game may be repeated with the final two teams competing for the reward. Provide prizes to the winning team.

**Group #2** (14-17, High school level)

Set up relay as suggested above. Divide students into two teams. Prior to beginning the race have each student write their definition of passion on a piece of notebook paper. The first runner must read his or her definition out loud: roll the paper up into a baton and carry it to the next runner. After receiving the baton from the first runner, the second runner of the team reads his or her definition of passion and wraps their definition around the first runner’s baton and proceeds to the next runner. The game continues with each student sharing their definition and rolling it around the previous runner’s definition until the word PRESS is spelled and the last runner crosses the finish line. Each runner must say “Press On” as they hand off the baton to the next runner. A volunteer should be stationed at each point during the relay to ensure they say the words as they hand off the baton. If any member fails to read their definition of passion aloud and say the words “Press On“< as they hand off the baton, the team is disqualified.
Following the activity, share the following story:

On May 15, 2014, Derek Redmond was running the 400 race in the Olympics. He was even favored to win this event. As he was running his hamstring snapped and he fell to the ground. He sat there for a few moments before he got up and limped toward the finish line. All of a sudden there was a man running onto the field and breaking through the Olympic Security team. It was his father. His dad grabbed hold of his son and helped him to the finish line. They did it together. This was a great Olympic moment, because you saw the heartbreak of the runner but the love of a father. Derek was disqualified because of the help from his father but he did cross the finish line. The finish line was more important than winning. We are running a race toward Jesus. We've already won because we have Jesus as our Savior, but our race is never over until we get to the finish line in Heaven. Our heavenly Father is helping us to run the race. He gave us His Holy Spirit to help us on our way. We just need to keep our eyes on Jesus because:

The Mentor/Teacher should read the supporting Scripture 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Explain to the students that determination requires strength, focus, sacrifice and suffering. Tie in the activity with 3:12-14 and 2 Timothy4:7-8. Point out Paul's testimony to Timothy about his completing the race. Paul was determined to complete the race before him. Timothy was a student of the Apostle Paul. Like his mentor, he was passionate in his desire to serve God. Paul suffered, he made sacrifices, yet he stayed focused on reaching the goal before him. His desire to serve God fueled his passion. Timothy was encouraged by Paul's determination and passion to serve.

Righteous Determination requires our persistence to overcome barriers that hold us back--those that can be overcome by more effort, right thinking, clear goals, and help from others. Obstacles that are wrong, misplaced, or laden with sin are the ones to hurdle first. We are to honor obstacles and the timing that God gives, and not rush through with matters to which we are not called, or are not ready for. Our study of God's Word, our prayer life, and listening to good, godly advice will be our keys to unlocking the right doors and making sure we do not open the wrong ones. Our Determination needs to be governed by righteous desire, commitment, and dedication to God's principles. You are on the right track if you have the desire to transform laziness or wrong direction into ways you can improve with good, Biblical, quality goals. If we are driven by pride or just the motivation to excel at all cost, it is a good bet we are on the wrong track and not in this Godly Character--just into ourselves.

Assessment/Independent Practice

Ask students if they found it difficult to finish the race? What did the race require of them? What was the level of their determination in reaching the goal?

Ask students to concentrate over the next week on a specific personal goal they are attempting to reach. Ask them write each day on index card or sticky note what they will do that day to help in reaching their goal? At the end of the week ask them to rate their level of passion in their determination to reach their goal.
WEEK # 3: DESTINY (DESTINATION)

Begin with prayer and read focus Scripture (Philippians 3:12-13b)

Introduce sub-topics for the week:

Destiny (destination)

- Our destiny is the goal of our determination
- Destiny is the end game
- Destiny is God's purpose for our lives
- Destiny is the “mark”

Guided Age Level Groups

The students can be separated into different age appropriate groups, 12-14 and 14-17.

Group #1 (12-14, Junior high school level)

Prior to class enter directions from your home to the church in GPS. Play for class after prayer and reading of Scripture.

Say to the students:

Many of you are familiar with GPS which can be found in most automobiles. The GPS cannot help you arrive if it does not know your destination. The same can be said for the journey through life which is controlled by our choices which ultimately lead us to our destination. Life is like GPS because each step moves you forward toward your destiny. You have to work at it every day because if you quit your destination will either be delayed or denied. Two words that are necessary for the journey, "Press On". This is the only way you can reach your destination.

Cut out the words, “but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” (NRSV) or “but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus.” (The Message) for 2-3 groups.). (e.g.)I press on/to make it my own/because Christ Jesus/ has made me his own. (This can be done differently based on the leader's preference)

Begin session by having youth name types of rewards people receive for reaching different types of goals. (Can be movies, sports, etc.)

Divide class into 2-3 groups. Have them review the scripture and discuss its meaning. After discussion have each group/team reconstruct the words to form the selected text. The team that completes the text first and correctly is the winner.

Remind the students: You are not on this journey alone. God walks with you every step of the way. Throughout you will discover God's promises and the fact that you can count on every one of them.
**Group #2 (14-17, High school level)**

The older group can take out their cell phones and ask for directions to one of their favorite places (destination). After doing so, have them share what their goals are after high school. How determined are they to reach their goals (destination). Have them think of a movie, book, or quote that fits their description. Have each student begin a vision board of their goals using the title "PRESS ON"

The Mentor/Teacher should remind the students that there are steps required in getting to the right destination. There will be some who will try to deter you from getting to that destination just like the rulers of religion did so with the Apostle Paul. The first step on the Christian journey to reaching our destination is to believe in God and the second is to have faith that God will direct you on your journey of faith. Share Proverbs 3:5-6 with students. Remind them of the previous lessons on desire and determination. Impress on them that having desire and determination strengthens their trust in God and enables them to believe and trust that God will direct their path.

Share the following quote from Langston Hughes with the students before closing in prayer.

*I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go.* – Langston Hughes

**Assessment/Independent Practice**

Ask students to reflect on the Destiny sub-topics over the following week leading up to the next class. As they travel to different destinations during the week (school, activities, the mall, outings with friends, home, etc.) ask them to ponder their desire, and determination in getting to their final destination. Ask them write on their index cards or sticky notes what helped them in reaching their destination or kept them from reaching their destination. Remind them to read the Proverbs 3:5-6 verses daily.
WEEK # 4: Direction

Begin with prayer and read focus Scripture (Philippians 3:12-13b)

Introduce sub-topics for the week:

Direction

- Direction is our guidance to our destination
- Our arrival at destiny is based on receiving guidance
- Mentorship/Discipleship by other leaders helps us to make it
- Must be willing to be lead

Guided Age Level Groups

The students can be separated into different age appropriate groups, 12-14 and 14-17.

Prior to activity have young adult or group of young adults give a dramatic reading of Exodus 14.

**Group #1** (12-14, Junior high school level)

Place a line down the center of the room from one end other, representing the Red sea. On one side place the words Egypt and the other the wilderness. Make Arrows pointing forward towards the Wilderness and backwards towards Egypt. Divide the students into two groups - Egyptians and Israelites.

Prepare directional cards (i.e., move forward one step or two steps, move backwards one step or two steps.). Ask for a volunteer to play the role of Moses directing the Israelites to cross the Red Sea and one to play the role of Pharaoh instructing the Egyptians.

Design the game in this manner: One volunteer holds the box or basket with the directional cards and draws a card. If the card is a move forward card, it is given to Moses to read. If it is a move backwards card, it is given to Pharaoh. The game continues until the Israelites cross the Red Sea.

Point out that God appointed Moses as a leader who directed the Israelites to cross the Red Sea out of Egypt. Because of Moses desire to please God, he followed God's direction and was determined to lead the people through the wilderness to God’s promised destination (The Promised Land).

**Group #2** (15-17, High school level)

Have the students share with one another their understanding of the text and how it relates to Paul's determination to press on toward his goal.

Make the following signs. Egypt; The Wilderness (Sinai); Promised Land (Canaan) (Destination) pointing in both directions.
Under the Egypt sign place the following words:
Oppression, Fear, Struggle, Suffering, Pain, Death

Under the Wilderness sign place the following words:
Bitterness, Fear, Disobedience, Punishment, Death

Under the Canaan (Promised Land) sign place the following words:
Hope, Joy, Reconciliation, Freedom, Trust, Promise

Have students walk the path from Egypt (Past) through the wilderness and into the Promised Land (Destiny) stopping along the way to let go of those things that keep them from getting to their destination. Have them to explain how letting go the past, trusting in God and following God’s directions (pressing on) will help them to reach the destination God has chosen for them.

Remind the students: What could have been a short journey from Sinai into Canaan became forty years of wandering in the wilderness because of their failure to follow the directions given to Moses by God.

Variation of these two activities can include both junior high and senior high. Adapt and modify for your youth group as necessary.

The mentor/teacher will share with the student’s that it is not always easy to follow directions. Sometimes we disregard or disrespect the leader whom God has appointed to point us in the right directions. Sometimes others try to keep us back or get us off-track from the path God would have us to travel. Having the desire to serve God, the determination to stay focused on our destiny (God’s purpose for our lives) and following God’s directions instills in us greater passion to serve God in our everyday lives. Just as God delivered the people out of Egypt God, through Jesus Christ God has saved us from sin and delivers us from all the things that keep us from PRESSING on to the heavenly call of Christ Jesus.

Assessment/Independent Practice

Before the closing prayer, have the students reflect on how the activity made them feel. Ask them to reflect back over the lessons for the month and write down on an index card or sticky notes how the lessons help them better understand their call to discipleship. Have them rate their overall passion for service to God (on a scale of 1-10). What do they need to do to move up on the scale?
A Skit about Passion

A young man and woman enter the chancel from the center aisle. They see a sign that reads "Emergency Room." The drama begins when the two begin to speak.

JENNIFER: How long have you been feeling bad?

STEVEN: Months!

JENNIFER: Come on, Steven, that’s not true. Up until today you looked fine. Be serious; how long have you been hurting?

STEVEN: Physically?

JENNIFER: (nodding) Yes.

STEVEN: A couple of days—stomach, head, general achiness.

JENNIFER: Let’s get you to a doctor.

STEVEN: No way! It won’t do any good; in fact, it may make matters worse.

JENNIFER: Don’t be silly! Come along.

JENNIFER and Steven move over to the emergency room area. A woman sits at a desk, talking on the telephone. She acknowledges their presence but continues her phone conversation.

RECEPTIONIST: Things have been so busy lately. Christopher and Madison has Girl Scouts so I run all over the city dropping kids off at activities. It's awful! By the way, how was that movie you went to see the other night?

STEVEN: Should I tell her that this is an emergency?

JENNIFER: She knows, Steve.

STEVEN: That makes it worse.

RECEPTIONIST: You're right, you never really know. Well, look, I'm real busy here; I've got to go. I'll talk to you soon. Uh huh...you bet...bye. (She turns her attention to Steven and Jennifer, speaking in an irritated voice.) Can I help you?

STEVEN: I really doubt it.

JENNIFER: Steven; don’t!

STEVEN: Alright, alright. I'm sorry, it's just that I feel real bad and have for three days. My head and stomach are killing me and I haven’t slept or eaten in two days.
RECEPTIONIST: (Putting her fingers on her computer keyboard) I see. What is your name?

STEVEN: Steven.

RECEPTIONIST: Address?

STEVEN: 9301 Bundy Road.

RECEPTIONIST: Insurance?

STEVEN: I don’t feel well. Could I just see a doctor, please?

RECEPTIONIST: (tersely) Not until I get the proper information. Insurance?

STEVEN: Here is my insurance card—everything you should need to know is on it. I’m gonna sit down, okay? How long do you think it’ll be before I can see a doctor?

RECEPTIONIST: There’s no way of knowing. We’re very busy.

STEVEN: But I’m the only one here!

RECEPTIONIST: (She glares at Steven, then picks up the telephone. As she begins to speak into the phone Jennifer and Steven walk to waiting room chairs set up in the chancel and sit down.) The nerve of some people! He expected me to drop everything and help him. I can’t be two people, you know.

JENNIFER: Steven, what has gotten into you? You’re so cynical all of a sudden.

STEVEN: I’m sick—sick of being in the way.

JENNIFER: What? What do you mean by that?

STEVEN: Don’t you ever get the feeling that no one really cares about what’s going on in your life, like that woman (gestures toward the receptionist). I got in the way between her and her phone. I’m in other people’s way when I drive down the street! I get the feeling I’m in the clerk’s way at the grocery store; all she wants is for her shift to be over. There just doesn’t seem to be any passion for life anymore.

(A man wearing a suit and a huge smile enters.)

CHAPLAIN NELSON: Good morning. I’m Chaplain Nelson. How’s it going today?

STEVEN: (smiling, looking genuinely glad to see a chaplain) Well, sort of rough. I was just telling Jennifer here, I’ve been in pain for a while now.

CHAPLAIN: Well, you know what they say, “When the going gets tough, and the tough gets going.” “Have our little pamphlet here, “Prayers for the waiting room.” (Gives Steven a pamphlet.) If you’re admitted to the hospital, we’d love to see you at Sunday services in the chapel. Have a good day and God bless!

JENNIFER: (as Steven is about to open his mouth) I know, you felt like you were in his way, too.
STEVEN: It seems no one waits around here but me.

NURSE: *(smiling and irritatingly cheerful)* But no longer! The doctor will see you now in room four. Go down the corridor, then turn left at the first hall, go to the water fountain, and turn right. It's the third door on the left.

JENNIFER: Do you have a map?

STEVEN: You're beginning to sound like me.

JENNIFER: That's scary. *(Jennifer and Steven walk in the available space, back and forth, and then at last sit down again in the chairs in the chancel. The physician enters.)*

DR. EUBANKS: Good morning! What can I do for you today?

STEVEN: Hi, Doc, I'm really glad to see you. My head and my stomach hurt. I just really feel lousy.

DR EUBANKS: *(puts a thermometer in Steven's mouth, then takes it out and says)* you're normal; it's probably nothing. Go home, have this prescription filled *(hands Steven a prescription)*, and if it doesn't work call me in a couple of days. Have a good day.

STEVEN: I'm normal? If I'm normal, then we are all in trouble! *(Steve and Jennifer start walking again. They are passed by a person about 12 years old, either in a wheelchair, or on crutches. Soon after passing them, the person turns around and comes back to them.)*

YOUNG PERSON: Mister, are you all right?

STEVEN: No! But I'm normal.

YOUNG PERSON: *(confused expression)* What?

JENNIFER: It's a joke that's not very funny.

YOUNG PERSON: Few things around here are.

STEVEN: What are you doing here?

YOUNG PERSON: I'm sick. I have cancer, the "Big C." I'm taking treatments. How about you?

STEVEN: They say it is nothing—at least those who will talk to me do.

YOUNG PERSON: Sounds to me like you're suffering from something pretty serious.

JENNIFER: *(defensively)* What do you mean?

YOUNG PERSON: *(to Jennifer)* His heart is broken.

*(Jennifer and Steven look at each other in wonder as they realize the young person is right!)*

STEVEN: It's just all getting to me. Life goes on day after day. My life, your life. Kids are born, people die, new diseases are discovered, earthquakes shake the world, and no one cares. There's just no... no... no...
YOUNG PERSON: Passion!

STEVEN: Exactly! There is no passion for life. No one lives as though life really counts for anything. It’s just as if the people in this world aren’t worth sweating or going out of your way for.

YOUNG PERSON: You’re right. And there is a good reason for it.

STEVEN: Apathy!

YOUNG PERSON: Not quite. Sin!

STEVEN: (turning to Jennifer) Another chaplain?

YOUNG PERSON: No, just another sufferer.

STEVEN: I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be nasty.

YOUNG PERSON: I know, but that’s sin for you—that’s what I’m talking about! You didn’t mean to be nasty, but you were. It’s your nature to do rebellious things, and most of the time you don’t even know it. It’s the same with those people (points to the Receptionist, Chaplain, Nurse and Doctor.) They didn’t mean not to either, but they were.

STEVEN: So, what am I supposed to do? Forgive them and go on?

YOUNG PERSON: That’s a place to start. Forgive them, love them, ask about their lives, find out what their problems are—see if you can understand how they got this way.

STEVEN: Isn’t that being sort of phony?

YOUNG PERSON: Only if you don’t really care...I mean, only if you have no passion for life.

JENNIFER: Where does your passion come from?

YOUNG PERSON: From God.

STEVEN: God is passionate! (Chuckles a little bit) I’m sorry, I just never thought of God as being filled with passion.

YOUNG PERSON: Are you kidding? God really gets into this world. He cares and cries and loves and gets angry—even jealous—with this world. God always gives us His all. Did you ever see a boring thunderstorm or an ugly sunset? Did you ever taste a bad strawberry? God does everything with a passion.

STEVEN: I wish He’d rub off on some of these folks.

YOUNG PERSON: He’s trying, so much that He came to rub shoulders with us. Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and passionately helped, healed, taught, forgave, and loved people. He got His hands dirty in our world. He went searching out people who needed Him and made them whole. So hundreds of people came out to see Him, and He cared for their needs for hours, until He was exhausted.
JENNIFER: But there has to be a limit to everything. I mean, how far can even God go in caring for people?

YOUNG PERSON: To death. Jesus cared for people to death. His love knows no limit; there is no way people can make Jesus stop loving them. He died on a cross for the sins of the whole world. He passionately cares for you!

STEVEN: Please don't be offended by what I'm about to say, but you seem to care about me too. You are showing concern about me even though you have so much to worry about yourself.

YOUNG PERSON: I do care, and that's how Jesus works. He gives life even in the face of death. So, Steven, take it from me, regardless of what is wrong with me, you take Jesus and live.

STEVEN: With PASSION.
March 2020: Relevant Service

Overview:

This month’s study focuses on the second letter of P.R.E.S.S.: Relevant. People who want to know how others relate to them are often evaluating to make sure they are relevant in their work. Artists want to know that their art work is relevant. Singers often worry that their music is not relevant. Software developers and gaming designers want to know that their programs are relevant. What, though, does “relevant” mean? To be relevant means that the intended audience relates to what is being offered, whether an art exhibit, a song, a new game, or even a message, sermon or service project. Relevant is derived from the Latin relevare, meaning “to pull up.” How fitting for those of us engaged in ministry, for what else should our sharing of the Gospel Message do except to “pull up” people from whatever low places they happen to find themselves, from whatever has them down, from whatever has them bound! To do so, however, our service must be relevant!

The lessons that follow are designed to help youth in a number of ways:

- Youth will seriously consider their call to share the Gospel Message, to share personal testimony with others as ministers of the Gospel
- Youth will seriously consider how they relate to people in sharing the Gospel Message; and
- Youth will determine to engage in relevant service opportunities that help to promote the Gospel and ultimately glorify God.

Introduction:

The book of Philippians is written by the Apostle Paul to the Church at Philippi. This church had sent Epaphroditus with aid for Paul to Ephesus, and on the way there, Epaphroditus had become ill. Yet, he had continued on, “pressed on” Paul says, “risking his life” (2:30) in order to assist Paul. The Church at Philippi had reason to be concerned about Epaphroditus, and he desired to return to them to assure them that he was well. This afforded Paul an opportunity to write them a letter that Epaphroditus would deliver: our “Letter to the Philippians.” In the letter, Paul discusses his concern about the progress of the Gospel Message, even amid difficult times. He reminds the Philippians of their progress in the faith while also providing examples of what to do as they “negotiate the hurdles” that stand between them and the attainment of their ultimate goal: eternity with Christ Jesus! He encourages that although difficulties arise, with God's help, victory is imminent.
Focal Bible Text: Philippians 3:1-21

New International Version (NIV)

3 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— even though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ— and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ— the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh— even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone
else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: I was circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may

gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

The Message Bible (MSG)

3 And that's about it, friends. Be glad in God! I don't mind repeating what I have written in earlier letters, and I hope you don't mind hearing it again. Better safe than sorry—so here goes.

2-6 Steer clear of the barking dogs, those religious busybodies, all bark and no bite. All they're interested in is appearances—knife-happy circumcisers, I call them. The real believers are the ones the Spirit of God leads to work away at this ministry, filling the air with Christ's praise as we do it. We couldn't carry this off by our own efforts, and we know it—even though we can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God's law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book.
Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God's righteousness.

10-11 I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.

12-14 I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

15-16 So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.

17-19 Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

20-21 But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.

International Children's Bible (ICB)

3 My brothers, be full of joy in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it will help you to be more ready. 2 Be careful of those who do evil. They are like dogs. They demand to cut[1] the body. 3 But we are the ones who are truly circumcised. We worship God through his Spirit. We are proud to be in Christ Jesus. And we do not trust in ourselves or anything we can do. 4 Even if I am able to trust in myself, still I do not. If anyone thinks that he has a reason to trust in himself, he should know that I have greater reason for trusting in myself. 5 I was circumcised eight days after my birth. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrews, and my parents were Hebrews. The law of Moses was very important to me. That is why I became a Pharisee. 6 I was so enthusiastic that I tried to hurt the church. No one could find fault with the way I obeyed the law of Moses. 7 At one time all these things were important to me. But now I think those things are worth nothing because of Christ. 8 Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Christ, I
have lost all those things. And now I know that all those things are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ and to belong to him. Now that I belong to Christ, I am right with God and this being right does not come from my following the law. It comes from God through faith. God uses my faith in Christ to make me right with him. All I want is to know Christ and the power of his rising from death. I want to share in Christ's sufferings and become like him in his death. If I have those things, then I have hope that I myself will be raised from death.

I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that. That is the reason Christ made me his. Brothers, I know that I have not yet reached that goal. But there is one thing I always do: I forget the things that are past. I try as hard as I can to reach the goal that is before me. I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize. That prize is mine because God called me through Christ to the life above.

All of us who have grown spiritually to be mature should think this way, too. And if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you. But we should continue following the truth we already have. Brothers, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you. Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them, and it makes me cry to tell you about them now. The way they live is leading them to destruction. Instead of serving God, they do whatever their bodies want. They do shameful things, and they are proud of it. They think only about earthly things.

But our homeland is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our humble bodies and make them like his own glorious body. Christ can do this by his power. With that power he is able to rule all things.
Week 1: Relevant Prayer Life

Objectives: Youth will recognize the importance of prayer to every aspect of their lives, particularly when engaging in ministry; they will then commit to the ministry of prayer and thanksgiving for the people, situations and causes God places in their lives and on their hearts.

Prelim:

Read Philippians 1, and take copious notes. Focus on the following questions:

- To whom is Paul writing this letter?
- Why does Paul give thanks to God?
- What is Paul's prayer for the people to whom he is writing?
- According to Paul, whether one's motives are pure or impure, what is most important?
- According to Paul, how should we live our lives?
- We are called to not only believe in Christ Jesus but to do what else?
- Paul repeats a few ideas throughout this section: advancing the Gospel, suffering for Christ, rejoicing in all circumstances. Which of these impacts you the most today, and how?

Read the “Overview” to this week's lesson on the prayer labyrinth. Then, journal any responses or questions you may have.

Overview: The labyrinth in the photo below is located at St. John's Episcopal Church on Madison Avenue in Montgomery, Alabama. It is open to the public day and evening as an open invitation to pray and meditate. So, what is a labyrinth?
A labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool that can be used in many ways. For many, it becomes a walk of prayer while, for others, it represents a pilgrimage (historically to Jerusalem). For some it can symbolize the journey of life and faith, as the person walking the labyrinth has to be open to hearing from God with each step on the labyrinth—and similarly with each step he or she takes throughout his/her lifetime. Whatever the reason, the person walking the labyrinth utters prayers and listens for replies from the Holy Spirit as he or she moves through the labyrinth toward the center and returns to the starting point. Now, a labyrinth differs from a maze in that there is one way toward and from the center of the labyrinth, and as long as one follows the path laid out for him or her, it is not possible to get lost—although one may spend a lengthy amount of time on one or more areas of the paths toward the center. Be that as it may, the point is that when one follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, life becomes easier because the Holy Spirit is our guide and helper as we simply follow the path laid out before us.

Prior to reading the Scriptures or beginning to minister or serve in any capacity, it is imperative that we begin in an attitude of prayer. This week’s lesson will focus on the relevance of prayer as we engage in serving those God calls us to serve.

**Time of Lesson:** 60 Minutes (Adjust the time if needed)

**Materials Needed:** Bible, a box—preferably decorative or cardboard (or small storage box/trunk), finger labyrinth (found after the activity descriptions), slips of paper/sticky notes, pens/pencils, instrumental/meditative music

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Greetings and Opening Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Introduce the concept of the prayer labyrinth; make sure to distinguish between a labyrinth and a maze. Pass to each participant a copy of the labyrinth found in this week's lesson and several slips of paper/sticky notes.</td>
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Give youth time to move through the labyrinth, noting any issues and concerns that emerge that they would like to have covered in prayer.

Have them write down these concerns on slips of paper. You may want to play soft instrumental music during the process.

| 15 minutes | After calling the group together, read Philippians 3. Have youth discuss pertinent ideas of the text. |
| 15 minutes | Then, ask youth to share their thoughts about the labyrinth experience and any prayer concerns that emerged. Explain to youth how important it is that we are shrouded in prayer as we prepare for ministry. Remind them how critical it is that we are led by the Holy Spirit, our helper/counselor who comes alongside us (paraclete). |
| 15 minutes | If youth are willing, have them place the prayer concerns in a box. As the group leader, pray over the concerns. Then have each youth take one to two prayer concerns and commit to praying for those concerns each day for the next week. |
| 10 minutes | Closing remarks and prayer Remind everyone of the Prelim assignment for the following week Ask if anyone has learned the Memory Verses yet; if so, have them recite it and give a small prize. |
**Memory Verses:** Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)

**Closing Prayer:** God of every blessing, I cannot save myself from my sins or break free from my bondages. Work in me so that my life pleases you. Light me up so that I shine brightly in this dark world. Let others be drawn to you because they see your Holy Spirit living inside me. Amen.
Chartres Labyrinth Download from The Labyrinth Society

Week 2: Relevant Possessions

Objectives: Youth will recognize the importance of building an intimate relationship with Christ Jesus; they will also realize the need to value their relationship with Jesus above every other possession and relationship they have.

Prelim:

Read Philippians 2, and take copious notes. Focus on the following questions:

- What kind of status are you trying to grasp?
- What does it look like to turn to Jesus for salvation and continue on that road?
- What kind of lifestyle and priorities does Jesus call us to?
- How do Timothy and Epaphroditus serve as examples for the lifestyle Paul has been exhorting the Philippians toward?
- Sometimes, the Holy Spirit leads us to be more humble in before others. What are some practical ways in which we can humble ourselves in order to look out for the interests of/be servant to others?
**Time of Lesson:** 60 Minutes (Adjust the time if needed)

**Materials Needed:** Bible, a box—preferably decorative or cardboard (or small storage box/trunk), slips of paper/sticky notes, pens/pencils

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Greetings and Opening Prayer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Give each participant a sheet of paper or various slips of paper. Ask them to think about their most valuable possessions, and write down no more than five of those possessions. Have them place the “possessions” in box (this could be a storage box, or replica trunk, or cardboard box). Have youth discuss their valuable possessions and why they treasure them so much. Place the box in a “safe place.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Then, have a participant read Philippians 3. As the Scripture is being read, have someone remove the box prized possessions from its location (This person should have been identified prior to the start of the session and told to get up as if to go to another room, but to quietly take the “prized possessions” as his/her own or destroy them). Once the missing box of possessions is acknowledged, ask participants how they would feel if their treasures were really lost or destroyed. Allow them to discuss their feelings, as well as why they would feel that way. Then ask them if there was ever anything that they truly loved but lost. Point out how sometimes we overly value things that in the grand scheme of things do not really matter. Allow time for discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Read Philippians 3 again, this time focusing on verses 7-11. Have youth discuss the things Paul once considered valuable and how he feels now that he has given up those things for an even greater prize: his relationship with Jesus Christ and all of the power that entails. Challenge students to place less value on their possessions and their accomplishments; instead help them to understand how building a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ should be their goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Closing remarks and prayer</strong></td>
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Remind everyone of the Prelim assignment for the following week
Ask if anyone has learned the Memory Verses yet; if so, have them recite it and give a small prize.

**Memory Verses:** Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)

**Closing Prayer:** God of mercy, everything I once considered valuable, I now count as worthless. I am much better off knowing you. I do not get your approval by following rules but through faith in you. Show me the power that brought you back to life. Amen.
Overview:

One of the things that Paul does in the book of Philippians is to encourage the people to look at examples of people faithful to the ministry. He readily admits that he has not fully attained the goal, but he presses forward.

Read the opening narrative about Kristin, a member of Taylor Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Prichard, Alabama and her teammates in this section. Kristin, like Paul, admits that she and her teammates have not attained their ultimate goal of winning, but daily they work toward the goal by training and conditioning. In what kinds of activities do they engage? They stretch daily. They run daily. They eat properly. Well…on most days they do! They have not given up on the goal they have in mind, even though they did not accomplish it on their first time out. How similar is what they do to what you must do as you engage in ministry and the spreading of the Gospel Message? Write in your journal about your thoughts.

Kristin had been trying for years to play sports. She was really good at cheerleading but no longer wanted to cheer, so she had tried going out for the softball team…twice…but to no avail. Her second attempt, though, was much better than the first. In eighth grade, however, she decided to try out for the track team. She was ecstatic when she made the cut. She practiced hard every day, and her very first time out on the field, she placed first in her sport. She explained how nervous she was that she would not do well, but then she remembered that the Holy Spirit is with her, and she competed well. She stated how excited she was that the following day on campus, “Everybody knew my name.” Although she and her team continued to excel, they fell short of making it to the state competition. At District, the fourth leg of her team dropped the baton and actually delayed in picking it up to continue running the race. Kristin and her teammates were livid, but more than that, they were heartbroken. After the initial shock of losing, they vowed to work even harder next year, and they prayed that things would be better.
Over the summer, Kristin spent her time conditioning by eating properly, working out, and resting well. She is committed to the team, so she is working on herself and encouraging the team members to do the same. She has led them in discussing what they did right last year and what things they need to work on. She and her teammates have in mind making it to state and becoming State Champions, but they understand much work is required to even make it to that level. However, they are committed to doing the work required to make that goal a reality...no matter how long it takes.

**Time:** 60-120 Minutes

**Materials Needed:** Various Bible Translations, Paper and Pens/Pencils, and a cross

This session could begin with lunch or dinner, so the traditional 60 minutes might need to be extended.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this event is to pass out as many award ribbons or certificates as possible for activities and actions youth normally take for granted. Thus, youth should be rewarded for all kinds of menial tasks: smiling, having a great attitude, being the first to arrive, moving quickly, placing their plates/cups in the trash, taking out the trash, leading in the devotions, sharing openly. WHATEVER they do that is positive, they should receive 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place awards. Hopefully, by the end of the session, everyone will have at least one award.

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<th>5 minutes</th>
<th>Greetings &amp; Prayer</th>
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| 10 minutes | Read Philippians 3:1-14. Use at least two versions or at least two different readers. (It helps to hear various voices of the same passage). Questions:  
  ❖ What are Paul's goals?  
  ❖ Do his goals change? How? |
| 15 minutes | **Relay**—Have the youth divided in two or more groups (five persons on a team). At one end of the room (or track field/lawn) have blocks with the words “Born Again,” “Grow,” “Serve,” “Persevere,” and “Goal” written on them. Give each team a baton (or stick); then line the teams up, give the signal to go, and have each member of the team run to the blocks, pick up one, and return to the starting position, handing off the baton to the next player who repeats the action until all blocks are been acquired and set in order. The team who has the blocks stacked properly first wins the round. |
The order should be visible: at the bottom is born again, then grow, then serve, persevere, and goal is on top. (Again, team members should be given prize ribbons or certificates.)

| 5 minutes | Read Philippians 3:1-14. Use at least two versions (It helps to hear various voices of the same passage). Questions:  
|     |   | What are Paul's goals?  
|     |   | Consider Paul's goals and your goals.  
|     |   | How can your goals be better aligned with those that would glorify God? |

| 10 minutes | Closing Remarks and Prayer  
|     | Remind youth that none of the accolades and treasures/prizes of this world matter when we think of eternity. Invite youth to come forward and "willingly" lay down their prize ribbons and certificates before Christ, placing them at the foot of a cross in silent celebration. Then close in prayer.  
|     | Remind everyone of the Prelim assignment for the following week  
|     | Ask if anyone has learned the Memory Verses yet; if so, have them recite it and give a small prize. |

Week 4: Relevant Service

Objectives:

Prelim:

Read Philippians 4, and take copious notes. Focus on the following questions:

- Can you tell of a time when giving was both beneficial to the receiver and the giver?
- How has giving and receiving affected your relationships in the past?
- Paul, in prison, is still rejoicing, and is content in the most trying of circumstances and states of need. What is his secret to contentment?

In all likelihood, we have heard some version of John Wesley's claim that if the church catches fire, people will come from miles around to watch it burn. His meaning? If we operate with the love of Christ, people will be drawn to that love in a remarkable manner. During the Annual Conferences of the Birmingham and Southeast Alabama Regions, Rev. Phoebe Presson, who pastors in the Birmingham Region in Alabama, spoke of her experiences at the 2019 Order of the Flame sponsored by the World Methodist Evangelism Organization. She shared this quote by our beloved Bishop William Henry Miles, the first Bishop of what is now the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. The statement speaks volumes about the level of service and sacrifice that is often required in order that the Gospel is shared and that ministry—true ministry—takes place. Spend time reading the quote several times; then, journal its various implications to your own ministry.
**Time:** 60-120 Minutes

**Overview:** This week's study will prepare youth to engage in a "relevant" service outreach opportunity. Although the session is based on a 60-minute time frame, it is possible for these activities to take place overnight in a lock-in at the local church or even on the church lawn/parking lot.

**Materials needed:** Bible, cardboard boxes, old mattresses, garbage bags, old tires, empty but clean soup/vegetable cans, cans of soup, and packages of crackers, and plastic cups, quarters, bubble gum, and heavy-traffic noises.

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<th>Activity Details</th>
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| 5 minutes| **Greetings and Prayer**  
Read the slide provided about Bishop William Henry Miles. Discuss its various implications to ministry. |
<p>| 5 minutes| <strong>Have a volunteer read Philippians 3:1-14</strong> |
| 5 minutes| <strong>Unfair Handouts</strong>—Have adult leaders pass out quarters or bubble gum to a few youth while the rest watch. Ask: How does it feel to be a “have” or a “have-not?” |
| 5 minutes| <strong>Meal</strong>—Serve the crackers, cold soup in cleaned-out old cans, and warm water in plastic cups. Ask: How would it affect you physically, emotionally, and mentally if this were your regular diet? |
| 10 minutes| <strong>Build-a-Bed</strong>—Have youth create their own “sleeping quarters” for the night by using materials found in your “junkyard,” located in one corner of your meeting room. Remind them that they must sleep in whatever they construct. While they build, ask: If the shelter you’re building were our only home, how would you feel? |
| 5 minutes| <strong>Traffic Noise</strong>—Play the heavy-traffic noise throughout the time they are building their sleeping areas and “sleeping.” |</p>
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<td>5 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Patrol Cops</strong>—Have one or two adult leaders roam around the room while youth are sleeping and beat on their “sleeping quarters.” They should insist youth move their belongings and their sleeping quarters to another location in the room. This should happen several times.</td>
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<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Give youth an opportunity to digest their experience. Then remind them that unfortunately homelessness is a reality for approximately 554,000 Americans each night of the year. Emphasize that this statistic only applies to homeless persons in America! The number is much more alarming world-wide!</td>
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<td>- Ask youth to contemplate how they might minister to this population in their local contexts.</td>
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<td>- Or, have them discuss other causes they might want to champion.</td>
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<td>- Lead them in planning at least one outreach opportunity to take place prior to their arrival in Greensboro, North Carolina in June 2020 for CYYAC2020.</td>
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**Additional Service Opportunity:** Think about someone whose ministry has inspired you, someone who has blessed your life in a magnificent manner. Chances are that person does not know the impact their investment in you has made in your life. Take time to write a letter to that person. In the letter, express your gratitude for how they have blessed your life, for how they have mentored you. Then, in the same letter, encourage them for the way they have poured into your life, as well as the lives of others. This, too, is a way to minister to others!
Memory Verses: Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, you call us to a life of service. Holy Spirit, help me to focus my thoughts on the people and matters you want me to value. Let my service, my giving, my ministry bring relief to people who need it the most. Richly equip me for the ministry to which you have called me. Glory belongs to you! Amen.
April 2020: Essential Service

Overview:

This month’s study focuses on the third letter of P.R.E.S.S.: that is essential service.

You may be wondering what essential service is and how do I apply it into the area of the church in which I currently find myself. First thing, first what is essential? This word is very important, in fact it means important. Essential means something is so important that it is necessary or required. For example, it is essential that we drink water for our bodies since water makes up 60 percent of our bodies. The same notion is applied for us in the church as it relates to service. Our service is needed. Our service is important for the foundation of the church. Our service makes up at least 60% of the church. It is our service that draws others to us. Our service can transform the lives of others.

Therefore, in order to press towards the mark, our service must be essential! In this lesson we will go back and forth between the movie, The Black Panther and the biblical focal text of Philippians 3:1-21. However, our key verses are verses 12-15.

The lessons that follow are designed to help youth in a number of ways:

- Youth will seriously consider it is essential that there is a level of spiritual maturity that we must obtain (Killmonger thinking he should be king)
- Youth will understand that it is essential to be committed to a service (each person knew their role and made sure they functioned fully to provide a service)
- Youth will seriously consider that we don’t become complacent (Wakanda trying to stay hidden; and
- Youth will understand that it is essential to be open to change to create service opportunities that help to promote the Gospel and ultimately glorify God, (Wakanda expanding to other countries)
Introduction:

Despite the subjective element, there is nothing like telling one’s own story to silence what are merely arguments on the other side. This is what Paul is now up to: but it is also more. As verse 15-16 make clear (note the crucial verb *phroneo*, “have this mindset”), he intends his story to be an example for the Philippians to follow, just as he did the story of Christ in 2:5-11. In his case, three crucial matters are being modeled: first, picking up the final clause of verses 3-4a, he sets his former and present life in contrast to what the "evil workers" are trying to achieve (vv. 4b-6[7]); but, second, the middle part (vv. 7-11) reminds us of earlier moments in the letter (especially his "motto" in 1:21 and the story of Christ in 2:6-8), calling us to knowing Christ as our ultimate concern and thus to live cruciform; he concludes, third, by returning to the recurring theme of vigorous pursuit of the final prize (vv. 12-14), which in light of verses 20-21 is an obviously primary concern in this letter as well (see 1:6, 10, 22-23; 2:16).

Thus he tells his (possibly) faltering and (apparently) feuding Philippian sisters and brothers that the future does not lie in embracing the past (vv. 4-6): rather, it lies altogether in knowing Christ now, even as that means knowing "the participation in his sufferings" (vv. 7-11); and such present "knowing" of Christ means that a certain prospect still lies in the future, where also lies the ultimate prize of knowing Christ forever (vv. 12-14).

For many of us, especially those from deeply religious but essentially "observant" backgrounds, this must become our story as well, or the gospel for which Paul eventually gave his life comes to naught. The same is true for the many whose past is not religious but in "the flesh" in the form of every kind of *un*Brightness. And we may not choose the parts of the story we like and leave out the rest. For the surpassing [worth] of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I not only must abandon every attempt to gain an advantage with God on the basis of giftings and achievements. But I must also be prepared to discover anew that truly knowing Christ means simultaneously knowing the power of his resurrection (the part I like) and sharing in his sufferings (the part I like less) so as to be conformed to the likeness of Christ’s own death (2:8) and thus to gain the resurrection. Rejecting His Religious Past (3:4-6) Paul’s encounter with the risen Christ functioned like a divine audit in his life. For all of his hard work to have "credit" with God, Christ turned these "gains" into "losses," so that Paul might have profit of such surpassing worth that the former now looked like dung to him. This opening paragraph in his story illustrates what formerly had worth with a list of seven items, six of which indicate different ways in which he "excelled." He begins with circumcision (not surprisingly, given verses 2-3), then moves on to his membership in the ancient people of God, including his tribal origins: he is a Hebrew of Hebrews, which can be demonstrated in three observable ways, concluding with the declaration "blameless, according to the righteousness found in the law." His B.C. (before Christ) credentials are both noteworthy and impeccable.

Little is new here, except the final assertion of blamelessness as to the law. From a sociological point of view, Paul is reiterating items that indicate "status." But the final two (and very likely, therefore, his being a Pharisee as well) indicate "achievement": so the interest is not simply in what was given to him by birth but in what he himself did so as rightly to be designated a Hebrew of Hebrews. All of this, he will go on, amounts to nothing more than "street filth" in comparison with knowing Christ. The Philippians’ own
future, therefore, does not lie in Paul’s religious past.

Verse 4b basically reiterates the preceding addendum to verse 3. It is at once ironical and theological. Not only can Paul play the Judaizers’ game (v. 4a), but “I can play it better than they can.” His credentials with regard to Jewish identity and observances are impeccable; indeed, in comparison with their grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more. In saying if others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, Paul does not imply that Judaizers were present in Philippi. Rather, this is his way of giving perspective to any in Philippi who, because of present suffering, might be tempted to lean this way—thus his way of warning against Judaizing teaching for their safety (v. 1).

What follows is a catalog of seven items that illustrate the foregoing assertion.

Introduction copied from: https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Phil/Example-Paul

Focal Bible Text: Philippians 3:1–21

New International Version (NIV)

3 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 4 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 5 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 6 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 7 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 9 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 10 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 11 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 12 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained. 17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your
eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh—even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ,[g] the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal;[g] but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved,[h] I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

17 Brothers and sisters,[k] join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of
our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

The Message Bible (MSG)

3 And that’s about it, friends. Be glad in God! I don’t mind repeating what I have written in earlier letters, and I hope you don’t mind hearing it again. Better safe than sorry—so here goes.

2-6 Steer clear of the barking dogs, those religious busybodies, all bark and no bite. All they’re interested in is appearances—knife-happy circumcisers, I call them. The real believers are the ones the Spirit of God leads to work away at this ministry, filling the air with Christ’s praise as we do it. We couldn’t carry this off by our own efforts, and we know it—even though we can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israeliite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God’s law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God’s law Book.

7-9 The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I’m tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I’ve dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn’t want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God’s righteousness.

10-11 I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.

12-14 I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.

15-16 So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet! Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it.

17-19 Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there
taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I’ve warned you of them many times; sadly, I’m having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ’s Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

20-21 But there’s far more to life for us. We’re citizens of high heaven! We’re waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He’ll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.

International Children’s Bible (ICB)

3 My brothers, be full of joy in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it will help you to be more ready. 2 Be careful of those who do evil. They are like dogs. They demand to cut off the body. 3 But we are the ones who are truly circumcised. We worship God through his Spirit. We are proud to be in Christ Jesus. And we do not trust in ourselves or anything we can do. 4 Even if I am able to trust in myself, still I do not. If anyone thinks that he has a reason to trust in himself, he should know that I have greater reason for trusting in myself. 5 I was circumcised eight days after my birth. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrews, and my parents were Hebrews. The law of Moses was very important to me. That is why I became a Pharisee. 6 I was so enthusiastic that I tried to hurt the church. No one could find fault with the way I obeyed the law of Moses. 7 At one time all these things were important to me. But now I think those things are worth nothing because of Christ. 8 Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Christ, I have lost all those things. And now I know that all those things are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ 9 and to belong to him. Now that I belong to Christ, I am right with God and this being right does not come from my following the law. It comes from God through faith. God uses my faith in Christ to make me right with him. 10 All I want is to know Christ and the power of his rising from death. I want to share in Christ’s sufferings and become like him in his death. 11 If I have those things, then I have hope that I myself will be raised from death.

12 I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that. That is the reason Christ made me his. 13 Brothers, I know that I have not yet reached that goal. But there is one thing I always do: I forget the things that are past. I try as hard as I can to reach the goal that is before me. 14 I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize. That prize is mine because God called me through Christ to the life above.
15 All of us who have grown spiritually to be mature should think this way, too. And if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you. 16 But we should continue following the truth we already have. 17 Brothers, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you. 18 Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them, and it makes me cry to tell you about them now. 19 The way they live is leading them to destruction. Instead of serving God, they do whatever their bodies want. They do shameful things, and they are proud of it. They think only about earthly things. 20 But our homeland is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. 21 He will change our humble bodies and make them like his own glorious body. Christ can do this by his power. With that power he is able to rule all things.
Week 1: Spiritual Maturity is Essential

Objectives: Youth will recognize the importance of having spiritual maturity.

Prelim:
Watch the movie Black Panther and take copious notes. Focus on the following questions:

- Who are the main characters in the movie?
- What is the role of each character?
- What do you think maturity is?
- Which character displays signs of maturity?
- Do you see elements of the church in the movie?

Read the "Overview" to this week's lesson on maturity. Afterwards, journal any responses or questions you may have.

The Main Characters

- **The Black Panther** is the royal leader of Wakanda, the richest, most powerful and technologically-advanced nation on earth.

- **The Black Panther, T’Challa** is empowered by the Panther’s spirit. Directed by the ancestors, a modern translation is that the panther is a metaphor of the Holy or Divine spirit of God. T’Challa’s power is not in his suit or the ancient herb that gives him strength, but his connection to the Spirit.

- **Dora Milaje, Okeye** is the royal guard of Wakanda. Women who devote their lives to protect the nation. They use a special martial art to fight as one unit to defeat enemies. According to Wakanda lore, only women have the stamina, IQ, and spiritual sensitivity to reach the highest level of warrior excellence.

- **Nakia** is a War Dog in the movie. It’s her job to spy on the rest of the world and report events back to Wakanda. She’s an extremely capable fighter and she tries to buck from the traditions of Wakanda.

- **Eric Killmonger**, born in Wakanda but raised and influenced by the values of Europe, he is the nemesis of Black Panther, always functioning as an African out of touch with his spirit and his roots.
• **M'Baku** is the leader of a tribe in Wakanda that is none too happy that T’Challa is now on the throne. M’Baku’s tribe is against all the technology in Wakanda and believes that the only way forward is to look toward the past.

• **Zuri** is the keeper of the Heart Shaped Herb, the plant that gives Black Panther his powers. Zuri is a connection to the more spiritual and religious side of Wakanda and serves as a link to T’Challa’s past.

• **W’Kabi** is T’Challa’s best friend and a member of the Border Tribe, one of the most important groups in Wakanda. They protect the Wakanda borders from invaders and keep up the charade that Wakanda is just a poor African nation.

**Overview**

Philippians 2:3, 5-7 “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:” This verse lets us know that humility should be evident in us: willing to be taught, willing to be a servant, willing to put others first, willing to own-it when we’re wrong, etc. This is a sign of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is important because it allow us to be unique and authentic. It tells us to stop trying to be someone else. A great example of this in the movie is how Killmonger, wanted to be the Black Panther instead of just finding his place in the family. It is common for us to hear about what someone else does and then think we need to be like them in order to be acceptable. You have a unique learning style, personality, background, level of understanding, spiritual gifting, etc. What role do you play in serving in the Body of Christ today?
Time of Lesson: 1 and 30 Minutes (Adjust the time if needed)

Materials Needed: Bible, paper, pens/pencils, and the Black Panther movie

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Greetings and Opening Prayer</td>
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<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Introduce the concept of maturity; Define maturity. Have them to define maturity in their own way. Allow youth to share their thoughts. Remind them that it important to have spiritual maturity because it reflects your service to God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>70 minutes</td>
<td>Watch the movie</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Closing remarks and prayer</td>
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Remind everyone of the Prelim assignment for the following week
Ask if anyone has learned the Memory Verses yet; if so, have them recite it and give a small prize.

Memory Verses: Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)

Closing Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your presence with us this day. As we depart from this space now, we ask you to bless us throughout the remainder of the day and guide us safely home. Do not let the learning and conversations of this gathering die, but, instead, may they continue to ruminate within us and bear fruit in our ministries throughout the year, until we find ourselves together again. We ask this in the name of Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.
Week 2: Commitment is Essential

Objectives: Youth will recognize the importance of spiritual maturity and commitment to service.

Prelim:

Go over the questions and overview from the previous week. Read Philippians 3:12-16, and take copious notes. Now go through the overview for this week. Focus mainly on the following questions:

- What kind of lifestyle and priorities does Jesus call us to?
- What are ways we can display Spiritual Maturity?
- Is commitment a Way of Spiritual Maturity?
- Who were committed to service in the movie? What services were they committed to?
- Have we made it to our goal of spiritual maturity?

Overview

Press On in Your Christian Life...Towards the Goal (vs. 12-16)

The Apostle Paul testifies that he presses on in his Christian life “to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (vs.15) “The prize” is defined as “the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, compare with 1 Peter 5:10 [God] has called you to His eternal glory in Christ.”

God’s “eternal glory” is His majestic splendor and blessedness. A glimpse of Christ’s eternal glory was revealed to the disciples at the time of our Lord’s transfiguration: “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (Matt. 17:1-2) Referring to this incident, Luke declares. “Now Peter and they who were with him...saw his glory” (Luke 9:32).

Paul presses on toward the goal, because he has not yet arrived. Hence we must understand that none of us have arrived to the goal; that is why he continued to press on. Scripture defines the Christian life as being a dynamic, progressive experience with Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 "we, the beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from [one degree of] glory to [a greater degree of] glory."

Scripture portrays the Christian life as a race to be run on a journey to be completed: let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2. Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2)

Consider the Apostle Paul’s testimony to young Timothy: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

Conversion and public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not the culmination of the Christian experience, it is the beginning, it is the entrance into the Christian life, and it is the
embarking on the Christian journey. By way of illustration, public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is like gaining entrance to the Freeway that leads to God. It is not the culmination of the journey. Paul presses on toward the goal because he has been claimed by Christ. We all have been claimed by Christ. We have been claimed by Christ. We all have been claimed by Christ, so like Paul we have to press on.

Verse 12: I press on so that I may take hold of that for which also I have been taken hold of by Christ," can be translated: I press on that I may claim the prize, because I have been claimed by Christ Jesus." It is Paul's relationship to Christ and the salvation Christ provides that is the incentive and the power for developing the Christian life and pursuing the goal.

Look at 1 John 3:2-3, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3)

A great illustration of this would be: If you possess a winning lottery ticket, that gives you the incentive to protect that ticket and cash it in—the certainty of its values and your claim to it creates the incentive and diligence.

Paul presses on toward the goal with great sense for urgency. There is strenuous exertion: I press on, "like an Olympic runner going for the gold medal. There is single minded exertion: "I do this one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead. 14. I press on to the goal. "It should be noted that "the things which are behind" is a reference to his triumphs and progresses in the Christian life, not a reference to his failures.

Hebrews 12:14 exhorts the Christian: "Follow after [or pursue] peace with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." Living the Christian life is not an "extra-curricular activity" for super Christians, it is for anyone who would inherit the kingdom of heaven. The Apostle Paul presses on toward the goal and he declares that we must do the same: "All of us who are mature should have this attitude (vs. 15a). All of us, like the Apostle Paul must exhibit the same focus and commitment to developing the Christian life. Paul goes on to write, "if you have any different attitude, God will certainly reveal that to you" (vs. 15b) That is to say, if some part of your life is "off track" and not in accordance with God's purpose, God will let you know about it, and God usually does so by means of the gracious convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

The LORD declares throughout the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, "when you turn aside to the right or to the left, with your ears you will hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21)

Then in the New Testament Jesus declares, "As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19) Paul exhorts us, "let us live in agreement with the level of maturity we have attained" (vs. 16.) Let us maintain the degree of spiritual maturity we have attained, let us not slip back from that level. On the contrary, let us strive to advance yet further and attain an even greater degree of spiritual maturity, we are to stay focused and continue to press on towards the goal.
**Time of Lesson:** 60 Minutes (Adjust the time if needed)

**Materials Needed:** Bible paper, pens/pencils

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<th>5 minutes</th>
<th>Greetings and Opening Prayer</th>
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<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Give each participant a sheet of paper or various slips of paper. Discuss the questions for the week.</td>
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| 15 minutes | Give them the worksheet. Ask them to identify their spiritual goals and commitment on the worksheet. As you discuss the commitment of the Black panther characters |

| 15 minutes | Read Philippians 3 again, this time focusing on verses 12-16. Have youth discuss the following: What should be at the center of their goals and who should they be committed to? Help them to understand how building a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ should be their goal. |

| 5 minutes | Closing remarks and prayer Remind everyone of the Prelim assignment for the following week Ask if anyone has learned the Memory Verses yet; if so, have them recite it and give a small prize. |

**Memory Verses:** Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)

**Closing Prayer:** Father, thank you that you have revealed Your love to us today. We invite You to send us out from here in the power of the Holy Spirit fan into flame the gifts that you have given us, Come reveal Your grace and truth to us each day. For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.
Week 3: Essential Priorities

Prelim:
Read Philippians 3, and take copious notes. Focus on the following questions:

- In Paul’s view, what is the primary hindrance in pursuing and attaining to eternal life? What is the solution?
- Who are you not supposed to be like?
- In the movie The Black Panther, what characters were only worried about themselves and not a greater service?
- In the movie, what characters continued to press on even when things got difficult?
- Are there times and/or situations that may make difficult to keep pressing on? Why?
- What might it mean to press on toward the goal even when others are not?

Overview

Press On in your Christian life. Don’t be like the enemies of the Cross (vs. 17-19).

In verse 17 the apostle urges us to actively imitate his conduct and take special note of those people who are doing so in their lives. “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” Note that it is not the “successful,” nor the influential, nor the wealthy; rather, it is the devout who are singled out for consideration and imitation. Vibrant, sincere, devout Christian are to be singled out for consideration and imitation as role models because there are so many people whose lifestyles identifies them as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (vs. 18.) By their conduct these people demonstrate that they and their lives are directly opposed to and in active opposition against the whole purpose of the cross of Christ. They demonstrate themselves to be “enemies of the cross of Christ,” in contrast to the confession, the attitude and the lifestyle that is the characteristic of the true Christian: “far be it for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14.)

Paul’s testimony is the testimony of every true Christian.

“You adulterous people, do you not realize that friendship with the world is enmity against God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4) Who are these people of whom the apostle writes and whom he identifies as “enemies of the cross of Christ”? The fact that he contrast them with devout Christian people and he weeps over them, seems to indicate that they were present within the church. Scripture teaches that there are people who understand the dynamics of grace, but fail to comprehend and appreciate the purpose of grace.
That is to say, they understand that by the grace of God the cross of Christ has provided the means of forgiveness for sins, but they fail to comprehend that the cross of Christ at the same time provides the means of salvation from sin: “What shall we say, then? Shall we continue sinning so that grace may increase? 2) God forbid. We died to sin; how can we live for it any longer? 3) Do you not realize that all of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Rom. 6:13.)

Paul provides the following character sketch of these whom he identifies as “enemies of the cross of Christ” glory in their shameful conduct, Those things God defines as shameful (vulgar speech and humor, deceit, immorality, etc.), they practice with confidence and even brashness. They are the same as those described by the LORD through the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah: “Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen: they will be brought down when I punish them, declares Jehovah” (Jer. 6:15.) They set their minds on earthly things.” Their outlook and their concerns are like the people of this world oriented on this present life, not focused on the kingdom of God with a transcendent perspective. Their attitude and perspective is totally contrary to that which the Christians is exhorted to exhibit: “So do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or, ‘What will we drink?’ Or, ‘What will we wear?’ 32The (unbelieving Gentiles are preoccupied with all their things, and you heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33But seek first his kingdom and its righteousness, and all these thing will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:31-33).

The Apostle Paul concludes his discussion of such persons by declaring, their “destiny is perdition.” This is in accord with the warning issued by the Lord Jesus Himself: “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? 23Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!” (Matt. 7:21-23)

In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul issued a similar warning: “Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked, for you reap whatever you sows. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh, but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit (Gal. 6:7-8)

We must understand that we can’t be in a place of complacency. We can be hidden in self-seeking to the point that we do harm to others. In everything we do it should be for the glory of God. This is our essential service. Our minds have to be stayed on Jesus and not the things of the world. Reflect on your priorities and goals from the previous lesson.

Who are they helping and who is in the center?

Do you need to revive your priorities or goals? Looking at the cross what can you imagine on the cross?
**Time:** 60-120 Minutes

**Materials Needed:** Various Bible Translations, Paper and Pens/Pencils, and a cross

**Purpose:** The purpose of this week is to affirm the youth of their essential priorities. Some may not know what they are, so just be open and guide them into the right areas. Make sure you are not forcing priorities and goals on them. This is a great way to build relationship and to see where they see themselves in essential service. You can give prizes for sharing.

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<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Greetings &amp; Prayer</td>
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<td>20 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Goal(s) Sharing:</strong> Begin by reading the overview to this week's lesson</td>
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<td>Ask youth to discuss goals and aspirations.</td>
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<td>(Be affirmative/supportive as they share; pass out a prize ribbon or</td>
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<td>certificate to youth as they share—regardless of the number of times</td>
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<td><strong>Questions:</strong></td>
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<td>- Which ones are your priorities?</td>
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<td>- Who are they helping?</td>
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<td>- Are you the only person benefitting from them?</td>
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<td>- Are they smart goals?</td>
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<td>10 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Read Philippians 3:1-14.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Questions:</strong></td>
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<td>- What are Paul’s goals?</td>
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<td>- Do his goals change? How?</td>
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<td>- How are Paul’s goals aligned with God?</td>
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<td>- How can you make sure your goals are aligned with God?</td>
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<td>10 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Closing Remarks and Prayer</strong></td>
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<td>Remind everyone of the Prelim assignment for the following week</td>
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<td>Ask if anyone has learned the Memory Verses yet; if so, have them recite</td>
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<td>it and give a small prize.</td>
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**Memory Verses:** Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. *(Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)*

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, as we leave this place and never your presence, we ask that You will be in our midst. Help us to make decisions that will be pleasing to You. Help us to be able to discuss the matters at hand in a reasonable way, and to be willing to give up having our own way. God let our time together be productive and, as should be the case in all areas of our lives, help us to keep You at the forefront of our minds as we do the work set before us. Amen.
Week 4: Essential Service: Where to Go From Here?

Objectives: Develop a Plan to Move Forward

Prelim:
Read the Overview. Review the Monthly Review Questions. Reflect on the changes that took place at the end of the Movie Black Panther. Now ask yourself:

- Where can you see your church in the movie?
- Where can you see yourself?
- Where do you go from here?
- What’s your part in it all?

Overview
Press On in your Christian life, because you hold citizenship in the Kingdom of God (vs. 20)

We are to carefully consider and imitate the godly life when we see it displayed in others (vs. 17), because as believers in Christ, we hold citizenship in the kingdom of God (vs. 20.)

In other words, those who, like the Apostle Paul, live devout God-centered lives are showing us how we are to conduct ourselves as citizens of God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. The force of the apostle’s words in verse 20a is this: “you presently hold citizenship in the kingdom of God.”

From the moment we believe in Christ we become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven: as Paul assured the Gentile believers who were a part of the church in Ephesus, “you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the family of God” (Eph. 2:19.) Indeed, from the moment we believe in Christ we become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Scripture not only identifies the Christian as a pilgrim journeying to the kingdom of God, it also identifies him or her as presently being a member of a colony of heaven existing in this world. As people who presently hold citizenship in the kingdom of God, we are obliged to conduct our lives in compliance with the laws of that heavenly kingdom even though we are living in this world. We are to stay focused and press on in our Christian life because we hold citizenship in the kingdom of God, and thus are obligated to live by its divine standards, as opposed to the standards that are accepted by the world.
**Time:** 60-120 Minutes

**Overview:** This week’s study will prepare youth to engage in an “essential” service outreach opportunity. Although the session is based on a 60-minute time frame this activity can be made to extend into other areas of ministry

**Materials needed:** Bible, paper, pencil/pens

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Greetings and Prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Read the Overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Discuss what happened and changed at the end of the Black Panther Movie</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Review the Monthly Review Questions</td>
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| 10 minutes | Discuss the Where do we go from here Questions:  
  - Where can you see your church in the movie?  
  - Where can you see yourself?  
  - Where do you go from here?  
  - What’s your part in it all? |
| 25 minutes | Handout the Smart Goals Worksheet and help them to create a simple goal which they can do in the church that can help others or provide an act of service. **Make sure this goal is around what they want to do. Not something you want them to do in the church.** |
| 20 minutes | Give youth an opportunity to digest their experience and discuss their smart goals. Have them to develop one goal they can all work on. |
**Time:** 60-120 Minutes

**Overview:** This week’s study will prepare youth to engage in an “essential” service outreach opportunity. Although the session is based on a 60-minute time frame this activity can be made to extend into other areas of ministry

**Materials needed:** Bible, paper, pencil/pens

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Essential Service Monthly Review

1. What does Paul say he is doing as a Christian? **See Philippians 3:14** (printed below)

_I press on to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus._ (Philippians 3:14)

The apostle Paul testifies that he presses on in his Christian life. He presses on toward the goal for the prize. He defines the prize as "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

2. What is "the high calling of God" of which the apostle speaks in Philippians 3:14? Look at 1 Peter 5:10 (printed below)

..._the God of all grace...has called you to his eternal glory in Christ..._ (1 Peter 5:10)

The apostle Peter writes, "God has called you to his eternal glory in Christ." God's "eternal glory" is His majestic nature and splendor and blessedness. The Lord by His grace has called the Christian to share in His own glory "in Christ." That is to say, by virtue of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ we are made to participate in the glory of God.

3. Why does Paul press on toward this goal (see Philippians 3:12-13 printed below?) What does this tell you about the Christian life?

_It is not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect; rather, I press on so that I may take hold of that for which also I have been taken hold of by Christ._ (13) _Brothers, I do not regard myself as having already taken hold of these things; rather, I do this one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead_ (Philippians 3:12-13)

Paul presses on toward the goal because he has not yet arrived. Scripture defines the Christian life as being a dynamic, progressive experience with Christ (note 2 Corinthians 3:18). Furthermore, Scripture portrays the Christian life as a race to be run or a journey to be completed (Hebrews 12:1-2, 2 Timothy 4:7). Conversion and public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not the culmination of the Christian experience, it is the beginning; it is the entrance into the Christian life, it is the embarking on the Christian journey. The Christian life is a spiritual journey that we undertake by the grace of God and with the assurance that we will arrive at our final God-ordained destination. This is an assurance the apostle expressed at the very outset of this epistle when he wrote of God, "he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).
4. What counsel does the apostle give to the Philippian church (and to all Christians) in verses 17-18 (printed below?)

*Join in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who are walking in accordance with the model you have in us. (18) As I have often told you, and even now tell you with tears, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.* (Philippians 3:17-18)

In verse 17 the apostle urges us to actively imitate his conduct and take special note of those people who are doing so in their lives. Note that it is not the “successful,” nor the influential, nor the wealthy; rather, it is the devout who are singled out for consideration and imitation. Vibrant, sincere, devout Christians are to be singled out for consideration and imitation as role models because there are so many other people whose lifestyle identifies them as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (verse 18). Such people by their conduct demonstrate that they and their lives are directly opposed to and in active opposition against the whole purpose of the cross of Christ (cp. Galatians 6:14; note James 4:4).

5. In verse 18 the apostle Paul speaks of those who “walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Of whom do you think he is speaking? What clues as to their identity are found in verse 18 (printed above under question #4?)

Who are these people of whom the apostle writes and whom he identifies as “enemies of the cross of Christ?” The fact that Paul contrasts them with devout Christian people and that he weeps over them, seems to indicate that they were present within the church. Scripture teaches that there are people who understand the dynamics of grace, but fail to comprehend and appreciate the purpose of grace. That is to say, they understand that by the grace of God the cross of Christ has provided the means of forgiveness for sins; but they fail to comprehend that the cross of Christ at the same time provides the means of salvation from sin (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:1-3).

**Additional Service Opportunity:** Think about someone who has inspired you, someone who has blessed your life in a magnificent manner. Chances are that person does not know the impact their investment in you has made in your life. What whys did they change your life and how can you do the same thing for others?

**Memory Verses:** Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. *(Philippians 3:12-14, NRSV)*

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We thank you that we can live in Your light and walk in Your truth. May the things that you have revealed and thoughts that we have shared dwell in our hearts and stir us to action. We ask all this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.
May 2020: Sincere Service

Overview:

SINCERE, WHOLEHEARTED, HEARTFELT, HEARTY, UNFEIGNED.

The above words are associated with the word sincere. They all point toward a meaning of genuine feeling. SINCERE stresses absence of hypocrisy, feigning, or any falsifying embellishment or exaggeration. WHOLEHEARTED suggests sincerity and earnest devotion without reservation or misgiving. HEARTFELT suggests depth of genuine feeling outwardly expressed. HEARTY suggests honesty, warmth, and exuberance in displaying feeling. UNFEIGNED stresses spontaneity and absence of pretense.

This month’s study focuses on the fourth letter of P.R.E.S.S: Sincere. To be sincere is to be honest, pure and true. It involves being totally absence of pretense. Sincere is to have one’s heart in the service that is rendered. An interesting thing about sincere service is the depth of genuine feeling outwardly expressed. An example of sincere is when one expresses gratitude. Sometimes we can say thank you with no expression. This often means we are not sincere about the gratitude.

The lessons that follow are designed to help youth in a number of ways:

* Youth will come to know a relationship between sincere prayer and sincere service.
* Youth will sincerely consider how sincere service involves sincere generosity.
* Youth will be determined to engage sincerely in service to others because of their love for others.
* Youth will become more engaged in worship as they grasp a deeper meaning of sincere worship.

Introduction:

Paul’s image of the Christian life as a race reminds us that we can never rest on our laurels. Keeping this in focus will cause us to never think we have it all together. It will actually cause us to examine ourselves. This is where sincere service begins. We must continually ask ourselves why am I serving. Am I sincere or honest about this service? Am I serving to earn points toward a scholarship or to brag to others about what I am doing?
Paul describes the goal of the Christian as “knowing Christ” or sharing his mind (3:8, 10). The pattern of the gospel must be stamped upon all who call “Christ” “Lord.” Christ himself is the blueprint for Christian behavior, but the apostle, modeling himself on Christ, becomes in turn the pattern for the Philippians, because they know him (3:17).

When Paul declares that “Christ Jesus has made me his own,” he describes a task that is both a privilege and a responsibility. Teresa of Avila expressed this task well when she said, “Christ has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which his is to go about doing good (sincere service). Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.” Not only is it a privilege it is our responsibility to serve others sincerely.
Running toward the Goal

12 I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. 13 My friends, I don’t feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. 14 I run toward the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to heaven. This is the prize that God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done. 15 All of us who are mature should think in this same way. And if any of you think differently, God will make it clear to you. 16 But we must keep going in the direction that we are now headed.

17 My friends, I want you to follow my example and learn from others who closely follow the example we set for you. 18 I often warned you that many people are living as enemies of the cross of Christ. And now with tears in my eyes, I warn you again 19 that they are headed for hell! They worship their stomachs and brag about the disgusting things they do. All they can think about are the things of this world.

20 But we are citizens of heaven and are eagerly waiting for our Savior to come from there. Our Lord Jesus Christ 21 has power over everything, and he will make these poor bodies of ours like his own glorious body.

4 Dear friends, I love you and long to see you. Please keep on being faithful to the Lord. You are my pride and joy.

Contemporary English Version (CEV)
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Philippians 3:12-4:1 International Children’s Bible (ICB)

Continuing Toward Our Goal

12 I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that. That is the reason Christ made me his. 13 Brothers, I know that I have not yet reached that goal. But there is one thing I always do: I forget
the things that are past. I try as hard as I can to reach the goal that is before me. 14 I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize. That prize is mine because God called me through Christ to the life above.

15 All of us who have grown spiritually to be mature should think this way, too. And if there are things you do not agree with, God will make them clear to you. 16 But we should continue following the truth we already have.

17 Brothers, all of you should try to follow my example and to copy those who live the way we showed you. 18 Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them, and it makes me cry to tell you about them now. 19 The way they live is leading them to destruction. Instead of serving God, they do whatever their bodies want. They do shameful things, and they are proud of it. They think only about earthly things. 20 But our homeland is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. 21 He will change our humble bodies and make them like his own glorious body. Christ can do this by his power. With that power he is able to rule all things.

What the Christians Are to Do

4 My dear brothers, I love you and want to see you. You bring me joy and make me proud of you. Continue following the Lord as I have told you.

International Children's Bible (ICB)


Focused on the Goal

12-14 I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

15-16 So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.
17-19 Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

Philippians 3:12-4:1 The Message (MSG)

Biblical texts copied from www.biblegateway.com
Week 1: Sincere Prayer

A sincere prayer is one that is truthful and genuine. A part of John Bunyan’s well-respected definition of prayer is that “prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ …”

At first glance this may seem easy. But if we were to examine our prayers, I bet we would find that we aren’t always “pouring out our hearts”. Instead we hold back, beat around the bush, withheld some truth, are a bit vague and lack passion.

We need to remember that God knows our life, our circumstances, our desires and our failings far more deeply than we even know them ourselves. Nothing comes as a surprise to God. Pouring out our hearts to the Lord is freeing. It means we confess our sins and shortcomings without excuses, without beating around the bush and without prevarication. It means we honestly tell God what we are thinking and feeling and what our heart’s desires are. This will often lead to our prayers being more detailed. And sometimes it can result in tears of shame or pain as well as songs of praise.

Sincere prayers have a way of drawing us close to our Lord, where He lifts our burdens from our shoulders and covers us with a cloak of comfort.

Looking to Jesus

Without a doubt, prayer is the only means that God has established to change lives, families, nations, and continents. It is very normal in some families for the father figure to represent the provider or the figure of authority. The members of the family communicate their needs and have expectations that the father will take care of. Something similar happens in prayer. Many times we relate to God as our figure of authority figure and we see God as our provider who just dispenses things to us. That is why we believe that we should pray to God when we have a need. However, the life of prayer is much more about the way we relate to God, and true success comes from cultivating an intimate and permanent friendship with God.

The question is, “How do we reach the Father? How do we get close to Him?” Thank God for Jesus Christ; He is the only one who can bridge our hearts to the Heavenly Father. “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life,” (1 John 5:12). We need to have the Son of God in our heart. The life of prayer is very important for each one of us, and it requires that we have a quiet place to spend uninterrupted time alone with God on a daily basis. Sometimes, I’ve just wanted to say a short prayer in order to calm my thoughts down, yet I have had to realize that this doesn’t really work. Instead, we need to take time to enter the presence of God, where we can see all the worry and anxiety disappear, as we surrender our lives to Him.
Prayer activates the angels of God to act in our favor. When Peter was in jail, he could see how an angel from the Lord freed him, (Acts 12:7). The angels really do act through prayer. True changes are experienced in the intimate moments of prayer, when you tell Jesus, “Lord, I need You. I want to be with You. I need Your guidance, Your help, and Your answer.” Many times we feel rage, resentment, and pain for some situation and we want to retaliate, but it is when we are in prayer that the Lord changes our resentment into forgiveness and our hatred into love. The Holy Spirit takes control of our emotions and gives us the victory over them.

The Psalmist said, “In You, LORD my God, I put my trust. I trust in You; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me,” (Psalm 25:1-2). Sometimes, we are afraid of failure but then after a time of prayer something happens inside of us. We start to be filled with security, authority and confidence because, in prayer, we are clothed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and faith comes and takes us on to defeat every obstacle that presents itself.

**SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

I had just begun my life as a Christian when one night I found myself praying in my room. The place was dark. I generally approached God with fear, because in my mind, I had the concept that the Heavenly Father was a very austere person. I imagined God sitting on a throne with a whip in God’s hand, ready to punish me for doing something wrong. Suddenly, I heard a voice that told me, “Who told you that God was like that? Don’t you know that God has God’s arms extended so that you can surrender to God?” Immediately, in an act of faith, I threw myself into the arms of God. Since then a deep assurance came to my life, and all of my emotional voids due to the lack of the love from my earthly father were supplied in full by God.

**TODAY’S DECLARATION**

“All the emptiness that was in my heart was filled by my Father God, and now I enjoy God’s blessing.”

The above is an excerpt from Pastor Cesar Castellanos’ book, Declarations of Power for 365 Days of the Year: Volume Three.
Lesson Plan 1—Sincere Prayer

Begin the lesson with a prayer of intercession for the students.

5 minutes  Read or summarize the narrative about prayer found at the beginning of this lesson.

10 minutes  Help students memorize John Bunyan’s definition of prayer.

10 minutes  Ask students to write or type in their tablets or phones words that they can say about God.

10 minutes  Ask students to shout out their words for God as you or a Designee record the words on a board.

10 minutes  Using the words on the board guide the students in writing a prayer.

15 minutes  Lead the students in a discussion about what prayer can do in helping to go forward with sincere prayer.
Week 2 Sincere Generosity

Ways to live a more generous, sincere life.

“Generosity is doing something for someone else expecting nothing in return. Show up to give, not to get.”
-Simon Sinek

All of life is a lesson in relationship building, whether we realize it or not. At the airport, the grocery store, on our way home in traffic, we are presented with opportunities to be generous to others. The unfortunate part is that not everyone sees it that way. Some people honk their horn behind you when the light turns green, let the door slam shut in your face as you walk through with an armful of groceries, or cut in front of you in the line at the movie theatre. Eventually, we all encounter people who are the opposite of generous.

When this happens, a feeling of justice starts to well up inside of us and we want to get even. We want to give them a piece of our minds. We want them to apologize for how they are acting. But the best thing to do in these situations is the unlikeliest thing: we must be generous, even when other people don’t deserve it, and here’s why:

The reason you give to others is not so that they will give back to you. That represents sincere generosity.

But it’s human nature to expect this, so when the recipients of our generosity don’t reciprocate with a thankful heart, we get upset. But we forget how the first tenant of generosity is to give with no strings attached. When we do this, it releases us from the burden of expecting that we will also receive something back. It also helps check our motivations to ensure we are giving with a sincere heart, one that’s free of demands. A gift isn’t really a gift when it’s got a mile-long list of requirements attached to it. The same goes for our giving. It has to be done with an open hand. Once we open our hands, we loosen our grip on what we desire, which is really to be appreciated.

Being generous in the face of ungratefulness produces patience.

This is a tough one, and I’m sure it brings to mind times when you offered something to someone in the spirit of generosity and they weren’t thankful for it. This can be infuriating! But someone who can tolerate being wronged without taking offense is a patient person. And a patient person is also a generous person, because they are not easily angered or quick to take back a gift they’ve offered someone. A patient person understands that other people’s actions do not determine how or when they give. It is done purely because it’s the right thing to do. Impatient people are highly concerned with the outcome, and if it’s not one that satisfies them, they become angry and defensive. But remember what Simon Sinek says: The reason you give to others is not so that they will look after you.
Generosity is not an act we do to gain, but to give away.

The act of giving should release us from the burden of expectations if it is done with a sincere heart. As soon as we attach an expectation to our gifts, they thwart the purpose of generosity which is to be selfless. Being selfless is not easy because it requires us to be humble. But it’s only when we are humble that we are able to truly give.

Humility produces patience, and patience produces generosity.

There are many more things we can be generous with than just our money. Think about your time. How can you commit 1-2 hours a week helping someone else or giving sincere service? Maybe your mom’s yard needs mowed and it’s as simple as taking a Saturday afternoon to do it. Maybe your neighbor’s kid’s ball needs air, or the flowerpots on your front steps need watering. Being generous with our time can seem even more difficult than giving away our money, but these are the types of opportunities that will shape us into generous people.

How can we start today by being more generous?

It might just be listening to the needs of people around you, or joining in with your church or non-profit that serves in your area.

One thing is for certain, generosity requires being intentional with our time, our money and relationships.

Being generous can and will shape us into better leaders who anticipate the needs of others and provide resourceful solutions through our sincere service. That’s the kind of person we all should strive to be!
Lesson Plan 2  Sincere Generosity

Begin the lesson with an intercessory prayer for the students.

5 minutes  Summarize or Read the Week 2 narrative found above

20 minutes  Ask students to respond to each of the underlined statements in the narrative.

5 minutes  Ask each student to write or type on their electronic device how their registration, hotel, travel and food is being paid, or for those not attending the conference, when their expenses are taken care of when on vacation or other outing.

10 minutes  Record the answers on a large board as students shout out their answers.

10 minutes  Ask students to discuss how can they show generosity for CYVAC20 (point them to the service project). Or for some other Church sponsored event.

10 minutes  Wrap up this session by repeating the five underlined statements and connecting them to sincere service
Week 3 Sincere Love

How to Show Sincere Love to Others:

These 3 exercises taken from the Shadow Work Journal can be performed in only a matter of minutes, sometimes even seconds. They're not a lot to ask from us, and don't take anything away from the tight schedules of daily life. Just imagine the feelings of sincere love you will transmit to those you care for, and how appreciated and nurtured they will feel as a result. What gift of sincere service can be better than that?

1. **Look deeply into the eyes of others.**

   This exercise is profoundly powerful and is perfect for causing an immediate sense of connection between you and another person. Doing this invigorates and deepens the bond we have with others.

   Some cultures refer to this practice as "soul gazing", as the eyes are the most expressive and arguably the most intimate areas of the body. Try setting aside some time to look silently and softly into the eyes of others. Don't be surprised if powerful feelings overcome you, or if you suddenly feel the unreality of your life become a reality. This will demand for us to be sincere Soul gazing is the perfect way to say "I see you; I understand you; I appreciate you; I love you". Studies show that people who lack continuous eye contact find themselves often displaying dysfunctional behaviors, such as hostility, aggression, irritability and general boredom toward each other. Imagine how disconnected you would feel from someone if you never made eye contact! What would happen if more youth would make eye contact with other youth on a continuous basis? What would happen with the anger, aggression, irritability and boredom?

2. **Do something unasked for:**

   No one likes to feel like a beggar constantly asking and nagging for things to be done. When we do kind things that we were never asked to do, we make others feel like Kings and Queens or Princes and Princesses. We show the people we love consideration, respect and appreciation when we open ourselves to sincerely serve them.

   How often have you done something unexpected for someone, given an unexpected gift, or simply offered to run an errand for another person? Loving people expects nothing in return, but receives joyous feelings in return for making another person's life richer and more enjoyable.

3. **Discover something new about people often**

   This may seem difficult at first, but just remember that each day we are all evolving. Each day our bodies become just a little bit older, each day we see just a little bit more and experience a little bit more. The (you) yesterday isn't in truth the (you) of today.

   The beauty of life is its growth, its evolution, and its transformation. Take the time to see others and observe them. We do this many times, often unconsciously during the day. Have you noticed anything new lately about someone you have known a long time?
Lesson Plan 3

Begin the session praying for the students, specifically regarding relationships.

5 minutes Summarize or read the narrative for Week 3.

15 minutes Ask students to find someone in the class who might not be a close friend. Ask the students to look each other in the eyes. Try to be sincere and not laugh. Ask the student to pay attention. Ask students to respond:
   How did you feel looking at the person in the eye?
   Were you comfortable or uncomfortable?

15 minutes Ask students: "What did you learn by looking the person in the eye?"

10 minutes Brainstorm as a group: ask students to name some things they might do that no one asked them to do, but would be helpful to another person in their church. Record the responses on the board, large sheet of paper or the screen, if using an LCD projector.

10 minutes Have students to form groups of 3 and just start talking about Whatever comes to their mind? Encourage each person in the Triad to participate

10 minutes Ask the students to write down one or two new things they learned from their triad partners.

10 minutes Wrap Up: Review the three exercise and emphasize sincere Service evolves out of love for others.
Week 4 Sincere Worship

What are our roles in corporate worship or worship in the congregation? First, we must recognize that God is the audience. I have used the word audience, but it is inadequate. When we think of audience we think of someone who is hearing. Well, I want to say God is hearing, but God is receiving our response to God. To me this means we who are responding might want to give our best.

If we are not the audience, as I was referred to in church recently, who are we? We are the participants. We are involved in liturgy, the work or acts of the people. We are the responders. We are the actors, not the ones receiving an act. I will address this more in chapter five.

There are people we call worship leaders who are part of the prompters for the participants to participate. These leaders are liturgists because they lead in the liturgy. They are not emcees or Master/Mistress of Ceremonies. The primary responsibility is to lead people in participating in the liturgy. Liturgists are not cheerleaders, but prompters. When the liturgy is printed, the liturgist's role is not to announce what is written, but to lead people in ways that they actively participate. We want to remember that we want people to focus on the audience, God, and not on us.

There are two approaches to worship. One is functional and one is theological. More than half of my life worship for me was functional. Sadly, most worship services I attend today are functional. I delineate the differences in the two approaches. I again go back to my Master of Divinity days. This time I reflect upon the Worship and Preaching Practicum class taught by Dr. Mary Lin Hudson. The word that stuck to me and in me was “theocentric.” This means God centered.

Approaching worship as functional means using liturgy that works. Oftentimes it is liturgy that is used over and over again with minor changes. Functional worship might be seen where songs are chosen based on what we feel comfortable singing. This is particularly true in choosing hymns to sing. Moreover, it is choosing songs we like to sing or have heard somewhere and they appeal to us. Other aspects of functional worship include liturgy designed to invoke or prompt a desired response like handclapping.

On the other hand, approaching worship theologically attempts to use the senses to embody and communicate a Faith (e.g. “the lighted candles where we communicate that Jesus is the light of the world.”) Furthermore, this type of worship has symbolic activities that speak for themselves while pointing beyond themselves (e.g. tithes/offering and altar prayer as a response to the preached word). At every point in worship we are asking ourselves “what are we saying as it relates to God?”
Lesson Plan 4

Begin the session with prayer.

5 minutes Ask students to discuss a time in church when something funny happened during worship, and a lot of people were distracted.

5 minutes Ask students to shout out things that most commonly distract them when they worship, such as, thinking about the upcoming week or watching other people or the use of the phone.

5 minutes Acknowledge staying focused is tough for adults as well. Explore some possible ways to stay focused (praying, resisting the phone)

5 minutes Summarize or read the narrative above for Week 4.

15 minutes Provide copies of the worship outline for your congregation. Help students to determine what is functional and what is theological.

15 minutes Provide students a scripture of your choosing and ask them to work in triads to talk about the meaning of the scripture

15 minutes Conclude with engaging the students in a discussion of the importance of worship (refer to “It is All About Discipleship” from the Department of Christian Education and Formation)
CONCLUSION

We pray that this study has been helpful as you engage youth and young adults in Christian Education and Formation that makes them thirsty for more about Jesus. As you help youth discover more about discipleship and grow in their faith, we pray that you as leaders, teachers, directors, and mentors have gained something as well that impacts your discipleship journey.

The Department of Christian Education and Formation’s mission is to “Create Events that form and Transform.” We pray that this study is one of many resources that accomplishes our mission.

As you prepare youth and young adults for the 2020 Connectional Youth and Young Adult Conference we pray that you will experience God’s abundant as you fulfill Jesus’ to make disciples.

There are additional resources that have been produced for the Conference. Please avail yourselves to them. You may contact the Department of Christian Education and Formation if you need assistance in obtaining them. They are available on our website or the CME website. Additional information is available through social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram).

In the month of February youth will have the opportunity to select their classes for the conference. Please stay tuned to announcements and updates. The CYYAC20 Resource Guide and CYYAC 20 Newsletters contain vital information for those planning to attend the Conference. A Youth Leaders Ministry Guide is also available at no cost along with the Chaperone’s Handbook. Please contact your Episcopal District Director of Christian Education if you have not received this letter or send an email to carmichaelcrutchfield@thecmechurchced.org.

Finally, we encourage you to engage your youth and young adults to P.R.E.S.S. On in their service to God by engaging them in a Passionate, Relevant, Essential, Sincere, Service project during the month of June. A list of service opportunities is included in the CYYAC20 Resource Guide Appendices. We encourage all local churches to participate and engage in the CYYAC20 One Year Long Service Project.

P.R.E.S.S. ON,

The Curriculum Committee
One Year-Long Service Project

In preparation for the CYYAC20 Together We Rise Service Project, the design team has selected to focus our efforts this conference year on FOSTER CARE Education and Projects. Each local church, district, and/or region is asked to conduct at least 1 major and 1 minor project. Document your activities and submit a report/article to the Department of Christian Education. You never know if your project will make it to the “big stage”\textsuperscript{.} We also ask for your assistance with the CYYAC20 Together We Rise Service Project. More details listed below.

Foster Care Education

- May is Foster Care Awareness Month
- November is National Adoption Month
- Foster Care Education Sunday
- Foster Care Recruitment Sunday
- Mentoring opportunities
- Volunteer
- Jobs

Foster Care Project Ideas

- School uniform vouchers
- Drop off gift cards for their birthday
- Prom dress/suit giveaway
- Presents during Christmas
- Prepare care packages

Foster Care Project Ideas (continued)

- Project Linus
- Cuddle kits - blanket, pillow & flashlights
- Pillowcase bags – sew kid-friendly pillowcases and add a drawstring or strap
- Infant care items – diapers, wipes, formula, bottles
- Emergency kits – Pajamas & toothbrushes
- College Dorm Prep Kits
- Birthday boxes
- Collect money for the CYYAC Together We Rise Service Project

*Since 2013, the number of children in US Foster Care continues to rise. As of September 30, 2017, there were 442,995 children in foster care - a 1.5 percent increase from 2016 and a 9.6 percent increase from 2013. When foster children move from home to home, they are usually given two trash bags to carry their belongings in. They deserve better than that. The Connectional Youth & Young Adult Conference is partnering with Together We Rise, a non-profit organization helping children in foster care. During CYYAC20, we’ll be decorating Sweet Cases, stuffing Teen Duffle bags, building bikes and skateboards to be donated to foster children in North Carolina.

Goal

$20,000

How can you help?

We’re asking youth & young adults across the denomination to help us raise funds to purchase the supplies we’ll need to stuff duffle bags and build bikes and skateboards. Our fundraising campaign will run from January through April 15, 2020. More details will be available in the CYYAC Pre-Conference Resource Guide.

To learn more about, visit www.togetherwerise.org/fundraise/CYYAC20