

MoSaic God with us

SAMPLE



ILLUSTRATED LETTERS

Learn about following Jesus from Paul's letters to young churches

BIBLE BACKGROUND FOR YOU

We look at three New Testament letters, written to deal with specific situations.

In Philippians Paul encourages the church to keep following Jesus. But serving Jesus can be costly, as Epaphroditus found. Yet even in his illness God still cared for him and looked after him. Paul expects the church to care for him as well – how well do we care for those who suffer?

Following Jesus requires change, which is why Paul encourages Philemon to take Onesimus back as a brother in Christ and forgive him: a massive challenge. How far are we ready to accept those who come from a different background or forgive those who have wronged us?

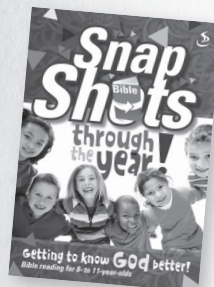
Paul encourages Timothy by reminding him of the truth of Jesus as we find it in the Bible, and the way in which it inspires, encourages, challenges and changes us. What are we doing to inspire the children in our groups to develop a passionate love for the Bible?

For your small group with a wide age range

We use Paul's letters to look at how God lives in his people, showing them goodness and mercy. Our older children will see that our relationships and outlook are very different from those who don't know God. Encourage younger children, who won't yet have this perspective, to feel they belong – this is so important to their understanding that they matter to God. Give scope for older children to realise that they can put what they are learning into action. In your group time, for instance, they can show care and acceptance for others who need their help and understanding.

Resources for ministry

The Bible is a key focus of this series. Get your 8–11s reading the Bible regularly with *Snapshots through the Year*. It encourages children to read and understand the Bible, with notes and activities in a yearbook/annual format with enough readings for every day of the year. Go to www.scriptureunion.org.uk/shop for resources for other age groups.



Highlights from *LightLive*

Go to the 'Search *LightLive*' tab at www.lightlive.org and enter this session's Bible reference to find:

- 'Bible story picture': a regular activity for 2–7s
- 'Audio Bible story': a regular mp3 download for 3–7s
- 'Learn and remember': a PowerPoint of a Bible verse to learn, for 5–11s (see also page 28)
- 'Presentation': an activity with animation for 11–14s



SERIES 1 ILLUSTRATED LETTERS

SESSION 1

No place like home



Bible:

Philippians 2:25-30

Aim: To see that when God lives with his people they take care of each other.

CORE PROGRAMME

For 3-14s

Bible story in a letter

20 minutes

Why: to see that when God lives with his people they take care of each other

With: a copy of the scroll (page 10), clue cards (page 11), a simple costume for a first-century Christian, *SU Bible Timeline* (all optional)

1 Prepare

In advance, copy the letter on page 11 and make it into a 'scroll', rolled up and if possible sealed with wax – it could also be made to look old by painting it pale brown or dipping it into cold tea.

2 Talk about letters

Find out from the group how they communicate with other people (for example, phone, email, text message). Challenge the children to find the entry for 'Paul's letters' on the *Bible Timeline*. Encourage them to imagine how Paul would

have sent his letters. Explain that, in biblical times, if someone wanted to send a letter they would write it on papyrus using a quill (feather) and then find someone they trusted to deliver it for them – they couldn't just put it in a post-box! Show the rolled-up scroll (if you have it) and ask how it differs from letters today (no envelope or stamp, but sealed with wax).

3 Listen to the letter

Dress in your costume, if you have one. Tell the children that you are one of the first Christians and that you live in Philippi. Explain that your church is very excited because you have received a letter from Paul, who was the first to tell you about Jesus. Open the letter and use the words to summarise Paul's letter to the Philippians and to tell the story of Epaphroditus. Remember to look at the children when explaining things, but to look down at the letter when reading. When you have finished, roll up the scroll and remove your costume.

4 JOY

Write the letters 'J O Y' on a sheet of paper and ask the children what it says. Explain that, although Paul was in a horrible situation, his letter to the Philippians told them how happy he was and that they should be joyful, too. If you have Bibles, help the children look up and read

Philippians 1:4; 2:29; 3:1; 4:4,10. Say that 'joy' is certainly a theme for Paul!

Explain that Christians sometimes say that if you want to have real joy then you need to learn to put Jesus first, Others second and Yourself last.

Invite the children to say how they think Paul, the Philippians and Epaphroditus put Jesus first, others second and themselves last. For example, Paul and Epaphroditus put Jesus first by telling others about him; the Philippians put others before themselves by collecting money for Paul; Epaphroditus put himself last when he took the money to Paul and then worked so hard that he nearly died. You could use the cards numbered 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 from page 11 as clues for this.

5 Challenge

Challenge the children to say whether they would want to put Jesus first, others next and themselves last in their daily lives. Perhaps you could display the sheet of paper and invite the children to write their names on it if they want to follow Jesus and put him first, others second and themselves last. However, it might be best to let them do this after the session, so they make their own decision and do not simply follow their peers.

Bible story in a letter scroll

From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's people in Philippi.

Listen to this – Paul says that he prays for us with joy and thanks God for us because we have helped him in his work of telling others! Oh, but poor Paul, he's written to us from prison. The authorities don't like him telling others about Jesus and often have him arrested. This time they've taken him to Rome, and have put him under house arrest. That means that he can't leave the house and has people guarding him all the time – but at least he's allowed visitors.

Hey... he says here that, even though he's in prison, God is using it for good! How can being in prison be good? Oh, I see... most of the people visiting him are Christians and they spend their time talking about Jesus. He says that even the soldiers who are guarding him know about Jesus now – and not only that, the other Christians are leaving Paul and then telling people about Jesus with a lot more confidence. So the message is continuing to spread – hallelujah!

You know, because Paul was in prison we had a collection to get some money so he could buy food and things. Epaphroditus, one of

the other Christians, took it to him and Paul says that everything arrived safely. I am pleased. It must have been a terrible journey for Epaphroditus – it's nearly 1,200 miles from Philippi to Rome, you know!

We've been so worried about Epaphroditus – he stayed on in Rome to help Paul, but then we heard that he was desperately ill. He had worked so hard telling others about Jesus and helping Paul that it took it out of him. Paul says that he nearly died! But now he's better, Paul has sent him back to us. One of the others saw him and said he's looking a lot thinner than he used to – but seems well nonetheless. He's the one who brought the letter from Paul to us.

Oh, it is so good to know that Paul and Timothy are all right. And Paul encourages us to keep running the Christian race because our reward will be with God in heaven. He says we should rejoice because good things are happening.

I haven't got time to read the rest of the letter now – I'll keep it for later. I'm so pleased to have it.

Clue cards

Cut out the cards. Number them on the back, and put each one face down in the correct order, with number 1 on the top.



| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <div>1</div> <div>Paul tells the Jews in Philippi about Jesus.</div> |
| <div>2</div> <div>Paul is arrested in Jerusalem because he will not stop preaching.</div> | <div>3</div> <div>Paul is sent to Rome where he is put under ‘house arrest’.</div> |
| <div>4</div> <div>The Philippians decide to have a collection to raise money to help Paul.</div> | <div>5</div> <div>Epaphroditus is chosen to take the money to Paul in Rome.</div> |
| <div>6</div> <div>Epaphroditus travels 1,200 miles to Rome.</div> | <div>7</div> <div>After giving Paul the money, Epaphroditus stays on to help Paul.</div> |
| <div>8</div> <div>Epaphroditus works so hard that he becomes ill and nearly dies.</div> | <div>9</div> <div>Paul writes to the believers in Philippi to encourage them in their faith.</div> |
| <div>10</div> <div>Epaphroditus recovers and Paul decides he should return home.</div> | <div>11</div> <div>Paul writes to the church in Philippi and tells them to keep on going as Christians.</div> |

CORE PROGRAMME CONTINUED

Circle prayers

5 minutes

Why: to thank God for each other

- 1 Recap the Bible story, emphasising who cared for whom and why. (Who did Paul care for? Who did Epaphroditus care for? Who did the church care for?)
- 2 Sit in a circle. Remind the children that you have been thinking about God's friends taking care of each other. Ask each person, in turn, to thank God for the person on their right.
- 3 Encourage the rest of the group to say 'Amen' after each prayer, as a sign that they agree with what has been prayed.

Ball of wool

10 minutes

Why: to see that God lives with his people and that they take care of each other

With: a ball of wool or string

- 1 Invite the children to stand in a circle facing inwards. Briefly, review the ways in which the different people in the Bible story cared for each other.
- 2 Begin by holding the end of the wool and throwing the ball across the circle, so that it unravels as it goes. Say, 'God lives with (name of person you are throwing to).'
- 3 Encourage the person who catches the wool to hold on to the strand and throw the ball to someone else, saying, 'God lives with [name]'. You could do this two or three times.
- 4 Now you have a 'spider's web' of wool, say, 'God's people care for each other by...' (Invite volunteers to finish the sentence.)

Active game

5 - 10 minutes

Why: to think about how people travelled to different countries

- 1 Play a version of 'Port and Starboard', with the following actions:
 - Port – run to the left side of the room
 - Starboard – run to the right side of the room
 - Captain's coming – salute
 - Sail for Philippi – point to a corner of the room
 - Storm coming – sway from side to side
 - Man overboard! – hold nose and pretend to go under water
 - Land ahoy! – shade eyes and look ahead
 - Row to shore – make rowing actions

2 Say that today's Bible passage is about Paul's journey to take the good news to people in other countries who had not heard of Jesus.

EXTENSION IDEAS

Activities for younger children

Memory game

5 - 10 minutes

Why: to remember how people care for us

- 1 Ask everyone to sit in a circle, facing inwards.
- 2 Explain that you are going to play a memory game. Invite the first child to complete the sentence 'People care for me by...' (for example, playing with me or giving me presents). Encourage the second child to repeat that sentence and add their own ending, and so on.
- 3 The game gradually gets more difficult, so start with the younger children and finish with the leaders! You could have a second round, remembering people who care for us.

Bible story picture

Why: to experience God's loving care

With: a copy of page 14 (also available from *LightLive*) printed on A4 paper for each child, art and craft materials

- 1 Beforehand, prepare a named envelope for each child and put the Bible story picture inside. (Do not seal the envelopes.)
- 2 'Deliver' the envelopes to the children and let them take out the picture. Explain what the picture is about and how Paul wrote a letter about Epaphroditus.
- 3 When the children have finished their pictures, ask them to put them back in the envelopes for next time.

For older children

Sending postcards

5 - 10 minutes

Why: to encourage friends or church members

With: blank postcards, stamps (optional)

- 1 Give each child a blank postcard. Invite them to think of someone in the church they would like to give it to (encourage them to remember people they may not have much contact with, such as whoever cleans the church or arranges the flowers). Challenge them to decide what they could say to that person to help or encourage them.
- 2 Remind the children of the things that Paul said to the people in Philippi when he wrote to them – check out Philippians 1:2; Philippians 1:3,4; Philippians 1:8; Philippians 1:12,13.
- 3 Allow time for the children to write their cards. (They could copy out one of the Bible verses just mentioned.)
- 4 Encourage the children to give the postcards to the people concerned, or put stamps on them, address them and post them!

THE LEARN AND REMEMBER VERSE

**‘My grace is all you need,
for my power is greatest
when you are weak.’**

2 Corinthians 12:9

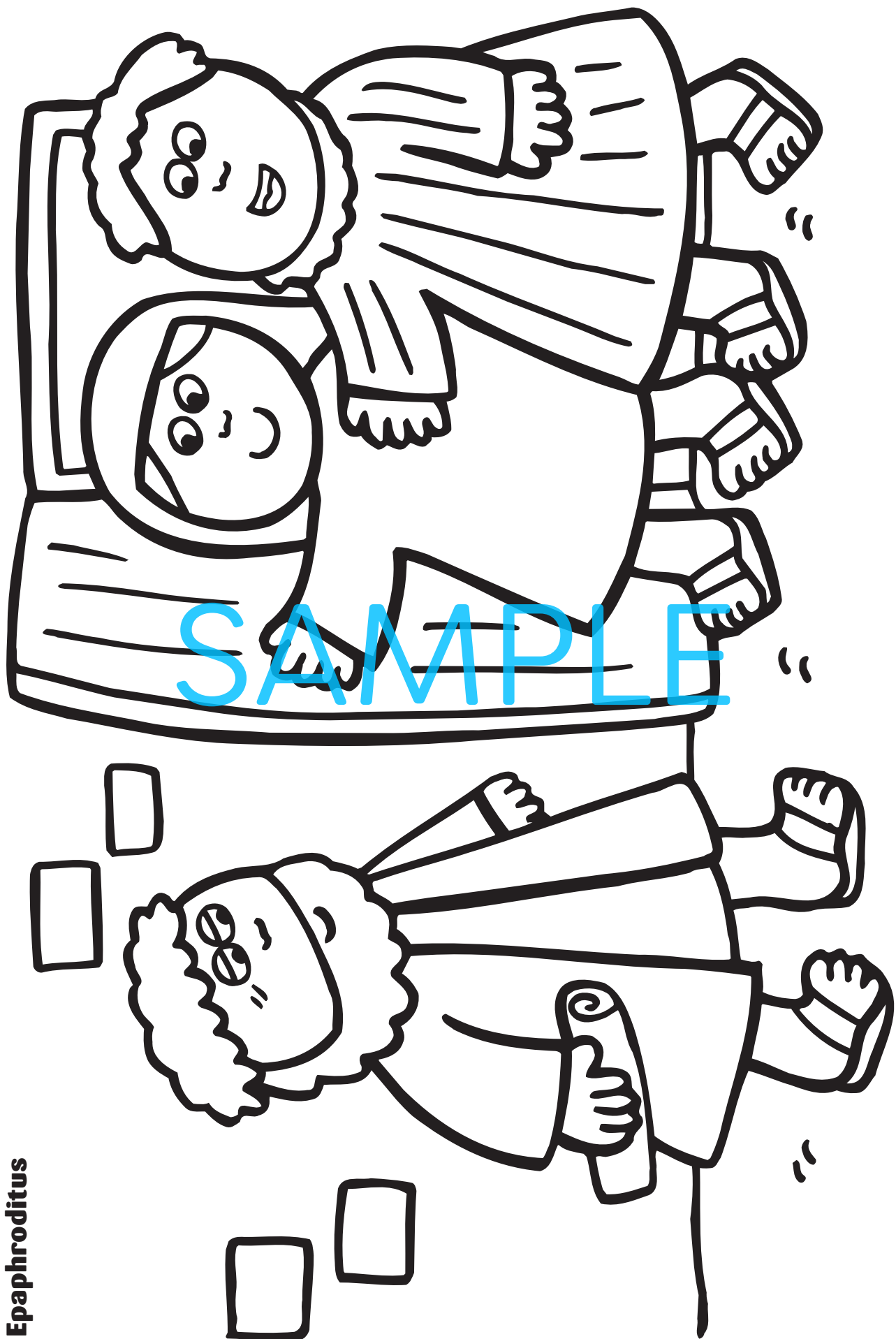
Play a game of hangman by writing a dash for each letter of the verse. In turn, invite different children to suggest letters of the alphabet. Fill them in as they are selected, until the complete verse is revealed. Say it together.

Find a poster for this Learn and remember verse on page 28.

You could also use the song ‘My Grace’ on the *Bitesize Bible Songs 2* CD, available from Scripture Union.

SAMPLE





Epaphroditus