

Community

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS | WEEK ONE

LEADER'S GUIDE

IN THIS GUIDE

1. Tips for leading this week's meeting.
2. Background to the Book of Philemon
3. "The True Meaning of Community"

LEADING THE MEETING

WEEK ONE | FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS

THE THEME OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of *Foundations for Christian Scholars* is to provide an introduction for graduate students to the idea of integrating faith and academics. This study is designed to encourage ongoing discussions about theology, faith, and their impact on your research.

THE THEME FOR THIS WEEK

This lesson takes participants through a study of Philemon that discusses the principles of living in Christian community. This provides a basis for the future discussions that will take place throughout the study. Here are our main goals for this session:

- For participants to understand that Christian community is essentially a partnership in advancing the Kingdom of God.
- To develop a sense of trust and authenticity among members of the group.
- To encourage personal connections between group members that extend beyond the scope of the weekly meetings.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Before the Session

Before you go into the meeting, make sure you have read the following materials in your packet:

- “The True Meaning of Community”
- Background to the Book of Philemon

Also, all participants will be reading these materials ahead of time and it would help to be familiar with them:

- The Book of Philemon

ORGANIZING THE SESSION

Here is a suggested outline of your time to follow as you begin the meeting:

Mingling (10 minutes)

Given some people will come in late anyway, allow about 10 minutes for everyone to catch up, get to know each other, and decompress before beginning the session. If people don't know each other yet, take the chance to let people introduce each other.

Prayer (2 minutes)

Open in prayer and ask God to bless the time together. You may want to ask someone else to do it. Just make sure that person is comfortable with the task before putting them on the spot.

Your Story (3 minutes)

As the facilitator for this week, open up the session by sharing your own story. What brought you into graduate school? What has God done in your life? What are you hoping to gain from Christian community at this point in your life? Check out our tips for sharing your testimony under “Tips for Success” below.

Teaching (15 minutes)

Take some time to teach through the materials, highlighting the things that stuck out to you most in the reading materials. Check out our tips for teaching under “Tips for Success” below.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Take the group through the discussion guides in their packets. Go through the questions and remember not to be scared of silence. Also, don't just move on after the first answer. Leave room for additional thoughts or even some disagreement!

Conclusion and Prayer (5 minutes)

Conclude the meeting by challenging participants with the following application points from the lesson and end in prayer:

- Grow in community by asking every person to find ONE other person from the group they can get to know; maybe go out to coffee, grab lunch or just sit down and hear their story.
- Have a vision for your (and your group's) role and contribution to the Kingdom; ask the question “What is your dream for an ideal grad community?”
- Encourage and affirm those who are brave in sharing their story, struggle or something deeper by thanking them and empathizing with them. This creates a community of closeness and safety.
- Be a healer and peace-maker. Identify any issues that need to be addressed with love and compassion. If there are none, perhaps make a pact to be open and honest with one another and agree to graciously hear the concerns of others when they bring up an issue.
- Keep evaluating and growing deeper as a community. Ask the question “What steps do we need to take to go deeper as a group?”
- Remember, others are watching! Consider how you can love and serve the greater grad community through service and outreach!

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Some General Suggestions

As you go into the session, please remember these tips:

- Take time to prepare. You are leading God's people. Take that task seriously!
- Trust the Spirit's leadership in you. You don't need to feel like you must cover everything in the lesson. Feel free to focus on whatever the group is ready to discuss, making sure to bring the topic back to the main point of the session.

- Be yourself. God has given you this opportunity. Don't imitate your professor or pastor.
- Be in prayer for yourself, your community and those who attend. You are leading, but God is doing the work in your group!
- Be sure to call on participants individually to encourage conversation if some are hesitant to speak up. People want to be heard and known.
- Start on time and end on time. As I'm sure you know time is a precious commodity to a grad student.

When Sharing Your Story

Consider following the outline below:

"Once upon a time..." (1 minute): Tell a little of your personal history before graduate school... How did you come to know Christ? How did God work in your life? What was important to you? How did you come to follow God?

"I decided to enter graduate school..." (1 minute): Why did you want to enter graduate school? Was God involved? How did you choose your field?

"But..." (1 minute): What are some obstacles that you've faced before and during graduate school? What are the failures and successes of your journey? How have you seen God shaping you in this process? What are some unresolved tensions in your life?

We tend not to share very intimate or revealing details until we know our community is safe and trustworthy but others will grow closer to you as they learn more of your story. Try to share parts of your story at your first meeting of the semester. These grads and professors will know you on a deeper level and form a community with you that will encourage you in both the good and bad days.

When Teaching

Try to cover each of these bases:

- Summary (2 minutes) – What is the main idea of the session and how does it fit into the structure of the entire study?
- What to KNOW (5 minutes): What are the key concepts presented in the articles and materials provided?
- How to FEEL (5 minutes): Share how the passage made you feel personally (did it bring joy, hope, conviction, or anything else?).
- What to DO (5 minutes): Practically speaking, how does this lesson relate to our lives? Select a point or two and draw out a personal example or application for your own life.
- Conclusion (3 minutes): End with a conclusion about your points.

BACKGROUND TO PHILEMON

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AUTHOR AND TITLE

It is written by Paul and Timothy to Philemon, a slave owner and is meant to be read by the entire church in Philemon's home.

DATE

It was likely written around A.D. 62, around the same time Paul wrote Colossians and Ephesians. Philemon would have been a member of the Colossian church, a ministry of the Ephesian church.

THEME

Paul is calling on Philemon to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, who has recently received Christ and will be returning by his own will. He is asking for mercy and grace for Onesimus when he could kill him under Roman law.