

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Voluntary Cooperation Among Churches
Acts 15:1-2, 22-32; Galatians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 16-9:6

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

Consider making copies of the scripture found at the end of the session. Make enough for the whole congregation. Perhaps put them on brightly coloured paper and suggest to the group that they use them in their Bibles as bookmarks until they have memorized the verses (1 Corinthians 4:1,2).

Music Sources:

“We are Called to Be God’s People”, #390, *BH*

“His Name Is Wonderful”, #203, *BH*

“Holy Ground”, #148, *Maranatha Praise*, 3rd Edition.

“God of Grace and God of Glory”, #395, *BH*.

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Voluntary Cooperation Among Churches

Focal Text

Acts 15:1-2, 22-32; Galatians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 16--9:6

Background Text

Acts 15; Galatians 2; 2 Corinthians 8, 9

Main Idea

“That the churches of the New Testament were local autonomous bodies under the lordship of Christ is quite clear. At the same time there is the pattern of voluntary cooperation between churches in matters of mutual interest and concern.” Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, p. 107

Questions to Explore

What are the Biblical reasons that churches should cooperate together? What Biblical teachings serve as guides for churches cooperating together?

Teaching Aim

To help participants describe the New Testament patterns churches follow in relationships with fellow churches.

Gathering together:

Sing:

“We are Called to Be God’s People”, #390, *BH*

“His Name Is Wonderful”, #203, *BH*

First thoughts:

Divide into two or three groups. Ask each group to list several things that will make a hockey (or another sport) team great. After the answers are shared, have each group to list several reasons why it would be important to work together. End the opening session by saying, “It is just as important for Christian people to work together as it is for a hockey team to do so.” Today we will learn about cooperation.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Voluntary Cooperation Among Churches

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Teaching Aim

To help participants describe the New Testament patterns churches follow in relationships with fellow churches.

Introduction to your personal study:

Most churches that have buildings place the name of their congregation on or near the building. Under the name there is usually a descriptive word about that church. Two that come to mind are “Independent” or “Cooperative.” “Independent” is defined as not being controlled by another and free to make its own decision. “Cooperative” has these values: working together for a common purpose; working together voluntarily and willingly. When used to describe a church, do these two words, independent and cooperative, seem opposing and contradicting?

Background:

Throughout the ages, cooperation between congregations has often led to church hierarchies, control by authoritative religious organizations, and rebellion by “independent” churches and religious groups. However, cooperation has also created some of the greatest methods of missionary efforts and ministry opportunities that churches have ever accomplished. The Bible offers some profound examples of churches cooperating together to accomplish God’s will and extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. In this session you will study some of that scripture and attempt to discern the best methods of inter-church cooperation for your congregation now—and the possibilities for healthy cooperation in the months and years ahead.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Churches dealing with conflicts of beliefs Acts 15:1-2

Acts 15:1 Paul and Barnabas were retracing the steps of their missionary journey. They had come back to Antioch where they had been commissioned and where they departed. While there, men from Judea came and taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation. The Jewish Christians had agreed in the case of Cornelius after proof was given by Peter that it was the Lord’s work for those Gentiles to be saved. They had not agreed to make Christianity primarily Gentile with only a few Jews. The teaching at Antioch undercut the basic teaching that salvation came simply from a faith in Christ who was the only way of salvation. It substituted the law of works for the justification by faith.

Acts 15:2 Paul and Barnabas disagreed with these men of Judea. There was much strife and questioning. They resisted the Judaizers who were self-appointed regulators of Christian orthodoxy from Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were then appointed by the church of Antioch to go to Jerusalem with others to discuss this dispute of salvation by faith or salvation by works.

Requests and not compulsion between churches Acts 15:22-29

Acts 15:22 The apostles had discussed this difference of understanding. James, as the leader of the church at Jerusalem, indicated that no one should place on the Gentiles the burden of Jewish ceremonies. The apostles and leaders with the whole church made a decision along with Paul and those with him. Judas and Silas, two leaders of the church were selected from the Jerusalem church to carry a letter to Antioch about this determination.

Acts 15:23 This party took a letter along with them. The letter stated that it was from the apostles and elders in the church at Jerusalem. They called themselves “brothers” to the Christians at Antioch. The letter was addressed to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. It began with “greetings” which means to greet, welcome, or salute. It was not labelled “commandment,” “rule,” or “directive.”

Acts 15:24 The body of the letter states that they had heard that some from the church at Jerusalem gone out without authority and had upset the believers there in the regions listed.

Acts 15:25 The apostles and elders had discussed the issue and then agreed to select men to go to the church at Antioch along with Barnabas and Paul.

Acts 15:26 The letter described Barnabas and Paul and men who had risked their lives for Christ. This is a reinforcement of the reputation of the two. This was to counter any attempt of the Judaizers to discredit Paul and Barnabas' religious views.

Acts 15:27 The written communication to Antioch was to be confirmed by the verbal assent of Judas and Silas. The leaders wanted the believers there to know that the word had come from a unanimous decision of the church at Jerusalem.

Acts 15:28 This action seemed good to both the Holy Spirit and to those on the council in Jerusalem. The council was conscious of having come to their conclusions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The "requirements" listed were necessary because they were wrong in themselves. The Gentiles were obligated under the law of love to avoid any actions which would hurt their Jewish brethren and would lead to dissension and alienation.

Acts 15:29 All Christians had an obligation to avoid sexual immorality. The avoiding of food offered to idols, from blood, from meat from strangled animals was necessary at the time to keep a good relationship between the Jews and Gentiles. The letter states that those who follow these guidelines do well. "Farewell" is used to strengthen and to encourage believers to be strong.

Churches collaborating together because of rightness Acts 15:30-32

Acts 15:30 The messengers were sent off by the council at Jerusalem. Upon their arrival in Antioch, the church met and received the letter.

Acts 15:31 After reading the letter the people approve of what had been done and rejoice at the possibility of a conclusion of the dispute.

Acts 15:32 Judas and Silas, the two prophets from the council, gave instruction which both encouraged and strengthened their fellow Christians.

Cooperation because of God's Spirit working Galatians 2:1-10

Galatians 2:1 Paul is recounting his journey to Jerusalem which is also recorded in Acts 15 where he and Barnabas were sent by the church at Antioch to take part in the

conference discussing the claims of the Judaizers that Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved. He adds that Titus, a Gentile convert, also went with them.

Galatians 2:2 Paul attended the meeting, not from a directive or summons, but in obedience to the revelation God had given him in his call to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He shared this message with them (those who seemed to be the leaders) in private. These leaders, Peter, James, and John are listed in v. 9. He wanted their approval on his understanding of the Gospel entrusted to him. Paul was speaking of the work he had already done. He was explaining this thoroughly, not because it was within the power of the Jerusalem council to change the gospel he had been preaching, but to have harmony and common understanding between them.

Galatians 2:3 They agreed with him because the Greek believer, Titus, was not expected to be circumcised. This undercut the argument of the Judaizers that Gentiles needed to submit to it.

Galatians 2:4 By stealth, Judaizers came in to spy and seek to make these Gentile believers slaves to Judaic bondage rather than enjoy Christian liberty.

Galatians 2:5 Paul did not concede to them. His interest was that the truth of the gospel might continue without compromise.

Galatians 2:6 The influential leaders of the Jerusalem church did not add to or change Paul's message. Whatever authority they had did not change the truth or take away the approval of God on Paul's preaching. Human distinction of rank or importance carried no weight with God.

Galatians 2:7 These leaders recognized Paul's sphere of work of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter had a sphere of work with the Jews.

Galatians 2:8 This recognized that God was working in Peter's ministry to the Jews and that he was also working in Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. This does not mean that there were two gospels—one for Jews and one for Gentiles. There was only one gospel.

Galatians 2:9 Paul's successful ministry to the Gentiles was recognized. They acknowledged that Paul's ministry was one of equality and partnership. James, Peter, and John, gave the right hand of fellowship as a sign of their approval, encouragement, and best wishes to Paul in his mission to the Gentiles while they continued their work with the Jews. This high moment climaxed a meeting in which the truth of the gospel had been jeopardized. It is interesting to note that this expression—the right hand of fellowship is a Biblical term. It is sometimes used to express a welcoming to the church membership of a new believer or church member. In the Biblical sense it has a rich meaning which indicates a meeting of the minds and spirits of believers – true harmony.

Galatians 2:10 These leaders asked Paul and his party to send contributions for the poor of Jerusalem which Paul was eager to do. Paul later canvassed the Gentile churches in a work to gather a relief offering for the poor in Jerusalem. Later he went with others from the churches to deliver the offering to Judea.

Churches helping others outside their fellowship voluntarily 2 Corinthians 8:1-17

2 Corinthians 8:1 Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, wanted them to know about what God had given the Grecian churches, the effect of grace that produced giving to those in need.

2 Corinthians 8:2 Severe trials, overflowing joy, and extreme poverty had resulted in rich generosity. In spite of these difficulties, the believers gave with great liberality.

2 Corinthians 8:3 Few gave out of their actual ability, but went far beyond this. Paul states that they did this without pressure; they did it on their own. Their giving was both overflowing and spontaneous.

2 Corinthians 8:4 They begged for the privilege of being able to partner in the ministry to the saints. They both wanted to give and to be in union in this ministry.

2 Corinthians 8:5 The Christians gave not as Paul had expected. They went beyond his desires for them. Giving themselves first explained the great giving. They gave themselves, not their money only, to God first, and then to Paul's guidance.

2 Corinthians 8:6 Paul had urged Titus to help the Corinthians finish the taking of the offering. Titus had organized the collection soon after they had received Paul's first letter. The taking of the offering had ceased through the various quarrels that had taken place.

2 Corinthians 8:7 They were encouraged to excel in the grace of giving as they excelled in others. Paul bragged on them for their excelling in all of these: faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love for him. He then encouraged them to match these graces with their giving.

2 Corinthians 8:8 Paul did not command them to give. He suggested that the generous giving of others should give them an opportunity of proving their sincerity. They had a chance to demonstrate that their love, as well as that of the Macedonians, was real.

2 Corinthians 8:16 Paul was thankful that Titus had been given the same concern and zeal for the Corinthians. The giving of the offering was for the gain and development of the church at Corinth. The benefit was to the giver as well as for the relief of those who were hungry.

2 Corinthians 8:17 Titus welcomed Paul's appeal and had a concern that was more earnest than was ordinary. Titus was coming on his own initiative.

Dealing with opportunities between churches responsibly 2 Corinthians 8:18-9:6

2 Corinthians 8:18 Sent with Titus was "the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel." His name is not known. Luke, Barnabas, Mark, and Silas are some of the men suggested, but we do not know who it was. The churches praised this individual for his service in the ministry.

2 Corinthians 8:19 The man was not Paul's choice. The churches chose him to go with Paul and the offering they had received. The selected group was to administer this offering in a way in which God would be honoured and that it would show the Macedonian churches' eagerness to help the believers in Judea.

2 Corinthians 8:20 Paul did not want to have any criticism for the way that the hoped for generous offering was going to be handled and distributed. With this group of believers, all above reproach and authorized by the churches and carrying the money themselves, it was hoped that no suspicion could come up.

2 Corinthians 8:21 They were concerned not only that they would do what was proper and good before the Lord, but they wanted men to understand and approve of what they did. Paul made the utmost effort so that no question could be raised about his dealing with these finances.

2 Corinthians 8:22 Going along with this group was another Christian brother. This unnamed person was one who had demonstrated and proved this zealously. He also had great confidence in the various churches.

2 Corinthians 8:23 Titus, described as Paul's partner and a fellow worker among the churches, was going. He stated that these, his Christian brothers, were both agents of the churches and were an honour to Christ.

2 Corinthians 8:24 Paul challenged the Macedonia churches to treat these individuals who were selected to deal with the collection. Paul wanted the churches to demonstrate why he was so proud of them through their treatment of these men and their response to the requested offering for the relief of the saints in Jerusalem. Proof would come through the response of the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 9:1 Paul is indicating that it was not necessary for him to write those at Corinth about the offering. Here it is called "service to the saints." In other places Paul calls it "rich generosity," "in this service," "act of grace," "gift," "offering," and "proof of your love." He never refers to "money."

2 Corinthians 9:2 Paul states that he knew of their willingness to help. He had been bragging to the Macedonians that the Corinthians were ready to give. This had stirred

up the Macedonians to giving. Paul's wisdom stimulated churches to imitate one another. Corinth had stimulated the Macedonians to generosity.

2 Corinthians 9:3 The Corinthians had been ready to take an offering but somehow they ceased their efforts. Paul was sending the "committee" to stimulate them in their giving so Paul's bragging would be true.

2 Corinthians 9:4 He continues to say that if the Macedonians came and they were not ready to give that both he and the Macedonians themselves would be embarrassed after being so confident. If the poverty-stricken Macedonians should come to Corinth and find out that the church there had given only a meagre amount, then both Paul and the church would be ashamed.

2 Corinthians 9:5 The committee was going to visit early and assist in arranging for the liberal offering that the church had promised. It would be a generous gift, and not a gift taken under pressure.

2 Corinthians 9:6 Paul reminds the church of the parable of the sower, the seeds, and the harvest. To give little means to harvest little, both in one's personal life and in the lives of others. The blessings to be received will be in proportion to the giving. Much spiritual benefit comes to both to the giver and receiver in this kind of love.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

Your responsibility as the Bible study leader this week includes guiding the congregation to better understand the concept of voluntary cooperation as opposed to involuntary cooperation on the one extreme or no cooperation between churches on the other.

You will focus on leading them to see cooperation between your church and other churches as a healthy and meaningful way to accomplish the missionary and ministry opportunities that God wants to provide your congregation.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Voluntary Cooperation Among Churches

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the *Focal Text* in their Bibles. Also, share with them the *Main Idea* to be learned from the Scriptures, and the *Questions to be Explored* by the group.

Focal Text

Acts 15:1-2, 22-32; Galatians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 16--9:6

Background Text

Acts 15; Galatians 2; 2 Corinthians 8, 9

Main Idea

“That the churches of the New Testament were local autonomous bodies under the lordship of Christ is quite clear. At the same time there is the pattern of voluntary cooperation between churches in matters of mutual interest and concern.” Hobbs and Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, p. 107

Questions to Explore

What are the Biblical reasons that churches should cooperate together? What Biblical teachings serve as guides for churches cooperating together?

Teaching Aim

To help participants describe the New Testament patterns churches follow in relationships with fellow churches.

Connect with Life:

Read this example: A group of guarded prisoners build a building. They pour the foundation. Then they put in the floor, the walls, and the roof. They install doors and windows. They do the electrical and plumbing work. Painting and carpet are put down. The result is a building built by forced labour.

Now, picture a group of volunteer people working on the same type of building. The same procedures are followed: foundation, floor, walls, roof, doors, windows, electrical and plumbing work, walls, painting, and carpet. What is the result? It is a finished building just like the first one. What is the difference? One is built by coerced labour; the second is build by cooperative workers. Does the fact that the second group did the same tasks as the first group take away from their independence?

Pause to see if anyone has a comment to make on this idea.

Explain: Working together voluntarily to accomplish a task does not take away an individual or church's independence. Today we look at how local autonomous churches under the direction of Christ can voluntarily cooperate in tasks of mutual interest and concern.

Guide the Study:

Tell the congregation: There was disagreement in the church at Antioch. Let's read in Acts 15:1-2 to see what it was about.

Request a person to read Acts 15:1-2. Discuss the disagreement.

Look for conclusions in this: What were the steps in this event? (Certain men say to be saved that Gentiles must be circumcised, there was sharp dispute and debate, and a committee was appointed to go to Jerusalem to solve this question).

Offer this as an opener: Let's see how this division was solved.

Have someone read Acts 15:22.

Encourage the group to discuss the steps in this event:

Decision by the church.

Another committee selected to go to Antioch.

A letter was written containing the decision.

The letter was polite.

It stated that the Judaizers were unauthorized.

It commended Paul and Barnabas' ministry.

Commented about the approval of the Holy Spirit.

Listed requirements for the non-Jews to be assured of fellowship with other churches.

Ask the following questions and seek opinions from the group:

Why were these requirements to be followed?

Was it because the church at Jerusalem said so?

Was it because the apostles said to do it?

Was it because the actions prohibited were wrong in themselves?

Help the class understand that it was because these actions were morally and ethically wrong for Christians. It was not because of the power of the Jerusalem church or apostles.

Inform the group: The letter ended with the word “farewell.” In this passage it is used in a way to strengthen the church and encourage them to be strong. Again, there was no compulsion or pressure.

Request an answer from someone: How did the church at Antioch receive the letter and the words of the group from Jerusalem?

Invite a person to read Acts 15:30-32.

Now, repeat the question: How did the church at Antioch receive the letter and the words of the group from Jerusalem?

Solicit responses from the group. These may include (glad for its encouraging message, Paul and Barnabas encouraged the believers, and prayed for the brothers from Jerusalem before sending them off).

Move ahead with this comment: Galatians 2:1-10 tells the story from Paul’s viewpoint. Let’s read it.

Have someone read Galatians 2:1-9.

Call for answers to these questions:

Why did Paul attend the meeting? (Not by direction of the church but by directive from God).

What was his approach in the meeting? (He approached the leaders in private. He did not want to create additional strife).

What was the insight of the leaders at Jerusalem? (They saw and understood Paul’s mission to the Gentiles).

What action did they take? (They gave the right hand of fellowship and agreed on their missions. Both groups were to remember the poor).

Continue: As we think of how churches relate together, let's look at 2 Corinthians 8:1-17. Watch for motivations and influences used to get the churches to share their dollars with the needy.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-17.

Create a brief discussion with this: What are some of the motivations and encouragements you discovered Paul used?

Help students pick out these motivations and encouragements:

- Paul bragged on their generosity.
- Said they did more than he expected.
- They begged to share.
- He urged them to excel.
- Did not command them to give.
- Wanted to test their sincerity.
- Cited the example of Jesus.
- Admonished them to finish what they started so well.
- Reminded them of the results of sharing.

Now question the group: Do any of these motivations appeal to outside control or power? (No, the decisions would be made by the believers themselves without outside authority).

State: If churches make independent decisions, how do they work together? There are some principles in 2 Corinthians 8:18-9:6 that can help us.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:18-9:6.

Comment: Here are some of these fundamentals:

- vv. 16, 17 Use concerned and enthusiastic people.
- v. 18 Use people praised by churches for their service.
- v. 19 Let the churches pick those who will lead the effort.
- v. 19 Seek to avoid criticism.
- v. 20 Do what is right in eyes of the Lord and of men.
- v. 22 Use people with confidence of the churches.
- v. 23 See group as representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ.

v. 24 Show men proof of your love.

Ch. 9:2 Build up the churches, not belittle them.

v. 5 Participate in a generous and open way, not reluctantly.

v. 6 Remind churches of results of sowing and reaping sparingly and generously.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Begin pulling together the teaching with this: Suppose a neighbouring church is attempting to survey a residential area around its meeting place to discover evangelistic and unreached individuals. What would be the benefits to that church and to your church for some of your member to assist in that project? Allow time for responses.

Now say: Another neighbouring group wants to have Vacation Bible School but did not have one last year because enough workers weren't available. What would be the benefits to your church and to the other group if you assisted them in this ministry to children? Allow time for discussion.

Solicit ideas with this question: What are some needs in this location that could benefit from our church linking with another congregation? Get responses. (Possible projects: jail services, ministry to prisoner's families, worship services in senior retirement homes, evangelistic booth at local fair, door to door distribution of New Testaments, assisting other churches with building needs, mission trip projects too big for one congregation, outreach to community youth).

Pray. Ask God to direct us in ways that we can honour him, develop in our relationship to him, and serve in the world.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Voluntary Cooperation Among Churches

Acts 15:1-2, 22-32; Galatians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 16—9:6

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Cooperation as a Learned Value

Can you think of things that animals do that seem to be “innate” or bred into their DNA? These are things that they do not appear to need to learn, even from their parents.

Do humans have such things with which we are born?

However, among the many things that we are not born with and must learn to achieve, have you thought to include the value of cooperating with each other? Psychologists suggest that small children are “ego-centric”. That is, they only see their own needs as important. This is why they must be carefully taught to share toys, food, comfort, etc. with others. We say that, for adults, ego-centrism is not “normal”. Our mental and emotional growth should lead us to be less concerned for ourselves at the expense of others. What is best for others should become more important to us.

Can you apply this “learned” concept to your own ability to cooperate with other teens for their good, the good of the group, and the good of persons beyond the teen group?

Can you finally apply this concept for the good of Christ’s work in the world? How can your church cooperate with other churches to accomplish the work of the Lord better than your church could do it by yourselves?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Voluntary Cooperation Among Churches*****Acts 15:1-2, 22-32; Galatians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8, 16—9:6****Beginning the Service:**

Sing “Holy Ground”, #148, *Maranatha Praise*, 3rd Edition.

Read Exodus 3:1-5

Explain that the song “Holy Ground” is written to remind us of this passage. Help children see that any time we gather to worship God, we are in a special, set-aside, “holy” place even if that place is just someone’s living room. The words, “And I know that there are angels all around” is to help us sense God’s presence. Children, who are literal thinkers, may have difficulty understanding this word picture and may expect angels to literally be all around. Say: This song helps us think about being close to God as we gather today to pray and study and worship. It says, “Let us praise Jesus now, We are standing in His presence on holy ground.” We do not see Jesus, but we know that He is always very close to us. We invite him today to join our worship in a special way. We ask Him to help us keep our minds thinking about Him.

Sing “Holy Ground” a second time.

Sing “God of Grace and God of Glory”, #395, *BH*.

Offering:

Emphasize ways in which your home church joins with other churches to further God’s work.

Praying for the World:

Have someone read the following prayer focus. A copy is available on the final page of this session.

The Tuareg (pronounced “tu-are-egg”) are scattered across wide-open spaces of the Saharan region in a number of countries. Their numbers are unclear, but estimates run between 300,000 and 1 million. A large number still remain largely untouched by outside influences. They are divided into five strictly defined social classes. Nobles

own land and camels and are the heads of the various political factions. Vassals farm and graze their herds on land managed by nobles. Slavery was abolished in the 1940s; however, many descendants of slaves still work for their former owners. The two other social classes are scholars and blacksmiths.

Say: Let's take a moment to pray for the Tuareg of the Saharan desert.

Ask someone to pray that ways will be found to share the gospel with this isolated group of people.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

We Must Cooperate **Philippians 4:1-2**

Introduction:

Have you ever noticed your hands? When they are open, each finger is weak and can only look like an item of peace. But you get your hand organized, close your fist into a tight, fearsome weapon, and you look invincible. A church is like that. Each member can only accomplish so much. But you allow the members of a church to get organized and God can do so much more through them than they could have ever done on their own. There is likewise a need for churches to work together to accomplish God's will. By cooperating, they will succeed in doing things that could not be done working alone. The truth is we have got to cooperate. Our world is too lost for us not to see a larger picture of cooperation to reach a lost world.

The New Testament Greek word "koinonia" means fellowship, partnership, or cooperation. In our text, Euodia (Āũ ō' dē ah) and Syntyche (Sin' tai chē) give an example of broken fellowship. They both worked diligently with Paul but could not work with each other. They hurt the cause of Christ by their example. Notice Paul called on other Christians to work with them to become partners in the work of Christ. Fellowship, partnership, or cooperation requires that we work together in harmony. This is true in a church, or among churches. The cause of Christ is far greater than our personal feelings.

1. Cooperation makes our understanding clearer.

When we cooperate, our understanding of each other as well as our common tasks becomes clearer. Our working together broadens our perspective and clarifies our need for each other. Our personal discernment is always partial and limited. A community of believers shares discernment. Let me share a fanciful story to illustrate the point. Two medieval knights spotted a large shield hanging from a limb of a tree. One said it was silver; the other said it was gold. A sharp argument between them erupted. They killed each other over their disagreement. A young maiden happened upon the scene to find the shield was gold on one side and silver on the other. A little cooperation could have saved their lives.

2. Cooperation makes our work easier.

Our work is easier if we cooperate. When we need to clean house, it is easier for everyone to help instead of thrusting all the work on one person. Geese fly in a “V” shape to create upward lift for each other. They take turns in leading. They focus on where they are going, not just on who is leading. Sounds like teamwork to me. By such sharing, geese increase their flying range by over seventy per cent. That should motivate every believer to partner with other believers in doing God’s will.

3. Cooperation makes our impact greater.

If we cooperate our impact is much greater. Soldiers make an army. Trees together make a forest. Shingles together make a roof. Bricks make a wall. Drops of water make a river. Snowflakes together make an avalanche. Links together make a chain. People cooperating create a team. Christian teams can impact the world.

4. Cooperation makes us enjoy every person’s part.

Teamwork makes our lives more enjoyable. We have people to share our joy or sorrow, victories or defeats. Every person has a part of the team’s victory. Suppose you and U.S. basketball star Michael Jordan together scored seventy points in a basketball game. Your one point added to his sixty-nine points made seventy points and your team wins the game. Everyone would celebrate the victory. Cooperation allows all of us to be part of something larger than ourselves. Christians should never stand alone. We work better, together.

Call to Commitment:

Our task to present the Gospel to a lost world is too large and too important for us not to cooperate. If you are standing alone, now is the time to make the decision to cooperate with others to carry the Gospel to a lost and dying world.

Concluding the Service:

The challenge for home churches to cooperate with other Christian groups is very real. It may seem easier just to continue to be interested in our own local ministry and one another.

Some churches will want to connect with a denominational group. Remember that just because a home church is smaller than some other church, it is still a church and has opportunities to be a part of the work of a larger denominational body. Often, groups of home churches with similar beliefs and goals will group together to cooperate in various ways. These groupings are frequently called home church networks.

Other home churches will contribute to or participate in Christian ministries which are already established. It is well for the members of the church to research the doctrinal beliefs, stated goals, and economic policies of any group with whom work is done or to whom money is given. What procedures hold the organization accountable to those who support them financially? No reputable Christian organization would hesitate to make known these aspects of their ministry.

Some home churches will contribute to friends who have individual and special ministries or to projects which may be currently before the public such as natural disasters. Again, issues of accountability are important. How will the funds be used? How can the church participate in more than just giving money?

Cooperation should take other forms than just giving money to support a cause. We can cooperate with other Christian groups in inner city ministry, Vacation Bible Schools or sports camps, building projects and prayer walking.

Pray today for a larger vision for our church and its cooperation with others.

Say: Let's bow together before our Lord and God. As we leave this place let us carry in our hearts God's challenge to us to hold His gospel in our hearts as a precious treasure to be shared with the world.

(1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2) ***¹“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. ²Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”***

(1 Corinthians 4:1,2) ***1“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”*** (NIV)

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For a person to share with the congregation during “Praying for the World” during the Worship Time.

Read this to the congregation:

The Tuareg (pronounced “tu-are-egg”) are scattered across wide-open spaces of the Saharan desert region in a number of countries of north Africa. Their numbers are unclear, but estimates run between 300,000 and 1 million. A large number still remain largely untouched by outside influences. They are divided into five strictly defined social classes. Nobles own land and camels and are the heads of the various political factions. Vassals farm and graze their herds on land managed by nobles. Slavery was abolished in the 1940s; however, many descendants of slaves still work for their former owners. The two other social classes are scholars and blacksmiths.

Say: Let’s take a moment to pray for the Tuareg of the Saharan desert.

Then lead in prayer or ask someone else to do so.