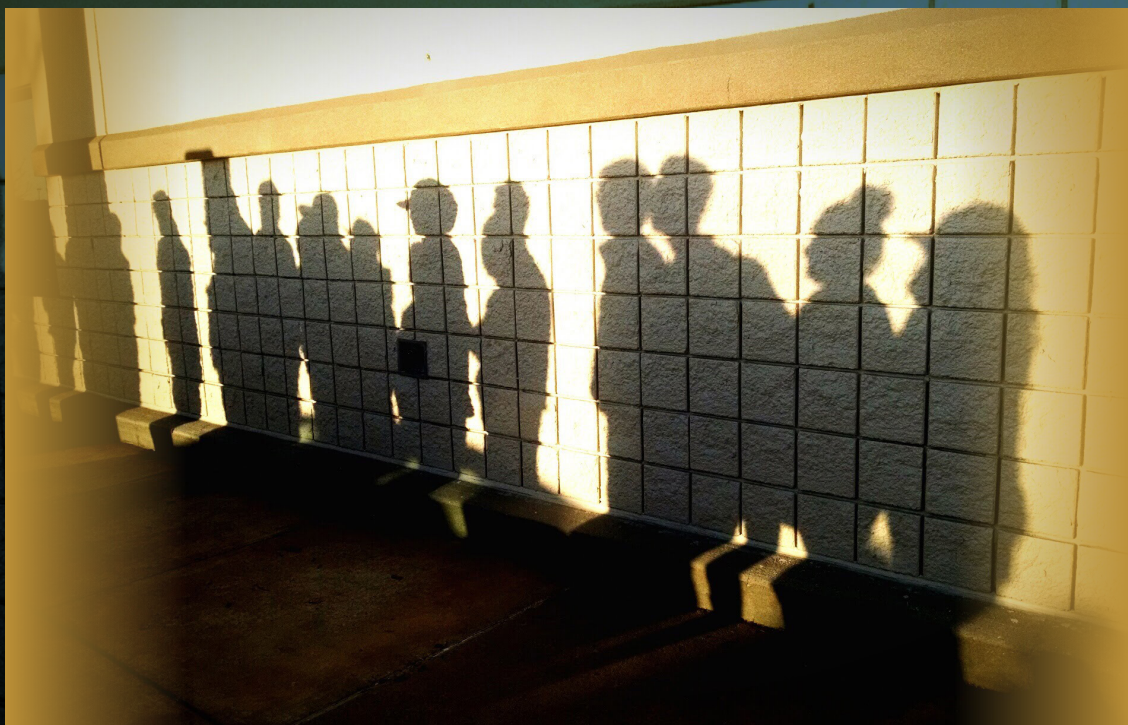


5 | Yield



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I get amused when I see a news story about people who camp out overnight to be one of the first to purchase the latest phone, tablet, or gadget. On the other hand, I'm saddened when I see the reports of people pushing, shoving, and even exchanging blows to be the first in the store for the black Friday sales during Thanksgiving weekend.

We don't always want to be first. The four-year-old will gladly let his sister go first when they line up for vaccinations. The skydiver will often step back and let someone else jump before taking that big step outside of the plane.

These examples all share one thing, whether it's to be the first in line or the last: selfishness. A desire for something isn't necessarily wrong, but when I push to get it at the expense of others, I've placed myself first and damaged my relationships.

In the Book of Philippians, Paul contended that we're called to be first in line for one thing: looking out for the needs of others. And when we do that, we get the great benefit of strong relationships.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: Humbly place the _____ of others
_____ your own.

One of the key themes in Paul's letter to the Philippians is his call for the church to remain united in Christ. Paul wrote of their common belief in the gospel as their reason for unity. In chapter 2, the apostle urged the Philippians to live in humble unity that places the needs of others before one's own. Paul's instruction may sound simple, but it's anything but.

Philippians 2:1-4 ¹ If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. ⁴ Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Humbly _____ for the needs and interests of others.

Paul challenged the church at Philippi to strive for a new level of maturity in relationships. He encouraged believers to “make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (v. 2). Live in harmony!

- ▶ Unity among His people pleases God (Psalm 133:1), just as a well-rehearsed song becomes “music to our ears.” If your church is like most, the members will not agree on every single line item in the annual budget, but you can agree to stay together, work together, pray together, and serve together. You can choose to push your differences aside and interact with each other with “affection and mercy” (v. 1).
- ▶ In verses 3-4, Paul spelled out the challenging realities of how believers are to maintain love and unity. He stated this truth both in both negative and positive terms.
- ▶ Negatively, Paul instructed, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit” (v. 3) and don't look out only for our own interests. On the positive side, Paul counseled believers to practice humility, “consider others as more important than yourselves,” and “look out ... for the interests of others” (vv. 3-4).

Philippians 2:5 ⁵ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

Jesus is our example of humility and _____ .

Watching someone else perform a task may be the best way to learn. It's not surprising that demonstration videos on YouTube® have multiplied exponentially. Wouldn't you rather learn by observation rather than reading an instruction manual?

Paul challenged believers to observe Jesus to learn what humility looks like. We're to follow His example. Christ provided a perfect sacrifice for our sins, and He offers a perfect model for navigating our way through personal relationships. It all comes down to attitude: "Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus" (v. 5).

Philippians 2:13-15 ¹³ For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world,

Live humbly without _____ , complaining, or arguing.

Paul was showing the early Christians and us how to "shine like stars in the world" (v. 15). The world is brimming over with whiners, haters, critics, and cynics. Be the breath of fresh air our culture is so desperately longing for. How? By being convinced that God is up to something great in your life! I'm not talking about having a blind optimism, but rather living in the reality of what God is doing. "For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose" (v. 13). When our focus is placed fully on God and His work in our lives, we can more easily place others' needs before our own.

"AFTER YOU"

How can these scenarios call for a yield from you? Choose one and discuss your response with your Bible study group.

Someone cuts you off in traffic.

A coworker gets the promotion you think you deserve.

You weren't invited to join a leadership team of influence at church.

A child is home sick and you must completely rearrange your day.

Your spouse doesn't approve of plans you have for an unexpected financial surplus.

LIVE IT OUT

What steps will you take to practice humility and place the needs of others before your own?

► **Small steps.** Next Sunday, park in the worst space in the church parking lot. Extra credit if it's raining. Come early and set up the room for your next small group meeting. Tell someone how much you appreciate his or her gifts or skills in a particular area.

► **Medium steps.** Share a story of a major failure from your past. Confess your need for the gospel. Volunteer in a homeless ministry and treat them as you would treat governors and kings.

► **Large steps.** Offer a sincere apology to someone you've hurt. Share your desire to be forgiven. Meet someone's need with a large sum of money ... and do it anonymously.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Philippians 2:1-5,13-15, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

Humility is a character trait that many people equate with weakness; they wrongly equate humility with being a doormat or being passive and totally pliable. That idea of humility allows one person to be domineering or dictatorial, and the other person simply to be treated as an object. The Book of Philippians paints a far better picture of humility, and it points us to Jesus to see just how humility is to be carried out.

How can we adopt the same mindset and priorities as Jesus?

What practical steps can you take this week to demonstrate humility in your relationships?

Before whom do you want to "shine" (v. 15) in your place of work or neighborhood? In what ways can you do so?

DAY 1: Humility moves us to consider what others need.

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

Paul's teaching in this passage is *not* an invitation to be a doormat and let others walk all over you! Paul wasn't suggesting that you ignore your own needs or stifle your own interests. It's good to tend to whatever you're responsible for in your life, but don't do it at the exclusion of others or at their expense. Work to help and meet the needs of others just as you work to meet your own needs. Jesus said the second greatest commandment was to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39)—not *instead of* yourself. Still, we shouldn't consider our own interests as more important than those of others.

Do you "look out" for others ... or do you mainly "look out" for yourself? If you're like me, you probably have no trouble at all thinking about your own desires—what you want. Most of us don't need alarms on our phones to remind us to eat, sleep, or play. We serve ourselves without thinking. However, we do need frequent promptings to keep our minds focused on others. Paul offered that prompt here, urging his Philippian friends—and us—to make the needs of other people a major focus of our lives.

More times than not, humility is an issue of the heart. If you struggle at times to consider the needs of others as more important than your own, ask God to help you see other people the way He does.

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

MATTHEW 22:39

DAY 2: Christ's humility made our salvation possible.

Read Philippians 2:5-11.

In the movie *Groundhog Day* (1993), weatherman Phil Connors gets caught up in a time warp on the worst day of his life. Begrudgingly, he has traveled to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to cover the annual Groundhog Day festivities. But a massive blizzard keeps him from leaving town and he must stay the night. When he wakes up the next morning, he is stuck in February 2 and is forced to relive the day's events. Day after day after day.

What makes this movie so hilarious is the “broken record” of this weatherman's life. Every day, he wakes up only to experience the same awful episodes over and over. One day Phil makes a seismic shift in his attitude. He chooses to shower the townspeople with his affection; he befriends and helps everyone in the town. Everything in his world changes as he changes. Phil learns the value of serving others, and, consequently, positively impacts his relationships. Jesus is a far greater example than some fictional character in a movie. Verses 6-11 show us how Jesus perfectly demonstrated humility: He died to bring us to God. “He emptied himself” (v. 7). Jesus is completely God, but He humbly emptied Himself of the glory and privileges that are rightfully His so that we might experience salvation.

Today, actively look for a way to give up your desires. As much as possible, humbly yield to others' needs and preferences.

DAY 3: Choose to put away pride.

Read Luke 14:7-14.

We've all met someone who was “full of himself.” You may have fit that description a time or two yourself. When a person is full of himself, he leaves no room for others. His opinions are the cleverest and his experiences are the richest. Jesus' attitude calls us to empty our egos and put others first. This is the essence of submission.

Jesus taught humility in His parables as well. In Luke 14:7-14, Jesus used a parable of a wedding banquet to challenge His followers to humbly select the worst seat in the house. Leave the coveted seat for someone else and consider yourself unworthy of such honor. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Don't buy into the lie that greatness comes only when an ever-growing number of people know your name, follow you on social media, or place you at the head of their table. Kill this attitude before it kills your connection with others.

Memorize Luke 14:11. Make this your prayer as you seek to follow Christ's example.

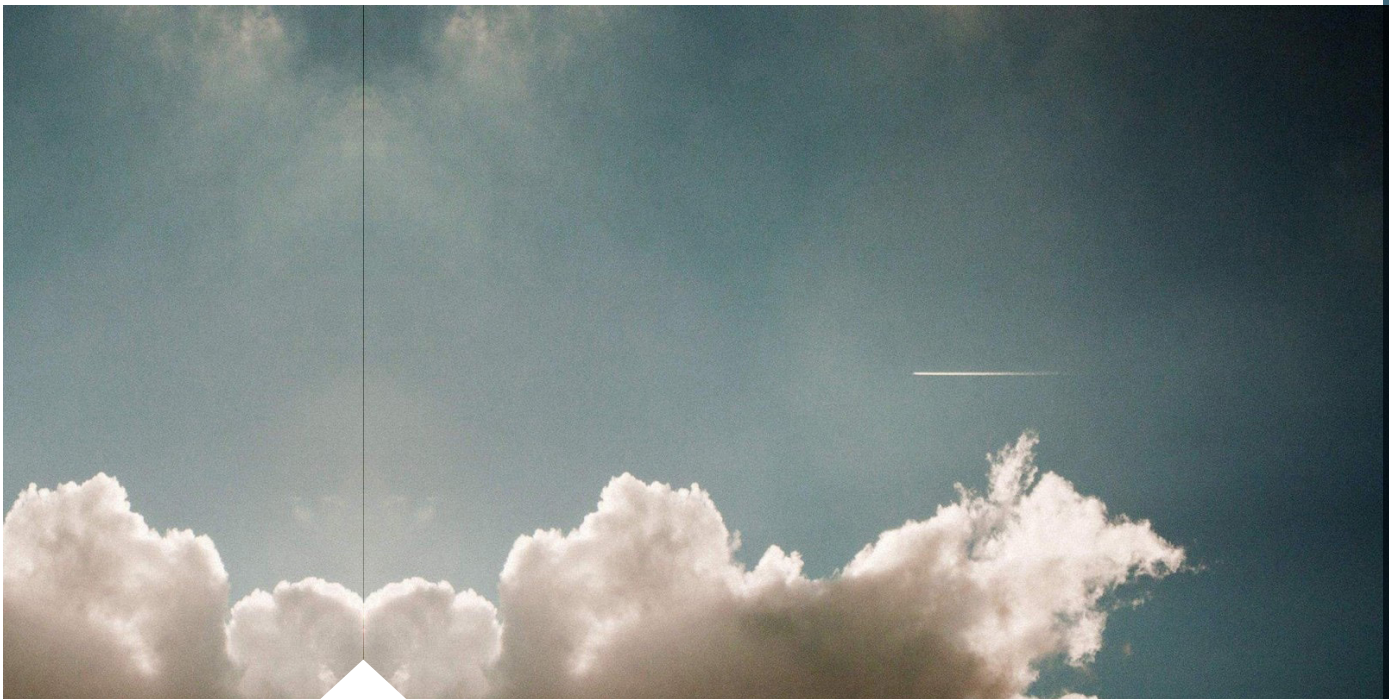
DAY 4: Eliminate complaints from your conversations.

Read Philippians 2:13-15.

“Do everything without grumbling and arguing” (v. 14). *C’mon, Paul. You surely don’t expect me to stand in line for over an hour without griping!* Is it even possible to follow Paul’s teaching? Yes, it is. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live without grumbling and arguing—or griping and raging. It means you must make the choice to remove all whining from your world.

Jonathan Edwards was a pastor who had a prolific writing career. He became world famous for his role in the First Great Awakening in the 1730-40s. After twenty-three years of serving his church, his flock fired him, sending him and his family out on the streets. While he was in the midst of being fired, badgered, and backstabbed, the people of the town paid close attention to his demeanor. As they observed his behavior, one man said: “I never saw the least symptoms of displeasure in his countenance the whole week, but he appeared like a man of God, whose happiness was out of the reach of his enemies...”¹⁰ Edwards had found what Paul had found: a joy that soars above the ups-and-downs of life. Like an airplane that flies above turbulence, we can fly above our storm circumstances. Our joy can be placed beyond the reach of our enemies.

Enlist a trusted friend’s help. Ask him or her to help keep you accountable in your speech by letting you know when your conversations rely heavily on complaints.



DAY 5: Christ transforms relationships when we exercise humility.

Read Ephesians 4:1-3.

Sharing isn't something that comes naturally to us. Two toddlers can be content to let a ball rest in the corner, but as soon as one wants to play with it, suddenly the other insists it is his. They may even exchange words and punches. Guess what happens over time? As these two little people grow into big people, their approach may become more civilized on the surface, but the basic attitude for life and relationships remains: It's mine!

While adults *usually* won't throw a punch, they find plenty of other ways to cause insult and injury. They sulk, stonewall, or slander. Relationships become a growing mess because they behave like self-centered, "me-focused" toddlers.

But when we start taking Paul's words seriously, our relationships will be affected.

- ▶ We take the focus off ourselves and our circumstances.
- ▶ We look for ways to humbly serve others.
- ▶ We stop complaining and start loving others through service.
- ▶ We take on the same attitude as Christ.

Christ-like humility transforms relationships.

Re-read Philippians 2:1-5,13-15. As you do, identify the dangers of ignoring the instructions found in these passages.

"He will do a work in us internally to prepare us to do a work for Him externally."

CHRISTINE CAINE