

SESSION 5

Yield



QUESTION 1:

When have you wanted to be first in line?

THE POINT

Humbly place the needs of others before your own.

THE PASSAGES

Philippians 2:1-8,13-15

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 am 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.

- ▶ A four-year-old will gladly let his sister go first when they line up for vaccinations.
- ▶ A private will often step back and let someone else volunteer for the dangerous assignment.

These examples all share one thing, whether it's to be the first in line or the last: selfishness. It's about what *I* want ... or what *I* want to avoid. A desire for something is not necessarily wrong, but when I push to get it at the expense of others, I have placed myself first and damaged my relationships.

In the Book of Philippians we learn of a better way. Paul contended that we are called to be first in line for one thing: looking out for the needs of others. When we do that, we get the great benefit of strong relationships.

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.

Self-centeredness is at the very root of our sin nature. Sharing is not something that comes naturally to us. Two toddlers may be perfectly 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. 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, slander, or keep a running tab of the trouble others have caused them. Relationships become a growing mess because they behave like self-centered, "me-focused" toddlers.

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." Live in harmony! Unity among His people pleases God (Ps. 133:1), just as a well-rehearsed song becomes "music to our ears." Church members 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."

QUESTION 2:

When have you benefited from someone who looked out for your interests?

Paul's emphasis on unity and oneness with Christ feels warm and inviting, and in verses 3-4 he spelled out the challenging realities of how believers are to maintain that love and unity. He stated this truth both in both negative and positive terms. Negatively, he instructed, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit," 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."

This is *not* an invitation to be a doormat and let others walk all over you! Paul was not 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 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" (Matt. 22:39)—not *instead of* yourself. Still, we should not 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 are 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.

QUESTION 3:

What does it look like practically to value others over ourselves?

Philippians 2:5-8

5 Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,
6 who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.

7 Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man,
8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

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 instead of reading an instruction manual?

Paul challenged believers to observe Jesus to learn what humility looks like. We are to follow His example. Christ provided a perfect sacrifice 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."

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. Phil can't wait to finish the ridiculous story so that he can scoot out of the one-horse town. But a 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.

DIGGING DEEPER

THE CONCEPT OF “MIND” IN PHILIPPIANS

Paul used the verb *phrone*, translated *mind* or *attitude*, three times in Philippians 2:1-5 in his appeal for unity. He generally used this term with the meaning to develop a mind-set and attitude or a manner of understanding.

He used it twice in verse 2, where he told the Philippians that they would bring him personal joy if they would set their minds (*phrone*) on the same thing. This is followed by three phrases that further describe what such unity of mind consists of: it is sharing the same love, being of like spirit, setting their minds (*phrone*) on one thing. Verse 5 contains the third use of *phrone*: one is to have the mind-set of Christ. There are two

possible interpretations. Paul may have meant that the Philippians were to pursue the sort of mind-set or attitude that was in Christ, that He exemplified in His earthly life. Paul also could have meant that the Philippians should possess the kind of attitude that is proper for those who belong to Christ. In verses 6-11 he followed with an eloquent reminder of how Christ did not insist on His own rights but left His heavenly glory, emptying Himself, taking on the earthly form of a slave, and being obedient to God's purposes, even to death on the cross. Paul challenged the Philippians to be like Jesus, to adopt His mind-set, His selfless attitude. The mind of Christ, His attitude, is the ultimate model for all Christian unity.

John Polhill, "The Concept of 'Mind' in Philippians," *Biblical Illustrator*, Summer, 2001, 48-51.

What makes this movie so hilarious is the “broken record” of this weatherman’s life. Every day, he wakes up with the same rotten attitude and must live the same awful episodes over and over. He is stuck in time and desperate to escape. But eventually Phil makes a seismic shift in his attitude. He chooses to seize the day and shower the townspeople with his affection. He befriends and helps everyone in the town. Everything in his world changes as he changes by serving others, and positively impacts his relationships.

Jesus is a far greater example than some fictional character in a movie. In fact, He is the quintessential example. Verses 6-11 show us how Jesus perfectly demonstrated humility and provided us the

ultimate service: He died for us to bring us to God. “He emptied himself.” Jesus is completely God, but He humbly emptied Himself of the glory and privileges that are rightfully His.

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. He tries to fill the room with his own self-importance. 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 Twitter®, or place you at the head of their table. Kill this attitude before it kills your connection with others.

ENGAGE

List words that describe humility in a negative light.

Doormat

List words that describe humility in a positive light.

Loving

Circle words from above that would accurately describe Jesus.

QUESTION 4:

How have you seen relationships strengthened through acts of humility?

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.

“Do everything without grumbling and arguing.”

C'mon, Paul. You surely don't expect me to stand in line for over an hour without griping! We can't truly accept our circumstances without raging against those responsible—can we? Yes, we can! Jesus did it ... and He expects us to follow His example. By the power of His 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. His life was busy and full; yet, like nearly all of us, he experienced great heartache along the way. After 23 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...”¹

Edwards had found what Paul had found: a joy that soars above the ups-and-downs of life. Like an airplane that flies above the turbulence, we can fly above our stormy circumstances. Our joy can be placed beyond the reach of our enemies.

Paul was showing us how to “shine like stars in the world.” 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.”

When you start taking Paul’s words seriously, your relationships will be affected.

- ▶ When you take the focus off yourself and your circumstances ...
- ▶ When you look for ways to humbly serve others ...
- ▶ When you stop complaining and start loving others through service ...
- ▶ When you take on the same attitude as Christ ...

... all your relationships will be affected. And those same people will discover you have stumbled upon a treasure they desperately long to find: inner peace and fixed joy.

QUESTION 5:

What strategies have helped you fight the urge to grumble, complain, or argue?

LIVE IT OUT

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

- ▶ **Small steps.** Park in the worst space in the church parking lot next Sunday. 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 those people 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.



END NOTES

1 Marsden, George M. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), 361.