

Session 5: Yield

QUESTION 1:

When have you really wanted to be first in line?



THE POINT

Humbly place the needs of others before your own.



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. Yet I am saddened when I see people pushing, shoving, and even fighting 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. 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. And when we do that, we get the great benefit of strong relationships.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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. 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. 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 and relationships remains: it's mine! Relationships become a growing mess because adults 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." If your church is like most, the members will not agree on every single line item in the annual budget, but you can choose to push your differences aside and interact with each other with "affection and mercy."

Paul's emphasis on unity and oneness with Christ feels warm and inviting, and in verses 3-4 he spelled out the realities of how believers are to maintain that love and unity. 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."

QUESTION 2:

What circumstances in life tempt you to ignore the instructions in these verses?

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.

QUESTION 3:

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

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. Paul urged his Philippian friends—and us—to make the needs of other people a major focus.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5

⁵ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

Paul challenged believers to observe Jesus to learn what humility looks like. We are 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's all about attitude: "Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus."

QUESTION 4:

How have you seen relationships strengthened through acts of humility?

In the movie *Groundhog Day*, 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 massive blizzard keeps him from leaving 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 over and over with the same rotten attitude. 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. 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. 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" (v. 7). Jesus is completely God, but He emptied Himself of the glory and privileges that are 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.



"YOU AND I CAN BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS TODAY.

"LET'S HUMBLE OURSELVES,

AND PUT THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS AHEAD OF OUR OWN."

Brian Doyle

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.

QUESTION 5:

What kind of natural outcomes would you expect to see when obeying these verses?

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 he experienced great heartache along the way. 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 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! “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.

ANTI-GRUMBLING PLAN

Choose one of the following scenarios and write how you can avoid grumbling or arguing.

Someone cuts you off in traffic.

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A coworker gets the promotion you think you deserve.

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You weren't asked to join a ministry team in your church.

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Your parents gave your brother or sister the birthday gift you asked for.

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You were stood up on a date that was special to you.

.....

LIVE IT OUT

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

- ▶ **Begin with 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.
- ▶ **Move on to 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.
- ▶ **Set a goal to take 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.

Placing ourselves first can damage our relationships. **Paul contended that we are called to be first in line for one thing: looking out for the needs of others.**

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