

STUDY GUIDE

NEW VISION
SURVIVALIST
HUMILITY
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11
01/29/2017



MAIN POINT

The Christian life is one of increasing humility.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How would you define the word “humility”?

Describe the personality and behavior of the most humble person you know.

Why is humility such a challenging trait to model? What does this tell us about ourselves?

The Christian life is one of increasing humility. But the pervasive idea that we should put ourselves first goes all the way back to the Fall. Most people in Paul's day did not view "humility" as a virtue, any more than many people today do. Understanding humility and attaining it are two entirely different things. Easier said than done, right? Paul was not advocating an unrealistic view of life. He was not saying we should view everyone as better than ourselves in every way. His point was that we should view others as worthy of more consideration than we give ourselves (cf. 1:15; Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

Paul gives Jesus as our example and motivation. Despite his equality with God, He “emptied” himself of heavenly privileges, taking the form of a servant and humbling himself to the point of death! The lowest point of Christ’s humiliation was crucifixion, a violent means of punishing and degrading the lowliest of criminals. Yet God raised Jesus to and will eventually receive universal praise. Jesus’ humble death, burial, and resurrection for our sins, is the essence of the gospel. Since we are one with Christ, Christians are to have Christ’s mind-set toward each other: having the same love, being of one mind, pursuing no rivalry, doing nothing from empty conceit, always prioritizing the interests of others. Since we are one with Christ by the Spirit we are to imitate Christ. This, Paul says, brings him joy (v.2)! When we are in a situation of pride, Philippians 2:3-4 is the tool we need!

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4.

What four specific areas of unity did Paul desire for the Philippian believers? How would you describe what Paul meant by each phrase?

How are each of these areas represented in our church and in our relationships?

Read John 13:34-35. What additional insight does Jesus' commandment give into the purpose of unity among Christians?

Paul called them to fulfill his joy by pursuing unity with one another. Their harmony could exist only by their having the same outlook—thinking the same way. They would express that unity by having the same love as Christ had, sharing the same feelings, and by their focusing on one goal. Jesus Christ stated that this kind of obvious, mutual love and practical unity is the distinguishing characteristic of His disciples.

Why would unity and love among the church complete Paul's joy, as he noted in verse 2?

What does it mean to consider someone "better than yourself" (v. 3)?

As a way of promoting unity in our churches, we must willingly demonstrate an unselfish attitude toward others. Any concern that one believer in Philippi had was to become a concern of the whole church. Paul's affirmation in this verse represents the epitome of unselfishness, and it sets the stage for the remainder of this passage. We are to give priority to our unity as believers. We demonstrate this priority by our behavior and by the biblical principles we use as our guides.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8.

With verse 5, Paul called believers to imitate Christ. He admonished Christians to have the same disposition or attitude that our Lord exhibited in His life and death.

What would it mean for you to have the attitude of Christ?

Read Mark 10:43-45. How did Jesus describe His own attitude? Why is serving others necessary if you want to display humility?

What do you think it was like for Jesus to leave heaven and become human? What did He give up in doing so? What did we gain from His action?

Though culture often views humility as a weakness, in what ways did Jesus' humility convey and require strength?

What are some specific examples of Jesus' humility in Scripture? Consider the following: Birth—Luke 2:16; Temptation—Matthew 4:7; Possessions—Matthew 8:20; Hunger and fatigue—Mark 3:20; Love for the unlovely—Matthew 8:2-3; Obedience—Matthew 26:39; John 6:38.

Paul pointed to Christ's love for others and His obedient service to God as examples for his Philippian friends. Christians who follow Christ's example and exhibit self-sacrificial love toward other believers and willing obedience to God help promote their churches' unity. We are to live with an attitude of humility as we relate to others. With a

healthy, balanced view of ourselves, we neither think too highly nor too little of ourselves. With that wholesome attitude, we can serve others effectively.

HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11.

For what reason did the Father exalt the Son, according to these verses?

How does this passage challenge society's definition of success?

God's exaltation of Christ is because of His death of humiliation on the cross. Our Lord did nothing out of selfishness, nor was He disobedient at any time to His Father's will. He did not seek His own glory. And, even in His exalted state, all of the glory will belong to the Heavenly Father. In this passage Paul lifted up Christ's self-sacrificial love for others and His obedient service to God as an example to the Philippians.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

If we are to be the church Christ wants in our community, what types of sacrifices should we be prepared to make?

What steps do you need to take this week to be able to focus on the goal of being more humble?

What is one specific way you can imitate Christ's humility this coming week?

PRAY

Divide up into pairs or small groups of men and women. Encourage everyone to share their prayer needs, specifically related to areas they need to practice humility, sacrifice, and unity. Challenge the groups to begin their prayer time by voicing statements of gratitude and praise to God for the work of Jesus on our behalf. Ask God to help you reflect daily the qualities of love, generosity, humility, and faith as you out the gospel, and that by doing so, others would be drawn to Jesus.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Paul built his challenge for unity on the reality of Christ within each believer. The phrase encouragement in Christ refers to encouragement that comes from Christian commitment. That Christ lived in the Philippians' hearts was indeed a great blessing for them. The term comfort from love refers to Christ's love for them. Believers are the eternal recipients of God's tender affection not because they deserve love, but because it is God's nature to love. The participation in the Spirit emphasizes the shared nature of the Christian life. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes possible the proper functioning of the body of Christ. With the expression affection and sympathy, Paul pointed to the mercies the Lord had given the believers at Philippi. The Holy Spirit provided rich fellowship among them (v. 1).

In verse 2 Paul shifted from the spiritual blessings the believers enjoyed together to their responsibility to him. The Philippian believers had a heartfelt concern for Paul. He planted the church at Philippi. They watched as he invested his life in their lives. Now he called them to continue what they started.

In contrast to his positive instructions, Paul also detailed for the Philippians what attitudes to avoid in pursuing unity. The word nothing (v. 3) emphasized Paul's conviction that rivalry or conceit should not taint any aspect of the

church's life. The term rivalry implies a selfish ambition that causes disputes and divisions. The sense is that the problems facing the Philippians caused members to choose sides. Paul saw schisms in the church as contrary to the testimony of Christ and dishonoring to God's name. Also the word conceit describes what is vainglorious or groundless pride. The cornerstone of Christian faith is that humans are powerless to save themselves and must trust Christ to provide all that is necessary for salvation. Thus the believer has no basis for arrogance toward others. Furthermore, arrogance strikes at the heart of Christian unity, spoiling the testimony of the faithful.

To avoid such a destructive mind-set, Paul directed the believers to consider fellow Christians and their needs as more important than their own interests and concerns (v. 4). The church's antidote for selfishness and divisions is an abiding concern for the welfare of others. Paul called the believers to take careful note of the concerns others hold. Such willing consideration of others erases the gaps between individuals and builds a strong unity.

The apostle then gave the Philippians a vivid illustration of the perspective he intended them to have. He showed them Christ. Verses 5 through 8 paint a poignant picture of the humility Christ revealed in His incarnation and His substitutionary death. Paul urged them to exchange their selfish motives for the Savior's attitude. While Christ has all cause for glorying, being God Himself, He willingly surrendered Himself for the needs of others. The Son of God did not seek His own advantage, that is, He refused to ignore others' needs. The passage states that Jesus Christ made himself nothing. The result was that the Savior set aside His glory to minister grace and mercy to those who are most undeserving of such blessings. Assuming the form of a slave, the Lord placed Himself under the authority of His Father. The focus of the Son was to please the Father, and in doing so He sacrificed Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.