



LC STUDY GUIDE

Done in Sync with the Come Together Sermon Series

The Passage: Philippians 2:1-11

For Life Community usage the week of 9/22/14

Intro: Today we come to one of the most beautiful and theologically rich chapters in the New Testament. Imprisoned in Rome and hearing about the sufferings from the churches in Philippi, Paul opens Philippians by encouraging them in light of their trials. Here in the second chapter, Paul urges that the response to persecution and suffering is not to look out for your own interest but to be united in Christ and seek the betterment of others. Using Jesus as the perfect example of obedience in the midst of suffering, Paul invites everyone to seek this type of humility as it is a chief building block of Christian community.

Intro Questions: Apart from the example of Jesus, what are some of the better examples of humility that have inspired you? What are some examples of false humility that you have seen or maybe even realized you were guilty of? Why is pursuing a life of humility a difficult virtue to sustain?

Today's Big Idea: Having the same mindset as Christ TOGETHER leads us to an amazing community and brings great beauty and love to the world.

Philippians 2:1-11 (NIV)

- 1** Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.
- 3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- 5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
 - 6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 - 7** rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
 - 8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
 - 9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
 - 10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 - 11** and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

O – According to verse 1, what are the commonalities that believers can have in Christ?

I – In verse 2, Paul says that his joy is to be made "complete" in the knowledge of their unity. The translation of that word "complete" (*plerosate*) toggles back and forth between "perfect" and "complete" in a whole sense in the Greek New Testament. And the term "like-minded" literally means "to mind the same thing." Why does Paul see this high call of unity as essential in seeking their preservation in the midst of suffering? (What happens when we "mind the same thing"?)

I – Paul's use of the term "selfish ambition" (v. 3) most likely comes from Aristotle's *Politica* (as it's arguably the only other mention in the ancient world). An educated follower would have understood this in the context of a political revolution and seen it as a greedy attempt to grab power for public office through unjust means. What is Paul (almost blatantly) saying in regards to Jesus and the Roman power structure? (Remember, Paul is writing from a jail in Rome.)

I – Greek culture held the concept of humility in contempt as they saw it to be a sign of weakness. Many barely familiar with the life of Jesus would have also seen him as a failed rebel leader executed under the Roman Law. While Paul is writing to a church of faithful believers, how do you think they would have processed Jesus' example of humility in their culture?

(The example of Jesus would be a complete reframing of the concept for them. The Son of God becomes a servant instead of an earthly king or an emperor. Jesus' power and teaching serve the least rather than profit the established. This is a key part of understanding the subversive nature of Christianity in the Roman world.)

A – In short, Paul teaches us not to do anything out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but instead seek the interest of others. How do we find the balance between our God-given calling and serving for the benefit of others?

O – It's often been debated that verses 6-11 were an ancient Christian hymn or theological poetry composed by Paul. What beauty can you find in its words and in its structure?

I – One of the potentially problematic verses in understanding Jesus' deity is v. 7. The NIV translation helps neutralize this by saying "he made himself nothing" but the Greek word (*ekenosen*) literally means "emptied himself" which confused some early Christians to think Jesus emptied himself of his deity. Being the second person of the Trinity, Jesus retains his deity/essence/power. One of the distinctions we see is Jesus the Son humbling himself as he yields to the Father's will throughout the Gospels. What passages and stories come to mind?

(The many instances of Jesus praying to the Father like John 17—why pray if you are the source of the answer? Jesus is modeling the need to be surrendered to the Father's will. Other examples include Matt. 24:30-40—no man knows the hour... only the Father.)

A – Verses 9-11 lead us through an amazing thought: that Jesus, the reason for the persecution of early Christians in Paul's context (and many today) was exalted by the Father and that one day everyone will bow and confess his name. In effect, Paul is saying that all will recognize the greatness and Lordship of Jesus. He is inviting the faithful to be part of this reality by being united in Christian humility. How can we apply this practice of Christian humility today in our lives, churches and throughout our world? What aspects of culture could change and whose lives could be transformed by the power of Jesus working through His followers?

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- c. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- d. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- e. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- f. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- g. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.