



[Complete the Home Study on pages 56–72.]

Bible Study Notes For Leaders

Read Philippians 2:1–11 and then work through the questions and notes below ahead of time to help you prepare to lead your group. The notes beneath the questions are not intended as answers to be read aloud. They are notes to help you facilitate the discussion.

1. Looking at verses 2–4, what can we infer is the problem that Paul is addressing in the Philippian church?

We can imagine what the problems are by looking at the positive exhortations. First, in verse 2, he asks them to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” This is a call to unity, but it is a threefold call, to mind, heart, and will. He wants them to agree on the truth (“like-minded”), love one another (“having the same love”), and work together toward the same goal (“being one in spirit and purpose”).

Verses 3 through 4 are a call to humility, to putting others’ interests ahead of their own. While verse 2 addressed the Christians as an entire body, verses 3 and 4 address each one as an individual. They are to turn from two things: “selfish ambition” (which is putting their own needs ahead of others) and “vain conceit” (which is an unrealistic assessment of themselves).

It seems that self-centeredness was leading to disunity in this church.



2. What are the four grounds for unity and humility that Paul lists in verse 1? How do these grounds lead to unity and humility?

The “encouragement from being united with Christ”

The word “encouragement” is the Greek word *paraklesis*, which means to be “strengthened” and given courage from our salvation in Christ.

The “comfort” of Christ’s love

The word “comfort” connotes the consolation you give someone who is grieving.

The Spirit’s “fellowship”

The word means “participation.”

“Tenderness and compassion”

These two words are used frequently in the Bible to describe God’s mercy.

Paul is saying that they have strength and deep consolation from Christ. They have been bound together by the participation in one Spirit, and they have been freely forgiven by the mercy of the Father.

There are many ways these grounds lead to unity and humility. Here are just a few:

- The strength and deep consolation from Christ should make us less needy. The term “vain conceit” connotes being hungry for honor, recognition, and status. If we have profound joy, encouragement, and consolation from Christ, we should not need the approbation of others.
- The “participation of the Spirit” means that all Christians are one, despite their differences. We may have diverse opinions, temperaments, or cultural mind-sets—but the fact that we all participate in the Spirit should be more important than political, intellectual, or cultural differences.
- The remembrance of the mercy of God should first humble us and second be a model for us. God’s care and provision for us was completely unmerited and undeserved, so we should humble ourselves before others.

3. Verse 5 says, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” What do we learn about Jesus’ attitude from verses 6–11?

The incarnation (vv. 6–7)

Here we see that Jesus, though he had a divine nature (v. 6a, “being in very nature God”), made himself nothing by “taking the very nature of a servant” (v. 7). Paul does not say that Jesus shed his nature as God, but rather he assumed a human nature. Jesus was, then, both divine and human at the same time.

The atonement (v. 8)

Jesus did not simply humble himself into being a man, but he also humbled himself to a particular task. He “became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Despite the fact that he retained his divine nature when on the earth, he voluntarily did not exercise his rights, but instead became weak and vulnerable and died on the cross for us.

The future kingdom (vv. 9–11)

This section tells us that God exalted Jesus “to the highest place” (v. 9). He is exalted and ruling from heaven. Paul looks all the way forward to the day when everyone and everything in the world will bow the knee to Jesus.

Jesus’ life was marked by not just one but two self-humblings: the incarnation and the cross. He was exalted—but by God, and only through and after his humbling.

Jesus turned away from personal glory and gain voluntarily, deliberately, and decisively. He shows us that the way to lead is to serve. The way to find fulfillment is not to seek fulfillment but look to the fulfillment of others.



4. In his book *Love in Hard Places* Don Carson writes,

The church is...made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together...because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance... They are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake.¹

Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not? Share examples.

One of the most important ways that the Christian church embodies the gospel is in the unity of Christians who are different from one another—temperamentally, culturally, and racially. We need to show the world that people who cannot live in love and unity outside of Christ can do so in Christ.

When it comes to building actual relationships across racial and cultural barriers, we quickly come up against a host of attitudes, rooted deeply in our own cultural customs and ways of thinking, that make it hard to accept and respect people of other groups. We are “natural enemies.” The gospel works to overcome these attitudes. We are sinners saved by sheer grace, and we need to draw out the implications and live in total consistency with that.

Read 1 Peter 2:9–12 and watch the DVD for Session 4 to help you prepare to lead your group through the discussion that follows.

Discussion Questions Notes For Leaders

After watching the DVD with your group, use these questions to encourage discussion. The notes beneath the questions are not intended as answers to be read aloud. They are notes to help you facilitate the discussion.

You do not need to complete all the questions. Depending on the dynamic of the group and your time limit, you may find it helpful to choose in advance the questions that will be of most value to your group and start with those.

1. Was there anything from the DVD that was new to you, or had an effect on you? Did you hear anything that raised more questions in your mind?

Discuss with your group.

2. We heard in the DVD that,

We are “a holy nation”—different, distinct from the world and the people around us. And yet at the same time, we’re supposed to be “a royal priesthood”—deeply involved in the lives of the world and the people around us.

Do you feel that you are part of the sort of community described in the DVD? If not, why not? What can you do to make this happen?

Discuss with your group.

3. “We will not know God, change deeply, nor win the world apart from community.” To what extent have you experienced this?

Discuss with your group.



4. What practices make a good, strong, healthy Christian community?

Brainstorm practical ways by which your own group can deepen its life together as a community.

The idea of community cannot be squared with merely attending church on Sunday—even regularly. The biblical texts imply a far deeper involvement. Our community needs to be marked by:

Cross-cultural unity

- When we believe the gospel, we receive a profound union with others who believe, even though they may be radically different from us in every other way. We should be making close friends with people from groupings, classes, or races who, apart from the gospel, we'd never know or care to know.
- It is worth noting that the unity of the church is a deeply missional factor (John 17:23). The early churches of the Mediterranean world were multi-ethnic, consisting of at least Jews and Greeks but often Africans and Asians too (see Acts 13:1 and following). Peter speaks of them collectively as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9).

Counter-cultural distinctiveness

- When Peter calls us a “holy nation,” he is saying, literally, that we are a distinct, unique community—a group of people who have distinct ways of doing nearly everything. We are a counter-culture in which we help each other become distinctive in everything we do:
 - how we use money and possessions
 - how we conduct relationships and family life
 - how we do our work
 - how we love and serve the poor and marginalized, and so on.

Corporate spirituality

- We should be praying with others.
- We should experience God with other people with some consistency.

Personal accountability

- We should be accountable personally to some others. We should have shared enough of our lives with others so that they see whether we are growing in Christ and can support us.

As well as all the other factors you may mention, including those from Philippians that you considered earlier, make sure to note that the “one another” commands that were examined in detail in the *Home Study* (the nine community-building practices) on pages 58–72 also contribute to a good, strong, healthy Christian community. You may want to review these briefly together as a group.

Some practical ways by which your own group can deepen its life together as a community include:

Common time

- Community requires availability. You must not be too hard for others to reach.
- Community requires frequency. There must be plenty of time shared together regularly.

Common practices

- Community requires a variety of practices:
 - eating together
 - recreation and often attending church together
 - learning together (Bible study, reading, and reflection in general)
 - personal counsel, comfort, and specific accountability for behavior
 - commitment to constant reconciliation and forgiveness
 - deeds of service and justice and witness done together
 - prayer, worship, and making music together

Common resources

- Community requires sharing home and living space through hospitality with others.
- Community requires sharing our resources, and feeling a sense of responsibility to others.



Being patient, forgiving, empathetic, and affectionate toward one another

- To be involved deeply in people's lives is hard spiritual work. C.S. Lewis said that the only way to be sure not to have your heart broken is to never give it to anyone.² As Christians, we will and must give our hearts to others. Love is not only an action, but must also be an inner attitude of good will, patience, forgiveness, and warmth toward others.

5. How can we love people we do not naturally like?

Can we do loving deeds even when we don't "feel" loving? As we carry out loving deeds in spite of how we feel, can we work on our hearts to put aside condescension, irritability, bias, and selfishness?

We must remember Jesus' sacrifice for us when we try to "love people we do not naturally like." How does this work?

- The gospel is this: we are not loved because we are lovely, but in spite of our unloveliness. We are not loved because we have made ourselves worthy of love, but because Jesus died for us when we were unattractive in order to make us attractive.
- If Christians think of this as they are serving unattractive people, they will find a growing degree of repentance. "Loving Father, I was so much more unattractive to you than this person is to me, yet you were tortured and killed—you gave up your life for me! And all I need to do is to give up some time and effort for this person."
- A person who does not understand the gospel cannot do this. People who are just generally moral and nice cannot do this. They have to choose between the two inadequate alternatives, either phony love (niceness toward people you dislike) or sporadic love (kindness only toward people you like).
- If you show love as you repent, however, your heart is softened as you serve. Your service is sincere toward God at that moment and becomes more sincere toward people as you go along.

Pastor and author John Piper gives the following six guidelines for loving each other amid differences:

- Let's avoid gossiping.
- Let's identify evidences of grace in each other and speak them to each other and about each other.
- Let's speak criticism directly to each other if we feel the need to speak to others about it.
- Let's look for, and assume, the best motive in the other's viewpoint, especially when we disagree.
- Let's think often of the magnificent things we hold in common.
- Let's be more amazed that we are forgiven than that we are right. And in that way, let's shape our relationships by the gospel.³

6. Look at the following list derived from Romans 12.

Love honestly, speaking out against what is wrong. (v. 9)
Love even unattractive people, because they are your brothers and sisters. (v. 10)
Love by making others feel honored and valuable. (v. 10)
Love by being generous in practical ways with your home, money, and time. (v. 13)
Love without bitterness. Don't "pay others back," or hold resentment against others. (v. 14)
Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others. (v. 15)
Love with humility. Be willing to associate with people who differ from you. (v. 16)

In which areas do you, as a group, tend to be the weakest, and why? What practical steps could you take to improve?

Discuss with your group.

[The Home Study is a project. Read pages 78–79 in advance to help you prepare to lead your group through this project.]

[Pray for your group.]

² The exact quote is: "Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal." C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), 121.

³ Read the whole article for biblical support and explanation of these guidelines. John Piper, "Six Biblical Guidelines for Loving Each Other Amid Differences." *Desiring God: www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary* (August 4, 2009)