SESSION 5
Yield

THE POINT
Humbly place the needs of others before your own.

THE PASSAGE
Philippians 2:1-5,13-15

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 reports of people pushing, shoving, and even punching to be the first in the store for the black Friday sales during Thanksgiving weekend.

We don’t always want to be first though.

- The four-year-old will gladly let his sister go first when lining up for shots.
- The adventurer will step back and let someone else volunteer for the boring assignment.

These examples 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 this session, we learn of a better way. Paul contended that we are called to be first in line for one thing: looking out for others. And when we do that, we get the benefit of strong relationships.

THE SETTING
Tradition holds that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi around AD 61-62 while he was under house arrest in Rome awaiting his first trial before the emperor. Paul wrote to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him through their messenger Epaphroditus. Paul also wrote to inform the church of his circumstances and to explain why he was sending Epaphroditus back home early.
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 113 of the PSG: “When have you really wanted to be first in line?”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the group option on page 151 of this Leader Guide to illustrate the importance of yielding.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 114 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of humility by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 114 of the PSG: “Humbly place the needs of others before your own.”

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 11, the “Submission” poster to reinforce the point. Invite a volunteer to read the quote aloud.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, prepare to play a worship song about yielding or with a theme of humility to lead into prayer.

NOTE: A music option can be found at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help group members learn to yield to Him and others in a spirit of humility. Thank Him for being a model of humility through Christ.
**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.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 2:1-4 on page 115 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** 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” (v. 2). Live in harmony! Unity among His people pleases God (Ps. 133:1), just as a well-rehearsed song becomes “music to our ears.” If your church is like most, the members will not agree on every single line item in the annual budget, but 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.”

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 115 of the PSG: “What circumstances in life tempt you to ignore the instructions in these verses?”

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help explain how Christians are to be unified.

**RECAP:** 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.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the skit option on page 151 of this Leader Guide to emphasize the importance of putting others before yourself.

**TRANSITION:** We are to humbly look out for the needs and interests of others. In the next verses, we see that Jesus is our example of humility and submission.
Philippians 2:1-4 Commentary

[VERSE 1] One of the key themes in Paul’s letter to the Philippians is his call for the church to remain united in Christ (Phil. 1:27–4:9). Paul wrote of their common belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ as their reason for unity. “The great cause of the proclamation of the gospel calls for them to be united in spirit, in task, and in confidence (1:27-30).”

In chapter 2, the apostle urged the Philippians to live in humble unity that places the needs of others before one’s own. The first four verses may be divided as follows: the basis of Paul’s appeal for unity (v. 1); the essence of Christian unity (v. 2); and the unique expression of Christian unity (vv. 3-4).

Paul pointed out four realities of the Christian life as grounds for his appeal to unity, each beginning with the word if. The use of the word if was not meant to convey doubt. The Greek construction expresses certainty, in the sense of “because there is.” Because believers had these significant realities in common, they should be united.

The first unifying factor is encouragement in Christ. The Greek term rendered encouragement comes from a verb that means “to call alongside” for the purpose of support and advocacy. A noun form (Greek: parakletos) designates the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26). Paul may have used this word form in the sense of a calling or summons; he assumed the Philippian believers answered to Christ, who called them to unity. The phrase in Christ stresses the Philippian believers’ union with Christ by faith.

A second reality that fostered unity is the consolation of love. The Greek term for consolation can also be translated “persuasion” or “incentive.” God’s kind of love (Greek: agape) provides incentive for Christian unity. Paul may have been appealing to their love for Christ as a ground of unity.

The third unifying factor is fellowship with the Spirit. The word translated fellowship is the same term rendered “partnership” in Philippians 1:5 that Paul used to describe his partnership with the Philippian believers in the ministry. Indwelt by, empowered by, and led by the Holy Spirit, Christians are to work together for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, believers share in affection and mercy. Affection conveys the sense of compassion and tenderheartedness. Mercy means kindness, especially in sharing sorrow and meeting needs.

[VERSE 2] On the basis of these four realities, Paul appealed to the Philippian believers to fill up or make complete his joy by being unified. Paul used an overriding admonition followed by three phrases to stress the oneness he wanted for his friends. The major exhortation was they think the same way. They were to have the same mindset, outlook, or attitude. Such an approach involved their having the same values and purpose. They would be like-minded if they had the same love—God’s kind of love that Christ demonstrated, if they were united in spirit—a spirit of close-knit harmony, and a focus on one purpose—a permanent disposition that focused emotions and will toward one aim.

[VERSES 3-4] Unity requires selflessness on the believers’ part. They must do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. Rather than being self-centered, believers need to be other-centered. They should not be in competition with one another or ego-driven. Rather, they must conduct themselves with humility.

Christians need a clear understanding of humility. First, we need to know that it is not weakness; groveling; self-abasement or disparagement; a poor self-image; or a false denial of talents, skills, or accomplishments. Humility is a healthy, balanced view of ourselves—a recognition of our strengths and weaknesses. It is being comfortable enough with ourselves and strong enough to make a deliberate commitment to others’ welfare. It is self-knowledge and self-acceptance that refrains from judging others but looks for good in them. The attitude or virtue of humility enables us to consider others as more important than ourselves, looking out for their needs and interests as much as we do our own.

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**Philippians 2:5**

5 Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 2:5 on page 116 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** 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 all comes down to attitude: “Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.”

Jesus is the quintessential example for us. 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.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help explain how Christ emptied himself.

**RECAP:** 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).

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 117 of the PSG: “How do we balance our responsibility to ourselves and to others?”

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that we must live humbly without grumbling, complaining, or arguing.
Philippians 2:5 Commentary

[VERSE 5] Christian living must have a theological foundation. Philippians 2:5 reveals Paul’s concern for both. The apostle presented Christ as the model by whom the Philippians were to pattern their lives. Jesus is the hope for Christians to live in submission.

Verse 5 begins with an imperative, adopt the same attitude, which facilitates the transition from verses 1-4 to verses 6-11. Using an imperative verb, Paul commanded the Philippians to have the same mindset as Christ. The mindset Christ epitomized is that of humility, self-sacrificing, self-giving, obedience, and service toward others—the same ideas that Paul just urged the Philippians to exemplify. Christ is the supreme example of the proper attitude of humble selflessness. The apostle precisely clarified which attitude he was emphasizing: the attitude that was also in Christ Jesus. The apostle could have meant individual Christians were to adopt Christ’s disposition, spirit, or approach—what we call “mindset.” More likely, he had in mind the church family as a whole. Either way, they were to be like-minded with Christ.

In verse 6, Paul emphasized Christ’s deity. From eternity, Christ existed as Deity. The phrase form of God does not mean Christ merely was like God; the term form has the idea of the expression of essential attributes and stresses the reality of Christ’s deity. In nature, essence, and being, He is God. To understand what God is like, we look to Jesus.

Even though Christ is Deity, He did not think of His equality with God as something “to be exploited.” In other words, He refused to use His deity selfishly. He could have retained all the prerogatives of His deity, but He chose not to do so. We should not be impressed with worldly status or position but should have the same humble attitude as Christ as we serve others. Jesus taught His disciples that greatness consists of being a servant. He said the only area in which His followers were to seek to be first was in serving others (see Mark 10:43-44). Then He offered the supreme example: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45). In a society that measures a person’s status by the number of people ready to do his or her bidding, believers are to offer the visible witness of humble service in Christ’s spirit.

Rather than holding on tightly to the prerogatives of His deity, Christ “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7). The Greek word used here means to waive one’s prerogatives or rights to something, to humble oneself or set aside a worthy reputation. Jesus chose to follow God’s will, to leave heaven, to lay aside the glory of God, and to take on our humanity. His emptying Himself is closely related to His choosing to become a servant. He fully retained His deity but chose to limit His glory.

Even though Christ was Deity in human flesh, “he humbled himself” (v. 8). Again, instead of trading on His deity, He chose to become obedient to the Father’s will. The Gospels emphasize that Christ consistently obeyed the Father. He told His disciples that His food was to “do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). In Gethsemane, facing the cross, He said: “Abba, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). Thus, Jesus was willingly obedient to the point of death.

Instead of claiming an elevated status among His people, He chose the path of self-sacrifice. As God’s Son, Christ was obedient to His Father, even when His obedience resulted in His opponents’ putting Him to death. Moreover, in His obedience He endured the most humiliating form of execution devised to that time: “death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). The word even in verse 8 points to this particular kind of death. It was employed to put to death slaves, criminals, and insurrectionists. It was designed to torture and dehumanize the individual as he died. Note the progression of intensity: obedient; obedient to death; obedient to death by agonizing crucifixion. Christ placed the Father’s will above His own.
**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.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 2:13-15 on page 117 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** “Do everything without grumbling and arguing” (v. 14). 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.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 118 of the PSG: “How have you seen relationships strengthened through acts of humility?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 118 of the PSG. 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.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help explain Paul’s comparison of believers to stars.

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 118 of the PSG: “How can our group serve as a safe place for honest conversation?”

**DO:** Direct group members to Engage with “Learning to Yield” on page 119 of the PSG (page 151 in this Leader Guide) to help them reflect on the importance of humility in our lives.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “Humbly place the needs of others before your own.”
Philippians 2:13-15 Commentary

[VERSE 13] Paul addressed the only way to truly live a submitted life in Christ. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. Believers are to constantly work at living submitted to Jesus. However, the Christian can live such a life only because God Himself is at work in believers. It is God who supplies the necessary empowerment of Christians to obedience. Interestingly, Paul supplied the Philippians the who, where, what, and why of Christian empowerment in verse 13. As has already been stated, the who is none other than God. Paul reminded the believers, it is God who is working in you. Paul indicated that the where is in you, the body of believers. Perhaps the what here is the most pressing theological issue in this verse. The what of Christian empowerment is God was enabling them to will and to work.

In the context of this verse, why should the believer submit to Christ? Paul clearly stated, to work according to his good purpose is the reason for Christian submission. Paul reminded the Philippians that they were not left to their own inadequate resources in living the Christian life. God was present to work in each of them and in the church collectively to motivate them and enable them to work effectively on behalf of (for) His redemptive purpose. The Greek term translated working and to work gives us our word energize and has the sense of efficient energy or power. Paul did not advocate passivity in the Christian life in which believers do nothing and God does everything for them. Rather, God works in believers and believers actively work. Verse 13 is one of the most comforting verses in the New Testament. We do not strive alone. God is working with us!

[VERSE 14] Paul wrote that believers are to do everything without grumbling and arguing. Evidently the Philippians were experiencing controversy in the church that was not being addressed in a healthy way. Here grumbling carries with it the connotation of “complaint” or “displeasure” which is often expressed by murmurings and gossip. A good example of grumbling can be seen in Numbers 14. The concept of arguing carries with it many different ideas. The Greek word can also be rendered “evil thoughts,” “disputes,” or “doubts.” One approach is to see grumbling as private complaints and arguing as public disputes.

[VERSE 15] At issue in verse 15 is the purpose for which Paul had been challenging the Philippians. The positive purpose is introduced by a purpose clause translated so that. Paul wanted the believers to be blameless with regard to their lives toward one another as well as the world. He commanded that their behavior be pure in light of their submission to one another and Christ. The language used here is reminiscent of the legal language found in Deuteronomy 32. The character Paul spoke of here is quite striking when viewed against the spiritual backdrop of a crooked and perverted generation. The believers who embrace the example that Christ set will contrast themselves with this dark world. To be crooked and perverted as a generation carries with it the connotation of an intentional misunderstanding of God’s Word and standards. The word generation referred to the believers’ hostile, pagan environment. In the darkness of a sphere ruled by evil, the Philippian believers shone like stars. The Greek term rendered stars occurs only in Philippians 2:15 and Revelation 21:11 (“radiance”). The word means “luminaries” or “light-giving bodies.” It could refer to any object that gives light, such as lanterns and torches. In the Septuagint, the word is used for the sun, moon, and stars. Most likely, Paul used it in the latter sense. Christians are to be light bearers in a sin-darkened world as they let Christ, “the light of the world” (John 9:5), shine through them. Much like the metaphors that Jesus gave in the Gospels (a city set on a hill, or a lamp set on a lampstand, Matt. 5:14-15), followers of Christ are to shine forth like brilliant stars set against a dark black tapestry.

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 120 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:

- **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.

**Wrap It Up**

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 120 of the PSG.

When’s the last time you fought hard to be first in line for something you wanted? When’s the last time you fought hard not to be first in line for something you dreaded? There’s a better way; by faith, let’s practice it!

**PRAY:** Conclude by thanking God for the grace He gives us so that we can yield to others. Praise Him and thank Him for humbling Himself through His work on earth for us, especially His death on the cross.

Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra
ENGAGE

Learning to Yield. In the following arenas of your life, how can you act without grumbling or arguing? (choose 3) Jot down some ways of responding that would be so countercultural that you would certainly shine like a star.

while driving  hanging at a sports event  functioning in your home
choosing what you wear  choosing entertainment options
speaking to others  spending money  working at the office

BONUS CONTENT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Divide into groups of two-three people to answer the following. Set a timer for two minutes on your watch or phone. List as many locations in your city as you can think of that have a “yield” sign posted. Try to list more locations than the other groups in the allotted time. Where do these signs seem to benefit you the most?

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, enlist two volunteers to perform a skit. Set up a table like a check-out stand in a grocery store. Give each volunteer a chair to use like shopping carts. Suggest they are arriving at the check-out simultaneously. Let them argue about who arrived first, who is in the biggest hurry, who has the fewest items, and so forth. Involve the group in deciding who should yield to whom. Then transition to the next section.