

thinking like Christ

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 2:1–11

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God commands believers to think and act with Christlike humility.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate their lives for evidence of Christ's humility.

MEMORY VERSES

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ The pattern in the world today is for people to be proud of who they are and make sure the rest of humanity treats them as they feel they should be treated. Get someone's pronouns wrong in Michigan, you could be fined \$10,000. "Respect me for my identity or I will make you pay!" is the cry of the modern, self-absorbed, self-loving person. Tragically, such self-absorption isn't giving people the happiness and fulfillment they thought it would. Seeking to find satisfaction in self-love leads to disillusionment and despondency.
- ☐ Read Philippians 2:1–11. Jesus put on humility to serve humanity in obedience to God the Father. He gave His all, including His life. In response, God exalted Jesus. God's Son now has eternal, unfailing joy. Jesus, more than anyone else, understands the kind of life that delivers the joy everyone seeks.
- ☐ The world peddles its self-love and self-centeredness everywhere. Your learners face such doctrines every day. They will adopt them if they don't guard their hearts and minds. Encourage them to proactively adopt the mind of Christ. This session goes a long way toward encouraging them to do so.

Session Summary

After commanding the Philippians to let their conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, Paul provided them with instructions on how to do that. He listed why we can be like-minded and described what like-mindedness looks like in our lives. Those who have the mind of Christ will be humble in their thoughts and deeds. Paul finished the section by presenting Christ's example of humility. Because of Jesus' humble death on the cross, God has exalted Him, giving Him a name above all names. One day everyone will acknowledge Jesus' exaltation. For unbelievers, their recognition will come too late.

Session Starters

Option 1—Five Most Famous

Gather

- Whiteboard and markers.

Steps

1. Have learners make a list of who they think are the five most well-known people of all time. Have them write their lists on the whiteboard if there is room.
2. Have learners explain and defend their lists.
3. Discuss the learners' lists.

ASK: What would you say characterizes the people you listed?

ASK: Are they famous because of their humility? Explain.

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul continued his instructions concerning unity, pointing to humility as the key to unity. He concluded with the example of Jesus. Most people would consider Jesus to be the most famous person of all time. His humility has a lot to do with His fame. This session points us to Jesus and encourages us to adopt His humility.

Option 2—Impressions

Steps

1. Arrange ahead of time for a learner or a guest to do some impressions. Or ask your learners to do an impression of you.
2. Talk about doing impressions.

ASK: What makes an impression funny? *The impressionist must pay close attention to how a person thinks and acts so he or she can reproduce the person's thoughts and actions.*

ASK: Has anyone ever impersonated you? How did the person do?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul called on the Philippians to think and act like Christ. Not in an impressionist way, but in how they lived every day. God expects the same of us. The result won't be laughs, but there will be joy involved. Those who think and act like Christ will know Christ's joy and will bring Christ's joy to those they serve.

Bible Study

I. Paul's Exhortation to Like-mindedness (Phil. 2:1, 2)

Before giving the reasons to be like-minded, we need to understand what Paul meant by the term (Phil. 2:2). To be like-minded means to "think the same thing." But "think" means more than thoughts. It describes a person's attitude and disposition. It suggests having a settled opinion. It includes both interest and decision. It is the kind of thinking that affects one's whole being so that he or she decides and follows through with action.

A. Reasons to be like-minded (2:1)

Before Paul commanded the Philippians to be like-minded, he focused their thinking on four Christian bonds that held them together as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

READ: Philippians 2:1.

The first of these bonds was the Philippians' consolation in Christ (Phil. 2:1). To console someone means to alleviate their troubles, including their sense of loss and grief. Christ consoled all the believers in Philippi. He didn't play favorites or leave anyone out. Christ still consoles believers today.

ASK: Why should Christ's consolation of all believers motivate us to be like-minded? *Christ consoles believers because He loves them. His love for all believers ought to motivate us to be like-minded with all believers.*

God expects those consoled by Christ to become consolers themselves. Paul told the church in Corinth to console others with the comfort they had received from God (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). So God primarily consoles believers through those believers He has already consoled through the ministry of other believers.

READ: 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

Church members should be the catalyst for consolation rather than the reason people cry out for it. Believers who are like-minded will be ready and anxious to console other hurting believers.

Second, the bond of a mutual comfort of God's love allows believers to be like-minded (Phil. 2:1). The word for "comfort" literally means "to speak close." Paul pointed to a person coming alongside to help an individual in need. God's love motivates the person doing the comforting, and God's love conveyed through the comforter then comforts the person in need.

ASK: When has God's love comforted you through someone who came alongside you?

Read "if" in Philippians 2:1 as "since."
Paul wasn't questioning whether the four bonds existed. On the contrary, he stated that the four bonds are indeed realities.

The third Christian bond that linked the Philippian believers together was the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This bond is the believer's partnership with other believers through the Holy Spirit. All believers receive the Holy Spirit at salvation. The Spirit moves in our hearts and minds in the same way, making unity possible.

READ: Galatians 5:25, 26. **ASK:** What happens when believers refuse to walk in the Spirit? *They become conceited and begin to provoke and envy one another.*

A church filled with envy, strife, and ill-will is a church filled with believers who refuse to walk in the Spirit.

The final Christian bond is affection and outward compassion. The original Greek word for affection translates as "bowels," which the Greeks considered to be the center of deep feelings. The word "mercies" refers to an outward expression of deep feelings. These words refer to the tender mercy and compassion of Christ, which the Philippians had experienced when God saved them. Because they experienced them, they were to exercise them toward each other.

Paul wanted the Philippians to treat one another as God treats them. We, too, should treat others as God treated us; we are partners in the gospel.

B. Results of like-mindedness (2:2)

After focusing the Philippians' attention on their spiritual bonds, Paul communicated the result of their like-mindedness, namely his joy.

READ: Philippians 2:2.

Paul had begun to know joy from the Philippians' spiritual progress (1:4), but there was more joy to realize. He wanted the Philippians to be like-minded to bring his joy to completion—to fill his cup of joy to the brim and then overflow it.

We have all thought about things we know we need to do but lack the motivation to do them. But all of us have also thought about something that prompted us to act immediately or as soon as possible. These types of thoughts interrupt our sleep and prompt us to act the next morning.

ASK: When have you had a thought that moved you to action? What motivated your action?

Thinking that demands action is what Paul had in mind when he commanded the Philippians to be like-minded. He called on them to think about their bonds in Christ in such a way that they would respond immediately by striving for unity.

Paul added that mutual love comes from like-mindedness (2:2). As believers we can love one another because God's Spirit has placed

divine love in our hearts. Paul said in Romans 5:5 that God's love has been poured broadly into our hearts, meaning it is overflowing. It is from the overflow of God's love in our hearts that we love others. Like-minded believers can't help but share their mutual love of God.

Being like-minded also means believers are of one "accord" (Phil. 2:2). "Harmonious" and "united in spirit" describe the meaning of "accord." There's a similarity of attitude and spirit. Like links in a chain, the believers at Philippi were to depend on each other.

Paul ended verse 2 with a repetition of the need for like-mindedness. The phrase "of one mind" means "thinking the one thing." Being like-minded, the Philippians would strive together to reach the goals God had established for them.

ASK: Do you see the results of like-mindedness (joy, love, accord) in our church? In what ways?

II. Paul's Explanation of Like-mindedness (Phil. 2:3, 4)

So how does one work toward becoming like-minded? It is by being humble in attitude and action. Paul presented the need for humility in verses 3 and 4.

A. Humble attitude (2:3)

READ: Philippians 2:3.

Like-minded ministry comes from hearts of humility rather than from hearts motivated by selfish ambitions and unfounded pride. The selfishly ambitious create strife as they lust for power and influence over others. Those acting out of vainglory have a high and yet false view of themselves. Such people claim to be always right, never admitting when they are wrong. Their conceit and desire for personal prestige blind them to their own ineptness.

John wrote about Diotrephes's love for preeminence in the church (3 John 9, 10). He spread malicious rumors about John and others he saw as his rivals. He even kept out those who came from other churches and drove out those who wanted to receive them. Pride motivated him to protect his power, even if it meant disharmony and disruption in the church.

Those who set like-mindedness as their goal, root out all strife and vainglory in their hearts. They adopt an attitude of lowliness and humility. They see themselves honestly, or as God sees them. They don't exercise self-deprecation, rather they understand they are nothing without Christ and must depend on His grace for any spiritual success. With their focus on Christ and off self, they count others as better than themselves because Christ values others, died for them, and is working in their lives to make them more like Him.

ASK: How might we know if we honor others better than ourselves? *We speak highly of them rather than gossiping about them; we encourage them; we root and pray for their spiritual success.*

B. Humble actions (2:4)

Humble attitudes lead to humble actions.

READ: Philippians 2:4.

The word “look” in verse 4 means looking attentively or taking note of. In the context, Paul directed the Philippians to purposefully notice other people’s situations in order to show them concern and lend them a helping hand. This outlook was possible only as the Philippians lived with an honest view of themselves, or with lowly minds.

Note that Paul didn’t say not to look out for one’s own interests. God expects believers to take care of their own spiritual growth. The more we care for our own souls, the more we will be burdened to reach out to help others. Our desire to help others spiritually grow flows out of the personal attention we give to God’s Word and prayer. A person who is caring for the spiritual health of others has first cared for his or her own spiritual health.

ASK: What are some examples in our church of believers taking the interests of others seriously?

III. Christ’s Example of Humility (Phil. 2:5–8)

Paul turned to Christ’s example of humility to support his point.

A. His humble attitude (2:5, 6)

READ: Philippians 2:5.

Christ modeled the humble, others-focused mind Paul just commanded the Philippians to have. Paul wanted the Philippians to exercise Christ’s mind, so that they think like Him. He then gave details about Christ’s thinking.

READ: Philippians 2:6.

Being in the form of God means “existing” in the form of God. Form implies the outward expression of the inward essence. So Christ has always been the Son of God and has always possessed all of God the Father’s attributes and abilities (John 1:1, 2).

The Greek in the second half of Philippians 2:6 literally says Christ “considered it not robbery” to exist in a manner equal to God. The Greek word for “robbery” refers to something to be grasped or held by force and used to one’s advantage. Christ didn’t regard His existing

in a manner equal to God as something to be grasped and exclusively applied for His own advantage.

ASK: What word would you use to describe Christ's attitude?
Humble, sacrificial, genuine, loving.

B. His humble actions (2:7, 8)

Christ showed His humility when He came to earth as a man.

READ: Philippians 2:7.

The first phrase in verse 7 means that Christ veiled His deity when He became a man. He freely laid aside the independent exercise of His divine prerogatives and lived on earth as a servant. For example, Christ used His omnipotence only under the power of the Holy Spirit and within God's will. That's why the Gospels don't record Jesus using His divine attributes until after His baptism and the subsequent empowering by the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21, 22). So during His growing up years, Jesus didn't miraculously provide a meal for Himself whenever He felt hungry. Nor did He show supernatural strength in any games or competitions with His brothers.

By taking the form of a servant, Jesus Christ did not exchange His deity for humanity; He became the God-Man, possessing a human nature as well as a divine nature. Jesus displayed the nature of God in the nature of a servant. The "form" of a servant denotes essence or character. It depicts servitude and subjection and other essential characteristics of a servant. When Christ took the form of a servant, He became a servant rather than simply acting like one. When he donned a towel to wash His disciples' feet on the night before He was betrayed, He illustrated His servanthood (John 13:1–17).

Coming in the "likeness of men" (Phil. 1:7) means Christ was born like all other human beings. It refers to His incarnation and points out Christ's "essential identity" with humanity. It implies the reality of the likeness of Christ to men. Christ existed as fully human and yet without a sin nature (Heb. 4:15).

The humility Christ showed in becoming a man moved Him to obey the Father and submit to the terrors of the cross, where He bore the sins of the world and satisfied the Father's wrath.

READ: Philippians 2:8.

Jesus appeared outwardly as a human. Most of those who wagged their finger at Jesus and mocked Him while He hung on the cross believed He was nothing more than a man (Matt. 27:39–41). Of course, they were gravely mistaken. The mockers didn't understand Jesus' humility had moved Him to the extreme of giving up His life on the cross for humanity.

The Greek word for "form" in verse 6 is the same Greek word for "form" in verse 7.

The word “even” in verse 8 introduces the most striking detail of the humiliation Christ endured. He did not merely die; He, though sinless, died in the manner of common criminals. Being nailed to a cross was the lowest, most shameful of all executions.

ASK: How does Jesus’ example of humility help you understand Paul’s command to be and act humbly?

God requires all believers to live with Christlike humility. And as we will see with Christ, living humbly will in the end bring great reward.

IV. Christ’s Exaltation for Being Humble (Phil. 2:9–11)

A. His unrivaled position (2:9)

READ: Philippians 2:9.

Because Christ humbled Himself, God “highly exalted” Him. The phrase “highly exalted” is one word in the Greek, occurring only in Philippians 2:9. The Holy Spirit reserved the word for use only in connection with Christ. No one else will be exalted to the “rank” Jesus earned through His humble obedience. His position will always be unrivaled. Revelation 5 gives us a glimpse of life in Heaven after the Rapture and before Christ’s return. Christ’s exaltation because of His humiliation on the cross is abundantly obvious.

READ: Revelation 5:8–10. **ASK:** Why will the church (the twenty-four elders) give Christ praise?

READ: 1 Peter 5:5, 6. **ASK:** What did Peter teach concerning humility? *God gives grace to the humble and will exalt them for their humility.*

God has also given Jesus a name above every name (Phil. 2:9). God gave Jesus the name, “Lord” (Yahweh), which represents the personal name of the God of Israel. The Philippians lived under Nero, who considered himself a lord. Paul’s point is that the Philippians should keep their eyes on Jesus, their highest, unrivaled authority.

B. His universal recognition (2:10, 11)

God had a twofold purpose in exalting Jesus and giving Him the name “Lord.”

READ: Philippians 2:10, 11.

God exalted Jesus so that every knee will bow before Jesus and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. These predictions refer to the time when everyone will recognize Christ’s sovereignty. Believers will physically bow before Jesus in Heaven after the Rapture. We ought to bow our hearts before Him and confess Him as Lord every day. Unbelievers will bow and confess at the end of time while standing

before the Great White Throne Judgment. By then it will be too late for their salvation. The bowing and confessing of all people of all time will ultimately be to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus willingly served others regardless of the cost. There were believers in the Philippian church whose aim was to serve themselves. They needed to follow the example of Christ. They needed to humble themselves and let God do the exalting. We must do the same.

Session Application

Steps

1. Review Paul's main point that living like-minded means adopting Christ's humility.

ASK: How might someone know if he or she is bowing before Christ and acknowledging Him as Lord? (Consider Paul's teaching in Philippians 2:1–4.)

ASK: Does your answer describe your life? Explain.

ASK: What steps toward humility do you need to take?

2. Encourage your learners to consider and answer on their own the following questions about their relationships.

ASK: With whom do you not enjoy like-mindedness?

ASK: How do you expect your focus on adopting the humility of Christ will affect those strained relationships?

3. Close in prayer for your learners. Praise God for Christ's example of humility and for making humility possible in our lives by providing salvation for us.

presenting unified testimonies

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 2:12–18

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God wants believers to work on their unity so they might be testimonies of the gospel light.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will actively seek like-mindedness and opportunities to take the word of life to the world.

MEMORY VERSE

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Teacher Preparation

- “This little light of mine. I’m going to let it shine.” So the children’s chorus goes. Every believer does have the light of the gospel to take to the those living in spiritual darkness. But the individual lights in a church will shine brightly only if they shine together.
- Read Philippians 2:12–18. Paul urged the Philippians to work on their unity, noting that God will be faithful to work in them to draw them together. Paul went on to point out the connection between their unity and their testimony. Churches with strong unity will have a strong testimony before the watching and crooked world.
- If you invited an unsaved friend to your church, would you be worried about your church’s testimony? What about a church softball game? Or what if your friend hung around for a church business meeting? Challenge your learners to work out their unity as a class and then as a part of your church. Encourage them to use their unity to draw others to Christ.

Session Summary

Paul commanded the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Specifically, he wanted them to work on their unity out of reverence and respect for Christ, Who humbled Himself and died to make their unity possible. Working on unity means working together without complaining and arguing. A unified church will shine as lights in the crooked and perverse world, drawing unbelievers to Christ. Paul added that he would rejoice in the day of Christ to see the Philippians united and reaching their world even if it meant he suffered and died for Christ.