

REDEFINING NORMAL

"REDEFINING COMMUNITY"

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

This Week's Core Competency

Biblical Community – I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world. Acts 2:44-47 *All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

People disagree; it happens. We get crosswise with others in community sometimes over principle mostly over preference. But when we do, the kaffuffle that results and often spreads should not be mistaken for a mark of community. It's not; it's an aberration. In Philippians 2:1 Paul describes the norms of Christian community in a series of "if" statements that should really be read as assertions. In this verse the apostle asserts that people who are united to Christ and to each other in community receive encouragement from one another, are comforted by their mutual love, benefit from sharing with each other, and show, as well as are shown, tenderness and compassion. These are the marks of Christian community.

Most of these marks can either be seen directly or inferred indirectly from the description of the

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

-Php 2:5

early Christian community in Acts 4:32-36. About it Luke writes, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet."

Nevertheless, disputes occur that create disturbances even in the best of Christian communities. It happened in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas disputed whether to take John Mark with them on their second missionary journey. He had deserted them on their first trip, and Paul wanted nothing more to do with him. The disagreement between them was so sharp that they resolved it by parting company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus; Paul chose Silas and retraced his earlier steps through Syria and Cilicia (Ac 15:37-41). It happened in Philippi. There were those who preached Christ out of selfish ambition hoping to stir up trouble for Paul (1:17). And there were two women, two close associates of the apostle, Euodia and Syntyche, whose very public disagreement had affected the entire congregation (4:2). These women were neither new nor carnal Christians. Quite the opposite, they were women who had in Paul's words, "contended by my side in the cause of the

con't pg 2

gospel" (v. 3), and yet they disagreed vehemently over something. We would like to believe over some spiritual principle rather than some personal preference, but who knows? Whatever, Paul pled with the two of them to resolve their dispute because their situation and its consequences was not the norm of Christian community. It was an aberration, an aberration to be corrected by the example of Jesus.

To prevent the introduction of such disturbances into Christian community or to eliminate them once they are introduced Paul says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others." And then he appeals to the example of Jesus who did just that.

For Discussion

After the group discussion ended, you and Bill continued discussing how to do what Paul told the Philippians to do. He said "doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility considering others better than yourself" made perfect sense and was doable in the Christian community where everyone played by the same rule, but made no sense and was not doable outside that community where no one played by that rule. You said while it might be more risky to do outside the Christian community, Christ followers "should look not only to their own interests, but also to the interest of others as well" both inside and outside the church. After all, the example of Jesus implied as much. Bill said, people outside the community would inevitably take unfair advantage of anyone who did so. Christians have to guard their best interests like everyone else in a competitive world. Doing otherwise would be like bringing a knife to a gunfight.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Philippians 2:1-11

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6Who, being in very nature God,

*did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death--
even death on a cross!
9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (NIV, (c)1984)*

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Put an asterisk before "if" and "then" in vv. 1, 2.
- * Circle "like-minded" in v. 1, "humility" in v. 3, "very nature" in vv. 6, 7, "made himself nothing" in v. 7, "humbled himself" in v. 8, "exalted him" in v. 9, and "name" in vv. 9, 10.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 3, 4, 7.
- * Put #1 over the word "having" and #2 over "being" in v. 2. Put #3 over "do nothing" in v. 3 and #4 over "should look not" in v. 4.
- * Box "the same as" indicating *comparison* in v. 5.
- * Underline the words "very nature God" and "equality with God" in v. 6.
- * Circle the word "even" used to intensify the death Jesus died in v. 8.
- * Draw a line across the page between v. 8 and v. 9.
- * In the margin beside vv. 5-8 write, "Christ humbled himself," and in the margin beside vv. 9-11 write, "God exalted him."
- * Box "that" indicating *purpose* in v. 10.
- * Draw a line from the words "the name" in v. 9 to the word "Lord" in v. 11.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Describe norms of Christian community mentioned in verse 1.
2. List what it would take for the Philippians to make the apostle's joy complete.
3. Explain the *contrast* in verse 3.
4. Give an example of each side of the *contrast* in verse 4.
5. Put the attitude of Christ in your own words.
6. Many think verses 6-11 are an early Christian hymn about Christ. Divide it into two stanzas and title each.
7. What is the relationship between the two stanzas?
8. What did Christ do to make himself nothing?
9. What *purpose* did God have for giving Jesus the "name" Lord?
10. **Discussion:** What do you consider most remarkable about the example of Christ Jesus?

Conflict with its consequences introduces disturbance into Christian community. The normative experience of community marked by encouragement, love, fellowship, tenderness and compassion is undermined when members act out of selfish ambition, vain conceit, looking out only for their own interests and not the interests of others. The preventative and corrective for all such behavior involves following the example of Christ who humbled himself for the sake of sinners.

The related words "humble" and "humility" appear 55 times in the NIV. "Humble" appears 29 times in the OT and 11 times in the NT; "humility" appears 6 times in the OT and 9 times in the NT. Both sides of the "humility coin" can be seen in Jesus' description of himself in Matthew 11:29. "I am gentle (*praus* also translated "meek," "humble") and humble in heart (*tapeinos te kardia* or "lowly in heart"). "The two thoughts stand in parallel and show that Jesus was submissive before God, completely dependent on him, and devoted to him, and at the same time humble before men whose servant and helper he had become" (TDNT, 2:262). Paul had the example of Jesus in mind when he wrote to the church at Philippi telling them, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (2:6).

On the example of Christ one author writes, "The incarnation of Christ Jesus represents the antithesis of the human drive to dominate. Although he had access to all the privilege and power to which his identity with God entitled him, and although he could have exploited that privilege and power to dominate his creatures, Jesus considered his deity an opportunity for service and obedience. His deity became a matter not of getting but of giving, not of being served but of serving, not of dominance but of obedience. The difficult part of all this for the

twentieth-century believer is that Paul did not leave his description of Christ's astounding refusal to dominate in the realm of abstract speculation. Instead, he advised the church at Philippi, and through them the church of today, to follow Christ's example" (Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians*, 129).

It's possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason. And I suppose doing the right thing for the wrong reason is better than doing the wrong thing for any reason. Paul said as much in his remarks concerning some of his contemporaries. "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely . . . but what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached" (Php 1:15, 17, 18). Nevertheless, motives matter. In the next chapter of Philippians, he said, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (2:3).

It's possible to serve Christ for selfish reasons, to use our place in his church for personal gain. And when we do, our good deeds, whatever they might be, are tainted by our ulterior motives. Leading to wield influence in the body and get our own way–tainted. Teaching to gain the praise of others–tainted. Giving to be known for our generosity–tainted. Serving to outdo everyone else–tainted. Talking piously to impress others with our spirituality–tainted. You get the picture. In other words, don't toot your own spiritual horn in church; in humility toot the horns of others instead.

The Message of this Passage

Look out not only for your own interests but also for the interests of others considering them better than yourself thereby preserving the experience of Christian community for everyone.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

• **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

Talk about the Situation for Discussion on page 2 of this issue of *The Scrolls*.

“Redefining Community”

(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1-4 Verses 1-4 constitute one 58-word-long sentence in the Greek text that contains just one basic command, "make my joy complete."
- v. 1 **(therefore)** The Gk. word *ouv* ("therefore," "so;" cf., the NET Bible, ESV) omitted by the NIV ties verse 1 to Paul's exhortation in 1:27 "to live as 'citizens' worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one Spirit against the opposition" (Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT, 175).
- v. 1 **if** The word implies doubt in English, but this Greek construction assumes an affirmative response, which explains the following translation: "Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. I urge you then . . ." (TEV). "They should be translated 'assuming . . . then make my joy complete'" (Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC, 93); or perhaps "since there is . . ." (Fee, 177).
- v. 1 **united with Christ** Lit., "in Christ." Cf., "if there is any encouragement in Christ" (ESV, the NET Bible). Paul assumes his Christian readers derive encouragement from one another or perhaps directly from Christ as a result of their relationship to him.
- v. 1 **from his love** Lit., "comfort of love." The NIV takes this as a reference to comfort from Christ's love for his people. More likely, it refers to comfort they receive from one another as the outworking of God's love in their hearts (see Thielman, 96).
- v. 1 **with the Spirit** Lit., "of the Spirit." The phrase more likely refers to the fellowship with others in the body of Christ that comes from the Spirit—just as encouragement comes from Christ and comfort comes from love. Some commentators take it two ways, "any fellowship with the Holy Ghost and mutual fellowship in the Spirit" (Jac. J. Muller, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, NICNT, 73; cf., Homer A. Kent, "Philippians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 11:121).
- v. 1 **tenderness and** The Spirit not only produces fellowship in the body of Christ, but he also produces within each member tenderness and compassion for other members of God's family (see Thielman, 97).
- v. 2 **being like-minded** Lit., "think the same thing." "The word does not mean 'to think' in the sense of 'cogitate'; rather it carries the nuance of 'setting one's mind on,' thus having a certain disposition toward something (e.g., life, values, people) or a certain way of looking at things, thus 'mind set'" (Fee, 185). "This occurs when Christian people have the same values and loves" (Melick, 94). Paul stated what it would take to make his joy complete then he used four participles to elaborate on what he meant (see Kent, 122). The parallelism is lost in English translations.
- v. 2 **being one in . . .** Lit., "together in soul," or "fellow souled."
- v. 3 **selfish ambition** Cf., 1:17. The term refers to "a greedy attempt to gain the upper hand through underhanded tactics" (Thielman, 97). "'Selfish ambition' stands at the heart of human fallenness, where self-interest and self-aggrandizement at the expense of others primarily dictate values and behavior" (Fee, 186).
- v. 3 **humility** The compound words in this Greek word group "first occur in secular literature in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. (Josephus, Plutarch, Epictetus), always with a depreciatory connotation: e.g., to think poorly, ill; to be ill-disposed, faint-hearted, or weakly; to have a servile mind" (DNTT, s.v., *tapeinos*, 2:259).
- v. 5 **attitude** The same word is translated "like-minded" (lit., "think the same thing") in v. 2.
- v. 6 **very nature** "Who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (NASB). "The word 'form' means an outward appearance consistent with what is true. The form perfectly expresses the inner reality" (Melick, 101, 102). The expression 'equality with God' denotes Christ's preexistence in-a-manner-equal-to-God, which implies his divine 'existential glory, the majesty of His revelation, the greatness and splendour of His manner of being' (Greijdanus)" (Muller, 80).
- v. 7 **made himself nothing** Lit., "emptied himself" (NASB). Of what Jesus "emptied himself" the text does not say. However, it implies that the emptying (kenosis) refers to the addition of humanity rather than the subtraction of divinity. In other words, as a human being, Christ gave up the appearance of deity and the independent exercise of his divine attributes without giving up "very nature God." "While he did not cease to be in nature what the Father was, he became functionally subordinated to the Father for the period of the incarnation. By taking on human nature, he accepted certain limitations upon the functioning of his divine attributes. These limitations were not the result of a loss of divine attributes but of the addition of human attributes" (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2:735).
- v. 8 **appearance** "The primary sense of the word has to do not with the essential quality of something, but with its externals, that which makes it recognizable. Thus, having said that Christ came in the 'likeness' of human beings (v. 7b), Paul now moves the narrative on to its next point, by saying he 'appeared' in a way that was clearly recognizable as human. Together the two phrases accent the reality of his humanity, just as the first two phrases in the preceding sentence accent his deity" (Fee, 215).
- v. 9 **highest place** "God has 'highly exalted' Christ, meaning exalted him to the highest possible degree" (221).
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Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

If you wanted to do something for a friend to show you loved him, what would you do? Jesus chose to do something that seemed a little strange. Read John 13:1-17. He washed his disciples' feet to show them how much he really loved them. A few days he would do something people thought was even stranger. He died on the cross for their sins. Jesus washed away the dirt and washed away their sins.

Pray it!

As a parent you can teach your child to pray by using actual scriptures as a guide. Pray this scripture with them this week..

Father, thank you for sending Jesus into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in him will stay in darkness. Jn 12:46

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Community – I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

Memory verse – "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."
Jn 12:46

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *Who was normally responsible for washing the feet of people when they came inside?
- *Why did Peter object to Jesus washing his feet?
- *Why did Jesus insist on washing his disciples' feet?
- *What needs to be "washed" for a person to belong to Jesus?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

It's a brand new year so it's a great opportunity to get back in the habit of doing those things that help you grow closer to God. One of those things is being an active part of biblical community. If your family is not involved in a weekly home group, talk to your parents about it. Remind them that BELONGING is an important part of the family's spiritual pathway!

Kids K through fourth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.



Family completes **Experience It** _____
 Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____
 Family participates in **Live It** _____ and **Pray It** _____
 Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Child's name _____

Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.