

## A PHILIPPIANS STUDY

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## PHILIPPIANS week 6 - Aaron McRae

This Discussion Guide is designed to help you **think more deeply** about the sermon and **engage with others** through thoughtful conversation, biblical exploration and **allow God to work** in your life as you apply what you discover.

### ➤ CONVERSATION STARTER

**What is one annoying habit or pet peeve that irritates you?**

### ➤ EXPLORATION

Have you ever been around people who just couldn't get along? Maybe they don't really like each other, or they have different opinions on everything, or they can't agree on anything, or...fill in the blank?

You know what makes it even worse? It's when the people who can't agree are Christians and they try to spiritualize their disagreement. They might say things like, "Well, I prayed about what you did to me and God agrees with me" or "I shared my prayer request about your actions (gossip) and everyone agrees with me."

Sadly, this is all too common. The Apostle Paul had a lot to say about unity in his letter to the Philippians.

**Philippians 2:1-11 (From your bible, read aloud)**

**What stands out to you from these verses?**

Paul speaks about two main points in this passage, **unity** and **humility**.

The only way for unity to become a reality is for God's people to be humble, promoting the interests of others over their own interests. We often want the advantages of unity without the sacrifices of humility.

**Why do you think humility is necessary for true unity?**

**Philippians 2:2 (From your bible, read aloud)**

We see here that living in biblical unity is only possible when we truly value the following:

- **Encouragement from being united with Christ** - coming alongside one another to offer encouragement, assistance and comfort
- **Comfort from his love** - growing in a close relationship with God
- **Common sharing in the Spirit** - partnership with others in the Spirit, mutually sharing your faith
- **Tenderness and compassion** - experiencing God's love and mercy as we extend love and mercy to others

Paul is pleading with his friends here to take unity seriously. But this is complicated work that takes time, persistence and grace.

**Unity is Experienced By:**

- **Being like minded** - actively seeking common understanding and genuine agreement
- **Having the same love** - sacrificial love that serves others, no matter who they are
- **Being one in spirit and mind** - Translated as "one-souled" Living in selfless harmony with others, intent on one purpose.

In John 12:35, Jesus reminded his followers, **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** This is a beautiful picture of unity. It is more than just being in agreement over a matter.

No two people who are following Jesus will be able to agree on everything. No matter how long you have been following Jesus, how ‘mature’ you are, there will be different opinions, interpretations, and ways of thinking or behaving... **BUT** if each person is guided by love and humility, the Spirit of God does this deep work of joining them into “one spirit”, not allowing preferences and inconsequential differences to unnecessarily divide.

*“The one danger that threatened the Philippian church was that of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy church. It is when people are really earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, that they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide.”*

~William Barclay ‘The Letter to the Philippians’

## Where do you see divisions and disunity among Christians today?

### *Philippians 2:3 (From your bible, read aloud)*

Divisions form when we **only** look out for our own interests. You could describe interests in lots of different ways:

- Don’t just look out for your own comfort, desires, satisfaction: But look out for others
- Don’t just look out for your own family, property, job: But look out for others
- Don’t just look out for your own finances, success, reputation: But look out for others

This is a radical new way of doing life and living out our faith in relationships. The gospel of Jesus invites us to be a new kind of people, formed and shaped by the Spirit of God. According to author, Moises Silva, “The true obstacle to unity is not the presence of legitimate difference of opinion, but of self-centeredness.”

So, how do we do what Paul is calling us to do? What practical steps can we take to live in such a way that unity is possible in the church?

## 5 Humble Actions That Promote Unity

### Negative - what NOT to do

- **Do nothing out of selfish ambition** - seeking personal advantage and gain, regardless of its effect on others
- **Do nothing out of vain conceit** - arrogant pride, assuming you know better
- **Do not look out just for your own interests** - only looking out for yourself, not considering others

### Positive - what TO do

- **In humility value others above yourself** - not necessarily putting yourself down, but lifting others up
- **Look out for the interests of others** - choosing persistent and deliberate efforts for the sake of others

## From these 5 Actions, which is the most difficult for you to live out consistently?

There are some very practical steps we can take to help us live in unity with others.

### 7 Principles For Eradicating Selfish Ambition From Christian Communities

- 1 Don’t participate in gossip/slander
- 2 Cultivate humility as sinners saved by grace
- 3 Listen ‘long and patiently’
- 4 Be interruptible
- 5 Bear each others burdens
- 6 Speak God’s word to each other
- 7 Serve without needing attention

(Paraphrased from “Life Together” Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

### > TAKE AWAY

The idea of unity is so appealing, but is very difficult to live out. It requires living a life of humility, submission and sacrifice. Paul is calling us to live in a way that honors God and honors our brothers and sisters in the faith. Only then will we have unity with one another.

**Take time to pray for one another that each of us will do our part to humbly submit to God and to care for each other in unity.**