

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"Make My Joy Complete by Not Being 'Me-First'"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 2:1-5; Phil. 1:3-11; 1:27-30; John 14:15-17; Col. 3:12; Gal. 5:26

"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Messiah, if there is any comfort of love, if there is any fellowship of the Ruach, if there is any mercy and compassion, then make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love, united in spirit, with one purpose. Do nothing out of selfishness or conceit, but with humility consider others as more important than yourselves, looking out not only for your own interests but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in Messiah Yeshua." — Phil. 2:1-5

Introduction: It Is So Easy to Become "Me-First"

Most of us probably would not describe ourselves as selfish people. We love our families. We care about people. We serve. We give. We pray for others. And yet it is amazing how quickly "me first" can quietly work its way into the way we think. I want my way. I want to be understood. I want my opinion heard. I want someone to notice what I have done. I want you to understand what is near to my heart before I take the time to understand what is near to yours. We may never say the words "me first," but that little mindset can hide in the recesses of our hearts and show itself in our relationships, our families, our congregations, and even our ministry.

That is what makes Phil. 2:1-5 such an incredibly practical passage. Paul has just told the Philippians to live out their citizenship in a manner worthy of the Good News, standing together in one spirit and striving side by side. Now he explains what that *actually looks like*. The chapter division can hide the flow of his thought, because Paul did not suddenly begin a new subject when he reached what we call chapter 2. His "therefore" connects everything together: if we belong to another kingdom, if we have been summoned in Messiah, if we share in His Spirit, His love, His mercy, and His compassion, then that reality ought to change how we treat one another. Kingdom citizenship cannot simply be something we confess. It must become something people can see in us.

1. LIVE FROM WHAT YOU HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED IN MESSIAH. Paul begins with four statements: *"if there is any encouragement in Messiah, if there is any comfort of love, if there is any fellowship of the Ruach, if there is any mercy and compassion."* The "if" here really carries the sense of "since." Paul is not questioning *whether* these things exist among the Philippians. He knows they do. **Since** you have been called and summoned in Messiah; **since** you know the story of His love; **since** you share and partake together in the Ruach; **since** there is tenderness, affection, mercy, and compassion among you—then live like those things are true. Paul is gently reminding them of what they already have in common. Before he tells them what they should do, he reminds them of what God has already done in them.

And that is important for us. Unity does not begin with everybody finally agreeing with me. It begins with recognizing what we already share in Messiah. Have we been called in Messiah? Yes. Have we received His love? Yes. Are we partakers together of the same Spirit? Yes. Have we received the mercy and compassion of God? Absolutely. Then those realities are supposed to become the source from which we relate to one another. Paul had already prayed that their love

would “overflow still more and more in knowledge and depth of discernment” so that it would produce genuine righteous fruit (Phil. 1:9–11). Now he shows them what some of that fruit looks like. The love we’ve received from Yeshua should become the love we extend to one another.

2. UNITY COMES WHEN “MY WAY” STOPS BEING THE GOAL. Paul says, “*then make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love, united in spirit, with one purpose.*” This does not mean that believers must have intellectual uniformity, agreeing about every detail, preference, idea, or opinion. The key word has to do with our mindset, our attitude, our overall disposition. Paul is calling us to a spiritual oneness—a shared way of approaching one another in Messiah. The real obstacle to that unity is often not the fact that we have legitimate differences. The obstacle is self-centeredness. Unity falls apart when the goal becomes getting everyone else over to **my** way. Paul therefore says something remarkably strong: “*Do nothing out of selfishness or conceit.*” Nothing. No pulling for my faction. No empty search for my glory. No maneuvering so that I come out on top.

Instead, Paul says, “*with humility consider others as more important than yourselves.*” Humility is really a lowering of the mind. It is not insecurity, pretending that you have no value, or believing that everybody else is somehow better than you. It is willingly choosing not to put yourself first. In our family, I have sometimes thought about the simple math of this. If there are seven people in a family and everybody is looking out for himself first, then each person has exactly one person looking out for him—himself. But if everyone begins putting the others ahead of himself, suddenly each person has six people looking out for him. The math works better when we stop living “me first.” Imagine what happens in a family, a marriage, a congregation, or a ministry when everybody begins saying, “I am going to care about what is happening in your heart, and I am going to trust you to care about what is happening in mine.”

3. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT IS NEAR TO SOMEONE ELSE’S HEART. Paul takes the idea one step further in verse 4: “*looking out not only for your own interests but also for the interests of others.*” The language carries the idea of paying attention to what is personal or near to someone. In other words, instead of continually focusing on what is near to **me**—my concern, my hurt, my preference, my needs—I begin asking what is near to **you**. What is weighing on your heart? What are you carrying? What are your concerns? What do I need to understand before I insist that you understand me? We are so naturally inclined to defend what matters to us that it takes the work of the Spirit to teach us to notice what matters to someone else.

We also have to allow the Lord to expose the subtle games our hearts can play. Sometimes something can look like humility while still being manipulation. I can appear to listen to you simply because I am waiting for the moment when I can finally explain why my way is better. I can serve while secretly wanting recognition. I can give while hoping to gain influence. Those hidden motives have to continually be laid before the Lord. And Paul gives us the ultimate standard in verse 5: “*Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in Messiah Yeshua.*” This is the mindset we are called to have. Yeshua did not grasp for His own glory or exalt Himself. He humbled Himself. So Paul does not ultimately point us to himself, or to some impressive human example. He points us to Messiah. If we want to know what “not me first” really looks like, we look at Yeshua.

CONCLUSION: HAVE THIS MINDSET IN YOU

Paul himself was already demonstrating this mindset. He was unjustly imprisoned, and yet instead of making everything about what had happened to him, he could say, in effect, “Look what is actually happening—the Good News is advancing.” There were even people proclaiming Messiah from selfish motives, apparently hoping to make his situation worse, and Paul still refused to make himself the center of the story. His response was essentially, “What then? Messiah is being proclaimed, and in *this* I rejoice.” He was demonstrating the very attitude he was now asking the Philippians to embrace. He was looking past himself toward the work of God and the good of others. And yet even Paul ultimately points beyond himself to Yeshua: *“Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in Messiah Yeshua.”*

So perhaps the place to come before the Lord today is not simply to ask, “Am I a good person?” The deeper question is: **Where is “me first” still hiding in me?** Where am I demanding my way? Where am I trying to be recognized? Where am I more concerned about being understood than understanding someone else? Where have selfish ambition, empty glory, pride, or even subtle manipulation worked their way into my relationships? Bring those places honestly before Yeshua. Ask the Spirit to search the hidden recesses of your heart and give you the mindset of Messiah. Maybe there is someone whose heart you need to hear instead of another argument you need to win. Maybe there is a right you need to lay down, an apology you need to make, or a person you need to begin putting ahead of yourself. Come before Him and say, “Lord, I do not want to live me first. Teach me to live like Yeshua.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Phil. 2:1, what four shared realities does Paul identify as the foundation for his appeal to the Philippian believers?
2. What does Paul mean when he calls believers to be of the “same mind”? How is spiritual oneness different from everyone having exactly the same opinions?
3. Why are selfish ambition and the pursuit of “empty glory” such serious obstacles to unity within the believing community?
4. Where do you most easily fall into a “me-first” mindset—in your marriage, family, friendships, congregation, workplace, or ministry? What does that usually look like in practice?
5. Think of someone close to you. What is “near to their heart” right now, and what would it look like this week for you to genuinely put their concern ahead of your own?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You that You have called us in Messiah, surrounded us with Your love, given us fellowship in Your Spirit, and shown us mercy and tender compassion. Search our hearts and reveal every place where selfish ambition, empty glory, pride, or the need to have our own way has taken root. Teach us to lower ourselves without insecurity, to listen without manipulating, to serve without needing recognition, and to pay attention to what is near to the hearts of others. Give us one mind, one love, and one purpose in You. Above all, form in us the attitude that was in Messiah Yeshua. May our families, our congregations, our ministries, and our relationships demonstrate the values of Your Kingdom because we have learned to say, not “me first,” but “Yeshua first, and others before myself.”

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.