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NT 637/737 Philppians

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Final Project

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My final project is a lesson plan for a 3-session Bible study on Philippians for the women in our church. The central idea that I want to communicate is that our faith in Christ calls us to live as citizens of heaven by collectively taking on the humble mindset of Christ, which ultimately leads us to more joy and peace together as members of the body of Christ.

For Session 1, I will focus on our Christian identity as heavenly citizens belonging to God's kingdom, who identify with the supremacy and reign of Christ even as we live on earth momentarily with many differences from one another. For Session 2, I will discuss the importance of taking on a humble mindset as we live in community by learning from the example of Christ's humility. For Session 3, I will highlight the joy and peace that we have in Christ by continuously trusting God and practicing obedience.

My vision for the women through these sessions is to equip them with biblical knowledge of what it means to live as believers in Christ who are spiritually maturing and increasingly able to relate to one another in a forbearing spirit, resulting in greater love and unity as a church. The Book of Philippians lends a window into life of a 1st-century Christian church and the first church community on European soil. The similar type of community issues that we can conjecture in the text will likely surprise and inspire us even in the contemporary church with its relevance. I believe that a resulting emotional connection to Paul and the Philippian church will

ignite a greater appreciation not only for the insights and encouragements we find in the text that are applicable to us today but also for the Word of God in general, which is a long-term goal that I hope such studies as this would help accomplish for the members of our church.

Session 1

Title: Heavenly Citizenship

Text: Phil 3:18-21

“For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Subject/ Topic: Our Christian identity as heavenly citizens under Christ’s lordship

Proposition: I propose to examine in Paul’s message the call for Christians at Philippi to recognize that their heavenly citizenship supersedes their earthly one, even a Roman citizenship, and to draw a connection to many of our church sisters’ dual identities as Korean-Americans/ Asian-Americans

Objective/ Outcome: I want our sisters to recognize that our heavenly citizenship is set apart, otherworldly and not necessarily and always congruent to our respective cultures or popular opinions. We are called to a wholly different way, one in which Christ is our Lord.

Interrogative: If an outsider were to objectively assess the way we live and operate, to whose authority, system or reign would he/she conclude that we belong and submit?

Introduction: For many of us, being a Korean-American often means that there are parts of us that do not fully identify with either. Even when we are in our “mother land” and speaking the “mother tongue,” we are not fully able to identify with Koreans (not that the population is

monolithic). Simultaneously, the parts of us that we may identify more with being American, may not be common to all Americans and may be specific to our own personal experience of living in America. Our distinctive appearance also at times unfortunately alienates us from what may be the “norm,” even if our families may have called America our home for multiple generations. This feeling of being a “misfit,” or “other,” however, may actually help us to understand the tension of living in a place as foreigners, as citizens belonging to another reign.

Body of Message/ Lesson:

- Introduce the audience of Paul’s letter to Philippians as Christians in the metropolis of Philippi, a Roman colony, with a popular sense of pride, respect, honor in the empire
- Political/ military terms purposefully employed by Paul attest to his familiarity with Philippi’s people and characteristics
- Believers at Philippi composing the church come from many different backgrounds who may nonetheless be held in common under Roman citizenship
- Paul calls them rather to recognize their primary spiritual citizenship in heaven, for they belong not to a human empire but to the Lord Jesus Christ
- The context of Phil 3:18-21: What does Paul mean by “enemies of the cross of Christ,” “their god is their stomach,” “mind set on earthly things,” etc.?
- In contrast, what does having our citizenship in heaven look like?
- What examples does Paul give personally as well as through others?

Conclusion/ Call for Response:

We are to live as people who serve the Lord, whose most important voice, standard and priorities all belong to Christ. This would be absurd if we lose sight of who Christ is and what God has done for us through Him, and what hope we have in Him. Each of us has an inner code that we

subscribe to and operate in daily, and yet it may be based on a lie and misleading us from Christ and His ways. Let us each identify one lie that we may have internalized as citizens on earth (Korean/ American/ Korean-American/ Millennials/ Gen Z, etc). And let us rewrite that code in light of Paul's reminder of our citizenship in heaven. (Take turns to share our response).

Session 2

Title: Humility towards Unity

Text: Phil 2:5-11

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

Subject/ Topic: Taking on Christ's humility, becoming like-minded with one another in Christ's humble mindset

Proposition: I propose to expand on what “humility” means in the text, what Paul seems to mean when he exhorts the Phillippian church in 2:2 to “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (not a call to force uniformity), and what embodying this humility may look like in our own community life by taking examples from Christ, Paul himself, his co-laborers

Objective/ Outcome: To take on a humble mindset and to take a greater interest in others as modeled by Christ, our Servant King, to appreciate the beauty of our exalted Lord who rescued all us through his humiliation, and to unite around this commonality of mindset amidst diversity

Interrogative: Given that a church can often be a vastly diverse composition of people from all walks of life and varying experiences of faith, how does a church community seek to unite, rather than divide, and to even live up to Christ's call to love another in such a way that attests to the world that we are disciples of Christ?

Introduction: (Option 1) A Sunday School activity from a lesson on humility from *Philippians* had a basket in the center of the room filled with different colored pom-poms. Participants were quietly assigned a unique color that they were not supposed to announce to others. When the activity began, participants took turns taking a handful of colorful pom poms from the basket to place into their respective bowls, and were instructed not to take their own colors. Next, they were instructed that the goal was to give away the pom-poms that were not their own colors while getting their own colors into their bowls. But they could not fill their own bowls or ask others to give them their colors. While each person's color was not publicly revealed, through examination and taking interest in one another's bowls (and teacher's help), everyone figured out to whom belonged which color, and began to help one another fill their bowls as a collective, not self-serving, effort. This was a lesson on taking a greater interest in others rather than serving ourselves first. This illustration was visually striking and illustrative for young kids and teachers alike, and therefore, it may be a light-hearted but powerful exercise to use for our setting as well to introduce the topic of humility.

Body of Message/ Lesson:

- Examine the theme of humility in 1) Christ Hymn (2:6-11), 2) Paul's personal conviction (3:5-11, not having confidence in his human qualifications but humbling himself to participate in Christ's suffering), 3) Paul's examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus who also model humility and sacrificial service for the gospel of Christ (2:19-30)

- Call attention to the lowering of oneself for the sake of serving another. The greatest distance in serving was sacrificially traveled by God Himself for the human race. His mindset to serve rather than to be served informs not only Paul, but also his co-laborers, who put the needs of others first before their own.
- Examine the exhortations which immediately precede the Christ Hymn– 2:3-4:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest but each of you to the interests of the other.”

 - Especially in the rushed atmosphere of the tri-state area in which our church congregates, we are acclimated to the culture of self-protection and self-promotion. Even so, we value the needs of those dear to us and not necessarily for faith reasons, practice hospitality and compassion. And yet the call to humility in Christ Jesus is not preferential, and is fueled by the overwhelming awe at the work of God through Christ to serve a people (us) who are not agreeable, are often offensive and undoubtedly wrong Him time and time again. It is a crazy love, displayed in an incredulous act of humility from God to mere human beings.

Conclusion/ Call for Response:

Each of us have been a part of a church community for various lengths of time. The location, demographic and context of every church community may be different, but it would be safe to say that there is a common experience in which the more time we spend with one another, the more exposure we get to our differences. Interestingly, we may even feel that we are united as a church when in fact we may be more aligned with one another in cultural values and preferences than in our commitment to faith in Christ. The key to unity in a church community seems to be taking on a humble mindset that is modeled by Christ and exemplified by Paul and his co-

laborers. This shared spirit of valuing others above oneself will help keep us from boasting, quarreling with one another, and disunity. Next time we feel that someone has offended or wronged us, how can we be more prepared to respond in the mindset of humility? Are there any examples from our own church experiences when the community sought to stay together despite our inevitable differences rather than divide?

Session 3

Title: Healthy Inner Beings

Text: Phil 4:4-9

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me— put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Subject/ Topic: Guarding the spiritual health of our inner beings in the joy and peace of Christ

Proposition: I propose to closely study the above passage with our sisters, to understand the significance of Paul’s call to pray and to think in a way that positions our trust in God and to keep taking actions in obedience. As we trust God and live out the gospel truths, we rejoice in Him continuously and experience His presence and peace.

Objective/ Outcome: I want our sisters to take these exhortations of Paul as practical steps for us to guard and strengthen our inner beings by learning to trust and obey God’s voice through prayer, faithful mindset and life practice. Many of us struggle with anxiety stemming from the paradox of so much available information and yet so much that is unknown and uncertain on the personal level, from living in a climate of constant striving in a culture that is disappointed with

or even disdainful of the Church, while wanting to grow deeper in faith but not knowing exactly how or even why.

Interrogative: What is the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” as Paul puts in 3:8? What good is there in knowing Christ, living under His lordship, following the examples of humility, especially in our day and age?

Introduction: Use the illustration of pursuing wellness and fitness. It involves a multifaceted approach of not only exercising but also eating nutritiously, having a good mindset and putting it into practice steadfastly, persevering. The ultimate goal is holistic wellness, by strengthening our physical muscles, conditioning our thoughts towards good habit building, and consistently putting into practice what we know is good for us. Similarly, we can take Paul’s exhortations as a how-to for our spiritual well-being in Christ.

Body of Message/ Lesson:

- Paul instructs the church to pray in every situation
 - Explain the ancient literary convention of Paul’s day to use multiple words to describe prayer and convey its importance (E.g. Verse 6 is not listing 3-4 distinctive properties of prayer one ought to abide by. Similar understanding applies to verses 8-9)
 - We are to trust in God in every situation through prayer and invite God to guard our inner being with His incomparable peace
- Paul urges the church to think on excellent and praiseworthy things
 - Scholars discuss the cultural, Stoic influence on Paul that values the good of these actions. How much more then, in light of Christ’s sacrificial love for us, should Christians embody these things?

- Paul urges the church to live out what they have learned and to follow examples.
 - In so doing, we are to experience the presence of God of peace, and this is the worth of knowing Christ– His presence with us in our every situation.

Conclusion/ Call for Response:

“PTL” - A classic acronym for “Praise the Lord,” perhaps can also be a reminder for Paul’s exhortations for us to Pray, Think, and Live, in a way that positions ourselves to invite our God of peace dwell in us each day as we live as heavenly citizens and foreigners, sojourning on earth and making our beautiful God known.

- As a closing activity, I envision a time of art-making in which each sister gets a text printout of the passage and chooses a word, a verse or a few verses to cut out and paste (like a collage) on a small canvas, and to then paint and decorate it so that she can put this art in her designated place of prayer, to help remember Paul’s message, to center on Christ in every situation. And having an insight into the context of the word/ phrase/ verses through our study of the book, she would be able to view the art as a practical aid and not merely a visual decoration.

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