



hope

**FUSE MIDDLE SCHOOL
CURRICULUM**

OVERVIEW

Our world is burdened by the broken place of hatred. We see discrimination, racism, genocide, dehumanization, and segregation along so many different lines (gender, age, race, nationality, etc.). Most of the time when we try to fix these problems, however, we don't acknowledge the fact that these are *outcomes* of a much longer path of hatred which starts anytime we see ourselves as better than the "other" we are encountering. To heal the broken place of hatred, we must walk an entirely different path: the path of self-giving love.

In Philippians 2:1-11, Paul pleads with the church in Philippi to "love one another" and "work together with one mind and purpose." To do this, he suggests we must have "the same attitude that Christ Jesus had." And how did Jesus live? He walked the path of self-giving love. Even though he had all power in the universe, he "gave up his divine privileges," lowered himself in humility, and lifted broken humanity up through his self-sacrificial love on the cross. As Christ's church, we can show the world an alternative to the hatred we see around us. When we encounter "others," we must follow our savior down the humble path he chose to walk.

WEEK 1

Big Idea: In the Kingdom of God, we must choose love.

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Philippians 2:1-5

Background Info on Philippians:

Paul is writing this letter to the church in Philippi—a church Paul helped establish. Philippi was a colony of Rome, but people there had the added privilege of being a Roman citizen (Jews in Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem did not). Paul is writing the letter from prison. Paul is most likely writing to address an internal tension within the Philippian church.

The point Paul is trying to get across in his letter is that it is important to get along as followers of Christ. As Roman citizens, Philippi Christians were used to living in favor with the law of the land, and as Christians they were starting to feel the tension of no longer being in favor with Rome. Their worries would have been that they were going to end up like Paul—in prison and without any security/freedom. You should be encouraged

when you live like Christ toward one another, and toward your neighbors that aren't like you. Having the same values and attitude as Christ is what leads us to loving each other well.

- Following Jesus means choosing to love others.
- We have to commit to Jesus' values to love others that aren't like us.

The Path of Self-giving love: Humility > Compassion > Elevation > Self-giving Love

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Philippians 2:3

- This is the path we must follow that Paul walks us through to be like Christ, to loving others. It starts with humility—thinking of others as better than yourselves.
- Do I think others are better than myself? Or do I think I'm better than others?
 - Thinking we are better than someone else takes us down the wrong path. It has to start with thinking of others as better than ourselves.
 - We believe that everyone was made equally—we are all equal in God's eyes. So what does it mean to think of others as better than ourselves? That doesn't make sense!
 - We know we aren't perfect. In fact, we may even know the specifics of how we aren't perfect—I know I'm not good at math. Thinking others as better than ourselves may mean that just because I'm bad at math doesn't mean that my neighbor is bad at math. It means being generous by assuming that their weaknesses are not my weaknesses! It might not be true, they might be bad at math too, but if I start with thinking of them as better than me, I've moved toward the next stage on the path to self-giving love; compassion. Because now I can relate to them with something we have in common, we both struggle with math!

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:6-11

- Having the same attitude as Christ is what leads us down the path of self-giving love.
- The path of self-giving love is the path God walked down through Jesus Christ.
- God of the universe—holy, eternal, and infinite—humbled Himself by becoming a human (Jesus), and living among us. God chose to be humble before all people even to a death on a cross. This is how we know what self-giving love is.
- Following Jesus means choosing to love others—because Jesus first loved us!

Application:

- How can Jesus help you to choose love? Be specific. Is there a time when you trusted Him to help you be humble and kind toward someone?
- In the Path to Self-giving love: humility leads to compassion. Compassion is feeling/sharing in someone else's struggles. What are specific ways your group can show compassion for one another?

WEEK 2

Big Idea: In the Kingdom of God, we need each other.

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. Ephesians 4:2-4

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. Ephesians 4:15-16

Seeing others as better than ourselves means elevating their gifts. Part of humility is acknowledging that we can't do it all alone. Others may have the gifts necessary to help us and the things we care about. When we care for each other, we will see that we need each other.

Background of Ephesians:

Ephesians addresses the tension between Jews and Christians that existed in the first century. This is because most Jesus followers early on were Jewish, but more and more Gentiles began following Jesus. Some churches were originally led by Jews, became led by Gentiles. Gentiles did not have to follow Jewish law, but Jews who followed Jesus still did. This created tension between what it meant to be Jewish versus what it meant to be Christian. Early on, Christians were not seen as a separate religion, but as a type of Judaism. This is why Paul says "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."

- In the path of self-giving love, compassion leads to elevation. This means not only do we share similarities, but we should celebrate our differences. Ex: I know that I'm not good at math, but you are GREAT at math! You can help me out, and maybe there's something that is my strength that I can help you out with.
- When we care for each other, we will see that we need each other.
- Uniqueness points to how we can be even better as a team, than if we go it alone. In Ephesians, Paul is telling the Jewish Christ followers and the Gentile Christ followers to work together WITH their differences, and not for one group to

become like the other. This builds on the path of self-giving love, starting with humility, and now toward elevating others' differences.

Application:

- What do you need to work on to be a good team member?
- In the Path to Self-giving Love: Last week we talked about humility > compassion. This week is how compassion > elevation; or realizing the importance of each other's gifts to work well as a team. We can't do it alone. What does your group need to work on to be a better team?

WEEK 3

Big Idea: In the Kingdom of God, we see the image of God in each other.

Background on James:

James is the brother of Jesus (not to be confused with other James in the NT.) James doesn't seem to be writing to anyone specific but writes a general letter to several churches (Paul wrote specific letters.) Most importantly James is writing because he wants faith to get PRACTICAL.

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, 'You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor' –well, doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? James 2:1-9

Choosing to walk down the path of love means we no longer judge each other by our appearances or our statuses but we can see the image of God in each other. We see that we have more in common than what separates us. This happens by looking beyond what others have or do not have, and remembering to choose the path of love.

- On the path to self-giving love, we know we are getting close to the end by the way we treat people.
 - Sometimes it takes work to see past what's happening on the surface of things. We want to judge people based on appearance and we miss who they actually are.
 - Self-giving love takes hard work, it's not just a passive thing.

Application:

- Hand out 3x5's, have students write their name at the top. Then, everyone passes the card to the person on their right, they write something positive they have noticed in that person. Where do they see the image of God in each other? Continue to do that until the cards get back to the original person.
- How is seeing the image of God in each other a way of choosing the path of love?
- Do you think that this comes naturally to people, or is it a choice?

WEEK 4

Big Idea: In the Kingdom of God, we are better together.

“Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the LORD rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the LORD rises and appears over you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance. “Look and see, for everyone is coming home! Your sons are coming from distant lands; your little daughters will be carried home. Your eyes will shine, and your heart will thrill with joy, for merchants from around the world will come to you. They will bring you the wealth of many lands. Vast caravans of camels will converge on you, the camels of Midian and Ephah. The people of Sheba will bring gold and frankincense and will come worshiping the LORD. The flocks of Kedar will be given to you, and the rams of Nebaioth will be brought for my altars. I will accept their offerings, and I will make my Temple glorious. “And what do I see flying like clouds to Israel, like doves to their nests? They are ships from the ends of the earth, from lands that trust in me, led by the great ships of Tarshish. They are bringing the people of Israel home from far away, carrying their silver and gold. They will honor the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has filled you with splendor. “Foreigners will come to rebuild your towns, and their kings will serve you. For though I have destroyed you in my anger, I will now have mercy on you through my grace. Your gates will stay open day and night to receive the wealth of many lands. The kings of the world will be led as captives in a victory procession. For the nations that refuse to serve you will be destroyed. “The glory of Lebanon will be yours—the forests of cypress, fir, and pine—to beautify my sanctuary. My Temple will be glorious! The descendants of your tormentors will come and bow before you. Those who despised you will kiss your feet. They will call you the City of the LORD, and Zion of the Holy One of Israel. “Though you were once despised and hated, with no one traveling through you, will make you beautiful forever, a joy to all generations. Powerful kings and mighty nations will satisfy your every need, as though you were a child nursing at the breast of a queen. You will know at last that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. I will exchange your bronze for gold, your iron for silver, your wood for bronze, and your stones for iron. I will make peace your leader and righteousness your ruler. Violence will disappear from your

land; the desolation and destruction of war will end. Salvation will surround you like city walls, and praise will be on the lips of all who enter there. "No longer will you need the sun to shine by day, nor the moon to give its light by night, for the LORD your God will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set; your moon will not go down. For the LORD will be your everlasting light. Your days of mourning will come to an end. All your people will be righteous. They will possess their land forever, for I will plant them there with my own hands in order to bring myself glory. The smallest family will become a thousand people, and the tiniest group will become a mighty nation. At the right time, I, the LORD, will make it happen." Isaiah 60

I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Revelation 21:22-26

Background on Revelation:

John wrote Revelation to a series of seven churches across Asia Minor. Revelation is considered an "apocalyptic" writing which means its cosmic in its scope—filled with intense imagery, the grandest scale, and a dream-like quality to it. One of the main themes John is addressing is whether churches should be focused on their current earthly issues or looking ahead to the big picture. Not that current earthly issues don't matter, the point seems to be, "don't lose sight of the big picture in your current problems."

In Isaiah 60, the prophet paints a beautiful future picture of nations from around the world coming to Jerusalem to worship God. As they come, they are bringing with them the wealth, splendor, art, and resources of their nations to adorn the temple. The image, echoed in Revelation 21:22-26, is not one of homogeneity and a loss of cultural distinction, but the *elevation* of human cultures for the sake of fully glorifying God in worship.

When we encounter other cultures here at Grace, we must use this image as an encouragement to walk the path of self-giving love. Rather than expecting immigrants, foreigners, and refugees to assimilate to *our* way of worship, we should seek to elevate *their* unique gifts and strengths, allowing them to influence our community, even as we influence theirs. God is glorified when the Church brings its diverse cultural gifts to him in worship.

- Similar to week 2, our differences do not need to be smoothed over, but rather celebrated as what they are—unique and special! – (with a broad cultural emphasis as opposed to the individualized emphasis of week 2.)
- The picture in Revelation shows us that God doesn't take away your identity from you in the end. This means God doesn't take away the identity of a Christian from another country either!

- Differences have often been seen as a problem, and not something to celebrate. MLK Jr saw the potential of what the path of self-giving can yield in our country:

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" (Yes), one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Application:

- What would the world be like if everyone did everything the same way, thought the same way, etc?
- What is something unique that you bring to your small group?