

LifeChange

TOPICAL BIBLE STUDIES SAMPLER

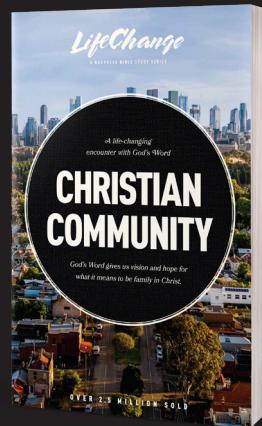
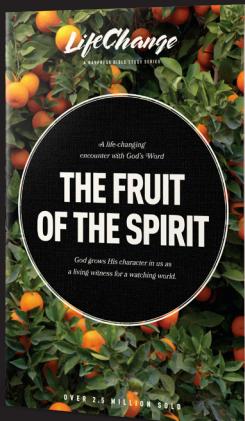
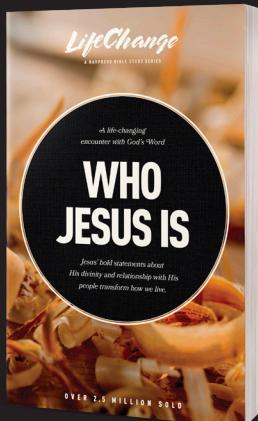


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WHAT TO EXPECT

With over 2.5 Million copies sold in the series, LifeChange Bible Studies are a proven resource for delivering a reliable and efficient study of every book of the Bible. And now you can go deeper on important Biblical themes with these topical studies.

The LifeChange Topical studies are optimized for small group use. Every study is broken down into 8-9 sessions of about 45 minutes. Each session includes:

- Questions, interpretation, and application of a passage to the topic
- Personally focused “Your Response” question
- “For Further Study” section that gives readers another passage to explore around the topic
- Callouts that include language study, historical context, and illuminating quotes from commentaries

LifeChange Bible Studies train you in good Bible study practices even as you enjoy a robust and engaging Bible study experience. Learn the skill as you study the Word. Your study of the Scriptures will never be the same!

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

The topical guides in the LifeChange series of Bible studies cover important topics from the Bible. Although the LifeChange guides vary with the topics they explore, they share some common goals:

1. to help readers grasp what key passages in the Bible say about the topic;
2. to provide readers with explanatory notes, word definitions, historical background, and cross-references so that the only other reference they need is the Bible;
3. to teach readers how to let God's Word transform them into Christ's image;
4. to provide small groups with a tool that will enhance group discussion of each passage and topic; and
5. to write each session so that advance preparation for group members is strongly encouraged but not required.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take forty-five minutes to complete.

Overview and Details

The study begins with an overview of the "I Am" statements of Jesus. The key to interpretation for each part of this study is content (what is the referenced passage *about*?), and the key to context is purpose (what is the author's *aim* for the passage as it relates to the overall topic?). Each lesson of the study explores one of the "I Am" statements of Jesus, with a corresponding passage from the Bible.

Kinds of Questions

Bible study provides different lenses and perspectives through which to engage the Scripture: observe (what does the passage *say*?), interpret (what does the passage *mean*?), and apply (how does this truth *affect* my life?). Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do You want me to see here?”, “Father, why is this true?”, and “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember what you’re learning.

Study Aids

Throughout the guide, there are study aids that provide background information on the passage, insights from a commentary, or word studies. These aids are included in the guide to help you interpret the Bible without needing to use other, outside sources. Still, if you’re interested in exploring further, the full resources are listed in the endnotes.

Scripture Versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the English Standard Version and the New Living Translation.

Use any translation you like for study—or preferably more than one. Ideally you would have on hand a good, modern translation such as the New International Version, the English Standard Version, the New Living Translation, or the Christian Standard Bible. A paraphrase such as *The Message* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and Meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return

to the passage as often as you can during the day for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For Group Study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other-sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and workplace Bible studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per meeting. This guide is formatted so you will be able to discuss each of the questions at length. Be sure to make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray for one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another resist temptation, assure each other that each person's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. If you wish, you can spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons and discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow your time of sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down what others have shared, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about what they shared at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Taking notes during discussion will help you remember to follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and have clarity on an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating.

Some best practices for groups:

1. If possible, come to the group discussion prepared. The more each group member knows about the passage and the questions being asked, the better your discussion will be.
2. Realize that the group leader will not be teaching from the passage but instead will be facilitating your discussion. Therefore, it is important for each group member to participate so that everyone can contribute to what you learn as a group.
3. Try to stick to the passage covered in the session and the specific questions in the study guide.

4. Listen attentively to the other members of the group when they are sharing their thoughts about the passage. Also, realize that most of the questions are open-ended, allowing for more than one answer.
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion—especially if you are the leader. Allow time for everyone to share their thoughts and ideas.
6. As mentioned previously, throughout the session are study aids that provide background information on the passage, insights from a commentary, or word studies. Reading these aloud during the meeting is optional and up to the discussion leader. However, each member can refer to these insights if they found them helpful in understanding the passage.

A Note on Topical Studies

LifeChange guides offer a robust and thoughtful engagement with God's Word. The book-centric guides focus on a step-by-step walk through that particular book of the Bible. The topical studies use Scripture to help you engage more deeply with God's Word and its implications for your life.

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

SAMPLER

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

WHO JESUS IS

*Jesus' bold statements
of identity and relationship
can transform how we live.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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INTRODUCTION

Who Jesus Is

WHO IS JESUS? Ask any number of people, and you'll get any number of answers. Was He the greatest teacher who ever lived? A wonderful moral example? A prophet? God?

Many people put their own spin on the person of Jesus. Some view Him as a failed prophet whose movement outlived Him. Others suggest that Jesus was simply a philosopher, a teacher of wisdom in the Cynic tradition (meaning he "renounced worldly goods and social conventions"). Still others believe He was simply a revolutionary who was influenced by the Zealot movement.¹

But very few people try to argue that He wasn't a real person—and that's because we have access to vivid detail we don't get about many historical figures: extensive accounts about Jesus' life and ministry in the four biblical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). People who walked with Jesus (Matthew and John) or people who knew those who walked with Jesus (Mark and Luke) carefully wrote down what they considered most important about Him—not just events but things He said—and the Gospels as a whole paint a remarkably consistent picture. The reality is, when we don't take the Gospels into account in our understanding of Jesus, our views of Jesus end up reflecting who we want Him to be, not who He really is. And when we take Jesus at His word, we see that He was far more than just a prophet or a teacher.

The Gospels paint a picture not just of the life of Jesus—from his genealogy, to his birth, to his life and death—but zoom in to give us His very words, the things He considered most important to pass along during His time on earth. The Gospel of John shows us a series of extraordinary claims Jesus made about who He is and why He came.

In this LifeChange study guide, we will look at eight amazing “I Am” statements Jesus made about Himself. Each session in the guide will focus on a key passage of Scripture that explores one “I Am” statement and its context. There will also be suggestions at the end of each session for studying related passages.

Jesus wants every Christian to know who He is and what He has done for us. This LifeChange guide will lead you through what Jesus has said about Himself, revealing that the Messiah and Savior is far greater and more powerful than anyone could have imagined.

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:25-59

IS THERE ANYTHING BETTER than fresh-baked bread? When I was in elementary school, we went on a field trip in Dallas to the headquarters and factory of Mrs. Baird's, a bakery known for its bread. After we watched the dough being poured into pans on an assembly line and then cooked in an oven, we were each given a small, fresh-baked loaf of bread that was still warm and covered with butter. We all thought it was the best bread we had ever eaten!

In our day, bread is often an optional part of a meal. But in Jesus' day, bread was the most significant part of the meal and the primary means for satisfying people's daily hunger. In a very real sense, their lives depended on bread. In this passage, which follows the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus claims to be the Bread of Life—spiritual sustenance that enables those who eat it to live forever!

1. Read John 6:25-59. Which of Jesus' statements stands out to you most? Why?

2. Read John 6:12-15, 23-24. Who was looking for Jesus? Why were they looking for Him?

3. How does Jesus expose and redirect the crowd's misguided motive (see verses 25-29)?

4. What is ironic about the crowd's request for a "sign" like their ancestors received in the wilderness (see verses 30-31)?

5. How do verses 32-34 underscore the crowd's confusion about what Jesus is saying?

Gary Burge writes: "Judaism understood that there was a storehouse or 'treasury' of manna in heaven that had been opened to feed the people during the era of Moses. The Israelites had been fed with 'bread from heaven.' This treasury would be reopened with the coming of the Messiah: 'The treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years' (2 Bar. 29:8). . . . An early Jewish commentary on Exodus 16:4 says, 'As the first redeemer caused manna to descend . . . so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend' (*Midrash Rabbah Eccles.* 1:9)."¹¹

"Jesus is 'living bread' as once before he offered 'living water.' This famous saying ('I am the bread of life') heads the list of what we call the 'I-am sayings' in John....

"In each of these sayings Jesus is taking a motif from Judaism (often in the context of a miracle or major festival discourse) and reinterpreting it for himself."²

6. How does Jesus explain his claim, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (verse 35; see verses 35-40)?

7. Our spiritual hunger and thirst will not be fully satisfied until our resurrection in the new heaven and earth. But how has Jesus already begun to satisfy your spiritual needs?

8. What reasons do the Jews give for rejecting Jesus' extravagant claims (see verses 41-42)?

9. Instead of answering their question at the end of verse 42, Jesus focuses on the real reason why they fail to understand him. What explanation does He give in verses 44–50?

Gary Burge explains: "The idea of Jesus' divine origin and descent (supplied to us as readers in ch. 1) is impossible for the crowd unless God in some fashion illuminates them. John 6:44 parallels 6:37 (emphasizing God's sovereignty) but now is followed by an explanation of what this 'drawing' means. John 6:45 echoes Isaiah 54:13 (or Jer. 31:33-34), where the prophet foresees a rebuilt Jerusalem (following the Exile) where intimacy with God will be regained. Jesus looks at this prophesy and sees its relevance. God must move the inner heart of a person before he or she can see the things of God. And this takes place on God's initiative (cf. 5:37)."⁷³

Some scholars believe that Jesus is speaking of the Eucharist or “Lord’s Supper,” where Christians partake of the bread and wine. But that sacrament is a symbolic reminder that those who believe in Jesus partake of the benefits of His literal broken body and shed blood on the cross.

10. Jesus alienates many in the crowd when He tells them, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (verse 53). To them it sounds like cannibalism. What do you think He means by this radical statement, and why do you think he gave it?

11. Understanding who Jesus is should affect how we follow Him. How do Jesus’ words “I am the bread of life” (verse 35) equip you to do what He has called you to do?

Your Response

We are all looking for something to fill what is empty within us. Who do you know who needs “the Bread of Life”?

For Further Study

Read Exodus 16, which describes the “bread from heaven” (manna) that the Lord gave to the Israelites during the Exodus. How does their grumbling foreshadow the grumbling of those who heard Jesus in John 6:25-59?



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SAMPLER

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

*God grows His character in us as
a living witness for a watching world.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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INTRODUCTION

The Fruit of the Spirit

JESUS ONCE TOLD His disciples: “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matthew 7:17). That’s a reality every farmer knows: a healthy tree, rooted and fed well by its source, shows its health by the good fruit it bears. But if a tree produces poor fruit—or worse, no fruit at all—something in the health of the tree or its connection to good soil and nutrition is compromised.

Jesus elaborated, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (verses 18-20).

Of course, we know that Jesus was not simply talking about agriculture. In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul tells us very clearly the nature of both bad and good fruit. The bad fruit, which humanity has displayed since the very first sin, includes “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.” Paul concludes this string of sins by saying, “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21, ESV).

Good fruit, on the other hand, does not come naturally to fallen human beings and can only appear through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, who lives within every true Christian: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, ESV). Jesus displayed these excellent qualities throughout His life on earth because they reflect the character of God Himself. And from the moment you received Jesus as your Savior and Lord, that “fruit” has gradually and increasingly begun to appear in your life.

In this LifeChange study guide, you will look at each element of the fruit of the Spirit one session at a time, in the order that Paul presents them. Each session will focus on one key passage of Scripture that fully describes the part of the fruit being considered. The end of each session contains suggestions for studying related passages.

Jesus desires every Christian to become more fruitful every day—neither withering away nor bearing thorns, but bearing life-giving fruit. This LifeChange study guide can encourage you to fulfill His desire so that the fruit you bear will increasingly look like His.

GOODNESS: OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

Romans 12:17-21

ON JUNE 25, 2010, on the streets of a North African city, gunshots rang out in the early morning air. An American missionary lay dead on the ground, killed by terrorists angry about the work he and his family had been doing in their country. Hours later, two high-level government officials from the Muslim republic sat in a living room with the man's wife, Emily. They had tears in their eyes, an unheard-of expression of public emotion for Muslim men. "Your husband was a good man," one of them said.¹

The missionary's family could have walked away in the face of such a horrific tragedy. They could have left the country forever and never looked back. Instead, they have continued the work in that North African nation, continuing to choose goodness among people God loves.

When we are faced with evil, our natural reaction is to retaliate. Alfred Hitchcock once said, "Revenge is sweet and not fattening." But the Holy Spirit equips us to live differently, to choose the good. One definition of the word used for *goodness* in Galatians 5 is "uprightness of heart and life."² When we pursue goodness, we live rightly in relation to other human beings, choosing to be upright in every aspect of our inner and outer worlds. In Romans 12, Paul teaches us how to do this when we are faced with evil and most tempted to turn from "uprightness of heart and life."

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1. Read Romans 12:17-21. What words and phrases seem most significant to you?

2. What does this passage indicate about the choice toward goodness?

3. Paul tells his readers, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (verse 17). Here and in verse 14, how does he echo Jesus' teaching (see Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-28)?

4. In contrast to retaliation, why is it important for Christians to “do what is right in the eyes of everyone” (verse 17)?

5. In a fallen and sinful world, Paul's command to "live at peace with everyone" (verse 18) seems impossible. How does he make this command more realistic by adding, "If it is possible" and "as far as it depends on you"?

New Testament scholar Douglas Moo writes: "Christians are to do what they can to find approval with non-Christians and to live at peace with them (v. 18c). But they must never seek approval with the world at the expense of God's moral demands; this means that harmonious relationships with unbelievers will not always lie in our power to achieve."³

6. What kinds of thoughts or actions would help you become more of a peacemaker?

7. Paul commands us, “Do not take revenge” (verse 19), assuring us that God will deal with our enemies. How does releasing our need to retaliate help us orient our motivations toward goodness?

8. In verse 20 Paul quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22. Why is it so difficult to treat our enemies this way?

“Believers are not to seek revenge,” Moo writes. “One reason why they should not do so is that God himself is the one who avenges wrong. ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says God in Deuteronomy 32:35. God knows all things, sees all things, and has all power. He is a perfectly just God, who will not ultimately allow evil to go unpunished.”⁴

9. Most commentators believe that the phrase “heap burning coals on his head” refers to our enemies becoming ashamed of their actions.⁵ Why might a posture of goodness toward those who wish us harm cause this response?

10. Paul tells his readers, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (verse 21). How might a Christian be “overcome by evil”?

How does allowing the Holy Spirit to produce goodness as our first response “overcome evil”?

Your Response

Can you identify a person or situation in your life where exercising goodness might overcome evil?

For Further Study

Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-13. How have Paul and his coworkers suffered because they serve Jesus Christ?

How do they respond to those who treat them badly?

How can you follow their example?

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SAMPLER

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

*God's Word gives us vision and hope for
what it means to be family in Christ.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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INTRODUCTION

Created for Community

CHRISTIAN AUTHOR and psychologist Dr. Larry Crabb once wrote this about the importance of community for our health and well-being:

Community matters. That's about like saying oxygen matters. As our lungs require air, so our souls require what only community provides. We were designed by our Trinitarian God (who is himself a group of three persons in profound relationship with each other) to live in relationship. Without it, we die. It's that simple. Without a community where we know, explore, discover, and touch one another, we experience isolation and despair that drive us in wrong directions, that corrupt our efforts to live meaningfully and to love well.

The future of the church depends on whether it develops true community.¹

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, millions of people worked from home rather than in an office. Church attendance dwindled, and many worship services were viewed from home rather than in person. The community group that my wife and I attend, which normally meets in homes for dinner, Bible study, and prayer, was held on an online video platform. It was better than nothing, but just barely.

The impact of the pandemic extended well beyond our physical bodies. As one article stated:

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population. Research has highlighted the impact on psychological well-being of the most exposed groups, including children, college students, and health workers, who are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and other symptoms of distress. The social distance and the security measures

Introduction

have affected the relationship among people and their perception of empathy toward others.²

Social isolation has such a devastating impact because, as Larry Crabb observed, God created us for community. At its heart, the Christian life is about relationships—loving God, our neighbors, and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In this LifeChange study guide, we'll learn what life is supposed to be like in God's family. Each session in the guide will focus on a key passage of Scripture that explores an aspect of Christian community and the context. There will also be suggestions at the end of each session for studying related passages.

As Christians, we are called to community relationships that are patterned after the eternal relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This LifeChange guide will help us catch the vision for what it means to live as the people of God.

CARING FOR EACH OTHER

Philippians 2:1-11

HENRI NOUWEN WAS a popular and successful professor at Harvard Divinity School, following years of renown as a priest, lecturer, and writer. His role at Harvard was what many would consider the much deserved recognition of a life of significance: teaching only one semester a year to accommodate his travel schedule and fame. But as he paid attention to his heart and soul, he realized his lack. He longed for community. “After twenty-five years of priesthood,” he wrote, “I found myself praying poorly, living somewhat isolated from other people. . . . I was living in a very dark place. . . . The term ‘burnout’ was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.”¹

Most would have seen this burnout as an invitation to rest, to do some so-called self-care. But Nouwen did something different. He began to serve in the L'Arche community, living among and caring for people with disabilities. There “his life was transformed” through friendship with and service to those around him.² And that is how he spent the rest of his life.

Caring for others is an invitation to abundant life. When we lay down our privilege and self-focus and choose to serve those around us, we are following the example of our Savior, who showed us what it means to serve.

-
1. Read Philippians 2:1-11. What characteristics of Jesus are we called to share in this passage?

2. What do you observe about the role of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in this passage?

3. Why do you think Paul prefaces his exhortations to the Philippians with a series of “if” statements about their relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit (see verse 1)?

4. Paul knows that the Philippians are experiencing “the same struggle” (1:30) that he is. How can “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2) enable them to endure those struggles?

5. How has the Christian community been able to help you during difficult times?

Frank Thielman writes: “The word ‘if’ does not mean that the Philippians’ possession of the qualities that Paul lists is hypothetical. The Greek word for ‘if’ used here (*ei*) can sometimes mean ‘since.’ Because Paul does not doubt that the Philippians have experienced, for example, the ‘encouragement’ and ‘comfort’ of Christ, the word clearly has this meaning here. Paul’s appeal, then, is based both on his friendship with them and on the blessings that belong to them because they belong to Christ.”³

Jac Müller states:
"Nothing must be done or contemplated from selfishness or conceit. There must be no self-seeking, no sinful egotism; and also no conceit or pride. . . ."

"Such a mind", furthermore, is adverse to the spirit of unity in the church, for it seeks itself and breaks up the fellowship. Instead of this each should in humility count the other better than himself. Humility, a modest opinion of oneself, meekness, and an insight in one's own insignificance, is the opposite of self-exaltation, and it counts the other . . . better and more excellent than himself. Such a disposition will promote unity, for it binds believers together in mutual interest, respect and appreciation."⁴

The second phrase in verse 6 has been translated a variety of ways: "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (ESV, RSV), "thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (KJV), and "did not think of equality with God as something to cling to" (NLT).

6. According to Paul, what are the contrasts between a self-centered and an others-centered mindset (see verses 3-4)?

7. Give examples of how you might value others above yourself and put the interests of others above your own interests (see verses 3-4).

8. Step by step, how did Jesus demonstrate that kind of humility in his incarnation and time on earth (see verses 5–8)?

9. What contrasts do you see between Christ's humiliation (see verses 6–8) and his subsequent exaltation (see verses 9–11)?

Frank Thielman writes: "This phrase is notoriously difficult because it represents a Greek word (*harpagmos*) that appears nowhere else in the Greek Bible and occurs only rarely in secular Greek. Its few secular occurrences carry the meaning 'robbery' or 'rape,' and so the KJV translated the phrase 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God.' Careful research has shown, however, that the word *harpagmos* could be used synonymously with the much more frequent word *harpagma*, and that both words appear in expressions similar to the one in Philippians 2:6 to mean 'an advantage.'¹⁵ Therefore, the NIV translates it as, 'did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage,' and the CSB says, 'did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.'

10. What Paul implies, Peter states explicitly:
“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s
mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time”
(1 Peter 5:6). How does this promise encourage
you to serve others in your Christian community?

Your Response

What steps can you take this week to focus less on your own interests and more on the interests and needs of others?

For Further Study

Read Philippians 2:17-30. How do Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus demonstrate the same mindset that Jesus did during his time on earth?