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INTRODUCTION TO DISCOVERING THE *J-CURVE* SERIES

“I’ve believed the gospel. Now what?”

Believing *more* seems like the correct response. But if you focus exclusively on believing more, you’ll likely become self-entangled, constantly looking inward at the state of your heart. The apostle Paul has a better answer:

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...” (Philippians 1:29).

So we don’t just believe the gospel; we become *like* the gospel. We join Christ in what Paul calls a “fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:1).

Paul acknowledges something we’ve largely ignored as a church: Jesus’ life takes a downward path into death before moving upward into resurrection.

If you think of it visually, you can trace the letter “J.” We at seeJesus call this arc of the gospel “the *J-Curve*.” The apostle Paul describes the *J-Curve* as the normal Christian life—a reenacting of the death and resurrection of Jesus—but it doesn’t feel normal to most Christians. *Discovering the J-Curve* is a series of four units that search out what it means to faithfully live the kind of dying-resurrection life Paul describes in Philippians. By God’s grace, we will catch Paul’s radical vision of living life in the shape of the *J-Curve*—a vision that lies at the heart of Paul’s definition of what it means to be a Christian.

Living in the *J-Curve* means we don’t have to succumb to our allergy to suffering or equate God’s favor with earthly success. Embracing the *J-Curve* renews our hope in a dark world, draws us into fellowship with God’s people, and radically re-centers our daily lives on Christ. And it answers our deep and earnest question: “I’ve believed the gospel. Now what?”

SUMMARY OF DISCOVERING THE *J-CURVE* SERIES

Unit 1: United with Christ

Union with Christ—being “in Christ”—doesn’t sound like the solution to a real problem. But a careful study of Philippians 3:1-11 reveals that our problems with legalism and the Flesh are solved by our union with Christ. Justification by faith liberates us from human pride and despair by giving us righteousness as a gift. This lays the groundwork for understanding how the *J-Curve* builds on justification by faith and makes union with Christ come alive in a way that simply believing the gospel by itself doesn’t.

Unit 2: A Jesus-Shaped Life

If Unit 1 looks at the larger world that surrounds the *J-Curve*, Unit 2 analyzes the different kinds of *J-Curves* that the apostle Paul describes. We begin by “getting our bearings” on Paul’s three different kinds of *Present J-Curves* (*Suffering, Repentance, and Love*), and then we discover how our *Present J-Curves* are based on the *Original J-Curve* and the *Faith J-Curve*. We see how all these *J-Curves* work together in the story of Joni Eareckson Tada’s life.

Unit 3: The Descent of Love

The focus of Unit 3 is the *Love J-Curve* in Philippians 2. The apostle Paul uses the story of Jesus’ *Original J-Curve* (his dying and rising for us) as the model for our own life of dying love. In Christ’s descent, his obedience to his Father is the very heart of the gospel. As we re-enact Jesus’ descent, the beauty of Jesus emerges in us. We call this the *Love J-Curve*. We’ll discover some of the fascinating patterns of the *Love J-Curve* that will encourage us in this most Jesus-like of all work—the work of love.

Unit 4: Living in Resurrection

We discover how a resurrection lens reshapes the apostle Paul’s vision of life. Participating in the dying and rising of Jesus transforms how Paul encounters both hardship and blessings. It is the secret to Paul’s joy. We begin in Philippians 1, where Paul tells the story of his imprisonment and possible release. In Philippians 2, we discover how Paul’s co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus, embody the gospel. Finally, in Philippians 4, we glimpse two of Paul’s co-laborers who don’t embody the gospel.

KEY CONCEPTS OF UNIT 3: *THE DESCENT OF LOVE*

The Love J-Curve

The focus of this unit is the *Love J-Curve* in Philippians 2. The apostle Paul uses the story of Jesus' *Original J-Curve* (his dying and rising for us) as the template or model for our own life of dying love. In Christ's descent, his obedience to his Father is the very heart of the gospel. As we re-enact Jesus' descent, the beauty of Jesus emerges in us. We call this the *Love J-Curve*. We'll discover some of the fascinating patterns of the *Love J-Curve* that will encourage us in this most Jesus-like of all work—the work of love.

It's helpful to remember the other two *J-Curves* that make up the *Present J-Curve*. They are the *Repentance J-Curve* and the *Suffering J-Curve*.

The Repentance J-Curve

In the *Repentance J-Curve*, the problem is in you. You are the problem. You cause the pain. Here you kill evil in yourself; you crucify it. The apostle Paul looks at everything, even our indwelling sin, through the lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Paul's two great passages on the *Repentance J-Curve*—Colossians 3 and Romans 8—he spells out the importance of “putting to death our sin.”

The Suffering J-Curve

In the *Suffering J-Curve* “the problem” is coming after us, unwanted. The *Suffering J-Curve* can expose our Flesh in new ways. Outside evil usually exposes our inside evil. When we see our inside evil, we realize our need to repent. Entering a *Repentance J-Curve* can mean embracing a *Suffering J-Curve*. It's also helpful to know that a *Suffering J-Curve* can follow a *Love J-Curve* because it keeps us from being surprised at the cost of love. It prepares us for “God's normal.”

COMPARISON CHART OF UNIT 3 AND *J-CURVE* BOOK

UNIT 3: THE DESCENT OF LOVE	<i>J-CURVE</i> BOOK
Lesson 1 The Mind of Christ	Chapters 15 & 16
Lesson 2 The Shape of the Story	Chapter 15
Lesson 3 A Jesus Journey	Chapters 1 & 10
Lesson 4 Cross-Shaped Love	Chapter 18
Lesson 5 The Justification of Jesus	Chapter 22
Lesson 6 Christ is Lord!	Chapter 22

LESSON 1: THE MIND OF CHRIST

In Section 1, we focus on Paul's famous hymn of the incarnation in Philippians 2. In this lesson, we discover: 1) The mind of Christ, 2) The humility of God, 3) Paul's incredible call to 24-7 love, 4) The inner structure of "fellowship of His suffering," 5) The "feel" of humility and how closely related humility is to love.

Corresponds to Chapters 15 & 16 in *J-Curve* book.

SECTION 1: What is the Mind of Christ?

5 mins



1. What do you think about when you think of someone's "mind"?

Their brain, thinking, intelligence, ways of thinking, opinions, etc.



2. Think about Jesus' mind for a minute. What do you think his mind is like?

Various answers. Our whole lesson will answer this question.

Read: Philippians 2:5-8

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Describe 2:5-8 with one word.

Humility. Incarnation. Love. *Accept multiple responses.*



3. So, what is the mind of Christ?

Accept multiple responses. Love shaped by humility. The lowering of God. It is breathtaking to see what God is like.

How is the mind of Christ different from what we initially thought?

We tend to be more rationalistic, materialistic, and miss the spirit, the heart.

Let's take a closer look at the mind of Christ, by looking at the context.

Read Philippians 2:1–5

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Italics added.)*

4. What is Paul's desire for the Philippians in verses 1 and 2?

Unity.

5. What is the secret to unity in verses 3 and 4?

Humility.

6. What is the key to humility in verse 5?

To have the mind of Christ.



7. What is the connection between love and humility?

Love inhabits humility. The two are inseparable. To love someone is to take a journey of humility.

8. So if you are recoiling from the hard work of love, what might you be reacting to?

The need for humility. We are allergic to it.



9. Why don't we like humility? What happens when we are being humbled? How do we feel?

Embarrassed, angry, powerless, deflated, feels like you are disappearing,



Insight:

Humility is the inner state of being humble. Humiliation is when your outer circumstances are humble. You can be in circumstances that are humble (humiliation), but still not have a humble heart.

What happens to your voice in humiliation?


Your voice is gone. It feels like you are disappearing.

How easy is it to get stuff done when you lose power?

Hard.

10. If someone is continually humiliating you, how can it begin to affect you? How might it affect how you see yourself?

You begin believing what they are saying about you is true, and acting like they are treating you.

 **11. How does having the mind of Christ protect you from believing a false narrative about yourself if someone is treating you badly? That is, how does the mind of Christ keep you from being co-dependent, living for the opinion of others?**

Teach what they don't say:

- Even though it may appear that you are “under the other person,” you are in reality following the pathway of Jesus. You are “under Jesus.”
- It helps you keep your dignity in the hard places of shame because it brings your shame up into glory. You follow Jesus’ path of shame to glory. It isn’t just your little life, but your little life is caught up in Jesus’ life. So, your life has a beauty about it...just like his did in his shame and humility.

So what does the downward path of Christ’s humility ultimately lead to?

Our death.

 **12. Let’s reflect again. What is the mind of Christ? What is God like?**


Teach what they don't say.

Love shaped by humility. The lowering of God. It is breathtaking to see what God is like. God is humble.

C. S. Lewis: “To become new men means losing what we now call ‘ourselves.’ Out of ourselves, into Christ, we must go. His will is to become ours and we are to think His thoughts, to ‘have the mind of Christ’ as the Bible says.”¹

SECTION 3: Paul’s Call to Love

10 mins

 **13. What is the feel of what Paul is calling us to in 2:1–4? Does Paul say, “Do your best to love?”**

Re-read the text emphasizing “any” and “do nothing from.” Most miss how radical Paul is.

Teach what they don't say.

Paul is calling us to a radical de-centering, to the complete death of self. He wants us to become 24-7 lovers.


¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1943), 189.

 **14. What are the ways, in the text, that Paul communicates that the entire Christian life is a life devoted to a 24-7, non-stop, undying love?**

- repetition of the lists.
- repetition of word *any*
- “do *nothing* from.”

Compare Paul’s Call to Love with Our Modern Christian One

MODERN CHRISTIAN CALL TO LOVE	PAUL’S CALL TO LOVE
<p>“I know life has been hard, and people have wounded you, but God wants us to love one another. Love is putting the other person first, like Jesus did. Of course, that doesn’t mean that you should endure in a difficult relationship. God won’t give you more than you can handle. One way to do that is to make sure that you have clear boundaries.”</p>	<p>“So if there is <i>any</i> encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, <i>any</i> participation in the Spirit, <i>any</i> affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the <i>same</i> mind, having the <i>same</i> love, being in <i>full</i> accord and of one mind. Do <i>nothing</i> from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let <i>each</i> of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”</p>

 **15. What is the difference between 2:1–4 and a typical “modern call to love”?**

Use the chart below. Remind them not to look at “Modern Culture.”

Pretend love	vs. Real love
Protected self	vs. Dying self
Dabbling at the edges of love	vs. Full immersion in love
Calculated, qualified to death	vs. Free, overflowing
Muddy, confusing	vs. Effervescent, beautiful

 **Modern Culture: The Enshrined Self**

None of the thoughts in this “modern call to love” are inherently wrong. Each one, taken individually has genuine Biblical wisdom, but taken as a whole it dilutes the entire feel of Paul’s radical call to love. The enshrined self of modern culture transforms Jesus’ radical call to love into a syrupy narcissism. That is, it appears loving but is really a sugary glaze of nice language over the pursuit of a comfortable and often indulgent life.



Insight: Similarities Between Philippians 2 and 3²

In the *J-Curve* Study Unit 1: United with Christ, we studied Philippians 3:7–11 that focuses on joining Jesus in a “fellowship of his suffering.” Philippians 2:1–9 focuses on love. Notice how closely linked these two passages are with Paul’s word choices.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5–8	PHILIPPIANS 3:7–11
<p>⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.</p>	<p>⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, being conformed³ to his death,¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Emphasis mine.)</p>

As you read the passage aloud, have them draw arrows in their participant manuals from Philippians 2 to Philippians 3. You could also display and mark the text via whiteboard or iPad (with a projector).

What matches “form of God” (2:6) and “form of a servant” (2:7) in Philippians 3?

“Being *conformed* to his death” (3:10); “Con-formed” is the same root word in Greek.

What matches “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (2:6) in Philippians 3?

“count as a loss” (3:7); “count everything loss” (3:8); “I have come to *count* as a loss” (3:9).

What matches “being found as a servant” (2:8) in Philippians 3?

“gain Christ and *be found* in him.” (3:9).

² Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 419-420.

³ “being conformed to” is my substitution from the New American Standard Bible in place of “becoming like him.” (ESV). NASB is closer to the literal Greek and captures Paul’s usage of the word *morphe* or “form.”

16. How is the overall pattern of Philippians 3:10–11 similar to Philippians 2?

Both have the *J-Curve*, the pattern of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

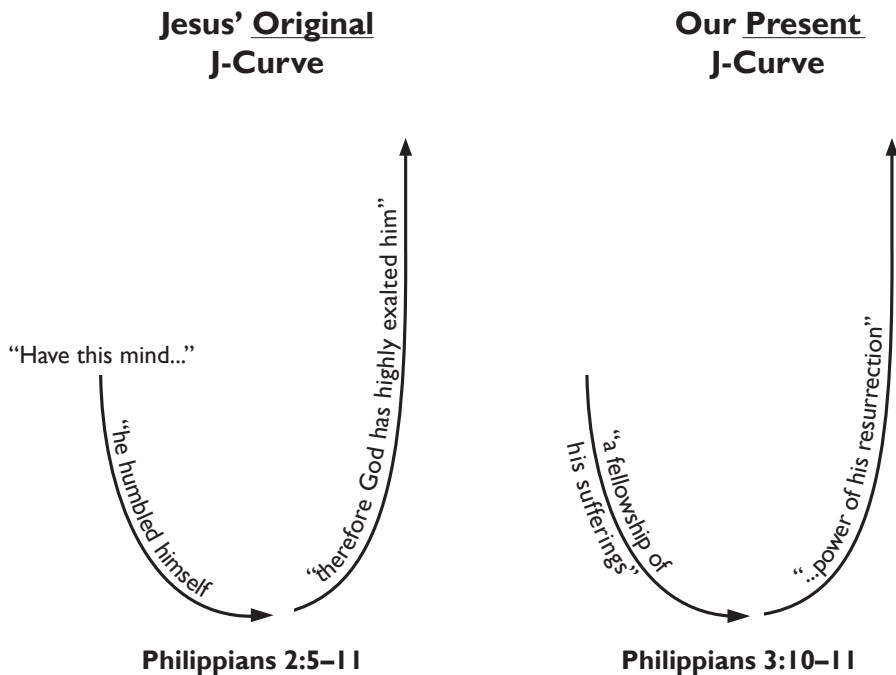
17. If Philippians 3 summarizes Philippians 2, what is the connection between the downward path of love (Philippians 2) and "a fellowship of His suffering" (Philippians 3)?

Love is a fellowship of sharing in His suffering. That is, the activity of love that we see in Jesus' incarnation is inseparable from lowering himself, from becoming a slave, from obedience to the point of death. Jesus' love brought suffering into his life.



Insight: The *Love J-Curve*

Paul has described two *J-Curves*. The *Original J-Curve* is the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (Philippians 2:5–11). In the *Love J-Curve*, we re-enact Jesus dying and rising as we relate to others. We die for others; we move towards the problem or person. We don't remain at a distance. (Philippians 2:5–11, 3:10–11). That's Jesus' "mind."



18. Is Paul just talking about himself, or does this apply to all of us?⁴

All of us.

⁴ According to Richard Gaffin, "Sometimes it is argued that the sufferings mentioned in the passages looked at are the sufferings of Paul the apostle, specifically *apostolic* suffering which excludes the rest of the church. But a number of considerations tell against this restriction: In II Corinthians, Paul says that the whole congregation shares in his sufferings (1:7). In Philippians, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and conformity to his death are, along with righteousness by faith, essential aspects of union with Christ (3:9,10). And here in Romans 8... suffering with Christ plainly includes all believers and is inseparable from their adoption." Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. "The Usefulness of the Cross." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 236. (Emphasis in original.)



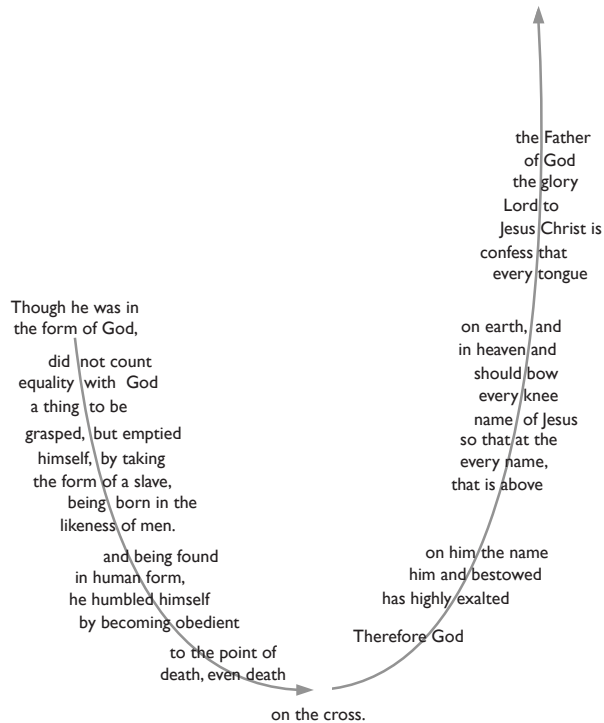
Gospel Connection: Fellowship of His Suffering Confusion

Because we've not understood "a fellowship of his suffering" many have thought that Paul the Apostle was a super-Christian. When we make Paul into a "saint" or "super-missionary," that keeps a "fellowship of his suffering" at arm's length.

SECTION 5: The End of the Story

5 mins

Let's look at the whole *J-Curve* in Philippians 2:5-11. *Read aloud below.*



Philippians 2:5-11

19. Why doesn't Paul just give us a list of dos and don'ts? What does Paul tell us?

Paul tells us a story! He tells us the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. So to become like Jesus is to enter into his story of dying and rising!



Insight:

There is nothing wrong with a list of dos and don'ts. The Bible is filled with lists like that, but those lists are rooted in the story of Jesus. Don't separate the lists of duties from the person who lives them!

20. When Paul refers to the mind of Christ, is he just referring to the downward movement of humility to death?

No, he is also referring to the upward movement of resurrection.

21. So in the path of humility, is death the final word?

No, resurrection is!

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

Recommended Reading: Chapter 15 & 16 in *J-Curve* book.

1. Re-read the “Modern Call to Love” and write your own version of “My Call to Love” emphasizing some of your weaknesses (without overdoing it!).
2. Now, in your own words, rewrite the apostle Paul’s Philippians 2:1–5 “Call to Love” in everyday language.
3. What is amazing about the mind of Christ? What is beautiful about it?
4. Can you think of someone in your life who embodies this? Tell a brief story about that person or describe them.
5. Reflect on our summary of Paul the Apostle’s teaching love all the time. How does that challenge you? What excuses do you tend to give yourself to not love?