

CONTENTS

Introduction to Discovering the <i>J-Curve</i> [®] Series	viii
Summary of Discovering the <i>J-Curve</i> Series	ix
Key Concepts of Unit 3: <i>The Descent of Love</i>	x
Comparison Chart of Unit 3 and <i>J-Curve</i> Book	xi
Other Resources from seeJesus	xiii
1. The Mind of Christ	1
(Philippians 2:1–8, 3:7–11)	
2. The Shape of the Story	11
(Philippians 2:1–8)	
3. A Jesus Journey: Kim’s Story	21
4. Cross-Shaped Love	29
(Philippians 2:5–8, Genesis 3:5–6, Matthew 4:1–4, 27:35–36, 39–43, John 10:17–18)	
5. The Justification of Jesus	37
(Philippians 2:9, Romans 4:22–25, 5:9, Matthew 27:65–66, Acts 2:22–24)	
6. Christ is Lord!	45
(Philippians 2:9–11, Colossians 2:9, Isaiah 45:22–23)	
Acknowledgements	53

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

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"?

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

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.

3. So, what is the mind of Christ?

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?**
5. **What is the secret to unity in verses 3 and 4?**
6. **What is the key to humility in verse 5?**
7. **What is the connection between love and humility?**
8. **So if you are recoiling from the hard work of love, what might you be reacting to?**
9. **Why don't we like humility? What happens when we are being humbled? How do we feel?**



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.

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

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?

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

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?"

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?

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”?



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 conformed to³ his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Emphasis mine.)</p>

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.”

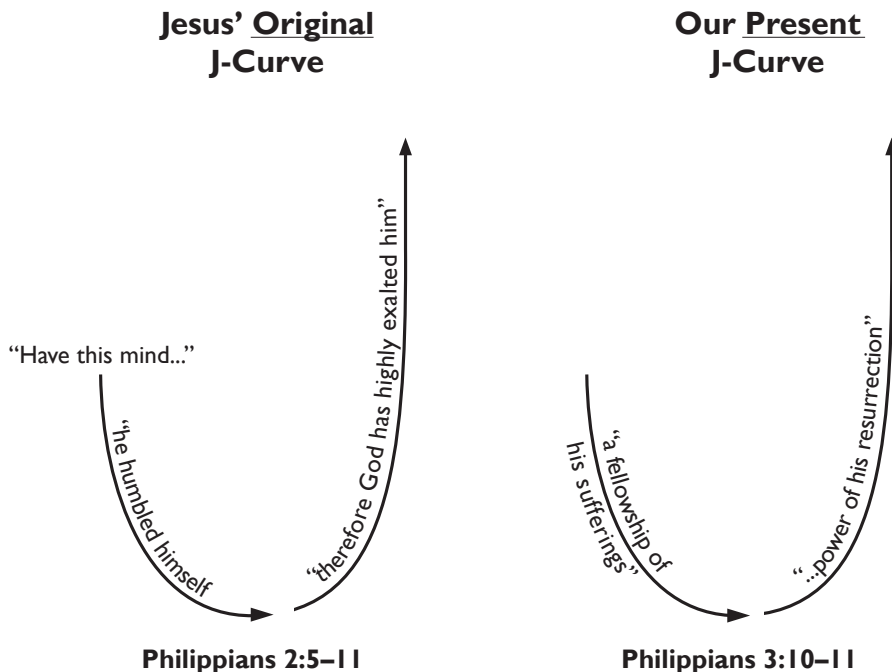
16. How is the overall pattern of Philippians 3:10–11 similar to Philippians 2?

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)?



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

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.)

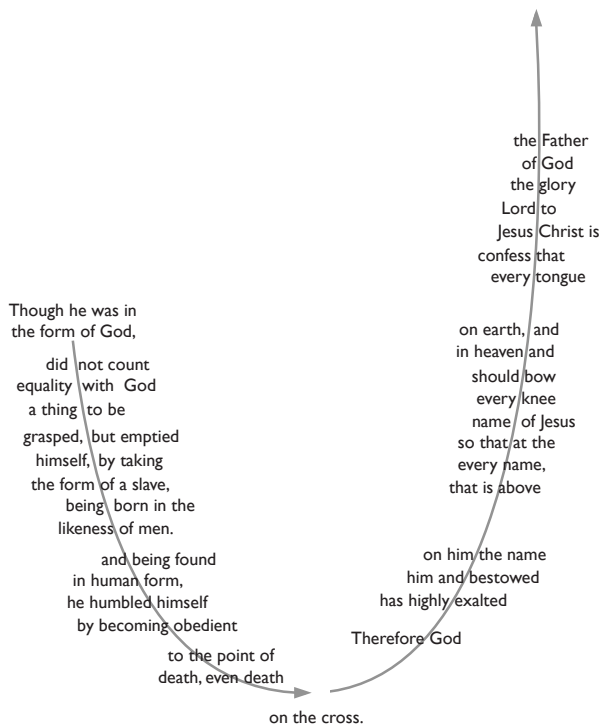


Gospel Connection: Fellowship of His Suffering Confusion

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



Philippians 2:5-11

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



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?

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

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?