

# Healthy Decision-making

## Philippians 2:1-4

### Background material for the leader when preparing

#### Synopsis

Healthy Decision-making is important for any congregation to understand and develop.

While some congregations become divided by conflict when it comes to discussion and decision-making, it is possible to be bound together even when there are strongly differing views being expressed. Recognizing behaviours that tend to divide and replacing them with positive habits is an important part of developing healthy decision-making.

<i>In congregations <b>divided</b> by conflict when making decisions</i>	<i>In congregations <b>bound together</b> during discussion and decision-making</i>
Leaders discourage disagreement	Leaders welcome open disagreement
Issues and people are frequently confused	Issues and people are kept separate
Past disagreements are dragged into the current decision-making	People keep unresolved disagreements separate from the current decision to be made
A few vocal leaders are heard	Many voices are heard
Individuals react defensively to others' suggestions	Individuals interact thoughtfully to others' suggestions
There is low tolerance of uncertainty and so discussion focuses on the solution	There is willingness to move calmly through periods of uncertainty as all options are considered and so discussion focuses on the process by which a decision is made
Reaching a decision is rushed	Time is allowed to reach a final decision

In reality most people can live with a decision they don't like, if they feel ok about the process by which it was made. Some things that help people feel good about a discussion or decision-making process include trust in those leading the process, transparency, being heard and knowing that others have been heard and an appropriate level of consensus about the decision being made.

Process includes such things as the criteria against which any proposed solution should be evaluated, what additional information needs to be sought before deciding, who else needs to be part of this discussion or be consulted with for their views on it, what weight of majority the decision should require in order for us to proceed, etc. Of course, in the church context one of the criteria we need to consider is how a decision will serve God's purposes. Considering our missional context, biblical imperatives and seeking God's will in prayer are all vital to healthy decision-making.

Moving from arguing for decisions or outcomes which simply serve your own interests to understanding the needs and interests which others also have and then seeking a way forward that meets as many of theirs and yours as is possible, is critical for healthy decision-making. It is also biblical: Philippians 2:4.

## Commentary

The letters of Paul we have in the New Testament were generally written in response to one or more difficulties those to whom he was writing were facing. Often that included some disagreement or conflict in that group of believers. The two-fold background to his letter to the Philippians appears to be opposition they were facing, which required persistence in their faith in harsh circumstances, and internal conflict, which required them adopting the mind of Christ in their relationships with one another.

Paul, according to the Book of Acts, had to leave Philippi after a time of serious persecution and imprisonment. That persecution seems to have been inherited by the church in Philippi. The exact nature of the opposition and whether it is all from civil authorities wary of this new religion, or whether it is in part from those who would espouse different teaching on the gospel than Paul has (*Phil. 1:15-18a, 3:1-4a*) or whether it is in part from factions within their fellowship opposed to the leaders to whom Paul is writing is not certain. What is clear is that there was also danger from conflict with each other (*Phil. 4:2-3*)

Paul says to them: “live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.” (*Phil. 1:27.*)

This is a letter of encouragement to the Philippians in the trials that they are going through. It is also an appeal for unity. Perhaps having reason to fear that they are somewhat divided by conflicting goals or petty jealousies Paul writes,

‘If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.’ (*Phil. 2:1-4*)

The verses following this (*Phil. 2:5-11*) are a powerful hymn-like passage that celebrates the self-emptying of Jesus and may well be quoted from even earlier Christian tradition or worship. At the heart of it is a call to embrace humility and to abandon self-interest for the greater good of God’s purposes.

We can all think of examples where pride or stubbornness or disagreement over petty matters has led to division in congregations. However, the reality in the church it is not just the danger of individuals pursuing self-ambition or egos coming into play that may produce serious disagreement or even conflict. Fracture is a danger in particular for many vibrant congregations. It is exactly when people’s beliefs really matter to them, when they have great drive, enthusiasm and ambitious plans that they are apt to collide. It is often because they care so deeply about the outcome of issues and decisions and choices of direction, perhaps for the best of reasons, that they find themselves clashing. That is one reason every congregation can usefully invest in exploring and adopting healthy decision-making approaches.

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## Suggestions for a One-Hour Bible Study

### Philippians 2:1-4

### Healthy Decision-making

#### You will need:

Paper, pens, Bibles, a whiteboard or flipchart and markers

*Optional:* Data projector and screen / wall, if you plan to use the PowerPoint slides.

#### Session plan:

#### **10 minutes: Introduction:**

Open with prayer.

Introduce the theme and the passage:

One of the common aspects of church life that leads to tension, conflict and even division is decision-making. It can occur around big matters with obvious long-term implications like whether or not to rebuild all or part of the building, temporary decisions like whether to employ a youth worker or even seemingly insignificant decisions like whether or not to cut the crusts off sandwiches for the Harvest Supper and whether or not to cut them into rectangles or triangles! There is no shortage of decisions to be made in a congregation that can potentially land us in conflict.

**(Advance to PowerPoint slide 1)**

This Bible study is based on Philippians 2:1-4 and its theme is Healthy Decision-making.

**(Advance to PowerPoint slide 2 and have someone read it)**

Philippians 2:1-4:

*“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”*

Draw upon the commentary to give a brief introduction of your own to this passage and its background.

You may want to end with a statement along the lines of:

There are many situations for which this passage is very relevant. However, for this particular session we are going to and focus on what it has to say to us about Healthy Decision-making in the life of the church.

**20 minutes:**

## **PART 1: Congregational Responses to Difficult Decision-making**

Those who have spent a lot of time reflecting on how different congregations deal with potentially difficult decisions say that some congregations are more prone to becoming divided by conflict when making decisions, while others are able to remain bound together even when making tough decisions.

### **Advance to Power Point Slide 3**

Some congregations are <b>Divided</b> by conflict when making decisions	Some congregations remain <b>Bound Together</b> in decision-making
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They have also observed that there are a number of contrasting characteristics between congregations that become divided and those that remain bound together.

In reality, no congregation always fits that first box or always fits the second. Most tend to be a mixture of both from time to time. This study is designed to help us explore these contrasting characteristics and some pointers that might help us to remain bound together more of the time even when we are dealing with contentious decisions.

When congregations do end up divided over decisions sometimes it is simply because they view disagreement as wrong or dangerous, whereas in congregation that remain bound together disagreement is viewed as an opportunities to learn and grow. That difference in outlook often influences how they approach meetings and decision-making.

### **Advance to PowerPoint slide 4 and 5:**



Cartoon: “*Our congregation holds lots of business meetings for discussion and to make decisions.....  
.....unfortunately, all of the decisions are made before the meetings begin and all of the discussion takes place after they end.*”

One of the things this study is designed to help us do is reverse that! Often conflicts arise as a result of badly planned and handled meetings and decision-making processes.

As we go through this initial section we may spot some areas where we need to change or improve. Equally may spot some things we are doing well, which we need to value and build upon.

For example, in some congregations leaders discourage disagreement while in others leaders welcome it.

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 6:**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
Leaders discourage disagreement	Leaders welcome open disagreement

In congregations that tend to be divided by conflict when making decisions it would not be unusual for a respected leader who is actually trying to help to say early in the business something like “*I’m sure we would all agree that ....*”

However, whether they know it or not, they often cut off further discussion by doing so – and leave those who don’t agree repressed, frustrated or angry.

Whereas, in congregations bound together during conflict, a thoughtful leader might say, “*I think such and such... but I imagine others have some different views that we also need to hear.*”

*First pointer:*

Make sure disagreement can be expressed openly BEFORE decisions are made.

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 7**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
Issues and people are frequently confused	Issues and people are kept separate

Sometimes we end up rejecting a suggestion simply because of who made it. We let issues and personalities get confused.

*Second pointer: Keep issues and personalities separate and focus on the ISSUE.*

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 8:**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
Past disagreements are dragged into the current decision-making	People keep unresolved disagreements separate from the current decision to be made

There is another reason why decision-making sometimes gets bogged down in conflict. The past gets dragged into it and every new decision that comes along ends up involving a power-struggle between those who were on different sides of some contentious decision long ago.

*Third pointer:*

Keep unresolved disagreements from the past separate from current decisions.

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 9:**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
A few vocal leaders are heard	Many voices are heard

Another difference between these congregations is how they make sure that as many people as possible both inside and outside of meetings can be heard when an important decision is being discussed.

Ask: From your experience, what are some ways to help make sure that, instead of just a few vocal leaders doing most of the talking, as many as possible are enabled to express their views around a decisions to be made?

*(If appropriate you could use small groups to discuss this and then share.)*

Note to the leader:

**Take their comments and then, if they have not mentioned the following, suggest these ways:**

- Break into small groups where those less confident about speaking in the large group can be heard and more people can air their views in a limited time period.

*NOTE for the leader - This can be important for a number of reasons:*

- a. About half of the population finds speaking in groups larger than 6-8 people difficult. Hence it is important to provide smaller groups where they do feel comfortable speaking.
  - b. Often individuals have ideas which they are willing to risk sharing in a small group first to test the waters and see whether the idea gets a positive response before they would dream of sharing it in a larger group. Breaking into smaller groups gives an opportunity for this.
  - c. Many more people get to air their views in the same amount of time when you divide into small groups, whereas trying to give everyone an opportunity to speak in the large group can be quite time consuming.
  - d. *A reminder:* When taking feedback /reports from small groups state clearly: “We don’t need to know who mentioned them, just the key points brought up in your group.” Often people are happier to have points they raised shared anonymously than to have their name attached to them.
- Say to someone who has been quiet: (Mary / John), You have been very quiet. I would love to hear what your view on this is.
  - Invite people to submit written suggestions / concerns / views – before, during or after the meeting - which a sub-group can then consider and report back on. (It is also possible to give others not present at a meeting the same opportunity.)
  - After a certain point in the discussion, the moderator/chair asks for views specifically from those who have not had an opportunity to speak and encourages others who have already spoken to hold back from speaking again until others who have not yet spoken have time to do so.
  - On very important decisions and in a smaller Kirk Session / Committee it can be important to simply go around the circle and invite each person in turn to say where they are on a particular decision, so that any dissension comes out in the meeting and can be addressed there, rather than surfaces only after a meeting.

*Fourth pointer: Make sure as many as possible get a chance to be heard.*

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 10:**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
Individuals react defensively	Individuals interact thoughtfully

In congregations divided by conflict over decisions people are often suspicious of or frightened by new suggestions or afraid of really listening to other’s viewpoints and so react defensively.

**Exercise:** Divide into smaller groups and come up with two sets of phrases

A. Typical phrases that tend to squelch discussion and creative thinking?  
For example: We’ve never done it that way....

*(Their suggestions might include such things as*

We tried it before and it didn’t work....

It would be too expensive....

That might work somewhere else but not here.....)

B. Phrases you have heard or use that open up discussion toward understanding and creative thinking.

For example: Help me understand....

*(Their suggestions might include such things as*

I’ve never thought of it that way...

Tell me what you have in mind....

Let me see if I understand you....

That could be interesting...)

Allow groups 4 minutes and then take responses from them.

*Pointer number 5:*

Use responses that encourage understanding and creative thinking.

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 11**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
There is low tolerance of uncertainty and so discussion quickly focuses on the <u>solution</u>	There is willingness to move calmly through periods of uncertainty as all options are considered and so discussion focuses on the <u>process</u> to be used to explore and decide

Process includes such things as

- The criteria against which any proposed solution should be evaluated  
*(Of course, in the church context one of the vital criteria we need to consider is how a decision will serve God’s purposes. Considering our missional context, biblical imperatives and seeking God’s will in prayer and being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit are all vital to healthy decision-making.)*
- What additional information needs to be sought before deciding
- Who else needs to be part of this discussion or be consulted for their views on it

- What weight of majority this decision needs in order for us to proceed

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 12**

There is a maxim that says

**Most people can live with a decision they don't like,  
if they feel ok about the process by which it was made.**

Ask participants: “What are some things that help you feel ok about a process by which an important decision is made?”

Take their responses and then

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 13: Use it to sum up**

Common things that help people feel ok about a decision-making process include ....

- I trust those leading the process
- I was heard
- Others were heard
- There is an opportunity to ask questions
- There is transparency
- There is a good level of consensus about the decision reached

(NOTE: Not all decisions CAN be reviewed once made – e.g. after building work. However, when there are decisions that can be – like changing the time of a service – arranging that there be a review after a reasonable period is another thing that helps people feel ok about the process.)

*Pointer number 6: Focus on the process by which to decide, not just the solution.*

**20 minutes (25 minutes if using nine dot exercise)**

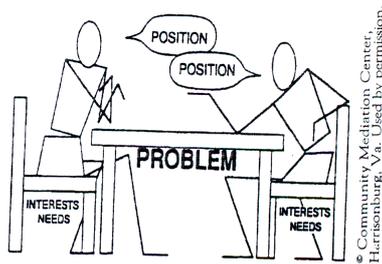
## **PART 2: Understanding Positions and Interests**

We have just noted that in congregations DIVIDED by conflict there is low tolerance of uncertainty and so participants quickly take a POSITION for or against one solution. Whereas, in those BOUND TOGETHER during conflict, discussion focuses on the process and everyone remains open to understanding each other and considering a variety of options or potential solutions.

In the passage from Philippians that we are exploring, Paul says: Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (*Philippians 2:4*)

So what is the difference between POSITIONS and INTERESTS?

**Advance to PowerPoint slides 14:**



Positions are statements or demands put forward as pre-conceived solutions.

Positions are generally out in the open – ‘on the table’ – early on, perhaps even before the problem has been clearly named, clarified and put on the table.

Positions tend to contain ‘bottom line’ language and posturing. They frequently are statements about what has to happen!

The way they are stated is also often incomplete. They don’t always include reasons or information to explain why those advocating them feel this must be the decision made.

**Advance to Power-Point slide 15:**

- Underlying most demands or positions are Interests, which are broader than positions and are essentially what each party needs for satisfaction in the decision reached.
- Interests are the reasons behind the position being taken and include such things as needs, fears, concerns and hopes.
- Interests are often hidden or unknown to others and, sometimes, even to those advocating a particular position. In that sense, they are ‘under the table.’

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 16**

Positions are what you have already decided  
Interests are what cause you to decide

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 17**

**Exercise:**

*(6 min)*

- What INTERESTS might be behind these POSITIONS?
- The caretaker has to go!
  - The caretaker has to stay!
  - The youth club must be closed!
  - The youth club must stay open!

Use example 1 or 2 and ask groups of 3-4 participants to name what they think are possible interests or needs behind the positions being taken.

After 3-4 minutes take responses from the groups.

(NOTE for the leader: When taking responses you may want to point out that there can be quite different interests that lead people to take the same position on some issue or

decision. Which is why it is never good or even possible to assume why someone is taking the position they are.)

EXAMPLE 1:

*Position being expressed*

“The caretaker has to go!”

*Some possible Interests / Needs / Concerns / Fears*

Work is not getting done and the church needs to be clean

It would be one way of saving money

The minister currently has to spend too much time checking up on the caretaker

“The caretaker has to stay”

The church needs to be clean

We owe that to this loyal employee (even if not everything is now being done perfectly)

A decision to dismiss this person would hurt the image of the church in the community

EXAMPLE 2:

“The youth club should be closed”

Too many youth are hanging around near the church the night it is open

It is taking up too much energy for a few participants

Damage is being done to the premises;

It is not providing enough of a witness to Christian faith

“The youth club must stay open”

Too many youth are hanging around the church the night it is open

It shows young people that the church cares about them and encourages them to consider why

It is one of the few things that some of our younger adults feel they can contribute to as leaders in the life of our congregation

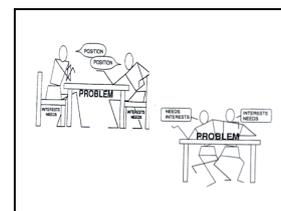
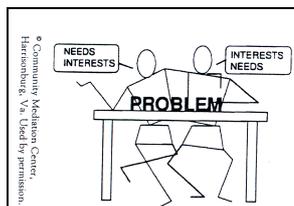
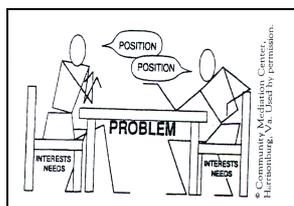
*(NOTE to leader: Often people who initially take opposite positions on some issue / decision can actually have very similar interests or needs but have reached different conclusions about how best to address those needs. However, parties in a debate or conflict rarely openly identify what their interests and needs are. This may be because they become so intent on ensuring that their position is met (winning) that they forget or do not consider what motivated their position in the first place. Often it can be because they have not articulated even for themselves what interest of theirs is behind the position they have taken.*

*If relevant, share the points in the note above. 2 min)*

**Advance to Power-Point slide 18:**

**then to slide 19**

**then on to slide 20**



Ask: What differences do you notice in the second cartoon from the previous one?

- The problem has been identified and is on the table
- Interests and needs are being shared
- The different parties are sitting side-by-side – working together on finding a solution to the problem that meets as many of their interests as possible rather than opposite each other arguing for their original position.

*Pointer number 7: Make sure interests and needs are out in the open and understood*

In Philippians Paul tells us to look not to our own interests but to the interests of others. If we are to do so we need to have first learned what they are!

**Advance to Power-Point slide 21:**

### **Some Strategies for Exploring Interests – and Moving From Positions to Interest**

Make a list of interests

Reframe locked-in positions as interests

Explore *why* a particular demand is being made

Explore why a particular proposal is *not* acceptable

Highlight similar or shared interests

Invite new ideas and solutions that could meet interests

Explore what would need to change to make a proposal acceptable

Possible comments about each bullet point on slide 21:

**Make a list of the interests as they surface:** If possible, put them up on a flipchart or wall so that they are visible to everyone. List all of the interests together, not each side’s separately. Doing the latter could risk portraying them as competing interests.

**Reframe locked-in positions as interests:** “The secretary has to go,” might become, “You are concerned that all of the administrative tasks are not getting done.” (By reframing it discussion opens up to various ways in which the tasks might get accomplished by the secretary or others.)

**Explore *why* a particular demand is being made** in order to draw out the underlying interests: “Tell me more about why that is important to you.” Or, “Help me understand how this will meet your objectives.” Or: “What matters most for you here?”

**Explore *why* a particular proposal is not acceptable** in order to understand the concerns better. “Say more about why this seems unfair.” “Help me understand why this doesn’t seem a workable solution to you.”

**Highlight similar or shared interests:** “You both seem concerned that…” or “\_\_\_\_\_ is really important to both of you. Help parties move from seeing each other as opponents to potential partners.

**(Optional Exercise)**

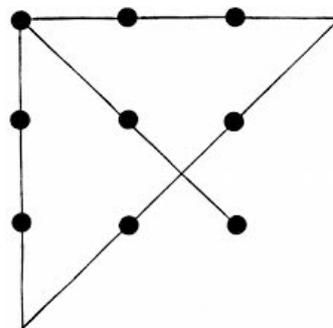
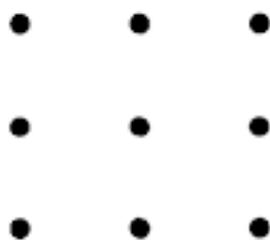
(About 5 minutes)

Before moving on to the next bullet point introduce a fun exercise.

Draw three rows of three dots on a whiteboard or flipchart sheet. Ask if anyone can connect them all with four straight lines, without lifting the marker from the board

If some already know the answer from some other occasion they have seen this puzzle, ask them to give others time to try to figure it out. Invite whoever thinks they have an answer to come and try it. If no one can get it after a few minutes, draw the answer yourself. THE POINT: We need to learn to think outside the box.

Your drawing should end up looking like this:



Answer: As above

Then go on to the bullet point below:

**Invite new ideas and solutions that could meet underlying interests and explore what would need to change to make a proposal acceptable.** Divide into small groups and ask each group to come up with three ways the issue before them could be addressed. Or, ask participants who are unhappy with a particular proposal, “How would that have to change for you to be happy with it?”

**NOTE: You should still have approximately 5 minutes left for the next four slides**

**Advance to slide 22** (which has the same content as slide 10)

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
There is low tolerance of uncertainty and so discussion focuses on the <u>solution</u>	Willing to move calmly through uncertainty as all options are considered and discussion focuses on the <u>process by which a decision will be explored and made</u>

In congregations BOUND TOGETHER even during conflict over decisions there is a willingness to move calmly through periods of uncertainty as all options are considered and so discussion focuses on the process by which a decision will be explored and made.

This means that, in order to arrive at the best decision, you hold back on evaluating any one proposed ‘solution’ until all needs and interests have been identified and explored and multiple possible solutions have been suggested.

*Pointer 8: When reaching the best decision is important, try to generate a variety of possible ways forward before evaluating and making a decision about any of them.*  
**Advance to PowerPoint slide 23:**

<b>Divided by:</b>	<b>Bound Together:</b>
Reaching a decision is rushed	Time is allowed to reach a final decision

Often this means journeying toward decisions over two or more meetings.

One example of this is a congregation where the suggestion was made to use the PCI course - Preparing Youth to be Peacemakers. Before deciding they agreed to get the coordinator to come speak about the course at the next meeting and answer some questions they had. They then discussed it amongst themselves. They then went away to pray and reflect on that discussion. Then at a subsequent meeting they decided whether or not to offer the course to their youth. The process took time, but the time taken allowed them to feel comfortable with the decision they made.

**Then advance to PowerPoint slide 24:** (It requires clicks to move through the bullet points)

An effective decision-making process usually takes TIME

However, the investment is worth it to reach the best decision and as much agreement as possible.

An ineffective decision-making process may in the long run end up consuming even more time because of the problems its creates

*Pointer 9: Don't rush decisions.*

## **10 minutes: Conclusion / Closing:**

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 25: Summary of Pointers:**

- When applying Philippians 2:1-4 we need to
- make sure disagreement can be expressed openly BEFORE decisions are made
  - keep issues and personalities separate and focus on the ISSUE
  - keep disagreements from the past separate from current decisions
  - make sure as many as possible get a chance to be heard
  - use responses that encourage understanding and creative thinking
  - focus on the process by which to decide, not just the solution
  - make sure interests are out in the open and understood
  - generate a variety of possible ways forward before evaluating and making a decision
  - make sure we don't rush decisions

Along with adopting the spirit of Christ's humility extolled in Philippians 2 remembering to apply these pointers can help a congregation or other group of Christians become, as Paul says in Philippians 2:3 "...in full accord and of one mind."

Equally they are important for us as those called to live as imitators of Jesus to apply these pointers in decision-making in our families, workplaces and politics.

**Advance to PowerPoint Slide: 26**

Having looked at these different responses to approaching difficult decision-making, what is the learning challenge for me personally in these points?  
(What do I personally most need to work on or remember to take into account?)

Invite participants to read the slide and think on it for a moment. If time allows and our group is open to it, invite each participant to name one thing they have learned or one thing they believe it would be useful for them individually or for this group to remember to improve their meetings and decision-making.

**Reading:** Let’s listen once again to what Paul wrote to the Philippians:

**Advance to PowerPoint slide 27**

**Philippians 2:1-4 (NRSV)** If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

**Closing Prayer:**

Loving God,  
We thank you for this time spent together and ask that you help us to apply what we have learned in this time and that you continue to equip us for and guide us through the decision-making times we have to deal with, so that both the way we conduct them and the decisions we reach may be for the good of your Kingdom, through Jesus Christ our common Lord. Amen.

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**Suggestion For A Talk With Children**

There is a Korean legend about someone being taken to see heaven and hell. In hell there were people sitting at long banquet tables with lots of delicious food, but they were very sad looking because they had chopsticks that were very long and so that every time they picked up food they couldn’t get it into their mouths. In heaven there were people sitting at tables with less elaborate food. They also had very long chopsticks, but they were happy because they had learned that they could put food in each other’s mouths. In the Bible passage we read this morning, Paul reminds us how important it is to look after each other’s needs, not just our own.

## **An active way to make the point of Philippians 2:4: Jigsaw Puzzles**

This is a good way of introducing the whole study particularly if using with youth or when you have longer than 1 hour.

### **Preparation:**

Have a square of card roughly 8 x 8 inches for each participant.

Use a marker to colour the edges just slightly.

Then cut each square into five pieces, using random straight line cuts. (You may end up with a combination of rectangles, triangles, etc.

Put all of the pieces for four of the jigsaws into one pile and mix them up.

Then, place five pieces randomly pulled from the pile into an envelope.

Repeat to fill three more envelopes.

Put an elastic band around those four envelopes or place them together in a larger envelop.

You will need to complete those actions for every group of 4 participants you anticipate having.

### **When meeting:**

Divide participants into groups of four. (If you have participants left over you can make one or more groups of five and ask two people to work together on the task they will be assigned.)

Get the groups of four to sit around tables or on the floor facing each other.

Place one envelop in front of each person and instruct them NOT to open them until told to do so.

*Give these instructions to the groups:*

Here is your task:

You are to work in silence. No talking allowed.

You are each to make a five-piece jigsaw.

You are not allowed to grab pieces from anyone else's pile.

(You can add that this is a challenge to see which group of four can complete their jigsaws first.)

Now open your envelopes and make jigsaws.

*Notes for the leader:*

As they work you may need to remind them that no talking is allowed.

Participants will soon realise that the five pieces in their envelope are not all part of the same jigsaw. However, they cannot grab pieces from anyone else's pile.

So they have to wait until someone else notices that one of the pieces in the pile in front of them might be useful in the jigsaw someone else making and offers it to them. Or, the person who has realised that the five pieces in their envelopes are not all part of the same jigsaw might notice that someone else needs one of their pieces and give it to them. Or they might simply give one of their pieces randomly to someone else, hoping that this begins a pattern of sharing and working together on all four jigsaws. Occasionally a participant ends up with a pile of pieces given to

them, but doesn't notice what others might need and so give any of their pieces to anyone else.

**When all of the groups have completed their jigsaws, debrief what just happened.**

Ask questions like:

Was that hard or easy for you?

What made it hard? (You will get answers like: *Not being able to talk when I saw a piece in someone else's pile I wanted to use. Not being able to just take what I wanted. Having to depend on someone else to give me what I needed. Getting so wrapped up in what I was doing that I didn't notice what others were doing or needed.*)

When did you begin to make progress?

Would it have been easier if you could have talked to each other during it?  
What might you have told each other?

How did you feel at the end?

Get someone to read Philippians 2:4 (2:1-4)

*"Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (NIV)*

Paul reminds us that this is an important part of the way we are to live as followers of Jesus who put others' needs before his own.

Point out that this is exactly what the task they were just doing required.

Point out also that part of what slowed their task down (or perhaps for some groups made it impossible to finish!) was that they couldn't say to each other what they needed.

In life if we are going to apply Philippians 2:4 we need to

- be aware of what is going on with others around us, not just get totally wrapped up in what we are doing
- learn to share with each other what we need and learn to ask others what it is they need – or listen carefully to what they are telling us they need when they do so