SESSION 3
LEAD IT: MIDDLE SCHOOL

GOALS

As students experience Philippians 2, they will. . .

- gain a greater understanding of what life in Christ can really be like.
- understand the difference between humility and selfish ambition.
- compare their own interests with the interests of Christ.

MATERIALS: Group

- colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- Whiteboard
- For the opening activity, you will need one small balloon per student and a slip of paper placed inside of each balloon. These will need prepped ahead of time; see "Game Prep" below.
- Optional: A prize for the student who correctly answers the "Bonus" review question is optional.

MATERIALS: Each Student

- A Bible
- A pen
- Student pages for Session 3
- Scripture sheets for Philippians 2

GAME PREP

Before your students arrive, print and cut into slips of paper the Hunger Games Game Sheet (you'll find the sheet with the student page) and place each slip inside a small balloon. If a printer isn't handy, use the Game Sheet as a guide to draw the symbols freehand on slips of paper. If you have more than nine students, you can fill up balloons and place slips with a red dot on them as "poison berries."

After you have placed each slip inside a small balloon, blow up the balloons and place them inside a small box or laundry basket. Be sure to place the original nine balloons before you add the extra "poison berries" to match the number of students in your group. The container or basket can be placed in the center of a room, on a table, or in the middle of a larger gymnasium space if it's available.

Prayer

After your group has gathered, open in prayer. Give a minute or two for students to put aside the distractions of the day and focus on why they're here. Pray that their hearts will be changed as they uncover truth in God's Word.

Review

Help your students stay connected to the big themes of Philippians by asking the following questions:

- What were at least two things Paul prayed for the Philippians in chapter 1?
- What did Paul say he was partnering with the Philippians in?
- Bonus Question: Paul said he was "confident" of something. What was it?

Open

After your group has gathered, ask:

> **Has anyone ever read the Hunger Games or seen the movie? If you haven't, you will still catch onto this game pretty quickly. In the story, players in the game are given a signal, and they race to the center of the arena, called the Cornucopia to get weapons. In the center here, you see I've placed a "Cornucopia" of balloons. When I give the signal, race (or lean in and grab) to the balloons and take one. Once you make it back to your seat, pop the balloon by sitting on it and see what "weapon" is inside. Some of you may have poison berries inside, and one person will have a Mockingjay on their slip. That person is the winner and will receive a prize.**

Once everyone has popped their balloon, go around the room and have them share what's on their slips of paper. Make a chart on your whiteboard with two columns labelled Weapons and Poison Berries. When each person says whether his or her item is a "weapon" or a "poison berry" write it under the appropriate column, leaving room to define the word or phrase if necessary. As each student reads his or her word, ask what they THINK that word means. If they are unsure, help clarify. Guide them to write these on their journal pages as you write them on the whiteboard. Share that slips with poison berries and no word are simply extra to make sure everyone got a balloon.

DIGGING IN

Ask the group to read Philippians 2:1–5 using their Scripture sheets. As they read, invite them to use two different colors to mark the words noted on their slips of paper, the "weapons" and "poison berries" they find in the passage.

1. **Weapon words: highlight or circle in one color**
2. **Poison berry words: highlight or circle in another color**

After your students have read and marked the passage, read verses 1-5 aloud then say in your own words:

> **When we read what Paul has to say to the Philippians, we can see there are good things that come from being "united with Christ." It seems sort of odd to call these things "weapons" but they really do fight something, mainly, selfishness. A few of you have "poison berries." Let's take a closer look at some of those.**

TAKING IT INWARD

Selfishness is such a common characteristic among people today that we hardly even notice it in ourselves and others. "Looking out for number one" is commonly considered the thing to do in relationships, in careers, and in almost every area of life. Yet Jesus tells us to take the back seat for others. Guide your students to look at their list of poison berries on their journal pages. Ask them to give a few examples of how these "Poison Berries" might play out in their own lives, at home or school, or team sports.

> **selfish ambition:** *one person wants all the attention, eliminates friendships, divides team players, takes the glory from God and places it on themselves, makes them difficult to coach*
>
> **vain conceit:** *makes us think we are better than we are, directs our money and resources on ourselves instead of others, puts emphasis on the outside instead of the inside*

After students have given their examples, share in your own words:

> **When we describe the kinds of attitudes that follow being selfish and conceited, it doesn't sound very Christ-like. It certainly doesn't sound like a very good friend. Now let's take a closer look at the "weapons" we have in our lives that combat this type of attitude.**

Guide students back to the columns on their journal pages. Ask students for examples of how these qualities might fight off a selfish nature.

> **encouragement:** *builds people up, makes difficult tasks easier, reminds us of our value, makes friendship more enjoyable*
>
> **comfort from His love:** *reminds us we are never alone, carries us through difficult times, helps us keep moving forward when we want to quit, motivates us to serve Jesus*

tenderness: *kindness draws people toward us, shows that we care, turns away an angry reaction*

compassion: *takes note when someone is in need, takes the emphasis off of us and puts in on someone else, is the ultimate example of Jesus, benefits our society at large, creates positive environments*

After going through the list of "weapons," share in your own words:

There is one more category that we haven't discussed. Does anyone have a Mockingjay on their card? Can you read to us what it says? (*complete joy*)

And as we said, you are the winner of the game! That's actually the big win in all this. When we are using those "weapons" to combat our own "selfish ambition" and "vain conceit" we are winning something incredible.

I don't think any of us could argue that complete joy is what we are all searching for. In all our efforts and desires, we really want joy at the end of the day. Looking again at verse 2, what instructions do we need to follow to make bring complete joy according to this verse?

Give students a minute to find this in Philippians 2:2 and invite them to write their responses under Taking It Inward on their journal pages. Then ask them to share their responses, guiding them to the following observations:

Instructions to follow that bring complete joy:
being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose

Then share:

It sounds like this joy can be complete by not only being united in Christ, but being together with other Christ followers who have the same purpose.

Which of these instructions do you think you need help with personally? What makes you think this?

Which of these instructions do we need help with as a group (or church)?

Remember, these aren't just "good ideas," but actual commands from God regarding our behavior as His people! If we want to have a close relationship with Christ, then our lives should show obedience to these commands.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Invite the group to share about any particular instruction that consistently gives them trouble. Encourage students to pray for each other throughout the coming week.

Ask for suggestions as to how the group could begin to live *selflessly*. Perhaps there's someone at school who needs help, an elderly person at church, or even a smaller youth group or campus club that needs some encouragement. After this study session, your group may want to devise a plan of action. Direct students to write these ideas on their journal page.

This session has the potential to be highly convicting, but don't let anyone leave feeling defeated. Spend some time in prayer, allowing students to ask God to "work in them" the characteristics He's shown them in Scripture. Encourage them to respond to their convictions.

Before your group disperses, invite them to boil their thoughts down to a single fact about following Christ. Have them write this short statement under the heading "What I Learned about Following Christ" on their journal pages.