

HUMILITY

Leader pages on pp. 146-149

THE POINT:
CONSIDER THE NEEDS
OF OTHERS BEFORE
YOUR OWN.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

¹ If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,
² make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

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MEMORY VERSE

³ **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.**

⁴ Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

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⁵ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.

⁷ Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man,
⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

⁹ For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—

¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

KEYWORDS

Encouragement in Christ (v. 1)—refers to the blessings of being in or united with Christ.

Intent...purpose (v. 2)—Refers to proclaiming Christ—spreading the gospel. The characteristics that they shared in their relationship with God bound Paul and the church together.

Conceit (v. 3)—"Empty glory." Conceit describes someone claiming glory for himself that does not exist.

Existing...form of God (v. 6)—Jesus always existed with the Father and Holy Spirit. He never relinquished the form of God, but He did take the form of a servant.

WHY IS HUMILITY CRUCIAL?

During the 2024 Olympics, America celebrated winning over 120 medals. While some athletes were bold and others were boastful, McLaughlin-Levrone is one athlete who took to the national stage displaying humility and her love for Christ.

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone is a world-class athlete and gold-medal Olympian. She has broken her own records multiple times and by most standards, has a lot to boast about. After beating her world record the World Athletics Championship 2022, she credited God for her achievements. She was quoted as responding to her achievements with, "Praise. His. Name."¹⁴ She also acknowledged

the role that prayer played in her preparation and quoted Scripture on social media.

She not only credits God with her athletic accomplishments, but she also shares God's influence in her personal life. During her engagement, she spoke of the importance her fiancé's faith in God played in their relationship.

Regardless of how good you are at a task, humility is needed. It is critical. Our study in Philippians 2 will show us why.

Humility Is Our Goal //

Philippians 2:1-2

While not without problems, the congregation of believers at Philippi was one of the healthier churches addressed in the New Testament. Paul, the author of this letter, was encouraged by the spiritual work that God had initiated in them (Phil. 1:6). As a result, he assumed some things about them—things that are true of all true believers—and these provide the basis for instruction about relationships with one another.

This passage begins with the word "if" and such a small word might seem unimportant to us. We might assume that the word "if" expresses some doubt in the mind of Paul. But in the Greek, this word can be translated as "since." This would be the preferable translation, to think of it along the lines of "since," because these are statements of reality that are assumed to be true.

Because of His sacrificial death on the cross, Christ's emboldening of us becomes real.

- **Consolation of love.** There is an incentive that comes from knowing you are loved. The persistent and constant love of God for each one of us can and should bring humility to our hearts. Once we realize how unconditional this love is, unprompted by any substantial merit on our part, then we lose any sense of superiority towards others.
- **Fellowship with the Spirit.** While this fellowship (Phil. 1:5) that Paul envisions can



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be both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with other people), there is an established order in the New Testament. First, we relate appropriately to God, followed by healthy relationships with others.

- **Affection and mercy.** This characteristic could be subjective or objective. Paul might be describing attitudes that these believers have toward one another. He might also have in view the heart of God towards His people. You might think of it as a wonderful, glorious circle of kindness. Sometimes the mercy extended by a friend or loved one opens us up to receive the mercy and kindness of God.

All these descriptions of God's blessings are manifestations of His love. By "thinking the same way" as God thinks about them, the Philippians can have "the same love" toward each other.

At this point, love and humility begin to mutually fuel one another. Why would I not be humble when I realize how unworthy I am of God's love? Being humbly considerate of other people, their experiences, and their needs, communicates love in a most profound way.

HOW CAN THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL HELP BRING UNITY?

The outcome of this beautiful interaction is that we become "united in spirit" with those who share our experience of God's grace. We come together with others because we realize that God has designed us to be in community with each other. We may accomplish some things by ourselves; however, we can accomplish much more when we work in unity with others. This is humbling to us, but it brings us into the spiritual fellowship of the church, and in that fellowship, we continue to experience the love of God through the love of others.

It is a beautiful life that God has planned for us, a unity with others who share our experience of amazing love. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

Humility Serves Others //

Philippians 2:3-4

As we dig into what the Scripture says about love, we don't go very far without encountering this corresponding virtue of humility. Both are motives of the heart.

Because character counts, motives matter. Paul invited his readers to think about their core motives in interpersonal relationships. Perhaps they were acting out of "selfish ambition." Deep in the heart, selfish ambition says, "I want what I want" and then begins to pursue that objective. Another motive is "conceit," and it sounds



DIGGING DEEPER JOSEPH'S CONSISTENT HUMILITY

If we define humility as putting someone's needs before our own, then we can learn a lot from the life of Joseph. He was hated by his brothers and they sold him into slavery. Joseph ended up in Egypt and by God's favor he served Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. Joseph was imprisoned after refusing Potiphar's wife's advances. In prison, Joseph received favor from God and was given authority over prisoners. Joseph helped a prison mate and asked him for help once he was released from prison. When Joseph was finally released, he again was placed in a high position (Gen. 41:39). Famine struck and his brothers came to Egypt for food. When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he forgave all that happened to him. Joseph considered every wrong done to him as the cost of preserving his family.

How is God asking us to endure inconvenience, or suffer to put others' needs in front of our own?



like this: "I deserve what I want more than you do." This is a rationalization of whatever selfish action someone decides to take.

Selfish ambition and conceit always block us from loving the way that God intends for us to experience love according to the gospel. The Bible always asks us to do this: "consider others as more important than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3). This defines true humility.

What the Bible is asking us to do in verse 3 is not a minimization of someone's inherent value. Because of the gospel we know that no one is inherently better than anyone else. But those who are moved by the gospel choose to give deference to another, and not because they must. It isn't because they are weak or inferior but rather because of an inner strength and peace.

Someone cuts in front of me on a crowded highway with traffic crawling at a snail's pace. Imagine for a moment that I don't get furious about it. That doesn't mean that I'm weak or inferior to the other driver. It means that in that moment I give deference to them. If the gospel is my motivation for doing that, then in that moment I have counted that person as more important than myself.

Do you know what we call that? Humility. And it communicates love like nothing else.

In case you're afraid that this type of lifestyle is unhealthy or makes you prone to being exploited, there's an important instruction given in verse 4:

"Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others." Keep this in mind as you think about what it means to live in love and humility. It is a safeguard against some kind of pseudo-spirituality in which you make yourself into a mistreated relational martyr.

HOW DO WE NAVIGATE THE TENSION OF PUTTING OTHERS FIRST BUT NOT GETTING RUN OVER OURSELVES?

Humility is not thinking less of yourself as much as it is thinking of yourself less.

Jesus Is Our Example //

Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus wants to save us and then give us a guide by which to live. His titles are—first—Savior, then Example. Spiritually, it is a fatal mistake to reverse the order. God's plan was not for Jesus to come and set for us an example which, if we could attain it, would then become a basis for salvation.

Think of it like this: the example that we see and follow in Jesus is actually what He did to save us. And we should follow it, not to save ourselves, but because we have already been saved by Him. And what is it specifically that we are called to emulate? Jesus was, is, and always will be God. Yet He did not exploit that status and use it as something behind which to ignore our most fundamental need, salvation. Instead, He gave up the prerogatives that are a part of being God. He gave up the independent exercise of His will and made Himself dependent on God the Father. Whatever knowledge Jesus possessed, it was because the Father revealed it to Him. Whatever good work He did, it stemmed from the strength the Father gave Him. Whatever He said came from the voice of God the Father.

WHAT ASPECT OF CHRIST'S EXAMPLE STANDS OUT TO YOU?

And all of this emptying that Jesus did can be summed up in one word: humility.

That word comes from the Latin word humus, which means "soil" or "earth." Genesis 2:7 teaches us that the first human (note the word similarity)

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was created from the ground. To be humble is to realize that you are human—a dependent creature who possesses everything as a gift from God.

In becoming a man, Jesus demonstrated humility. How ironic that He became what He was not by nature, but we won't humbly admit who we are—dependent creatures. We are dependent on God and yet we act as if we're not.

To think of ourselves with humility, to see ourselves as dependent on God is an attitude. It is the attitude that Jesus displayed by coming to earth as a man. And we should "adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus." Paul's description of Jesus in verses 6-8 was designed to help His followers understand His mind—how He thought. So, follow the example of Jesus both in mind and action when it comes to humility. Make sure it is a part of your character and your habitual behavior.

God makes a positive response to the attitude of humility. "For this reason" points to the connection between humility and God's approval. Jesus humbled Himself and then God highly exalted Him. Practicing humility in the world probably won't bring you any fame, but your humility matters to God.

WHEN DO YOU FIND IT PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO HAVE THE SAME ATTITUDE AS JESUS?

DID YOU KNOW?

Forgiveness is central to salvation. Christ died on the cross to atone for our sins. In Christ's resurrection, we find forgiveness for all we have ever done, or will do, against God that kept us from relationship with Him. When we profess faith in Christ, we accept the gift of Christ's forgiveness and are ushered into a life secured by the fact that we will have eternal life. While we celebrate the gift of forgiveness in Christ, it can still be hard to extend forgiveness to others. Scroll through social media and you will find plenty of examples of unforgiveness. People are often affirmed that they are right to be angry and encouraged to hold onto their anger. God's word reminds us to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving (Eph. 4:31-32). When you forgive others, you can point to Jesus as your model of forgiveness.

Biblical Truth: "And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ" (Eph. 4:32).

Do you have a relationship that could be repaired by forgiveness?

LIVE IT

How can we live in the humility of Christ in our daily lives?

We are to model the same humility and love Christ displayed when He humbled Himself for our sake. Humility is a fundamental component of the type of character God desires. Here are some practical steps for you in your quest for character:

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- **Look around.** Notice examples of humility in the normal pattern of a day. You might be surprised at how often it is practiced.
- **Look within.** Study your own life and recall occasions in which you acted in an arrogant fashion. Think about better ways to respond.
- **Look up.** Find examples of humility on the part of Bible characters. Use a concordance or other study aids to compile a list of men and women in the Scripture whose humility mirrored the example of Jesus.

DAILY READINGS

1. HOLY HARMONY // PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

According to the Britannica Dictionary, harmony is “the combination of different musical notes played or sung at the same time to produce a pleasing sound.”¹⁵ There is not a uniformity of notes, but a combination of different notes united in such a way that they go together well or agree with one another. The church is a unity in diversity—a combination of various types of personalities, cultures, ethnicities, and incomes with one common faith. Christ is the conductor, the Holy Spirit is the harmonizer, the saints are the orchestra, and the notes are the Scriptures, as we make beautiful “music” together to the glory of God. How do we do that? By lovingly submitting to one another and humbly submitting to the Holy Spirit. Holy Humility maintains harmony!

By lovingly submitting to one another, holy humility produces harmony.

2. MORE IMPORTANT THAN ME? // PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

The origin of the word “selfish” is the idea of campaigning for a political office. We are all created in the image of God, so Paul is not asking us to consider ourselves lesser human beings than others. Although there are times when we are better suited for a position, Paul says we ought to consider that there may be others who are better suited than we are because they are more skilled, experienced, or mature. In those cases, we ought to esteem them as the “better” person. In this “dog eat dog,” world, this is a radically different thought process than a culture that calls for us to campaign for ourselves.

Examine your motives in ministry service. Where are areas you need to submit in humility?

3. WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS? // PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

What if that was Jesus’ attitude toward salvation? Where would we spend eternity if Jesus clung to His right to function equally with the Father and to exercise all power as God? The answer is obvious:

we’d all be condemned to hell. Instead of holding on to His rights as God, Jesus humbly took on the responsibility of saving us, put on human flesh, died on a cross for your sins and my sins, and rose from the dead so that we might have everlasting life. So, the next time you say, “I have rights,” or “what about my rights,” could it be that God is calling for you to give up your rights in order to show grace and mercy to someone who doesn’t deserve it? Isn’t that what forgiveness is all about?

When we accept Christ, we give up our rights for His reign.

4. BANK OR BANKRUPT? // ECCLESIASTES 4:7-9

The author of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon says that life is empty. He communicates that the pursuit of people, places, and things is nothing but chasing after the wind. Solomon was extremely wealthy, so he indulged in as many arenas as possible, and still found it all vanity. Despite all our labors and pursuit of money (because many believe money is the key to happiness), Solomon concludes that money cannot satisfy and the pursuit of it often leaves a person lonely. What does he finally conclude? That contentment can only be found in reverencing God and keeping His commandments.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil . . . ” (1 Tim. 6:10).

5. CONTENT OR COVETOUS? // HEBREWS 13:5

One in five people to one in ten people live in poverty.¹⁶ 84% or 6.7 billion of the world’s population live on less than \$30 per day (ourworldindata.org).¹⁷ 309 million people face chronic hunger (wfp.org). 150 million people worldwide are homeless (homelessnomore.com).¹⁸ While things are relative and we must be careful comparing, do you have a roof over your head? Can you choose daily what you are going to eat? If so, are you content with what you have? Or do you complain about what you don’t have?

True contentment is found in Christ alone. Anything or anyone else, will never satisfy.