

Becoming Like Christ

Lesson 11: Humility: The Mind of Christ -- Philippians 2:1-11

Picture the most powerful person you can imagine, someone with everything: unlimited resources, total security, the respect of everyone in the room, no need that anyone could ever meet for Him. Now picture that same person kneeling on a dirty floor with a basin of water and a towel, washing the grime off the feet of people who, within hours, will abandon Him. That is not a thought experiment. That is a Thursday night in an upper room in Jerusalem, and the person on the floor is the Lord of glory. Humility, it turns out, is not weakness pretending to be virtue. It is strength bending low on purpose.

We live in a world that tells us the opposite. From the time we are small we are taught to climb, to compete, to make a name, to look out for number one. We measure ourselves against the people around us and feel the familiar tug to be a little more noticed, a little more right, a little more important than they are. Even in the church this current runs strong and quiet. We can serve in order to be seen. We can speak in order to win. We can give in order to be thanked. The grasping reflex goes deep, and most of the time we do not even feel it operating.

Into this Paul drops a passage of staggering beauty. He has a divided, slightly quarrelsome congregation on his hands, and instead of merely scolding them he lifts their eyes to Jesus. He tells them to have the same mind among themselves which was also in Christ Jesus, and then he sings. The words that follow in Philippians 2:6-11 may be the oldest hymn of the church, a soaring description of the One who was in the very form of God and yet did not clutch at His privileges, but emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, and obeyed all the way down to a criminal's cross. And then, the great turn: God highly exalted Him.

This lesson asks us to stand under that hymn and let it reshape us. Humility is not a minor footnote in the Christian life; it is the very shape of the mind of Christ, and we are commanded to share it. So read these eleven verses slowly. They will tell you who Jesus is, what He gave up and never stopped being, how low He was willing to go, and how God answered that descent. And somewhere in the reading you may feel your own grip beginning to loosen on the things you have been clutching too tightly.

Group Discussion: Paul tells a quarreling church to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility to count others more significant than themselves (Philippians 2:3). In a culture that prizes self-promotion and looking out for oneself, what makes this command so countercultural? What might it actually look like, in concrete terms, for a group of Christians to live this way toward one another?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about where the grasping reflex shows up in your own life, the quiet need to be noticed, to be right, to be thanked, or to come out ahead.

Where do you feel that tug most strongly right now? As you read of the One who emptied Himself, what is one place where you sense Jesus inviting you to loosen your grip?

Read Philippians 2:1–11

Study Questions

1. Paul grounds his entire appeal for unity and humility in a string of realities the Philippians already possess in Christ: encouragement in Christ, comfort from love, participation in the Spirit, affection and sympathy (Philippians 2:1). Why does Paul root the command to be humble in what we have already received from God rather than in mere moral effort? What does this tell us about where genuine humility comes from?
2. Paul says to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility to count others more significant than yourselves (Philippians 2:3). Selfish ambition can wear very respectable clothes, even in church work. Where have you noticed the desire to be seen, thanked, or recognized quietly shaping why you do what you do? What would it look like to serve in that area for an audience of One?
3. Paul writes, Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). Notice he does not forbid attending to our own needs; he forbids stopping there. How does this balance protect us both from selfish self-absorption and from an unhealthy neglect of ourselves? What does it teach us about the nature of Christlike love?
4. Humility is not mainly a feeling; it shows up in ordinary, costly choices toward real people. Think of one relationship right now, at home, at work, or in the church, where counting the other person more significant than yourself would change how you act. What is one concrete thing you could do this week to look to their interests as well as your own?

5. Paul commands, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5), and then points to Jesus emptying Himself and taking the form of a servant. Why does Paul give us a person to imitate rather than simply a list of rules for humility? How does keeping our eyes on Christ shape humility differently than merely trying hard to be humble?
6. Paul says the One who was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing (Philippians 2:6–7). We tend to cling hardest to our rights, our reputation, and our comfort. What is one right or privilege you find yourself gripping tightly, and what might it look like to hold it with an open hand the way Jesus held His?
7. The hymn says Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). In the Roman world the cross was the most shameful, degrading death imaginable. Why is it significant that Jesus' humility led not merely to lowliness but to obedience, and that His obedience went all the way to the cross? What does this reveal about the connection between true humility and obedience to God?
8. Paul says God highly exalted Jesus and gave Him the name above every name (Philippians 2:9), so that the path down was also the path up. Where in your life are you tempted to grab exaltation for yourself instead of humbling yourself and trusting God to lift you up in His time (1 Peter 5:6)? What would it look like to entrust your reputation and your future to God this week?
9. The hymn rises to its climax: Jesus, who was in the very form of God and equal with God, emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, yet God exalted Him so that at His name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:6–11). What does this passage teach us about the deity of

Christ, about what did and did not change when He became a servant, and about His present lordship over all things?

10. Look back across the whole hymn: the One in the form of God who did not grasp, who emptied Himself, who took the form of a servant, who obeyed to the point of death on a cross, and whom God highly exalted. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming His own humility in you through this passage, and one concrete step you will take this week to count someone else more significant than yourself.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:1–12, the suffering servant who poured out His soul to death; John 13:3–17, Jesus washing His disciples' feet as the pattern for His people; Matthew 20:25–28, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom; 1 Peter 5:5–6, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, so humble yourselves and He will exalt you; Colossians 1:15–20, Christ the image of the invisible God in whom all the fullness dwells.