

Stooping for the sake of others

(Philippians 2:1-11)

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Churches, like people in general, make decisions based on what they really desire to be. How we spend the money we have, where we invest our time and energy... What we decide are priorities—all reflect where we want to go and what we want to be. We live in a world where position, possessions, and prestige are at the top of the list of values. It can also be true in the church.

Whether it is in the area of faith, business, entertainment, sports, politics, science or the arts, there is something that draws us to the stories of “successful” people.

We spend a great deal of time and energy trying to obtain status, resources and influence. We would like to think that if we had a higher status, more resources, or greater influence, we would use them for the good of others. But would we? The answer lies in what we are doing with what we have now.

Today I want to challenge you to develop and prize a value that honors God and helps others most. I want to speak to you about humility. Humility is unique among the virtues in that as soon as you think you have it, you probably don't.

Did you hear about the man in a local community who had such a reputation for being humble that the local leaders decided to give him an award? They had a ceremony and gave him a pin and a trophy that read, “John Jones, the Most Humble Man in our Community.” Unfortunately for John, he had to give the trophy back when he began carrying it around showing it to anyone who came near.

We all struggle with pride and the cultivation of humility.

The “Door of Humility”

In the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the main entrance to the basilica is a very short door known as the “Door of Humility”. The taller you are, the more you must stoop. Only small children and the shortest adults can freely stroll through its opening.

The “Door of Humility” is a good picture of how we come into God’s presence. No one enters without bending, stooping before God. Humility is also the key to practicing God’s presence in our lives daily. It is key to a healthy church.

Humility is not the same as humiliation. Nor does it mean serving as a doormat for others, having low self-esteem, or surrendering your strengths, abilities and achievements.

John Dickson wrote a little book called *Humilitas*. It is about humility. His definition of humility is a good one and fits the biblical description: **Humility is the choice to forego status, deploy your resources, or use your influence for the good of others before yourself.**

Notice three things:

- It is a *choice* we make, not one that is forced on us.
- It presupposes *dignity*. To humble yourself means that you lower yourself in some way.
- True humility is *social*. It is not just modesty in a private way, but it is lowering yourself “for the good of others”.

Imagine if humility was valued and practiced by everyone in your church. Imagine what it would be like to belong to a church where people were constantly setting aside their status/position for the good of others ... Deploying their resources/possessions for others ... Using their influence/power for the good of others.

Would you like to belong and serve in that kind of church? Would you like to be around that kind of person? Would you like to BE that kind of person? Do you know anyone who should be listening to this message? Could that person be you?

The humility of Christ

The church in Philippi was struggling. Unkind words were spoken. Tempers flared. Conflict and even division were looming. Feelings were hurt. What was the answer? Paul highlights one thing—Humility, first seen in the attitude of Christ and then encouraged in us.

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Look at the distance he traveled. None of us could ever give up as much as he gave up.

First, we see it in his birth

Status/Position? ***“Being in very nature God.”*** V. 6. Jesus was and is and will ever be God. To see Jesus is to see the face of God.

Yet ***“He made himself nothing.”*** V. 7. From the Highest to the Lowest. What does it mean that Jesus became nothing? Perhaps the best way to understand it is not to think what he gave up, but what he became.

Paul says Jesus ***“took the very nature of a servant”*** and was made in ***“human likeness”***. He became one of us—a human being. Imagine being one of his disciples. You had walked with Jesus all day. At the end of the day, he says, “Boy, I am hungry and thirsty. And tired. Let’s get some sleep!” Yes, he got hungry, thirsty and tired.

Think of where Jesus chose to be born on earth—not in the capital city but a small town, not in a palace but in a manger, probably in a cave on the side of a hill, to peasant parents who couldn’t even afford the traditional birth offering of a lamb given at the Temple, but only a couple of pigeons.

Listen to his teaching

In Jesus’ day, humility was the attitude of slaves, not teachers or leaders. Yet Jesus taught, ***“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

And he not only taught that, but he lived it out.

Look at his life choices

In v. 7, ... ***“He took the very nature of a servant.”*** On the night before he was killed, Jesus taught his disciples an unforgettable lesson about leadership. He began to wash his friends’ feet. This was the job of a servant! It is not the way masters act!

No pillow to lay his head... associating with people looked down on by respectable society... leaving places where multitudes were flocking to hear him, to be alone... touching untouchables like lepers and prostitutes... calling despised tax collectors and fishermen his friends... Everywhere and in every way, Jesus refused the ways that we normally choose to climb ladders of success and position.

We see his humility in his death

⁸ (...) He humbled himself and became obedient unto death —even death on a cross!

For us, although we don’t like to talk about it, death is a given. But Christ chose to die. And he did it FOR US. Willingly. Sacrificially.

The level of his humility is put in words that the translators of the NIV could not help but to mark with an exclamation point!! —***“even death on a cross!”***

A cross in Jesus’ day was a symbol of ultimate shame in society and forsakenness by God. The practice was reserved for foreigners and slaves. The Old Testament declared anyone who was crucified to be cursed by God. Imagine the horror of the disciples when they saw the One they thought was the Messiah, condemned to die on a cross. God’s Messiah does not die on a cross! But he did!

And God the Father was pleased:

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under

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

The servant of all is declared to be Lord of all. His name is above all names. The great Creator became my Savior, and the Crucified one is the One before whom I bow and the One whom I confess is Lord. The Father honors the Son and the Son gives glory to the Father.

All because of his choice to forego (put aside) status... deploy his resources... use his influence for the good of others. That is humility!

Our example to follow

Hear again Paul's words to the church:

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Putting a face on humility

Church= "saints." But we do not always live as saints. Sometimes we disagree. Sometimes others hurt us and we hurt others. It is part of life.

*"To live above with saints I love,
That will be glory.
To live below with saints I know
That's another story."*

The question is not, will a church ever have conflict? But rather, how will they deal with the hurt feelings and disappointments and disagreements?

Too often what we WANT to do is the very opposite of what Jesus did. We make it our ambition to win the fight. We insist on our status! We withhold our resources. We abuse our influence to get our way. We say and do things we should not. And then pride keeps us from admitting our wrong and making it right with others.

Paul calls us back to the example of Jesus —v. 5— ***"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."*** In big and small things, humility seeks to meet the needs of others without the need to be constantly affirmed and congratulated.

It is rare to see people who step out of the spotlight and point the light on others. It is noticeable when it happens. We see it in sports figures like Roger Federer, who for years was the World's Number One Tennis Player, yet who could not win or lose a game without praising his opponent.

Herb Grover, deacon in name and life. While others talked about a need that should be met, Herb met the need. No fanfare. No need to be recognized. He just did it. God, give us more people like Herb Grover.

A man walked into a posh jewelry store in Sydney, Australia. Pink argyle diamond. Credit card. Problem with computer. Fixed. “You know a little about computer, do you?” Check. “Mr. Bill Gates.” Microsoft convention.

Humble people change the world.

There is much that God wants you to do now and in the future. But more important question is, “Who will you choose to BE as a church?” Humility is the key to what we prize—unity, harmony, peace and purpose (verses 1-2).

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Taking the first step toward humility

How do I cultivate humility in my life?” C. S. Lewis once gave a speech on humility. He concluded his speech with some wise advice: ***“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”***

The first step in the pursuit of humility is to recognize I am NOT humble. Are you on your way? Have you taken the very first step?

Applications for living

1. Choose to bow to the One who died for you.

He is Lord. Will you say it today? One day all will. Now you can say it and receive forgiveness and new life. Today, God is calling you to humble your heart before the One who stooped for you.

2. Choose to stoop to serve others.

Your position... your possessions... your power can be used to serve others. Take the initiative to start giving and stop demanding. Put others before yourself.

You can start this very moment. Ask God to help you learn to live and serve in humility, and then begin. You will have an opportunity to do so immediately—in words you speak, a smile, a touch, an apology, a listening ear, a refusal to bend things your way. Serving in humility is a heart decision before it is an act.

We have a perfect Savior who stooped to serve us. He gave us an example that if we will follow, will make a world of difference.

Discussion questions:

1. Who is one of the humblest, servant-hearted people that you have even known? Why do you choose this person?
2. In your own words, paraphrase the following words of Jesus: *“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”*
3. Can you think of a story of Jesus’ life where we see Jesus being a servant to others?
4. Why do you think people find it so difficult to be humble servants?
5. What do you think God wants you to remember from this sermon?
6. This week how can you apply this to your life?