

A Humble Attitude

Philippians 2: 1-11

Written by Charlie Lehardy



Getting Started

No one likes a braggart, but practicing true humility is hard. We all have egos and they just don't like to be told to be quiet. Sometimes the desire to tell people how awesome we are gets the better of us. At such times, people on Twitter have resorted to what's become known as the "humble-brag", a Tweet designed to let people know that we're pretty darned wonderful, while pretending at the same time to downplay the whole thing.

"It amazes me that I can be in Prague, London, and the Paramus Whole Foods all in one day! Travel and technology boggle my mind!" "I am featured in People's Most Beautiful, but did the shoot with no makeup, and I have to say... SCARY." "The downside of my glamorous life standing around for six hours at the royal wedding: My entire little toe is one big blister." "Dear NY City. A mansion tax?! Seriously?! It's just a two-bedroom apartment!"

It's apparent from the first chapter of Paul's letter that there was some sort of competition going on in the Philippian church. A few leaders were vying to take Paul's place now that he was safely locked up behind bars. And as these leaders jockeyed for position, it's likely that their vanity and power-grabbing was beginning to infect the whole church.

Instead of taking sides in the power struggle, Paul addressed the heart of the problem by talking about humility and pointing to Jesus as the prime example for how we should behave towards each other. In this study we want to look honestly at our behavior, our attitudes, and our hidden motives, and examine them next to the example of Jesus. We want to come away with answers to the questions, What does true humility look like, Why is it so hard, and Why does it matter to the church?

Content questions:

1. In some translations, Paul begins verse 1 "if you have...." He isn't questioning the Philippians' faith here, but is using a rhetorical device to assert that these things are in fact true for them. In verses 1 and 2, what are the things Christ has done for the Philippians, and what are the things Paul calls the Philippians to do in response?
2. From what you know or can surmise about the Philippians' culture and their church, what do you think would have been some of the issues that made it difficult for them to be "one in spirit and in mind," as Paul asks them to be at the end of verse 2?
3. Humility can be difficult to define, but Paul gives us a picture of humility in his description of Jesus in verses 3-8. Based on what Paul says and what you know about Jesus from the Gospels, list some words or phrases that describe humility. Think of some examples from Jesus' life and ministry: How did he live out humility?

4. Paul says that Jesus gave up the advantages and privileges he had as God's son. Contrast Jesus' life prior to becoming a human with the life he lived in the Gospels: What did Jesus give up in agreeing to come to earth? And on the plus side, what did he gain that made it worthwhile?
5. Verse 7 says "[Jesus] made himself nothing..." and verse 8 says "he humbled himself..." In other words, according to Paul, Jesus went all in and embraced a life of humility and servanthood. What was God's response to Jesus' humbling of himself?

Application questions:

1. What are some of the realities about who we are as Grace Community Church that keep us from being "like-minded" and "one in spirit"?
2. In verse 3, Paul says that we should "value others above yourselves" and "look... to the interests of others." Give some examples of when you have seen that happen or have been the recipient of that sort of humble, selfless love.
3. What are some of the situations you've experienced where it has been hardest to live out that sort of humble, other-focused love, and why?
4. The opposite of humility is pride, one of the sins the Bible constantly warns against. Why is pride dangerous?
5. Read Matthew 6:1-4 for one of Jesus' teachings on humility. We have a choice, apparently, between exalting ourselves and putting our own desires first, or humbling ourselves and depending on God to exalt us in his own time and own way. What would Paul say are the reasons we should leave it to God to lift us up?
6. Thinking about the relationships you are invested in at church, in marriage, at work, in school, with family and friends, how would "doing nothing from vain conceit" and "valuing others above yourself" reflect on you, on your relationships, and on the perceptions people have about Jesus?