

“All Together, Now, Part 6:  
‘Knight One Another’ ”  
Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

**Introduction**

In my home country, there is a prestigious award called The Presidential Medal of Freedom. The president honors people who have made "an especially meritorious contribution to the United States, to world peace, or to culture."

I think sometimes presidents give this honor to people that most of us have never heard of, but people we *should* know about, because they've done extraordinary things.

Other times presidents give this medal of freedom to celebrities. And it sometimes seems like our presidents just want to grab some of their fame for themselves. "You stand here. I'll put a medal on you. You'll thank me. I'll look good."

Maybe that's a little bit cynical of me to say.

There is a medal of honor in the Christian church, too. But it's not the pastor or the pope or the council chairperson who gives this medal of honor. It's every one of you who get to give this award. We *get* to give it. But we also *must* give it.

To show honor to another Christian believer in your church---to "knight one another," as I call it in the sermon title---means that we are recognizing and honoring the nobility and status we see in each other in Christ. And Paul here in Romans 12:10 calls us to get moving on this. He challenges us to

1. Run Ahead
2. Race Below
3. Recognize the Victor

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First, Run Ahead.

### 1. Run Ahead

Paul says, Romans 12:10, “honor one another above yourselves” (as the NIV says), or, better, “outdo one another in showing honor” (ESV), “take delight in honoring one another” (NLT), and---how about this!--- “compete with each other in giving mutual respect” (NTE).

The reason there are so many different ways of saying this is because this Greek word, (proēgoumenoi) Προηγούμενοι, is what they call a “hapax legomennon,”---it’s the only time this word is used in the NT. So it takes some creativity to get its meaning. Literally it means “to go before as a guide.” In our context it means that you’re running ahead. You’re getting first to where everyone else is going. You’re leading the way. You’re going somewhere and you’re in an excited hurry to get there.

The thing about this race is that not everyone starts at the same time or at the same place. Some people don’t even know they’re signed up for the race yet. Doesn’t matter. You’re registered. You’ve got your number. *You* hear the gun go off. You hear a great cloud of witnesses cheering you on from heaven. So you go! You run ahead, even if nobody else knows the race is starting. And you’re trying to beat everyone to the place where you can show them honor.

An ancient Jewish scholar said that if your neighbor is in the habit of bowing to you when they see you, then when you see them on the street, you should sneak up on them and bow before them before they bow to you.

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In Korea I learned that Koreans bow---a lot. I have a Korean friend who is a professor at perhaps Korea’s best university, and a Christian man. This man literally races ahead and bows first. I have never been able to beat him to the bow. And when it’s time to say goodbye, he always gets the last bow. It’s as if Romans 12:10 is the theme verse for his life. And this friend makes it easy for me to want to honor him, too.

But Paul is challenging us to race ahead to honor others in the church *whether or not they’re going to bow and honor us, too*. And this is scary for us, and often lonely. You can feel like you’re the only one racing ahead to honor others.

Whether you live in Rome in the first century or in Zurich in the twenty-first century, it’s easy to fear that if you honor others, and nobody honors you, you’ll live without honor.

We fear that honor is a currency like Swiss Francs. If you give Francs away, you have fewer Francs. Unless you give Francs with an expectation that you’ll get them back with interest, you’re losing money!

So if I run ahead and start giving honor, and there’s no guarantee that anyone will even *think* of honoring me, then I will have to live without honor. And to live without honor is to live in shame; to be a nobody.

In our fear, we think: I’ll start honoring people when they start honoring me. Guess what Paul says. Nope. That’s fundamentally un-Christian. Because a Christian who is growing in grace, he says, has (Rom 12:10) a devoted, affectionate care for other Christians.

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Two Greek words for love are here together---*philos*, brotherly love; and *storge*, the natural affection of family. I don't wait till I've gotten enough honor from my brother or my children before I honor them. He's my *brother*. They're my kids! It's natural to think they're special, and to treat them like it. And when Jesus has gotten ahold of your heart, the people in your church family get ahold of your heart, too. And you can't *not* run ahead, without hesitation, and love them way in advance of any honor in return; without any guarantee of honor in return.

As the American naturalist and writer Wendell Berry says, “Always in the big woods when you leave familiar ground and step off alone into a new place there will be ... a little nagging of dread.” And as my son Deacon says, “bravery is not the absence of fear, but a willingness to face it.”

We Run Ahead to honor one another, despite our fears of being the first to honor, of being alone in showing honor, or of being unhonored in return.

## **2. Race Below**

We Run Ahead, but then, once we arrive, we Race Below.

If we live life in the church as if honor was money ... If we think that if you give honor, you lose honor, then it's going to be hard to Run Ahead. But we're *definitely never* going to Race Below.

My friend grew up and lives in Kanton Aargau. She's been telling me about how, often, folks from Zurich look down on people from Aargau. It's not just that they assume they drive poorly. Often folks from Zurich think of them as culturally inferior.

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But the other day, some of us were in a bakery here in Zurich, and they had Aargau-style carrot cake---a specialty from that Kanton. We joked that they must have kidnapped some poor baker from Aargau in order to make a profit for the Zurich bakery. But what was actually happening? A Zurich baker was humble enough to say, “look, let’s face it, nobody does carrot cake like Aargau.”

Think of the church potluck dinner. You make your favorite dish to share. Your best dish. Your hometown specialty. Someone comes up to you and says, *did YOU make that delicious Korean Dakgalbi? Did YOU make those amazing Mexican tamales? Did YOU make that incredible Icelandic Vinarterta?* This delights you. Their taste buds have been treated to *your* contribution.

But that’s only one reason you go to the potluck. The real reason is, you go there *to eat everybody else’s best dish!* And it’s the most natural thing in the world to want to go up to people and say “wow! This is incredible! God bless you and your delicious hometown cuisine!”

A pot luck is a magical place, a spiritual place. Because the food is good, but the praise and honor and self-forgetfulness and delight are moving around the dinner table with such a holy power that you feel like you might be in heaven.

And heaven is precisely the place where the best of every tribe and nation is brought together for a great feast, full of honor. The place where nobody asks “Can I, being from Zurich, honor this person from Aargau?” “If I, a Swiss person, honor a German or a Croatian or a Nigerian, am I losing what’s honorable about being Swiss?” “If I, as a professional classical musician, affirm and take delight in this amateur folk musician, am I going to lose the position and prestige I’ve earned through all my hard work?” The

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church is meant to be a taste of heaven because it's the place where we never worry about such questions.

When the people of God grow in grace together, they don't just Run Ahead to show honor before anyone else gets the chance. They will show honor to *anybody*, no matter what *anybody else* thinks, because they enjoy the unique gifts and contributions that every sort of person brings to our diverse family.

To Race Below becomes so natural for a growing Christian that they don't even *think* about the “below” part. They know that no one who is less wealthy, less educated, less popular, less healthy, or less talented is less human or less Christian than them, so they honor them without hardly thinking about Racing *Below*. If a growing Christian *does* think about social and economic status, they recognize that if they have more socio-economic privilege than others in the church, then they have the opportunity to use that privilege to *serve* and *honor* those who *don't* have so much of it. And they do so humbly, and without any superiority.

The hard truth here, church, is that you don't have a choice. You are commanded to Run Ahead, and to Race Below, to show honor to the people in our congregation. You must. And sometimes it's hard.

But the encouraging truth here, church, is that, the more you grow in grace, the less it will feel like a command you are obeying because you must, and the more it will feel like a pleasure that you get to indulge.

Because in Christ the church is a community of people that, by God's grace, grows in natural, familial affection for one another. Honor one another whether it's easy or hard.

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Run Ahead and Race Below to honor one another, and, later, it will be a joy and not a trial.

### 3. Recognize the victor

Maybe you're still not convinced that you can do it. Maybe it's just too scary to go first. To Run Ahead with no guarantee of being honored by those you honor. To Race Below to honor people others might not think are worthy of honor. Maybe it's not scary, but it's still not second-nature. It's not *joyful*.

I want you to think about Jesus.

Because if Jesus had waited until you showed him honor first before he left his place of honor at God's right hand to come and honor you, he would still be waiting. He didn't wait. He Ran Ahead.

If Jesus had only shown honor to people who made him look good, he'd still be looking for someone worth honoring. Instead, he Raced Below.

Here are two things that are true.

Number 1: If you and I are ever going to Run Ahead and Race Below to honor one another, we'll only be pushed beyond our comforts and past our fears if the love of Christ compels us. Only when we see just how much Jesus has outdone everyone else in showing honor---in showing *you* honor, and *me* honor---will we rush ahead and bow low to honor each other. We've got to have the experience of *having been honored*. *Then* we'll be moved to honor one another.

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Number 2: Once we do Run Ahead and Race Below to honor others--- Once you show up first to show honor, you’ll realize something: you weren’t there first, after all. You thought you were alone, bravely rushing ahead to honor others with no guarantees. But when you arrive to honor someone, you realize that Jesus has beat you to it. Jesus has Run Ahead. And Raced Below. He has already honored the one you seek to honor by giving himself completely for them. And now he’s using you to remind them of what he’s already done for them.

Do you see the way that God has Run Ahead and Raced Below in Jesus to honor you? Have you felt that significance and honor bestowed upon you by King Jesus? If you haven’t, why not bow today and receive the great honor of being a prince or princess in the kingdom of God, an adopted younger sister or brother of Jesus the King. Nobility granted to you---not because you reached up and honored him first, but because he Ran Ahead and Raced Below and honored *you* first. Don’t wait till tomorrow. *Today* is the day he has come to honor you by his grace.

And in his grace, Run Ahead and Race Below to show one another honor. Do it because you’ve experienced Jesus. Do it because once you do, you’ll experience more of Jesus still. Do it because Jesus has honored you. Do it because he always Runs Ahead and Races Below to outdo *you* in showing honor---both to you and to those you’re called to honor in his name.

Amen.