

Week 4 (Oct 1–7): Choose Joy by Living Humbly!

Philippians 2:1–11

One of the best ways to define humility is by looking at its opposites: pride, arrogance and selfishness. In his book *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis defined humility with the following example:

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

Philippians 2:1–11 explains how Lewis could come to such a definition of humility. To better teach the truths of this passage, we will start with verses 6–11 (begin with Christology) then return to the practical implications of Jesus’s example in verses 1–5.

Jesus Came as a HUMBLE SERVANT

Philippians 2:6–8

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.

Theologically, the passage communicates that Jesus already existed as the form/nature of God prior to His coming (see also John 1, Colossians 1–2, and Hebrews 1). As Jesus said in John’s Gospel, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). Jesus took on humanity without giving up His divinity. He was equal to God but chose not to exploit His power while on earth. In His coming, Jesus took nothing away from His divinity, but adds humanity onto His divinity.

In this “descension,” Jesus did not in any way lose any divine attributes, either temporarily or permanently. At every moment of the incarnation, the Word was exercising His divine attributes to the full (e.g., Colossians 1:17), just like He was before the incarnation. However, His human nature is a genuine human nature and so at least some of the divine attributes are not accessible to the

human nature of Christ. We call this divine humility. This is Christ willfully and humbly submitting to the will of the Father!

The idea of Jesus “emptying himself” is not in reference to losing His deity but is a metaphor for humility. Jesus “poured himself out” by taking on flesh, becoming a servant and being obedient to death, even death on a cross.

The God of the universe BECAME His creation to save His creation. The King of Glory stooped down and took on flesh and served other flesh to the point of a criminal’s death. In our fleshly state, we tend to feel a sense of entitlement. Yet He is the only one entitled to glory, power, praise, honor and kingship and for our sake He set those aside and died for those He loved. Jesus is our model for humility.

Jesus Is the EXALTED KING

Philippians 2:9-11

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.

Jesus was always God’s plan of redemption, and He alone is worthy of praise. In His divine humility, Jesus defeated sin and death and is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus is the central object of worship! In His death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus completed the work needed for salvation and inaugurated His coming kingdom.

Jesus is the King. We can either acknowledge this now by pledging our allegiance to His rule and His reign or we can reject this now and one day be forced to bend our knee. But whichever the case, Jesus will reign forever. Some will embrace His lordship with anguish and despair, realizing their rebellion as they stand condemned. But many others will embrace His lordship with joy and humility.

Believers Are TRANSFORMED into His Likeness!

Philippians 2:1, 5

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion... In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:1 says that if you know the Jesus in verses 6–11, then live in His likeness and model His humility. Knowing Jesus must precede having relationships like Jesus. People often want to love like Jesus (as a teacher), without the transformation of Jesus. But according to the full context of this passage, Jesus wasn't just an example to follow. Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of lords!

If Jesus wasn't this Christ and Lord, then His example would only serve as a measuring stick among other virtuous people. But because He is Lord, He transforms you into a new creation so that you can actually live out the humility He models. The Christian life is one of complete dependence upon the work of Jesus and the empowering of the Spirit to do what God has called us to do. Humility is not a natural state of the sinful human. But when we share in Christ, we are called to take on His humility.

Christians Should Be Known by Their HUMILITY

Philippians 2:2–4

Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Paul has already identified that the fullness of his joy is in the gospel being lived out in his life and the lives of others. So, to complete Paul's joy is to ultimately see these people do what God has called them to do. Like a pastor urging his congregation, Paul is adding his personal touch to the calling of God in these people's lives.

The command becomes: If you believe in the gospel, then do the work of the gospel in your relationships with others. Live out the gospel joy humbly and model Jesus's humility and love. What is the example of Christ? Do nothing that is selfish or driven by pride. These kinds of actions build up no eternal glory and will make us fall.

Instead, we should consider others better than ourselves. To be clear, humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Jesus recognizes the value, dignity and potential of every image bearer. We can model Christ when we display the grace we've been given by loving and serving others selflessly. We are called to serve those around us with truth and love (Ephesians 4:15).

Discussion Questions:

- How do you define humility?
- Verses 6–11 contain both significant theological truths as well as practical applications about servant leadership. Take a few minutes to discuss both.
- What is overwhelming about verses 9–11? (Hint: the fact that we know Christ and He knows us!)
- Verses 1–4 sets a high standard for the Christian. Explain both what the expectations are for the Christian as well as the motivations behind the actions.
- How did Jesus model these same traits (2:1–4) in His life?
- How does this passage relate to John 13:1–17?
- How does this passage relate to Matthew 20:28?
- Who is an example of humility in your life? What traits or qualities do you admire about that individual?
- What are obstacles that stand in the way of your pursuing humility?