



Session 3

Humility

THE POINT

Consider the needs of others before your own.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Benedict Arnold was perhaps the best general America had during the Revolutionary War. He could organize men. He was good at strategy. He was fearless. His march on Quebec, his capture of Fort Ticonderoga, and his planning for the Battle of Saratoga remain textbook cases of great military leadership.

Benedict Arnold was a good leader, and he knew it. Arnold had an ego. He was impetuous. When the Continental Congress promoted five men to major general, Arnold was not one of them. They looked to military men who could also be team players. Benedict Arnold was good, but he was in it for himself.

Arnold changed sides all because of pride. Who knows, perhaps the Revolutionary War would've ended sooner with less casualties had Arnold humbled himself and stayed with the patriots. He certainly wouldn't have been disdained and maligned for 240+ years. And he would likely have kept in good standing and not died destitute in London.

Regardless of how good you are at a task, humility is needed. It's critical. Our study in Philippians 2 will show us why.

QUESTION 1:

When have you been reminded that pride comes before a fall?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

¹ If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

While not without problems, the congregation of believers at Philippi was one of the healthier churches addressed in the New Testament. Paul was encouraged by the spiritual work that God had initiated in them (Phil. 1:6). As a result, he assumed some things about them—things that are true of all true believers—and these provide the basis for instruction about relationships with one another.

This passage begins with the word “if” (2:1) and such a small word might seem unimportant to us. We might assume that the word “if” expresses some doubt in the mind of Paul. But in the Greek, this word can be translated as “since.” This would be the preferable translation, to think of it along the lines of “since” because these are statements of reality that are assumed to be true.

We often use the word “if” in this same way. A parent says to a child, “If you don’t want to be grounded, then get your homework done!” Well, of course, no child wants to be grounded. One spouse might say to the other spouse, “If you want to eat dinner tonight, then we need to have the oven fixed.” We’ve all grown accustomed to enjoying a meal, no matter who is doing the cooking that evening.

Here are the four things Paul assumes are true about these followers of Jesus:

- 1. Encouragement in Christ** What does encouragement look like? It often looks like exhorting people to overcome challenges. Because of His death on the cross, Christ’s emboldening of us becomes incredibly real.
- 2. Consolation of love.** There’s an incentive that comes from knowing you’re loved. The persistent and constant love of God for each one of us can and should bring humility to our hearts.
- 3. Fellowship with the Spirit.** While this fellowship (Phil. 1:5) that Paul envisions can be both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with other people), there’s an established order in the New Testament. God comes first.
- 4. Affection and mercy.** This characteristic could be subjective or objective. Paul might be describing the attitudes that these believers have toward one another. He might also have in view the heart of God towards His people. You might think of it as a wonderful, glorious circle of kindness. Sometimes the mercy extended by a friend opens us up to receive the mercy and kindness of God.

All these descriptions of God's blessings are manifestations of His love. By "thinking the same way" as God thinks about them, the Philippians can have "the same love" (v. 2) toward each other. At this point, love and humility begin to mutually fuel one another.

The outcome of this interaction is we become "united in spirit" (v. 2) with those who share in God's grace. We come together with others in the realization that we're not sufficient in ourselves. This humility brings us into the fellowship, and we continue to experience God's love through the love of others.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. ⁴ Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

Bring up love in a conversation, even among nonbelievers, and you'll find the wind at your back, metaphorically speaking. Everyone likes love. You'll find some conversational smooth sailing. Try and talk about humility however, and you'll find that the wind is now blowing against you. It doesn't meet with the same warmth. But we can't really talk about one without the other.

As we dig into what the Scripture says about love, we don't go very far without encountering this corresponding virtue of humility. Both are motives of the heart. Because character counts, motives matter. Paul invited his readers to think about their core motives in interpersonal relationships. Perhaps they were acting out of "selfish ambition" (v. 3). Deep in the heart, selfish ambition says, "I want what I want" and then begins to pursue that objective. Another motive is "conceit" (v. 3): "I deserve what I want more

It's a beautiful life that God has planned for us, a unity with others who share our experience of amazing love. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

QUESTION 2:

How does love lay the groundwork for humility?

than you do." This is a rationalization of whatever selfish action someone decides to take.

Selfish ambition and conceit always block us from loving the way that God intends for us to experience love according to the gospel. The Bible always asks us to do this: "consider others as more important than yourselves" (v. 3). This defines true humility.

What the Bible is asking us to do in verse 3 is not a minimization of someone's inherent value. Because of the gospel we know that no one is inherently better than anyone else. But those who are moved by the gospel choose to give deference to another, and not because they must. It isn't because they're weak or inferior but rather because of an inner strength.

Someone cuts in front of me on a crowded highway with traffic crawling at a snail's pace. Imagine for a moment that I don't get furious about it. That doesn't mean I'm inferior to the other driver. It means that in that moment I give deference to that person. If the gospel is my motivation for doing that, then in that moment I have counted that person as more important than myself.

In case you're afraid this type of lifestyle is unhealthy or makes you prone to being exploited, there's an important instruction given in verse 4: "Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others." Keep this in mind as you think about what it means to live in love and humility. It's a safeguard against pseudo-spirituality in which you become a mistreated, relational martyr.

Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. We're not talking about self-loathing resulting in low self-esteem. Healthy humility is the opposite of selfishness. It's thinking of yourself less.

We might, on the other hand, decide to simply look out for our own interests, as Paul wrote

about in verse 4. There are things that concern us that aren't a concern for other people. And vice versa. For example, your next-door neighbor may have some priorities that you may not share. Your neighbor rakes leaves on Saturdays. You like to watch college football. Leaves are his thing. Football is yours. Nothing is going to keep you from watching football; it's going to be an all-day marathon. But your neighbor's getting older and moves a lot slower than when you first met him. It takes him twice as long to do it these days. Wouldn't that be a moment to consider his interests as more important than your own?

Where does humility come from to make that kind of a sacrifice? What does the mind of Christ look like in this environment?

QUESTION 3:

What are the benefits of looking out for one another's interests in the church and community?

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

⁵ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. ⁷ Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth— ¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Engage

WALKING IN HUMILITY

Which of the images below best represent when you are most challenged to walk in humility? Choose an image and then write a prayer to God asking for His help walking in humility.



My Prayer:

Most of us have titles by which we describe ourselves and know ourselves. Teacher. Electrician. Writer. Nurse. The list of possibilities is long, but you get the idea. Often our titles show up on a business card or resume. If Jesus had a business card, what would have been the title under His name? How about “Savior”? Perhaps “Example”? Having them in that order matters.

Jesus wants to save us and then gives us a guide by which to live. His titles are Savior first, then Example. The Bible says He emptied Himself. There’s plenty of discussion about what He emptied Himself of, but what we know is that it represents His humility.

The word *humility* comes from the Latin word *humus*, which means “soil” or “earth.” Genesis 2:7 teaches us that the first human (note the word similarity) was created from the ground. To be humble is to realize that you’re human—a dependent creature who possesses everything as a gift from God.

In becoming a man, Jesus demonstrated humility. How ironic that He became what He wasn’t by nature, but we won’t humbly admit who we are—dependent creatures. We’re dependent on God, and yet we act as if we’re not. We often see ourselves as smart people, but we only know what we know because we’ve been taught, not because we’re brilliant in and of ourselves.

QUESTION 4:

What do you find most remarkable about Jesus’s humility?

To see ourselves as dependent on God is an attitude. It’s the attitude that Jesus displayed by coming to earth. And we should “adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus” (v. 5). Paul’s description of Jesus was designed to help Christ-followers understand how He thought.

God makes a positive response to the attitude of humility. “For this reason” points to the connection between humility and God’s approval. The Bible often reinforces this truth:

- “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6).
- “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).
- “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Pet. 5:6).
- “He [God] has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly” (Luke 1:52).

Jesus humbled Himself and then God highly exalted Him. Practicing humility in the world probably won’t bring you any fame. However, remind yourself that your humility matters to God. He exalted Jesus because of His humble sacrifice. When we follow that example, God is pleased. And that should matter most to us.

QUESTION 5:

How can we follow the example of Jesus in displaying humility?

LIVE IT OUT

Humility is a fundamental component of the type of character God desires. Here are some practical steps for you in your quest for character.

- **Look around.** Notice examples of humility in the normal pattern of a day. You might be surprised at how often it's practiced.
- **Look within.** Study your own life and recall occasions in which you acted in an arrogant fashion. Think about better responses that could have been made.
- **Look up.** Find examples of humility on the part of Bible characters. Use a concordance or other study aids to compile a list of men and women in the Scriptures whose humility mirrored the example of Jesus.


