**Humility**

Philippians 2:1-11

When Jesus knelt to ***wash the disciples’ feet*** it was one of the most shocking moments of His three-year ministry. Peter, true to form, did his best to refuse. But Jesus was showing them what real humility looks like. It’s not just a state of mind. It’s not about a soft-spoken personality. It’s about simple, practical acts of service.

In the days of sandals and dirt roads, **someone had to wash the feet** of weary travelers. Usually that task fell to the lowest servant or the youngest in a group - like the most menial scut work on a surgical floor. After you put in your time you are grateful that the worst jobs fall to someone else.

That’s how the disciples felt. ***They were all tired.*** They had all been through a lot. They all had very dirty feet. They were all ready for that first glass of wine that would start the Passover meal. But as they jostled around for the best spots around the table, Jesus took off his cloak and wrapped a towel around his waist. ***He dressed himself to serve while his followers prepared themselves to be served.***

Then, one by one, Jesus carefully and gently washed Peter and Andrew, James and John, Bartholomew and Matthew, Philip and Bartholomew, little James and Thaddaeus, Simon and Judas. Yes, Judas. Those must have been a few difficult minutes with Judas in particular. But imagine the silence in the room as Jesus made his way around. It was too late for one of them to speak up or jump up. They couldn’t volunteer now to take turns. They had to wait as the Greatest One of all time did the lowest of all servant tasks.

And, of course, we know that was a foreshadowing of the work he was about to do on the cross.

* There in the upper room Jesus washed their travel dirty feet with a basin and a towel.
* But on the cross Jesus washed their sin-laden hearts with the blood and agony of his ultimate sacrifice.

Here is how Jesus summed up the lesson there in the upper room:

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” John 13:14-15

That is what humility does. That is ***what true humility looks like***. Philippians 2 shows us the mindset and beliefs that enable this kind of servanthood. Let’s dig in to this beautiful, hymn-like passage in Scripture to see the Head, Heart and Hands of Humility. Jesus has given us an example and expects us to follow it. We should expect that loving and serving one another in the church will be messy, challenging, sacrificial work that our flesh will resist. Here’s how the Holy Spirit can empower us to take up the basin and the towel. First:

**How to Develop Christ-like Humility:**

1. Understand you deserve **Nothing**

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Philippians 2:3

***What a powerful definition and application of HUMILITY***: do NOTHING from selfish ambition. Phew. Not one thing. Wouldn’t you say that generally speaking here in the U.S. people do almost EVERYTHING out of selfish ambition? And feel good about it! Now, not you and me, of course - we are far better than most. But those people - those wicked, idolatrous rebellious sinners out there - THEY do an awful lot from selfish ambition and vain conceit.

***How do we even begin to understand this command much less obey it?***

Did you catch the context from verses 1-2? This is **all about RELATIONSHIPS in the church**. This is about getting along in relationship with other believers; about how we approach things in a church setting. Look ahead to chapter four.

**How to Develop Christ-like Humility:**

1. Understand you deserve **Nothing**

**“**I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.” Philippians 4:2

Can you imagine being called out in a letter to the whole church in the region of Philippi? These two ladies must have been having quite a ruckus.

* One was for hymns, the other for choruses; one for guitar, the other for piano…
* One was for community groups, the other for Discipleship-groups;
* One was for a tea party for women, the other wanted to do a service project…

Who knows what the issue was - but whatever it was, it had gotten all the way back to the apostle Paul and those two ladies are preserved for all time in God’s Word for having a **public quarrel**. Ouch.

***If Paul wrote a letter to Oakwood, is there something he might call us out on?*** “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.” Yes, this is a general principle for the life of the Christian, but especially in the church - are we seeking to promote OURSELVES, to make a name for ourselves, to get our own way at the expense of what someone else wants or needs.

Remember the fight the early church had in Acts 6? ***The Greek widows were being neglected***, while the Hebrew widows were being cared for. Maybe the Jewish believers were caring for “their own,” and the Gentile believers were not used to that kind of ministry to your extended family - and the Jewish folks were uncomfortable crossing over to bring meals and assistance to the home of a Greek. Tricky territory.

But look at how Paul calls the church to humility:

**How to Develop Christ-like Humility:**

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He starts with the **HEAD**. “Count others more significant.” Consider them better than you. Don’t begin to imagine there is a hierarchy and you are toward the top. If there has to be a list, then put yourself at the bottom.

Remind you of anyone? ***The 12 disciples bickered frequently*** about who was first and best, and Jesus constantly had to teach and remind them that “the first will be last and the last will be first,” that the greatest among them was the one who acted like the least; that they should all seek to be like little children, who have no status or standing, no rights or authority.

In other words, understand what you actually deserve: nothing. You have no rights. In the church you are entitled to nothing at all.

We can nod our heads and say, ***“Yes, I get it. Those silly disciples.”*** But do we really get it? Do we really count others more significant than ourselves?

***How do we treat IMPORTANT people?*** Let’s say FRANCIS CHAN was in Tampa and was coming to your house (he’s a very famous Christian preacher and leader, by the way). If you don’t know Francis just imagine Billy Graham if he was still on earth, or Chuck Swindoll or Colin Smith - whoever you consider a great Christian leader.

* You would clean and tidy up a good bit, right?
* You would prepare something - snacks, drinks, maybe a pretty nice meal.
* You would shower and dress nicely.
* You would be there a couple of hours early to be sure everything was ready - you wouldn’t dream of being late.

Ok, that’s how we would treat someone we know is more significant than we are. Do you see the punchline here? ***That is how we should treat EVERYONE in the church. VIP service.***

* Think about **TIME**. What does it communicate if you are consistently LATE for meetings? It means YOU are more important and THEY can wait.
* Being on time or early says THEY are more important. That’s treating others as more significant than yourself.
* What about **WORDS**. Generally the “more important” person does more of the talking, right? If we really believed other people were “more significant” than we are, wouldn’t we listen more?
* What about **PEOPLE** in general? Do we spend time only with people who can benefit us? Do we concentrate our time on friends we have almost everything in common with? Do we consider some people BENEATH us? Not worthy of our time and attention?

That’s the selfish ambition and conceit Paul is talking about - the feeling of being BETTER, more deserving, than others.

Boy, ***this flies in the face of American theology*** doesn’t it? The “It’s all about YOU,” mantra of Disney and every marketing team aimed at children up through seniors - you are the beautiful, magical snowflake of glory and wonder, and anyone who tells you otherwise should be stapled to the ground and trampled by toddlers.

Let’s keep going with Paul’s reasoning here.

1. Understand you deserve **Nothing**

“Have this mind among you which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Philippians 2:5-6

This should be **our MIND**. Paul used that word twice in verse 2 already. “Be of the same mind… in full accord and of one mind.” So this is all about unity and concern for one another within the church. And notice this beautiful statement - this mind is already ours in Christ Jesus!

***“May the mind of Christ, my Savior, live in me from day to day; by his love and power controlling all I do and say.”* [Yes, we should probably sing the hymn!]**

Oh, if only! And what is the mind of Christ? Primarily, in this context, it is the ***mindset of HUMILITY***. Although Jesus was ***by nature in the form of God*** - sharing the same divine essence of God the Father and God the Spirit - He did not cling to His rights as the eternal Son of God. He did not seek to grasp and hold on to His right to being seen as the equal with God, but “emptied himself” (which we’ll get to in a minute).

**Jesus did not seek equality with God** - even though He is, in His very nature, equal with God.

So ***when we demand “our rights,”*** or assert our own will over against a brother or sister in Christ, do you see what we’re doing? Not only are we thinking we deserve better treatment because we are more significant than others, but we are trying to grasp onto EQUALITY WITH GOD.

Jesus didn’t try to hold onto that status - but ***WE DO!***

***What do I deserve?*** Attention. Recognition. Appreciation, love, respect, affection - everything God deserves - yeah, that’s what I deserve. That’s my MIND.

And do you know ***whose mind that is?*** Lucifer. The devil. The most glorious of the angels who literally tried to overthrow God and take His throne in heaven…

So let’s do a heart check today.

* In your **marriage**, what mind do you have right now? Do you consider YOURSELF more important, more valuable, more deserving - or do you consider your husband or wife as better than you?
* In your **Community Group**, what mind do you have right now? Do you go to group consistently or do you consider it an optional activity you can choose or reject based on your preferences? What mind do you have? Are the people in your group more deserving than you or less deserving?
* On your **Ministry Team**, whether that’s men’s, women’s, elders, deacons, children, youth, ESL. worship, hospitality - whatever your team is, do you consider others more significant than yourself? Or if you’re honest do you feel like you DESERVE more credit, more recognition, more appreciation than most?

I’ll be honest, in this room right now there is **probably one person** who is most susceptible to having the devil’s mind instead of that of Jesus - one person who regularly feels like he is so important, so significant… Take a breath - I’m not calling anyone out! It’s me. I expect Paul wrote this mainly for LEADERS in the church. We have this nasty tendency to start to believe we are important. And worse than that, we can think about church and work at church ***more and more out of selfish ambition*** and conceit. It’s a tragedy of church in America that this is possible - but it’s actually quite common - that lead pastors, preaching pastors start to believe the hype, believe that they’re something; they have that IT thing.

I share this not so we judge pastors of big churches - but so we pray for them. **Pray for me**. I know so many of you do, and that means so much. Not that I am so deserving of prayer - but because I am so in need of prayer. Pray that I would have the mind of Christ, the attitude of humble self-abandon. And pray that for yourself and for each other.

The truth is that ***we all deserve nothing from God but judgment and eternal wrath***. I’ve shared before about my friend Scott, who gave us these 13 perfections of Jesus. He and Cindy have four kids close in age to our kids. If their kids ever got unruly or demanding - like if they were driving along and the kids started whining for ice cream or McDonalds or something Scott would slam on the brakes, pull the minivan over and sternly ask, “What - do you think you DESERVE ice cream? You deserve McDonalds?” and he’d let that question sit for a minute. Then he would ask, “Come on. What do you deserve?”

And they would all shake their heads and say, ***“We know, we know, Dad. Death and hell. Death and hell.”*** Exactly.

That’s the first key to developing humility - understand the truth that you don’t deserve anything, you aren’t entitled to any blessings from God or anyone. In fact, what we all deserve is quite simply death and hell. ***But Jesus humbled himself and was obedient to the point of death***, even death on a cross so that you and I would not get what we deserve. Verse 9:

1. Believe Jesus is **Everything**

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.” Philippians 2:9

Now we move from head to heart - ***from understanding to beliefs and convictions***. Once we get clarity that we deserve nothing but judgment we are ready to see that Jesus offers us EVERYTHING. The one who went to the cross for you and me - because of His humble submission, His all the way obedience to the Father, God therefore exalted Him to the highest place.

Now **Jesus started out in the highest place** - as the eternally divine Son of God through whom all things were made. So it’s not that Jesus became more glorious or more powerful or more exalted after the cross, He was simply RESTORED to His rightful place of glory, power and dominion at the Father’s right hand. But the point of Philippians 2 is that the Way of Jesus is our Way of salvation too - humble yourself to be exalted.

***That’s how salvation works***. You have to humble yourself and join Jesus on the cross - letting your old self die with Him in true repentance and saving faith that clings to the Old rugged cross. But when you come humbly, desperately to the cross, Jesus lifts you up with Him, He raises you from the dead with Him and - according to Ephesians 2 - seats you right there with Him in the heavenly places.

And that’s ***how Christian growth works too***. It’s only as we humble ourselves that we are exalted by God. If we take the devil’s path - exalting ourselves, asserting our own preferences, following our own desires, God will have to humble us. Only when we lay down our preferences, surrender our “rights,” and give up our selfish ambition, only then do we experience the blessing of God.

Consider your **PRAYER LIFE**. ***Prayer reveals what we truly believe***. If you believe that you can handle most of life and just need God for the big things, you won’t pray very much. In some seasons you might pray a little more, but then as felt needs subside you will probably pray less or not at all.

Whose work matters more? Your work or God’s?

If we really believe that God’s work matters more than our own, we will pray. I’ll confess this has been ***a growth area for me*** throughout my 20 years of ministry - falling into seasons of self-reliance and prayerlessness, only to be reminded of my total need for God and how powerless I am without Him.

Beyond prayer, consider your **overall relationship with God**: Bible reading, devotional time, journaling, prayer walking - whatever you do to spend time alone with God. It’s not just an issue of dependence - it’s primarily an issue of JOY. Do you LOVE spending time with God? Do you NEED it because He fills you up? Do you delight in the Lord and treasure those moments with Him or have devotions devolved into duty? Are you just going through the motions?

We all have dry patches due to lack of discipline or misplaced love. But God always calls us deeper, calls us back to Himself; calls us more and more ***to EXALT the Name of Jesus in our hearts and lives***.

Look back at verse 1 and how Paul opens this section.

1. Believe Jesus is **Everything**

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy…” Philippians 2:1

The apostle is calling the church of Philippi to unity, humility and service to one another. He is lifting up the Lord Jesus as the example of humble, sacrificial service. But first, **he appeals to their personal experience with Jesus** - do you have any encouragement in Christ? Have you drawn any comfort from His love? Have you enjoyed fellowship with the Spirit, participation in the Spirit’s work? Do you feel any affection for other believers, any sympathy for one another?

Because once you’ve experienced the ***overflowing love of Jesus*** it changes you. It changes your vertical relationship with God from a duty to a delight, and it changes your horizontal relationship with other believers from the discipline of service to the joy of loving and serving the people Jesus loves.

Have you come to truly, deeply believe that ***JESUS IS EVERYTHING?***

There’s a head part of this - an understanding that is necessary to process that He died for you, He rose again, He offers you forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But the way we access that data is by FAITH. We connect with Jesus directly and personally as we exercise the muscle of TRUST, as we rest our confidence, our affection, our zeal and our joy in Him and Him alone.

Look back at Philippians 1. Paul is encouraging the believers there as he writes from a prison cell - really house arrest. He explains that ***God is using his imprisonment*** to advance the gospel as many of his guards had heard and responded to the good news; and it was obviously giving him a chance to write some letters - and praise the Lord he did!

In the midst of that explanation Paul makes this striking statement:

1. Believe Jesus is **Everything**

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21

He processes his thoughts on paper saying, “part of me would be glad to be killed because that would mean going directly to Jesus, the greatest joy of all. But another part of me knows I still have work to do, so I’m confident I’ll be around a little longer for YOUR progress and joy in the Lord.”

Can we honestly say this with Paul? “To live is Christ.”

Is Jesus what we live and breathe? Is He the reason you get up in the morning and the purpose of your day? Is Jesus the song in your heart and the words on your lips? Does Jesus spill out of you as you interact with people?

Or, if we’re being honest ***would we have to fill in the answer differently***:

“For me to live is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blank.

* For me to live is WORK.
* For me to live is FAMILY.
* For me to live is STRESS.
* For me to live is HOCKEY. I don’t know what it is for you.

For me personally a lot of the time I’d have to say, “For me, to live is CHURCH STUFF.” Meetings. Plans. Calls. Committees. I certainly try to bring Jesus into all of that. But I don’t think I can realistically claim that Pauline single-mindedness.

What about the second half there: “To die is gain.”

There is a test of our real faith. We might know on one level that heaven will be better than this life. ***But do we deeply BELIEVE that to die now would be gain?***

If Jesus is everything to you then death should not be a fearful thing but a joyful thing - it is a reunion! A wonderful uniting with the One your heart most loves. It is hearing that whisper in the ear that Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross: “Truly I say to you, ***today you will be with me in paradise.”***

Scripture is clear that **Jesus IS everything** - He is the full and final revelation of the nature and glory of God; He is the Creator of all things and the End for which they were created; He is the loving Savior and the victorious Lord; all things are sustained by the Word of His power and all things are being reconciled to God through Him.

Jesus is everything. Is He everything TO YOU?

Humility first understands that we deserve nothing. Then humility believes that Jesus deserves everything because He is the most deserving, the most worthy - the Name above all names.

One more step toward humility.

1. Serve as your **Only** thing

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:4

This is a very practical part of the letter, even though it feels very poetic and hymn-like. The application is right here in verses 3-4. Do nothing from selfish ambition and ***adopt the attitude and practices of a SERVANT***. This must mean ACTION. Humility cannot just be an intellectual recognition of low status; it can’t stop with internal convictions about the glory and worthiness of Jesus. Humility must be acted out in simple, practical acts of service.

And the standard for service is very high: the cross of Jesus.

1. Serve as your **Only** thing

“But emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Philippians 2:7

Jesus poured Himself out. The most deserving one poured out his rights - he laid aside his recognized status in heaven and ***stepped down into anonymity and helplessness***. Think of what it meant for Jesus to be born fully human.

* For nine months in Mary’s womb Jesus could hardly move at all and ***could make no sound***. The One who spoke the words, “Let there be light,” was silent. The One who thundered at the Pharisees, “Woe to you hypocrites!” could not utter words.
* Jesus could not take care of himself. He ***depended completely on Mary*** and Joseph for all of his needs, like every human baby.
* Jesus had to ***learn how to walk and talk*** and even what the Bible says.
* The One who inspired and empowered the authors of Scripture had to ***re-learn every word from Moses***, Isaiah, David and the rest.
* The One who defines HOLINESS had to ***endure every temptation*** - every struggle, every enticement - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

Jesus was fully human. He experienced everything you and I do so he could be **our perfect high priest** - fully sympathizing with what we go through. But that was just the platform for his life of service. For 30 years he lived as an unknown carpenter in the backwater, insignificant town of Nazareth. Of everything Jesus did in his life, other than the cross itself, this is perhaps the most amazing expression of His humility. He was an absolute NOBODY.

If you ever feel like your work doesn’t matter, like you’re doing some mundane project with flat zero eternal significance, **think about Jesus the carpenter**. As he learned from his father, Joseph, and took over the family business whenever Joseph died, Jesus worked with his hands to provide for his mother and his family - perhaps serving as the primary breadwinner when he was only 15, 16 years old.

The tables and chairs he made were acts of WORSHIP, they were lovingly fashioned with excellence to honor the God who made the trees from which they came and who gave Jesus the hands and the skill to make them.

Now, not all work is worship - we have to dedicate our efforts to the Lord, submitting our hours and days to Him, and making our efforts worthy of His Name. ***“Whatever you do, do it all in the Name of Jesus,” and all for the glory of God.*** But all work CAN BE worship - all work can be a meaningful act of service given to another person who is a beloved child of God.

The human life of Jesus gives great dignity and value to all human work. Your work matters. Your minutes matter. Your days are investments in serving the people God made, the people God loves.

* You don’t have to say “God bless your Chick-fil-a sandwich,” as you work in the drive thru - your efficiency and positive attitude are enough.
* You don’t have to say “Jesus loves you,” as you welcome people to Walmart - your smile is enough.
* You don’t have to sign your emails with “In His Grip,” your excellence and dedication are themselves acts of worship and service.

The silly story is told of the **airline pilot who really wanted to share his faith** - he wanted to be more bold with the gospel. So once they got to cruising altitude and he got on the intercom to give his little flight update he said, “Now I just want to give you all something to think about - if you die today do you know that you’ll go to heaven?”

Understandably, a bit of a panic broke out on the plane as people worried that they were all going down. If you’re a pilot you don’t need to share the gospel over the intercom and you really shouldn’t use that particular approach if you do. You serve every person on board by remaining alert, navigating whatever weather and other issues need attention, and then landing the plane. That is a service not only to those on board but to everyone who knows and loves them.

Jesus didn’t begin to humbly serve the world when he started his public ministry, ***he continued his life of humble service***. That was Jesus’ ONLY THING. That was his life, his way. He was a SERVANT.

And the apostle Paul adopted that same Christ-like identity - introducing himself in his letters as an apostle sent by the Lord and primarily as **a SERVANT of Christ Jesus**.

Do you see yourself as a servant of Jesus? Is that your central identity? Jesus emptied himself - laid down his rights, his recognition, his comfort and security and verse 8:

1. Serve as your **Only** thing

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8

Jesus’ whole ministry was one of constant service and sacrifice. The show **The Chosen** illustrates this powerfully in season 2. There is a time when Jesus is healing everyone who comes, and there is a long line, so Jesus meets with them one by one and heals them all. Even as it gets late in the day, Jesus won’t turn anyone away, but keeps meeting with and praying for and healing them all.

While the Lord is graciously and personally serving all who came to him, the disciples back in camp start to argue and bicker. They get to ***fighting over their past*** and are yelling at each other - when suddenly Jesus stumbles back into camp - utterly exhausted. He staggers to his little tent area and silence washes over the disciples. Suddenly they realize how selfish they were all being, how consumed with their own thoughts and desires, while Jesus was pouring himself out, giving himself away. And Jesus’ mother is the one who washes her son’s feet and helps him get ready for bed. It’s a very tender moment - a powerful window into the humble, difficult ministry of service that Jesus provided.

But of course, ***His ministry was always headed toward the cross***. That was not a surprise ending for Jesus - He knew that’s how his earthly story would end. But even as he agonized over the fracture it would mean in His eternally perfect communion with the Father in the bond of the Spirit, Jesus humbly submitted saying, “Not my will, but yours be done.” He remained obedient to the call to lay down His life as a ransom for all of us.

That is our standard. ***That is our example. That is our calling.***

Just as ***Jesus took off his outer garment and wrapped a towel around his waist*** in order to wash his disciples’ feet, so are we to serve one another in that way. He gave us an example that we should follow in his steps. If our Lord and Master embraced the identity and actions of a SERVANT, how much more should we, His servants, submit to the small acts of sacrifice and service He calls us to each day?

What is the Holy Spirit showing you right now? ***What is your venue for service?***

* In your home - how could you be more of a servant?
* In your marriage - how could you demand less and serve more?
* In your work - how could you sacrificially give your time, effort, and attention?
* In your ministry here at Oakwood - how could you take up your cross to serve others?
* In your neighborhood - how could you get to know your neighbors better, enter their lives a little more to learn how you could love and serve them?

Let’s step back and remember - **we deserve NOTHING**. We are entitled to nothing from God but His judgment and condemnation. Yet in Christ ***God has given us EVERYTHING***! We have every spiritual blessing in Him - we have love, joy, peace, patience, power, purpose - we have the very fullness of God inside of us as those who are united with Jesus by faith. So, let’s embrace the life of a SERVANT - ***let’s serve as our ONLY THING***. This is who we are. This is what we do. We lay down our lives just like our Master. We wash feet. It’s what we do.

Let’s pray.