

A Faithful Mindset

Focal Verses • Philippians 2:1-11

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: ANALYZE the work of Christ in Philippians 2:1–11; FOLLOW Christ’s example of humility and sacrifice; and GROW in our ability to place the needs of others before our own.

In Focus

Mr. Jefferies was one of the most popular people in the barbershop. Every evening, the silver-haired, slightly balding man dressed in a blue maintenance shirt came by the shop to sweep up the hair. Whenever Mr. Jefferies was around, he offered commentary about everything from politics to sports. His words were mixed wisdom and wit.

One day, Mr. Jefferies approached Aaron while he was waiting on his barber. “Young man, you’re mighty dapper—what line of business are you in?”

“I’m in commercial real estate,” Aaron answered. “Are you familiar with it?”

“I know a little something, but that was back in the day,” Mr. Jefferies explained. “Gentrification has taken over now, so I’m sure things have changed.”

From that moment, Aaron and Mr. Jefferies became barbershop buddies. Aaron wondered why such a learned man was sweeping up around a barbershop.

“Andre, why does Mr. Jefferies work here?” Aaron asked his barber Andre. “Are you for real, Aaron? You don’t know who Mr. Jefferies is?”

Aaron was puzzled. “Mr. Jefferies owns this barbershop and 10 other buildings in the city,” Andre said. “Mr. Jefferies is a multimillionaire. He cleans up just to stay connected to the community.”

Mr. Jefferies reminds us of Christ’s example of humility. What helps you to stay humble before God and others?

Keep in Mind

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3, KJV).

KJV

Philippians 2:1-11

1. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,
- 2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
- 3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
- 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
- 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

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7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

NLT

Philippians 2:1-11

1. Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,

8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The People, Places, and Times

Philippi. It was a Roman colony in Macedonia. The people of Philippi were proud of their status as Roman citizens, promoting Latin as their official language and taking advantage of their tax-free status. Many of the social and governmental institutions of Philippi were modeled after those in Rome. The apostle Paul preached the Gospel to the city of Philippi on his second missionary journey. One of Paul's first converts in the area was a prominent Philippian businesswoman named Lydia. She welcomed Paul and his entourage into her home, which was one of the first house churches in Philippi.

What places or cultures do we see as models in our community building?

Background

Paul writes to the Ephesians while under house arrest. His testimony about Christ took him to Rome, where he waited for trial before Caesar. During this time, he sent a letter to the Ephesians explaining the great mysteries of the faith and, specifically, the mystery of the church. While the first part of the letter is a theological explanation (1:1–3:21), the latter is a practical exhortation or encouragement (4:1–6:24).

In today's verses, Paul begins with the encouragement of unity in diversity. The "body of Christ" imagery is powerful because it calls all believers to rise above their circumstances and backgrounds to focus on Christ.

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The challenge, of course, is functioning as a unified body when people are so different. While the task of unity has not become any easier over time, the need for it is as urgent now as when Christ first called His believers to be one, just as He and the Father are one (John 17:21).

What contemporary issue(s) causes the greatest divide in the church?

At-A-Glance

1. Community is Created Through Humility (Philippians 2:1–4)
2. Christ is the Model of Humility (vv. 5–11)

In Depth

1. Community is Created Through Humility (Philippians 2:1–4)

Paul begins his call to unity through humility by reminding the Philippians of what they have received in Christ. He lists four characteristics of the Christian community: encouragement in Christ; consolation in love; fellowship in the Spirit; and compassion and tenderness (2:1, NLT). Paul affirms these characteristics as the foundation of the Philippian community and exhorts them to maintain these to achieve unification. He encourages them to agree wholeheartedly with each other, by “loving one another,” and “working together with one mind and one purpose” (2:2, NLT).

In order to fulfill these commands, the community must exhibit the virtue of humility by considering others “better than themselves” (2:3). While Paul is calling the Philippians to unity, he is not calling for uniformity. Paul values the variety of ideas and opinions within the community, but recognizes that diversity can cause division. Paul calls for unity in diversity by way of humility. Individuals can and should maintain their individuality and diversity of thought, but must be careful to avoid selfishness and personal pride that will destroy unity. Paul encourages them to place the interests of others above individual self-interests within the community. Through this type of demonstrated humility on a personal level, unity will be achieved among the Philippians on the communal level.

What does humility look like in diversity?

2. Christ is the Model of Humility (vv. 5–11)

Paul urges the Philippians to follow the example of humility found in Christ’s ministry. Through “the Philippian hymn” (vv. 5–11), Paul highlights Christ’s humility by drawing specific attention to His servant’s nature. He did not use His divine status for His own personal gain or for special privileges, but to benefit others. While Christ never gave up His divine nature, He “emptied himself,” or laid it aside, becoming human so that He could reach humans. Christ’s humility went to the depths of the human experience by accepting and subjecting Himself to the most degrading form of capital punishment during the time of His earthly ministry—Roman crucifixion.

As Christ was willing to go to the depths of human humiliation for the benefit of others, the Philippians are called do to the same. Paul urged them to the same type of radical obedience and self-sacrifice that Christ modeled for the world by abandoning self-interest, identifying with the needs of others, and embracing the depths of human suffering for the benefit of others. Christ’s incarnation—suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection—is the ultimate example of humility and is the standard for living in Christian community among the Philippians.

How can you “empty yourself” like Christ did?

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Search the Scriptures

1. How did Paul ask the Philippians to help make him happy (Philippians 2:2)?
2. Why do you think Paul uses a hymn to call the Philippians to humility (vv. 5–11)? What role do hymns play in other New Testament passages?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What responsibility do you have to share your talents with other people?
2. Philippians is known as the “joy letter.” What role does joy play in humility?

Liberating Lesson

While Paul uses the language of “slave” and “servant” to describe the humility that Christ modeled for believers to embody, this has the potential to take on different meanings in light of the African and African-American experiences. Modern-day believers should avoid harmful interpretations of this text that would suggest we are called to purposeless suffering that does not affirm or benefit humanity. Humility’s end is to lift others out of sin and suffering, not to humiliate them or ourselves needlessly. Through humility, we are to look for those who are suffering and place their needs and interests above ours. When we do this, we fulfill the Christian mandate of humility by serving others and lifting ourselves together to God through Christ.

Application for Activation

Reflect on your relationships with God, yourself, your faith community, and your larger community. Write in your journal about your experiences to see how you already exhibit Christ’s humility and how you can embody humility more fully. Ask a trusted friend where he or she sees humility at work in your life. Ask God to show you where you can serve more deeply and purposefully. What aspects of humility do you need to develop? Where is God calling for your service in your family, faith community, and greater community? How can you deepen and expand your service in the world?

More Light on the Text

Philippians 2:1–11

Although chapter 2 begins a new section, it is definitely connected to and a continuation of the preceding thought in the closing section of chapter 1. There Paul exhorts and wishes that the Philippians “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (v. 27), that they be resolutely united in their faith even in the face of suffering from their adversaries (vv. 28–29). This indicates that the Philippian church was going through persecution. In the present section, Paul reiterates the necessity for unity and appeals for individual humility, which is the quality that will foster true oneness. The first four verses deal with Paul’s appeal to them by various considerations, to live in unity and in the spirit of the Gospel, loving one another, and each preferring another to oneself. The latter seven verses speak to what the mindset of Christ is and its results.

2:1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

Paul starts with a cluster of clauses each introduced with the particle “if,” which generally expresses conditional clauses. However, here Paul’s use of “if ” is rhetorical to remind the Philippians there is no doubt that Christ supplies consolation, comfort, and the rest abundantly. The phrase “fellowship of the Spirit” refers to the fellowship that comes through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in both the

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church and individual lives of the members. In the final clause, Paul uses two words, “bowels,” and “mercies.” The first word translated, “bowels,” is the Greek noun *splagchnon* (SPLANGKH-non), which means intestines and innards. In the Greek culture, bowels were regarded as the seat of the more violent passions, such as anger, anxiety, and love. To the Hebrews, bowels were the seat of only the more tender affections, especially kindness, benevolence, and compassion. Paul uses it figuratively to express an inward or deep affection, pity, or sympathy (1:8; cf. Colossians 3:12; Philemon 7, 12, 20). The second word used here by Paul is *oiktirmos* (Gk. oik-tier-MOCE), translated “mercies.” Unlike the more common word for mercy (Gk. *eleos*, eh-LEH-oc), *oiktirmos* appears only five times in the New Testament and is synonymous in meaning with “bowels.” It is almost exclusively used by Paul and describes such feelings as pity, compassion, and kindness. It is most probable that Paul has in mind here God’s affection and compassion toward the Philippians. Therefore, it seems Paul is setting up to say, “If you have experienced the tender mercies and compassion of the Lord, then respond accordingly, and demonstrate it by living it out in your lives.”

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

What would make Paul’s joy complete is if the Philippians were united in love and in mind with humility, without selfishness, but caring for one another. Earlier in chapter 1 (vv. 4–5) Paul expressed the joy the Philippians had brought to him, in spite of his affliction, through their “fellowship in the gospel from the first day.” “That ye be likeminded” and “of one mind” are identical in meaning, and emphasize Paul’s main concern for the Philippian church, which is unity of mind. Paul’s frequent use of the word *phroneo* (Gk. fro-NEH-oh, “to think”) and its derivatives in this book reflects his concern for proper Christian attitude, singleness of purpose, and mental concentration, which is a catalyst for spiritual growth and holiness. It does not mean everyone should have or agree on the same thing all the time without individual or independent opinion. Rather Paul’s choice of the verb *phroneo* seems to convey the idea of spiritual unity or oneness, an inward attitude of mind submitted to the authority of the Holy Spirit, which overrides personal or individual and selfish desires or opinions. The second and third clauses, “having the same love” and “being of one accord” seem to reinforce his concern expressed by the two clauses as explained above. Love is the cord that binds friends, families, fellowships, and churches together. Quite simply, any group that lacks love lacks unity. Therefore, mutual love, such as demonstrated by Christ’s sacrificial death for the church, should pervade every Christian community (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 John 3:16).

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Verses 3 and 4 expand upon the central thought in the previous verses, the exhortation for unity and oneness through humility. Paul says imperatively, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory,” meaning do not oppose one another by acting selfishly for personal gain. With the word *eritheia* (Gk. eh-ree-THAY-ah, “strife”), Paul is probably alluding to his earlier description of those who preach the Gospel out of selfish and impure motives (1:16). Paul points out that humility is the key to unity, while pride breeds strife and contention. The overarching concern here is selfishness or lack of concern for the affairs of other people, which would show an absence of the love that Paul spoke of just before (v. 2).

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

The poetic structure and pattern of the passage have compelled many scholars to say that it was an early Christian hymn about Christ Jesus. Whether or not Paul was the composer is not as important as the message Paul tries to convey to the Philippians through it: humility. Paul begins by urging the Philippians to be of the same type of mind as Christ Jesus. The attitude that Paul has been explaining and hoping the Philippians to have (vv. 2–4) corresponds with the attitude displayed by Christ (vv. 6–9). Elsewhere in his

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epistles, Paul uses the life and death of Christ as a pattern for Christians to follow (Romans 15:1–7; 1 Corinthians 10:31– 11:1; 2 Corinthians 8:6–9). While we cannot copy Christ’s work of salvation, we can copy the spiritual basis to these acts: His love, humility, and servitude to others. These are the attitudes or disposition “which was also in Christ Jesus.”

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

After the transition (v. 5), the main body of the “Christ-hymn” begins. The pronoun “who” links and identifies this historical Jesus (v. 5) with the preexistent Christ before His incarnation. The use of this relative pronoun is consistent with the beginning of other hymn-like passages in the New Testament (cf. Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3).

In eternity, Christ was “in the form of God.” The word *morphe* (Gk. more-FAY, “form”) has the idea of external appearance, an outward form that strikes the vision. Saying that Christ existed in the form of God is probably a subtle way of affirming the divine nature of Christ, that He possessed the very nature of God, without saying plainly that Christ was God.

The next clause, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” seems to corroborate the above interpretation. The word “robbery” (Gk. *harpagmos*, har-pog-MOCE) means plundering or seizing. Here it is best interpreted that although He was equal with God in His divine nature, Jesus did not think this equality as something to be seized upon or to be held fast or held on to. That means that Christ possessed the divine nature and was, by all accounts, equal with God and had the right to hold tight to it and use it to His own advantage. To be in the form of God or possessing the divine nature— and for that matter being equal with God—is a position of honor, respect, and pride with many advantages, a position no mere human would ever want to give up. Contrary to this human evaluation, Christ did not view His equality with the Father as a position to greedily and selfishly hold on to, but used it for the benefit of others. This is made clearer in the following verses.

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

Paul clearly states that rather than holding tight to His divine nature and equality with God, Christ voluntarily “made himself of no reputation” (Gk. *kenoo*, keh-NO-oh), i.e., “to empty out, or to drain.” While on earth, although He was and is and ever remains God, the Son laid aside all these things (while retaining His divine nature) and functioned as a human as He assumed human form. An illustration or two will suffice. One is not a pastor just because he preaches every Sunday, neither is one an accountant because she deals with figures, or a doctor because he prescribes medicines and heals people. One is a pastor, an accountant, or a doctor by training or qualification, although they may not function in that capacity at a given time. One can function as a janitor and still be a pastor by ordination or qualification. A qualified doctor who has no job in her field of training is still a doctor by profession, but not by employment. Employment can be temporary. With Christ, He was never divested of His divine nature in His incarnation, but He “poured out himself,” laying aside all the divine attributes and functioned as a human in order to reach the world.

When He “took upon” (Gk. *lambano*, lom-BAH-no) Himself the form of a “servant” (Gk. *doulos*, DOO-loce) means that He adopted or accepted the disposition, characteristics, and attributes of a slave or bond-man. Thus Paul’s designation of Christ as *doulos* emphasizes that in the incarnation, Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave—a person without advantage, with no rights or privileges of his own for the express purpose of placing himself completely at the service of humanity. In serving people, He was serving God,

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and in taking the role of a slave, He was acting in obedience to God's will. The idea here is that Christ in all respects, both in appearance and vulnerability, was like other human beings. He was genuinely human. The use and meaning of "form" or "likeness" in this passage cannot be understood as meaning Christ took on only the shape or appearance of a man but remained some other form in reality. Such an understanding would diminish or contradict the reality of Christ's humanness in His incarnation on earth, for His human nature was as real as other human beings, except that it was not sinful as ours.

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Paul continues to describe the thought of Christ's humility as shown not only by His assuming human form and the role of a servant, but by humbling Himself to such a degree of acceptance and subjecting Himself to the most humiliating type of death: crucifixion. This, Paul seems to convey, is the lowest step of humility. His obedience has no limits, the statement implies.

Death by crucifixion is said to have come from the Persians and developed by the Romans. It was the most humiliating and cruel form of capital punishment, reserved only for the worst criminals, such as robbers, murderers, and sometimes slaves. Both Jews and Romans were disgusted by this type of death. For the Jew, death by crucifixion not only brought shame and pain, it was considered accursed by God (see Deuteronomy 21:22–23; 1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 3:13). It was a humiliating public execution. The underlying thought is that if Christ humbled Himself and went so low as to die, the Philippians, and indeed all believers, should constantly endeavor to follow their master's example of humility, and strive to achieve the spirit of oneness among themselves (vv. 5–8).

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

While the foregoing section dealt with total debasement of Christ to the lowest depth of humiliation, this section (vv. 9–11) deals with His unprecedented exaltation to highest point of honor. He humbled Himself, therefore He was exalted, which follows the natural and divine order of things as taught by Christ Himself. The same rule that He laid down for others is applicable to Him and to the Philippians, and indeed to Christians of all times. The Greek word used for Christ's exaltation and usually translated as "highly exalted" is *huperupsoo* (hoo-pair-oo-p-SO-oh). It is found only here in the New Testament. It means to exalt to the highest rank and power, as in the military or highest office, to be elevated to the highest position, to super-exalt. Here Christ is exalted beyond measure, to a point after which nothing is higher He is also granted or bestowed the greatest name that surpasses every thinkable name. In the ancient and modern Jewish tradition, name-giving is more than merely a means of identity, label, or distinguishing one person from another. To them, a name usually carries a relational, spiritual, or historical significance; it also, in many instances, reflects the person's character, inner being, God's activity in a life, and the true nature of the individual. For example, God changed Abram's name to Abraham because He was about to make Abraham "father of many nations," which is the meaning of the new name (Genesis 17:5–8).

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

Paul gives us a two-part purpose for Christ's exaltation and bestowal of the highest name. The name is now bestowed to the historical Jesus, who humbled Himself to the lowest depth, took up the role of a slave, and became human in time and space. He, who was obedient even to death, is to be obeyed and worshiped. The bowing of the knee is almost universally used as a sign of reverence to someone of higher authority, such as kings and chiefs, a way of paying homage or respect to the one in authority. Bending of the knee is also a symbol of worship and such worship is reserved for God only (Exodus 20:5, Isaiah 45:23). Here this honor

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is now applied to Jesus. Therefore, everything and everyone in the universe must fall on their knees before Christ in worship. Paul uses this example to again reiterate that Jesus Christ is God.

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now Paul reveals the second of God's twopart purpose in exalting Christ and giving Him the highest name above every other name. Here the writer reaches the climax of the hymn and gives us the name that is above other names: "Lord." It is notable that the term *kurios* (Gk. KOO-ree-ocē) is used in Greek translation of the Old Testament (call the Septuagint, or LXX) to translate the personal name of God, Yahweh, the self-existent One. After His resurrection Jesus declared, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18; cf. Ephesians 1:20–21). He possesses the sovereign authority and rules over the entire universe.

The verb "confess" is the Greek *exomologeō* (ex-oh-mo-lo-GEH-oh), which is to acknowledge openly and joyfully, the Lordship of Christ. The idea here is to affirm and celebrate Jesus as Lord, to praise and honor Him. Paul says every "tongue" (Gk. *glossa*, GLOCE-sah) will praise Him, which can mean language or organ of speech, but used here as a metonymy for people groups that use different languages. Therefore, this confession is not limited to the church, but includes every being that speaks within the sphere of God's creation. They will all admit that Jesus is Lord, which is an allusion to Isaiah 45:23.

Paul concludes this hymn by saying that the acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord is "to the glory of God the Father." The exaltation of Christ to the utmost heights, giving Him the highest name ever imaginable, and proclaiming Christ as Lord by all peoples, has one ultimate goal—the glory of the Father. Thus, when the Son is glorified, the Father is also glorified (John 13:31–32; 14:13; 17:1).

Paul calls the Philippians to follow the example of Christ and His humility, for that is the true road to personal exaltation and the glory of God.

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Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

John 2:1–25
Psalm 110

TUESDAY

John 3:1–36
Psalm 111

WEDNESDAY

John 4:1–54
Psalm 112

THURSDAY

John 5:1–47
Psalm 113

FRIDAY

John 6:1–40
Psalm 114

SATURDAY

John 6:41–71
Psalm 115

SUNDAY

John 7:1–53
Psalm 116