

“Humility and Service”

Philippians 2:1-11, Genesis 1:27-28, 2:7

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Prayer for Understanding May the words of our mouth and meditations of our heart be pleasing to you gracious God our rock and redeemer. Amen

John Newton said: “Love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ.” The Apostle Paul explains that humility and service are the keys to joyful abundant living. Paul wrote: **Philippians 2:1-11 “If you have gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if God’s love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: serve each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Do not push your way to the front; do not sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside and help others. Do not be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. Though Jesus was God, Jesus did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, Jesus gave up his divine privileges; Jesus took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When Jesus appeared in human form, Jesus humbled himself in service to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated Jesus to the place of highest honor and gave Jesus the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Parent.”**

This scripture has circular logic and tension. The glory of God will be experienced, and we have already experienced God’s glory. Paul begins with a series of “ifs” to help us remember instances of God’s love. Remember encouragement. Remember belonging. Remember comfort. Remember love. Remember fellowship. Remember when you were heard, seen, and understood.

How do you remember love? How do you celebrate goodness? Gratitude cultivates remembering. Journaling, art, music, fellowship, nature, savoring, and sauntering all are tools to help us celebrate the myriad of ways God is loving us.

This scripture assumes we understand the Biblical concept of humility. The word “humility” is related to the word humus, fertile soil from which all vegetation springs and ultimately supports all life. A truly humble person is of the earth, someone who is literally grounded.

Genesis states: **Genesis 1:27-28 “God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, earth itself and every animal that moves on the face of earth.” God created human beings; God created them godlike, reflecting God’s nature. God blessed them. “Prosper! Be fruitful! Multiply! Be responsible for everything on earth.” Genesis 2:7 “God formed humanity from the dust of the ground. God breathed the breath of life into humanity’s nostrils, and they became a living person.”**

Humility is having an accurate view of self and all our relationships. Humility recognizes that God is the creator and we are the creation. Humility accepts the value God gave us without viewing self as superior or inferior to others. Humility believes we are blessed to bless others. We are the image of God capable of multiplying the love, goodness and glory of the cosmos. Healthy humility lives in the tension that we are humus, dirt, soil, dust and creative, loving, joyful, peaceful, graceful. Humility is not self-deprecation. Humility does not have a high or low self-esteem, rather a tension that views self as equal to others. A humble person is grounded knowing they are dirt and knowing they are God’s masterpiece.

Jesus lived humility. Jesus is God and served others. Jesus is life and washes feet. Jesus is teacher and listens. Jesus is living water and wipes away tears. Jesus is the way and recovers the lost. Jesus is the resurrection and laid down his life on the cross. Jesus owns the penthouse of heaven yet pressed the down button all the way down to a manager and criminal’s cross, showing that true grace moves downward into the lives of others. Jesus is gathering everyone and will push the up button for everyone so everyone can enjoy the glory of heaven forever.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, rather thinking of yourself less. Humility is “letting go” so you can “let come” loving relationship with all. Humility is not abandonment of self-esteem, not beating ourselves up inside, not guilt or shame. Humility does not view oneself higher or lower than any other person. Humility does not view creation as merely consumable. Humility is in tune with the creation story. We, like every element of the cosmos, are the essential stuff from which the cosmos is expanding. We are one with all. We are wonderfully designed to serve, creating universally flourishing for the entire cosmos.

Henri Nouwen wrote: “Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, “Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody.” ... [My dark side says,] I am no good ... I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the “Beloved.” Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.”

The Apostle Paul urges us to expand his joy by being humble, serving and being deep-spirited friends. We are to strive to be as close to one another as we are to ourselves. We are to allow others to get to know us and we are to get to know them. A core element of fear, hate, oppression, and violence is not knowing someone or a group. If you disagree with someone, then strive to become friends to suppress negative thoughts of them. Throughout history, many times children attending the same school from two warring sides has resulted in peace. One is much less likely to demonize someone if you know them. Paul advises us to be as close to others as we are to ourselves. We are to befriend others and befriend ourselves.

Mix healthy humility with being deep-spirited friends to super charge your caring service. Love is a choosing to compassionate serve.

A student asked Warren Buffett to share his definition of success. Warren replied, “Your only measure of success ought to be love. If you get to my age in life and nobody thinks well of you, I do not care how big your bank account is, your life is a disaster. The problem with love is that love is not for sale. The only way to get love is to be lovable. It is very irritating if you have a lot of money. You would like to think you could write a check: I will buy a million dollars’ worth of love. But it does not work that way. The more you give love away, the more you get.”

Humility and service resurrects love in our hearts and transforms our relationships. Humility is a gateway to peace. The humility of Jesus reveals the infinite glory of God’s love. Jesus’ humility to lay down his life on the cross for you, puts you first. In contrast, some of our relationships are transactional, focusing on what we may get out of the relationship rather than what we give. Sometimes our ego objects demanding, “What is it for me?” In contrast, Jesus gives all to us. In Jesus we find glory and service, diversity and unity, fairness and grace, freedom and dependence, striving and grace.

A visitor to a lighthouse said to the keeper, “Are not you afraid to live here with the storms, wind and waves lashing the walls?” The keeper replied. “I think more about those out on the sea. I maintain the light so those in great danger may be saved.”

When Benjamin Franklin decided to interest the people of Philadelphia in street lighting, he hung a beautiful lantern on the end of a long bracket attached to the front of his house. He kept the glass brightly polished and carefully lit the wick each evening at the approach of dusk. Anyone walking on the dark street could see this light from a long way off and find their way home. A few of Benjamin’s neighbors began placing lamps outside their homes. In time Philadelphia embraced the value of streetlights.

Anne Lamott tells about a 7-year-old girl who got lost in a big city. The girl frantically ran up and down several streets looking for a familiar landmark. A policeperson helped by giving her a ride driving slowly through the streets. The girl pointed to a church and said. “This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.” We are the church. We are to help everyone find their way home.

Pau’s scripture ends in universally flourishing. All people will experience grace, the love of God, be filled with awe and gratitude. Ultimately, glory will radiate from all. The time is coming when everyone’s joy will overflow. Listen again to God’s word through the Apostle Paul: **Philippians 2:1-11** “If you have gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if God’s love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: serve each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Do not push your way to the front; do not sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside and help others. Do not be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. Though Jesus was God, Jesus did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, Jesus gave up his divine privileges; Jesus took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When Jesus appeared in human form, Jesus humbled himself in service to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated Jesus to the place of highest honor and gave Jesus the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Parent.” Amen

