

In our fast-paced world of achievement and accomplishment, the word “up” is filled with all sorts of positive connotations, and we associate with everything we want and want to be—upwardly mobile, upgraded, upbeat and upscale. We like things to be on the upswing. We usually avoid things associated with the word down—downhearted, downward trend, downscale, crackdown, breakdown, shutdown, down the river. Things we don’t want anyone to know about we keep on the down low. If we’re feeling hopeful and optimistic we say we’re up, but if we’re down in the dumps we’re told not to be such a Debbie downer.

When we post something we like it when people give it a thumbs up, but it hurts when people give it a thumbs down. If we approve, we give it an up vote, but if we disapprove it gets a down vote. We would rather be in the upper class than the lower class. A bull market is up. A bear market is down. If you’re making the big bucks, you can move up to the penthouse apartment, but if you’ve fallen on hard times you live down in mom’s basement.

I’ve read different theories as to why, but in our society there is a negative association with most things down. We all like a mark down, but none of us wants to be let down, put down, or beat down. After 9 months of Covid we’re all feeling a little run down.

Meanwhile, up is the life of the party. Everyone wants up. In a culture that is infatuated with everything up and that does everything to avoid down, then the hardest passage in the Bible may very well be our Core Verses this week found in Philippians 2:5-7. They are all about moving down.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

These verses are all about humility, and our example, our model for humility is Jesus Himself. He looked down onto a human race that was down and out and out of options. He left his lofty heavenly throne and came down among us. He took the ultimate downgrade setting aside His divine nature, and becoming like one of us. He came down to our level. And this is the attitude, this is the mind we are to have.

This is our call to humility. This is our call to go down to help others up. We talked a little bit about unity last week as an essential ingredient to unity, but this week the focus is entirely on humility. Paul then gives us the greatest example of humility ever, the life of Jesus.

I love how the NIV phrases verse 5, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” Paul says to have true humility, we need to think like Jesus. How did He think? What was His mindset? It tells us in verses 6, 7, and 8:

*6 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[b] 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!*

Do you hear it in those words? Even though He was equal with God, he didn't use it to his advantage. He made Himself nothing. He took on the nature of a servant. He humbled himself. He was obedient.

Jesus gave up His position that he had as the Son of God. Jesus gave up His power that he had as the Son of God. Jesus gave up His perks that he had as the Son of God. He gave it all up- position, power, perks, for you- to die on the cross for your sin. He came down to lift you up.

That's the mindset of Jesus. That's how we're supposed to think. That's our model for humility.

Jesus charts for us a different path to greatness. Bill Hybels writes in his book "Descending into greatness."

If you want to be truly great, then the direction you must go is down. You must descend into greatness...Greatness is not a measure of self-will, but rather self-abandonment. The more you lose the more you gain.

I. What Humility Looks Like

If you ever want to see Jesus, you have to go the direction He went. There's a quote that's often attributed to C.S. Lewis, but he likely never said it. Doesn't matter, it's still good, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." If we want to think like Jesus, we're going to have to be willing to move in a downward trajectory.

Humility looks like giving God the glory instead of taking the credit. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:28 and 31, "*God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all...Therefore, as the Scriptures say, 'If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD.'*"

Humility is seen when we recognize all our gifts come from God. 1 Cor. 4:7b "*What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?*"

Humility looks like acknowledging that God is in control of all things. James in his letter warned against pride and arrogance in our plans and purposes. In 4:15 he writes, "*What you ought to say, 'If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.'*"

Humility looks like forgiving one another. Col. 3:13 *"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."* It's not optional folks.

Humility looks like serving one another. Think of Jesus washing the disciple's feet.

Humility looks like "you-first" instead of "me-first." Right here in Philippians 2:3, *"in humility count others more significant than yourselves."*

II. Motivations for Humility

If we back up a few verses, Paul begins chapter 2 listing four motivations for humility, for having the mind of Christ. *"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, and affection and sympathy."* If these things are true. This doesn't mean that Paul doubts these things are true. These are rhetorical *ifs*. Each *if* anticipates an answer of "Yes, that's true." Read them like the word *since*. *"Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is comfort from love since there is participation in the Spirit, since there is affection and sympathy."*

He's asking us to consider our own salvation experience. If your salvation is real, then each of these things are true. These are things that every person receives from Christ in their salvation. We may not always feel it, because we don't do a good job of thinking like Jesus.

Our first motivation is the encouragement we receive from being united with Christ. In salvation we've had the burden of sin taken from our lives, hope has been restored to our hearts, the shroud of darkness has been lifted and replaced with light.

Our second motivation is comfort we receive from Christ's love. When we deserved judgement, Christ gave grace. Instead of wrath, mercy. The knowledge that we are unconditionally loved, that we don't have to measure up to some impossible standard, that we don't have to earn salvation on our own strength, can comfort any soul.

Our third motivation to have the mind of Christ is the fellowship we have with the Holy Spirit. Christ does not save us and leave us on our own. He gives his own spirit to live in our lives. The word *participation* here means partnership or fellowship. Christ's own Spirit participates in our lives, becoming our partner in living the life of faith.

Our fourth motivation is the *affection* and *sympathy* we receive from Christ. This tenderness and compassion. If you're still using the old King James, you'll see a funny phrase here, "the bowels of compassion." Usually when I got something going on in my bowels, it's not compassion I'm feeling.

The King Jimmy actually gets this bowel image from the Greek. We view compassion or sympathy as something that comes from the heart. The ancient Greeks, however, viewed the lower internal organs as the seat of our emotions.

Look at it this way. Because of what Jesus did for us we can feel for others way deep down in our guts, not just a superficial sympathy, but a compassion that goes deep. Think of Jesus' compassion as he wept over Jerusalem for her salvation, or who wept with Mary and her sister Martha over the death of their friend Lazarus. We can feel that kind of tenderness for each other.

III. Attitudes of Humility

The truth, the reality of these four *ifs*, is all the motivation we need to have the same mindset as Jesus, to think like Jesus. These four ifs are followed by some pretty powerful *thens*– what we'll call attitudes of humility.

Before I became a preacher, I was going to be a computer programmer. I studied to be a programmer, and had even got my first programming job. In programming the if-then statement is the most essential of guiding statements. If this thing is true then perform this function, however, if this thing is false, the perform that function.

Paul is saying if these things are true, then here are the attitudes we need to have–

then complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul is saying, if your experience of salvation is real, If you truly know Jesus as Lord, then there will be these attitudes in your life. It might be important to note a couple of things at this point. First, this passage shows us that there is a strong connection between our relationship with Jesus and our relationships with each other. When you look at verse 1 and then 2-3 you see that Paul sees a direct connection between the two. You can't claim to love Jesus, but not love His people. They go together.

The second thing to note is that Paul encourages 4 attitudes in our lives not actions. We focus so much on action today: we want Paul to say do A. B. and B. But instead he focuses on our attitudes. It's not that what you do doesn't matter, but it begins with who you are. Doing begins with being. One of my favorite teachers, Alan Ahlgrim loves to say we are human beings, not human doings. The world focuses on what you do, but God is first concerned about who you are.

A. Be of the Same Mind

Paul first says we are to be of the same mind. This doesn't mean we all have to think alike or have the same opinions about everything. Unity doesn't mean we become clones. We are not like the Borg in Star Trek. Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated.

One of the characteristics of humility is that it is voluntary. It can't be forced. It can't be coaxed. It must be given. Humility doesn't require that we give up our individuality. The word Paul uses here means to direct one's mind to a thing. We are not mindless drones, but we are to have our minds committed to the same things. We must hold our highest goals and values in common. We might have different ideas and approaches on getting there. But we all need to be heading in the same direction.

B. Have the Same Love

Secondly, we are to have the same love. In the early church Emperor Hadrian sent a man by the name of Aristedes to spy out this mysterious new religion called Christianity. Aristedes infiltrated the church posing as a new convert, he then issued a report to emperor Hadrian. His report contained a variety of information, but one declaration spoke volumes, he wrote, "Behold, how they love one another."

If Aristedes infiltrated the church today what would he write, "Behold, how they love one another," "Behold, how they judge one another." "Behold, how they seek their own," "Behold, how they talk about one another."

C. Be United in Purpose

Thirdly, we are to be unity in purpose. Our text in the English Standard Version translations says to be "*in full accord*." I love the ESV translation, but I must admit this sounds rather clunky. We don't talk like this. "Hey Roger, we both like fishing, so let's be of full accord and go fishing." *Accord* is a unity word. It means to be one in spirit, one in soul. We might be different in a lot of superficial ways, but we are united way down deep where it counts. Now Satan tries to convince us that it's the superficial differences that matter most. No, they don't. It's our soul unity that matters.

Then Paul talks about being of one mind again, same words he just used— to have our minds set on the same thing. When you combine that with soul-unity, way down deep unity, it means to be committed to the same purpose.

One of the things that's killing the church today is that everyone is pursuing their own purpose. Everyone wants something different out of church, and if they don't get it, well, then they're either going to throw a fit or move us to somewhere else. But Paul says we need to be united in pursuing God's purpose, even if that means, in humility, setting aside our purpose.

We can be different in lots of ways, but we must be committed to our two ultimate purposes: loving God and loving people. If you are humble enough to commit to those two things above and beyond all else, then I can worship side by side with you. I can serve side by side with you. I can love you as a brother and sister. You are family.

D. Make Others Count

The fourth attitude is make others count— not your own selfish ambition, but to humbly count others more significant than yourselves. This doesn't mean we don't think about ourselves at all, but as verse 4 points out, we consider the interests of others, as well as our own. A phone company study of 500 conversations revealed that the most used word is "I." It was used over 4,000 times in those 500 conversations.

When it says *count others more significant*, take note of that word *count*. The NIV says *Value*. This is not about how you feel about them. How you feel about them doesn't come into the calculation. This is a bit of mental accounting where you assign this other person a greater value in your mind. I will regard them as though they are this valuable. I will treat them as if they have this worth.

If we only think of other people what we feel they're worth, we'll never make it. The church will never make. We must learn to treat them according to what God says their worth, and He figured they were worth the life of His Son. Does that calculation make a difference in what we say? Do it make a difference in what we do? You bet it does.

I'll guarantee you, whenever there's a problem in the church, someone's forgotten Philippians 2. When we're all following Philippians 2, we can overcome any challenge.

What are you doing to make others count? I know this is tough stuff. It goes against every fiber of our individualistic culture. It rubs our selfish, sinful nature in every wrong way. It flows in the opposite direction of our red American blood. But God call us to think like Jesus, to humble ourselves. Instead of looking at something and thinking how can I put them down to put myself on top, we ask how can I bend down, to lift them up.

What's keeping you from humility today? Is there a conversation that needs to happen this week, maybe even today, where you say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong." Those might be the five toughest words to ever cross your lips, "I'm sorry. I was wrong." No excuses. No justifications. No, "but you," just admit you were wrong. Is there someone you need to ask forgiveness? "Please forgive me." Might be the 7th, 8th, and 9th toughest words to say. But you know what are the greatest words to hear. "I forgive you."

Do you need to submit to authority in some area of your life? Do you need to begin serving in same manner? Is there someone else you need to put first? Do you need to become less self-focused, and more God-focused? What's keeping you from humility today?

Here's the reality, either you will humble yourself, or something or someone someday will do it for you.

But let me take you to the end of the story.

Because this story doesn't end face down in the dirt. When Christians start talking about humility and putting others first, I think everyone's biggest fear is that they end up as a doormat. But this story does not end down low. It ends high and exalted.

Jesus gave up everything for. He gave up heaven. He gave up glory. He gave up the worship and adoration of masses of countless angels worshipping and adoring him. He gave up His power. He gave up His authority. He gave up His limitless divine nature to become just like you. Just like me.

But now that he's done that. Now that he has lifted us up from our miserable state, verse 9 says, *"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name."* This refers back to his ascension, that Jesus is not on the throne at the right hand of the Father. Back in heaven where he belongs. All glory restored. Myriads and myriads of angels exalting His name. No longer fully man, but full God. All present, all knowing, and all powerful.

As someone who belongs to Jesus, guess where your destiny is? From the lips of Jesus Himself in Revelation 3:21, *"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."*

The path to greatness is not in the direction the world claims. We can beat each other senseless to be the king of the mountain, but true exaltation is found in the other direction. Greatness begins with the most important act of humility found in verses 10 and 11 of Philippians 2.

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Every knee will bow before Him, either here and now, or there and then. It's your choice, but you will bow your knee. You will be humble before Him.

Have bowed your knee before Him? Have you confessed Him as Your Lord and Savior?

You will never lower yourself more than Jesus lowered himself to love you.

You will never give up more than Jesus gave up to gain you.

You will never give up more than you gain in Jesus.

Anything we might ever lose in humility, we more than gain in the honor and glory of Christ.