

LEADER GUIDE

CHARACTER COUNTS

HUMILITY

BIG IDEA: Consider the needs of others before your own.

DATE: Sunday, August 30, 2026

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:1-11

OPENING QUESTION

When have you been reminded that pride comes before a fall? *Who are some examples in history or popular culture of where pride led to someone's fall?*

One example is Benedict Arnold, who 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 250 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.

Call attention to The Big Idea of today's lesson: Consider the needs of others before your own.

SETTING THE STAGE

Philippians. Paul was the first preacher to spread the gospel in Philippi, leading Lydia to Christ in a conversation outside the city beside a river (Acts 16:11-15). He also was imprisoned for casting a demon from a slave girl, and while imprisoned led the jailer to Christ (vv. 16-34). The Philippian church supported Paul throughout his ministry, including during the apostle's first Roman imprisonment from where he wrote the letter to the Philippians in response to a monetary gift he had received from the Philippian church. The theme of the letter is joy; the Greek term for "joy" appears five times and the term for "rejoice" eight times in the four chapters.

SCRIPTURE READING

Philippians 2:1-11 (CSB)

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.

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.

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.

DISCUSSION

LOVE LEADS TO UNITY

READ: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

Use the commentary for these verses to give some background for the book of Philippians.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

Recap: 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?

How does love lay the groundwork for humility?

How can love help us be united in spirit and intent on one purpose?

DOORMAT ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use this visual aid to help introduce the importance of biblical humility. **In advance**, bring a doormat and place it at the entrance to your room. Draw attention to the doormat and ask how it signifies what many people think of as humility. **Say:** "Humility isn't being a doormat that allows people to walk all over us as they head to where they want to go. Humility is being a door that invites others to go in ahead of us. This type of biblical humility makes it possible for everyone to get to where they need to go."

Transition: Love lays the groundwork for humility. In the next verses, we see that love leads us to humbly serve others.

LOVE LEADS TO HUMILITY

READ: PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Read this paragraph about humility out loud:

HUMILITY

The personal quality of being free from arrogance and pride and having an accurate estimate of one's worth. Jesus Christ's life provides the best example of what it means to have humility. Jesus preached and taught often about the need for humility. He urged those who desired to live by kingdom standards to practice humility. The person with humility does not look down on others. While God resists those who are proud, He provides grace for the humble. Paul believed that quality relationships with other people hinged on the presence of humility. Biblical humility is often associated with a proper understanding of one's place before God and a heart of servanthood and dependence on God.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses to further explain humility.

Recap: 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.

Lyrics ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): **In advance**, bring lyrics to the first verse of "Amazing Grace." Invite a volunteer to lead the class in singing the verse. Write the word "wretch" on the board. Ask the group what comes to mind as they sang "that saved a wretch like me." Write responses on a tear sheet or whiteboard around the term "wretch." Make the point that when we realize what we were and what Jesus did to save us, we are motivated to respond in humility toward God and one another.

Recap: 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*.

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

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

What are some specific ways you have seen someone else show humility?

How do we navigate the tension of putting others first but not getting run over ourselves?

Transition: In the next verses, we see that we should follow the example of Jesus in displaying humility.

FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS [READ: PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11]

Recap: 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.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses to explain what it means that Jesus emptied Himself.

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

What are some specific examples of Jesus demonstrating humility?

Summarize: "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).

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

Who do you know who's a great example of humility?

GUIDE: Refer back to **The Point** for this session: **Consider the needs of others before your own.**

RESPONSE

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.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

Connection to The Point: Love for one another lays the groundwork for humility that leads to unity.

If, then (v. 1). What Paul wrote in the first chapter of Philippians led to this transition at the start of chapter 2. He began his letter with a note of thanksgiving to God for the Philippian believers (1:3-8). He viewed these Christians as true partners in the gospel, as they stood by him while he was in prison. He prayed that God would help them to grow in their understanding of God, so that they might remain faithful and continue to grow to spiritual maturity until Christ returned (vv. 9-11). To ease their anxiety about his imprisonment, Paul explained how God had used his circumstances as an opportunity to advance the gospel (vv. 12-20). Prison stopped his traveling but did not stop his mission. Paul told the Philippians whether he lived or died, Christ would care for him (vv. 21-26). Finally, the apostle urged the Philippian believers to remain faithful to Christ, even in the face of opposition and persecution (vv. 27-30). With these events in mind, he laid the groundwork for his teaching on true humility.

Philippians 2:1-4 is a single sentence in the Greek. It is a type of Greek conditional sentence which assumes the stated premise is true. The four characteristics of the if-clause are true because of the common faith in Christ Paul shared with the Philippians. All these characteristics together produced unity and humility within the church.

Encouragement in Christ (v. 1) refers to the blessings of being in or united with Christ. Both Paul, who was in a Roman prison, and the Philippian believers, who were facing opposition for their faith, could find encouragement in being in Christ. Neither Paul nor the Philippians were alone in their situations. Another characteristic they shared was the love they received from Christ (**consolation of love**). Jesus's love for them remained certain (Rom. 8:31-39). Furthermore, this love Christ had for them resulted in their love for one another, which sustained Paul in prison (Phil. 1:3-8).

Fellowship with the Spirit (v. 1) could refer either to fellowship with the Holy Spirit or fellowship brought about by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit indwells every believer and is the source of the love and fellowship believers have for one another. Finally, Paul and the Philippians shared the common experience of grace, whereby God poured out His **affection** and tender **mercy** upon them. He gave them all what they did not deserve—salvation and all its benefits.

Thinking the same way (v. 2) refers to being like-minded. Paul was not encouraging uniformity, but rather unity in the sense of sharing common values and purpose in how they viewed things in regard to Christ and the church. Such thinking involves the intellect, emotions, and will, which lead to a comprehensive attitude which is reflected in one's actions.¹

Having the same love (v. 2) refers to the Philippians' shared love for Christ in their lives, which should also manifest itself in the common love toward each other. Because believers have experienced the love of God in Christ, they can and should demonstrate such love toward other believers (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-21).

United in spirit (v. 2) could refer to both Paul and the Philippians sharing the same spirit in the sense of an attitude, or it could refer to both sharing in the Spirit of God. Earlier, in relation to "contending together for the faith of the gospel," Paul wrote that he hoped to hear that the Philippians were "standing firm in one spirit" (1:27).

Intent on one purpose (v. 2) refers to proclaiming Christ—spreading the gospel. All the characteristics that they shared in their relationship with God (2:1) and in their relationships with each other (v. 2) bound Paul and the church together, as well as uniting the Philippian church itself.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Connection to The Point: Love leads us to place others before ourselves.

Selfish ambition (v. 3). Paul had already written that some preached Christ because of *selfish ambition* (1:17). Before New Testament times, this term appeared only in the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, when he described those who selfishly sought political office in unfair ways. Here Paul used the term in the sense of having rivalries or self-seeking interests. Elsewhere the apostle used the term to describe those who pursued their own selfish interests rather than God's ways (Rom. 2:8). Paul also used the term in connection with the disunity and factions within the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 12:20). "Selfish ambitions" are also one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). People with selfish ambition exhibit both a lack of humility and a divisive spirit.

Conceit (v. 3) means "empty glory." *Conceit* describes someone claiming glory for himself that does not exist. It can involve either a vain, exaggerated view of oneself or vanity that comes from excessive ambition. It can lead to both provocation and envy (Gal. 5:26).

Humility (v. 3) is the opposite of selfish ambition and conceit. It is having a correct estimation of oneself, particularly in relation to God, since we are unworthy to receive all He has given us in Christ. It is modesty. Paul defined *humility* as considering others more important than oneself. It is a characteristic that God's people are to exhibit along with compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12). Peter encouraged believers to clothe themselves in humility in relation to others (1 Pet. 5:5). It is possible to demonstrate false humility in the pursuit of self-seeking purposes (Col. 2:23).

In first-century Greco-Roman culture, *humility* carried negative connotations. It described the mentality of a slave and was used to refer to members of the society that were viewed as being of little or no value—those seen as insignificant, weak, poor, and so forth. In Scripture, humility is a characteristic of God (Pss. 18:35; 45:4), and it is through humility that one comes to an understanding of God's ways (25:9) and gains wisdom (Prov. 11:2). Jesus, who entered the world in a humble birth, taught His disciples to be humble (Luke 14:7-14) and emphasized the need for an attitude of humble servanthood (Matt. 23:11-12; John 13:1-17).

Consider others as more important than yourselves

(v. 3). Jesus taught, "Whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). These words, often known as "the Golden Rule," are considered a guide for how to relate to others. However, this does not entail self-neglect or self-loathing, putting oneself down—which would be false humility. Rather, it is having a correct estimation of oneself in relation to God and others. Implicit in Jesus's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39; see Lev. 19:18) is the understanding that we treat ourselves in a healthy, reasonable manner.

To consider others more important than oneself involves not always claiming the rights and privileges that are ours. It entails looking out for **the interest of others** first, rather than only looking out for our **own interests**. Balance is needed. Paul commanded believers to look out for their own families. If they did not provide and care for them, they were denying the faith and worse than unbelievers (1 Tim. 5:8). However, believers should not be so concerned with their own needs that they neglect or ignore *the interests of others*. Paul encouraged the Galatian believers to "carry one

another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

Such an attitude can require sacrifice. Paul continually exhibited through his actions how he put others before himself for the sake of the spread of the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, the apostle detailed all the things he had humbly endured in order to take the gospel to the world.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Connection to The Point: Follow the example of Jesus in displaying humility.

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus

(v. 5). The attitude of humility and servanthood Paul had encouraged among the Philippians (vv. 3-4) he now provided an example of (vv. 6-11), most likely using an early Christian hymn. They were to adopt the attitude of *Christ Jesus*, the attitude Christ exhibited in His role as the Messiah.

Christ is the English word for the Greek term meaning "anointed one," and is the equivalent of the Hebrew term translated "Messiah." *Jesus* is the name given to Him at His birth because He would "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21,25). It is derived from the Hebrew word for "Joshua" which means "God saves." Jesus is the anointed Messiah promised in the Old Testament and sent by God the Father to redeem people from their sins (John 3:16-18).

Existing in the form of God (v. 6) is contrasted with **the form of a servant (v. 7)**. The Son of God always existed with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Through the incarnation, He became a human being. Jesus was not part-man and part-God. He is fully God and fully man. Jesus never relinquished the *form of God*, but He did take the *form of a servant*.

Emptied himself (v. 7). Jesus's humility demonstrated itself in His actions. The first action that He took was that He *emptied himself*. This does not mean, as some have argued, that Jesus divested Himself of certain qualities of the Godhead. While Jesus experienced the limitations of His humanity (Matt. 24:36; John 4:6), He always remained fully God and fully man. The only limitations Jesus experienced were self-limitations, not an emptying of His essence as God. He willingly submitted to the will of His Father by taking on the outward **form of a servant** and **the likeness of humanity**. Jesus deserved to be in heaven. He deserved all the glory of the Godhead. Instead, He emptied Himself of those rights to become a part of humanity He had created. Yet, He never ceased being God.

Humbled himself by becoming obedient (v. 8). In addition to emptying Himself, Jesus also *humbled* Himself. This was the primary reason Paul used this hymn as an illustration. He had challenged the Philippians to live with humility (2:3), and here he provided the ultimate illustration of what that looks like. Every act of the incarnate Christ was a lesson in humility. He experienced life as a human being—birth, growth, temptation, pain, and even died a humiliating death. His every act was in obedience to the will of God the Father (John 6:38-40).

Death on a cross . . . highly exalted him (vv. 8-9). Jesus submitted to crucifixion, the harshest form of capital punishment in the Roman world. He died as the substitutionary atonement for our sins. This was God the Father's plan to which Jesus, God the Son, submitted (Luke 22:42; John 3:16). However, what was viewed negatively as humiliating by the world was the reason for Jesus's exaltation in the plan of God. This exaltation refers to Jesus's resurrection, ascension, and glorification that followed His humiliating death (Acts 2:32-33; 1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 1:3; 12:2). God the Father exalted Jesus by raising Him from the dead and giving Him **the name that is above every name**. But what is that name? In light of verses 10-11, many consider the name to be "Lord." The title refers to both Jesus's character and function.² Jesus deserves all worship and praise because He defeated death, hell, and the grave, and through His sacrificial death achieved salvation for all who

will repent of their sins and place their faith in Him as their Savior and Lord.

Every knee will bow . . . every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (vv. 10-11). Both the bending of the knee and confession of the tongue refer to the act of worship. All of God's creation will one day acknowledge the lordship of Christ. However, that does not mean everyone will be saved. Some will voluntarily acknowledge and submit to the lordship of Christ through repentance and faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Others will be conquered by Christ and acknowledge Jesus as Lord as His defeated foes. These people will not participate in the glory and exaltation of the Lord. Rather, they will experience eternal punishment and separation from God for their rebellion and sin. Nevertheless, one day all will acknowledge Jesus as Lord.