

Philippians Unplugged

Meditations from a pastor

When I was in seminary I came across a latin term *Lectio Divina*, which means divine reading. Basically, this was a spiritual discipline where you would read a passage very slowly and then meditate on it for an hour in silence, “listening” for God to provide insight on the text. After each meditation, I journaled my experience. Initially this discipline was very difficult because it is hard to keep your mind focused exclusively on a passage for an hour. But slowly, I learned how to focus my mind and experienced some rich insight from the Word of God. This series we are doing on Philippians is modeled after the practice of *Lectio Divina*. For this series I used no commentaries, I didn’t listen to other pastors, instead I just spent the majority of the week submerging myself in this text.

I am a firm believer in meditation and contemplation when it comes to the Scriptures. I mentioned last week that one of the disciplines of the men’s leadership class is that they choose one chapter a day and meditate on it. Too many times, folks read the Bible and try to plow through it and they rob themselves of the insight that comes from God if we just slow down and keep a particular text on our mind throughout the day. Now it is not easy and requires learning how to train your mind—but I have come to this conclusion regarding God. If you truly want to experience God at a deeper and more intimate level we will have to put in the work. My hope is that you will be encouraged by these meditations.

Interestingly, last week I had several people mention that sharing sinful things in my past must have been tough. It is not that bad for me because He has used those experiences to help me become a better person, one who is more committed to His truth. Whenever you meditate on a passage you intrinsically ask God “How does this apply to me”—often you will discover things about yourself that are not in line with God’s truth, some obvious, others less. The key is to accept that reality and commit yourself to change. The reason I can share my sin is because God is changing me from the inside and has brought me to the point where my sharing is a tool that can be used to help you in grow in your spiritual journey. If I can help you by sharing some of my sin—then praise be to God because He needs to be magnified and I need to be experiencing Him and learning as His servant. Humility is an attribute that you will see from this passage we will study today; but a humility that is different than you may perceive. I do not consider myself a man of humiity—but I do think with God’s help and rebuke I am becoming more aware of how I need to be. I am in process. With that said let’s begin our study and focus on Philippians 2 and its theme of humility.

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 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 made himself nothing, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The word that stands out here for me is the adjective, *any*. Many times life seems hard, whether it is relationally, financially, health related, or some tragic episodes. Sometimes it is just a matter of wanting something and not getting your way. In many cases, when we go through tough times it is easy to disconnect from others and be completely focused on your world—not God’s. Yet, as tough as things can be; Paul is saying if there is “any” attribute in you that is Christ like, allow it to be the one that guides you and unifies you with other believers. Here Paul, writes through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and says *if there is any* encouragement, *any* comfort from love, *any* participation from the Spirit, *any* affection and sympathy, give that away to others. You might think how can I give what little I have to others, I won’t have anything left for me. But God recharges you when you commit to taking the focus of of yourself and placing the framgments of Christ-like character on others. That is what Christ did, he gave *any* amount of encouragement, comfort, participation in the Spirit, affection and sympathy and poured it out onto others until his death. He drenched others with his Christ-likeness! Paul is saying *if there is any* life in you use it to be in accord with others.

Adding Humanity to His nature: In verse 5 Paul clarifies that the kind of mindset we should have is exemplified in Jesus; who though in the *form* of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. The Greek word translated as “form” found in verses 6 and 7; is “*morphe*” and the it stresses the idea of being of the *same substance*, thus Jesus was *in*; “or already”, of the same substance as the God (vs. 6), and then *added* humanity to his nature where he also became in the

morphe of a human. The word is similar to what we think of when something morphes into something else, like a caterpillar into a butterfly. However, that analogy can only go so far because the butterfly ceases to be a caterpillar after its cocoon experience. The best way to describe what happened to Christ is that *he continued to be fully God* and then *added a second nature*, humanity, to his being.

Now some of your translations in verse 7, will read *Christ emptied himself* instead of *he became nothing*. So here is the question of the ages? What did Christ empty himself of? Some have suggested that Christ emptied himself of his deity. In other words, he ceased to be God while he took on the person of Christ. That is, He ceased to be omniscient, omnipresent; omnipotent to use some theological terms. This line of thinking leads one to believe that Christ was exclusively a human while on earth, voluntarily giving up his divinity. The problem here is the idea that God could somehow divide Himself and cease to be divine. The best way to understand this issue is that Christ on earth had two natures, both human and divine. These natures were no separate ones; this thinking was condemned as an early church heresy, but rather that his very nature, is both divine and human. There is no way you can separate the two; otherwise you fail to capture Jesus for who he was and still is, both a hundred percent God and man.

So if Christ did not give up his deity on earth then what did he empty himself of? Well if you look at the context of the passage you will find that what he gave up was his position and prestige of being God. Not only that—but his humanity was not one of power and position as one would expect from a divine being who added humanity; but rather it was one of poverty and low stature. When the text says Jesus *became nothing* or *emptied himself* it means that he went from the top of the food chain—God Almighty—to the very bottom—that of a lowly human servant. But it is actually better than that because servants still have the capability to be selfish and bitter against God and man. Christ demonstrates true and pure humility by remaining completely obedient to God; even to the point of death. That is why when we study humility we have to do it by exploring the life of Jesus.

Two Categories of Humility: The way I see it there are two categories that define humility in the Christian circles. There is a moral self-conscious humility and there is a Christlike humility. Here is how I break this down. The moral self-conscious humility tries very hard to be humble and very moral. But here's the problem. The moral self-conscious person is so focused on saying the right things, doing the right things, that when someone criticizes their morality—they become defensive. I'll give you a sinful example from my life.

On Thursday night, our landlord made a mistake and wanted to charge us for utility bills that we paid already. As I listened to him on the phone he said he was ninety percent sure he was right. Well since I knew he was wrong this really bothered me, even though he was going to double check and get back to me. I started thinking about ways I was going to prove him wrong. Well, when I went to bed at 10:30 I was still feeling some resentment and I knew I had to go in the living room and spend some time in prayer. I told God I should not feel this way inside but I was upset because I knew he was wrong. Then God began to minister to me. The reason I was upset is because I felt I had been wronged. Then I thought about Jesus on the cross who though perfect and without fault was wronged. Now when Jesus was beaten, flogged, and nailed to a cross—he did not have the bitter feelings I had toward my landowner because I had been wronged. Instead, Jesus had the kind of humility that asked God to forgive those who falsely put him to death because they did not know what they were doing. Do you see the difference between moral self-conscious humility and the kind displayed by Christ. One has traces of pride that springs up because their morality, their character, their integrity, their intelligence has been offended. The other does not care and intercedes for others.

May I suggest to you that is what the text intends to communicate when it reads that Christ literally became nothing. He emptied himself of the prestige and respect that was due him as Almighty God; and even the kind due to a human by becoming a servant, even to the point of death. A person that demonstrates Christ-like humility does not think of himself or herself as humble—they think of themselves as nothing. That is what Christ did in his divine and human nature. He considered himself to be nothing. That is important to ponder!

So then, how was Christ rewarded for his pure and untarnished humility? Paul answer this question in the following verses.....

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The U Curve: Jesus was exalted above every name and ultimately he will be recognized and worshipped as Lord by everyone at the end of the age. To illustrate this reality, imagine Jesus' life being like a U curve. On the left side, he was with God in the beginning and created the heavens and the earth. Now Jesus moves down the U curve to the mid point on the left side of the curve, this represents God dwelling on earth as a man. As we add a noth even lover, on the left, imagine Jesus now as a lowly servant. Finally, the ultimate humiliation is that Jesus was pereeuted, flogged, and crucified on the cross. This represents the very bottom of the U curve. But Jesus was raised from the dead, which places him at the midpoint of the U curve on the right side. Finally, God exalts him and has him sit at His right side in heaven where he awaits every knee to bow and tongue confess he is Lord. The left side of the U cirve demonstrates Christ humility who considered himself nothing and choose to remain completely obedient to God. The right side represents his exaltation for his humility. The bottom line is that God honors those who are truly humble for him. But again there are two types of humility found in the Christian church, moral self conscious humility which is still filled with pride and Christ centered humility who thought of himself as nothing and committed his life to obeying God despite the injustice done to him. In reality, it is very difficult to develop the kind of humility that Christ had because of pride. When we can give ourselves to God wholeheartily and think of ourselves as nothing and follow God—then we tap into the kind of humility that God honors.

Knowing this, Paul the apostle calls the Philippian church to Christ-like humility.

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Working out your salvation with fear and trembling is is better understood as one who will cintinue to stand for truth; even to the point of persecution, because of their awe and appreciation for God's calling in their lives. If we decide to live our lives for God we will face injustice and persecution. But the goal of humility is to think of your life as nothing because you fear God more than man. When God tells us to do something according to His truth; we must do it without questionig or grumbling. We cannot be like the Israelites who were grumbling because following God was hard; instead we must be like Jesus, who though following God was hard, did it anyway. Why? Paul answer this in verse 15. So we can be blameless, children of God in the midst of our crooked and twisted generation. If we are to shine like lights in this world we need to hold fast to the things of God so that we don't run our Christian life in vain. Paul concludes this chapter by describing two people who exemplified the humility of Christ.

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Paul's point was to show the Philippians two people who walked according to the guidelines of Christ-like humility. Timothy is described as someone who is genuinely concerned for the welfare of the Philippians, someone who seeks the interest of Jesus, and someone who had been like a son to Paul because he learned to live his life following strictly the teachings of Jesus. In fact, Timothy shows his humility in the sense that he went out of his way to visit Paul in prison.

Epaphroditus, on the other hand was a member of the church of Philippi who was sent to provide Paul with comfort and help Paul with gifts and resources for his ministry and physical needs. Like Christ, he is described as someone who risked his life to help Paul and even became ill to the point of death. Yet, God had mercy on him. Interestingly, what dominates Epaphroditus' mindset is that he wants to comfort the hearts of the Philippians because he knew they were concerned for his health. Once again, Epaphroditus demonstrates the kind of humility that focuses on others, not himself. He did not consider his life very important as a person, which is shown by the fact he was willing to die for the faith. Consequently, Timothy and Epaphroditus serve as examples of Christ-like humility and how the church is to minister in a world that needs us to be lights in a crooked and twisted generation.

Practical Application: It is hard to give some practical application on how to have a Christ-like humility because suggestions take away from the nature of humility and makes it more of moral self-awareness humility. The best way it seems is to share a story.

The other day I was journaling down my thoughts for this study when a man came and sat next to my table playing video games. I had seen this man a week earlier and he did not leave a good impression because he was once again, playing video games, but the volume was loud. Over and over again, I kept hearing machine guns and it was hard to think. So there he was on Thursday and he was sitting right next to me. I glanced his direction and noticed he was playing video games again, but this time with the volume down—so I just went about my journaling. A little while later he looked over my direction and said that I had a nice computer. I told him, “thanks” and gave him a little attention—but all along, I wanted to get back to what I was doing because I was deep in thought. Besides, Ron was different than me and had some rotted out teeth and looked like he was on the brink of being homeless. Anyhow, he kept talking and talking and I was waiting for him to stop so I could get back to my lesson on Christ-like humility. At that moment it was impressed on me that I should stop studying Philippians 2 and start living it. In other words, Ron was someone I felt better than socially and I had more important things to do than waste my valuable time talking to him. So I heeded God's command. I listened to Ron and even transitioned our talk into a gospel presentation. It turned out he was a Christian but it was nice to have him clarify what he believed about Jesus. I decided, with some Holy Spirit prompting not to look at my computer and to continue talking with Ron and then invited him to church and offered to pick him up. He was very grateful and asked my advice on other spiritual matters. I share this story not to boast but explain how our pride can get in the way of taking advantage of ministry opportunities that the Lord can deliver right into your lap. I had to fight my pride and tell God that I am nothing and what is important is the person I am talking to.

In the end, it will be a battle to exercise the Christ-like humility that Jesus displayed by emptying himself and becoming nothing. The only hope we really have is to meditate on Jesus who added humanity to his nature just so he could dwell among people who were lost and going nowhere. Theologians call the birth of Christ his incarnation among humanity. In the end, my friends, that is what we are called to do as Christians who have been indwelt with the Holy Spirit. We are to share the love of Christ by dwelling among the people, in many cases, a generation like Paul describes is twisted and crooked generation. You see, we have the truth within us if we know Jesus and it is our job to think of ourselves as nothing and take risks sharing the love of Jesus. Yes, you will grumble. Yes, you will want to be disobedient. Yes, you will fail. But the bottom line is that one success story makes it all worth it. Folks, we are the lights that have been filled with oil because of Jesus. Let us continue our Incarnational journey in this world and make Christ first in our life above all things. Let it be said of us that we were men and women of God who modeled their lives after Jesus and ministered like Timothy and Epaphroditus, who considered the interest of others before our own needs and desires. Let's make a difference for Jesus.