

Philippians: The Jesus Song

Big Idea: How low can you go?

Purpose: To challenge people to go low.

Passage: Philippians 2:1-11

Verse: Philippians 2:3

Transition Update

-I want to give all of you an update on our transition. I am pleased to announce that we have officially closed on the sale of our building with Our Lady LaVang Catholic Church. This is the culmination of years of hard work and planning by countless people to bring us to this point. We truly see God's hand in this event. It gives us the freedom to be the church God is calling us to become. We are deeply grateful.

-The quarantine slowed down our well laid plans. In light of that, we are renting back for one month to allow us time to move well. This week we also signed a lease on an 8,000-foot office space within walking distance of our present building. This space will serve as our office and ministry center when the world begins to open back up. It will afford us the opportunity to host mid-size gatherings of all kinds and continue to do the good work God has invited us into.

-We continue to plan to meet at Clackamas High School for Sunday services when it becomes permissible to do so. We are also actively exploring options for our long-term home. Feel free to reach out with any questions. We will do our best to answer them.

I would ask you to continue to pray over your church in this significant season of transition. We sense God moving and working and directing our steps. We look forward with great anticipation at what He has in store for us. Let's pray.

Public Reading

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

This is the Word of the LORD.

Story

-We live in a world that tells us that to succeed we must go higher and higher. We are burdened with hearts that aspire to climb the ladder of success. I started playing sports when I was 5 years old. My parents snuck me on a team where the minimum age was 6. Growing up I played any and every sport I could play. The goal of sports is largely to win. The goal is not to lose. The goal is not to shot for 3rd place. The goal is first place – to go higher and finish above the other competitors or teams. **The goal is to finish on top.**

In *school* we rarely get celebrated for getting a C. **We get celebrated for getting an A.** It is the valedictorian who gets to give the speech. **Our goal is to go higher and finish above others.**

Our *economy* is based on a system called **capitalism**. Capitalism is meant to give everyone equal opportunity to succeed. But capitalism is meant to reward those who are the brightest, most gifted and most diligent. **The goal of capitalism is to go higher and finish above others.**

Even our dominant *scientific theory* is based on the idea of going higher than others - **survival of the fittest**. Now there is nothing wrong with trying to win a competition, do well in school or work hard. But they reinforce this idea that is so prevalent in our broken hearts that **the goal in life is to go higher and to finish**

above others. The danger is, that is the very opposite mindset of the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is not about *ascending* greatness. It is about *descending* greatness. ***The way of Jesus is not about going higher. It is about going lower.***

Review

-We are in the 3rd week of a series called ***A New Way of Living***. It is a study of Paul's letter to the Philippians. We have discovered that Paul wants to change our minds. ***If we change our minds, we will change how we live.*** Paul wants us to see ourselves as God sees us – ***saints, holy ones, set apart and called out to a new way of living.***

Last week we explored Paul's central challenge of the letter – ***that we would live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel.*** What is the ***gospel***? The gospel means ***good announcement.*** The gospel is ***the announcement of God's reign and restoration in King Jesus.*** Jesus sits on the throne right now. His death and resurrection were his inauguration. ***His death and resurrection offer restoration for anyone and everyone who looks to Him for life.***

But the gospel is about way more than just my salvation and your salvation. The gospel is ***God's reign and restoration of the entire world.*** Paul wants us to live as ***gospel citizens.*** He wants us to have the mindset of people who serve a King who is in the midst of making all things right.

-This week we are going to look at one of the most well-known passages in Philippians. In this passage, Paul will describe more about what our mindset should look like. It is the ***mindset of Jesus. It is a mindset that is not about ascending greatness. It is about descending greatness. It is not about going higher. It is about going lower.***

-We are recommending everyone purchase a copy of Dr. Nijay Gupta's little book ***Reading Philippians*** to help deepen our experience in studying Paul's letter. I convinced Nijay to preach in a few weeks, so you will get a chance to learn from a brilliant NT scholar.

Before we dive into the passage we read earlier, let's consider the first four verses that preceded it in Philippians 2:1-4.

Philippians 2:1-4

-Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Color Commentary

Verses 1-4

-Paul's first word in chapter two is *therefore*. This points the reader back to the passage we explored last week. One of the qualities of a ***gospel citizen*** is, to use Paul's words to ***stand firm in one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.*** If we are operating as gospel citizens, we will stand firm as one like those Roman military formations – we don't break ranks. We know from later in the letter that there was some dissension in the church. Paul is encouraging them to stay united. He says that *his joy will be complete to hear the Philippians are like-minded and are one in spirit and mind.*

How are they to achieve this like-mindedness in a world that is coming apart? He tells them. He tells us.

-Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Selfish ambition is the type of mindset that will bring division and not unity. I like the way Nijay translates verse 3: ***“reject any temptation to live according to point-scoring, rivalry or self-glorification, empty of substance.”*** We can only find this phrase for *selfish ambition* one other place in ancient writings. Aristotle uses it to refer to a *greedy attempt to gain the upper hand*. It is a ***mindset that seeks to go higher at the expense of others.*** It is the way of the world and the

way of our hearts. Paul calls them to a new way of living. Paul calls them to lives of humility. **Instead of seeking to go higher at the expense of others, Paul calls them to go lower so others can be lifted up.** Instead of getting ahead at the expense of others Paul wants them to let others go ahead even at personal expense. **Once again, he is flipping the script and asking them to think differently so they can live differently.** If they have a world mindset marked by selfish ambition it will cause division and dissension. He wants them to have a new mindset, the mindset of Jesus.

Verses 5-11

-Paul says as much: *in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset of Christ Jesus.* The word **mindset** means to **think like this among yourselves.** *Paul wants to change our minds. He wants us to think like Jesus. He wants us to think like Jesus so we will live like Jesus.*

-**Verses 6-11** have been hotly debated by scholars and theologians since the early church fathers. They appear to be a **hymn of some sort.** This section is often referred to as the **Christ Hymn.** I call it the **Jesus Song.** The primary question: **Was it original to Paul or was Paul quoting a poem or hymn that came before him?**

Paul likely wrote Philippians around A.D. 62. We now know that the earliest followers of Jesus passed along stories and sayings of Jesus in oral form until they were written down. This was a common way of remembering in their time. We are fairly confident that followers of Jesus memorized creeds to help them remember the core components of their faith. We can see one of those creeds in 1 Corinthians 15. Most scholars believe that this creed was dated within a few years of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

While Paul was certainly capable of crafting his own original Jesus song, I think it is more likely he was quoting an older Jesus song, or revising an older Jesus song to fit the purposes of his letter. In this Jesus song, Paul is revealing the mindset and lifestyle that he wants the Philippians, and that he wants us, to model. **He does it by giving painting a brief picture of Jesus descending to greatness.**

-Paul tells us that **Jesus, who was God in the flesh, did not consider being God in the flesh something to be used to his own advantage.** Jesus was the Almighty God, maker of Heaven and Earth. **Jesus had all the power in the universe at His disposal. What did He do with this power? Jesus didn't use His power for His own advantage.** Nijay translates this verse as, **"he did not cling to his divine status with a tight fist."** Essentially Paul is telling us that Jesus didn't use his power to exploit others even though he could have done so.

So many people with power use it for their own benefit to exploit others. Not God. God put on flesh to serve us. **The essence of divine power is that it is given away for the good of others.** Jesus put on flesh to become a servant. Paul says Jesus **made himself nothing.** **This does not mean Jesus gave up His divinity. It's that His divinity caused Him to become nothing.** The Greek word for **made himself nothing** literally means Jesus **emptied Himself.** This word is used 4 others times. **It never means to pour out the contents of something, but to nullify, or to make something of no account.**

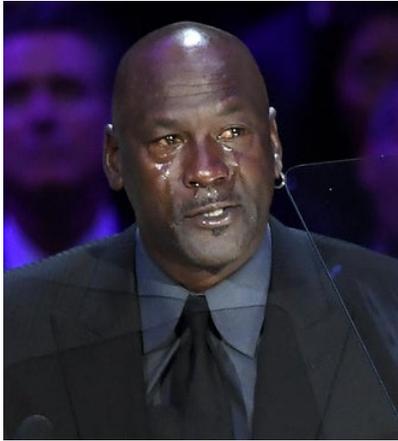
Recently **Prince Harry and his wife Duchess Meghan** decided to give up their royal titles and the benefits that come with those titles. They wanted to live normal lives. They still are who they are but they have set aside all the royal titles and benefits. This is similar to what Paul is telling us about Jesus.



-Then Paul tells us about the journey of Jesus. This is the same journey we are invited to participate in. God the Son descended from the height of glory and power to put on flesh and become human. **Then Jesus, God the Son in the flesh, humbled Himself and descended to the lowest depths of humanity – death on a cross.** Crucifixion was reserved for the lowliest of criminals. It was depths of shame and dishonor. **Jesus humbly chose not to go higher and higher, but to go lower and lower.**

But then **God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave Jesus the name above every name.** Paul promises that one day, every knee in heaven and on earth will bend the knee to Jesus and acknowledge that He is Lord. Paul, or whoever wrote the Jesus song, is quoting the prophet Isaiah here. *Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.* ²³ *By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.* ²⁴ *They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.* (Isaiah 45:23-24a) **Jesus lowered Himself from the highest rung to the lowest rung. Jesus chose to lower Himself. As He did so, God exalted Him. This is not only a pattern we are meant to follow – it is a promise of what will happen.**

-There was global mourning with Kobe Bryant passed away unexpectedly earlier this year. I watched some of his memorial. It was a star-studded event. **The highlight was when Michael Jordan spoke.**



Michael Jordan is generally regarded as the greatest basketball player that ever lived. Kobe grew up idolizing Jordan. He patterned his game after Jordan. He wanted to be the next Jordan. He came pretty close. Michael is not known for his softness or tenderness and yet he shared about Kobe with tears streaming down his face. He joked that he made the mistake of giving young Kobe his cell phone number. He said that Kobe was pretty much the only person on earth that would call Michael at all hours grilling him for information on how he could improve as a basketball player, how he could be more like Mike. Kobe would take detailed notes on Jordan's footwork, where he held the ball, what he did with his head. **Kobe was seeking to imitate Jordan because Jordan was the greatest to ever play the game.**

-In the same way Paul wants us to model our thinking and our actions after Jesus. Paul wants us to imitate Jesus. Paul has already told us we are in Christ, that Jesus is the source of our identity, the reason we are made right with God. Now Paul wants us to live like Jesus, to pattern our lives after his life. He wants us to have the mindset of Jesus. **Why? Because Jesus showed us exactly how we are meant to live in a world that is not yet restored.** Jesus lived the perfect life. We won't live perfect lives – far from it – but we can pattern our imperfect lives after the One who lived perfectly.

-Our world and our hearts tell us that to succeed we need to go higher and higher. But the way of Jesus is not about ascending greatness. It is about descending greatness. The way of Jesus is not about going higher and higher. The way of Jesus is about going lower and lower. Paul sums up this with one word – **humility.** He uses it twice in our passage. **Let's talk about humility.**

Thinking Differently About Humility

A new virtue

-Humility was not an ancient virtue. Thinkers like Aristotle and Plato did not promote humility. In the ancient Near East, honor was the highest virtue and shame was the greatest fear. The ancient Greeks had a collection of 147 maxims called *The Delphic Canon*. It was the sum and substance of their ethical life. Humility is never mentioned. To lower yourself especially for someone of inferior status was unheard of and despised.

The Romans did not believe that all people were created equal. They believed that life was like a big ladder. The goal in life was to climb to higher rungs of the ladder. They believed it was fine to knock people off the ladder on the way up.

Not much has changed. **The path of humility is still the path less traveled.** This is why the way of Jesus was so unique, so remarkable, and so ridiculed. **Humility essentially originated with Jesus.** Jesus described himself as someone who was *gentle and humble in heart*. His listeners would not have initially found that to be a noble definition in a world where everyone was seeking to go higher.

-Let's attempt to define humility because I think we have some misconceptions about the concept. We have to think differently about humility. Let's begin to discussing what humility is not.

What Humility is Not

-Humility is not low self-esteem or a low sense of self. To have a low sense of self is to disagree with God, who made us in his image and calls us Beloved. Jesus is our example of humility, and He deeply believed that He was beloved and that God was well pleased with Him.

We all struggle with low self-esteem at times. Humility is not thinking lower of ourselves. In fact, to seek humility we must have a solid sense of who we are in Jesus. As someone famously said, **true humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.**

-Humility is not humiliation. Humiliation is an experience of deep shame caused by something that has happened to us. Humility is a choice that flows from a confidence in who God is and who God has called us to be.

-Humility is not false humility. We all know what this looks like. It is when we are operating in our God-given strengths and someone compliments us, and we say, "It wasn't very good", or, "I am not very good", when we know that it was good. We aren't fooling anyone. People can sniff out false humility. **False humility is just another form of pride.** We know we are good at something or did well at something but we don't want to admit it so we can appear to be humble so people will think even better of us. When someone compliments you just say, "thanks", because, in the end, everything we are and do is a gift. Don't deny it. That isn't humility.

-Humility is not having no ambitions. Paul is warning us against selfish ambitions. He is not warning us against properly aligned ambitions. People with no aspirations aren't humble. Maybe they are lazy or gripped by fear. Humble people aren't lacking ambition. Humble people have ambitions that are about serving God and others. The great missionary William Carey once said, **Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.**

-Finally, **humility is not putting up with abuse.** Humility is not being a doormat for someone else. If someone is verbally, emotionally, or physically abusing you, that is not o.k. **To allow that abuse is not humility.** To allow that abuse is not loving to yourself or to the person abusing you. Please reach out to us at New Hope if you are in abusive situation and don't know what to do. We can help.

To say nothing is not humility.

So, now that we know what humility is not. What is humility?

What Humility Is

-As you parents might know, our **New Hope Kids Community** has been studying the virtue of humility this month. LeRoy and our Kids Community team have done a wonderful job producing super high-quality videos each week and making a ton of resources available to families. Each Sunday after we participate in our Facebook Live service, my wife and I watch these videos with our daughter Jubilee. If you haven't been participating I encourage you to do so. You can access the videos and sign up for the emails by going to newhopepdx.org, scrolling down and clicking on Kids Online Community. This month our kids have been memorizing Philippians 2:3 – *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.*



Our Kids Community has been defining **humility** as: **putting others first by giving up what you think you deserve.** I think that's a great definition that mirrors how Paul defines it. But we can simplify it even more.

-In Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the word used to describe humility simply means *low*, as in *low to the ground*. Essentially it means to *go low*. **Humility is the choice to go lower and put the interests of others**

ahead of your own interests. As we seek to follow Jesus and model our lives after His life, we are meant to answer the question: *how low can you go?*

-Our world and our hearts tell us that to succeed we need to go higher and higher. But the way of Jesus is not about ascending greatness. The way of Jesus is about descending greatness. The way of Jesus is not about higher and higher. The way of Jesus is about going lower and lower. How low can you go? Jesus flips everything upside down. In this upside-down world we must think differently. There is a key principle that governs this upside-down world. It is found in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5.

Upside Down

God opposes the proud

-Both James and Peter quote Proverbs 11:2 when they declare this essential upside-down world principle: **God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.** (Proverbs 11:2, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5)

It is noteworthy that both James and Peter quote this verse. It verifies that is a key principle for living.

-**God opposes the proud.** God hates pride. Proverbs is a book on how to live wisely or skillfully. In Proverbs 6 the writer lists 7 things God can't stand. Would you like to guess what is #1 on the list? *Haughty or prideful eyes.* This is a major theme in the book of Proverbs. We are told that the *LORD detests the proud of heart and will tear down the houses of the proud.* Near the end of Proverbs, we are told *there is more hope for a fool than for a prideful person.* Why does God hate pride so much? Because pride is the root of all sin. Pride leads to every other sin. C.S. Lewis wrote that *pride was the complete anti-God state of mind.*

-What is pride? **Pride is the opposite of humility.** The Hebrew word for *haughty* literally means *high of heart.* If humility is going lower. Pride is going higher. Pride is going higher so we can look down on someone else. God hates this. It is the very opposite of how we are meant to live. It is the very opposite of how Jesus modeled for us to live.

-Corrie and I just celebrated our 20th anniversary. Much of those 20 years is a blur and the edges get worn off a lot of the memories. But we also have distinct memories that we look back on with clarity. One of those memories involved a pastry. I call it the *pastry incident.* Three or four days into our honeymoon, we were headed up to Lake Superior where we were planning to board a boat that would take us to an island where we would backpack for a week. On the way up north, we stopped for lunch at a quaint little coffee shop. We got some caffeinated beverages and a large homemade pastry to share.

As we drove, we talked and laughed, drank coffee, and ate the pastry. We handed it back and forth, each taking bites in a very equitable fashion. Then came this pivotal moment. I was holding the pastry. It was delicious. We were almost done with it. I took a bite and there was still a little left. I looked at the pastry, I looked at Corrie, I looked back at the pastry, I looked back at Corrie. I could swear she wasn't watching. **And then I ate the last bite.** It was so delicious. Then about 30 seconds passed and Corrie looked at me and said, *"I saw that."* At that moment, I discovered she had eyes in the front, back and side of her head. She said at that moment, she knew she had her work cut out for her. **That is an illustration of pride. I put my own desires in front of her desires. Instead of going lower I went higher.**

-**God hates that.** It is not how we are meant to live and do life together. It is not how Jesus modeled for us to live. James, Peter, and Proverbs tell us that God opposes the proud. We are tempted to go high. When we are tempted to eat the last bite of pastry we should ask ourselves – **do we want God opposing us?**

God gives grace to the humble

-**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** We don't want God opposes us but we certainly want God's grace. Raise your hand if you need some grace from God? If we want God's grace we will seek humility. We won't go high we will go low.

-The principle is that if we go high and elevate ourselves, God will lower us. But if we seek humility and go low God will lift us up. That's exactly what James and Peter tell us. **If we humble ourselves, God will lift us up.** That sounds way better than God opposing us.

-Our world and our hearts tell us that to succeed we need to go higher and higher. But the way of Jesus is not about *ascending* greatness. The way of Jesus is about *descending* greatness. The way of Jesus is not about higher and higher. The way of Jesus is about going lower and lower. How low can you go?

How low can you go?

-Have you ever done the limbo? Music starts to play and everyone gets in the limbo line. The goal is to go low so you can get under a bar. If you can't get low enough and get under the bar then you get eliminated. *Shemika Charles* calls herself the *limbo queen*. She has earned that name. Here is a picture of Shemika doing the limbo under a vehicle. I can't even fathom getting that low. It must have taken years of training and stretching to get to be able to get that low.



That is the mentality Paul wants the Philippians to have. That is the mindset he wants us to have. The mindset of Jesus which is continually asking – how low can I go? That mindset changes how we live. It leads to a new way of living – a life of humility, a life of going lower so that God can lift us up.

-We see this mindset constantly in Jesus' teaching and ministry. Jesus tells that parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector who were praying. The Pharisee thanked God that he was better than others. He thought highly of himself. The tax collector prayed, "God, have mercy on me a sinner." Then Jesus declares, ***For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*** (Luke 18:14)

Then there is the story of Jesus being invited to a very important dinner with very important people. In those days where you sat indicated how important you were. Jesus gave the dinner party this advice – *when you are invited to dinner – take the lowest place and then he repeats the line – those exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

Then we have the disciples who so mirror our broken hearts. What was their most frequent argument? "Who is the greatest?" We see it constantly in the gospels. **They had this argument after the Last Supper right after Jesus had washed their feet.** Jesus tells them again and again – the way of the world is to go higher and higher, my way is to go lower and lower. If you go high God will lower you, if you go low, God will lift you up.

-Numerous times this week and in the weeks to come, we will be confronted with a collision of competing interests. Someone wants to watch something on Netflix and someone else wants to watch something else. A chore needs to be done and no one wants to do it. You are down to the last banana or the last bite of pastry. **When competing interests collide – will you go high or will you go low? How low can we go?**

-Let's pray.

Closing: Glory in the Lowest

-British author and thinker G.K. Chesterton once wrote a poem about Jesus. He included a brilliant line. We are familiar with the idea of ***glory to God in the highest.*** Chesterton wrote, "***...glory to God in the lowest.***"

-3 times in John's gospel we are told that Jesus will one day be lifted up. The irony is that John was referring to Jesus on the cross. The cross was Jesus' lowest point – but it was also His highest point. Jesus lowered Himself to the point of death on our behalf. In lowering Himself, He redeemed the world. In lowering Himself, He was lifted up. May we live like Jesus. Glory to God in the lowest.

Benediction

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.