Part 9: The Model of Humility

Philippians 2:1-11

In our everyday relationships, we are called to imitate the humble, selfless, sacrificial love of Jesus to will the good of others.

I. Echoes of Jesus

There is a practice in the Marine Corps where junior enlisted personnel eat first while senior officers eat last – the purpose is to embody the truth that real leaders sacrifice their own comfort and safety for the welfare of their people.

EX. *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek: This Marine Corps practice is the inspiration for Simin Sinek's book to business leaders. His message = power, privilege and authority are to be used in humble love and service of others. This sounds like it could have come from the lips of Jesus.

What may be a newly discovered mindset or ethic for some in our culture is actually the ancient wisdom of the God revealed in Jesus Christ and embodied, however imperfectly, in those who call Jesus "Lord."

This is now the third week we have camped out in Philippians 2:1-11. Two weeks ago, we looked at the grace of humility in 2:1-4. What is humility and how do we grow in the grace of humility. Last week we looked at 2:5-11 and the mind-blowing reality that God has revealed himself in the crucified Christ.

We are called to imitate Jesus' humility and service as we seek the good of others.

Today, I want to try to help us identify the ways we may embody this call and ethic. I want to focus on three areas of our lives: church, family, and our work.

Let's start with the specific command that Paul gives us and try to wrestle with what Paul is saying and is not saying. This will include a brief review of what I said two weeks ago about humility.

Note: This sermon is sort of a staff sermon, because I asked the staff for help in thinking through the application of this call from Paul.

II. The Call to Imitate Christ

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,

but in humility

value others better than yourselves.

Each of you should not only look to your own interests,

but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude (mindset) should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 2:3-5

Do not live your life marked by these two sinful characteristics. Selfish ambition is the desire to succeed at the expense of others and apart from surrender to God's will and glory. Vain conceit is an exaltation of oneself in the pursuit of personal prestige and power. It's the opposite of humility.

Paul is not saying that we should falsely consider others better than ourselves. Paul assumes that human nature will seek its own self-interests. As Martin Luther said of fallen humanity – "man is curved in on himself."

Paul wants us to take the same level of concern that we have for ourselves and apply it to others. This is another way of saying Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

True humility does not mean that we think of ourselves as inferior to others. It does not mean that we let others abuse us. True love of self and others includes healthy boundaries (See "Boundaries" by Cloud & Townsend; talk to Bryn St. Cyr for a helpful metaphor).

Humility is seeing God and ourselves in the true light of God's Word. Humility requires that we accept our status before our Creator and Savior as both inherently valued, loved, and as sinners in need of the redeeming grace of God in Christ (marred masterpieces in need of restoration).

Humility is an honest acceptance of who God says we are; what He has given to us; and what He has not given to us. False humility denies these realities and may manifest itself in co-dependent behavior.

“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.” John 13:3-4

Back to our primary verses:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,

but in humility

value others better than yourselves.

Each of you should not only look to your own interests,

but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude [mindset] should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 2:3-5

“We are called to give up our selfish ambitions, self-importance, and self-centeredness and give ourselves to downward mobility, humble service, and unselfish love.” – Nicky Gumbel, A Life Worth Living

III. Nurturing & Protecting Relationships Through Devoted Love

A. The Church

If you are seeking to live in a covenant community of Jesus disciples – a local church – you will inevitably face relational disappointment, maybe some level of offense and sin against you.

Our culture has so thinned out relationships that we are tempted to respond in any number of ways … let the relational hurt fester, let our hearts grow cold or indifferent towards the person, withdraw from the person, and maybe even leave the small group, ministry team, or even the church.

Paul is telling the church how to deal with conflict, and he’s calling the community to help those in conflict work through it. Have the same mindset as Jesus … be humble, take the initiative to repair, seek to understand, speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Ex. Sydney Carrol story of college friend speaking the truth in love.

“Humility that nurtures and protects relationships requires vulnerability and a refusal to judge.” – Jasona Brown

By refusing to judge, we mean the willingness to forgive one another. See practice of forgiveness.

Ex. I.O.U. (relinquish the debt owed).

B. Family

Paul gives us specific counsel for our family relationships – marriage and parenting (Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4). It is essentially applying our scripture today to those relationships.

One of the risks in our marriages is that we will allow disappointment, offenses, and sin to be a wet blanket over our hearts that causes our love to grow cold. We will start keeping score turning our covenant of love into a contract for happiness.

We slowly lose our willingness to be kind and compassionate with one another. We can even allow contempt for the other to take root in our hearts.

The way of Jesus is the way of healing … humbling ourselves before one another, speaking the truth in love, forgiving one another, serving one another. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us offer our spouses the same love, tenderness, and compassion that we have received from the Lord (2:1).

C. Work

Guard your heart against selfish ambition and vain conceit. Consider your work as a field of ministry not just a source of income or career advancement. View your work as an opportunity to humbly serve love those you work with (think of *Leaders Eat Last*).

"To this John replied, 'A man can only receive what is given him from heaven.'" John 3:27

IV. King Jesus Our Model

Our communities are bound by a fabric of trust that each of us will keep our call to nurture and protect the relational bonds we have in Christ. This is the explicit call to every follower of Jesus.

Ex. Shroud of Turin: I offer this as a visual of the "fabric of trust" we are called to nurture and protect in our relations with one another.

Paul says: "let this same mindset be in you as that of King Jesus" (2:5).

Earlier he said: "conduct yourselves in a manner of the gospel of Christ …" (1:27).

I said last week that this is a truth that can melt our hearts into joyful obedience. May it be so for our good and the honor of our crucified King.

Recommended Practices:

1. Resilience: Devoted Love in a Culture of Disconnection
2. Forgiveness

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Philippians 2:1-11 out loud. Clearly Paul is calling us to imitate Christ's humility and sacrificial love. Is this a new teaching for you?

2. Look more closely at 2:3-5. Did the sermon help you understand these verses? Was anything helpful? Did it raise questions for you?
3. How does this ethic differ from the way our culture views relationships and power?
4. Have you attempted to live this ethic in your relationships? What has been your experience?
5. Which of the three spheres or relationships – church, family, or work – do you find this ethic the most challenging to embody? Why?
6. Every covenantal relationship has a “fabric of trust” that binds us to seek one another’s welfare. How does ethic challenge or encourage you to nurture and protect the fabric of trust?
7. How can the group pray for you to embody this ethic more faithfully?