



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

St. Paul's Weekly Toolkit

LifeGroup Study

Daily devotionals for the week following November 17, 2024
Micah 6:8; Philippians 2:1-13

Community

THEME:

God’s sacrificial command is that we live in humble obedience, walking humbly with our God. Paul, using Jesus as an example, calls us to servanthood. It begins with a consistent relationship with God through the Holy Spirit (2:1), who will then create in us a humble spirit (2:2-4). This becomes real in our obedient service to others (2:6-8). This sacrificial command points us toward sacrifice for the sake of what matters to God in the world. How might this affect how we spend money and how we prepare for the Christmas season?

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

In order to walk humbly with our God, there are at least three steps we can take: confession, submission and secret service.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

Live into the holiday season with the characteristics of humility guiding our gift-giving, our spending, and our overall stewardship.

INTRODUCTION PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13

In Philippians 1, Paul focuses on the conflict that the Philippians face with those who deny the gospel. Paul, writing from prison, is facing a similar conflict (1:29). Paul wants these young Christians to examine their life together, and, modeling their life together on Christ’s example, live in unity. Unity would be the best defense against those who attack the church from the outside.

Paul begins his appeal by connecting to the Philippians’ experience. The real thrust of verse 1 is “since,” not “if.” Since the Philippians have experienced encouragement in Christ, Since the Philippians are constrained by the unconditional love of God in Christ, Since the Holy Spirit is active in their lives, Since the Philippians have experienced tenderness and compassion as fruit of the Spirit’s work in their lives, Since all of these things are true, Paul urges the Philippians to live in unity. Paul is not calling for uniformity, everyone believing and acting in exactly the same way. Instead, he is calling for a kind of community harmony in which different “notes” still blend to create the same symphony of mission and ministry. This unity would only be possible if the Philippians lived out of a deep humility.

ICEBREAKER

What is your definition of humility? Who is the most humble person you know?

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, we know that if we want to be a people who do justice and love kindness, we will need to become people who walk humbly with you each day. Help us to lay our lives before you in confession. Lead us into daily submission to your will that changes our hearts and transforms our minds. Guide us into sacrificial service directed toward the needs of others in your name. Amen.

Content

The word “humble” and its variant forms come from the Latin word “humus,” which means soil, or dirt. This root helps inform the tension, or paradox, of humility. On the one hand we are reminded, as we are on Ash Wednesday, that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. On the other hand, we are dust that has been formed by the hand of God, breathed into life, and made the crown of God’s creation. So Paul’s call to humility reminds us that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, or less of ourselves than we ought. Humility, then, finds its expression in the following ways, according to Paul:

- Our motivations for action or decisions should not be self-centered;
- We are to regard others more highly than ourselves, a fitting attitude for servant leaders;
- We must balance self-interest and the interests of others.

Paul then affirms that humility is first and foremost an attitude, a mindset, and one that we can choose as we focus on the model of Christ. In other places (for example, Romans 12:2 and Galatians 5:22ff), Paul also affirms that this mindset is a matter of God’s transforming grace and the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives.

To illustrate genuine humility, and to point to the power that grows humility in us, Paul paints a picture of Jesus. (*Read Philippians 2:1-13.*)

DISCUSSION Did you notice the movement from selfishness to humility in the text? How is Jesus both our model and our power for this kind of transformation? What role does the Holy Spirit play in this transformation?

Despite the fact that Jesus is God, Jesus does not cling to his divinity. Instead he “empties himself.” Scholars debate as to what, exactly, Jesus empties himself of. Possibilities include:

- he empties himself of his divine preincarnate glory;
- he gives up the rights and authority of his deity;
- he relinquishes the independent use of his power and authority;
- he limits the use of some of his attributes of deity: omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence.

Jesus' example of humility focuses not just on what he is willing to give up, but also what he is willing to embrace:

- the restrictions of humanity, including temptation;
- the attitude of a slave, living to serve others;
- complete obedience to the point of death on a cross.

God honors Jesus' humility by highly exalting him, so that all people will know that he is Lord of all and worship him as such. We, too, will be highly exalted because we are one with Christ and will one day share in his rule and reign.

DISCUSSION What do you think Jesus empties himself of? How do you think we can empty ourselves and embrace humility?

GOING DEEPER:

3 STEPS ON THE JOURNEY TO HUMILITY

The first step on the journey toward humility is confession. God invites us to kneel down and spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to show us who we really are, and get honest with God about our self-centeredness. We can spend time reflecting on today's Scripture reading and allow God to speak deeply into our lives through the example of Jesus. We're invited to lay it all out before God, and let God forgive us and give us a fresh start.

DISCUSSION Why do you think confession is a good first step on this journey? What are some of the things we need to confess in order to take the next step?

Here's a second step in the journey: submission. We pray and ask God for the Spirit's power to set us free from ourselves. The good news is that Jesus isn't just the model for humility. His Spirit is also the power for change. This is a daily process of kneeling – at least metaphorically, if not physically – before God, asking God to do in us what we cannot do for ourselves: change our hearts and transform our minds.

DISCUSSION Why do we resist having our hearts and minds changed? Give an example of what submission might look like.

That leads to the third step in the journey: secret service. Richard Foster, in his book *In Celebration of Discipline*, suggests that the most powerful discipline for growing in humility is to serve others without letting anyone know what you're doing. Nothing starves our over-inflated egos like secret service. Sacrificially serve someone's needs or give someone what they need, but don't let anyone know what you've done. And when your ego cries out for attention, recognition and adulation, starve it to death!

DISCUSSION What are some ways that our egos cry out for attention? Have you ever served someone else secretly? What was your experience?

Application

NOW WHAT?

This week, plan one act of secret service, and then report back to the group next week.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you have given us Jesus, who is our model and power for a life of humble service. We know that we are not able to cleanse ourselves from sin or serve you on our own. Our pride gets in the way of humility. Our self-interest gets in the way of serving the interests of others. Our independence gets in the way of trusting you for all things. By the power of your Holy Spirit, create in us a heart that is renewed and willing to serve you and others. Help us to put our personal agendas aside, empty ourselves of ourselves, and count others more important than ourselves. Amen.

Philippians 2:1-13 NLT Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? (2) Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. (3) Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. (4) Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (5) You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (6) Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. (7) Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, (8) he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (9) Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (12) Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. (13) For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.



Daily Walk on the Rock

Daily devotionals for the week following November 17, 2024

Monday: *Unity*

Daily reading: Philippians 1:27-30; Genesis 11:1-6

In Philippians 1, Paul focuses on the conflict that the Philippians face with those who deny the gospel. Paul, writing from prison, is facing a similar conflict (1:29). Paul is concerned that these young Christians examine their life together and, modeling their life together on Christ's example, live in unity. Unity is the best defense against those who attack the church from the outside. Paul is not calling for uniformity, everyone believing and acting in exactly the same way. This unity is only possible if the Philippians live out of a deep humility. In Genesis, we see a picture of the first kind of unity on earth; one language and one people. Since that chapter was written, much has been shattered in our world. In your life today, are there places where unity is not present? In your prayers, ask God to more deeply connect you with those people in your life.

Tuesday: *Humility*

Daily reading: Micah 6:8; Philippians 2:8-11

The word “humble” comes from the Latin word “humus,” which means soil or dirt. This root helps inform the tension, or paradox, of humility. On one hand, we are reminded, as we are on Ash Wednesday, that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. On the other hand, we are dust that has been formed by the hand of God, breathed into life and made the crown of God's creation. Paul's call to humility reminds us that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, or less of ourselves than we ought. Humility finds its expression in actions that are not self-centered; actions that regard others as more important than ourselves. We must balance self-interest and the interests of others. This is modeled by Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit accomplishes this work in our lives. Where do you need more humility? Ask God to show you where humility is needed in your life, and to transform your heart and mind by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday: *Mindset*

Daily reading: Romans 12:2; Philippians 2:5-7

Paul affirms that humility is first an attitude, a mindset that we can choose as we focus on the model of Christ. Paul also affirms that this mindset is a matter of God's transforming grace and the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives (Romans 12:2; Galatians 5:22ff). To illustrate genuine humility, and to point to the power that grows humility in us, Paul paints a picture of Jesus. He says “have this mind among yourselves.” The mindset he points to is one of servanthood and humility, the mindset best demonstrated by Jesus Christ. What's your mindset? Ask God to make you more aware of your mindset and more willing to be “transformed.”

Thursday: *Hoops*

Daily reading: Micah 6:6-7; Matthew 23:13-15

Micah 6:8 calls us to lives of sacrifice. Many of us would like to know exactly what that sacrifice is and put it on our to-do list, so

that we can satisfy the requirement, check it off, and move on with “our” lives. But Micah 6:6-7 makes it clear that jumping through hoops and merely fulfilling requirements is not what God has in mind. Rigid, external obedience which left the heart unchanged was not God's desire back in Micah's day, nor was it God's desire in Jesus' day. On Thanksgiving Day, and most of us will eat a big meal and give thanks for the blessings of life. Do you ever feel like you are jumping through religious hoops and fulfilling requirements? Ask God to change your heart and take away what might be rigid rule-keeping in your life, and replace it with a heart filled with thanksgiving.

Friday: *Confession*

Daily reading: Leviticus 5:5-6; 1 John 1:8-10

The first step on the journey toward humility is confession. God invites us to kneel down and spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to show us who we really are, and get honest with God about our self-centeredness. We can spend time reflecting on today's Scripture reading and allow God to speak deeply into our lives through the example of Jesus. We're invited to lay it all out before God, and let God forgive us and give us a fresh start. We practice confession each week as we worship together. The next time you worship in a public setting, notice the language of the confession and think about why it's important for you. What do you need to confess today? In your prayers, make your confession to God.

Saturday: *Submission*

Daily reading: Micah 6:8 again; James 4:4-10

The second step in our journey toward humility is submission. We pray and ask God for the Spirit's power to set us free from ourselves. The good news is that Jesus isn't just the model for humility. His Spirit is also the power for change. This is a daily process of kneeling – at least metaphorically, if not physically – before God, asking God to do in us what we cannot do for ourselves: change our hearts and transform our minds. The text from James invites us to “humble ourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

This comes directly from the pattern of Jesus who humbled himself on a cross. What in your heart and mind needs transformation? Go to your knees and ask God to transform those things that need changing, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sunday: *Secret Service*

Daily reading: Isaiah 41:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

The third step on our journey toward humility is secret service. Richard Foster, in his book *In Celebration of Discipline*, suggests that the most powerful discipline for growing in humility is to serve others without letting anyone know what you're doing. Nothing starves our over-inflated egos like secret service. Sacrificially serve someone's needs, but don't let anyone know. When your ego cries out for attention, recognition and adulation, starve it to death! Today, secretly serve someone and see what happens in your soul. Ask God to lead you to the perfect person who needs serving today.