

Study 05

“CommUnity through Humility”

Philippians 2:1-4



Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Philippians 2:1-4 (ideally in a few different translations) and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

Beginning the Conversation

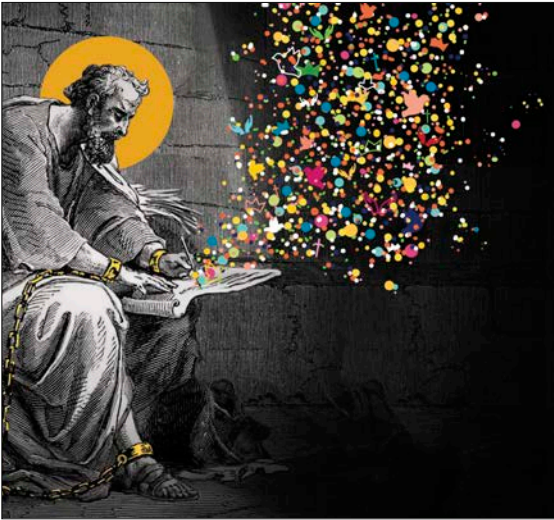
1. Has there been a time when someone put your needs/interests above theirs? Describe the situation. What effect did that have on you?
2. What kind of comfort do you find in having a shared life with others in Christ? What aspects of living a Christian life together brings you comfort and/or joy?

Digging Deeper

1. Paul begins this section by appealing to the deepest experiences of the Triune God common to every Christ follower, including the selfless love of God, being “in Christ”, and being united by the Holy Spirit (2:1). How do you understand God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – working together in us to foster community? What are their different roles? How have you experienced any of what Paul describes?
2. One of the first ways Paul says they can “complete his joy” is by having the same “considered disposition” (or mindset or being like-minded). Paul isn’t saying we have to be identical in all things, but that we need to display a common posture of how we think and act towards each other. How do you understand the difference between unity and uniformity in the church?
3. The way that Paul understands this unified “considered disposition” as being lived out in their community of faith is by always acting out of humility. How is humility un-Roman (and even un-Canadian)? How would you define humility? How does Paul describe humility in 2:3-4? (you may want to look up these other occurrences: Phil 2:3; Acts 20:19; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; 1Peter 5:5).
4. In contrast to a humble disposition, Paul describes “selfishness” or “selfish ambition” (see 1:17; cf. Rom 2:8; 2Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20) and having an “exaggerated self-evaluation” (“arrogance” or “vain conceit”) as destroyers of community and relationships. Do you have any experiences where you saw the negative impact of selfishness or arrogance in a church community? How do you think we can create a church culture where humility is the standard?

Living it Out

1. Paul calls us to the high standard of having a humble disposition and looking out for the interests of others above your own interests (2:4). What practical steps can you take to try to think of others before yourself? How do you balance caring for yourself in healthy ways with also living a life of service to others?
2. How does acting out of humility or having a humble disposition help when dealing with differences or disagreements in the church? Do you have any personal experiences you can draw on?
3. We constantly need God’s help to foster a posture of humility in our lives. A good spiritual discipline to build into our lives is to write a prayer asking for humility and make it a part of your daily prayer routine.



CommUnity through Humility

Philippians 2:1-4

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CommUnity through Humility

The KEY to living as “worthy citizens of the gospel” is to live out a vibrant, faith-filled, life together as brothers and sisters in Christ ...

And maintaining the unity we already have in Christ by being of the same *considered disposition* or mindset, and loving one another with *humility* as our fundamental posture to others.

CommUnity through Humility

Paul sandwiches this call to unity at the beginning and end with the basis of our unity:

- The common **experience** that all Christ followers have of the love of the Triune God (2:1); and
- Theologically and ethically on the **example** of Jesus Christ himself (2:5-11).

Our Common Experience

“Therefore” (οὖν) connects it with 1:27-30.

Followed by four parallel clauses describe what **all** Christ followers experience.

- Despite beginning with an “if”, the Greek construction is a positive statement that they have indeed experienced all of these things.

Our Common Experience

¹Therefore,

If you have experienced any encouragement from being united with Christ (*as of course you have!*)

If you have experienced any comfort from God's selfless love (*as of course you have!*)

Our Common Experience

If you have experienced any joy of being in a community created by the Spirit (*as of course you have!*)

If you have experienced any compassion or mercy (*as of course you have!*)

Our Common Experience

Paul appeals to the deepest experiences of the Triune God common to every Christ follower:

- encouragement from being united with Jesus;
- experience of the *agape* love of God in our lives;
- common *koinonia* with the Holy Spirit,
- experiences of compassion or mercy.

Our Common Experience

"Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. This means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time and united for eternity" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21).

Our Common Practice

“Complete my joy by...” following a common practice characterized by two fundamentals:

1. Having the same considered disposition...
2. expressed by always acting out of humility.

Our Common Practice

²Complete my joy (in this way):

Have the same considered disposition;

 have the same selfless love; be entirely unified;
again, have one considered disposition.

Our Common Practice

³Do nothing out of selfishness or an elevated opinion of yourselves,

 but in humility regard one another as more important than yourselves.

⁴Do not look out for your own interests,

 but [also] look out for the interests of others.

1. The Same Disposition

“Have the same considered disposition” (φρονεω *phroneo*; 10x) - to develop a disposition or posture based on careful thought and consideration.

- “To have an attitude, to think in a particular manner” (Louw & Nida).
- “Displaying a common pattern of thinking and acting” (Stephen Fowl, *Philippians*, 81).

1. The Same Disposition

"In your relationships with one another, have *the same considered disposition* as Christ Jesus..." (2:5).

"I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to have *the same considered disposition* in the Lord" (4:2).

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you *the same considered disposition* toward each other that Christ Jesus had..." (Rom 15:5; 2Cor 13:11).

1. The Same Disposition

A basic inward attitude of mind and a fundamental disposition of the will that keeps in check our personal wants and desires for the sake of the gospel.

- Does NOT mean a drab uniformity of thought!
- But an overarching unity despite our diversity.

1. The Same Disposition

This considered disposition consists of

- "Having the same selfless love" (αγάπη *agape*; 2:2) for one another that they have already experienced from the Triune God (2:1).
- Being "entirely unified" (συμψυχος *sumpsychos*; 2:2) - lit. "soul-joined"; to act in harmony as if the same person.

2. Acting out of Humility

This "same considered disposition" is then described as always acting out of humility (2:3).

- Humility (ταπεινοφροσυνη *tapeinophrosune*)
 - "regarding one another as more important than yourselves" (2:3) or "looking out for the interests of others" (2:4).

2. Acting out of Humility

Negative: Do nothing out of selfishness or an elevated opinion of yourselves,

Positive: BUT: In humility regard one another as more important than yourselves.

Negative: Do not look out for your own interests,

Positive: BUT: Look out for the interests of others.

2. Acting out of Humility

Destroyers of Community and relationships:

- Selfishness (επιθεια *eritheia*) - self-seeking, selfish ambition, strife, contentiousness, rivalry (1:17; cf. Rom 2:8; 2Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20).
- Exaggerated self-evaluation (κενοδοξια *kenodoxia*) - vain conceit, excessive ambition.

2. Acting out of Humility

Humility: A Uniquely Christian Virtue

- Seen as a shortcoming in Greek & Roman thought (the mentality of a slave).
- Mocked by Nietzsche as a sign of weakness.
- Idea has its origins in the Old Testament.

2. Acting out of Humility

Humility has to do with having a proper and balanced estimation of oneself.

- It is supposed to characterize the ethos of the Christ's body, the church, and as such is key to maintaining unity.
- A disposition inspired by the very example of Jesus Christ (2:5-11).

Conclusions

We need God's help and forgiveness against our own sinful tendencies towards selfishness.

We need to unlearn our commitments to the radical individualism we are culturally formed by.

We need the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to maintain a common disposition and love one another with humility.