



April 26, 2020
Rev. Ellis White

Elevate Others: Humility

Philippians 2:1-8

Good morning! I'm so glad you're joining us this weekend. My name is Ellis White and I am the Pastor of Weekend Services here at Chapel Hill. And I have to start by saying how proud I have been of my team these last few weeks. When we began preparing to stream our services a year ago, we had no idea how timely it would be. Nevertheless, the last few weeks have been some of the hardest work we've all had to do in a long time.

So let me thank you for your patience as we've done everything we can to put together one weekend service every weekend. And I have heard from a lot of you, who previously attended our Classic 9:00 am worship service, that you are grateful for all the effort that is going into our services, but that you miss hearing and singing the old hymns. And I get it. There is just something about the songs you grew up with that connects with your heart.

The last few weeks we've really had to focus our energies on getting one worship service online, and that has taken a huge amount of effort. We chose to do a modern style-service because the majority of our congregation worships in that style and it is the style most likely to connect with people browsing online. But we feel like we're getting into the swing of things, and so I am really excited to let you know, that from next Sunday, in addition to this 10:00 am service, we will be streaming a 9:00 am classic style worship service in all the same places you are currently watching this service. I'm thankful for our team and their willingness to jump to the next level of commitment as this season of lockdown continues.

Humility

As hard as it has been, and it has been very hard, I have enjoyed a few things these last few weeks of lockdown. One of those has been the greater involvement I've been able to have in my kids' Sunday school teaching. And in the last few weeks, I've enjoyed using the resources that our awesome kids' team has been sending out to us all around this month's topic of humility.

Last week as we were taking a car ride just to try and get out of the house, I said to my kids, who are four and six, "Evelyn, Ezra, what is humility?" And immediately my four-year-old said, "Putting others first." Adorable, right? If only they knew how to do it.

It's so easy to recognize when people don't have humility right? I mean, we know it instantly. Like this guy. Or the driver of the open-top red sports car I was behind last week on our drive who had this license plate. I'm not even making that up. It was like sermon illustration manna dropping from heaven. We all know what humility doesn't look like. But what does it look like?

Last week, Pastor Mark kicked off this new series we're calling Elevate Others. It is based around the second part of our new mission statement, which is "exalt Jesus, elevate others, and launch disciple-makers. We believe that there is no time like the present to be focused on elevating others, and so we are taking the next 7 weeks to talk about what that looks like in a variety of different ways.

Last week Pastor Mark kicked us off by talking about the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This week, we're going to be talking about humility. A huge part of the motivation for using that phrase "Elevate Others" in our mission statement came from this idea of humility, and in particular the passage from the Bible we are going to look at today. And parents, you might be familiar with this passage, because it's been our kids memory verse this month!

One of the early church leaders, Paul, wrote a letter to a church in the ancient city of Philippi. And in this letter we come across an encouragement from him that the church in Philippi would be united. In order to be so, Paul encourages them to practice humility. Let's take a look.

"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, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2:1-4)

What is Humility?

In the ancient world, humility was not a characteristic to be sought after. The noun used here for humility is not found in any ancient Greek writing before the New Testament.¹ And the adjective related to this word was used to describe the mentality related to a slave.² It conveyed the idea of being "base, unfit, shabby, mean, of no account."³ Many people associated the word humility with being humiliated. Humility was not a character trait that the ancient world aspired to. And in many ways, I'm not sure it is a character trait that our world aspires to.

¹ H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Cambridge, 1895), 66.

² Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, vol. 43 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 87-88.

³ *Ibid.*

Just take social media for example. The times I have posted on social media have rarely put forth a humbler image of myself. More often than not, I have used social media to build my own image and reputation. I have used it to make myself look better than I really am. And I know I'm not alone! One USA Today opinion piece referred to our era as "the age of braggadocio."⁴ We are bombarded daily by an onslaught of filtered photos and social media bragging that makes us look and feel like we are ugly and boring. Our world doesn't seem to desire humility any more than the ancient world.

And yet... I believe true humility can be one of the most attractive traits when we see it. Paul tells us in this passage that to be humble is to [SLIDE] "value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." It is not about being trampled on, or humiliated. It is not about another person being in power and us submitting to their authority. It is actually the complete opposite. It is about choosing *not* to exert our power and value above any other person, but to consider that other person as more valuable than we are.

C.S. Lewis, who was the author of the Chronicles of Narnia, wrote this in his book *Mere Christianity*, "Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all."⁵

He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, summarized what Lewis said in a very memorable statement: "This is true humility: not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves *less*."⁶ Not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less. As I meditated on this concept of humility this week, I began to see an example of what that looks like right in front of my face.

Zoom

I don't know about you, but before this year, I had never done a Zoom call in my life. Now, I added it up, and I spend at least 15 hours/week on Zoom. And I honestly quite enjoy it! But I have noticed one thing, and to show you, I'm going to ask my LifeGroup to help me. So, here they are... Hello gents! This is Rich, Ben, Dan, Chris, Chuck, and Bob. Say hello! And we meet together every Friday morning via Zoom. And do you know what I've noticed about my time on

⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2018/12/15/humility-social-media-bragging-depression-twitter-column/2227922002/> (Accessed 4/20/20)

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2002), 107-108.

⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life (Expanded Edition)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 262.

Zoom? I've noticed that, and I hope I'm not the only one here... that I spend the majority of time looking not at the images of other people, but at my own image.

I'm thinking... "Oh yeah, your hair looks great today, Ellis! And... Do I really have that much fat under my chin? And... Oh, hang on, if I stretch like this it makes my arms look massive. Nice!" Now, you might think I'm joking here, for the purposes of an illustration, but I'm really not. These are the actual thoughts that go through my mind as I sit there on a Zoom call!

It is literally, an illustration of what the opposite of humility looks like—pride. I'm totally focused on myself instead of on those around me. And so, I've done something radical in my Zoom chats that I think is just about the best illustration of humility I can give you. I have chosen to "Hide Self View." Watch... if I click on my picture and then click this button, it hides my self-view. Now, all I can look at is the other people on the call.

Now, I'm not recommending you all go out there and do this, because some of you don't even know how to get your face in the middle of the camera. I've looked at enough of the top halves of people's heads to last a lifetime! But I do wonder, if "Hide Self View" might be what we need to do to practice humility in our lives. We are so often focused on ourselves, that sometimes we need to metaphorically hit that "Hide Self View" button. We need to take the attention off of ourselves. Stop thinking about me and my needs. Stop thinking about my hurt and my pain.

Okay, thank you gents! I appreciate you zooming with me. See you on Friday morning!

1. Hide Self View

I want to make three points from this passage today. Three ways we can learn to show humility to others. The first of these is this... 1. Hide self view. That's the starting place for humility. To stop focusing on ourselves. To stop thinking about my needs and my rights and my hurts.

And Paul goes on in his letter to provide the ultimate illustration of what it looks like to hide self view. In one of the most magnificent passages of the Bible, Paul tells us that Jesus himself showed us what it looked like to hide self view. Listen to this, beginning in verse 5...

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!"

(Philippians 2:5–8)

If anyone had the right to look at themselves and think, "I am great," it was Jesus. It was through Jesus that the whole world was created. He was God himself. And yet, as Paul says, Jesus, "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." Instead, Jesus chose to hide self view. Paul writes, "he made himself nothing." Jesus took on

human likeness, putting himself in the same position as those he had created. And more than that, Paul says, Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to death.” The one who had ultimate power, chose to hide that power.

2. Look to Jesus

Jesus showed us what it looks like to hide self view—to turn your attention away from your own rights and privileges. And I believe this moves us to our second point—the second step towards practicing humility. First, we must hide self view, and then second, we must... 2. Look to Jesus. When we look to Jesus it shows us the depth of our own sin... our own desire to exalt ourselves, rather than exalt Him. It helps put each of us in our rightful place. And it shows us the depth of Christ’s love for us—that he would be willing to give up all that was rightfully his, so that he might win us back.

I was thinking about where we have the practice humility in our lives, and I realized that one of the places I have to practice it most is in receiving feedback on work I have produced. I don’t know about you, but feedback can be excruciating at times!

Last week, after Easter, we received several pieces of feedback about our Easter services. As far as our weekend services go, Easter is undoubtedly the biggest service of the year—it is our Super Bowl Sunday. So, obviously, I want Easter to be the best it possibly can be. This year, of course, we had some significant limitations to what we could do. In fact, at one point, we didn’t even know if we would be able to gather and film Easter. So... we rushed to film the music 3 weeks ahead, right as the stay-at-home order was coming out.

In the end, I loved what our team managed to pull together. Blaine and Brittany Staub, our production team, need a huge shout out for their tireless work these last few weeks. In fact, why don’t you say thank you to them in the chat right now? So, we worked hard on Easter and then, for me, it all came crashing down when we started receiving negative comments back from people. There was one in particular that really stung me personally. I was really hurt. Now, thankfully, I’ve learned, don’t reply to emails if you are hurt or angry. So I took a time out.

In fact, I went and worked on this sermon. And as I was studying the Bible, I began to realize that the reason I was so hurt by these comments was because I had an elevated view of myself and my achievements. I was so fixated on what I had done that I couldn't see past myself. So I had to make a decision, first to hide self-view; to stop focusing on myself and my own hurts and defenses and anger. And then once I'd turned off self-view, I needed to start looking at Jesus.

And as I did, it began to reveal the depth of my own pride. How even on this most holy of weekends, I had somehow managed to put myself ahead of Jesus. And so I repented. As I hid self-view, and looked to Jesus it brought me to a place of repentance. Of recognizing that ultimately, Jesus is the one who deserves our praise, not Ellis or Chapel Hill Church. And that what others say doesn't affect who I am in relation to Christ. And then beyond that, I began to receive Jesus' love for me. That even for someone as prideful and sinful as me, he was willing to give up his divine privileges and take on human likeness, in humility becoming obedient to death on a cross. As the great British hymn writer Charles Wesley wrote,

"Amazing love, how can it be?
That thou my God shouldst die for me."

3. Elevate Others

Hiding self-view and looking to Jesus allowed me to take a third step, that is our third step for practicing humility, and that is to 3. Elevate Others.

Paul writes, "value others above yourselves." Literally, Paul is saying we need to elevate others in value way above ourselves. We need to treat them as if they are more valuable than we are.

For me, in my story of receiving feedback, only when I had hidden self-view and looked towards Jesus was I able to get into a mental and emotional place where I could actually elevate above myself those people who had made those comments. And as I elevated them, and, as Paul says, valued them above myself... As I looked to their interests, I began to realize that for many of us, this Easter represented not a celebration, but a loss. The sort of comments we received betrayed a reality that the commenters were grieving that this Easter was not what they expected.

And I know what that feels like. Because this Easter was not what I had expected. We had glorious plans for two different services styles. In one style having a full choir and bell choir and orchestra opening with Christ the Lord is Risen Today. And in the other style beginning with a powerful spoken word, moving us from darkness to light, and ending with the declaration: "Gone. Gone. Now my sin is dead and gone." And yet, we didn't get any of that. Instead we rushed to reproduce one style from last year's Easter because that was all we could do with what we had.

And so I could understand why these people felt the way they did. In fact, I felt that same sense of loss. And so, it enabled me to pray for them... to elevate them... and to demonstrate humility

in realizing that I am no better than they are, that I am just as broken and sinful, and in just as much hurt and pain.

Conclusion

Hide self-view. Look to Jesus. Elevate others. Humility is a hard practice. And I wonder how God might be calling you to practice these three steps of humility right now? Perhaps like me it is in the receiving of feedback that God is asking you to practice humility? Perhaps you need to look beyond your own finances to the financial needs of others? Perhaps you need to look beyond your own health to the health of others? Perhaps you need to look beyond your one freedom to the freedom of others? Where in your life right now do you need to practice humility? Where do you need to hide self-view, look to Jesus and elevate others?

I wonder if, for those of us who live with others, the most immediate application of this is to practice humility with those we live with. With our spouse, whom we might never have spent this much time with before. Choosing in our marriages to click that metaphorical “Hide Self View” button and through the power of Jesus, put our spouse’s needs above our own. Or maybe, whether you live with someone or not, we need to practice humility with our neighbors. To choose to overlook grievances, and through the power of the Holy Spirit to serve them and love them in very practical ways in this season.

Whatever it looks like for you to elevate others by practicing humility in this season, I’d love to close by spending some time in prayer, asking God to reveal to us where that is for each one of us, and inviting the Holy Spirit to empower us to do so.