

The Humility of Jesus Philippians 2:5-8

to was Hank Aaron, arguably the greatest hitter of all time.

The year was 1953. A tall man with bushy hair and big moustache stepped off the train at the Chicago railroad station. Cameras flashed and city officials approached him with outstretched hands to welcome the man who had arrived to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He politely thanked them and then excused himself as he walked through the crowd to the side of an elderly woman struggling with two large suitcases. Smiling at her, he picked them up and escorted her to the waiting bus and helped her get on wishing her a safe journey. He then returned to the crowd and apologized for keeping them waiting. A member of the reception committee was overheard saying “That’s the first time I ever saw a sermon walking.” The man was Albert Schweitzer.

The dictionary defines humility as a modest or low view of one’s own importance; freedom from pride or arrogance.

Vine’s Bible Dictionary simply defines it as “lowliness of mind.” It is the absence of self. Humility is not thinking less of self, it is thinking of self less.

With your Bibles opened to **Philippians 2:5-8**, our topic is the humility of Jesus. We could spend a lot of time discussing this topic and yet never fully plumb the depths of its value or virtue for the Christian. Yet it is a topic that we so desperately need in our world today. From the halls of Congress to the field of sports or the glittering lights of Hollywood and everywhere in between, our culture is saturated with an over inflated opinion of self. We could spend just as much time talking about the problem of pride.

An up and coming young baseball player found himself seated next to a person on the plane who also had an interest in baseball. Wanting to impress the older gentleman, he talked about his batting average and home runs and amazing feats flaunting his athletic prowess. After all his bragging, only later did he find out that the man he was seated next

Someone has said that the difference between confidence and arrogance is humility. From time to time, we may hear people say “I don’t mean to brag, but…” There is even a term called humblebrag, which seems like an oxymoron. Psychologists claim it’s a way to disguise a brag with some humility. But quite frankly, yes, they do want to toot their own horn. It is in our nature to want to brag about accomplishments for the express purpose of getting attention and some admiration. If the difference between confidence and arrogance truly is humility, it’s because humility changes how we see ourselves.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn’t a technology problem like a radar malfunction. It wasn’t a dense fog that caused the tragedy. The cause was human stubbornness or pride. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first.

John Flavel, a 17th century Puritan minister once said, “**they that know God will be humble, and they that know themselves cannot be proud.**”

The author of “Roots”, Alex Haley had a painting of a turtle on top of a fence post. When people asked him why he had the painting, he replied that it reminded him of a great truth: Whenever you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he didn’t get there by himself. Somebody had to put him there.

When we feel a little bit puffed up about all the great things we have done, and we are about to break our arm patting ourself on the back, or want people to notice us, remember the turtle on the fence post. We didn’t crawl to the top by ourselves. Somebody had to put us there. No matter how many accomplishments we may pile up, our attitude should be one of humility.

By His example, Jesus shows us what it is to be truly humble. He gives us our pattern of humility.

I. OUR PATTERN OF HUMILITY – Philippians 2:5-8

I'm not sure if the Philippian church had a problem with pride, but Paul felt that the issue of humility should be addressed. In the beginning of the chapter, he called them to a spirit of unity. He also challenged the churches in Rome and Corinth to have a spirit of harmony. Pride is a universal problem and is even found in the church. Someone always wants the spotlight.

They want everyone to notice their famous recipe.

They want to be the featured singer.

They want people to notice the size of their class.

They want to be known for their oratory eloquence or all the books they've written.

They want attention.

In **verses 3-4** Paul draws attention to the fact that instead of preferring places of honor we are to **“do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”**

Luke 14 records for us how one day Jesus noticed that people were coming in and looking for places of honor to sit. They wanted to be at the head of the table. Jesus then told His audience a parable about a wedding feast. Most weddings I've attended have open seating. Sit wherever you want. He told them when you're invited to a wedding feast don't take the seat of honor because someone more important may come in and you may be asked to move to the back. **On occasion, I would earn a little money ushering for the drama productions that our college put on. One night there was a little bustle as it was discovered that the person selling the tickets had inadvertently sold the seats reserved for the college president. The other couple was asked to give their seats up for the president.**

Remember the slogan – WWJD – what would Jesus do? He is our pattern for humility. As our example, let's consider first the character of Jesus.

A. The Character of Jesus – vv. 5-6a

One day Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator, happened to be walking in an exclusive section of town. He had just been appointed as the president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He was stopped by a wealthy white woman who didn't realize to whom she was talking. She asked if he would like to earn a few dollars chopping wood for her. Because he didn't have any pressing business at the moment, he smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore of chopping wood. When he had finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the woman. The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office and profusely apologized. He said it was perfectly all right as he occasionally enjoyed a little manual labor and said it was a delight to do something for a friend. Out of admiration for his kind and humble character, she persuaded other wealthy friends to contribute to the Institute.

Paul begins by telling us who Jesus is. He echoes the thought which begins **John 1** **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-4, 14)**

Both Paul and John remind us of who Jesus is. He is the One who created everything in the universe and keeps it all going. Paul says He had the very nature of God, thus affirming His deity. That nature is the sum of all the qualities that make God specifically God. The word **“nature”** stresses all the reality of that which it is associated. Jesus is the very essence of God. He is not just a likeness of God. He is God. **Hebrews 1:3** tells us He is the exact representation of God's being. And **John 1:18** says that God, the One and Only, referring to Jesus in the flesh, has revealed God to us.

If we are going to see the example of humility displayed by Jesus it is important for us to understand the position from which He came to the position He assumed here on earth in His incarnation. As John Flavel said, if we really want to put things into perspective when we try to toot our own horn, all we need to do is to put ourselves up against God and we'll see how tiny we are.

You may recall the entire book of Job is a defense by the author claiming his innocence while refuting the allegations of his three friends. Beginning in **chapter 38**, God speaks and instead of defending Job, He questions him. Listen to what God says.

Job 38:1-14

God continues to question Job through **chapter 41** describing His very nature and power. Paul reminds us of who Jesus is, God in the flesh who, although in human form, bore the same character as God the Father. Paul reminds us first of the character of Jesus and then reveals the choice of Jesus.

B. The Choice of Jesus – vv.6b-8a

He begins by saying this is who Jesus is and then moves into telling us who Jesus became, and that this was a choice on His part. Jesus didn't consider His state as God something to grasp, meaning He didn't consider it something to forcibly hold onto, something that He was unwilling to give up. To accomplish the purpose of the Father, it was something He was willing to set aside. He didn't hesitate setting aside His deity to take on humanity. He still retained the nature, rights, and privileges of God, but surrendered the rights of the glory He had known, a glory that was briefly revealed on the Mt. of Transfiguration.

He did not hold onto His position, but emptied Himself of those privileges. That doesn't mean He ceased to be God when He became man, but that He put them aside and chose not to exercise those rights as God.

II Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Jesus set aside His glory for a time so that in time we can experience that glory.

As Warren Wiersbe puts it: “I (speaking of Jesus) cannot keep my privileges for myself, I must use them for others; and to do this, I will gladly lay them aside and pay whatever price necessary.”

How did He accomplish that you might ask? He did so by becoming a man, but not just any man. As God, He could have come down and immediately claimed the right to the throne and assumed the crown. Even from his lineage He had the right to the throne of David, something that could easily be traced as the Jews kept meticulous records of a person's lineage proving that He was a king.

He could have come down and demanded that people bow down to Him, and one day every knee will bow, not because He will demand it, but because He will deserve it.

He could have come down and taken His place as the head of their religious system, but He didn't do that either.

He came down in the most humble fashion, born to two peasants who lived a meager life. On one occasion He stated that He came to serve rather than to be served (**Mark 10:45**). The word Paul uses in Philippians 2 is the lowest position one could have in society. He was a doulos, a bond-servant. He was someone who owned nothing.

The best example of His servant nature is found in **John 13** where He showed the disciples the extent of His love for them by taking a towel and wash basin to wash their feet. They had just been arguing about which of them was the greatest, something they had done on more than one occasion and Jesus showed them who was greatest. He says it is the person who serves. Just after the mother of James and John asked Jesus if her two sons could have a seat of honor next to Him in heaven, the other disciples became indignant. Here's what Jesus did. **Matthew 20:25-28**

In other words, the way up is actually down. C. S. Lewis says that in the Christian story, God descends

to re-ascend. “He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift.”

God became a servant who carried our load of sin.

Perhaps we could try and illustrate it this way. Let’s say the owner of the company you work for decides he wants to schedule a day when all the employees go downtown and help the homeless. He wants to feed them, give them haircuts, maybe some new clothes. Everyone shows up to help on the designated day, even the owner, and he’s the first one out there serving. He’s still the owner and retains all the rights as owner, but he’s set that position aside so that he can serve.

The first step Jesus took in His humility was to leave heaven. That doesn’t mean He was abdicating the throne or making it possible for someone else to swoop in and claim it. **Hebrews 12:2** tells us that He didn’t do this reluctantly, but joyfully/willingly.

We can only imagine what heaven was like, with all the angels standing around praising Him and yet He was willing to give up all that glory. I don’t think humility was something He learned when He gave all that up, I think it was something He already had as part of His character, but only put it into practice when it was needed. It’s just like grace or mercy. He already possessed them as part of His character, but didn’t exercise them until it was necessary. Coming to live among us as a man was for the purpose of serving and giving His life as a ransom. He chose to become a servant.

The second step in Jesus’ humility was to be made of no reputation or not to take equality with God something to be grasped. In **John 17:5** Jesus didn’t pray that His deity would be restored. He prayed that His glory would be restored. He was still God, but His glory was hidden.

The third step in Jesus’ humility was to become a servant.

The fourth step in Jesus’ humility was to be made in

the likeness of man in which He took on all the characteristics of man from infancy on by experiencing tiredness, thirst, hunger, sorrow, temptation, pain, even death.

The fifth step we see in this passage is that He humbled Himself. No one humbled Him. If I was a betting man, I say that something or someone has humbled us in some way.

Stuart Blackie was a Christian professor at the University of Edinburg. One day he was listening to students presenting their oral readings. One student got up to begin and had his book in the wrong hand. The professor shouted at him to put the book in his right hand and sit down. The student held up his right arm revealing that he had no right hand. The professor went to the student and put his arm around him and asked forgiveness. The professor had been humbled. It is not in our nature to humble ourselves. Only the Holy Spirit can do that work in us to make us truly humble.

D. L. Moody said that he often prayed that God would humble him, but then asked God not to tell him when it happened. He also said, “be humble or you’ll stumble.”

The sixth step in the humility of Jesus was that He humbled Himself to the point of death by becoming our sacrifice. And the seventh step in His humility is that He humbled Himself by dying on the cross, the most humiliating form of death.

In His character, Jesus had the ability to humble Himself. It was His choice.

Then the pattern of His humility is seen in the concern of Jesus.

C. The Concern of Jesus – v. 8b

Jesus became a servant that He might die on the cross in obedience to the will of the Father. Again, from **Mark 10:45** –as a servant He became a ransom for those who would place faith in Him. His concern was for our eternal destiny. His concern was for our eternal soul. His concern was for our salvation. His concern was that we might not be selfish in our attitudes, but instead, put the needs of

others ahead of our own, not in neglect of our own, but for their benefit. Jesus cared enough for each of us that He willingly and obediently gave up the glory of heaven to come to earth as a servant.

To take a phrase from one of the hymns we sing “If that isn’t love.” Love is the motivating factor behind humility.

Love for others is humility.

Love for self is pride.

Humility looks out for the needs of others.

Pride looks out only for the need of self.

Humility seeks to lift others up.

Pride only seeks to lift self up.

Jesus gives us the pattern of what this kind of humility drenched with love looks like. And that leads to our practice through humility.

II. OUR PRACTICE THROUGH HUMILITY

There are a number of verses that talk about our need for humility.

Micah 6:8 “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of You? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Proverbs 15:33 “The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.”

Colossians 3:12 “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Do you want to walk with God? Be humble.

Do you want to be wise and honored? Be humble.

Do you want to be clothed in the garments of godliness? Be humble.

So where does our practice of humility begin? Why is humility necessary?

A. Humility Is Necessary For Salvation

Matthew 5:13 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace are you saved...”

The spiritually proud and self-sufficient person can

never come to a place of receiving salvation unless they first acknowledge that they are sinners.

Humility is necessary to receive the gift of eternal.

We can’t brag about getting it on our own. We can do nothing to merit salvation. We must humbly admit that we are sinners and need the Savior.

Luke 18:9-14

The religious guy thought his self-righteousness was all he needed to be considered eligible for the kingdom of God. He lived by the letter of the law, yet he lacked the humility necessary to be saved.

The tax collector had the right heart attitude when he cried out in utter humility – God, only You can

save me, have mercy. That’s true saving humility.

J. Vernon McGee has rightly said that “a man who is not born again is not even in the territory of being willing to take a humble place.”

Too many people think they don’t need God and are unwilling to humble themselves to be saved. Their

pride keeps them from entering heaven. That was the plight of most of the Pharisees. Don’t let

spiritual pride keep you from heaven. When we come to Christ as a sinner, we must come in

humility. It is necessary for our salvation.

B. Humility Is Necessary For Our Sanctification

Psalm 25:9

Romans 12:1-3, 16

Colossians 3:12

Psalm 25:9 says that we need humility to have a teachable spirit. We can’t mature in godliness if we think we’ve got it all together spiritually. Humility isn’t just something we are on the outside. It is a

heart attitude. If we want to be a maturing Christian, humility is a prerequisite. Again, **Matthew 20:26-**

27 says if we want to be great in God’s kingdom, we must first be humble.

James 4:10 reminds us that we are to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. That means we have a true heart of meekness instead of false humility. That’s how the Pharisees acted. They did their pious acts to be seen by others. They wanted to give others the appearance of their humility. We

aren't to appear humble before others, we are to be humble before the Lord. Without humility there is selfish ambition, conceit, and strife. A haughty spirit is divisive and destructive, where a humble spirit leads to unity and peace and edification of others. Without humility we won't allow the Holy Spirit to develop other Christ-like characteristics in our life. Humility is necessary to love others, even enemies. Without humility we can think that others aren't worth the time of day. A truly humble person doesn't know it. As soon as we think we have it, we've lost it.

Humility is necessary to experience joy. Without it we can become filled with sorrow because something didn't happen the way we thought it would or should.

Humility is necessary to have peace in our heart with God and with others. Without humility we can become bitter and resentful and angry.

Humility is necessary for patience with others. Without it we will always be put out with others when they inconvenience us.

Humility is necessary for gentleness. Without humility we can be harsh and demanding.

Humility is necessary for kindness. Without humility we can become cruel.

We can see how important it is for the Holy Spirit's role in developing humility in us. Humility is necessary for our spiritual sanctification.

Humility is necessary for our service.

C. Humility Is Necessary For Our Service Philippians 2:3-4

Looking out for the interests of others is akin to being a servant, considering how we might serve them using our spiritual gifts. According to **Romans 12**, every believer has been given a spiritual gift. Paul says that each gift is to benefit others in the body of Christ. My gift is to serve you. In serving others we must count the cost and be willing to do what we can for their good and God's glory. Jesus was willing to count the cost and humble Himself and sacrifice Himself as a servant for us.

Warren Wiersbe states that many are willing to serve others if there is no cost to them.

Dr. Henry Jowett reasoned that "ministry which costs nothing accomplishes nothing."

A missionary in Brazil was at a religious festival going from booth to booth when he came to one booth with this sign: CHEAP CROSSES. As Christians we can't look for a cheap cross that costs us little in our act of humble service.

Warren Wiersbe writes "The person with a humble and submissive mind does not avoid sacrifice. He lives for the glory of God and service of others. Sacrifice and service done in humility always go together if service is to be true Christian ministry."

A true servant's heart, demonstrated by Jesus when He washed the disciples feet, is the same attitude of humility that we are to have in serving. We can fool others into thinking that our service is genuine when our heart says otherwise. **Is our service out of sincere interest for others or out of selfish intent for us? Ask yourself when you serve if it's for God's glory or for yours?** Humble service is an act of obedience. Humility is a daily desire to die to self (**Romans 12:1**), to put God and others first, which Paul says is an act of worship.

There is one more practice of humility that is necessary for the believer that requires humility. Humility is necessary after we sin.

D. Humility Is Necessary After We Sin Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 16-17

Repentance of sin requires a heart of humility that stands before a Holy God and confesses sin with a contrite heart, a heart that needs cleansing. We can't come to God with a flippant attitude about our sin. True repentance requires humility.

That is our practice through humility, what a maturing Christian should look like. Now let me close with two thoughts about our prize for humility.

III. OUR PRIZE FOR HUMILITY

I am speaking here about the reward for humility. As I said, our attitude and actions from humility are not for the applause of men. We've already established the fact that Jesus said if that is our motive, we have our reward. Instead, the prize or reward I'm talking about is one that comes from God. Would you rather look for the immediate gratification of man's approval or the eternal reward of God, to hear Him say "well done, good and faithful servant?"

James 4:6 "He [God] gives more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

When we truly humble ourselves, the prize we are given is grace. There is grace for the humble.

A. There Is Grace For The Humble

I think we can all agree that it takes an incredible amount of grace to be humble, especially when we want the applause. Grace creates true unity in the church.

Ephesians 4:2-3 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Proverbs 3:34 "He [God] mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble."

Grace applauds the accomplishments of others, even when we were part of the team, but received no applause. It takes grace from humility to play second chair in the orchestra.

We can be like a moth and move to the spotlight, but find that it may be a shocking experience. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. When we are tempted to want the spotlight, pray for grace. Nebuchadnezzar needed to exercise grace, but instead bragged about the great kingdom he had built. God says that those who exalt themselves He is opposed to and will humble them. A proud heart is among the things that God hates listed in **Proverbs 6:16** and **16:5**, but He loves a humble spirit. We need God's grace to keep us humble and to keep us from pride.

There is grace for the humble.
There is glory for the humble.

B. There Is Glory For The Humble

Proverbs 18:12 "Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor."

Proverbs 22:4 "Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life."

Proverbs 29:23 "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor."

James 4:10 "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Paul said in **Philippians 2:9** that after Jesus humbled Himself, God exalted Him to the highest place. If it's true honor we want, then live in humility and let God be the one to exalt you. Let Him give you glory for a humble life.

If we want to receive honor from the Lord, what does He require? Walk humbly before Him. Again, as John Flavel has said, if we truly know God, we will be humble, if we truly know ourselves we cannot be proud.

In our practice, let's follow the pattern of Jesus, after which there is a prize that awaits us.