

## **Humility in Community**

Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jeremy, and I am one of the leaders around here. And for some reason, probably because I need to hear this message as much as anyone else here, Keith thought it would be a good idea for me to share a little bit today about humility in community and what it means to wrestle with that together. And for those who have been gone for a while or are new here today we have been going through a series on what it means to be a community founded upon Jesus. What does it mean to try and be the church, a community here at Riverside, who really seeks to live out the things that are in the Bible? And I don't know about you, but for me, this has been a challenging series because it not only calls for individual change in my life, but also for corporate change as we try and really figure out what it means to serve and love people Sunday to Sunday outside of this building and on a daily basis with people in this room.

As I was preparing for this message throughout the week I kept trying to think about a time in my life where I felt completely humbled. And I kept thinking of times in my life where my arrogance or pride really got me into trouble. There were lots of them! Oftentimes, for me, humility is not something that is natural or part of my default in any way. My default is a sinful grasp at almost anything in life that makes me comfortable, or builds me up, or makes me feel a little bit better. But it has been a really good week for me of reflection on my life and the chasm between where God is calling me to be and where I know I am today. And it has been good because it has forced me to realize that nothing in life really makes any sense outside of the grace of God.

In the fall of 1997 I was a freshman at Wheaton College in Illinois beginning my college soccer career ([show picture of the soccer team](#)). And on the screen up there is a picture of that team. If you have owl eyes, and an imagination, you might be able to recognize me in there somewhere. Let me give you a hint, if you take my current physique and shave off many, many pounds, add much more hair, and then go ahead and give that hair some awesome blond tips then you may be able to see me up there on the bottom row wearing number 19.

Here's a better picture ([show picture of me](#)). And, yes, I did say "blond tips" when referring to my hair. Wow, this is actually really humbling!

([Go back to regular screen](#))Anyway, that fall at Wheaton seemed like one of the best times of my life. You see, I started playing soccer when I was 4 years old. I basically grew up on a soccer field. And that was partly by design too because I have a dad who is a soccer coach. My whole family played soccer, that's just what we did. And for as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be able to play soccer in college and win a national championship. Even when I was 8 years old I remember my dad taking us to the soccer field and doing drills with us and telling us that someday, if we kept working at it, if we practiced and practiced, we could win a national championship.

In 1997 at Wheaton that is exactly what we did. In a lot of ways, I accomplished a goal that year that I had set about working to accomplish when I was a little kid. That year we were undefeated and won the national Championship. Life was good. I had awesome hair, got to start for the best team in the country, picked up an expensive gold ring and got the trophy and praise that comes with that sort of thing. It was everything I could have wanted, right?

Actually...no! You see, there is an actual form of depression known as "[Post-Olympic Depression Syndrome](#)." And for the first time in my life I realized that, for me, I had so much of my identity wrapped up into soccer and this goal of winning a national championship that I didn't know what to do next. I had a bit of an identity crisis (not that the dyed hair wasn't a crisis in and of itself...but, you know). And even though I was in a great community, a community of believers there at Wheaton, I still really struggled the next 7 months. I drank very heavily, got into some pretty bad situations, and was so depressed I couldn't really function.

And that next spring when my dad came to pick me up in May and he had to shake me awake because I was still drunk in bed at 11 in the morning, I hit the bottom. I hit a gigantic wall of humility. I hit the bottom because on that morning, as he had told me later, my dad had come to pick me up and he had been so excited to tell me that he was proud of me for making it through a tough

year. His oldest child had made it through his first year of college. And when he came into that room and it had smelled like a brewery, which is what he said, and I wasn't ready to go home, he was really hurt and disappointed. That was one of the most humbling days of my entire life. It was one of those days that help you to realize that you are not the center of the world even though you had been living like it, you know what I mean?

I was also reminded this week about another time during the summer after my first year of college where humility caught up with me again. That day my sister had some friends over and they were out back jumping on our trampoline. As I sat inside checking out her friends I realized that they were really cute....they were cute and I was single so... I thought I would go out back and introduce them to my new hair. 😊 And in my parents' house they had a screened in porch with a swing that led out into the back yard. As I walked out to try and flirt with my sister's friends, who were sure to be pumped about meeting me, I never realized that the screen door was not open. So I bet you can guess what happened next? Yep, I walked right into that door! Not only did I walk into that door, I demolished that screen door. In fact, I remember feeling like I was in slow motion, like a Matrix movie, as my face sort of bounced off the screen and then my body unknowingly kept its momentum moving forward as I knocked the entire door completely off and landed on my face on the ground. Now that was a humbling experience!....Which reminds me of a great quote I saw one time: What is very humble and has 2 thumbs?...This guy! ([Pointing at myself](#)).

And as I prepared this week, I kept thinking about how much this issue of humility, and my lack of it at so many different points in my own life, has caused me separation from other people and a really deep sense of missing the point of what it means to be trying to follow Jesus and make a difference in the lives of others. And I kept thinking that I might not be alone in this. Regardless of religious beliefs I think that all people are driven at some level by either desire or fear in the decisions they make and the way they live their lives. And often times these decisions are acted upon and taken on alone. But we were not made to live life alone. And we were not made to bring glory to ourselves or to look out for

numero uno. That is why a passage like the one we are looking at today in Philippians is so important.

So if you have your bible please turn with me to **Philippians 2**. We will be going through **verses 1-11**. If you don't have a Bible free to grab one under the chair you are sitting in or the one next to you. If you are using one of those Bibles we will be on page\_\_\_\_.(show NLT verses 1-11)

1 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,[a]  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.

7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges[b];  
he took the humble position of a slave[c]  
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,[d]

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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Let me just pray for our time today as we explore these verses together. **God, open our eyes to your Word and the message you have to share with us today. Open our hearts to receive your wisdom and grace and mercy. Teach us, Lord, to be humble and to be honest with where we fall short on this issue. Teach us to live lives that look like your Son Jesus' life and to really seek to be the church and not act like the church. Holy Spirit, come. We need to hear from you today. Amen!**

Dictionary.com([show definition](#)) defines humility as, “the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one’s own importance, rank, etc.” Sounds kind of wimpy, doesn’t it? Well maybe that is because the world we live in doesn’t really value humility. The world we live in looks at humility as a weakness, but the Bible looks at it a little differently. And Paul seems to be speaking with a much different message here to the church in Philippi and to us today.

([Go back to regular screen or passage](#))So as context, and Keith touched when he spoke on the first chapter of Philippians a few weeks ago, this is a letter to the church at Philippi that Paul wrote from Rome around AD 62 when he was a prisoner there. This was a church Paul had “planted” during his second missionary journey that you can read about in the book of Acts. And these Christians in Philippi were citizens of Rome and proud of it. In the verses immediately preceding the ones we are studying today he basically told them that if their standards are to be the same as God’s standard then they need to be united and to stand firm as they strive together for the gospel. He told them they needed to be united as they stood together in the face of opposition. But they also needed to deal with the opposition and dissension within their church too, which is what Paul is getting at in here in **chapter 2**.

He starts off the first four verses by really encouraging the church at Philippi to stand united against division within. The NLT shows him starting off with some questions, but I like how the NIV puts it better([show NIV version of 1-4](#)),

“<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Why is Paul being so rhetorical in the way he speaks here? He’s speaking this way because he is really making a heartfelt appeal to them. He is burdened by this issue of dissension within the church. And remember, Paul is literally in chains at this point, writing from Rome. He is concerned because he knows that internal unity, doing life together, is crucial for holding back the things that seek to hinder the progress of the gospel and mission of their church. And the same issues plague our church here today and all churches around the world. No one is immune from this. If we go through life putting ourselves first, and everyone else goes through their lives putting themselves first, then there are points where battles are going to occur. If you have not experienced these struggles in church yet, just wait, you will. You’ll get hurt by someone here at Riverside at some point. You will also most likely hurt someone here at some point. That’s just the reality of being a part of a messy, broken world and dealing with messy, broken people.

([Go back to NLT 1-11 screen](#)) So what is the solution? How does Paul propose fixing the internal unity problem in the church? **Verse 3** ([highlight verse 3](#)) is the critical one to take in here. In **verse 3** Paul says, **“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.”** Wow, that sounds easy, doesn’t it. So, basically, you just stop being selfish and trying to make yourself look good, while being humble and really looking out for the interests of other people ahead of your own. Do that and everyone wins, right?

Which, again, takes us back to the emphasis Paul is putting on the first part of this chapter. This stuff matters! Being united together matters! Being humble matters! It matters because that is the example that God gave us in Jesus. The

way to live in humility is to mirror Jesus. **Humility is the chief quality of Jesus' relationship with us. I'll say that again, humility is the chief quality of Jesus' relationship with us.** If the church is going to really be the church and make a difference in the lives of others, then the church needs to recognize the grace of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, as the basis for all it does, as the basis of all that we do. A few weeks ago when Keith talked about a community of saints he made this statement to describe how Paul views the church (Add following quote as slide): "The church is a gathered group of saints committed to the love and transformation of each other for the sake of the world." Why are we to be committed to the love and transformation of each other? For the sake of the world. And what better example do we have of this type of living than Jesus? (Go to slide of whole passage with 6-8 highlighted)

As Paul reminds in **verses 6-8**, Jesus literally became a slave or a servant in his very nature and came to us. So the divinity of Jesus, the God part of him, is completely compatible with the life of a servant that he lived out on this earth. Those two things are not contradictory. Which should change what we think about puffing ourselves up, shouldn't it? If Jesus can humble himself to come serve us, how much more should we be willing to risk everything to love people and seek to serve them. As we are reminded in **Mark 10:45**(show slide in NLT),

**"<sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

I think we get that part. (Go back to 1-11 slide) We understand what Paul is saying here about the idea that God was humbling himself by coming down, but what is he saying in **verse 6** where he talks about equality with God as something he did not "**cling to?**" What he is saying is that Jesus did not see his equality with God as something to be exploited, something he should take advantage of. Rather, he saw it as a matter of unselfish giving of demonstrating true humility . I can't think of anything that would be more proof of the need to live a life that is outward focused, concerned with others, and unselfish. Jesus came, which is humbling enough, that the God of the universe came down and chose to live as a

man on this earth, but even more than that, he took it to a level that none of us have or will probably ever have to take it by giving up his life on the cross, by literally dying the death of a criminal on a cross.

The absolute worst method of torture ever invented by man was death on a cross. Jesus did not die because he was nailed to a couple of boards. Jesus suffocated to death on the cross because of the way he was positioned on those beams. He literally had to push himself up to get air, and eventually was not able to do that anymore and died there. And he knew, **HE KNEW** that this would happen from the beginning of time. He knew when he was here on earth that this was the ending he would endure, yet he chose that path because it was the only one that could solve the problem of sin in this world.

Webster's makes humility seem bland and uninteresting. In a sense they almost make it seem like something you wouldn't want to do. It seems like the definition of humility almost calls us to put ourselves down. In fact, the world kind of reinforces this idea too, doesn't it? The world tells us to take comfort in feelings and to value the inner attitudes and ideas that we have...because if I don't look out for myself, then who will? But these verses seem to be saying the opposite. Humility in these verses is not about self degradation, it's not about putting yourself down...because that is all about self. Humility is about thinking of others and seeing them as more important than you. You and I don't need more knowledge we need more love for others. We need God to give us the ability to love others in the way that he does. The church does not need a bunch of robots, walking in step with each other. The church needs individuals, who despite their differences, are willing to show love for each other by putting the well being of others first.

[\(Go to regular screen\)](#) So what do we do with a passage like this? In these verses we get to see a bit of the character of God, and are called to live our lives with this same character. We see that not only is God all the things we have heard about like infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being and wisdom and power, but he is also a God who identifies with the weak and powerless to the extent that he lived a life that served them and ultimately shared their fate. He didn't

use His power for selfish ends, but expressed it in lowly and humble service. How do we apply this to our lives and our community? I think Rick Warren (make slide quote) had it right when he said, “We believe those passages we actually act upon.”

So let me ask you: **(Slow down Here)**

**Do we, as a community, seek to meet the needs of every sector of human society, or just the ones that make us comfortable?**

**How hard do you and I think about the broken people among us and outside of our walls?**

**When was the last time you wept for someone here because your heart just broke for what they were going through?**

**Of those of us in this room who have known Jesus for a long time, does our life actually look anything like His?**

**How much do you love people...really love them? Is your mindset focus on God, then people, and then you?**

**If someone came here for the first time would they see so much love among us that they actually get a glimpse of God?**

These are tough questions because they call us to not only evaluate ourselves but to do so in light of the role we have to play here in community with each other. Humility in community is not easy to do, but it's also not optional. We are called to love each other in this place and to love others outside of these walls. If we did that, really did that, what would it look like to the world? If we could love each other the way God is calling us to then someone who doesn't even know God should be able to walk into this room and see God. And the person you are sitting next to should be able to walk out of this place on Sundays or away from one of our home groups during the week and feel built up and feel

like they have a vital role to play and a part in the story that is crucial to everyone else around them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer ([picture of Bonhoeffer](#)) was a German pastor, and theologian, who became a martyr who died in 1945. So as we wind things down here I want to just share, as some application points for us to consider, my summary of Bonhoeffer's 7 principles for eradicating selfish ambition from his essay *Life Together*. (Slide of the 7 principles with a delay before each one to give me time to say them prior to going up)

As a community trying to live out humility together we should:

1. Hold our tongues, refusing to speak bad about another believer.
2. Cultivate humility that comes from understanding, Like Paul, that we are the greatest of sinners and can only live in God's site because of his grace.
3. Listen long and patiently so that we will understand each other's needs.
4. Refuse to consider our time and work so important that we refuse to be interrupted to help with unexpected needs that arise, no matter how small they are.
5. Bear the burden of each other, by valuing each other's freedom and forgiving the sinful abuse of that freedom
6. Declare the word of God to each other when we need to hear it.
7. Understand that Christian authority is defined by service and does not draw attention to the one who performs the service.

To conclude I want to share one more thing about that fall of my freshman year when I played soccer. That year our team motto was *Kopian*. And "*Kopian*" is a Greek word that means "*to labor to the point of utter exhaustion*" and can be found in this same chapter of *Philippians* in *verses 14-16* (show slide of this) where Paul says this,

“<sup>14</sup> Do all things without complaining and disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”

(Cut to regular slide)As we prepare to worship and share in communion today I just encourage you to reflect on your own story and how it lines up with these verses we have looked at today. Do you, like I did in the fall of 97, have the knowledge in your head of what humility might mean in community, but a life that looks different? Or perhaps you are someone who is committed to a life like Paul of being poured out to the point of utter exhaustion because of the love that you have for others? Perhaps you fall in between, or even outside of, both of those. I know I have personally roamed between all of them during my life. No matter where you are on that spectrum today, I encourage you to take some time and just talk to God. Ask him to give you a heart that loves. Ask him to give you a heart that breaks for the poor and the weak, the widows and the orphans the sick and the weary. Just ask him to speak to you. And then when you are ready just come to the table. Come to the table because it is a reminder that there has been only one with bloodstained hands who was always humble. And that was Jesus.

So if you need prayer or just want to talk for any reason at all there will be some of our leaders in back who would love to pray with you for whatever it is that you are dealing with today. We would love to just be a part of loving you in that and walking with you through whatever it is you are going through. Let's pray!