

Putting Others First

Phil. 2:1-11

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Jan. 13, 2013 PM




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Philippians 2:1-11

2013 Family Enrichment Series – Parenting for Relationships



January 13, 2013

INTRODUCTION



- ❖ Conflict, difficult circumstances, disappointments, illness, and other trials of life are windows into your child's heart
- ❖ Children learn to live in the context of relationships
- ❖ It is surprising how early our children develop **insight and perception** into their own sinfulness
- ❖ Do not to set expectations and measure godliness and maturity merely by outward appearances

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Putting Others First

It has been said that raising children in any context is not for the faint of heart. Add to this a desire to instruct them according to God's word and for His glory and you are doomed to feel a failure at some point to your calling as a parent. It requires large amounts of patience, persistence, wisdom, love, and at times the ability to deal with heart-break and disappointment. This is by design. You see as God uses us to instruct them and help them grow, God also uses our children to instruct us and help us grow. So we must find satisfaction as parents, not in the absence of conflict or challenges, but in knowing that they as children, and we as parents, are growing in grace and in service to Christ and one another.

You may think parenting an impossible task. But here again, by God's design, the context of family relationships and difficult circumstances reveals much about what is going on in the heart and mind of a child if we are willing to take the time and effort to understand them. Conflict, difficult circumstances, disappointments, illness, and other trials of life are windows into your child's heart. Look at them as opportunities to teach rather than inconveniences to our own personal comfort. Be willing to allow your children to experience hardship and the challenges of dealing with the sins of others so that God may shape them into the image of His Son; even when your initial reaction is to protect them from life's injustices.

It is also by God's design that our children, especially as they are younger, are learning to live in the context of family relationships. Their relationships start within the biological family, then quickly expand to the church, and on to the social communities and world in which they live. As parents, each of these contexts represents different challenges and an understanding of different types of relationships. And as our children grow they become more sophisticated sinners; more careful to guard and conceal their hearts so as to avoid the negative consequences of their sinful behaviors.

In fact, it is surprising how early our children develop insight and perception into their own sinfulness. This became painfully evident to me when one of our boys was only four years old. We were vacationing with the Engle clan at Dottie and Terry's cabin when Amy caught Kyle retrieving an item he had been playing with off a ledge along the stairs. Knowing Kyle wasn't allowed on the ledge, Amy reminded him that even if his parents didn't see what he was doing, God could see everything he did. Without hesitation Kyle pointed out to Amy that while that was true, God didn't tell parents.

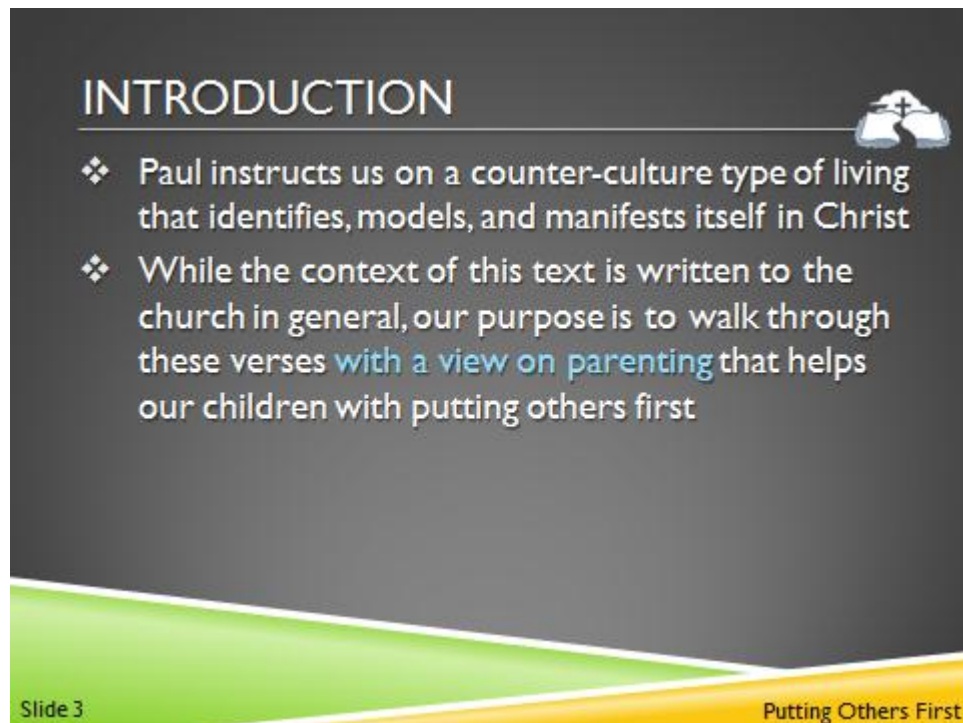
While humorous, Kyle's reply revealed to me that he understood more about his sinfulness than I gave him credit for. You see even at a young age he understood the difference between sin concealed within the heart and sin made evident in relationship to another person. The book of Jeremiah says that our hearts are deceitful above all things, who can understand it.

But let me urge you to be careful as authority figures in the lives of your children and not to set expectations and measure godliness and maturity merely by outward appearances. Outward appearances of obedience and right living toward others may be the result of budding legalism, a compliant child, or simply a desire to avoid punishment. You must strive to see past external behaviors and into their hearts. So

as we look at Philippians 2 we must apply the text with wisdom and understanding, knowing that each child is developing and being transformed by God's sovereign plan.

Consider one final challenge to parenting before we look at our text this evening. Our children are bombarded by a culture that reinforces and encourages their selfishness and pride. As parents we must think of ourselves as soldiers in a spiritual war; battling with the rebellious hearts of our children and a culture that actively undermines God's truth in their minds. And so we must fight to teach our children what love for others and for Christ looks like in relationship to others and how to understand their deceitful hearts in light of the gospel.

But there is good news! Our passage this evening speaks of gospel living that transforms and changes our relationships with others. We must strive as parents to help our children understand the power of the Gospel and the cross. Only there will they find power to change the desires of their heart. Only there will they find truth to counter the lies they are tempted to believe. And only there, will you as parent find comfort and rest as you entrust your children to God.



INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Paul instructs us on a counter-culture type of living that identifies, models, and manifests itself in Christ
- ❖ While the context of this text is written to the church in general, our purpose is to walk through these verses with a view on parenting that helps our children with putting others first

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Our passage tonight continues our series on parenting out of Philippians. As Pastor Dale noted last week, Paul is instructing the church at Philippi to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. It is a counter-culture type of living that identifies, models, and manifests itself in Christ. It is not merely having a set of good rules that make life better, helps us to get along with others, and be successful in life. Rather, it is a way of viewing ourselves and others in light of Christ that transforms selfishness and prideful children into humble servants as they mature into adulthood.

While the context of this text is written to the church in general, our purpose is to walk through these verses with a view on parenting that helps our children with putting others first. It is my hope that with this focus we will reflect on our own hearts and see that as parents, these are lessons that should never get old. We must walk the talk in our relationships with others. In fact, most of what we teach our children, comes out of what they see modeled before them. So that when **they** fail, we give them the same grace we ask God to give us. And when **we** fail, we let our own need for the gospel point them to Christ and forgiveness found in mercy and grace at the cross.



THE CALL TO HUMILITY (v 2:1-4)

- ❖ The context is within our community and relationships with one another
- ❖ Humility is a quality that is largely expressed and defined in reference to others
- ❖ Keep in mind that true humility comes from a heart being transformed by the gospel
- ❖ We must set our expectations allowing for our children to develop and change according to God's plan; and not ours

Slide 4 Putting Others First

Please open your bibles to Philippians Chapter 2 where we will begin tonight. Here is God's word to us. *"1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

Our passage begins with a call to humility. In verse one Paul is calling the church to humility on the basis of four assertions that he presumes to be true. Note that the context of these assertions is within our community and relationships with one another. The start of each assertion is noted by the word "any". If you have **any** encouragement or motivation in Christ; if there is **any** comfort or support in the love of others; if you find **any** fellowship in life shared together in the Spirit of God; and if you have experienced **any** affections, care, and compassion from others, then the way you treat each other and live together in community should reflect these truths.

What follows these assertions is a description of humility. It is important to note that humility is a quality that is largely expressed and defined in reference to others. Humility is about how we think about ourselves and act towards others. A person or child who is humble places others before themselves. In verses three and four Paul describes humility as having three characteristics. First, humility is the absence of selfish ambitions and desires. Second, humility regards others as more important than themselves. And third, humility prefers the interests of others. Here is what Paul is saying. **Humility is a way of thinking and living that places a greater value on community than individualism.** It's not that we ignore or exclude our own needs and desires, but instead our relationships with others become a priority over self.

If we are honest, our goals are more often around conforming our children's behaviors to standards that reflect the characteristics of humility. And while we should strive to teach them what humility looks like, we must also keep in mind that true humility comes from a heart being transformed by the gospel. As you teach your children what humility does and does not look like, you must also remind them that their hearts are naturally inclined to be selfishness and rebellious to God's ways. Help them understand the battle with the flesh they will encounter and that their call to humility is based in Christ and community. And whether they are believers or unbelievers, point them to the cross and remind them that only in Christ can their sin be forgiven and their hearts changed into His image.

You must also be careful how you react to their lack of humility and selfish behaviors. It is easy to become impatient and react in frustration; to respond with anger and punishment rather than mercy and instruction. It is good for us to remember that biblical change takes place over time. Just as you are still learning lessons in humility as adults, our children are growing intellectually and spiritually. I know at some level we all get this. But it is not enough just to understand it. We must set our expectations allowing for our children to develop and change according to God's plan; **and not ours.**

It is sadly ironic how we can respond to our children's selfishness with a selfishness of our own; being more concerned about how their behavior reflects on us or makes our lives more difficult. Just as Christ is patient and full of mercy toward our sin, we must grant grace to our children as they learn to live in humility toward others and grow toward maturity in Christ. As hard as it can be, you must work on considering your children's lack of humility as a blessing and an opportunity for both you and them to learn to live in community to the glory of Christ.

THE CHALLENGE OF HUMILITY (v 2:5-8)



- ❖ Humility is a sensitivity and consideration that **makes more of others** and less of self
- ❖ Christ-like humility is letting go of what **we** may deserve and desire so that **others** may receive what they do **not** deserve
- ❖ If children expect fairness in everything, they will be disappointed or angry when it is not met
- ❖ Humility begins when a child values the importance God places on relationships with others

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Putting Others First

In the next part of our text Paul moves from the call of humility to its challenge. Follow along as we read verses 5 through 8. *"5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

The incredible challenge of humility is that our example is Jesus. Much as husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church, we are called to humility in a way that reflects Christ selfless love in coming to earth to redeem us. Verse five instructs us to have the same humble attitude and self-denial as Christ did in coming to die for us. It is a way of thinking that considers ourselves servants in relationship to others.

The essence of humility is found in a heart attitude that is willing to sacrifice self for the sake of others. Humble actions toward others flow out of hearts that see and value the larger context of gospel-oriented community in Christ. It is a sensitivity and consideration that makes more of others and less of self. Humility cuts to the heart of pride and selfishness of the flesh. And it can only happen where hearts are supernaturally changed by the work of Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit.

The last three verses reveal the key to a humble heart. Here Paul gives us a glimpse into the selfless humility of Christ who gave up all claims to who He was and deserved, so that He might serve those He came to save. He did not give up His deity or become any less God. Though He had every reason to rule and reign, he **chose** to give up His rights to be honored and treated as God, obediently following the will and plan of the Father as a lowly servant dying for those who deserved wrath and judgment. You see

Christ-like humility is letting go of what **we** may deserve and desire so that **others** may receive what they do not deserve.

Is this the message on relationships our culture bombards our children with? Our flesh and the world speak to us with thoughts of what we deserve and what rights we have. This really gets to the crux of the conflict humility causes within our hearts doesn't it? We selfishly cling to our idols and demand that others serve them or at least not interfere with our pursuit of them. And when they don't, we get upset or angry at even the slightest discomfort, inconvenience, or violation to those perceived rights.

If these verses picture the essence of a humble heart, then they are the essence of teaching our children the key to putting others first. They must understand it will not be natural or easy for them to give up their rights or claims for the sake of others. Point your children to the example of Christ so they may see how He valued His relationship with the Father and with us more than getting what He deserved or could rightfully own. Help them to see the greater worth of their relationships to family and church by your own sacrificial example. And guard your own thoughts so that you do not give audible voice to your own selfishness and pride in moments when you are tested. Our children can often follow after our worst examples.

Also, be careful not to inadvertently fuel a child's sense of selfishness. What do I mean by that? Culturally, we tend to have an overdeveloped sense of fairness. That is, we believe everyone should be treated equally or the same. While there is a sense in which this is true, we all know that this is not how our children will experience God's sovereignty in life and relationships with others. Life is not fair. If our children are taught to expect equality and fairness in everything, they will be either disappointed or angry when it is not met. Teach your children the blessing of dealing with inequity by preferring others. Talk through situations that challenge their sense of fairness rather than meeting out parental justice that simply rectifies the imbalance.

Practically speaking, what does this look like? How do you respond when your young children are fighting over a toy? Do you teach one child to truly prefer the other or do you establish equitable rules that ensure each child gets an equal amount of play time. When you buy a gift for one child do you make sure you buy a gift to keep the other happy? Why not use it as an opportunity to teach the other child the value of taking joy in the happiness of the other?

What about when your child has his or her rights infringed on? Do you reinforce their sense of loss by commiserating with them or do you encourage them to respond with thoughts and actions of love toward those who offended them? You can greatly assist or hinder them by how you react to unfairness in their lives. Teach them that God is sovereign even when life is not fair. Help them develop a sense of Christ-like humility by being on the lookout for opportunities that encourage them to deny self and prefer others.

These lessons are especially powerful when grace and preference can be given to those who do not deserve it. It is easier for your children to serve those who have shown them kindness, in the absence of conflict, or where it does not require any level of sacrifice. But the deeper the inequity required in preferring others, the greater will be the clarity of Christ's example and the disparity with the world. These are teaching moments that God can use in the heart of a believing child to help them treasure Christ, the cross, and relationships in the community of their family and their church.

At some level, humility begins when a child begins to value and understand the importance God places on their relationships with others. While lasting change is the work of Christ in their heart, your example as parents is perhaps their greatest teacher. Does your life demonstrate a Christ-like love for community and relationships with others? Is your life and home open to others? How do you react when life does not go your way? How do you respond when you are mistreated by others? Live humbly before your children and you will teach them humility. And then teach them the reasons for the grace and sacrifices made for the sake of others.

You see humbling and sacrifice go together. Humility that does not have some cost to ourselves is either empty or a show for others. Is this not Paul's point in giving us Christ's example at the cross. Verse 8 concludes reminding us that Christ did what? He humbled himself by obeying even to the point of death. And it was not just any death; but the terrible death and humiliation of the cross. Teach your children to make sacrifices for the sake of others in real and practical ways. When they push back, and they will, remind them of the powerful example of Christ so that they may see the value in what they are doing. Fathers, lead in a way that treasures humility as a family. Honor humility and make much of it. And celebrate it when your children show humility to others on their own.

THE CROWNING OF HUMILITY (v 2:9-11)



- ❖ Though Christ was humbled and made low, He now reigns in authority over all
- ❖ Christ's work and humble example is affirmed by the Father
- ❖ Humility that expects a reward is **not** true humility
- ❖ Preferring others demonstrates the self-sacrificing nature of Christ and the value placed on relationships with others

Paul's instructions to the church conclude with the crowning of humility in verses 9 through 11. Please follow as I read these last three verses. *"9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so 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."*

"Therefore", Paul begins this sentence. In other words, because of all that is true of Christ's humility, sacrifice, and obedience, God confirms his approval of the Son by glorifying and magnifying Him and giving great honor to His name. **Though Christ was humbled and made low, He now reigns in authority over all;** so that one day at the sound of His name, every knee throughout all of creation will bow and confess that He is Lord. He chose to humble himself and die a criminal's death to serve and save as our Redeemer. But God also has exalted Him as Lord and King. Christ incarnate, now God and man, **has** risen and rules over all. He is now both Savior and King that we may trust Him for salvation and bow before His authority in our lives.


Please look at the last seven words of this text; "to the glory of God the Father". The humility and exaltation of Christ has a crowning outcome. What is the final result of Christ's example? That God the Father would be glorified. Here is the crowning of humility. Even in Christ's worship and magnification, God the Father receives great glory. We see here that **Christ's work and humble example is affirmed by the Father.** For the Father is pleased and takes great joy in the honor and exaltation of His Son.

We should be careful not to make a direct application that says we should be humble so that we may be honored. **Humility that expects a reward is not true humility.** While humility may have its own eternal reward, that is not our motivation. Rather, the application here is that we choose to humble ourselves so that God may receive the glory. Just as Christ's example ultimately brought glory to the Father, so the humility of our lives is all about bringing glory to God.

This is the big picture of putting others first that our children must understand. They are to put others first not so that they can feel good about themselves, please their parents, or keep a set of rules. **It is simply and wonderfully about bringing glory to God the Father.** Preferring others over themselves demonstrates the self-sacrificing nature of Christ and the value they place on relationships with others. Knowing that God the Father is pleased and glorified through the humility of their lives will motivate and encourage a believing child to prefer others.

Even in this, we should keep in mind the foolishness of a child and deceitfulness of their hearts. They will twist God's words to fit their own sinful desires. Though it was many years ago, Sheila and I still remember two of our kids arguing over which one should prefer the other. The whole point of preferring one another had been perverted to selfish gain. Instead of putting another's interests first, humility became a tool to get what they wanted from others. Your children will struggle against giving up their rights

and desires for the sake of others and for the Fathers' glory. Expect it and use those moments as opportunities to teach and guide them in Christ's perfect example.

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Slide 6 Putting Others First

I will close this evening with a few thoughts of encouragement. This year I became a parent of four adult children. As I look back over that time I think there is more I did wrong in teaching about humility than I did right. I share these closing thoughts with you not as a father who got it all right, but as one who struggled with humility in my own life and in teaching it to my children. There are many things I would now do differently. So take these words as counsel that now flow out of my own experiences and a deeper understanding of God's Word many years later.

First, let me encourage you to include them when you humbly serve others. The more your children see the value placed on relationships and community in your life the more you encourage them to do the same. Take them along when you minister to others. Involve them in decisions and actions where you put others before yourselves. Also, be intentional in explaining humility in your family life. Fathers, honor the service of your wives as they put your family first. Explain to your children the "what" and "why" of the sacrifices she makes. Moms, be sure your children understand why dad works hard to provide for the family. And why he is gone for an evening to attend a ministry meeting. Be sure that they don't miss how he is putting others first and why? These are powerful ways in which you can show how Christ and the cross have changed your lives that might otherwise be taken for granted.

Second, I urge you with all that I am not to give up. Developing humility in the heart of a child takes time and is hard work. In fact, I can guarantee you will be working at it until your children are out of your home. But no matter how hard it becomes, never ever give up. If you choose to follow a path of teaching Christ-like humility, there will

be times you will want to give up or take an easier road. It may feel like there are more disappointments than triumphs and more heartaches than joy. But persist and encourage one another in Christ as you work hard at preparing and equipping your children to put others first.

I am convinced that many other sins your child will struggle with flow out of a lack of humility and putting themselves first. This may be a primary battle field within your child's heart. Learning to deny self for the sake of others and God's glory is foundational. If you work hard here you will be helping your child in many other areas. And if you absent yourself from this spiritual battle, you may be setting both your child and yourself up for much conflict down the road. Do not give up!

Lastly and most important, be sure to faithfully commit the transformation of your child's heart to much prayer. As parents we are commanded to faithfully guide, teach, and instruct our children. But heart change is the work of God. We must prayerfully leave that work to Him. There are no guarantees. Our children will make the choices they will within God's sovereignty and plans. Therefore, be careful of about setting your expectations on having children that put others first. Pray for each child's growth. Pray for them to understand and desire Christ's example of humility. Pray that God would bring circumstances their way that would bring practical lessons in humility. Pray that you would be faithful to teach well and live humbly before them. Pray much for the wisdom you will need. Pray that you would have an abundance of patience and grace. And then trust that God will do what He will in the lives of your children to the glory and praise of God the Father.

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