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**Topic:** Unshackled Joy - A life in Christ - Humility is not about us, it is about seeing Jesus and how awesome He is.

Has there ever been a time in your life when someone has noticed something different about you?

Let me tell you an experience of where someone saw it in mine. Looking through the lens of my life, one my friends, described one particular experience in a speech at our wedding. He said - We went to party at Rory's (him and a couple of my good mates). We took a 6 pack of beer, but it was weird, we arrived but no else was drinking. So we asked each other the question - what the heck happened to Rory?

They had noticed that I had turned 180 degrees, i had changed course, and was going a completely different direction in life.

He said later in the following weeks that there was something different about that party, I'll never forget it. I couldn't shake it, he said. No one was drinking, but yet it was the most joyful party I'd ever been to, everyone was alive with joy. Including you, in fact it looked like you had a 1000 weights lifted off your shoulders. He said to me.

I was then able to tell him what Jesus did in my life. That my joy wasn't attained by me, it wasn't something I achieved by working harder on myself. Instead it was granted to me by God. A gift God produced by the work of the Holy Spirit. Now I no longer need to worry, I set my future hope in Jesus.

As I continued journeying with this friend, he shared with me later that year that, that particular party shaped his own decision to now follow Jesus. Today my friend lives a life in Christ and speaks boldly of where his joy is found!

Another person, people noticed something different about, is Paul.

### **[Slide 1]**

Over the next few weeks we're going to journey with Paul through a little short letter he wrote called Philipians. He writes to the church of Philippi from his prison cell in Rome, part of our series Unshackled Joy.

Philippi was a church that Paul loved and Joy is the constant theme through the letter. At the end of Philipians 1, Paul tells the church how to guard

themselves from external conflicts, now in the beginning of the second chapter he drops knowledge and wisdom against internal conflicts.

The passage of scripture we are about to read would have challenged the social norms of the time. It means that an owner will serve his slave, and that a Roman can be friends with a Jew. This would have been freeing words for those being mistreated, revealing the truth, that no human should be used for the advancement of another. And that your status in society does not dictate the way you are valued. It is in church, as it will be in heaven... status means nothing.

In Paul's day, this was not an easy message to receive. In a Roman city like Philippi, with all its grandeur, success and wealth there were all sorts of hierarchies between slaves and freemen and women. Their society was divided according to class, wealth and social ranking, and of course the ultimate aim in life was to seek honour and social prestige.

Let's read now Philippians 2:1-4

**[Slide 2]**

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

**[Slide 3]**

Paul says to the Philippians, and to us: Let the church family; The body be a people of encouragement, comfort, belonging, tenderness and compassion. May your unity with one another be an expression of your unity with Jesus.

It is easy to be all these, when things are going well, but what happens when someone hurts us? We must say to one another, as far as our relationship goes, what ever happens, I'm sticking by you. Regardless of what you choose to say to me or do to me. I love you. Even if it hurts.

Into verse 3-4 he says put aside [your want for promotion and advancement], and Instead of seeking your own honour and social prestige seek to care for and honour one another.

Actually before we can “care” for others, he says we need to “value others” and do that, the word he uses is “Humility”.

In the Roman world in Paul’s day humility was not a virtue. In fact before Jesus, the act of humility was regarded as being weak. And it turns out ‘the Greek term translated ‘humility’ is not found before the Christian era. The word is a combination of the Greek word ‘lowly’ and the verb ‘to think’.

‘To think’ involves both thoughts and attitudes, and also actions – it’s a verb. Humility, then, is to think and to act lowly; to accept our ordinariness, to stop trying to ascend the social hierarchy, to serve others.

A local pastor once told a story, that before God called him to become a Pastor, he had a job cleaning public toilets on the strand, I can’t remember exactly how long, I think he said it was for something like 1 year. And I can’t remember if he said he carried a plunger and wore overalls, But everyday he would see people he knew on the street and he said that experience shaped his humility like no other experience.

I came across a quote by CS Lewis that really helps to understand this elusive fruit of the Spirit better. I initially dismissed it, but actually it really helps with understanding Humility, it is “Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

### **[Slide 5]**

You read it, and you think isn’t he saying the same thing? But actually the first option “Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself” it addresses the ‘me-focus’ - If I focus on myself and work on ‘thinking that I’m weak’ that’ll fix my pride and I will become humble. We spend a lot of time thinking less of ourselves but we only end up thinking a lot about ourselves.

The second option says “Humility is thinking less of yourself”. If I focus my attention outwards on “others” I will become humble, see the difference, the first one teaches self improvement, the second - serving others.

The person most deserving of our ‘thinking’, attention and service is Jesus. Humility can set us free because when we think about ourselves less we are free to think about Jesus.

Humility set the pastor free in the story because he had his eyes fixed on Jesus while he worked and served others.

Another group of people set free by humility was the Church of Philippi, the church was already living for Christ and serving others. One guy Epaphroditus they sent off with a financial gift to go and serve Paul while his time in prison, Epaphroditus almost died while risking his life to help Paul. So Paul sent him back, and he is the one who carried the letter back to the Philippians.

Paul closes his appeal for unity to them, by pointing to the supreme example for humility. Philippians 2:5 onwards is a beautiful piece of poetry known as the Christ Hymn or Creed. The key message is that Humility is not about us, it is about seeing Jesus and how awesome He is.

It is believed that the words of this poem were probably not Paul's, but that Paul adapted them for his context.

Let's now read Philippians 2:5-11

**[Slide 6]**

**5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:**

**6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,**

**did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;**

**7 rather, he made himself nothing**

**by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.**

**8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself**

**by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!**

**9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place**

**and gave him the name that is above every name,**

**10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

**11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.**

From the heights of heaven, to the depths of human depravity, our God in an act of humility sent his Son to earth, on a rescue mission, to save his people, and now He has risen again and is seated at His rightful place.

I've broken down the passage, into 3 chunks. Let's now step through each chunk.

**[Slide 7]**

In v6-7 we learn, He didn't show up like the terminator or superman, instead a perfect God chose to live among us in the lowest place and the lowest form possible. We read "Jesus made himself nothing", or as other translations say, he emptied himself. This does not mean that Jesus emptied himself of his deity at any stage, he was fully God and fully man. Simply he gave up his godly rights and added to himself a human form.

**[Slide 8]**

This concept is very hard for us to grasp. But Phillip Yancey says it beautifully with this quote "The Messiah, who showed up wore a different kind of glory, the glory of humility. 'God is great,' the cry of the Moslems, is a truth which needed no supernatural being to teach men, "That God is little", that is the truth which Jesus taught man. The God who roared, who could order armies and empires about like pawns on a chessboard, this God emerged in Palestine as a baby who would not speak or eat solid food, who depended on a teenager for shelter, food and love" [Phillip Yancey quoting Father Figgis ~ The Jesus I Never Knew]

**[Slide 9]**

**8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!**

In v8 Jesus doesn't stop at just humbling himself as a man. He knew the whole time, what his outcome on earth was, his death was decreed from the beginning.

The soldiers cursed and spat and crowned him with the thorns of their contempt and he was crucified on a cross. As the scorn of his day, Jesus embraced humiliation.

Crucifixion was such a shameful death that it was not permitted for Roman citizens (such as the people of Philippi or Paul). A victim of crucifixion was considered by the Jews to be cursed by God.

The crucified Christ humbled himself to the point of death, he came all the way down to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross. The King of kings become the slaves of slaves.

But again he doesn't stop there, he humbles himself, now at the lowest possible point, he then takes all sin and punishment upon himself.

The Son made a choice to be obedient to his Father. The Son made a choice to meet our highest possible need. He who was perfect and without sin chose to take sin upon himself, so that we now receive the forgiveness for sin. For everyone who believes in him - He came to bring freedom.

This is real love. Dying the worst death of all so that others might live. The death of the cross shows that there is no limit to what God will do to demonstrate His love, humility and saving power to us.

**[Slide 10]**

**9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.**

He is risen!

*"Now, just pause over this thought - that Christ did not crown himself, but that his Father crowned him; that he did not elevate himself to the throne of majesty, but that his Father lifted him there, and placed him on his throne." (Said Spurgeon)*

Jesus was gloriously rewarded for this self-emptying, servanthood even unto death, verses 9–11 show his glorious ascension into heaven.

This completes the steps of Christ's humble entry into the world and what he gave up for us. Let's zoom out and look at the bigger picture of that this means for us. What does this story mean? It tells us Our God. The one who, in humility and sacrificial love, leads us to unity, with Himself and with one another.

Practically, we continually learn the way to treat others is by looking at Jesus. His humble life's example shows us how to behave in every situation. Jesus is the ultimate role model.

Except, Jesus is more than a role model, he is the suffering servant. Jesus doesn't promise us a life without suffering, in fact like Jesus, we can't have glory without suffering. Everyone wants the glory but no one wants to suffer.

**[Slide 11]**

For us suffering, Suffering for Jesus can look a lot different, than what it did for Paul, yes we experience constant joy, but that doesn't mean we don't experience pain. For Paul it was a prison cell and life of persecution, but the trials of life can look very different for each of us.

Some of us are forced to work long hours to feed our families, bodies that are failing us, depression, hard marriages, children in difficult circumstances, the list goes on and on.

This pain is real, perhaps you're here today and you can't change the situation you're in. It is a continual suffering, a constant choice, and you always choose love, self-sacrificial love. There is joy in your hearts, but yet you have so many - 'why' God questions.

How can we "greatly rejoice" while at the same time having "to suffer grief in all kinds of trials"?

These prison cells won't hold you.

**[Slide 12]**

Always remember the joy you have in Christ. Your "joy" does not depend upon the circumstances. It does not depend upon what happens – good or bad. As you've learnt from Paul's story, my story, perhaps even remembering your own story. Joy is far deeper. It flows out of a relationship with the One who never changes, the One who never lets us down, the One who never leaves us or forsakes us - Our joy is in Christ.

Out of this gift of 'persistent' joy flows humility. Humility is not about us, it is about seeing Jesus and how awesome He is. This humble attitude leads us to love and live for him and for others.

**[Slide 13]**

And that my friends, is a life worthy of the gospel. A life of love, service and sacrifice. A life of unshackled joy, a life in Christ.

*Practical application - Pray, because prayer takes the focus off ourselves, and turns to the relationship with Jesus, which invites the gift of humility by the Holy Spirit.*

*Perhaps your own suffering seems to great to bear, there are people willing to listen to you and pray with you today.*