

## How Low Can You Go? Phil 2:5-11

Jerry was the kind of guy you love to hate. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

When asked about his positive attitude Jerry answered. "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood.' I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live life."

Some time later, Jerry did something you are never supposed to do in a restaurant business: he left the back door open one morning and was held up at gunpoint by three armed robbers. While trying to open the safe, his hand, shaking from nervousness, slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jerry was found relatively quickly and rushed to the local trauma center.

Jerry remembers, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read, 'He's a dead man.'" I knew I needed to take action."

"There was a big, burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Jerry. "She asked if I was allergic to anything, 'Yes,' I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, 'Bullets!' Over their laughter, I told them, 'I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.'"

Jerry lived thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything.

How's your attitude this morning? Is it positive or negative? Selfless or self-centred? Maybe you're excited because of someone you are going to see. Maybe your angry at someone and can't wait to give them a piece of your mind.

Or did you come this morning with Philippians 2 verse 5 in your mind. **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus"**

One of the things I really enjoy about preaching a series is how connected each sermon can be. We spoke last week of being one with God and being in unity with each other. This week Paul reveals to us the perfect example to help us accomplish this. Obviously it's Jesus. Through this passage Paul reveals to us 2 things about Jesus which we are called to imitate and the responses to these things.

### 1. Attitude.

Our attitudes affect everything we do in life – great and small. They affects the way we do our jobs, the way we treat our loved ones, the friends that we have, and they even affect our relationship with God.

When life is going smoothly, almost everyone we meet seems to have a pleasant disposition. We smile, we're courteous, and we're willing to go out of our way for others. But let the road get a little bumpy - let things go crazy on the job, let us be treated unfairly, let us get stuck in the company of others who have rotten attitudes - and that's when our true attitude is revealed.

Attitude is a choice. No-one forces an attitude on you. You choose every day what your attitude will be. It will reveal our priorities and dictate our responses to those around us.

Charles Swindoll once wrote:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... We cannot change the fact that people will act a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have and that is ATTITUDE...

So Paul continues this passage in Chapter 2 reminding the Philippians to mirror their attitudes with Jesus' Which he then goes on to explain.

**“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” vs. 6-7**

It's important to remember that Jesus did not have his beginning in a lowly manger here on earth. John 1:1-3 reminds us that **“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 was being made.”**

Jesus is full of the divine nature of God. Everything we speak of when we speak of God is true about Jesus. He was really and truly, in every way in his nature, God.

Yet the attitude which Jesus chose to take was one of humility. He chose to take his divine nature and set it aside in an act of obedience to the will of God. At any time Jesus could have laid claim to the divine nature which was his but rather through a humble attitude chose to be recognized as a man; to the point where others did not see anything special in him. “Isn't this the carpenter's son” they asked. Nothing of the divine was recognized in Jesus. All of the miracles and teaching which Jesus performed during his ministry on earth he attributed to his Father in heaven. **“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me” John 6:38**

Although he and the Father are one, Jesus lived a life that displayed humility and obedience toward the Father. An attitude we are all called to imitate.

## **2. The Path of Downward Mobility.**

Author and scholar Henri Nouwen coined this phrase “downward mobility” when describing the life God has called us to live in the presence of Himself and of others. Henri Nouwen was a priest and scholar who taught at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard. He was well respected, looked to for insight and leadership, had reached the top and yet was unfulfilled and lonely. Through a time of depression and struggle he made contact with Jean Vanier who led the L'Arche communities, which were communities that ministered to the severely mentally and physically handicapped. Henri became the Chaplain at the L'Arche community in Toronto and many of his writings are from when he was there.

He would describe his downwardly mobile journey from academia to servant of the “least of these” as the greatest move in his life and to the most spiritual awakening and deepening of his relationship with God.

The society in which we live suggests countless ways that the way to go is up. Making it to the top, entering the limelight, breaking the record – that’s what draws attention, gets us on the front page of the newspaper, and offers us the rewards of money and fame.

Unfortunately along with the rise to fame, to reaching the top come the temptation of power. We claw and climb over others to get our way, to get our voices heard to stand up on top and say “Hey look at me, listen to me, I know best.”

And although we look outside these walls and say with confidence that this is the way of the world, this is what society values, we in the church get caught up in it as well. Throughout the history of the church people are again and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, and forcing their way over another’s way. Why? I think at times it is more natural to follow the world’s pressure to climb to the top than it is to take the road that leads down to the ultimate expression of humility and servant hood. Our sin originates in our grasp to become greater. Satan told Eve that if she ate the fruit she “would be like God.” That’s why Jesus came, to break the power of that prideful sin.

Look at our passage again as Paul documents Jesus’ steps downward.

a) Steps from being God to being a human. **“being made in human likeness.” Vs. 7**  
We have already talked about this so I won’t repeat all those points.

b) Steps from being a human to being a servant – **“Taking the very nature of a servant” vs. 7**

Jesus served others. **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)** Jesus did not come as a superstar. He came as a lowly carpenter. Jesus was never too proud to do whatever it took to glorify His Heavenly Father.

Jesus demonstrated how to serve with a towel and basin. Jesus took on the role of a servant to his own disciples. At the last supper in the upper room his disciples were sitting around the table. Their feet were dirty and smelly from walking all day on the dusty roads. Jesus took a towel and basin and went to each one and washed their feet. When Jesus finished he said: **“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” John 13:15.**

We are to be servants to one another. When we ask for people to lead or assist we are looking for servants, not volunteers. What’s the difference? Volunteers dictate their involvement whereas servants do the bidding of another. Servants quietly exalt another without looking for their own recognition. Servants don’t up and quit when it doesn’t go their way. Servants are always at the ready to be of assistance to another.

c) Steps from a servant to being obedient to death

**“Became obedient to death.” Vs. 8** – The immortal chose to die. Jesus humbled himself to the ultimate point of obedience. Nothing was held back, all had been given up. Death did not take Jesus. Jesus chose to allow death to claim the required sacrifice. Up until now all sacrifices for the cleansing of the people’s sins were reluctant sacrifices. I doubt too many of the animals enjoyed their fate. I’m sure their instincts to survive kicked in and they fought death. But Jesus, Jesus didn’t fight, he didn’t resist and in the end became the perfect willing sacrifice for all of humanity.

d) Steps from being obedient in death to dying on a cross.

**“even death on a cross.”** Vs. 8. Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice held the sting of it being the worst possible way to die that man of his time had come up with. The Romans had a law against crucifying any Roman citizen with the emperor’s consent because it was considered too cruel of a death.

Gene Wilkes, in his book, *Jesus on Leadership*, writes:

“Jesus did not come to gain a place of power.

He did not come to defeat his human enemies.

He did not come to overthrow an unjust government.

Jesus came to show us the heart of God. His entire message and ministry on earth was to show selfish, power-hungry people like you and me what love looks like. As he knelt before Judas, Jesus showed us a love that no human can conceive on his own: a love that is brutally honest about what is going on but still kneels before us to lay down his life so we can be free from the sin that infects us. Jesus loves you as he loved Judas. If you miss that, you have missed eternal life.” P. 168

“But I deserve to have it my way because I have been in this church for so many years, or I hold such and such a position.” We struggle to have control over what happens here, which program gets precedence, which music gets sung, which area gets the money, who gets to make which decisions. Power and control can quickly become the signature of a church and yet it goes against everything Jesus’ attitude displayed in his journey of downward mobility. Jesus is not asking you to die for a cause or to die for a theology or an ideology, Jesus is asking us to die to ourselves, to become the servants of all and to join him on the journey of humility. And to recognize that whether that journey requires my physical death for the sake of Jesus or death to my own rights and agenda it is the path that leads to freedom.

As we look ahead this morning to communion we are reminded of the lowest of places Jesus traveled to because of his willingness to be humbled for the sake of love. God himself gave up all his rights and privileges. He lived a humbled life as a servant and willingly went to the deepest, darkest place that humans have ever come up with; death, or rather being executed, on a cross. It’s important that we take the time to reflect on the significance not only of Jesus’ death but on the manner in which he laid down his life for us. The ultimate humiliation, willingly accepted.

### **3. The Responses.**

In our last few verses Paul makes us aware of three responses to this journey of downward mobility Jesus has modeled for us.

The First is God’s. **“Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,” vs. 9**

It is important for us to note that God’s response to Jesus is not based on his actions on the cross. Rather it is based on his character, his principals, and his attitude of humility.

Jesus tells us the same thing. **“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” Matt. 23:11-12**

Again in **1 Peter 5:5b-6** **“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”**

Notice what happens when our goal is to build up ourselves. We will crumble and fall. Instead humble yourself and allow God to be the one to lift you up. What that will look like could be different for all of us. It may happen in this life or it may happen in the next. The point is that we need to be patient and not force God to make things happen by pushing our agenda of what we think that should look like. There's nothing humble about that.

Look at the examples of Sarah, Hagar and Hannah. Abraham was promised descendants beyond the number of the stars but Sarah couldn't wait for God. She gave her servant Hagar to Abraham to try and raise a family through her. Yet it was God's plan to give her a child all along. Which he did 14 years after Hagar's son Ishmael was born, Isaac was born.

Compare that to Hannah, who also could not bear children, she prayed and she waited, she did not force God's timing and as a result, Samuel was born.

Our call to humility includes allowing God to take care of the rest. It was God who exalted Jesus to the highest place.

The second response is the unbeliever's response.

**"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Vs. 10-11a**

All of us, believers or not will one day kneel before Jesus. For some it will be a joyous submission before their Saviour but for others it will be grudging acknowledgement that they chose to ignore the truth and a final understanding of what is to come. All will submit, all will confess, but not will be saved.

And finally for the believer, this exaltation of Christ ought to bring mixed responses. On the one hand we will kneel with joy and anticipation of the great glory that awaits us in heaven which we will spend with Jesus. On the other hand it reminds us that our time of evangelism, our time of sharing the good news to all the world is limited. A time will come when these opportunities will cease and when all those who have denied the truth of Jesus' life, death and resurrection will be held accountable for their decision.

It ought to motivate us to humble ourselves, our pride, our positions in order to share the love of Jesus with everyone we come in contact with.

The exaltation of Jesus by God reinforces the point at which we started. Jesus was exalted because he never ceased looking up to the Father, seeking his approval, and outwards to others seeking their eternal welfare. Jesus held nothing back so that he might more fully obey God and save the lost.

I'd like to finish with the words of Henri Nouwen as he reflects on this journey of downward mobility:

Our true challenge is to return to the centre, to the heart, and to find there the gentle voice that speaks to us and affirms us in a way no human voice ever could. The basis of all ministry is the experience of God's unlimited and unlimiting acceptance of us as beloved children, an acceptance so full, so total, and all embracing, that it sets us free from our compulsion to be seen, praised, and admired and frees us for Christ, who leads on the road of service.

This experience of God's acceptance frees us from our needy self and thus creates new space where we can pay selfless attention to others. This new freedom in Christ allows us to move in the world uninhibited by our compulsions and to act creatively even when we are laughed at and rejected, even when our words and actions lead us to death."