

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Philippians 2:3-11*

DATE: *January 7, 2024*

SERMON: *“God Gives Grace to the Humble”*

(Special acknowledgement to Tim Keller for various sermons on Philippians 2)

BILL: Good morning everyone...thanks for coming out on this first Sunday of 2024, and a warm welcome to those of you who are able to join us online.

You know, I guess we shouldn't just assume that everybody knows what's going on here. A lot of you in here *do* know that about once a year the three of us come together up here on the stage to bring the morning message. But for those of you who have started attending FFC in the past year, this would be a first for you.

And so let me just do a little introducing before we get started. Won't be necessary for many, but probably will be helpful to some. Over here we have Pastor Shaun, and again, many of you are aware that Shaun serves as our primary preaching pastor. Over here we have Pastor Ray, who many of you know is Shaun's dad. On our staff we also have Pastor Chris and Pastor Brady who lead our Children's Ministries and Student Ministries, and while they are not up here on the stage this morning, they are very much involved and each play a vital role on our staff. And I'm Pastor Bill, and whenever Shaun isn't bringing the message, it will usually either be Ray or myself who will have the opportunity to share with you what we believe that God has shared with us.

Shaun: And what we're doing here this morning is something the three of us really enjoy...we have a lot of fun working together, but I imagine there's probably some concern on your part, because as you are probably aware, pastors like to talk. You give us 10 minutes we'll take 20. Give us 30 and we'll take 40. And just when you think we're wrapping up and bringing the sermon in for a landing, off we go again. And so you do the math...about 30 minutes allotted for a sermon, three of us...you might want to settle in and make yourselves comfortable.

Ray: You know guys, it reminds me of this joke I heard not long ago. It seems there was this pastor who was known for his lengthy sermons, and one Sunday morning he noticed a man get up and leave in the middle of his message. The man returned just before the conclusion of the service. Afterwards the pastor asked the man where he had gone. "I went to get a haircut," the man said. "But why didn't you do that before the service?" the pastor asked. "Because I didn't need one then." was the man's answer.

In all seriousness, like Bill said, what's happening here only happens about once a year, in fact the last time that the three of us were up here together was a year ago, the first Sunday of 2023. The message that morning gave us an opportunity to **reveal** the verse and the theme that we emphasized throughout the rest of the year...the verse coming from Colossians 1:28 and the theme being **"Fully Mature in Christ."**

As a staff we are grateful for the steps many of you took this past year because of your desire to grow and mature in your walk with Jesus.

Shaun: And so now we come together again to reveal and launch the verse and the theme that we're going to be focusing on here in 2024. As a staff we committed to this theme many months ago, but as far as we know, we've kept it

pretty close to the vest, wanting to wait till this morning to make everyone aware of what we are going to be emphasizing this year. And so here it is, our theme verse for 2024: **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** Whereas “Maturity” was the word that was kept before us throughout 2023, the word for this year is going to be **“Humility”**.

Bill: And so why this theme...why humility? Well, for one, it’s good to be challenged, and this theme will certainly do that. There are some things that we do as followers of Jesus where the cultural wind is at our back. Here at Five Forks we have a food bank and a clothes closet and in our culture, everybody – those who follow Jesus and even those who don’t – everybody gives a big thumbs up, everyone would say that providing food and clothing for those in need is good – and so here at FFC we have the wind at our back when it comes to these outreach ministries.

But when talking about Humility, we’re going to have the cultural wind hitting us smack in the face. Some of you know how hard it is to walk, run or bike when the wind is coming strong against you. By putting an emphasis this year on walking in humility, it may seem at times as if we have the wind against us, because in our current culture, humility is not getting a big thumbs up, rather, it’s often seen as weakness. We find ourselves living in a culture steeped in self-promotion...sometimes we don’t care whether people like us or not, we just want to be noticed and be seen as successful.

But when we turn our attention to Jesus, we hear Him saying on numerous occasions that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

A while back I remember hearing somebody say that the one thing that can separate you from God – that can cause Him to actually oppose you - is a lack of

humility. As a follower of Jesus you can lack almost anything. You can be lacking when it comes to controlling your tongue or your emotions, lacking when it comes to managing your time or your money..lacking when it comes to your prayer life and daily Bible reading...because God is gracious and patient and kind and if you acknowledge your struggles and give Him something to work with, He can and will work with you in those areas where you are lacking.

But for those who are proud, who don't feel that they are lacking in areas where they very well may be...it is these that God opposes. And we don't want to find ourselves there. And so it seems to me that humility – as challenging as it is - would be a good theme for us to focus on this year.

Ray: And so here's the direction we're headed this morning. We're going to first **Look at the Passage**, or more accurately *the passages* where our theme verse is found. Then we're going to **Look** specifically **at Philippians 2** which gives us this magnificent account of the humility of Jesus. And This passage will give us an opportunity to evaluate ourselves; to see that God has a plan for us moving forward, and that plan is to follow the example of Jesus. And finally we'll **Look Ahead** and talk about some ways that we will look to keep this before us in the coming year.

So let's first...

A. LOOK AT THE PASSAGE

...where our theme verse is found. If I asked you where this verse is found - "which book of the bible" in other words - and you had to guess, your odds would be improved by the fact that it actually appears in three different books.

The first occasion is found in Proverbs 3, verse 34 which reads...

Proverbs 3:34 He (that is, the Lord) mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble.

The book of Proverbs is filled with this type of teaching, many short, simple statements, “nuggets of wisdom”, which provide us with instructions on how to live well. And having a heart marked by humility would qualify as living well.

Shaun: But that’s not the only book of the Bible where these words are found. This verse from Proverbs is found in the New Testament, where James makes reference to it. He’s confronting the early church because of all the turmoil that’s taking place...arguments, quarrelling.

He says just like many in the surrounding culture, the church is looking out for their own interests rather than truly seeking God’s direction. And so James is letting them know that they need to go against that “cultural wind” that Bill talked about earlier. And it’s in the midst of this that James makes reference to the verse found in the Proverbs, telling the church...

James 4:6b This is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Bill: So...Old Testament book of Proverbs, New Testament book of James, but we’re not done yet, there’s one other book, or letter, where these words are found. Peter, one of Jesus’ closest friends is writing to the early church and near the end of his letter he’s addressing the young men in the church, writing...

1 Peter 5:5-6 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

This should get our attention, should it not? Three different time periods, different authors, different audiences...and what God is wanting us to see here is that He gives grace to the humble. And we want and need His grace...we ask that as a church, He will show us favor.

Ray: But we want to make clear that we are not trying to present a formula. Like: If we do this, God will do that for us. We are not suggesting that we are to be humble so God will give us grace. Jesus did not make himself humble, or act humble so God would exult him. Rather Jesus humbled himself, because that is who he is. Jesus was a humble person and we want to learn to be humble people – so humility will come naturally to us. And so let's explore this, let's talk about humility, what it is, what it isn't, and I'd suggest that we begin by taking a...

B. LOOK AT PHILIPPIANS 2

Specifically verses 3 through 11. God's word says...

Philippians 2:3-11 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of the others.

Shaun: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

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

Bill: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Ray: This is just a great passage, and as I said earlier, it provides us with an opportunity for...

I. Self-Evaluation

The self-evaluation begins with a thoughtful reading of verse 3, which says...

Philippians 2:3a Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit...

Underneath the umbrella of pride are these two short phrases...selfish ambition and vain conceit. What do they mean, and are they evident in our lives? Let's look first at **selfish ambition**. These two words can be somewhat challenging to translate, but what they refer to here is **"a spirit of rivalry."**

Shaun: Let's be clear before we go any further....ambition does not need to be a bad thing. To pursue excellence is not a bad thing. As parents we want our kids to show ambition, to be hard working and to be driven to do their best and be their best. As adults, we can embrace healthy competition with others in order to find enjoyment and pleasure in giving and doing our best. Win or lose, many of us relish the opportunity to compete.

The problem is that in our humanity, our ambition and our competitive spirit can easily become distorted because of our pride. We view others not as fellow competitors, but as rivals where satisfaction doesn't come from doing our best, but by gaining a sense of superiority *over them*. C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity* points out that **"Pride gets no pleasure out of having (achieving) something, pride only gets pleasure in having more (achieving more) than the next person."**

This selfish ambition, this spirit of rivalry can occur on a small scale such as within families. It can occur on a larger scale...in the workplace, in churches and among churches. And it occurs on a very large scale, among ethnic groups and among nations. Advancing myself, my family, my church, my people group to the detriment of you...or your family, church, people group.

Bill: I was listening to a sermon by the late Pastor, Tim Keller, and he was talking about selfish ambition, and he made reference to this old Star Trek episode as a good example. I immediately recognized the episode that he was referring to, because as a kid I think I saw them all, several times. And some of those original episodes were really thought provoking.

In the episode that Keller was talking about, Kirk and Spock and the rest of the crew come across **two men** from another planet and are half black and half white. Right down the center they are black on one side, white on the other...and these two men hate each other, they are bitter rivals. And the question is, "Why?" Kirk and Spock spend the whole show trying to figure it out...until finally, at one point, Kirk asks, "What's the problem here?". You men are from the same place, you're the same species...what's the problem, the reason for this bitter rivalry? And the one man speaks up and says, "Captain, don't you see...don't you get it?"

And for those of you who *have* seen it, what was Captain Kirk overlooking? What was he not getting?

The fact that one was black on the right and white on the left...while the other man was just the opposite. And this episode was trying to get us to see how broken we can be...there's this element of pride within us where we see others not as individuals or people groups that God has breathed life into....but as rivals to be put in their place...somewhere beneath us.

Ray: That's a great example of a spirit of rivalry among people groups, but as Shaun said, **it happens among individuals** as well. Shaun pointed out how many of us love to compete. Whether it's on a playing field or on a stage, in the backyard, or at the kitchen table playing a board game, we love to compete. And competition can be a great thing that brings out the best in us, or it can bring out the worst in us.

When it brings out the worst in us, we have this tendency to think that "If I can sing...run...speak...think...look better than you, **I can then see myself as superior to you, and this entitles me to put my needs ahead of yours.** In short, this is what the Bible refers to as selfish ambition.

Bill: What you just said there Ray takes me back to a sermon Shaun preached in early November...Remember the **Titus** series? There was this one Sunday when Shaun read a quote from Dallas Willard, and I knew at the time that humility would be our theme for 2024. And so I printed this quote and have it posted over in my office. It's such a challenge to me, but one that I want to embrace. Anyway, I had the chance to remind Shaun of what he shared with us back in November, and I asked him if he would share it with us again this morning.

Shaun: Yeah, so the sermon back in November was about doing good, because throughout the book of Titus "doing good" was a theme that kept coming up over and over again. And laying aside pride and displaying humility would certainly qualify as doing good. At one point near the end of the message I read this quote that Bill's referring to. Dallas Willard said...

"If you want to experience the flow of love as never before, the next time you are in a competitive situation, pray that the others around you will be

*more outstanding, more praised, and more used by God than yourself.
Really pull for them and rejoice in their successes. (Dallas Willard)*

Ray: Wow that is going to be difficult. But this humble approach - laying aside any selfish ambition - can be put into practice on the field or on the stage, in the backyard or playing a board game. And it takes real maturity. So let's take advantage of this opportunity to evaluate our pride, our ambition.

Does my motivation come from simply wanting to do my best and be my best...or is my motivation to advance myself, my family, my church, my group ahead of others, or even worse, to the detriment of others?

Bill: Okay, so let's take a moment to talk about **vain conceit**, the other short phrase found here in verse 3.

Now, we'd all like to have what is called a healthy self-esteem. Not thinking too much of ourselves while not thinking too little of ourselves. But have you ever come across someone who appears to think more of himself or herself than is warranted? Vain conceit is having an elevated sense of self. It's having a false reality about ourselves.

In the original language it was just a single Greek word – **kenodoxian**, and it literally means “**empty glory**”. While there's nothing wrong with wanting to be appreciated and respected, for some, there needs to be more...pride causes us to take steps to glorify ourselves, elevating ourselves above others, or at the expense of others. It's what takes us down the road that leads to selfish ambition, that spirit of rivalry..

Ray: Self-Evaluations are not always pleasant are they? Because God uses His Word and Himself to expose the spirit of rivalry and the glory hunger that resides

within our hearts. But once He exposes us for who we are, He doesn't walk away, rather, He shows us...

II. The Way Forward

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,...

So here is where we actually come across the word humility, which simply means **“gentle, modest, deferential.”** Deferential is not a common word, but it means to defer...to say, “You go first”...or “Let's try it your way”...or “I want to hear and understand what you have to say.”

You see one characteristic of pride – and unfortunately it's said that this is pretty common in churches in particular - is an inability to consider other people's views and beliefs. A humble person is able to admit that he or she might be wrong or mis-informed. A humble person is willing to seek advice and receive correction. A humble person possesses what is called a “teachable spirit.”

Shaun: And so we see that to be humble is to have the ability, the willingness to defer, to listen and consider what others have to say. God's way forward also involves...

Philippians 2:4 ...not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

This verse isn't saying that you shouldn't have any interests...you can and should have things that you're passionate about. But one essential aspect of humility includes looking out for the interests of others. There's this great quote from C.S. Lewis who points out that **“Humility is not thinking less of yourself...it's thinking of yourself less.”**

A short but profound statement that we should etch in the front of our minds throughout 2024.

Bill: I've got to say, that quote from Lewis has really been on my mind since I first heard it. I don't think that any of us are the kind that go around boasting, beating our chests and talking about how great we are. I've come to see that for us, at least for myself, it's much more subtle. I may not think a lot of myself, but I think of myself a lot. How do I look? How do I sound?

Instead of thinking about how various life events reflect on God or how it impacts others, too often my first thought is how it reflects on me.

And I don't think I'm the only one...I think we've all come across people who always want to bring whatever is being talked about around to themselves. "Well let me tell you *my* experience." For myself, I admit that I want to be liked and to be respected, but I also want to avoid that vain conceit that we talked about earlier. More and more I hope to look at life's events outwardly rather than inwardly...not to think less of myself, but to think of myself less.

Ray: So where are we at? We've recognized the need for us to evaluate ourselves. Acknowledging the pride that lies within us, whether it be selfish ambition or vain conceit, God has shown us that the way forward is found in humility. This is where we value others above ourselves, looking to their interests ahead of our own. Which sounds nice, but also sounds pretty hard.

Because **humility is something that can't be worked on directly**. What I mean is, there are some things we want to work on, and we can work on them directly. We can say, "I'm going to read one chapter of Scripture every day." Or, "I'm going to get up a half hour early every morning in order to pray." Or "I'm going to give 3 hours of my time every week to further the ministry of the church."

It's not that simple - that direct - when it comes to humility. What are we going to say? "Today, I'm going to be more humble." And if somehow you are, and you recognize it, how are you supposed to handle that? Because as Shaun just pointed out, "*Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.*"

We *can* say, "Today, I'm going to take steps in order to *look* more humble." But that's not we're looking for is it?

God is showing us the way forward...value others above yourselves, look to the interests of others. But as I said, pretty hard to do. And so what's the key to putting this into practice?

Bill: I think we begin by recognizing that first and foremost, we are followers of Jesus. The three of us recognize that while not everyone sitting in here or watching out there has yet made a decision to follow Jesus, many of you have, and so what we do, as His followers, is look to His life and the example we are to follow.

And this passage in Philippians gives us just what we need, because it sets before us...

III. The Example of Jesus

God's word says...

Philippians 2:5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus....

We're told to look to Jesus, have His mindset, follow His example. And what follows verse 5 is this amazing theological discourse which can be broken down into 3 sections, the first two sections dealing with deep doctrinal truths like Jesus' **incarnation** and **atonement**.

Shaun: But it's in the third section that we find the practical application that we're looking for. It's not about incarnation or atonement, what it's about is **Trajectory**. **"...he humbled himself...Therefore God exalted him..."**

He made Himself low...and God lifted Him up.

Ray: And what I'd like for you to see is how Jesus went about it. Look at verse 7 where it says...

Philippians 2:7 ...he made himself nothing...

When it says, "he made himself nothing", you will often see this translated as **"he emptied himself..."**

You know, a lot of people read this passage and think that it's saying that Jesus emptied Himself of His divinity. "Though He was God, He gave up His divinity..." But that's not what it's saying. Jesus did not give up being God. He came to us fully God and fully man.

And so what did Jesus empty Himself of? And the answer is, "His glory." Though Jesus, being in very nature God...though Jesus had all honor and glory and power...He emptied Himself of this...made himself nothing...

Philippians 2:7 ... by taking the very nature of a servant,

Bill: Taking on the role of a servant, His mindset was to value us above Himself...His mindset was to look to our interests. And so fed us. Healed us. Washed our feet. Died for us. His was an attitude, a mindset of humility. It's who Jesus was, at the very core of His being. *"Therefore God exalted him..."*

And here's where we see the trajectory that Shaun pointed out. The way up – whether it be individually, as a church, or as any kind of group – **the way up, is**

down. Jesus teaches us that real power, true power is found in serving others. Meaning and fulfillment is found not in looking out for our own interests, but in looking for and taking advantage of opportunities to serve others.

This is the example that Jesus set, and has His followers, we will look to follow His example. We want this mindset, this attitude to be at the core of who we are.

And one last thing that I find pretty interesting, back to that phrase where it says Jesus “made Himself nothing”...or, He “emptied” Himself.....the Greek word for “emptied” here in this passage...it’s actually a form of the word **kenodoxian**.

Remember that word from before? We talked about how we hunger for glory, but it often turns out to be nothing more than empty glory. The thing is, Jesus was full of glory, but emptied Himself so that we could be filled. Not filled with a vain glory, thinking more of ourselves than is warranted.

Filled with His life. Jesus living in us and through us, and so there is no need to elevate and promote ourselves at the expense of others. Instead, **we begin to think of ourselves less, by thinking of others more.** We live a life of humility, and by doing so, open the door for God to pour out His grace and use us in a way that is beneficial to all.

Ray: So thank you for giving us your attention as we’ve introduced our theme verse for the year. Let’s just take a moment to briefly...

C. LOOK AHEAD

It’s our intention to keep this theme of humility before us throughout the year, but just like last year with the theme of maturity, we want to find balance.

Last year we wanted to both challenge and encourage you to take steps that would lead to maturity, but we didn’t want to talk about it so much that in the end

wasn't helpful. In the same way, throughout this year we'll be looking to encourage and challenge you to follow Jesus' example, to lay aside your hunger for glory and in humility, look to serve and elevate others.

One way that Bill and I intend to do this is by following a similar pattern as last year. In 2023 Bill and I built our sermons around the Fruit of the Spirit, looking to mature in the nine character traits listed in Galatians. This year we will be doing **9 or 10 character studies**...taking 9 or 10 Sundays to look at men and women in the Bible who displayed humble hearts in sometimes subtle or sometimes very dramatic ways. We hope that these messages will serve as occasional reminders of how God calls us to live.

Shaun: And just like last year, I'll look to take advantage of opportunities to keep this theme in front of us in some of the messages I bring. As I look ahead and see some of what I'm working on, I already recognize some opportunities to show how humility is a theme that – like we've been saying – runs throughout the Bible and is very, very important to God.

For example, next we'll begin our first sermon series of the year. I'm calling it, **Practicing Virtue**. We'll get into what exactly we mean by virtue next week. But many Biblical scholars would call humility chief among the virtues. So while today's message isn't necessarily part of that series, it's a great lead in! More than that, next week's message is specifically focused on a virtue called: surrender. Surrender is at the very heart of humility.

I'm hoping this series on practicing virtue will give us direction and begin leading us into a life marked by humility!

Bill: Thanks Shaun, sounds like a good and challenging series, and I'm sure I'm not the only one looking forward to it.

Let's close by humbling ourselves before God, and asking Him to give us the help we will surely need in order to grow and mature in humility here in 2024. Please pray with me.

Prayer