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UNBROKEN JOY  
COUNT OTHERS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN YOURSELVES

Philippians 2:1-4

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

This passage is a majestic passage. If you take the whole of verses 1-11, you have one of the mountain peaks, of which there are many, in the book of Philippians. This is certainly a high point and verses 5-11 form for us a hymn that exalts Christ in exceptionally beautiful fashion. These verses, verses 1-4, are sort of an introduction for that majestic hymn.

There is something interesting about this passage. It teaches us about relationships. It teaches us about community, and there are some surprising applications for us. If you are here as a person that would say you haven't had great success in the area of relationships; you don't consider yourself to have great friendships; maybe you don't choose friends well or you choose people that in the end don't make you better; your friendships are not always lasting. In an unexpected way, this passage is, I think, going to help us in the area of relationships, friendships, all kinds of relationships.

In a related fashion, this passage also offers a lot of help for community, for church life. You see, there is something about the nature of joy, and you remember that this is a theme for Paul in the book of Philippians. He is talking to us about his own joy in the Lord and how that joy does not rely on circumstances going on around him, and that that is an unbroken, uninterrupted joy. It is for all of eternity. And we have observed already how he has a certain vitality and energy and strength and hope and contentment that are all characteristic of true joy, which is found in Christ.

Well, in this passage, we begin to see more clearly something that Paul has assumed throughout chapter one. There has been this assumption at work, and now he states it clearly as he opens chapter two. But, it is one of those kinds of assumptions that, it's so there, it's so obvious that we often miss it. It is something

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about the nature of joy and it's this: It is that *joy always wants to express itself*. It always wants to include others in its happiness. *Joy in Christ has come from meeting him, from being changed by him, and the experience of joy finds greater satisfaction, finds completion when we get to bring others into it.*

There is an account in Acts, chapter three – I was reading it this week in my own devotional time. Peter and John are going into the temple to pray. There is a man at the gate to the temple and every day his family members would carry him. He had been lame from birth. Peter and John came by this man. There is something fascinating when you think about this. Certainly, Jesus himself had passed this man a number of times entering into the temple. But on this day, Peter and John stopped and they see the man. The man looks to them and he is begging. He is looking for some help, some financial help. Famously, Peter looks at the man and tells him, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” We are told that immediately Peter seized the man by the hand. He got up. His legs were strengthened, and he was healed. Just a few verses later we read this description, “...leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.” Now that is a picture of joy. Lame from birth, begging at temple gate, immediately healed, and then just overcome with joy.

I've commented on this before, just the nature of the miracles of Jesus, how a man lame all his life is immediately physically restored. If I sit in a chair for too long in the wrong position, I feel like I can't get across the room. Nothing happens immediately. Everything has to warm up. This man is immediately healed! Can you just imagine the emotion that overcomes him? He is leaping and praising God! “Praise” is a good synonym for the word “rejoice.” Paul tells us throughout the book of Philippians, “Rejoice, rejoice, and again I will say, rejoice.” What we are doing in that moment is expressing our exhilaration to God and to others about God.

John, chapter nine, tells about another man who was born with an illness. He was born blind. And he, too, was healed by Jesus. His healing creates this controversy. The religious leaders come and they are all stirred up about this. They are troubled by it. They bring his parents in and they question his parents, and his parents are afraid. Then they bring him in and they question him. They are asking “Who did this and in what name was this done?” So the man was telling them about Jesus. They are saying that this man is a sinner, but the blind man says, “I don't know that he's a sinner. I mean, he healed me. From the beginning of history we have never heard about anyone born blind being healed. All I know is: Once I was

blind, but now I see.”

He has been changed by this encounter with Christ and his experience. The lame man and the blind man are really pictures of what happens to us spiritually. We are lame spiritually. We are blind spiritually. We are spiritually dead and Christ comes in and brings us to life. All of a sudden I have found my purpose, my reason for existence! I have met someone who is infinitely good, who is, as we worshipped today, perfect. And I am overcome with that.

Paul is making this point: when we really know God and experience this joy, we *have* to share it. In chapter one he says, “You know, I’m here in prison, but I think I’m going to get out. I hope I get out and if I do it’s going to be a joyous occasion for you and for me.” Again, that assumption that joy wants to share itself.

That brings Paul to the subject of chapter two. Because if joy finds pleasure in other people experiencing its happiness and its source, then it’s very troubled by *disunity* and *division*. Paul, in chapter two, is going to attack the problem of broken relationship. He is going to address this potential division that is taking place at Philippi. Some church leaders were not getting along. Little factions were starting to form, perhaps, and Paul talks as if that’s going to quench, in one respect, it’s going to prevent the display, the experience of our joy in Christ. So he attacks it.

He attacks it and he does three things here. This is what we are going to talk about if you’re taking notes. This is our outline for this morning. He is going to give us:

- I. **The cause of disunity**, and then he is going to give us
- II. **The cure for disunity**, and then he does something very helpful. He talks to us about
- III. **The practice of the cure**. There is something given to us in this chapter. In fact, it’s really the theme of the entire chapter that we can do on a daily basis that helps us to walk in spiritual health, to walk in relational health.

- I. **The cause.**

**The cause** is described in verse 3. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

So, what is the cause? *The cause is just good old-fashioned pride.* Now, he describes it in terms that really help us see it from some different angles. He uses this first description; there are two phrases here. One is “selfish ambition.” He is speaking here of self-seeking, self-promotion. It is a word that is sometimes translated as “strife” or “factions.” It is a factious spirit, a self-orientation that’s concerned with gathering my own little power unit, my own little power group, so that you are with me and against them. The word itself illustrates for us that factions come out of our own selfish ambition.

The second word: He says “do nothing from conceit.” This word is especially descriptive. It’s a Greek word, “kenodoxia,” and it’s formed from two Greek words. I don’t often give you Greek vocabulary because I know you don’t want Greek vocabulary, but in this case it helps you because it’s two words: “kenosis”, which means “empty” (some of you recognize that word), and the word for “glory” – “doxa.” It literally means “empty of glory.” The King James translated this word “vainglory,” empty of glory. The person who is conceited is craving glory. He or she is constantly saying, “I am empty of glory and I want it. I want self-magnification. Would you please just pay me some attention? Would you notice me? Would you acknowledge me? Would you fuss over me? Don’t you love me? Aren’t you crazy about me like I’m crazy about me? Can we talk about me?”

### II. The cure

So, the conceited person always finds a way, sometimes more creatively than not, to bring the conversation back to his or her favorite topic: me. Paul says to do nothing out of this craving to exalt yourself. He identifies this as the **cause** of disunity – selfish ambition, conceit, which leads him then to the **cure**. We are not surprised that at first glance **the cure is identified as humility**.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

So, we think about humility and counting others more significant than ourselves. The challenge for us is that the more we think about humility, oftentimes the less humble we become because of how much more we are thinking about ourselves. So we need to slow down here for a minute and step back and try to take a biblical view of the subject of humility. Because when we think about humility we think, “Okay, I should think of others as better than myself.” That’s probably a poor definition of humility most of the time. He says we are to think of others as more significant than ourselves, but the whole, “You’re better than I am” doesn’t always work.

I mean, some of you are better golfers than I am, I'm sure. But I'm pretty confident I'm a better golfer than some of the people that are here this morning. And if we went out to play golf, I would not be thinking "Wow, they're just better than me." I'd be thinking, "No, they're horrible!" Because some of you are horrible at golf, right? Some of you are better than other people at mathematics. Here's a shock, but some of you are better looking than the rest of us. It is not becoming for a beautiful person to always be saying, "Oh, I'm so ugly," because in the end, what do we think? "That person is just trying to draw attention to their own beauty. Would you stop talking about how ugly you are because in reality you're beautiful and it's obnoxious?" Am I wrong? No. We understand that that whole dynamic of saying, "Okay, you're better than me" is not a very complex definition or understanding of what humility is.

So let's think about humility in three ways. First of all, there is the humility of **perspective**, of perspective. This is the closest to that misunderstanding, "You're better than I am." But there is a biblical basis for proper self-assessment, proper self-evaluation.

We talked earlier about John, chapter nine, and the man born blind, and he was healed. Well, when the religious leaders bring him in, they start to question him. The reality of what's happened in his life is undeniable. They are arguing with him, so he really agitates them. He's like, "Wow, you're asking a lot of questions. Are you guys wanting to become disciples of Christ? Do you want to follow him?" They are getting angry and he just comes to the bottom line. He goes, "All I know is that I was blind and now I see. You are calling him a sinner, but God doesn't listen to sinners, not like this."

This was their response: "You are an utter sinner. You were born in complete sin, and you are going to teach us?!" And the scripture says they cast him out. That's a word picture of the contempt of pride. Pride looks with disdain at other people and says, "I despise you. You couldn't teach me anything. I am so far above you!" As the account clearly teaches before it is over, pride lacks a proper self-assessment and evaluation.

At the end of the chapter, the man is healed. He has gone through all this turmoil with the religious leaders. It's so ironic, isn't it? They are not happy for him. They are all bent out of shape because of their pride. So Jesus has an interchange with the man and he brings him to faith. He helps him understand who he is and what he has done, and the man worships Jesus at the end of the chapter.

Then Jesus proclaims these words. He says,

*“For judgment I came into this world,” (listen carefully) “that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” (Hmmm.) Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said to him, “Are we also blind?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”*

Jesus is saying to the religious leaders, “You are spiritually blind. You just saw me heal this man of physical blindness. And that is your spiritual condition. But in your pride you refuse to see that and because of that, your guilt remains upon you and I will judge you.” But, here is the good news of the gospel. To the person who says, “I am blind – *help me*. Lord, I look at my life – there is enough evidence for me to see I don’t have this figured out. *Help me!*” God says, “No guilt. You come to me, trust in me, worship me. I remove your guilt and I will give you a proper self-assessment. You will see your *need* for a messiah, your *need* for a savior, and you will *have* a savior.

The first aspect of humility is probably the healthy understanding of “you’re better than me.” It’s actually just a proper self-**perspective** of our own spiritual need before God. Then there is secondly the humility of **position**. So, there’s the humility of **perspective** or self-evaluation, then there’s the humility of **position**. That is where I position myself to serve. I take the lowest place. So Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. Jesus comes, and becomes a man, and serves, even to the point of going to the cross so that he can give his life for us. He seeks the lowest place, the place of humility, the place of serving others.

Thirdly, there is the humility of **purpose**. You’ve got **perspective**, **position**, and **purpose**. The humility of **purpose** is this: It’s that my purpose is no longer self. I am not at the center of my life purpose, but now my purpose is God. God’s glory. Christ. Exalting Christ and therefore other people. At the center of my life I have removed self and God and others are there, so that there is an other-orientation taking place in my life.

This is an important understanding for us because we started by saying that the more we talk about humility, the more prideful we tend to become, because we are so self-focused in that orientation. C.S. Lewis famously wrote, “The humble man will not be thinking about humility. He will not be thinking about himself at all.” True humility is not this kind of self-deprecation that we pour and heap on ourselves. It is losing self-focus. It is not thinking about ourselves.

If we were to stop the message right here at this point, you would be miserable. We have said that

*disunity* is a problem. It kills joy, or it kills the spread of joy. It's unnatural for the Christian. The source of it is *pride*. The answer is *humility*. If we said, "Amen," and everyone went home, you would be worse off than when we started, because we really haven't yet gotten to the **cure**. If humility is what I need, how do I get it? How do I walk in it? Where does it come from? Most of us would just leave with more guilt about how we are not humble. Even when we think we are humble we are the most prideful of all.

Here is where Paul helps us. He tells us that **the cure is the gospel**. Did you notice how we began the chapter? He says, "...if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind." Those first four clauses are describing for you the result of the gospel, the result of Christ in your life. The Christian is someone who has been encouraged, strengthened, given hope, comforted by Christ, comforted by the love of God, comforted by the love of Christ. The Holy Spirit has come in. He participates with the Spirit. The word is "fellowship." He fellowships with the Spirit of God. He is in relationship, receiving the comfort and the love of God. He has received affection and sympathy.

Let's apply the gospel to this message. Pride brings division, broken relationship, broken marriage, broken friendship, broken relationship within the church, breaks up community, divides nations, brings war. **Pride is the enemy. Humility is the answer.**

You and I stop right there. If Christ has lifted the veil and opened our eyes to see, you know what we say? We say, "Wow. I'm prideful. And I try to be humble, but I fail. I mean, I try to serve, but the truth is, when I serve, would someone please recognize me? I mean, really, I'm serving here! Don't you see that this is beneath me? Don't you see how incredibly sacrificial and humble this makes me?"

Even in our greatest moments, we often display our greatest pride. Think about it. There you are. Let's just pretend for a moment you are married. You may be married, you may not be. You've had an argument with your spouse, *again*. As I've said to you before, this is completely hypothetical. This has never happened in my own situation or marriage. You are thinking, "Okay, scripture tells me, 'Be humble. I need to make this right. I need to ask for forgiveness.' Alright, I could have been more patient. I'm going to own that. I'm going to ask for forgiveness." "So, sweetheart, would you forgive me for not being more patient?"

There is this critical moment right now. You have tried to step out in humility. What happens if your spouse doesn't react in that moment in the right way? What if they say back to you, "You don't mean that.

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Oh, you just want something. Oh, you say that. Sure, you say that, but you've said that before and tomorrow nothing will change." Do you know what happens? "I wasn't even wrong! I was just doing this to help!" Then all of a sudden all this stuff starts to come up. We become more monstrous in our pride than we were before we ever tried to walk in humility, because deep down in us is this craving for it to be about us, and for us to be right, and for us to get our way.

Now, the gospel brings you comfort. The gospel meets you and says, "I know just how dark your heart is. I know that your sin is not just up here on the surface, in terms of how you can be impatient and angry and relationships suffer. I see the root of it, and I see the spiritual death that covers you like a blanket. And I am going to give my life – my perfect, sinless life – to forgive you, to remove guilt, to remove shame, and to give you a new life.

The gospel truly comforts you because you want to come to God and say, "God, I read this about Paul in prison, and to live is Christ and to die is gain, and I just feel more and more condemned because that's not how I feel. I'm not even in prison, but if I don't get a good night's sleep, I am grumpy! God, what a mess I am!" The gospel comes and says, "Yes, and so was Paul! Paul was out murdering Christians!" And the encouragement of Christ and the hope of Christ come.

The devil has these little tricks that he plays on us. He says "Yeah, but you've asked for forgiveness for this sin over and over and over." Of course you have! Because this is the condition of your heart. What happens in those moments of despair is you are just beginning to see how big a sinner you really are and how much you need a savior. It is then that the gospel really begins to take shape. God is saying to you, "Yes, I know. I am not surprised. You are surprised. You are in a little bit worse shape than you thought you were. I am not surprised. I am here to save you, to cleanse you, to comfort you." So pride is displaced by the good news of Jesus Christ, by the comfort of the gospel.

When we are there in that moment of relational conflict, many times our sin spills over to a point where we have to acknowledge it. We become so angry or abusive or dysfunctional that we are confronted with—boom!—our pride is right there. At that point I want to ask you, if you are a Christian, do you run to Christ to receive the comfort of the gospel or do you run to try to make it right? You need to run to Christ first and receive the comfort of the gospel and displace self, so that then you can go and make it right. If we try to make it right apart from the gospel, in the end we are still keeping self as the purpose, and in the middle.

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**The cure is Christ.** That’s what he calls them to. Do you hear in the language, “Hey I want you to be of the same mind, the same allegiance, the same love. You have received comfort. Keep your mind on Christ and his love. That allegiance will serve you and help you.”

Let me give you some questions as we move out of this point to help you evaluate where you are in terms of humility in your life. Ask yourself these questions:

- Question #1 - How do I respond to criticism? How do I respond to correction?
- Question #2 - Am I easily offended?
- Question #3 – Am I defensive?

These questions will help you to diagnose the humility of **perspective**. Am I properly seeing myself? If so, I am not going to be surprised when I need correction. I am not going to be defensive and easily offended.

- Question #4 – Am I concerned about recognition?
- Question #5 – Are titles important to me?
- Question #6 - Am I always comparing? (It’s not enough for me to do well, I have to do better than the next person.)
- Question #7 – Am I given to a spirit of entitlement, where I take others and blessings for granted?
- Question #8 – Do I consistently and sacrificially serve others without looking for acknowledgment?

All of questions 4 through 8 really address and help us diagnose the humility of **position**. Am I seeking to serve or do I feel entitled? Am I wanting recognition?

- Question #9 – Are my private thoughts consumed with me? Do I fantasize about personal exaltation?
- Question #10 – How much of my prayer is focused on God, on worship?
- One more – Question #11 – Am I more sin-conscious or grace-conscious? Am I more aware of my sin or of God’s provision for my sin?

Those last several questions are trying to attack this “humility of **purpose**.” Alone, in my thoughts, is it always about me? Or has the gospel, and has God, and has Christ come in and displaced that so that my focus is on God and on others?

### III. The practice of the cure.

I want to end with this. We are going to talk about this more in the weeks to come, but I said I would just give you a note about the **practice of the cure**. We have talked about the **cause**, the **cure**, which is humility, but really the gospel, really Christ, who brings us to a place where we can walk in humility. And there is a place where Paul helps us here with the **practice**. It's really in verse 4 where he says, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." He sets that up at the end of verse 3 where he says, "...in humility, count others more significant than yourselves."

So, here is what we've said: If my whole focus is on "I've got to be humble... I've got to be humble. I've got to be humble," I'm just thinking more and more about me, me, me, me! In the end, it's a trap. The practical application that Paul gives you is, "Stop thinking about you and start thinking about others." *Be others-focused*. Be focused on how significant they are. Put them in front of yourself and look out, not only for your own interests, but for others, where you are immediately aware of others.

My wife and I would laugh, because with the kids we would notice this dynamic in all of them, some of them more than others. We would be in a room. There would be three or four of us talking, and one would walk into the room and just start talking, like we've all been waiting there for them to arrive, doing nothing. We all do it, right? We are completely unaware of conversations happening. Sometimes patiently, and sometimes very impatiently, we are like, "No, stop!" That's the way we are! We are aware of *me*! Humility—great focal, practical point—is just constantly be focused on others.

For me as a husband, I was completely unprepared. I didn't have a clue how to anticipate what the effects of moving from Dallas to South Florida would be for my wife, and a career change, and a living change. Then pregnancy. It took me years, and I'm still learning to be focused on someone other than me! And how these things are affecting lives! We are surrounded by people who are going through sickness, and promotion, and job loss, and this, and that, and broken relationship. We give them a pat on the back and we go on. Scripture is calling us to think about the interests of others. It's a wonderfully helpful, practical application of this truth.

Now, this is what will happen in the chapter. Paul will take that verse 4, and it's his focus for the rest of the chapter. He will give Jesus as an example. Then he will give himself as an example. Then he will give Timothy and Epaphroditus. He will give four examples in the remaining part of this chapter to talk to us

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about living a life in community where we are focused on other people and not ourselves.

So let's respond, starting with just that picture of our own need for spiritual help. If you are here listening to this message, we talked about the lame man at the gate. It's called "The Beautiful Gate." He is there at the gate of the temple begging. Peter and John come in and they are used of God to heal him. Peter gets up and starts to preach. He says, "By faith in the name of Jesus Christ, this man has been made strong and given perfect health." Then he takes that idea and he starts to talk to them about their need for spiritual help. He says, "Repent of your sin, trust in Christ, and you will experience a refreshing in the Holy Spirit."

These pictures are given to us in scripture: the lame walking, the blind seeing, because God wants to say to us, "It's not just your bodies that are broken and experiencing the impact of sin. It's your soul, and I want to heal you. I want to give you strength. Come. Humbly repent of your sin and trust in me and *you will receive life.*" That's the first and ongoing application for us.