

I was born and raised right down the street in Westford. The youngest of three, (two older sisters so I was the only son). Born into a relatively wealthy family, with very intelligent, successful, involved and supportive parents. I was athletic, always had great friends, I was musical from an early age... It was the perfect breeding ground for me to grow up **COMPLETELY OBSESSED WITH MYSELF.**

I thought it would be appropriate to begin our time today with a brief history of my love of myself. It began at an early age, when I was in kindergarten, I would **steal toys** from other kids at school and just show up at home with someone else's action figures in my backpack, as if my mother would believe my story of "*finding them on the school bus.*" I would get in trouble for **calling other kids names**, I used to **kick my neighbor in the shins** almost every day we'd play together. Yes, it was a **GIRL** neighbor, but she deserved it!

But my "selfish little snot" phase didn't end there. I had some friends in the neighborhood that weren't GREAT influences on me, so we used to **terrorize** our neighborhood with **setting off firecrackers**, or **riding mini-dirtbikes** across people's lawns, I even remember **taking people's mail out of their mailboxes**, which I now understand to be a felony. (*Punishable by up to 3 years in prison, but let's just keep that between me and you, ok?*)

To make matters worse, I was really good at skateboarding, so the older kids always wanted me around to skate with. I would hang out with my older sister's friends. Always felt **really cool** to be hanging out with older kids.

My father taught me how to play guitar at an early age, taught me the basic chords and a handful of Beatles songs. As I entered high school, I learned that playing guitar had a very specific effect on the pretty girls in high school. Especially if you played Dashboard Confessional or Dave Matthews songs. **So that's just what I did!** And not only THAT, I started writing some of my own songs about these said "pretty girls" in high school. Sometimes, when I thought I came up with a pretty clever song, something REALLY SAPPY and EMO, I realized that I could just switch girls' names and use that song more than once!

This was all prior to my own **Copernican Revolution**, when I learned the universe didn't revolve around me. All of this came crashing down in my Junior and Senior year of high school, through a series of significant events. One of them was getting arrested for possession of marijuana, which I've shared here before. It was one of the first times I

realized I **wasn't invincible**. I got in trouble, 6 months of probation, everyone in the school found out. It was humbling.

Another revelation was when a close friend of mine, Kevin Beals, had a hard conversation with me to say, "*John, you know that people just laugh at you behind your back, right? There are a lot of people who you THINK like you, but that really don't like you.*" That was like having my food supply cut off. I was living off of other people's approval of me, and to learn that people were on to me, and that I wasn't this impressive, cool kid that everyone wanted to be around... That was NEWS TO ME!

And throughout all of this, I had a few incredible YoungLife leaders, which I was involved with at the time, constantly reminding me that **JESUS was the main character**, and that JOHN was a member of the supporting cast.

My love story had come to an abrupt, disappointing end. I hadn't become the King. People weren't praising me. My friends had sort of abandoned ship... And I had my first experience of standing naked before a Holy God (metaphorically speaking). **I was able to see myself through the eyes of people around me. I was able to see the great disparity between my perception and reality. And it wasn't fun.**

Have you ever been there? **Have you ever had your CIRCUMSTANCES create a moment of true humility in your life?** The makeup is gone, the rug is pulled out, there aren't any words to persuade or impress the people around you, and you're seen exactly as you are... Flaws and all. My hope is that we've each had that experience, and if you haven't had that yet... It's coming. *(And the later it comes in life, the more it's going to suck.)*

What I want to do here is read this next section of Philippians and explore together what it means for us as a community to live humbly.

The passage of scripture that we'll be looking at today is the beginning of chapter 2. If you'd like to turn there, to Philippians 2, that'd be great. **If you'd like a Bible but don't have one, please feel comfortable getting up to grab one in the back.** Our heart for you as a leadership is that you'd be comfortable holding a bible in your hands, that you wouldn't be afraid of the TABLE OF CONTENTS to figure out what page each book of the bible starts on. In fact, if you're using one of our blue bibles, **we'll be on page 708.** If you have a Bible App on your phone, take it out and choose the New Living Translation, if you want to follow along there.

Philippians 2:1-11

1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. 9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul begins this passage with a series of rhetorical questions in verse 1. He's using these questions as leverage to make his point. He's putting together an argument for unity, and a compelling one at that. **He knows the necessity of UNITY within any church community.** In fact, you can't have COMMUNITY without UNITY. It's right there in the word.

"Community" is derived from the Latin word "**communitas**" which means fellowship, which was derived from "**communis**" which means common. The prefix "**COM**" means "**together,**" so COMM-UNITY simply means "**together with unity.**" COMM-UNITY.

We may have the best intentions and the highest hopes for our community and for the people around us, but if the WAY WE EXPRESS THOSE FEELINGS isn't done in humility, they're lost in translation. One of my mentors says, "*How you say what you say IS what you say.*"

So Paul gives us this very basic definition of humility: *“Don’t be selfish, stop trying to impress people, show an interest in other people’s lives...”* but he doesn’t stop there. **He launches into this poem or hymn of sorts. He shares this vignette of Jesus’ life, showing how Jesus exemplified what it meant to be humble.**

“Though He was God, he didn’t think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up ALL OF THAT to become a human... And not only that, but the position of a human SLAVE. A servant. A carpenter’s son. A poor, marginalized peasant.”

C.S. Lewis writes about it this way... He says that if we want to understand what it would be like to be an Eternal Being, the Second Person of the Trinity, One who knows everything and who created the entire universe, to then become a man, (FULLY man), with a particular height and weight and hair color... It would be like us agreeing to become a slug or a crab. Going from a human with **consciousness** and **creativity** and **hopes** and **dreams** and **intellectual capacity**, to a little crab, with no ability to communicate and a brain the size of a Skittle, at best. **This decision demonstrates humility.**

What can we learn from Jesus when it comes to humility?

Since we’ve already been dissecting words a little bit, the word **“humility”** comes from the Latin word **humilitas**, which can obviously be translated as **“humble”** but also **“grounded”** or **“from the earth.”** That root, **“humus”** means **“earth.”** (*Which is why some people think hummus tastes like dirt... Because, well... it’s right there in the name.*) **“From the earth.”** I love that... **Humility simply means that we are GROUNDED.**

Some people wrongly understand **humility** to be self-deprecating, putting yourself down, questioning our self-worth or your talents. **But we don’t see that anywhere in Jesus’ life.** There are a handful of instances when people made bold claims about Him when He said, *“Hey, keep that under wraps...”* but He didn’t spend His days putting Himself down.

When I first heard that Tim Keller quote years ago, it changed my whole perspective of humility. I think Jeff shared this a few weeks back... **“Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, it’s simply thinking of yourself less.”** Not putting yourself down, but thinking of yourself less often.

Consider for a moment, what Jesus' life would've looked like if He lived to our modern-day interpretation of humility. The crowds would gather, people would come to hear Him speak and to be healed from disease, and there Jesus would be, hands in His pockets, saying "**Well, gee.. I don't know if I can do this. What should I say?**" Jesus' humility didn't strip Him of His confidence.

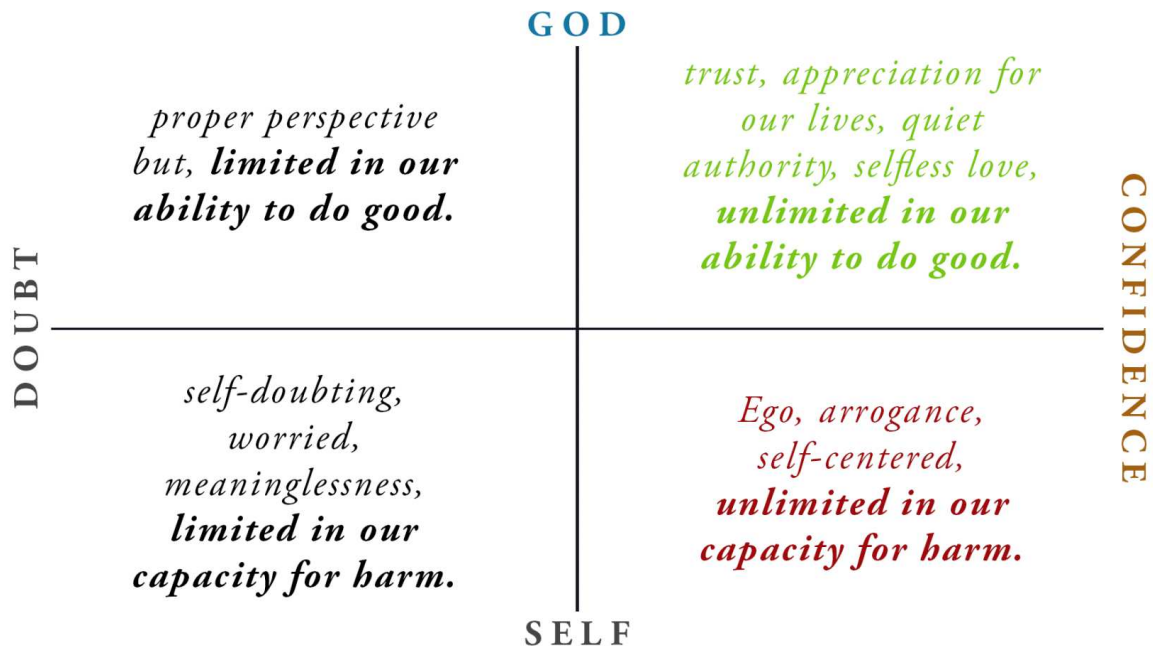
Hear that: Jesus' humility didn't strip Him of His confidence. Jesus had a quiet authority about Him. He didn't parade around with a marching band with big banners saying "VOTE FOR JESUS!" trying to make much of Himself... **But, and this is important**, He also had the confidence and authority to lay His hands on people and heal them from disease, He stood before thousands and thousands with BOLD, counter-cultural, unpopular, progressive teachings. He began a revolution that is **UNFOLDING TODAY**. Think about that.

No campaign managers, no fundraising and a short window of time (the Gospel of John mentions three Passovers (3 years) but the synoptics suggest an even shorter timeframe.) That would be like if Jesus kicked off His ministry just after the Boston Marathon bombings, which feels very recent, and it was coming to a close in the next couple months. INCREDIBLY short period of time. **And we're still talking about Him!** More literature written about the person of Jesus than any other figure in history. If He had shied away from His calling, none of us would be here today, in this basement.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks states that in Judaism, the background that Jesus and Paul were coming from, "*Humility is an **appreciation of oneself, one's talents, skills, and virtues. It is not meekness or self-deprecating thought, but the effacing of oneself to something higher. Humility is not to think lowly of oneself, but to appreciate the self one has received.***"

There's a tension we must live within, a balance of how we understand ourselves. We must be brought low from our own perceptions of our significance, but we also MUST understand our inherent value. Yes, we were made from the DIRT, but God breathed His spirit into us.

As I was thinking through all of this, I drew a simple XY axis, and I want to share this little illustration with you. **With the Y axis being SELF—GOD, this is about our FOCUS.** This is what we spend our time thinking about. **The Y axis is sort of our MIND axis. The X axis is DOUBT—CONFIDENCE.** This is about our HEARTS, this is more emotion and soul/spirit stuff.



1. If you're in the bottom left quadrant, you're in a tough spot. Focused on YOURSELF and wrestling with DOUBT. The words I wrote in here, and this was all just a brainstorm, were "Self-doubting, worried, meaninglessness, **limited in our capacity for harm.**" Because you're focused on yourself, there's a chance you'll harm those around you, but because you're wrestling with doubt, you're limited in that ability.
2. If you're in the top left quadrant, you've got your priorities straight, focusing on God and others, **but you're still questioning your talents, abilities, calling.** There's a good chance you GIVE IN and LISTEN to the voices in your head that call you 'incapable' or 'damaged goods' or 'unworthy.' This is an OK place to be, if this is where you're at, THERE'S HOPE! The words I wrote down here were "Proper perspective but **limited in our ability to do good.**"
3. The third quadrant, the bottom right, is where I was living for the first 18 years of my life (and where I still wake up some mornings to this very day!). Where CONFIDENCE and SELF meet, there's trouble brewing. The words I wrote here were "Ego, arrogance, self-centered, **unlimited in our capacity for harm.**" We all know people like this, and if you don't... You might be in that quadrant. We've seen **politicians** do incredible harm, we've seen **people claim equality with God**, the **caesars** of Jesus' day, the **Pharaohs, Kanye West...** But let me tell you, from personal experience, the more weight you place on yourself, the more painful it is when your knees buckle and your back gives out. It's exhausting to be your own god.

4. And the final quadrant (where Jesus was and where we want to be!) is **HOLY CONFIDENCE**. You're focused on God and others, and you trust that what God says about you and your inherent value is true. You embrace your unique gifts and what you have to offer to the Body of Christ. You serve those around you with a quiet authority that comes from God. The words I wrote here were *"Trust, appreciation for our lives, quiet authority, selfless love, **unlimited in our ability to do good.**"*

But how do we get there? If we're in one of the other quadrants, which we inevitably will be... (sometimes I hit all 4 in one day!), **How do we bring ourselves back into HOLY CONFIDENCE?**

- If you're a bottom-left type of person, there are **two areas** of your life that need adjustment. **Your focus and your heart**. You need someone in your life to help you (first!) understand God. That there's a God that is real and present and available. A God that already knows everything about you and **STILL LOVES YOU**. **Can you believe that?** A God that doesn't see us the way the world sees us, by what we can offer to the world, but rather by our inherent value by being sons and daughters. **Parents, you understand this**. You might feel proud of your children by their accomplishments or talents but your **LOVE FOR THEM** is just built in. It just IS... And once you begin to focus on God and not yourself, you can begin actually **listening** to God. Listening to what He says about you. **And you'll begin to listen less to the voices of doubt, the lies of the Enemy, the guilt from the past or the shame of mistakes...** And you'll slowly start creeping into a confidence and trust in God. That's the path for a bottom-left person. **God first, then confidence**.
- If you're a top-left type of person, you're halfway there. You're likely a very **faithful** person, **committed** to your church, **faithful** to your spouse and friends, but feeling **limited** or feeling **held back**. Every time an opportunity pops up to do something exciting or to share the love of God with someone, doubt creeps in and the moment passes by. **This is LIKELY because you've given too large of a platform to the Enemy**.
 - When Jesus was baptized, recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, John baptizes Jesus sort of reluctantly, like... *"Shouldn't you be baptizing me?!"* but he obeys Jesus and when he's pulling Jesus up out of the water, it says ***"the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended, settling on Him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.'"*** Now, what happens next? Matthew 4, Jesus is led by that Spirit, the same spirit that just descended on Him, into the

wilderness to be tempted there by the devil (Satan, darkness, evil). And what were the temptations Jesus faced?

- *“If you are the Son of God, tell these **stones** to become loaves of bread.”*
- *“If you are the Son of God, **jump** off the highest point of the Temple.”*
- *“I will give you all the **kingdoms** of the world and their glory, if you kneel down and worship me.”*
- There’s no law that says *“Don’t turn stones into bread.”* or *“Don’t jump off things and allow angels to catch you.”* **So what was the real temptation there?**
- ***“IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD...”*** Jesus had JUST heard from God that He was “His dearly loved son who brings Him great joy” and the Enemy is trying to get Jesus to question that. He’s trying to introduce doubt. He’s trying to tempt Jesus into “rising above” that calling, to take things into His own hands... To forget what God had said to Him.
- **The Enemy wants nothing more than to cloud the airspace between us and God.** We have to remain committed, as a community, to continually clear the air; to trust that ‘when we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.’ To not walk around carrying baggage of guilt and shame. **Are you allowing space for God to speak in your life?**
- If you’re a top-left person, try creating space for quiet and allowing God to speak. Listen to what HE CALLS YOU, not what the world or any dark thoughts might say.
- If you’re a bottom-right person, **buckle up**. I believe that your ego and your arrogance actually won’t allow you to break over that line into the top-right. **Anytime “God” pops up into the conversation, your ego will immediately flick your thoughts back to yourself.** Self-preservation, acclaim, power, money, security... All of these “good” things have turned into “God” things and they need to be de-throned. So the path for you, **at least how it worked for me in my Copernican Revolution**, is clockwise. Admitting your weakness, admitting that the story isn’t only about you, allowing yourself to doubt, confronting your mortality. **And then, and only then, allowing God to lift your face from the ashes.** To call you a beloved child, to draw you up into the top-left and slowly gaining confidence and authority from God, to begin doing good for the Kingdom, and investing your life into eternally significant things. ***It’s a struggle, but I’ve found no other path.*** They all look different, take different periods of time, but I’ve never seen it done otherwise.

- If you're in the top-right, **you're exactly where God wants you to be**. You're holding your talents and passions and callings in proper perspective, and God is likely doing powerful things through you. This is an incredible place to be, but there are daily threats of the slippery slope back into SELF or DOUBT.
- **Now, I want to say that none of this is perfect, this chart didn't come down from Heaven**, and on any given day we can be in a great spot and then one little thing will send us careening into a different quadrant, but hopefully by illustrating this and trying to better understand how we're wired, we can use this as a tool in our thought life, to be the best versions of ourselves possible, for the sake of the Kingdom.

So Paul is calling the Philippians to HUMILITY, but understanding that **humility is a means to an end**. And for the Philippian church, the end was UNITY. That's why Paul was writing this portion of the letter. And we've talked about humility, different threats of it, and how we can work to make our lives look more like the life of Jesus, so I want to close by spending a minute on UNITY.

Whenever there is a transition, there is a threat of **disunity**. Jed leaving could have caused an unraveling. **It could have been the perfect opportunity for the Enemy to begin chipping away at our leadership, and to begin to sow seeds of discord**. When Jed told me that he was leaving, there was a temptation to leave. It sounds ridiculous to even say that out loud, but it's true. It was a very gut-level, ego-centric, bottom-right quadrant thought. *"If you're out, I'm out. I like you, so if you're leaving, I'm leaving."* **But thank God for GOD** and His ability to slap some sense into us. Immediately, I was struck by the thoughts of our closest friends here, the people we love, and how this community is EXACTLY where Elyse and I want to be raising our family.

Do we have room to grow? **Yes**.

Are there roles that need to be filled on staff? **Absolutely**.

But are we exactly where God wants us? **Yes**.

As a church community, I'm confident that our best days are ahead of us. Our leadership is stronger than ever before. Our vision and our plans for the future are more defined and focused than ever before. **And we need God to show up in a HUGE WAY, like we've never seen before**. There's something refreshing about stepping out in faith. After we've walked through the hardest parts of transition, we're struck with a hopeful abandon. This is when God, once again, proves Himself to be God.

He is the great **provider**, He is the great **visionary**, He is the great **teacher**.

I'll close with this. Let's close our eyes together, I'll read this blessing.

May we, Harbor, **embrace** our positions in the body of Christ.

May we understand ourselves in relation to God.

May we understand the **unique way** that He has wired us, and how we might **play a significant role** in the future of this church.

May we walk in, and only in, **Holy Confidence**.

Let's pray...