

The Pattern of Humility — Resetting the Direction of Your Mind (Philippians 2:1-30)

This passage includes examples of humility in the Philippians themselves, Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

XT	NKJV	NASV
A. Paul exhorts the Philippian assembly to humbly submit to one another. (2:1-4)		
<p>¹ So then, [in view of the previously mentioned things, namely: your governing yourselves as free citizens [1:27a], your standing firm in one spirit [1:27d], your fighting alongside one another with one mind for the faith of the gospel [1:27e], your fearlessness at the opposition [1:28], your trusting faith while suffering on behalf of Christ [1:29], and your sharing my conflict [1:30] of whether to live or to die [1:18-26] — in view of these things:]</p> <p>if {there does exist among you} some {measure of} encouragement {founded} in Christ;</p> <p>if {there does exist among you} some {measure of} solace {flowing} from devoted love;</p> <p>if {there does exist among you} some {measure of} communion {in the realm} of {the} spirit;</p> <p>if {there does exist among you} some {inward measure of} tender affections along with {outward movement of} gentle compassions,</p> <p>² {then,} make my rejoicing full: such that you should {make a habit of} directing your minds toward the {very} same {purpose} — {with everyone} possessing the same devoted love, {being inseparably} united in {spiritual} life, directing {your} minds toward this one {purpose}:</p> <p>³ {namely, to do} nothing in the spirit of self-interest [personal advantage] OR self-esteem [empty personal conceit], but rather, under {the influence of} humility of mind, {while} each {person} is esteeming every other {person to be} superior to himself, ⁴ let each {person, as a habit of mind,} be directing his attention, not {merely} toward his own {personal interests [concerns /well-being /rights /due claims /advantages]}, but rather, {let} each {person be directing his attention} also {toward} the {individual interests [r]} of {the} others.</p>	<p>¹ Therefore</p> <p>if <i>there is</i> any consolation in Christ,</p> <p>if any comfort of love,</p> <p>if any fellowship of the Spirit,</p> <p>if any affection and mercy,</p> <p>² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, <i>being</i> of one accord, of one mind.</p> <p>³ <i>Let nothing be done</i> through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.</p>	<p>¹ Therefore</p> <p>if there is any encouragement in Christ,</p> <p>if there is any consolation of love,</p> <p>if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,</p> <p>if any affection and compassion,</p> <p>² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.</p> <p>³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not <i>merely</i> look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.</p>
B. Paul presents Christ as the premier example of the humble servant mindset. (2:5-11)		
<p>⁵ For {so} let your mind be {habitually} directed toward this {purpose} among you, which {purpose was} also in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, existing from the beginning in {the} distinct form [distinguishable characteristics] of God, He did not regard the {status} of being on an exactly equal basis with God {as a} preference to be {self-servingly} held onto;</p> <p>⁷ but rather, He emptied Himself {of the distinct form}, taking on {the} distinct form of {a} bondservant [slave], having come into {material} existence with {the natural born} likeness of men, ⁸ and having been found with respect to outward appearance [fashion] {to be} as {an ordinary} man, He humbled Himself {further} by means of becoming obedient to the point of death — even, {the most humiliating} the death of a cross.</p> <p>⁹ On account of which {self humiliation}, God also highly exalted Him, and He freely granted to Him {a} Name [Lorded Title] which {is} above every name [r], ¹⁰ such that, at the Name [r] of Jesus, every knee should bend — of heavenly {beings}, and of earthly {beings}, and of infernal {beings} — ¹¹ and every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ {is} Lord, to {the} glory of God {the} Father.</p>	<p>⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,</p> <p>⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, <i>and</i> coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to <i>the point of death</i>, even the death of the cross.</p> <p>⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and <i>that</i> every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.</p>	<p>⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, <i>and</i> being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.</p> <p>⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.</p>
C. Paul calls the Philippians to humble selfless service to one another. (2:12-16)		
<p>¹² So then, my dearly beloved, even as you have always obeyed — not only while in my presence, but rather now much more {while} in my absence — be {continually} working out to completion your own {collective [generic]} salvation with {anxious} fear and {nervous} trembling, ¹³ for it is God Who is effectually operating [actively working] among [in] you — both the {ability} to will [desire /choose] and the {ability} to effectually operate [r] on behalf of His good pleasure.</p>	<p>¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for <i>His</i> good pleasure.</p>	<p>¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for <i>His</i> good pleasure.</p>
<p>¹⁴ {As by force of custom,} be doing all {activities} apart from {discontented} complaints and {opinionated} disputes. ¹⁵ so that you may become faultless and harmless, "CHILDREN" of God "WITHOUT CAUSE FOR BLAME," in {the} midst of "an inwardly} DEPRAVED AND {an outwardly} PERVERTED GENERATION," [Deuteronomy 32:5] among whom you are {continually} shining as luminaries [stars] in the cosmos [order of things /world /universe], ¹⁶ by holding forth {the} message [word] of life, serving for me as a cause for boasting in {the judgment} day of Christ: that I did not run [endure {the distance}] in vain, nor did I toil to weariness in vain.</p>	<p>¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.</p>	<p>¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.</p>

D. Paul presents himself as an example of humble selfless service. (2:17-18)		
¹⁷ Nevertheless, if indeed I am being poured out (as a drink offering) upon the sacrificial offering and priestly service which characterizes your faith, (then) I am rejoicing (about this), and I am sharing my joy with you all. ¹⁸ For the same (reason) also you yourselves be (continually) rejoicing and be sharing (your) joy with me.	¹⁷ Yes, and if I am being poured out as a <i>drink offering</i> on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.	¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸ You too, <i>I urge you</i> , rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.
E. Paul presents Timothy as an example of humble selfless service. (2:19-24)		
¹⁹ Now I am hoping, with (the permission of the) Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon, so that I myself also may be of good spirits [<i>animated of cheerful soul</i>], when (I personally) come to know your circumstances, ²⁰ for I have no one (who is so) like minded, (who is) of such character as will be genuinely concerned about your circumstances, ²¹ — for all (men) are (customarily) intent on (advancing) their own (interests), not the (interests) of Christ Jesus — ²² but you have come to know (by experience) his proven character, because as (a) child (serves under a) father, (so) he served with me as a bondservant with regard to (advancing the interests of) the gospel. ²³ Therefore, to be sure, I am hoping to send this (bondservant) immediately hereafter — when ever I may have assessed my (own) circumstances. ²⁴ Yet I have become persuaded in (the) Lord that I myself (in person) shall also come soon.	¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. ²⁰ For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know his proven character, that as a son with <i>his</i> father he served with me in the gospel. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. ²⁴ But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.	¹⁹ But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰ For I have no one <i>else</i> of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child <i>serv</i> ing his father. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things <i>go</i> with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.
F. Paul presents Epaphroditus as an example of humble selfless service. (2:25-30)		
²⁵ Meanwhile, I have considered (it) necessary to send Epaphroditus directly to you — (who is) my brother and companion in labor and comrade in waging war, but also your messenger on a mission [<i>apostle</i>] and priestly servant to my (recent) need. ²⁶ (I sent him,) seeing that he has been (continually) longing for you all, and (he has been) deeply distressed, because you had heard that he was ill; ²⁷ for indeed he was ill — a near neighbor to death. Nevertheless, God had pity on him, yet not on him only, but rather on me also, lest I should (come to) have (abiding) grief (laid) upon (my current) grief. ²⁸ Therefore, I have sent him (all the) more urgently, so that upon seeing him you should be joyful again, and I myself should be less grieved. ²⁹ Now then, be (in the process of) preparing to welcome him in (the) Lord with every joy, and (always) be holding such (persons as these) in honor, ³⁰ because he drew near to the point of death for the sake of the work of Christ, having shown disregard for [<i>risked</i>] his (own) life so that he might fill up what(ever) insufficiency (remained) of your priestly service for me.	²⁵ Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; ²⁶ since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. ²⁹ Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; ³⁰ because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.	²⁵ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned <i>about you</i> . ²⁹ Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

2:1-4 - A. Paul exhorts the Philippian assembly to humbly submit to one another.

2:1 - "So then" reaches back to the list of observations which Paul made in 1:27-30, and then back to 1:18-26. The Philippians governed themselves as free citizens, stood firm in one spirit, fought alongside one another with one mind for the faith of the gospel, were fearless at the opposition, had trusting faith while suffering on behalf of Christ, and shared Paul's conflict whether to live or to die.

In view of those more outwardly observable things which Paul has just described about the Philippians, Paul then lists here less outwardly observable things which the Greek grammar indicates are assumed to be true — at least for the purposes of developing an argument — namely: that there does exist among them some measure of encouragement, solace, communion, affection, and compassion. Where such things do not exist and prevail, there are no bonds of union in Christ — at least not at what level they should exist within a body-assembly.

2:2-4 - If these things are true, then it consistently follows that, in love and unanimity, the Philippians should direct their minds toward this one purpose: to quash self-interest and self-esteem among them, and to humbly put in its place an esteem for the other members and their interests as being superior to their own.

By the nature of the case, in confronting daily the fallen nature of man, the righteous must protect himself from the world with a strong sense of personal self-interest. However, the assembly, by its nature, operates in another world where a strong sense of selfless other-interest should prevail. Beware of any worldly philosophy which wants us to be selfless in the world — like socialism; beware of any religious philosophy which wants us to be pursue self-interest within the body-assembly — like a prosperity gospel.

2:2 - Without the article, "one" [ἓν] would signify numerical unity as distinguished from plurality. With the article (as it is in this verse), "this one {purpose}" [τὸ ἓν] implies uniformity or unanimity as opposed to diversity. As a body, they were obligated to be unanimous in their thought and uniform in their pursuit of the one purpose described in the next two verses and illustrated in lives of Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

2:3 ▪ *“Self-interest or self-esteem” — What I think is soundest; what I propose is best; my reasons are irrefutable; my schemes cannot be impugned; to differ from me is evidence of lack of judgment; to oppose me is folly or obstinacy; I must lead — why shouldn’t I? All must follow — why shouldn’t they?*

By its nature, humility displaces self-importance. Humility puts us in our place. We should be willing to use to the greatest advantage the talents which God gives us, not underrating our gifts. Nevertheless, we should not overrate our own personal importance nor underrate the gifts and importance of others.

2:4 ▪ *This is not an absolute denial of one’s own interests as a pretense for neglecting those interests while meddling in everyone else’s’ interests. This is a measured subjugation of one’s own interests to the interests of others. It is the nature of the case that unless we do care for our own interests, we will neither be capable nor qualified to care for the interests of others. Though this is not focused on worldly interests, nevertheless spiritual interests do not come totally separated from worldly interests. The commandment to do for others what we would have them do for us assumes that we understand our own interests.*

2:5-11 ▪ B. Paul presents Christ as the premier example of the humble servant mindset.

2:5 ▪ *“This” refers to the purpose and mindset of the previous verse. Because Christ is the picture of perfect humanity, his life is legislative; His example, so far as it applies, is law.*

2:6 ▪ *Satan, then Adam and Eve, then their descendants, grasped at being equal with God. Christ Jesus was God in nature and person, and therefore He was originally constituted in the glorious form and appearance of God. Though Christ Jesus was, is, and always will be God in Essence and Person — He remained God in every way — nevertheless He did not retain the accompanying glorious form, but He divested Himself of the “form” of God in order to take on another form — the humble form of human flesh — He became a man. He did not cling to that privileged status which was His by original and absolute right.*

2:7 ▪ *He temporarily divested Himself, not of His divine essence, but of the privileges and prerogatives of His divine status. For the sake of our salvation, He emptied himself of the form or distinctive recognizable features of God. The person of deity clothed Himself with the nature of humanity, taking on a new identity, and identifying with men, except He was not identical to men with regard to possessing a depraved and sinful nature. 2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”*

In the Old Testament, He appeared in exalted theophanies as an angel. But He has now appeared as a man. Though He was a sinless man, He was regarded and treated as the worst of sinners.

2:8 ▪ *He assumed a different status, a different nature, and a different bearing.*

As God, He emptied Himself by becoming a man. As man, He humbled Himself by obeying to the point of death.

His was not a momentary act of gallantry or enthusiasm, but an act of deliberate voluntary surrender to obedience.

We may compare this to a king who takes off his royal robes and puts on humble clothing in the appearance of a peasant, and allows himself to be treated as a peasant. (Josephus uses this word.)

Crucifixion was reserved for slaves, rebels, and the lowest criminals — the unbearable, despicable, and accursed death of the cross.

2:7-8 ▪ *Note how Jesus took successive steps of humiliation.*

2:6-8 ▪ *He directed His attention not merely to His own interests — His eternal honor and glory — but also to the interests of others, humbling Himself to save them. He loved His elect more than continuing in the eternal form of God. The grand example here is not Christ’s obedience to the Father, but His gracious generosity toward His own people. We should have such a mindset as to forget own self-interest in the pursuit of the interests of others.*

Compare the Greek play of words: ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων — divine nature; μορφήν δούλου λαβὼν — human nature; ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος — likeness of men; σχήματι εὔρεθεις ὡς ἄνθρωπος — appearance of man.

2:9 ▪ *He gave up the form of God to assume the humility of man, and He thereby was exalted to the highest name among men — Jesus Christ, Lord of all. He who humbles himself shall be exalted. The honor falls upon Christ in His humanity. God cannot receive any more honor, for to Him is due all honor.*

2:10 ▪ *The threefold designation is probably meant to signify all possible beings. Some think it refers to: 1) angels — including demons, 2) living men, and 3) dead men. Others think: 1) elect angels and disembodied saved men, 2) living men, and 3) demons and damned men.*

2:11 ▪ *Even in Christ’s exaltation, all praise, honor, and glory finally fall upon the Father. John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”*

2:5-11 ▪ *This is the grandest example of fulfilling the command, “Let each person be directing his attention not merely toward his own personal interests, but rather, also toward the individual interests of the others.”*

2:12-16 ▪ C. Paul calls the Philippians to humble selfless service to one another.

2:12 ▪ *“obeyed” literally means to answer the door.*

Paul’s absence made their obligation more imperative, not less.

The words, “not only while in my presence, but rather now much more while in my absence” may modify either the phrase “as you have always obeyed” or the phrase “be continually working out to completion your own salvation ...”

The “working out” is plural, the salvation is singular, so the salvation is either generic — the kind of salvation that each individual in a class has — or else the salvation is collective — the salvation which they all share together. The context seems to favor the collective sense, but this does not

exclude, but actually implies the individual generic sense by way of application — the collective salvation could not be worked out without working out the individual salvations.

The Philippians should fear and quake as Israel feared and quaked at the presence of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:18; the expression is also found in Deuteronomy 20:3). Why? Because in the gathered body-assembly, the Philippians come closer to God's presence than the Israelites ever dreamt of doing. (Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:21-22; 3:18-21; 4:15-16; 1 Peter 2:4-5; compare 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16 [your – plural; body – singular])

In emulation of Christ's example of the frame of mind or mindset which denies and humbles itself to serve others, the Philippians are commanded to be working out the command of verse 4, "Let each person be directing his attention not merely toward his own personal interests, but rather, also toward the individual interests of the others."

2:13 ▪ God inspires and empowers us. God is working into us the willing and working, and God is carrying out His will and His work through us (Ephesians 2:10).

Men act in true freedom when they are enabled by God's grace to surrender their wills to perform God's works. Lazarus freely came forth from the tomb, but only because He was made alive and willing by the creative resurrecting power of God. The knowledge that the power of God is actively working in us is a great incentive for us to work out our salvation. This does not reduce us to a machine, but our new motivations and our new character is in perfect harmony with our new freedom and our new responsibilities.

2:14 ▪ *Christ submitted to the will of the Father with no complaints or doubts, and so we should pursue together the will of God without complaints and doubts.*

2:15 ▪ *He who is without complaints is faultless. He who is without doubts is harmless. Israel was complaining and doubting (Deuteronomy 32:5).*

2:16 ▪ "Run in vain" means lose the prize.

The successful assembly is not measured by growth in numbers and wealth, but by growth in spirituality — particularly described here as growth in a Christ-like frame of mind or mindset.

2:17-18 - D. Paul presents himself as an example of humble selfless service.

2:17 ▪ After giving a full example of Christ's life and applying it to the Philippians, Paul indirectly gives himself as an example as he describes his ministry to them as a drink offering. When an animal was about to be slain in sacrifice, the drink offering of wine was poured on it as a solemn act of devoting it to God (Numbers 15:5-6; 28:7, 14). The drink offering was a symbol of joy. Paul pouring out his life for their sake was a selfless joy. Paul was ready even to die if that was what was necessary to make their service complete and acceptable to God.

2:18 ▪ Paul exhorts the Philippians to adopt the same attitude as Paul.

2:19-24 - E. Paul presents Timothy as an example of humble selfless service.

2:19 ▪ Everything is contingent upon the Lord, 1 Corinthians 16:7 "I hope ... if the Lord permit."

2:20 ▪ Paul means only that Timothy was the one person available to him whom he trusted was competent to apply the Apostle's teachings to the Philippian's situation. He does not mean to imply that everyone else was incompetent.

2:21 ▪ "All men" — Paul's comparison must extend as a general statement about men. Paul would not mean to insult other Christians, including the Philippians or his companions.

2:22 ▪ *The Philippians had observed first hand how Timothy's character was tried and proven true. Paul had observed first hand how Timothy was genuinely concerned for the Philippians. Paul knew the worth of sending to them someone in whom they had already developed an appropriate measure of trust.*

2:23 ▪ Paul resumes what he began to say in verse 19. Paul intends to keep Timothy with him until he sees how things develop and turn out for him regarding his imprisonment, then He intends to send Timothy as soon as he knows — which means the Philippians will know soon thereafter.

2:23-24 ▪ Greek (verse 23) *μὲν* ... (verse 24) *δὲ* = "to be sure ... yet."

2:24 ▪ Timothy will come immediately [*ἐξαυτῆς*]. Paul will come soon [*ταχέως*], but a little later. Paul hoped [*ἐλπίζω*] to send Timothy immediately. Paul more strongly is persuaded [*πειθω*] that he himself will come soon. The sphere of Paul's persuasion is in the Lord, not in himself.

2:25-30 - F. Paul presents Epaphroditus as an example of humble selfless service.

2:25-26 ▪ Epaphroditus could have gone with Timothy, or with Paul, but instead Paul believed it was necessary to send him directly. Epaphroditus is messenger on a mission, literally an "apostle" [*ἀπόστολος*] in the lower sense of the term. He is also a priestly servant or liturgist [*λειτουργός*], one who performs a priestly or religious duty.

2:27 ▪ The death of Epaphroditus would have been a further grief laid upon his current grief of imprisonment.

2:28 ▪ Paul's sorrowful confinement would be lessened by the knowledge that the Philippians' sorrow about Epaphroditus would be relieved.

2:29 ▪ Paul refers to the future, but Epaphroditus is carrying this very letter, so whatever the Philippians' would do in preparing to welcome Epaphroditus could only refer to things which would follow Epaphroditus' actual arrival and the reading at least to this point in this letter. Anyone who is as self-denying and dedicated as Epaphroditus should be held in high esteem.

2:30 ▪ Because they were absent, they could supply no deficiency; but Epaphroditus represented the Philippians who were absent, so he supplied what He knew they would have supplied if they were present. No doubt, that is why the Philippians sent him — knowing that Epaphroditus would be to Paul what Paul thought Timothy would be to the Philippians.