

Philippians 2:1-11
Series: BELIEVE Week 30: Humility
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The Woodside Church

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It's summer time and that means Superheroes! During the upcoming hazy days we'll witness the return of Wonder Woman, Transformers and Spiderman to the big screen. This fall will feature Thor and the Justice League and, rounding out the year, the next installment of Star Wars.

You may not be aware that I, Doug Hoglund, your humble pastor, am in fact a superhero. Yes, I know, you've had your suspicions all along. I must confess I was not aware of it myself. But my true secret identity was revealed to me many years ago by an organist named Helen Roche. Once, after hearing me preach, she complimented me on my sermon. Then she said, "You remind me of one of those superheroes." "A superhero, Helen?" I asked a little surprised. "Which one?" In my mind I thought of Batman, Superman, Spiderman. Helen replied, "You're just like Mighty Mouse!"

What if you are a superhero? What if you could fly at supersonic speed? What if bullets bounced off you? What if you could see through walls and read people's minds? What if you had ultimate and unlimited power? Would you use it for good, evil or a little of both? Would you always serve humanity or would you occasionally give in to selfishness? After all no police or army can stop you from getting what you want. Even Comic book superheroes sometimes give in to their dark sides. When they first appeared in the 1930s they always fought for "truth, justice and the American way!" But now they are dark knights and vigilantes who live outside the law and dispense their own brand of justice. "Power corrupts" Lord Acton once said, "and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

You and I are not the type of superheroes who wear masks and tights and capes. But you do have super powers inside you.

- The power to forgive or hold a grudge.
- The power to heal or to hurt with our words.
- The power to cooperate or compete with colleagues.
- The power to repair or wreck a marriage.
- The power to build up or break down our children.
- The power to share the Good News about Jesus or stay silent.
- The power to satisfy selfish desires or serve the desperate needs in front of us.

Why do I call these super powers? Every ounce of power you possess comes from God. He gives you the ability to think, love, work, design, create, speak and build. The question is: how are you using your God-given super powers?

Our final chapter of BELIEVE focuses on the most essential Christ-like quality of all: humility. If we want to BE like Jesus we must be humble. Let me do a little survey: Raise your hand if you are a humble person! Gotcha. You're going to need this lesson. Humility is the opposite of egotistical pride and self-promotion. That's why Muhammad Ali said, "When you are as great as I am, it's hard to be humble." Muhammad Ali thought he was a super hero. You've probably heard the story about the time he boarded a plane and sat down. The flight attendant asked him to please buckle his seatbelt. Ali replied, "I am the greatest. I don't need a seatbelt." "Please sir," the attendant replied, "It's required by law. Buckle your seatbelt." "You don't understand," Ali said, "I am Superman. Superman don't need no seatbelt to fly." To which the attendant replied, "And Superman don't need no plane to fly. Buckle your seatbelt."

Humility is the opposite of pride. Yet humility is also not humiliation. That's when someone puts you down or you put yourself down. Humble people build others up. Our theme in BELIEVE is: I choose to esteem others above myself. A principle that underlines this whole BELIEVE series is what you BELIEVE on the inside determines what you will BE on the outside. So if you have a Low Self Image on the inside you will feel Humiliated on the outside. Or you may be Boastful on the outside. If you have an overly Inflated or High Self Image on the inside you will be Proud, Arrogant or Superior on the outside. When two Low Self Images meet they compete to see who has it worse. When a High and Low Self Image meet the High crushes the Low under his feet. When two High Self Images meet the destruction is complete. In each case we use our God-given power the wrong way. Are you using power God's way or your way?

The Christians in Philippi are using their power their way. Of all the churches the Apostle Paul started, the Philippians are one of the best. Yet even they get on each other's nerves. Even these exemplary Christians misuse their power and fight with each other. You can see it if you read between the lines in Paul's letter:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (Philippians 2:1-2).

This is the equivalent of a parent saying to two or three fighting children, "If you want to make me really happy, stop bickering and be friends." Paul writes this because the Philippians are not getting along. Paul first points out all the blessings in their lives: Jesus gives them encouragement, comfort, compassion, friendship, and love. With all that going for them, why are they fighting each other? 'If you want to fill me with joy,' Paul writes, 'agree with one another in your minds, love another with your hearts, unite with one another in your spirits, work together toward one purpose.' In short, use your power God's way. How? Paul gives them a principle and an example. The principle is:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4).

Two actions to avoid: self-promotion and self-glorification. A dating website called OKCupid asks thousands of questions in order to scientifically pair you up with your perfect soulmate. Now, to get more matches, a person may be tempted to polish their profile a little. For example: When asked, “Are you a genius?” what percent of men said “Yes”? 50% After all, that’s what their mothers probably told them. Unfortunately, guys if you claim to be a genius women may think you look like Einstein.¹

Self-promotion and self-glorification are what Paul calls “vain conceit.” That literally means “empty glory.” It’s all shine and no substance. People pump themselves up or puff themselves up because they don’t feel good about who they really are. Instead, practice humility. Now as I said before humility does not mean putting yourself down. That’s false humility – a hidden type of pride. We all know Low Self Image people who constantly put themselves down so they can draw comfort and compliments. To be humble, you don’t have to put yourself down. Instead, lift others up. Don’t just worry about your own concerns, Paul advises, help others with theirs.

Robert Roberts of Cambridge University writes about a fourth grade teacher who treated her class to a game of Balloon Stomp. A balloon is tied to the ankle of each child. The goal of the game is to pop everyone else’s balloon while protecting yours. The person with the last inflated balloon is the winner. The idea is simple: if I win, then you lose. Like fireworks on the fourth of July the classroom is suddenly filled with explosions. In seconds, the 9-year-olds stomp until only one balloon remains. Its owner suddenly becomes the most disliked kid in the room.

Later in the day, a second group arrives to play Balloon Stomp – only this time the class is made up of developmentally challenged children. The game goes quite differently. After giving the same instructions, the children grasp that the goal is to pop the balloons. But instead of fighting each other, they assume they are supposed to help each other. They form a kind of balloon stomp co-op. One little girl holds her own balloon carefully in place so a little boy could stomp it. He, in turn, does the same for her. When the last balloon is popped, everyone cheers. Everyone won! Now the question is: “Who got the game right?”²

Paul gives us the perfect example of how to humbly use power God’s way.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human

¹ Rosie Cima, "The Psychology of Self-Appointed Genius," Priceonomics blog (5-11-15).

² Robert Roberts, *An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge University, 2003) cited by Dave Stone, in the sermon "A Reason for Self-Denial" (Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky).

likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Here is an interesting twist. Remember a few minutes ago when I said “vain conceit” means “empty glory.” When Paul says Jesus “made himself nothing” he takes almost the same word and reverses it to say: “glory emptied.” Jesus, the One who has all glory, emptied it and became a servant who humbled himself to save us. Jesus emptied his glory. So should we. Jesus laid aside his rights and privileges. So should we. Jesus served. So should we. That is what it means to be humble and lift others up. In fact, that’s what God the Father did. He lifted Jesus up.

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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11).

Jesus is the only real superman who ever visited this planet. He was more than human. He was God. It would have been easy and safe for Him to stay in heaven, to hold on to his glory and authority. But instead, He gave it up and made himself nothing. He traded:

- A palace in heaven for a barn on earth,
- Almighty being for the weak body of a human being
- The praise of angels for the screams of enemies
- A crown of gold for a crown of thorns
- A glorious throne for a gory hard wood cross
- The infinite cosmos for a tiny, borrowed tomb.

In the Garden of Gethsemane he could have called upon ten thousand legions of angels to save him. But instead, despite all the power at his disposal Jesus became obedient to death – even death on a cross. He did that for you and me. He could have stomped us flat. But in humility he looked after our interests. In humility He considered us better than Himself. In humility He used His power to save us instead of saving Himself.

That is why He was raised to the highest place. That is why He received a name above every name. That is why one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That is how a true Super Hero uses power: by humbling serving others. So the answer is not to have a Low Self-Image or a High Self-Image but a Christ Self-Image. What you Believe on the inside will determine what you will Be on the outside. Put into practice what you learned these past 30 weeks of BELIEVE. Practice thinking, acting and being like Jesus. Humbly lift others up.

This world needs superheroes:

Who will give up the safety of suburbia and lift up the children of Trenton.

Who will give up the comfort of their homes and go on a mission trip.

Who will give up their selfishness and heal their marriages and families.

Who will give up their fears and start a Growth Group for their unchurched friends.

Who will give up their preconceptions and help the homeless, hungry and addicted

Who will give up the ease of sitting in these seats and teach children the Word of God

Who will give up their silence and share about Jesus.

Who will give up the security of Woodside and go start a new church.

Jeff Collins learned the hard way what it's like to be like Jesus. He writes,

It had been a trying week at our Love & Action office. At five o'clock on a Friday, I was looking forward to having a quiet dinner with friends. Then the phone rang.

"Jeff! It's Jimmy!" I heard a quivering voice say. Jimmy, who suffered from several AIDS-related illnesses, was one of our regular clients. "I'm really sick, Jeff. I've got a fever. Please help me."

I was angry. After a 60-hour workweek, I didn't want to hear about Jimmy. But I promised to be right over. Still, during the drive, I complained to God about the inconvenience.

The moment I walked in the door, I could smell the vomit. Jimmy was on the sofa, shivering and in distress. I wiped his forehead, then got a bucket of soapy water to clean up the mess. I managed to maintain a facade of concern, even though I was raging inside.

Jimmy's friend, Russ, who also had AIDS, came down the stairs. The odor made Russ sick, too.

As I cleaned the carpet around Russ's chair, I was ready to explode inside. Then Russ startled me. "I understand! I understand!"

"What, Russ?" Jimmy asked weakly.

"I understand who Jesus is," Russ said through tears. "He's like Jeff!" Weeping, I hugged Russ and prayed with him. That night Russ trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior—a God who used me to show his love in spite of myself.³

Be a Superhero. You've got it in you.

³ Jeffrey Collins, "It Happened on a Friday," *Christian Reader* (March/April 1998), Vol. 36, no. 2