



# Christian Crusaders

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## Living the Jesus Life: Get Over Yourself

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TEXT: Philippians 2:1-11 (ESV)

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. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so 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.

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Dear friends,

Back in the 1980s and 90s, I had the privilege of attending a few Billy Graham evangelistic rallies. Each one of these rallies had the exact same format for the evening: there'd be music, and testimony, Billy Graham would preach the gospel, and then he'd ask people to come forward if they wanted to receive Christ into their lives. And after people came forward, he would talk with them about next steps. One of the steps he cited was the importance of finding a church home to help them spiritually grow. You see, he understood that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is not meant to be a

private affair. Jesus never had that in mind for us. He intended for his followers to live in community and serve in community with other believers. It's actually vital for our spiritual growth. Christian author Eugene Peterson, writing about this, said "There can be no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life, apart from an immersion in, and embrace of, community." I think you would agree with me, Christian community sounds like a good idea.

But, living together in Christian community, whether it's a marriage or a congregation, has its challenges. And our greatest challenge to healthy relationships in our community is self: selfishness, self-centeredness, self-promotion, self-indulgence, self-interest, self-absorption, selfish pride. I mean, self can be our worst enemy when it comes to our relationships. It leads to stepped-on toes and hurt feelings and resentment and toxic environments. First, in the church: have you ever been in a congregation where everybody is trying to get their own way? Where there's a constant bickering going on about MY will being done here, MY music used, MY style preferred, MY tastes catered to, MY hurts nursed? It's absolutely painful to be a part of that. And self is always in the middle of it. Feelings get trampled and there are heated words and sides get drawn and anger and distrust prevail in the community. There's low morale and an unhealthy environment. We're so unproductive when that happens; nothing gets done for the kingdom of God, as we become distracted more and more and turned in on self. And that's not what Jesus had in mind at all.

And self can wreak havoc in Christian homes and marriages. As a pastor who's done a bit of pastoral counseling along the way, I've encountered many struggling Christian marriages without joy and hope, because the attitude towards one another is "your job is to make me happy and do things my way." Selfish attitudes like that have destroyed more marriages than you can shake a stick at. And self kind of sneaks up on us; it's dangerous and sneaky and insidious. We sometimes don't notice it taking over. Have you read a story that jumped out at you and made you feel convicted? Well listen to this one, because it convicted me as a spouse. Dave Goetz writes:

I've asked my wife through the years to support me in different ventures. When we were first married, I was a youth pastor and was taking classes at the University of Colorado at Denver. And I decided, "I'm going to be a writer." So Jana and I moved to the Chicago suburbs so I could take a job as a writer and editor. About four years later, I became restless, so I began working on an MBA. I expected her again to sacrifice. By that time, we'd had one child. I also had a book contract. So I was working full-time, going to graduate school two nights a week, and writing a book. I'm not the one sacrificing; she is. Then I decided to start my business. By this time, we had two children. And the week I told her I was leaving my secure job to start a business, she told me she was pregnant. And

again, who sacrificed? So, recently, Jana told me she wants to go back to school. And how did I respond? I became unsupportive and critical. I thought, "We don't have the money," or, "You actually need to work more, because..." It didn't matter that we didn't have the money for me to get my MBA or to start my business. I had a great opportunity to give up power, to sacrifice some of the things I wanted, so I could help my wife with her dreams. But I told Jana the other day, "I know in my head that I need to do this, and it's killing me because it's so difficult." Why? Because I think about what I have to give up. I want my goals.

And that is selfishness in marriage.

So the question for us today is: how do you and I keep the unity in our community, if we truly believe it's important? So that we can not just survive together, but thrive together, to the glory of God. Well Paul, the apostle, has some valuable instructions regarding that question in the passage we read earlier. Obviously he understood the value of healthy Christian relationships, and he'd seen what damage can happen to a church were that's lacking. In fact, a little later in this letter he's going to tell them to "knock off" a little bit bickering was going on within the congregation. And this still happens – we can get so upset and combative with one another in God's family. So here's how Paul begins his coaching: he said "if you have any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy..." What's he saying here? What he means is "I know that you do have these things. So do you. You've received this from having Jesus Christ in your life, and the Holy Spirit is already at work in you. Complete my joy," Paul writes "by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord in one mind. In other words: work at building on the 'community' in your community."

And then he gets specific as to how: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself. Selfish ambitions, self-promotion are to be set aside as you do your part in the community. There's to be no showing off, no bragging, no looking for applause or status; it's keeping your focus on serving Jesus first." Years ago the magazine *Atlantic Monthly* told about superstar heroes [The Three] Tenors, José Carreras, Plácido Domingo, and Luciano Pavarotti, performing together in Los Angeles. The reporter tried to press the issue of competitiveness between the three men. Domingo responded though, he said "you have to put all of your concentration into opening your heart to the music. You can't be rivals when you're together making music."

Friends, that's also true in the church, and that's what Paul is saying. When he says "In humility, count others more significant than yourself," we need ask "what is humility?"

It's not looking at yourself as a terrible sort of lowlife. Humility is a healthy self-forgetfulness. It's an attitude of "I'm not the center of the universe," others matter even more than me. It's counting others more significant than yourself, seeing them as God sees them, helping them to be all that God intended them to be.

It's like a story I read in *Sports Illustrated* about a pro football running back. His name is Tony Richardson, and most people never heard him because his primary role was not running, it was helping the other running backs on his team succeed. He blocked so they can run, and over the span of 17 seasons, the teams paired Richardson with some of the best backs in pro football. Now back in 2001, he was slated to be the main running back, but instead he went to his teammate, Priest Holmes, and told him "It's time for me to step out of the way. You need to be getting the ball, and I will do everything I can help you." Holmes went on to lead the league in rushing, but Richardson never grew envious or resentful about it. As Holmes said "He used to call me up and say 'I saw you on SportsCenter!', and he was happier for me than I was for myself." Later on in an interview, Tony Richardson said "I can't explain it, but it just means more to me to help someone else achieve glory. There's something about it that feels right to me."

And that's what Paul's talking about. He says "and let each of you look out for others' interests, as well as your own." Get interested in those around you. It's important that you seek one another's welfare. Life is not about just you. It's time to be more of a listener than a talker. If you're like most people, you have a clear hands-down favorite topic for most your conversations: it's yourself. On average, studies show, people spend 60% of conversations talking about themselves, and it jumps to 80% when it comes to social media. Start noticing one another. Start treating one another as the most interesting person you've ever met. And get involved helping each other, and be interruptible for one another. Be there for each other spiritually and physically and emotionally – care about each other, about each other's growth in Christ. Paul says "if you do that, that's like Jesus."

He goes on to say "have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ." That's the way Jesus was, he says, He was in a form of God, He didn't count equality with God a thing to be hung onto, grasped. And so we get this picture of Jesus choosing leave behind the glories of Heaven to rescue us from sin and death. And He emptied himself, He poured himself out, He made himself nothing, He took on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. That's the Christmas story. The form of God was not given up, for God cannot cease to be God, but He did take on the form of a lowly servant in that Bethlehem birth at a stable. He was genuine man, but also God, laying aside His Majesty. The song goes on to describe the depths of humility to which Jesus

went for us. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He lived the perfect life of obedience to His Heavenly Father's plan, all His life, something we could never do. And He went to death on a cross. He sacrificed His life for you and me to pay the penalty for our sinfulness before God. He endured the death reserved for servants and foreigners and criminals when He went to a cross. And worse than that, He even went through experiencing the wrath of God for humanity's sin as He cried out "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" What grace! From Heaven to earth, from glory to shame, from master to servant, from life to death, even death on a cross. What wondrous love is this.

But that's not the end of the story; the song goes on. God exalted the servant Jesus and has given Him the name that is above every other name. He affirmed everything Jesus said and did for us. "That at His name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," which means God, to the glory of God the Father. That day is coming, ultimately, when Christ returns.

How do you keep the "unity" in "community"? Humility and servanthood. That's what makes life together work the best – in our churches and in our homes. That's what God has put His stamp of approval on, as we live the Jesus life, When He exalted Jesus Christ. Just imagine a congregation, a marriage, where humble, servant-like loving activities are the norm, where there's an attitude like that. Where the spirit of fellowship and love is so strong and thick in the air that you can almost cut it with a knife. People looking out for each other, taking care of each other, concerned about what's best for the other, listening carefully, paying attention to each other, selfishness replaced by servanthood, where the only fighting that happens is the conflict over who gets to serve who. And what matters most is God getting glory. That's exactly what Jesus had in mind for those of us who follow Him in the Jesus life. "He who is greatest among you will be a servant," Jesus said. He washed the feet of His disciples the night before He was crucified, and then told them "You call Me teacher and Lord, and you're right, I am. If I, your teacher and Lord have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I've given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. Be a servant to each other."

So what's the bottom line? Very simple: get-over-your-self. Get over of yourself! Now I know that sounds like a tall order, and you wonder "is it possible?" Because, after all, we do know ourselves quite, well how self-centered we can be. It's like the Christian author Henri Nouwen once wrote about himself, he said "Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world, against the culture of which I'm a part." But, I'm here to tell you it can happen; not perfectly, mind you, because of our sinful nature, but still...

Your church and your marriage can be a beautiful joy-filled thing, a servant experience that brings God glory, which is the ultimate goal of living the Jesus life. It begins with choosing to step into the role of a humble servant. It's a willingness to take on the attitude that others are important and precious in God's sight, and that I'm here to serve them and help them to be all they can be in the name of Christ. Because I know that I'm loved and valued in God's sight already, and that's enough. It's continually praying "Lord, help me be a servant. Use me bless someone today." And He'll answer that prayer.

And, by the way, let's go back to the beginning of this passage and remind ourselves: he says "If there's any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any participation in the spirit, if you are a follower Jesus Christ, if you trust in Jesus as your Savior Lord," (which I hope you do), you, my friend, are not on your own. Yeah, you can't change yourself, but God can. And when you follow Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit in you, and the love and encouragement of Christ in you, enabling you to humbly serve and love others as Christ has loved you. We're not being asked to do the impossible thing here, but the faithful, obedient, God-glorifying thing.

So here's the bottom line, one more time in case you missed it: the Jesus life is a life of getting over yourself. May the words of this next hymn be your daily prayer: "O Master let me walk with Thee, in lowly paths of service free."

Amen.