PEOPLE THE GOSPEL CREATES · WEEK 4

The Mind of Christ

October 18, 2026 · Philippians 2:1–11 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

The clearest evidence of holiness is not how highly we think of ourselves, but how freely we give ourselves in love.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Philippians 2:1–11** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. Verses 6–11 may have been a hymn the early church sang, so read them slowly. If you have time, read Philippians 1 as well. Last week Paul prayed that we would be "rooted and established in love" (Ephesians 3:17). This week moves to Philippians, but the subject is the same: holiness that grows out of what Christ has given us and shows up in how we treat each other.

Where this passage sits

Paul wrote Philippians in chains (1:13). He had planted this church in Philippi, a city in northern Greece, on his second missionary journey (Acts 16). Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, and a Roman jailer and his family were among the first believers. The Philippians had supported Paul from the beginning (4:15–16), and he loved them deeply.

Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), full of people proud of their Roman citizenship and its privileges. That matters for verse 8. Crucifixion was the death Rome reserved for slaves, rebels and criminals, not citizens.

There was friction in the congregation. Near the end of the letter Paul pleads with two women, Euodia and Syntyche, "to be of the same mind in the Lord" (4:2). So before he gets there, he talks about how Christians think. The word for "mind" or "mindset" shows up about ten times in this short letter.

A few words worth a closer look

"If" (2:1)

In Greek this "if" assumes the answer is yes. It means *since*: since you've been united with Christ, since His love has comforted you.

"Like-minded . . . of one mind" (2:2)

The word means more than what you think about. It's your mindset, the direction your thinking runs. It doesn't mean agreeing about everything.

"Selfish ambition" (2:3)

Originally a word for people who worked for hire, it came to mean self-promotion and faction-building. Paul used it in 1:17 for people preaching Christ to advance themselves.

"Vain conceit" (2:3)

One Greek word meaning *empty glory*: wanting credit that wouldn't feed you even if you got it.

"Humility" (2:3, 8)

In the Greek world it meant low and servile, hardly a virtue. Christians made it one because of Jesus.

"Made himself nothing" (2:7)

Literally *emptied himself*. Paul explains how: by *taking* the nature of a servant and *being made* in human likeness. The Son didn't stop being God. He added our humanity and took the lowest place in it.

"Servant" (2:7)

The Greek word is *doulos*, which means slave. The NIV says "servant"; the NRSV and NLT say "slave."

"Every knee should bow" (2:10–11)

Paul borrows Isaiah 45:23, where the Lord says this about Himself, and applies it to Jesus.

---

1 Start from what Christ has already given you

READ Philippians 2:1–2, Philippians 1:3–11 and Ephesians 3:16–19

Pastor Bart told a story on himself. Years ago he pastored a church in Florida that had declined badly. God did real miracles in people's lives there, but there weren't many people left and there wasn't much help. His family helped, a few friends from other churches pitched in, and so did people doing court-ordered community service. Still, he did a lot of it himself: housekeeping, heavy remodeling, hauling out debris, scrubbing toilets and vacuuming week after week. "Whatever it takes" had been his motto in the Navy, and it stuck. But he underestimated how long it would take.

On bad days a thought started showing up: *I used to command a ship. Look how far I've fallen.* He began to feel like a slave to people who wouldn't do anything to improve their own church. He kept working and didn't quit, but he was keeping score, and eventually the score came out of his mouth in a sharp remark from the pulpit about youth sports on Sunday. A friend who happened to watch the livestream lovingly pointed out how it sounded: legalistic, resentful. He still thinks gathered worship matters. He was wrong about what was going on inside him. People can hear resentment even when your theology is in order.

Most of us aren't tempted to refuse every humble job. We'll do the dishes, cover the shift and run the nursery one more Sunday. Our temptation is to do it and keep the ledger. In a church that takes holiness seriously, there's a particular version: thinking highly of ourselves because of how faithfully we serve, how often we're here or how well we know our Bibles. It's possible to be right about holiness and still not look much like Jesus.

So notice where Paul starts. Verse 1 lists what they've already received: union with Christ, the comfort of His love, a shared life in the Spirit, tenderness and compassion. Only then does he ask anything. Many of us try to live this passage on empty. We grit our teeth and try to care more. But you can't keep giving yourself away for long if nothing's

coming in. In Florida, Pastor Bart was drawing on what he'd started to think people owed him, not on the encouragement of being united with Christ. Those are very different fuels. One runs out, and when it does, it turns sour.

Then verse 2: "Make my joy complete by being like-minded." Being of one mind doesn't mean everyone at Pathway agrees about everything. Think of the choir from two weeks ago: different parts, the same music. Paul isn't asking them to manufacture unity by willpower. The Spirit has already given them a common life. Now he wants their minds to catch up.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where do you serve regularly, at home, at work or at church? When does it feel like joy, and when does it feel like a burden?

2. Have you ever done the right thing with the wrong attitude, and had someone notice? What happened?

3. Read verse 1 as "since" instead of "if." Which of those four gifts do you most need to draw on right now?

4. What does "living this passage on empty" look like? What are the signs that your fuel is resentment?

5. Why might faithful church people be especially tempted to think highly of themselves?

6. What's the difference between being like-minded and agreeing about everything?

2 Stop chasing empty glory and start noticing people

READ Philippians 2:3–4, Philippians 1:15–18, 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 and Luke 18:9–14

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit." *Selfish ambition* is the language of office politics: building your faction, angling for position. In 1:17 Paul used it for people preaching Christ "out of selfish ambition, not sincerely." Think about that. They were preaching the gospel to advance themselves. You can do ministry from selfish ambition. You can serve the church from it, and you can clean the church from it.

Vain conceit means empty glory, glory with nothing in it. Pastor Bart said that in Florida, maybe that's what he was after: the toilets were clean, but part of him wanted people to know who'd cleaned them and how far he'd come down to do it.

Instead, "in humility value others above yourselves." Be careful with that phrase. Paul isn't telling you that you're worthless, or that your gifts and needs don't count. He's saying other people's good is worth your attention, time and effort. Then verse 4: "not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." *Looking* means keeping your eye on something. Paul doesn't say you can't have interests. He's talking about where your eyes go.

That was the problem with scorekeeping: it kept Pastor Bart's eyes on himself. What if he'd kept his eye on the interests of someone in the room whose kids did play Sunday sports, or on people who hadn't yet been discipled as far as he thought they should be? He might still have said something about the importance of gathered worship. Paul doesn't ask pastors to stop telling the truth. But that's different from keeping score against people.

"Love . . . is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5). No ledger. That's hard for faithful church people. When you're always here, it gets easy to keep an eye on who isn't. In Jesus' story, the Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people" (Luke 18:11). That prayer doesn't usually come from lazy people. It often comes from people who've worked hard and noticed who didn't. Paul's answer isn't to stop serving. It's to change what we're looking at while we serve.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can someone do good things, even ministry, out of selfish ambition? How would they know?

2. What does "empty glory" look like in everyday life? Why doesn't it satisfy?

3. How is "value others above yourselves" different from thinking you're worthless?

4. Where do your eyes naturally go when you're serving: on the people you serve, or on yourself and who isn't helping?

5. Read Luke 18:9–14. Why is the Pharisee's prayer such a temptation for hardworking, faithful people?

6. How can a person speak the truth about something important without keeping score against others?

3 Follow Christ on the way down

READ Philippians 2:5–11, Mark 10:42–45, John 10:17–18 and Isaiah 45:22–23

To show what looking to others' interests looks like, Paul doesn't give us a principle. He gives us a song about Jesus. "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (2:5). The King James says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Paul tells us how Jesus thinks by telling us what He did.

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." Equality with God wasn't something Jesus reached for. It was already His. The question was what He would do with it. That speaks to anyone with standing: rank, a title, seniority, years of faithful service, a reputation. Paul doesn't ask you to pretend you don't have it. He asks what you're using it for.

"He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant." The word is *doulos*, slave. That's the word Pastor Bart sometimes grumbled about himself in Florida. Jesus took the nature of a slave, and nobody made Him do it.

There's a difference between being reduced to a servant and choosing to serve. "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" The Philippians, proud of their Roman citizenship, would have felt that. Jesus went from equality with God to human life, from human life to a slave's place, and from there to a slave's death. Every step down was His choice (John 10:18), and He made it for people who weren't keeping up their end. That's the mind of Christ: a mind that gives itself away freely.

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place." Be careful with that *therefore*. Jesus didn't humble Himself as a strategy, the way someone takes a lower job to get noticed for a promotion. And Paul isn't promising that if we take the lower place, people will eventually honor us. Sometimes they won't; a lot of faithful service goes unnoticed as long as we live. Verse 9 is God's verdict, not a reward we earn. The Father declares that the way of His Son is the right way. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Paul takes words God spoke about Himself in Isaiah 45:23 and applies them to Jesus. At the center of the universe isn't a God who grabs. It's the Lord who washed feet and went to the cross.

Last week we talked about entire sanctification. When John Wesley described it, he kept coming back to this passage. In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* he called it "all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked." The fullest holiness isn't a spiritual trophy. It's this mind, the one that goes down and gives itself away.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Paul answers a church conflict with a song about Jesus instead of a list of rules?
2. Jesus had equality with God and didn't use it for His own advantage. What standing do you have, and what are you using it for?
3. What's the difference between being reduced to a servant and choosing to serve? Have you experienced both?
4. Why would "even death on a cross" have hit the Philippians especially hard?
5. Why is it important that verse 9 is God's verdict and not a reward strategy?
6. How does Wesley's description of holiness as "all the mind which was in Christ" change your picture of a holy person?

Two questions to take home

READ Philippians 2:12–13 and Ephesians 4:11–13

First, an important guardrail. Following Christ on the way down doesn't mean letting people use you, staying somewhere you're being harmed or deciding you don't count. Jesus gave Himself; nobody took His life by force (John

10:18). What's pulled out of you by manipulation or abuse isn't the same as love freely given. If that's where you are, please talk with Pastor Bart or someone you trust. And a church where one person does all the work isn't healthy, either. Christ gives leaders "to equip his people for works of service" (Ephesians 4:12). Pastor Bart's frustration in Florida wasn't wrong about that, and eventually more people did carry the load. But he could be right about that and still be wrong in his heart. Both were true at once.

What would it look like for Pathway to have the mind of Christ? People who serve without keeping score. People who've been here for years making room for people who've been here for weeks. When someone stops showing up, we'd find out why before deciding what it says about them.

Where am I serving but keeping score? At home, at work or at church, there may be a ledger in your head: what you've done, who hasn't helped, how much you're owed. Take it to God, confess it for what it is, and go back to verse 1. Ask Him to fill you with what you already have in Christ. You can't give yourself away freely for long if you're running on resentment.

Whose interests have I stopped looking at? Maybe you've made up your mind about someone. You see what they don't do, and you've stopped seeing them. If you've been right about something in a way that hurt someone, you may need to go back. You don't have to take back the truth, but you may need to own the way you said it.

Right after the hymn, Paul says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act" (2:12–13). We have a real part, but the mind of Christ isn't something we produce by gritting our teeth. God is at work in the wanting and the doing.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where is your ledger? At home, at work or at church?

2. Who is one person whose interests you've stopped looking at? What's one concrete thing you could do this week to put your eyes on their interests?

3. How does verse 13 encourage you if you feel you're running on empty?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Philippians 1:1–11. Notice Paul's affection for this church. Thank God for the people who have supported you.
☐	**Tuesday**	Philippians 2:1–4. Before you serve today, stop and ask God to fill you with what you already have in Christ.
☐	**Wednesday**	1 Corinthians 13:4–7 and Luke 18:9–14. Ask God to show you any record of wrongs you've been keeping.
☐	**Thursday**	Philippians 2:5–8 and Mark 10:42–45. Look for one way to serve today without anyone knowing it was you.
☐	**Friday**	Philippians 2:9–13 and Isaiah 45:22–25. Worship Jesus as Lord, and ask Him to keep working in you to will and to act.

Try this

Write down your ledger, the things you've done that you feel no one noticed or repaid, and the people who haven't pulled their weight. Then pray over it, give it to God and tear it up. This week, do one concrete thing that puts your eyes on someone else's interests: ask a real question and listen, show up somewhere that matters to them, or find out what their week has been like.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You that You didn't wait for us to deserve Your love before You gave it. Thank You for Jesus, who was equal with You and didn't hold on to it for His own advantage, who took the nature of a servant and went all the way to the cross for us. We confess that we don't always think like Him. Sometimes we serve and keep score, chase glory that doesn't satisfy, or are right about something and still unloving in how we carry it. Show us the ledgers we've been keeping and give us grace to let them go. Open our eyes to the people around us. Where we've hurt someone, give us humility to make it right. Where some of us have been used or harmed, give wisdom, protection and people to help carry the weight. Give us the mind of Christ, and teach us to give ourselves freely in love. In the name of Jesus, whose name is above every name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/the-mind-of-christ** for the video, this guide and Pastor Bart's blog post on this week's message.

Pathway, A Wesleyan Church · 4960 Portland Rd, Saranac, MI · Sundays at 10 AM · pathwaywes.com