



# “better THAN PERFECT”

## Unity of the Spirit

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6

Bible Teacher Duffy Robbins

1. Have you ever experienced a time when you were part of a team or an environment that accomplished something together that you could not do alone? (maybe a project, a sports team, a mission trip, etc.) What did you accomplish? What did the experience teach you?
2. Read Philippians 1:27-2:11. Duffy makes the point that humility is not about having low self-esteem or intentionally putting yourself down. Humility is, rather, a form of honoring and elevating the needs of others. C.S. Lewis says “When you meet a truly humble person you won’t walk away thinking about how humble he was. You’ll walk away thinking what a great time you had and how much you were able to share about yourself.”
  - a. What similarities do you see between the apostle Paul’s flow of thought in this passage as compared to the flow of Ephesians 4?
  - b. Why do you think these are themes that the apostle Paul seems to keep coming back to in many of his letters to various churches?
  - c. How did Jesus display humility?
  - d. What is required of us if we want to practice humility?
  - e. What are some tangible ways that we can practice Christ-like humility in our relationships at home, at work, at church? (See Study Deeper)
3. Read Matthew 5:5.
  - a. What is your understanding of the word meek?
  - b. In what way was Jesus’ life on earth an example of meekness?
  - c. Jesus’ promises that the meek will “inherit the earth.” In what sense, does Jesus “inherit the earth” as a result of His meekness? How do we do the same?
4. While practicing patience, we are also called to “speak the truth in love” according to Ephesians 4:15. This is easier said than done.
  - a. How can we speak the truth in love without coming across as judgmental?

- b. What steps should we take before we speak the truth in love (i.e. Does the other person know and trust you? Are you sure you are speaking from a place of love and not anger or impatience?)
  - c. When is a time someone has spoken truth in love to you? What did you learn? How did it help you grow or resolve conflict?
5. Duffy said that if we truly want to know what's on the inside – how humble, meek, patient, and forbearing we are – the test is what happens when someone commits an offense against us.
- a. How do you typically respond to conflict? Retaliation? Do you cut that person out of your life? Do you harbor resentment?
  - b. Where would you say you have the most trouble? With your family? With your co-workers or boss?
  - c. Share a recent example.
  - d. How can we handle conflict in a God-honoring way? How do these muscles help us?

Challenge: Of the 4 “muscles” that Paul writes about in Ephesians 4:1-6, which one is your strength? Where do you need to grow? What practical steps can you put into practice this week to begin exercising that muscle?

Prayer: Jesus, teach us to be like You in all our ways. Teach us kindness, gentleness, generosity, and to be giving, forgiving, loving and caring. Teach us to follow in Your humble footsteps. Guide us to the place You want us to be, take control. Mold and shape us into the brilliant beings we were always destined to become.

Savior, lead us to the place in our souls where there is tranquility, peace and calmness. Where the waters are so still we can walk on them with You holding our hands and leading the way. Allow our gentle spirits of love, kindness and gentleness to infiltrate and infect the land. Let it spread like a wildfire across the nation.

Let our lights shine so brightly that people will be drawn to us wanting to know You and, as they seek You, they will surely find You. Those who hunger will be filled with satisfaction, for You Lord are our portion and only You can satisfy. Quiet our souls when anger, hatred, sadness or worry fills our minds, Oh peaceful Savior.

We shall cling to You when oceans rise and thunders roar, for You are our rock and strong tower, our comforter in our most vulnerable times. Jesus, intercede within our hearts so that we would be kind and gentle to the people that surround us, in Your precious Name we pray, Amen!

## STUDY DEEPER

### ONE SIMPLE WAY TO DEMONSTRATE LOVE AND HUMILITY

Years ago I remember a friend telling me that C.S. Lewis once said something to the effect: "When you meet a truly humble person you won't walk away thinking about how humble he was. You'll walk away thinking what a great time you had and how much you were able to share about yourself." I had forgotten that this was from Mere Christianity, until today when Justin Taylor linked to the quote, as did a commenter on this blog. Here's the real thing:

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him.

Lewis' point is well taken, and, as always, well put. The humble person does not draw attention to his humility; he draws conversation out of you.

There are hundreds of ways to love and a myriad of ways to demonstrate humility. But one of the most effective ways to accomplish both is to simply ask questions. True, it's possible to be nothing but a smooth talking salesman who cares little for the actual person across the table. But every virtue can be faked from time to time. So let's not let that deter us from giving others the gift of our curiosity.

Almost everyone loves to talk about themselves. So loving others as we want to be loved should entail asking lots of questions. Ask how the couple met. Ask what their kids are like. Ask what their plans are for the summer. Ask what you do with a packaging degree. Ask where they learned to speak French. Ask when they first came to the United States. Ask what they miss about being at home. Ask if they've seen any good movies or read any good books. Ask where they're from and what they are studying in school. Ask about their health and their jobs. Ask about sports or the weather or the local news. In time, ask about Jesus. Ask about their church. Ask about what they're learning in the Bible. Ask how the difficult conversation went last week. Ask how you can pray.

#### Hard for Some, But Doable For All

Yes, I realize that question-asking comes easier for some than for others. But I don't think it comes easily for most of us. Even the extremely extroverted are rarely extroverted in ways that center on others. I'm a borderline extrovert-introvert (if you pay those tests any mind). I am outgoing around my friends and like to lead. But it's much easier for me to be in my study than meeting new people. I don't think I'm the best model for asking questions. My wife is probably better at it than I am. I'm sure too many people who know me could think of stories where I didn't try very hard to engage them in conversation. But learning to ask good questions and make other-centered conversation is something I work at. And for all those who feel too shy or awkward to launch into question-asking at the oddly-seated wedding reception, I'm here to tell you that loving others with your questions is a skill you can develop.

It wasn't until the end of seminary that it really dawned on me that I could ask adults questions or lead in conversation. My whole life I had allowed others to draw me out, include me in, or do the hard work of helping others talk. Teachers asked me questions. Parents asked me questions. Adults at church asked me questions. I was a relational sponge, conversationally inert until someone cared enough to wring me out.

I'm not sure how I learned to ask questions. Maybe I saw it modeled in more mature Christians. Maybe God worked in my heart. Maybe moving across the country by myself gave me more sympathy for outsiders. Maybe I just figured I need the skill to survive in ministry. Whatever the cause(s), by the time I graduated seminary I found myself more at ease in engaging strangers in conversation. Suddenly I noticed things I hadn't noticed before, like the newcomer all by herself or the young man in the circle not saying a word. I still don't think I am the most gifted conversationalist, but I certainly have better ears for listening and know how to ask better questions.

### People Need to Talk

I remember reading an essay by Chuck Kloosterman not too long ago where he mused about why complete strangers will disclose so much to him in an interview. He surmised (or maybe it was the man he was interviewing, I can't remember) that people feel an insatiable need to tell their stories. Most people will tell you more than you might imagine, simply because someone asked.

We are highly verbal creatures. Which is no surprise because we know God because he has spoken to us. Even with all the appropriate cautions about the disembodied relationships taking root in the new social media, the fact remains that most of us would rather talk to a friend over the phone or by email than sit a room together saying nothing. We love and feel loved, to a large extent, through words.

### Like a Good Neighbor

And one of the best ways to love others and demonstrate humility in putting their desires before our own is to ask questions. Don't be the Brian Regan Me-Monster intent on regaling your audience with tales of the airport in Zurich and how you get, like, a thousand emails a day. And while we're at it, don't be the One-Word-Willie wither who shuts down conversations with a series of monosyllabic "Fine's" and "Good's." (I'm not saying we should be afraid to talk. Refusing to answer good questions can be as rude as not asking them.)

What I am saying is that most of us need to see conversation as a way to care for others and not as something we wait for others to do for us. It would be an exercise of courageous humility for many Christians (especially the young) to make the family dinner table or the church foyer an audience of for our questions instead of our quietness. Not to put too fine a point on it, many of us, pastors by no means excepted, need to grow in our ability and desire to simply talk to others. Love your neighbor as yourself and make him the center of your attention.

<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2010/06/08/one-simple-way-to-demonstrate-love-and-humility/>