

Humble Yourself?

Walk the Walk: James Pt. 6

We are walking through the New Testament book of James. We've said James is a practical book, and the question it asks - and answers - is...If you really believe the basic message of Jesus, the gospel of Jesus Christ, what kind of life will that create on the ground? What will it look like practically? And we tend to read that "you" in the individual singular tense – because we're an American church! – but lurking in the background each week, each text has been also about what kind of *community* does that create amongst people who believe the gospel?

This week, however, the text puts the subject of community in the foreground. And therefore, what we have in this passage, chapter 4 – but I'm going to start with the last verse of chapter 3, which we read last week - is about the *importance* of community between believing Christians, what the main *barriers* are to that community, and *how to break through* those barriers. That's going to be the outline, but we are getting ahead of ourselves because we need to read the text. So let's do that...

James 3:18–4:12

3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

There's the text and again, we want to dig in to discover some things about a gospel influenced community – the *us*, not just the *me*. Why it's important, what the main barriers are - why we really don't enjoy the community we're supposed to enjoy - and how to break through those barriers. A nice, simple outline. I read this week that the ancient Greeks really liked to break lectures into threes – that explains a lot about communication patterns.

First, The importance of community. And the importance of community comes out here at the very beginning. It may not be the very first thing that strikes you, but look at the first verse we read (**James 3:18**), it says, “*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*” Now scholars talk about words having a lexical range, and the word “righteousness”, which is one of the main and most important words in the Bible, means to be put right. If you're righteous, you've been put right.

And in some cases, in some parts of the Bible, the meaning of the word is this part of the range. It's means being put right with God. To be a righteous person sometimes means in right standing with God, forgiven, and justified in His sight. *Other* times the person using the word is using a meaning in a little different part of the lexical range.

Which means sometimes righteousness has to do with our relationships with our neighbors and our friends. To be a righteous person means to live justly, to live with integrity and with love. To be a just or righteous person sometimes has to do with how we live with one another.

When James uses the word, it almost always means *both*. James uses the full lexical range of the word - and it means to be put right with God, it means to be put right with others - and *therefore*, it really means everything the Holy Spirit is supposed to do in your life, putting *every* part of you right: your relationship with God, your relationship with yourself, and your relationship with others.

And that's why this is so significant, this verse 18, because here James likens righteousness, this supernatural character change, to a crop. What does a crop need? A crop needs seed. It doesn't grow without seed, and what is the seed for this supernaturally changed life? Peacemaking. And peacemaking here in context doesn't just mean making peace between two people. It means creating a harmonious community. That's what the word means.

Therefore, verse 18 actually says you will never change, your life will not change, and the Spirit will not put his changes into your life apart from deep involvement in a peaceable community, in a community of peace and harmony and unity. Now let's stop for a second and talk about this, because we have to.

We live in the most individualistic society in the history of the world. This is *deep* in you and me. If you've grown up in the West, if you've grown up in Western culture - not all of you have, but if you have - it's been pounded into you that you are who you *choose* to be, you are who you *determine yourself* to be, you are who you seek to be and make an effort to be, *you* make yourself who you are.

But most societies in the world – not just in history, America is an anomaly here and now – and, most importantly, the Bible says that's not true, that's a fiction, and that you are basically the product of your family, your culture, and therefore, you're basically the product of your primary community. So for example, social scientists will tell you - and we don't like to hear this - that your beliefs are much more a product of relationships than they are of rationality.

Basically, you tend to believe, or you find beliefs to be the most plausible, if they are articulated by people you like and who like you, and who you admire and who admire you. And therefore, to a very great degree, your beliefs are the product of - not your thinking and your reasoning - but your relationships. We're a product of our families and communities. We don't want to believe that, but there's all sort of proof. Social scientists will tell you.

If I can meddle – especially for those of you who may be watching online – this is one of the great problems with digital church. We still have a lot of people who have not returned to church from the pandemic – not just here but in America the national average is 1/3 of previous church attenders have not returned to regular worship. I have to tell you, that's very dangerous for your spiritual development.

Because just listening to a sermon – which of course I think is important – but it is not enough to elicit life change. Listening to worship music – which of course is important – is not enough to develop spiritual strength and vitality. And here's the reason why. The Bible says - I won't read you all the texts - we are to honor one another, accept one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, and confess our sins to one another. We are to bear the burdens of one another, share our possessions with one another, and submit to the needs of one another. And you can't do that via YouTube.

But guess what? You can't do that sitting in this room for an hour and a half on Sunday mornings *either*. I don't care how inspired you get in here. You can't do *any* of those things in here, not really. A four minute mixer is not doing life together. Hebrews 3:13 says to admonish and confront one another. That takes more than four minutes.

And so if the main way you experience SWFF is online, or even just attending the Sunday service, you're not actually in a community – not in a life-transforming way. And as a result, by and large, you may get inspired and feel better but not actually *get* better, because it's in community that you get better. *Real life* is meeting, and you essentially become like your primary social community, the people you play with and eat with, the people you converse with and counsel with and open your heart to, embodied face to face in regular community.

That's who you primarily become like, and that's primarily what forms you. And therefore, there is no supernatural character change without deep involvement in community. Not only that...Give me two more minutes here. Up till now, I've been telling you the importance of community and I've been very pragmatic, very American.

The reason why you need community is, “if you want to change, you have to be in community”, but actually, there's a non-pragmatic aspect to this. One of the most surprising things about verses 1–4, if you read it carefully, is you'll see in verse 1 of chapter 4, it says, “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” James is upset about the fights going on in the church.

See there are two ways to fail to be part of a good Christian community. One is to not engage, just be indifferent, or be too busy – stay on the couch. The other is to get into it and then fight and fight and fight. Either way you are not sustaining strong Christian community. But the fighting in verse 1...Look what it says about it in v. 4, “*You adulterous people...*” - We'll get back to that - “*...don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?*”

Well what is it talking about? What is friendship with the world? It's the fighting. What is hatred toward God then? It's the fighting. Listen, I've grown up in church hearing this verse abused to create artificial barriers between Christians and non-Christians. “Oh you want to go to prom? That's *worldly*. Why do you hate God?” No. The most famous verse in all the Bible begins, “For God so *loved* the world...” What this is talking about is world *systems* – not people.

And the biggest system in this world is the strong devour the weak – that’s the basis of evolution. And so whatever you do, don’t be weak. And the way you demonstrate strength is to dominate over others. Beat your chest and show them who’s boss. *That’s worldly.* And we bring that system right into the church. I’m going to a Presbyters meeting tomorrow, and the odds are strong I will see that system in action. But God hates that. But not just for pragmatic reasons. There’s something about God’s heart...

In **John 17:21** Jesus is praying to his Father and says, that his prayer for his disciples, his followers, is, “*that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*” And then just a couple of verse later he doubles down and prayer, (**v.23**) “*...that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*”

Do you know what Jesus was saying? “The number one argument I’m giving you, the number one demonstration, the number one tool, I’m giving you to show the world who I am is the beauty and depth of your love for each other. And if you fail to create and be part of good, strong Christian community, either by indifference or by fighting, it’s hating God.”

I don’t know how else to read verses 1–4. That’s what it is. It’s trampling on the one thing God has given you, the main thing God has given you, to show the world who He is. So there are both practical and theological reasons why community is so important according to the Bible.

Number two now, The main barriers to community. So what is it that keeps us from experiencing community? What keeps community from really forming? And there are actually *two* causes here that are listed in chapter 4. One I’m going to call “the cause” of why we don’t have community. The other I’m going to call “the cause of the cause.” So one is a more surface level and the other is down below in the roots. And here they are.

The first cause we see in the first two verses. What causes the breakdown of community? **V.1-2**, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight...*” You want something. You desire something, but you don’t get it so fighting breaks out. Now that looks pretty simple.

But the Greek word there for “desires” is the word *hedone* from which we get our word “hedonism”. And what it means here is you please yourself. You live a life of self-pleasing. *Your* comfort, *your* convenience, and *your* control are more important than anybody else’s. Your needs are more important than the people around you, and that’s all it takes.

Would you please be patient with me? Because I’m about to tell you something I know you’re going to think is just a little too simple, and yet...That’s probably our problem. What I’m about to show you is *so* simple that you’re going to say, “Okay. Tell me something I don’t know,” or “Tell me something important,” but this *is* important.

Essentially, *because* you please yourself and I please myself, because I would rather put *my* comfort and *my* convenience - in 100 little ways every single day - ahead of the comfort and convenience of the people around me, that’s the reason for this complete breakdown. That’s the reason why we’re not realizing community.

George MacDonald, the great nineteenth century poet and preacher, very famously said in a sermon, “The one principle of hell is—‘I am my own.’” You see, the difference between heaven and hell is fairly direct. And it’s only the eternal extension of what is lived out

on this mortal coil every day. There are two ways to live. You have a hundred opportunities every day to either operate on the basis of “my life for yours” (your needs above mine) or “my life for me” (my needs above yours).

I mean this is so basic, no life has even existed – no child has received life, without the laying down of his or her mother’s life for months in bearing and nourishing the child. And somebody had to lay down their life for the child year after year in caring and training and providing for that child. We live only because someone else has followed this principle of “my life for yours”.

And there’s always death involved in this choice. If the mother says, “no, I will not put your life ahead of mine” the baby dies. But on a much smaller scale as well. If you are very busy but choose to take 30 minutes out of your day to listen to a problem I’m facing...you have *sacrificed* your time. That’s death language. Your time dies, your money dies, your emotional energy dies – all kinds of things must be sacrificed in a “my life for yours” existence. But the alternative is the death of your soul. Selfishness suffocates your spirit. And this is the choice before every one of us, countless times a day. Somebody said it’s, “Heaven or hell lurking in your living room.”

You see the ethic of the world system is “anything to avoid death”. This is the foundation of evolutionary biology – “nature red in tooth and claw”. But the heartbeat of God’s system is death leads to resurrection. This is the central tenant of Christian faith. Jesus laid it out brilliantly just before his own death in **John 12:24**, “*Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. **But if it dies, it produces many seeds.***” Elsewhere he says that he who loses his life will find it. But that’s not *just* true of your physical body.

Death to your **individual needs** leads to a resurrection of **community**, because when somebody comes and dies to their time. Do you realize that being a faithful participant in a Connect Group is as much sacrificing time from your busy schedule as anything else? Or lets say someone offers to come and help you out with a project. That’s humbling to receive and it makes you grateful to them...and humility and gratitude spark true community.

See it’s humbling to have to rely on someone else. You’re now “in their debt” so to speak. But you see, heaven is a place full of gratitude and humility. Hell is the place where you don’t owe anybody anything! Hell is very self-sufficient. Which means it’s very lonely.

But when you say, “Thank you! I really appreciated that,” you’ve just lost some of your independence. You owe that person to some degree. There are obligations of community now that link you to others. You’ve been bonded to another person - in the *smallest* of ways - but if a hundred times a day you put *their* needs ahead of *yours* and they say, “Thank you,” what’s happening is joyfully, slowly but surely, we’re becoming a community.

And sometimes I’ll owe you, and sometimes you’ll owe me. But it’s not about keeping up with a debt total – the Bible actually says that another way to *destroy* community – it’s just the byproduct of when everyone attempts to live a “my life for yours” existence. That builds community. Because death leads to resurrection. But a refusal to die – a “my life for me” existence – leads to a breakdown of community. Kills community. And where does that principle come from? It’s certainly not humility.

And that brings us to the root beneath the surface. The cause of the cause is **pride**. It’s all over the place. Verse 6: “God opposes the proud ...” Verse 10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord ...” Why? The solution to the community breakdown is humility. Therefore, the reason for the community breakdown is pride.

Jonathan Edwards, was one of the key figures in the Great Awakening – an important religious revival that swept the English colonies in America in the 1730’s and 1740’s. And he wrote a book called *On Revival* to explain why every time he saw a revival in his little town of Northampton, Massachusetts, it would eventually fall apart – not because outside persecution – but every time, it came apart because of fighting that broke out inside the church.

And he identified the central culprit of the fighting – as James does – as spiritual pride. And in that little book he identifies six causes of spiritual pride. And I had outlined it for you, but then the sermon was just too long so I cut it all out! We’ll have to do another sermon sometime just on pride. But he compares it at each point to spiritual humility.

So let me just do a little inventory by way of abbreviation. Humble people - “Humble yourselves before God” What does that mean? I’ll tell you. Humble people are slow to speak of other people’s faults. When they do, they always speak very gently and respectfully and kindly, never disdainfully and proudly. They stick with people through hard relationships and difficult relationships. They don’t give up.

They are very flexible rather than being dogmatic. They are not afraid of confronting, but they don’t like it, and when they do it, they’re very persuasive because they’re not out to win; they’re out to heal. And they have almost no self-pity. They’re not Debbie-Downers. They’re not always grumbling or complaining about life.

Because you see, there are two sides to the coin we call “pride” – and often times we’re very blind to one side or the other. One side of the coin is a form of pride we might call **arrogance**. Certainly we see how that’s a community killer. Right? “Gimme, gimme, gimme, because I’m better than all y’all!” But there’s a flip side to that coin that we might call “**low self-esteem**” – and it is equally deadly. You heard me right. There is a kind of thing the Bible calls pride that we call low self-esteem. Why?

A person with low self-esteem is somebody who is always down on themselves. You’re always feeling shame or feeling bad or feeling like a failure or feeling timid or feeling self-conscious. And what does that mean? It’s still “my life for me.” It’s all about you. You’re always concerned with how you’re coming across or what’s going on.

In other words, you're focused on yourself. You're thinking about yourself. You're feeling sorry for yourself all the time. And that kills community every bit as much. It's still the "my life for me" coin. The arrogant person - the superiority complex and the inferiority complex - are both forms of self-absorption, self-centeredness, and self-obsession, and they kill community. It's still "my life for me" not "my life for yours."

All right, so number three, How to break through the barrier? How *do* we humble ourselves? How *do* we develop this humility? And right away we need to see something I hope you've already begun to see. Just like we misunderstand pride, we misunderstand humility. What you and I today in this world call "humility" is not what the Bible calls humility, because traits you and I call humility are shyness and a lack of self-assertion. Right?

When you think of a humble person, we think of somebody who is passive and maybe not very self-assertive. That's not what you see here at all. For example, take a look at **v. 6-7**. "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God.*" What's the very next thing? "***Resist the devil...***"

Now I know we live in a time in which most people don't believe in the Devil, but I just want you to consider what James is saying. *If* you believe in the Devil and you know this is a being of enormous power - this is the *most* powerful evil personal being there is - to say, "Be humble, and don't you dare be afraid of the Devil. Take him on. Face him down."

If he says, "I don't want you to be afraid of the Devil," what James is actually saying is, "I don't want you to be afraid of *anything*. If you're not afraid of the Devil, you wouldn't be afraid of anything, if you believed in the Devil." That doesn't seem to go along now, does it, with being humble?

Yes, it does! Let me give you an Old Testament illustration. Moses went to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." Let me put that into social, historical context for you. Moses went before the most powerful leader in the world at that time, and said, "I want you to give up your entire free labor force - which is the cornerstone of your economic and military superiority - right now, without remuneration, unconditionally, and immediately."

Then in **Numbers 12:3** we're told, "*Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.*" Now, if you claim to be the most humble person on the face of the earth, that's a red flag. But if the Bible calls you that...that's impressive. But do you see the point? Moses was not courageous and bold *in spite of* being humble. Moses was courageous and bold *because* he was humble. Do you know why? We have only been describing humility. We haven't defined it. Let's define it.

Here's what the Bible means by humility. Humility is not thinking less of yourself - "Oh, I'm nothing." - It's thinking of yourself less. It's looking at yourself less. Humility is not a lack of confidence. It's not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. You don't have to be looking at yourself all the time, because on the inside you are *supremely* confident of your value and worth to God, and that God is ultimately taking care of the circumstances of your life.

On a battlefield, what is cowardice? Cowardice is looking at yourself, thinking about yourself. "If I charge out of this trench, what will happen to me?" What is courage? It's forgetting about yourself. It's not even looking, not caring, but "For God and country, boys, upward and onward!"

Now few of us will ever be in actual trench warfare - thankfully! But let's talk about a battle all of us face. Why is a humble person able to forgive and be gracious when someone attacks them - not with a bayonet, but with words? "Because I don't care what you think of me. I know who I am. I know God's value of me. And therefore, you can vilify me but as long as God is for me, I can handle it." Humility, kindness, graciousness, deference, forgiveness, and courage are a lack of self-concentration, because on the inside you *know*. It's not a lack of confidence. It's *incredible* confidence.

See, a proud person who doesn't have that inner confidence is always feeling snubbed, is always feeling offended, is always feeling, "I'm not getting my rights," is always feeling, "What's going to happen to me now?" We know that all bullies are actually terribly insecure. That's pride, and that's the reason why proud people are not courageous. That's why proud people are not forgiving. It's why proud people are always having meltdowns over how people are treating them.

Humble people are kind. There is poise. There is patience. They only confront when they have to and they do it very well - they are not just out to win, but to win-over. They're not always filled with self-pity. Are you starting to figure out what it means to be humble? It's to have this *incredible* internal confidence of your worth to God and that God is taking care of the circumstances of life. Now how do you get that?

That's what humility is, and that's what you have to have in order to have community, so how do we get that? Well, the rest of chapter 4 gives us two things you have to have. Let me take what few minutes I have left to show you what those two things are. They are enormous. They basically summarize almost everything else in the Bible. But let me show you what they are.

The two things...you can have this kind of growing humility to the degree you know these two things. The first is *the enormity of God's love for you*, and the second is *the upside-down principle* that is at the heart of the universe. Only a second on the enormity of God's love for you. Look at v. 4 where James says, "*You adulterous people...*" That's a nice translation but it's not literal. And the reason why the translators cannot give you a literal translation is because it would be confusing. Because the Greek word James uses is in the "feminine vocative plural case" – I knew my Greek classes would pay off! So what he actually says here is, "You adulteresses..."

Now he's speaking to men and women. He's speaking to a church, male and female, but he very deliberately calls them *all* adulteresses - female. Why? Why would he talk to an entire body of people, male and female, as female? And the answer is James is tapping in to one of the great themes of the Bible; that God does not just love us the way a shepherd loves his sheep and God does not just love us the way even a father loves his children.

God loves us the way a husband loves a wife. God is our husband, spiritually speaking, and when we sin, it is spiritual adultery. That's what this cryptic v. 5 means, "*Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?*" It talks about the Spirit God puts in us who is jealous and envies for us.

When the words jealousy and envy are used *for human beings*, it's usually filled with a lot of negative stuff and oppression and that kind of thing, but *with God*? No. Never. When the Holy Spirit of God envies and is jealous, it means He's longing for your love the way a husband who is in love with a wife longs for her love. That's amazing how *daring* that is! He longs for our love, but that's not all.

The second thing we're told here, when James says "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up," This is the upside-down principle at the very heart of the universe. Over and over and over again the Bible says things like, "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." What does that mean?

It means if you lay down your life for God, if you say, “I’m going to follow Him no matter what; I don’t care what it costs me,” if you lay down your life for other people a hundred times a day, if you lay down your life and you die to your own power and your own control, if you lay down your life for God and the people around you, you will get your life back *forever* - safe and sound.

But if you *hold on* to your power, if you hold on to your safety, if you say, “I don’t want to serve other people; I want them to serve me - ‘my life for me’ -” you’ll become more and more like Satan and your life here will become more and more like hell, and afterwards, it will be hell. He who would lose his life will find it, and he who would find his life will lose it.

The way up is down. The way down is up. The way to have *true* power is to give your power away and serve. And the way to feel eternally great about yourself is to admit you’re a hopeless, helpless sinner and repent and say, “You have every right to send me to hell, but because of Jesus Christ, accept me.” And once you feel and sense and know and believe that he has - to the degree you understand that Jesus has done that - that is the *beginning* of the humility that is incredible inner confidence of your worth to God and that He’s caring for you in life.

It’s the *beginning* of this thing that enables you to have courage, and enables you to forgive, and enables you just to lay down your life for other people, and enables you to create community with the people around you. And when I say this is the heart of the universe, this is also at the heart of history. Do you know why?

Think about this. The Trinity. Before there was anything in the world, the Trinity - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - we’re told what they were doing from all eternity. They were loving *each other*. They were serving each other. They were glorifying each other. What does it mean to glorify *each other*?

Jesus says, “The Father glorified me, and I glorified Him.” That means you’re deferring, you’re loving, you’re honoring each other. The inner life of the Trinity was “my life for yours”. And *that’s* the reason why God created a world in which “my life for yours,” is the only basis on which life can be lived...at least lived to the fullness that it was designed for. You can’t even live unless someone sacrifices for you to be born into this world.

And of course, if the world had been perfect and if we had followed God, of course, it would continue to just be “my life for yours” all over the place. But God’s perfect design was corrupted. What is sin? Sin is, “I am my own. I call the shots. I want to be first not second. I want to be in power. I don’t want to serve. I want other people to serve me. I don’t want to serve God. I want to be in charge.” And that’s where all the wars come from. That’s where all the racism comes from. It’s where all the injustice, all the brokenness, all the family breakdowns...*everything!* That’s sin. That’s what it’s all about. “I am my own.”

But what has God done? In Jesus Christ, we see “my life for yours” in the ultimate. We see the humbling, the greatest act of humility. God comes to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. He leaves his glory behind. You know in **Romans 15:2-3**, Paul says we should bear with one another, “*Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself...*”

That’s the greatest understatement in the Bible, because here’s what Jesus did. He came to earth and he not only gave up his glory but he gave up his power, and eventually he gave up *his life* for you. And he did that to pay a penalty. Now what was that penalty, class? Do you know what that penalty was?

See I know at this point, if you’re thoughtful at all, if you’re listening to me at all, you’re saying, “Guess what. I know you’re right, but this ‘my life for yours’ is awfully hard. I can’t live like that. I know what James is asking from me, but I can’t live like that.”

Okay, I hear that and to an extent I agree with that. But guess what. **V. 6.** “*But he gives more grace.*” What does that mean? Jesus lived out verses 6, 7, and 8 for you. *Jesus* humbled himself. Jesus resisted the Devil - remember, in the wilderness? - and the devil fled from him. Jesus Christ lived out verse 6 for you in your place. He lived out verse 7 for you in your place. And in verse 8, when he sought to draw near to God...God did *not* draw near to him.

When Jesus tried to draw near to God in the garden of Gethsemane, he sensed God’s absence, and when he got on the cross, he said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” What was the penalty you and I deserve for saying, “My life is my own”? Cosmic loneliness. That’s the penalty. It’s the natural consequence. It’s the fair consequence.

On the cross, Jesus Christ got that loneliness so that now, if you try to draw near to God *imperfectly*, if you try to humble yourself *imperfectly*, if you try to serve other people *imperfectly*, if you try to resist the Devil *imperfectly*, God will draw near to you. He’ll draw near to you because *Jesus* died in your place. He laid down his life for you.

And you know the one place where to me this all comes together - the enormity of his love for you, the upside-down principle at the heart of the universe - is in that John 17 passage I read before, but here's where it winds up. This is the night before the cross. Jesus says, "I have finished the work you gave me to do. Now glorify me with the glory I had before the world began. May my disciples be brought to complete oneness. Then **John 17:23**, "*Then the world will know that you sent me and **have loved them even as you have loved me.***"

Do you see it all coming together there? Jesus Christ laid down the glory he had. He laid down his life. "My life for yours." He *proved* that this is the way we should *all* live. He humbled himself, and then he was lifted up. And here's how, if you humble yourself, you'll know this.

Because of what Jesus Christ has done, when you believe in Christ, in Christ God loves you *even as* he loves Christ. Jesus says, "You love them even as..." Can we just meditate on that together? How much does the Father love the Son? What honor and glory does the Son deserve for all that he's done, for the cosmic loneliness he took upon himself? What does he deserve? How much does the Father love the Son?

That's what *you* get when you believe in him. That's how God looks at you. Let that pound into your heart. Let that pound into your head until the *confidence* of your worth before God and the confidence that God is working out everything in life for your good starts to grow inside of you. Then you have the real spiritual humility, that lack of self-consciousness, not having to focus on yourself. Then you can serve one another.

The language of your heart should be...Why should I be selfish when I am full of real wealth and love? Why should I be defensive when all charges against me have been dismissed by the real Judge? Why should I be offended when I have the love of the King of the universe? Why should I begrudge giving forgiveness when I'm awash in Christ's forgiveness now? Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Let's pray...