

Series: Spiritual Health Checkup
Title: He Carried our Weight
Text: Philippians 2:5-11
Key Word: Steps
Proposition: Everyone will exchange the weight of selfishness and pride for the joyous weightlessness of following Christ by taking these steps.

A little boy helped his dad move some books out of an attic into a downstairs room. He loved helping his dad, even though he was probably getting in the way and slowing things down more than he was actually helping. His dad though, knew it was more important to work with his son than it was to work efficiently.

Some of the books were large study books. It was hard for the boy to carry them down stairs. On one particular load the boy dropped his pile of books several times. Finally, he sat down on the stairs and wept in frustration. He wasn't doing any good at all. He wasn't strong enough to carry the big books down the stairway. It hurt him to think he couldn't do this for his daddy.

Without a word, the father picked up the dropped books, put them into the boy's arms, and scooped up both the boy and the books into his arms and carried them down stairs. And so they continued, load after load, enjoying each other's company. The boy carried the books, while the dad carried the boy.

In some ways the boy lost weight. His dad carried the weight of the books and his son. The boy became weightless, for someone else bore the weight for him. I suspect they were both carried by sheer joy.

The church at Philippi joyously carried the weight of Paul's imprisonment. A friend arrived with a gift from this church. This gift gave him relief and hope,

strengthening him to persevere in his witness. Paul then drafted this joy-filled letter, expressing his gratitude for their love and their partnership in the gospel. He encouraged them to pattern their witness after Christ, “taking the form of a servant.”

Following in His steps, we too will experience the weightless joy in bearing the weight of others. Following in the steps of Christ will lead us into greatness.

Greatness not as the world defines it. The world says greatness is the size of the contract, the score at the end of a ball game, the list of ones accomplishments, or by ones position within the establishment. However Jesus defined greatness by saying, *“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all.”*

Paul echoes this secret which Jesus personified. We do not ascend to greatness. We descend to greatness. A father became great in the eyes of his son when he descended to pick up the dropped books, placing them in the son’s arms and carried them both. Jesus did not ascend to greatness by his profound teaching, miraculous healings, or his leadership. He descended into greatness by taking the form of a humble slave, serving people, and by carrying the weight of sin with his death on the cross.

What are the joyous steps of following Christ? Paul points to Jesus who reveals the steps. **First, possess a humble attitude.** *“Christ Jesus was truly God. But He did not try to remain equal with God.” “He humbled himself.”* (vs 6, 8) In the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, we see the eternal God in the flesh. If you want to

know God, learn what He is like, examine the life of Jesus. In Him, we see the One who was there at the creation of the world and the One who will be there at the end of time.

The infinite, eternal God willingly stepped into human smallness. God is with us. God is one of us. John, a follower of Jesus, never recovered from this thrilling reality. He opens his gospel acknowledging this profound truth. The Word—that is, the Christ—became flesh and made his dwelling among us,—or, as Eugene Peterson so vividly wrote, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." God is with us. God is no longer far removed, transcendent and remote, unknowable and untouchable. God became a neighbor, a friend, a confidante.

Jesus did not give up His godliness in His humanity. He occasionally set his glory and power aside. In obedience to His Father, He limited his power. Out of love, He laid aside all his rights in order to identify with human suffering, temptations, and yes, even death. Although, he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor. He did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.

We see his humility in the upper room. Before He served his followers their last Passover together, he took upon himself the role of a servant. Knowing who He was and where He going, he took off his outer garments and wrapped a towel around his waist. He then poured water into a basin and washed His disciples' feet. The

King of Kings washes feet. The CEO of Kingdom Enterprises serves his employees. The Commander in Chief of all the Angel Armies bends over before His enlisted men. Such humility carries weight in heaven's eyes.

A teenage girl had a reputation for being a snotty, stuck-up teen. She would spend much time gazing at the bathroom mirror arranging and rearranging her hair and applying make-up. Her nails looked like china. Her lips glowed like a rose shining with the morning dew. She would strut down the halls of her high school like a fashion model down a runway. She was overbearing, always right, and domineering.

One summer she went on a work camp with her church youth group. They traveled into the rural, impoverished areas of Appalachia. She would often sit in the shade, while her church friends worked, installing siding on a house in the hot summer sun. On the third day, a shy, little, autistic boy approached her under the shade tree. He had dirt all over him. His hair was greasy and unkempt. He unwashed clothes smelled of dried sweat. But when this girl looked into his eyes, she couldn't help but reach out to him. They played in the dirt. They laughed. They walk under the hot, summer sun into a nearby wood. They collected flowers and bugs, and other critters that crawled on the earth. A change was taking place. Her pride was dying, drying up under the heat of love. Silent hostility became compassion. Christ came to this girl in the form of an autistic boy. Her pride was carried away by the winds of humility. Later this teenage girl graduated from High

School, attended college and became a special education teacher. Losing the weight of her pride, she found God's joy among the least. An Appalachian boy lost the weight of loneliness in the arms of selfless love. John, a follower of Jesus wrote, "*No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.*" 1 JN 4:12

The Old Testament tells us stories where people saw God, saw him huge, vivid and breathtakingly close. The New Testament clearly teaches that we see God in Christ. But actual God sightings and encounters—are rare, and are reserved for the likes of Adam, Moses, Ezekiel, and a few others. Few individuals have ever met Jesus face-to-face. It's likely that even among the people John wrote to, he alone was an eyewitness to Jesus. So John announces a general principle of human existence: no one ever sees God. Except in rare and unrepeatable circumstances, we get a glimpse of God in expressions of humble love.

Second, pursue a servant lifestyle. "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...who...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,*" (vs 5,7) The Gospels present Jesus as one who was a charismatic leader holding people spellbound with his teaching. Compassion moved Him to action. He cleansed lepers. He rejoiced over his followers successes. He unleashed his anger toward coldhearted legalists. He displayed grief over an unreceptive city, and moaned in the garden of Gethsemane. He loved to praise people, deflecting credit back on the recipients of his

healing love. The woman at the well, a religious leader who spoke with him at night, fisherman by a lake quickly built rapport with Him.

Jesus refused to follow his to-do list on his “blackberry” allowing for many interruptions during the course of his day. He partied at a wedding feast for days. He was in the words of Bonhoeffer, “the man for others.” He kept himself free—free for others.

Paul says that we become who we were created and redeemed to be, when we pursue such a servant lifestyle, a life lived for others. There is a story of a group visiting an oil refinery. The tour guide showed them all the intricacies of the refining process: The vast catalyst chambers, the pipes, the heating vats—everything that went into the refining of oil. As the tour ended, one of the visitors asked the tour guide, “Sir, you showed us everything except the shipping department. This size of oil refinery processes a huge amount of petroleum, turning it into gasoline and lubricants. But you haven’t showed us where it’s all put into containers and shipped out to the world.”

“Well, you see,” said the tour guide, “we don’t have a shipping department. Everything that is produced in this refinery is used up as energy to keep the refinery going.” I wonder if that is what some would say of the church. She keeps what she produces for only for herself. But the Church who ships out what she produces, who gives herself away, is the church who is most like Christ.

Finally, practice sacrificial habits. *“And being found in appearance as a man...became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”* (Vs 8) Jesus’ life was marked by his obedient sacrificial habits, which climaxed at the cross.

Taylor University is a Christian college in Indiana. Years ago, they were pleased to learn that an African student, Sam, was going to be enrolling in their school. This was before it was commonplace for international students to come to the U.S. to study. He was a bright young man with great promise, and the school felt honored to have him. When he arrived on campus, the President of the University took him on a tour, showing him all the dorms. When the tour was over, the President asked Sam where he would like to live. The young man replied, "If there is a room that no one wants, give that room to me." The President turned away in tears. Over the years he had welcomed thousands of Christian men and women to the campus, and none had ever made such a request.

"If there is a room that no one wants, give that room to me." That's the kind of attitude that Jesus showed.

If there is a cross that no one wants to bear, I bear that cross.

If there is a job that no one wants to do, I'll do that job.

If there's a kid that no one wants to eat lunch with, I'll eat with that kid.

If there's a piece of toast that's burnt, I'll take that piece.

If there's a parking space that's far away from the church, I'll park in that space.

If there's a service time that's less convenient for people, I'll worship at that service.

If there's one cookie left in the cookie jar, I'll leave that cookie.

If there's someone who needs a pair of shoes, I'll give her my new ones.

If there's someone who needs an hour of my time, I'll give him two.

If there's a sacrifice someone needs to make, I'll make that sacrifice.

A Kurt Vonnegut story ends with a statement one character makes to another: "You were sick. Now you're well. And now, there is work to do." That's a description of every Christian's experience. I was sick. Now I'm well. And now there's work to do. God in his infinite love doesn't just save us, clean us, and dump us. He saves us, cleanses us, and sends us out to joyously follow his steps, possessing a humble attitude, pursuing a servant lifestyle, and practicing sacrificial habits.

