

# THE GOSPEL-CENTERED COMMUNITY

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## LESSON 6 — A HUMBLE COMMUNITY

### BIG IDEA

One mark of a gospel-centered community is humility. All of us want to be part of a community where pride and ego are put to death and selflessness and service are brought to life. That kind of community exalts God and blesses humanity. So what hinders that sort of community? Pride, of course. But pride is one of those abstract concepts that we talk about vaguely yet rarely think about in particular. To grow in humility, we need to identify the ways pride manifests itself in our lives and we need to put pride to death by looking to Jesus as our example and experiencing his grace personally. This lesson seeks to help you understand biblical humility, become a more humble person, and shape a more humble community that is eager to serve.

### NOTES:



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## LESSON 6 ARTICLE — A HUMBLE COMMUNITY

Before her death in 1997, Mother Teresa spent her life serving the poor in the slums of Calcutta. Her mission, in her own words, was to serve “the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.”<sup>1</sup>

Mother Teresa never sought fame or power. And yet, in an odd way, she had both. She won the Nobel Peace Prize. She inspired millions. She influenced presidents and kings. She is one of the most admired and revered humanitarians in recent history.

We may argue about her politics or disagree with her religious convictions, but all of us feel a desire to honor a person like Mother Teresa. Why? Because she considered other people’s needs above her own. Not just in her ideology, but in her practice.

All of us want to be part of a community where people consider the needs of others and take action to meet them—a community where pride and ego are put to death and selflessness and service are brought to life. This is just the kind of community the Bible urges us toward: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4 NASB).

Notice that the key to servanthood is “humility of mind.” If we want a more serving community, we must cultivate humility. In other words, our lack of service to others is primarily because we lack humility. John Stott wrote, “At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend.” The table below contrasts the consumer and the servant.

A CONSUMER	A SERVANT
“What’s in it for me?”	“How can I serve others?”
“Who’s going to relate to me and meet my needs?”	“Who can I relate to and whose needs can I meet?”
Critical of the community’s faults and weaknesses	Looking for God’s grace at work in the community
Gravitates toward people who have something to offer	Recognizes the diversity of gifts in the body
Uses others for personal gain	Empowers others for the good of the kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 18-21.



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The essence of pride is self-concern. It may manifest itself as arrogance and boasting or as self-protection and fear of people—but it's pride either way and it kills community. We have all been in a community where everyone seems to enjoy each other, but below the surface all are preoccupied with self: worried about how they are perceived by others, anxious about their needs, desperate for attention, insecure or self-righteous as they compare themselves with others, and the like. All forms of self-concern manifest themselves in a lack of love for others. We become consumers instead of servants. Such self-absorption can turn an entire community in on itself, concerned only about those within it and indifferent to the staggering needs of the world beyond it.

Our consumerism is rooted in a lack of faith. We are worried about what others think because we are not convinced that God delights in us (Psalm 149:4). We are anxious because we do not believe God will meet our needs (Matthew 6:32). We vie for attention because we do not think God rewards what is done in secret (Matthew 6:6). We compare ourselves to others because we forget that Jesus is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). A consumer is self-seeking because he is preoccupied with building his own kingdom in order to meet his own needs. Jesus calls us to just the opposite: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Those who trust God to meet their needs are free to consider the needs of others. They discover this gospel paradox: As long as I'm looking to get my needs met, I will never get my needs met. But when I begin to meet the needs of others—when I begin to live for them instead of for myself—I find that God graciously takes care of my needs in the process.

The grace of God turns us into servants. Rather than demanding that we be served, we joyfully lay down our rights and seek to serve God and others. But it begins with “humility of mind,” which we only get by looking to Jesus and understanding more deeply the gospel's implications for our lives. Paul shows us how in Philippians 2.

Right after his exhortation to consider others more important than ourselves, he said, “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” (Philippians 2:5-7).

Jesus serves as our example of the ultimate servant. He had a right to be served simply because he is God, but rather than claim that right, Jesus became flesh in the form of a humble servant. “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus serves us personally so that we can experience his grace. But often we aren't comfortable with a God who serves us. Instead, selfishly (and ironically), we want to serve God so that we can demand something in return. We want a transaction: Because I've done X for God, God should do Y for me. But when we allow Jesus to serve us, when we accept his grace instead of insisting on repaying him, we are humbled. This is how Paul could say, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I



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received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15–16).

Jesus transforms us from selfish consumers to faithful servants. Through the gospel, we become “bond-servants” of Christ—free persons who willingly become servants out of gratitude and honor to our master. “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). As bond-servants of Christ, we live to serve others, for Jesus’ sake and for God’s glory. “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5 NIV). As this penetrates our hearts, we will be eager to bless not just each other, but the world around us as well.

Humility of mind involves more than the intellect. God’s grace toward us in Christ needs to get down deep into our hearts in order to change us. We need to acknowledge our resistance to grace—our reluctance to be served by Jesus. We need to “give up” and allow him to serve us in the ways we so desperately need. And we need to reflect on his gracious humility toward us so that our hearts are softened and changed. Then we will find ourselves increasingly joyful and selfless as we delight in serving him by serving others in our community and reaching beyond ourselves to serve those who do not yet know Jesus.



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## LESSON 6 EXERCISE — PRIDE & PREJUDICE

We commonly think of pride only as arrogance or haughtiness. But the essence of pride is **self-concern**, which can manifest itself offensively (as arrogance) or defensively (as fear). The two lists below show characteristics of arrogant pride and fearful pride. Mark the two or three characteristics you see reflected most often in your life. (**Note:** This isn't an either/or exercise. Most people will display tendencies from both lists.)

### CHARACTERISTICS OF ARROGANT PRIDE

- I must be in control.
- I see most issues as black and white and tend to view people as either for me or against me.
- I am threatened by people with legitimate differences. I avoid disagreement or critique.
- I am often insensitive; I don't take other people's feelings into account.
- I tend to be closed-minded and committed to my own way of seeing things.
- I see other gifted, competent people as competition.
- I can be hypercritical of others.
- I lack self-awareness. I have a hard time seeing or admitting my sins, errors, and faults.
- I like to do things myself; I don't delegate significant responsibilities to others.
- I long to be respected by everyone.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF FEARFUL PRIDE

- I avoid leadership; I'm hesitant to take charge.
- I see all issues as shades of gray. I'm reluctant to fight for anything.
- I'm paralyzed by people with legitimate differences. I spend lots of time and energy thinking about or responding to disagreement and critique.
- I'm overly sensitive; I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.
- I'm overly welcoming of new ideas and viewpoints. I don't have many strong convictions or opinions.
- I see other gifted, competent people as threats.
- I am rarely critical of others—even when I should be.
- I lack self-confidence; I am often paralyzed by an awareness of my sins, errors, and faults.
- I want everybody to have a voice in every decision.
- I long to be liked by everyone.

Now, look back at the characteristics you've identified and consider the following questions:

- What elements of self-concern are present in the tendencies you identified? (How are these things ultimately about you, not others?)
- How do these tendencies hinder you from glorifying God and serving others?
- How does the gospel address this lack of humility and love? (Be as specific as possible.)



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- What will repentance and faith look like for you in this area?

Now, consider how we function together as a group. Do you see evidence of a consumer orientation instead of a servant's heart? Do we focus on our neediness to the point that we have no energy for others? Are we content to enjoy each other's company and closed to others we might welcome into our group? Are we indifferent to ways we might serve others together? If these elements are present in our community life, what would repentance and faith look like for us as a group?

