

Joining Jesus' Story
Week 11: Low maintenance disciples

This is our final week in our series, Joining Jesus' Story, which is a trip through the book of Philippians.

- Not the **story of Bill**, starring Bill, including Jesus. It is the story of Jesus, starring Jesus, and Bill gets to be in it.

Here is Paul's rendering of the story we are to join if we choose to follow Jesus. *You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.* ⁶ *Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.* ⁷ *Instead, he gave up his divine privileges ; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,* ⁸ *he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.* ⁹ *Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,* ¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
Philippians 2:5-11 NLT

Here's the way we have been **trying to visualize** this story.

- V He is **God**.
- V Did not use this for his own **advantage**.
- V Gave up his divine **privilege**.
- V Took the role of a **servant**.
- V Was **born** as a human being.
- V **Humbled** himself.
- V Obedient to the point of **death**.
- V Even death on a **cross**.

*And everyone will confess that Jesus is **Lord**
He commands all creation to **bow** to Jesus
He gave him the name above every **name**
God lifted him to a place of **honor***

This is a 74 way of looking at life. Seven steps down and then he was raised up four to where he remains today.

Today we come to the **last part** of this letter from prison.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be **content**. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, **but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit**. ¹⁸ **I have received full payment, and more**. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a **fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God**. (Epaphroditus has brought money to help Paul from the Philippians)

¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Philippians 4:10-23

Typically we read these famous words and then **we look at Paul as our example** of how to have the attitude of Jesus, even in difficult situations. **That is true, but I don't want us to forget that this is a letter**. Paul is writing to this group of Christ followers in Philippi who are also in a culture that is very contentious toward their faith. **So let's look at what Paul is saying about these people and what he wants for them**.

That being said...**This is more than the normal pleasantries** at the end of a letter. Paul wants to end strong, with more than a "love you, see you soon." He has more to say.

Here's a little background that we need to know to understand why Paul seems to **keep saying "thank you,"** but I didn't really need the money.

Remember they sent Ephraditus with a gift and to care for Paul personally. There's a reason for this. **In that culture there were a lot of charlatans running around dressed up like philosophers and then gathering a following in order to ask for money. They called it "shearing the sheep."** Paul wanted to make sure that they knew he appreciated the gift, but he wasn't in it for that. **If they couldn't or wouldn't help, God would have taken care of him because God had more for him to do.**

Paul wants to avoid any hint of this as he receives a gift from them. Here's what he says to the church in Corinth. **If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:12**

Paul's priority is the mission. therefore if God has more for him to do, then he won't starve and he won't be put to death at the moment.

Content can also mean "self-sufficient." He is trusting in God, that he will be taken care of.

Paul is describing the life he is trying to live, joining Jesus' story. He is taking on the attitude of Jesus. **Jesus was looking to what the father had given him to do, not his own comfort.** He lowered himself. **Paul is lowering himself in that he isn't demanding** what would be reasonable in that day because that would hinder the gospel. **That's what he wants for the Philippians and for us.** People who join the story we have just described are...**Low maintenance with high output.**

I had a teammate once who was very talented and was probably better than me. But the problem was if anything wasn't right physically or mentally, he would lose. If he didn't get the right thing to eat, didn't sleep well the night before, he didn't get a warm up...

Paul is a model of this, but the exciting part is that he is starting to see it in the Philippians.

I was trying to think of what the opposite of this would be. The word that came to mind is a diva. **A diva is someone who is talented too, but high**

maintenance. They believe that because of who they are, they should get extra special consideration and treatment. **If anything is not how the diva expects,** there will be a price to pay. They will not perform well. In the NFL **wide receivers** are the divas who need to be **appreciated** and have their **egos stroked** before performing at their best. They are **Ferrari's,** not Ford trucks or minivans. There **are singers or actors** who need water at the right temperature, a **certain type of flowers** in the dressing room, M&M's, but no green ones...

I heard about a bride who when her bridesmaids showed up. one had lost a lot of weight. The diva bride was mad because she wouldn't be the skinniest.

Don't despair if you see yourself as somewhat high maintenance. It's so tempting in our culture. Seek to be low maintenance. **Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.** ¹² **I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.** ¹³ **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.** V. 11-13

So many people in our culture are never really content or happy...something is always wrong.

Another way to describe this is fragile or easily knocked off course.

This past year, it was really tempting to have this attitude where we throw up your hands and just pray for it to be over instead of moving forward.

Paul would endure anything so as not to get in the way of the gospel going forward.

When you are a low maintenance, high output person, **you start thinking not about what I can do, but what can I help others do.** That's when... **Your fruit grows on someone else's tree.**

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ **I have received full payment, and more.** V. 17-18a

"increases to your credit"...spiritual capital, account.

Paul is saying that **he appreciates the money, but his full payment as a leader is that he sees them joining Jesus' story as they support him and continue to proclaim the gospel. The evidence of their Jesus' attitude is more of a blessing than even the money.**

Is there something that you have poured into someone's life that is now growing in his or her life and the kingdom is being benefitted. It's no longer about you.

My joy has come from seeing people making disciples, loving those around them, and doing it when we aren't doing church exactly the way we would like.

When I see...people in my bridge group talking about the people in their lives that God has asked them to love and serve...people ministering to someone who has lost their spouse...A teacher who is praying for her non-believing coworker who is now asking for prayer....People who some of you have developed relationships with at Cultivate who now are a part of Beaverton, but not just attending, serving...Men and women who are ready to start their own Builder Cohorts after going through one themselves. When we as a church did things like Cultivate and Beaverton that weren't really about meeting our needs or increasing our numbers and I heard very little, "but what about me?"

Whose fruit is growing on my tree? List some of the people who have poured into you and now fruit is coming out of it. Greg Weins, Bob Boyd, my dad, Robin, Steve Wimmer, Tom Plank, Jim Shanks, and Sterling Gatling...

Their gift means that they are following Paul's example of being content in all circumstances. They will make it under the pressure of persecution because they have taken this attitude. This attitude and what it will do for the kingdom is Paul's fruit growing on their trees.

Paul wants the Philippians to be low maintenance, high output people. That starts with thinking about my fruit growing on someone else's tree.

Paul also believes that these kind of people will practice...**Generosity based on trust**.

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. V. 19 The foundation for their generosity was trusting in this kind of God.

They were poor, divided, and persecuted and yet they gave generously. This tells Paul something important about where they are in trusting Jesus. They believe that he will take care of them, even if they give.

It is important for our spiritual development that we give, release the one thing we want to squeeze more than anything, our money. We tend to squeeze in order to be in control. We squeeze our time and our money.

There was no, "we will be generous when..."

"God supplies the needs of his people by giving them the resources to cope with hardship. Hardship tempts us to think that God is unmoved by our plight or is against us and so we despair. Thus, when we experience difficult times, we need the moderating presence of God, who shows us by the cross of Christ that he is for us, not against us, and that he was so filled with love for us that he sent his Son to die on our behalf. If this powerful truth dominates our lives, then we can face even the ultimate human hardship with the equanimity of Paul (1:18b-26), and we can rest assured that God is conducting us toward salvation, even in the midst of our hardship." 241

If I believe that God is good and I trust him, that he knows what I really need then, when things don't look so promising, I can still be generous.

Look at the other ways Paul describes their gift....**a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. V. 18c**

Using OT imagery. (Isaiah 56:7; 60:7) All through the words of the Prophet Isaiah there are phrases about the people's burnt offerings in the temple as being acceptable or unacceptable. **When they have been acting justly and being the example** to the rest of the peoples of how to

please God, then Isaiah would call their offerings acceptable or even "fragrant", meaning when the smoke went up to the heavens, the aroma was pleasing to God. This is all about the hearts of the people. If their hearts were about evil and chasing after the false gods of their neighbors, then the offerings and their prayers are not heard or acknowledged by God. When their hearts were right and they were obeying God and keeping themselves only for Him, then God accepted their offerings and prayers, and they moved Him.

By using these phrases, Paul is saying that the Philippians "get it." They understand God's love. They are giving out of a heart that desires to please God and know him. Their desire is the same as Paul's, that what they do will move the Gospel forward and not hinder it. And they are willing to do this under great external pressure.

This verse is about Pharisees who had a high maintenance, low output attitude. These were the religious people who wanted to make sure everyone behaved well and that the people of Israel stayed away from outsiders or sinners. "What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. Luke 11:42 The tithe was 10% of their income given to support the temple and it's workers where they worshipped. The Pharisees are careful to tithe, but their hearts are not right. Luke 11:42

They lowered themselves to serve Paul, which is a way of joining Jesus' story. Therefore, God will supply their needs or "raise them up."

But that doesn't always mean meeting my physical needs. Giving to God or, as some say, planting a seed of faith, moves God to make you healthy, wealthy, and successful. This is the prosperity gospel. This is not what God is promising the Philippians, or us, today. We may struggle and not get what we think we need. But what God always gives in abundance is his presence to those who trust him, that love relationship with their heavenly father through his son, Jesus.

The other thing that he is promising is that he will finish what he has started in us. He is going to enable them to continue to be his people in

tough circumstances, because their greatest need could be to continue Jesus' story under the circumstances they find themselves in.

This is the time we need to be generous, even if we aren't always getting what we want out of church. After all, our customers are out there and our patrons are in here. If we act like consumers then we forfeit our ability to join Jesus' story. We are not willing to lower ourselves and take the role of a servant.

When we are fearful, we squeeze what we believe we need in order to feel safe and feel like we are in control.

That's why when we were given an incredible gift that was enough to pay off our building instead of meeting some more of our wants and needs, we started giving it away to some of our partners in ministry and good causes in the community.

When we release what we want to squeeze, our money, then God can do things with it to further the kingdom. There are many things God wants us to do as we join his story this year and some of it will take money. Generosity is born out of trusting in the goodness of God. When we practice this type of generosity, we get to see God transform our lives. We become low maintenance, high output people.

Paul wants the Philippians to be low maintenance, high output people. That starts with thinking about my fruit growing on someone else's tree and being generous because we trust God's goodness. Paul also believes that these kinds of people will demonstrate...[Proof of being set apart.](#)

Let's look at verse 21 through the beginning of 22. [Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you... v. 21-22a](#)

The Greek word that is translated "saint" is the same one that is also translated "holy". They don't mean perfect or flawless. They mean set apart for God's use above anything else. A tool that they might have used in the temple back in the OT would have been called holy because it wasn't

used to take coals out of the fire in the temple and then used for gardening. **One use, and that was for God.**

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. ²¹ Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, **made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.** ²² Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a **pure heart.** 2 Timothy 2:20-22

Paul is saying to the Philippians "greet each and every saint." Paul, "stresses the equal worth before God" of each member of the congregation. Each has been set apart to belong to 'god's chosen people.'
238

Paul is saying that these people who have given him money, who cared enough to send Epaphroditus to care for him in prison, are **thinking and behaving like "saints"**. They are proving that they are set apart by God as his people. Each and every one, **not simply the key leaders, or teachers or apostles** who start new churches, with all of their differences, unique abilities and backgrounds; they are all set apart for God's use and his Glory. **Let that sink in for a minute. Yes, that means you, if you are trusting in Jesus and joining his story, you are a saint. You will be transformed into a low maintenance, high output person for God.**

Steps to Joining Jesus' Story

1. Trust God's goodness and begin servicing and giving.

Make this your coming out of the pandemic commitment to be less high maintenance and more about the gospel and others. Tithe is a good practice to begin or work towards. It teaches us how to give up control and trust God's goodness.

2. Place the gospel definition in a place you will see it daily. Put it on your mirror, on your desktop at work, in your locker at school, on your computer on your car dashboard. Read it, feed on it and look for opportunities to share it.

3. Whose fruit is growing on your tree and who is it feeding? Make a list of those who have nourished you so now their fruit is growing in your life. Then list those who are being nourished/fed spiritually through what you have received from those on the first list.

Let's do this one last time. As I step, you shout out the words. Close with the 74 story as the last thing we do.

V He is **God**.

V Did not use this for his own **advantage**.

V Gave up his divine **privilege**.

V Took the role of a **servant**.

V Was **born** as a human being.

V **Humbled** himself.

V Obedient to the point of **death**.

V Even death on a **cross**.

And everyone will confess that Jesus is **Lord**

He commands all creation to **bow** to Jesus

He gave him the name above every **name**

God lifted him to a place of **honor**

That's Jesus' story and it can be yours if you will trust him and ask him to remake you as a part of that story.