



SPECIAL SESSION

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# The First Christmas Carol

## SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see Christ as the ultimate example of humility, leaving heaven to come willingly to Earth as a fragile and lowly infant. His human life provided us with an example of obedience, moving from the manger to the cross continually choosing God's will over His own comfort. Ultimately, He was exalted by the Father after the cross when He was raised to the throne. One day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

## SCRIPTURE

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Philippians 2:5-11

# THE POINT

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**God calls us to adopt the posture of a humble servant we see in Christ.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Let's be honest, it can be difficult for us to remember the reason for the Christmas season—celebrating *Immanuel, God with us*. With what seem like endless parties, shopping lists, and family gatherings, the season leading up to Christmas day is typically rushed and stressful. Beyond this busyness is a constant temptation to indulge ourselves. From grandma's cooking to the latest gadget, the inclinations of our hearts and flesh to be gratified through toys and treats is in overdrive. This season gives us countless opportunities to think about ourselves, our wants, and our wishes.

Busyness, excess, and self-gratification are all problems of the season, but the biggest hurdle in the way of celebrating and honoring Christ this Christmas is not primarily in the external distractions; it's in our tendency to want what we want, how we want it, and when we want it. We forget that life is not all about us, and Christmas surely isn't either. We must intentionally remember that Christmas is about Christ. Christmas is not primarily about celebrating time with family, making memories, or showing love through gift-giving.

The actions we take during this Christmas season (and every other day of the year) ought to be acts of worship toward the God who sent His only Son for us. As we dive into what some might call "the first Christmas carol," let's study with an attitude of worship.

- **What are some of your biggest distractions during Christmas? What holiday traditions help you remember to worship God for sending Jesus to save us?**

### Option 2

How do humility and service go together? Essentially, humility is being submissive rather than proud or arrogant. Humble people also tend to defer to others' needs and desires. Service means to be of use to or help others. It would seem obvious that humility and service go together because both uplift others above self. This doesn't mean we forget ourselves completely, just that we think of others more than we think of ourselves.

- **Name someone you know who displays the characteristics of humility and service.**
- **What are some behaviors and attitudes you can model after this person?**

Ultimately, Jesus is our model for humility and service. Though He is God, He humbled Himself to live as a man and served us by living a perfect life and dying for our sin. Who has helped anyone more than Jesus helped humanity? He submitted to the Father and placed our needs above His own. He teaches us to do the same for others.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God calls us to adopt the posture of a humble servant we see in Christ.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** eternal Son of God; second Person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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This session takes us to Paul's letter to the Philippian church. This passage contains parts of an early church hymn, a carol relating to who Jesus is and what He did for us. May it shine brightly into your Christmas season, allowing you to see more of Christ and your need for Him during this time.

## CHRIST'S HUMILITY: FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

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Though examples of humility can be rare, the Bible gives us many snapshots of Jesus' humility, so we can follow His example.

**<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant. (Phil. 2:5-7a)**

This one great act of voluntary demotion Jesus took demonstrated the depths of both His love for us and His love for His Father. There are two parts to this great story in which the Son of God moved from heaven and took up residence on Earth: He let go and He took on.

We first need to see and believe Jesus indeed existed in the form of God before He came to earth in order to understand what He let go. Jesus—the Word—was in the beginning with God. He created all things, and without Him nothing exists (John 1:1-3). Jesus, in a great act of grace-filled humility, set aside His privileges of being God (without ceasing to be God) so He could join the human race for the sake of humankind.

For our sake, Jesus let go of more than we can ever imagine so we could enter into an eternal relationship with God the Father. As the apostle Paul wrote, Jesus demonstrated His grace to us by becoming poor so we might become rich in Him (2 Cor. 8:9). Christ temporarily gave up His exalted seat next to the Father so that we might enjoy God's exalted presence for eternity.

Not only did Christ let go, but He also took on. It's one thing to pass up a first-class ticket. It's quite another to move to the worst seat and choose to serve the rest of the people on the plane. Jesus emptied Himself of His right to glory and privilege and instead took on limitation and servitude. This was not a one-time decision. Throughout His human life, the Son of God followed the calling of a humble servant and lived a life of stripped-down humanity, beginning with Him being born as a defenseless, dependent infant. He continually chose the posture of a servant. He voluntarily washed feet. He faithfully endured insult and injury. Why? Because He came to serve and give His life for us, not to be served by us (Mark 10:45).

- **Jesus' whole life was drenched in humility. What can you learn about the way you should live your life from the way He lived His?**  
(p. 28, PSG)

### TIMELINE

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*\* Bonus Session*  
**FROM HUMILIATION TO EXALTATION**  
*Jesus' arrival is one of humility, obedience, and exaltation.*

**THE FIRST MARTYR**  
*Stephen reflects Jesus in his life and his death.*

**THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER**  
*Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.*

## CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE: FROM THE MANGER TO THE CROSS

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From birth to His last day on earth, complete obedience—though not automatic—was the only option Jesus entertained. He was always about His Father's business, despite the consequences He knew would come and because He knew what would ultimately result from His suffering.

**7 ... being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:7b-8)**

- **List some of the ways Jesus was tempted in Scripture and ways He would have been tempted because of His human nature. What encouragement should we receive because Jesus remained perfectly obedient to the Father?** (*p. 29, PSG*)

Selfishness. Pride. Laziness. Gluttony. Lust. You name it, He faced it. Yet He rightly chose to resist and fight against each temptation, every single time. He didn't make all the right choices because they were easy or because He was without opportunity to sin. Christ obeyed because of His underlying desire and determination to do the will of the Father.

On the night of His betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane, we have a glimpse into what might be the most critical moment of Jesus' life of obedience. Knowing the pain and suffering that awaited Him, the Son of God so fervently prayed for another way that His sweat was like blood drops (Matt. 26:39; Luke 22:44). Jesus agonized over this obedient choice, and He even petitioned for another way. Because He was human, obedience was not easy. Yet because of His love and commitment to the plan and glory of God, obedience was the only choice He would make. For the sake of God's purpose for humankind, He deliberately and joyfully took every agonizing step toward the cross. Enduring torture and taunting, Jesus remained on the cross until God's plan for that step of redemption was finished.

## CHRIST'S EXALTATION: FROM THE CROSS TO THE THRONE

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So far in this passage, the focus has been on Jesus, but Paul turned the focus from Jesus Christ's attitude to the actions of God the Father. And with a crescendo, the apostle gave us a beautiful refrain of celebratory praise.

**<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)**

Anytime we see *therefore* or *for this reason* in Scripture, we need to pay attention and figure out what is going on. Typically, the author is concluding with an important statement. In this case, the transition takes place in verse 9. Because verses 5-8 are true, verses 9-11 came to be. In other words, since Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a man and obediently followed God's plan all the way to death on a cross, God exalted Him and gave Him the greatest name of all: Lord of all. The Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah pointed to the exalted name of the Christ child long ago: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). The majestic reign of Jesus Christ was restored through the Father's act of exaltation because of His complete obedience.

Just as the word *therefore* or the phrase *for this reason* in Scripture is often important, the phrase *so that* is as well. In this passage, both phrases "for this reason" and "so that," help us see a very important theme in the Bible: All things are for God's glory. God's exaltation of Christ had purpose; it wasn't simply to celebrate the acts of Jesus as we tend to celebrate them here on earth. Granting Christ the name above every name was not a one-time gift like a trophy for Christ to leave on His bookcase. This name was a giving and restoring of the honored position He left behind when He entered Earth as a child in Mary's womb. Jesus' exaltation continues to echo throughout all of history. All of this, in turn, glorified the Father, the One who glorified the Son as He had been before the foundation of the world (John 17:4-5).

### TIMELINE

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#### **PETER VISITS CORNELIUS**

*The gospel goes to the Gentiles.*

#### **FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER**

*The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.*

#### **EARLY MISSIONARIES**

*Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Jesus' Humanity (p. 30, PSG)

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*In addition to being fully divine, the Bible also affirms that Jesus is fully human. Not only does the Old Testament affirm that the Promised One (Messiah) would be a man (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus' earthly life bore all the marks of being a human. He experienced the circumstances common to living as a human being, such as hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matt. 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The early Christians celebrated the significance of Christ coming to earth (incarnation), His death on the cross for our sins, and His exaltation as the Lord of the world.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Have you encountered people giving up their rights and/or comforts for the sake of others? If so, how did it make you feel? Why do you think this type of sacrifice is so rare?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we demonstrate in our lives the humble attitude Jesus displayed in becoming a human being?** *We demonstrate humility when we seek the good of others rather than our own, consider others as more important than ourselves, look out for the interests of others, and so forth.*
- **What is the connection between humility and obedience?** *Humility and obedience are two sides to the same coin—those who are humbled before God and recognize their need for Him are also willing to walk in obedience. Their obedience arises out of love for God because of His gracious forgiveness towards them.*
- **How can we prepare ourselves for the potential consequences of our own obedience to the Father as we share in Jesus' humble attitude?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Setting aside His glory and privilege, Jesus took on servitude and suffering for the sake of God's will. A monumental example to follow, no doubt, but one we must pursue. Instead of giving in to the cravings of consumerism, Paul encourages us to take on the mind of Christ and follow the example of His life. Just as Christ lived and died for the sake of God's glory, we also give our humble attitudes and sacrificial actions as a continual offering of praise to the Father.

- **How can you adjust your plans to make this Christmas season even more about the celebration of your Savior and all He's done for you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What types of New Year's resolutions will you make that challenge you to deny yourself and pursue humility?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Many commentators agree that Philippians 2:5-11 was part of an early church hymn. If this is true, Paul would then be pointing to well-known and loved words that celebrated and affirmed the lordship of Jesus. Most of us can sing songs from our childhood, even after years of not hearing them. The early church carried on this beautiful tradition of memory and worship through song. The tradition continues to this day as we worship both individually and corporately for the glory of the Father in the name of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- **What are some of your favorite songs and hymns that point to the truth of who Christ is?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can you use the words of these songs to encourage Christians in the faith and even call others to turn to Jesus in saving faith?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Glorifying God in our humility will work itself out in our interactions with other Christians and in our actions in the world. In the midst of a Christmas season when people are easily driven to observe a holiday for selfish reasons, we should stand out as we unselfishly celebrate our Savior (Phil. 2:15). We should humbly serve one another rather than seeking to be served. We should live as pure children of God in the sight of all people so they glorify God when they see our good works (Matt. 5:16). And like Christ, though we will suffer in this world living lives of humility, we will be exalted when the time is right (1 Pet. 5:6).

- **In what ways do your Christmas celebrations point you to the accomplishments of Christ?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can you better demonstrate humility toward those around you?** *You can demonstrate humility toward others by placing others' needs before your own, thinking of ways you can serve others, following through with serving those needs, and so forth.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPMissionWin18](http://lifeway.com/TGPMissionWin18))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**