

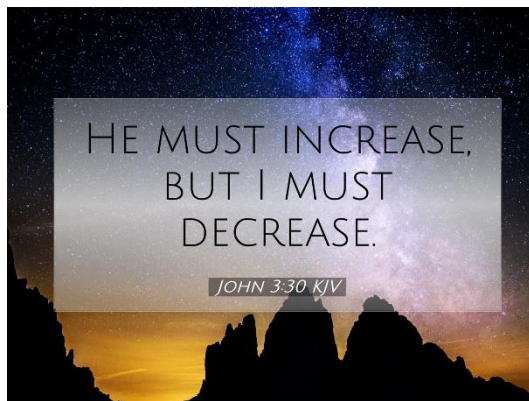
Becoming Less

John 3:30

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

What does effective ministry look like in this modern age? It is increasingly difficult to seek first the kingdom of God when the culture around us prioritizes the worship of self. Even as new creations in Christ, we struggle with His command:



“Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). How much harm is done when church leaders misuse their authority, claiming to possess all spiritual gifts and assuming control over every ministry! Yet the body of Christ is meant to be diverse, and only Christ—who purchased the church with His life—is worthy to assign spiritual gifts and roles. If we are to live lives worthy of the Gospel, putting the interests of others before our own must be our divine directive. In the upcoming sermon, we will explore the profound truth behind John the Baptist’s words: “He must become greater;

I must become less” (John 3:30), and how this humility is key to serving in God’s kingdom.

John the Baptist

If we are to discuss the great figures of the Bible, the “forerunner of the Messiah” (Luke 1:17) must surely be at the top of our list. In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, from the priestly division of Abijah, and



his wife Elizabeth, a descendant of Aaron (Luke 1:5). Both were righteous in God’s sight, observing all His commands and decrees blamelessly, yet they were childless because Elizabeth was unable to conceive (1:6-7). Likely between the ages of 60 and 80, their lack of children led many Israelites to wonder what sin they had committed, as children were seen as a sign of God’s blessing (Deuteronomy 11:29). This all

changed when Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter the temple and burn incense before the Lord (1:8-9). As he was offering incense an angel of the Lord appeared to him. He was gripped with fear likely wondering if he had offered “unauthorized fire” before the Lord like Nabab and Abihu and was about to be consumed by fire (Leviticus 10:1-2)! The angel told him to not

be afraid for he was not going to harm Zachariah but instead announce to him that his wife Elizabeth, though her womb had long been shut, would conceive a son and they were to call his name John (1:11-13).

John's calling was extraordinary, foretold by Isaiah over 700 years earlier as the "voice of one calling in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3).



Luke provides insight into this forerunner of the Messiah, describing him as one who would abstain from wine and fermented drink, be filled with the Holy Spirit even before birth, and bring many Israelites back to the Lord their God. John was to go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah," turning the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, preparing a people ready for the Lord (Luke 1:15-17). Matthew adds

that John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. Rather than preaching in the temple at Jerusalem, John chose the wilderness of Judea to deliver his message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:1-4).

What makes John even more remarkable was his profound humility in service to the Lord. In John 3, we learn that while Jesus and His disciples were baptizing in the Judean

countryside, John was also baptizing at Aenon near Salim, where there was plenty of water (John 3:22-23). When one of John's



disciples pointed out that Jesus was baptizing and that "everyone is going to Him" (John 3:26), John could have easily succumbed to jealousy over another's ministry success. Instead, he responded with calm wisdom, affirming, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of Him'" (John 3:27-28). John, uninterested in the pomp and circumstance of the temple system, fully embraced his role as a servant of the Most-High God. People came from miles away, drawn by his compelling

message to seek first the kingdom of God. Despite his significant role, John humbly acknowledged his unworthiness to even untie Christ's sandals (John 1:26-27) and declared with deep humility, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

Apostle Paul

But this kind of humility in service often takes effort to cultivate. For example, another significant figure in the Bible who ultimately exemplified humility in service to the Lord is the Apostle Paul. Born in Tarsus, likely around the same decade as

Jesus, Paul was educated as a Pharisee under the renowned Jerusalem teacher Gamaliel. He testified that he was "thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors" and was as "zealous for God"



as any of his fellow Pharisees (Acts 22:3). Paul stated, "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14). As a devout Pharisee, Paul viewed himself as a Guardian of the Law, supplanting the priests who had long ceased to be effective leaders. His primary focus was to share his expertise in the Law and Jewish traditions, wielding influence

through the Sanhedrin, synagogues, and schools of his day. He was circumcised on the eighth day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and by his own admission, "as for righteousness based on the law, faultless" (Philippians 3:4-6). Despite his impressive credentials, Paul later demonstrated profound humility, acknowledging that all his achievements were nothing compared to knowing Christ.

While Paul began by excelling beyond his peers in zeal and adherence to the law, he soon demonstrated that zeal without divine wisdom can lead to opposing the very One whom one seeks to worship. Paul, who was deeply committed to the Jewish faith, found it impossible to accept the teachings of Jesus—that entrance into the Kingdom of God was not based on the temple, nationality, or even the Torah, but on faith in God's one and only

Son. By his own admission, he "intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13). He openly



confessed to being "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man" (1 Timothy 1:13). Paul was present at and approved of the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-59), but his rage against the followers of "The Way" did not stop there. With authority from the chief priests, he went from house to house, dragging off men and women to

prison (Acts 8:1-3), casting his vote against them, and having them executed. So consumed was he by his mission to persecute the followers of Jesus that he even pursued them in foreign cities (Acts 26:10-11).

Even as Paul "breathed out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1), his encounter on the road to Damascus, where a light from heaven surrounded him and the words "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:3-4) rang out, marked the transformation of his zeal. That day, Paul began to learn the humility of service that John the Baptist had long demonstrated. His fervor shifted from strict adherence to religion and tradition to faith in the sovereign power of the risen Savior. Paul's new focus was on seeking first the kingdom of

God, understanding the church not as a political or genealogical institution, but as the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2), composed of all who have faith in Christ, the true descendants



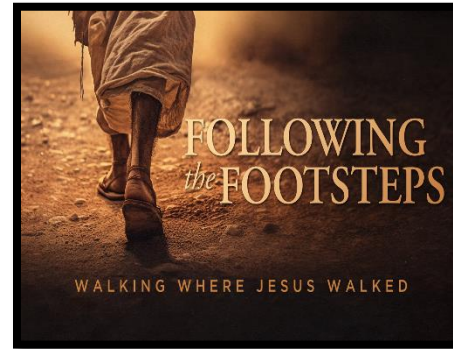
of Abraham (Galatians 3:23-29). Ministry success was no longer about gaining authority over the religious elite but about

following in Christ's footsteps and serving others. Despite enduring persecution—five times receiving the "forty lashes minus one," being beaten with rods, stoned, and constantly in danger (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)—Paul never preached out of selfish ambition (Philippians 1:13). His life and ministry reflected the Gospel, grounded in righteousness through faith in Christ, not the law (Philippians 3:9).

Practical Steps for Cultivating Humility

A practical approach to cultivating humility in everyday ministry begins with a daily commitment to self-reflection and surrender. Start each day by asking God to reveal areas where pride or self-interest may be creeping in and seek His strength to walk in humility. Regularly immerse yourself in Scripture, focusing on passages that emphasize servanthood, such as

Philippians 2:3-4, which calls us to value others above ourselves. In practice, this means actively looking for opportunities to serve others without expecting recognition, whether it's within your church, community, or family. Engaging in acts of service—like mentoring, visiting the sick, or helping with tasks no one else



wants to do—develops a posture of humility. Moreover, seek accountability from trusted fellow believers who can challenge you when pride arises and encourage you in your pursuit of Christlike humility. Finally, make

it a habit to give God the glory for any successes in ministry, recognizing that all achievements are the result of His power at work, not your own efforts. By prioritizing these steps, humility becomes a natural part of your ministry and a reflection of the servant-hearted nature of Christ.

Conclusion

To humbly serve the Lord, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2). Christ, who gave Himself as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), redefined faithfulness as servanthood. True discipleship requires us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). We are not called to seek positions of

authority to "lord" over others (Matthew 20:25), but to live in humility, valuing others above ourselves and looking out for their interests (Philippians 2:3). Sealed by the Holy Spirit and equipped with spiritual gifts determined by God (1 Corinthians 12:11), we recognize that no one possesses all gifts; some are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). The goal of service is not to seek numbers or results, for God alone determines the outcomes, but to build one another up in faith for His glory, not our own. Therefore, let us seek first the kingdom of God and let our good deeds point to the Father, He may become greater, and I become less (John 3:30) for His honor and glory, amen.