

# Sunday 26th April 2026 - Values: Humility

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Date: 26 April 2026

Preacher: Matt Wallace

[ 0 : 00 ] As Ian was saying, we are starting this new Sunday series, which we're simply calling Values, but it's a series which is rooted in our desire to consider who we want to be under God.

And then how those principles, those values might shape what we do as a church, who we want to be shaping what we do.

So it's the being that comes before the doing. And it's been said many times before, but first and foremost, we are human beings, not human doings.

The doing is important, wouldn't get far without it, but it's designed to flow from who we are as people under God. And this being before doing principle, well, I think we see it demonstrated time and time again in the life of Jesus, where who he is, is more important than what he does.

So, for example, at that first Christmas, Jesus being born as a human being is of paramount importance.

[ 1 : 15 ] You know, a baby doesn't really do anything, apart from the obvious, which you have to clear up every now and again. But a baby doesn't do much, does it? But even as a baby, we're told Jesus is worthy of worship and adoration because of who he is.

A little bit older, equally, when he reached 12 years of age in the temple, we're told that Jesus, as a preteen, is listened to by the religious teachers who were amazed by him.

Not because he's done anything of note at that stage of his life, but because of who he is, you know, his wisdom, his character, his understanding of God as his loving father.

And then later, his baptism, again, before Jesus has publicly done anything of note, we hear God, the father, declaring that this is my son, whom I love.

With him, I am well pleased. Jesus is therefore loved, not because of what he does. He hasn't done any miracles, any teaching, any preaching, anything, any works of wonder or anything at this stage.

[ 2 : 26 ] Jesus is simply loved because of who he is, not because of what he does. And in theory, I guess that should be the case for us too.

Our worth comes from our being, not our doing. And yet in our culture, I think it's sadly often what we do that seems to be the defining thing about us.

For example, I'm sure I can't be the only one who, when I was growing up in my younger years, that's me, had more hair in those days, as is kind of obvious.

That's Basin, yeah, the fringe. That was me. In my younger years, I'm sure it can't just have been me, who was often asked by people, what do you want to be when you grow up?

What do you want to be when you grow up? And I didn't have much of a clue, really. In my teenage years, I quite fancied perhaps being a late night radio DJ. That was always the dream, you know, hello to all you truckers out there and that kind of thing.

[ 3 : 33 ] Still time for a career change, maybe. But I wonder what you wanted to be when you were younger, when you were growing up. What's interesting though, I think, is that in even asking or answering that question, what do you want to be, we automatically default to thinking about what we might do for a living.

So maybe you wanted a job as a teacher, a paramedic, a chef, a footballer. These days, maybe you'd want to be a YouTuber or an influencer or something. But really, what do you want to be, that question may not be about the jobs.

It could be answered in a very different way. So if you went a bit deeper, we might say, well, in terms of what I want to be, I want to be happy.

I want to be fulfilled. I want to be contented. But again, I wonder if even those answers are really just byproducts of what it truly means to be.

Instead, I'd suggest perhaps the best way to answer this question, what do you want to be at any age, at any stage of life, is for us to think in terms of values.

[ 4 : 47 ] So we might say, well, most of all, I want to be kind. I want to be caring. I want to be faithful. I want to be curious, perhaps.

I want to be brave. You know, those kind of qualities and many more. Those kinds of values, they may well result in a greater sense of happiness and fulfillment and so on.

And they may well shape what our dream job might be. You know, what we spend our time doing. But in line with Jesus and in line with who we are as people, I'd suggest these values come first. They're foundational for our being, which then shapes our doing. And just as that's true for us as individuals, it's equally, if not more true for us as a collective.

Since working out with God what our shared values are, I think that will help us to become more of the church, the collective God wants us to be.

[ 5 : 51 ] And so, as Ian was saying, after spending a fair bit of time now thinking and talking and praying this through as a leadership team and with the PCC, you know, the trustees of the church, we've settled on these six values.

One's on the postcard. One's on the screen. And these six, they're not intended to be comprehensive. There could be loads more. I mean, we could go on and on and on with these. But we think that these values of kindness, integrity, generosity, humility, openness, and inclusion, we think they're a pretty good basis for working through with God who we want to be going forward as a church.

But most importantly, I'd say they're all values that are very much in evidence in the life and the person of Jesus.

You know, as with anything that we see in Jesus that we'd like more of in our lives, though, these values, they're all aspirations, you know, qualities to aspire to rather than attributes that we think we've already got cracked.

[ 6 : 59 ] But if the point of following Jesus is that through his spirit at work in us, we might become more like Jesus, then the hope is that these six values might give us some frameworks, some sort of tangible targets, if you like, to aim for.

And so because these values are very much a work in progress, it seemed right today to begin by looking at the value of humility and what being a humble church might look like.

Trouble is, though, humility is a quality, I think, which by its very nature is pretty elusive. In fact, it seems that it's almost an impossible value or virtue to work on without it going away.

I mean, the moment you think, oh, you know what, I'm getting pretty good at this humility stuff. I'm much more humble than I used to be, you know. It's gone like a vape of smoke or whatever.

And any humility that we thought we had is immediately replaced by a sense of pride. You can't have a big head about being humble. It just doesn't work that way. So how do we grow in humility?

[ 8 : 17 ] How might it become a lived out, worthwhile value for us without us losing the very thing that we're aiming for? Well, I think there's a clue, perhaps, in the word humility itself, which in English comes from the Latin word hummus or humus.

Hummus, not the chickpea dip, as nice as that is. Hummus is a word which means earth or ground. So the idea is, it seems, that humility is associated with being lowly, being ground level, not in terms of identity, but in terms of status, not elevating ourselves above others or trying to stand out, to stand out proud, if you like, from the crowd.

Indeed, the Hebrew word in our Bible is that we translate as humility. It's this word, anava, anava. And it's a word which literally means this, to occupy your God-given space in the world.

I like that. I like that definition. I like it because it's a way of saying, don't overestimate yourself or your abilities. All of your space, all of our space, is simply God-given anyway.

It's all a gift. But equally, don't underestimate them either. Occupy, you know, settle in, be at home in, flourish in the space God has given you, God has given us.

[ 9 : 51 ] You know, we're simply called to be ourselves, to be the person God calls us to be. And that, I would suggest, reveals that humility probably means two things.

Firstly, I'd say it means not thinking of ourselves as worthless because we're not. You're not.

You know, in fact, to think we are worthless, it demeans the uniqueness of the person God has made us to be. It demeans the love that others have for us.

And most of all, to think we are worthless, I'd say that that demeans God. God declares, he says, you are precious and special in my sight and I love you.

And so, to think of ourselves as anything less than lovable, as anything less than precious and special, what makes God out to be a liar?

[10:55] So, humility means, I think, not thinking of ourselves as worthless, but then secondly, humility also means not thinking of ourselves as more worthy than others because that in turn will demean them, demeans each other and how precious and special everyone else is in the sight of God.

So, how do we live with this tension, if you like, of not being worth less but not being worth more than others? where it seems true humility, I think we could define it like this and that humility is not thinking more of yourself or less of yourself but simply thinking of yourself less.

In other words, humility is a form of self-forgetfulness. You know, not being up yourself or down on yourself but just not thinking about yourself as much.

The opposite of this self-forgetfulness and perhaps the opposite therefore of humility is self-absorption which usually plays out in one of two ways. So, on the one hand, self-absorption can come out as kind of narcissism, you know, self-importance, self-promotion.

You know, I think about maybe the constant stream of selfies on some people's social media feeds. Think about those who perhaps, this may be you, apologies if it is, but maybe those who film themselves at the gym on Instagram, that kind of thing, you know.

[12:33] That might be self-importance, self-promotion, self-absorption. But on the other hand, and I'll say this gently today, self-absorption can also come out through feelings not of superiority but of inferiority.

in that listening to that constant inner voice of self-criticism or even self-loathing, that can sometimes be equally self-absorbed.

But, neither self-importance or self-loathing are healthy. Neither of them are God's wish for our lives and neither are they humble because in different ways they're both ultimately focused on ourselves, on the self.

Instead, true humility comes from forgetting about ourselves, of getting out of our own heads and instead focusing on something beyond ourselves.

Now, please don't misunderstand me here. Of course, self-reflection, self-examination, self-awareness, self-care can be vitally important and so much of modern day therapy and counseling is rightly geared around these priorities.

[13:52] Therapy and counseling, which I myself, I know, have really benefited from engaging with over the years. Self-awareness is crucial for living in community and it can be a route to real wisdom and understanding and emotional intelligence.

All qualities, if you think about it, that Jesus had in abundance. I don't know for you, I know for myself, when I become too insular, too caught up in myself, when I think about myself too often, then my self-awareness veers into self-absorption!

And for me, that's often a surefire route to depression because my life suddenly becomes very small, kind of implodes on itself like a mini black hole or whatever.

Instead, when I get out of my own head and spend time with others, when I find ways to help others, listen to others, serve others, I'm far less depressed.

My depression invariably fades because my eyes are lifted up from my own valley to the mountains ahead and the possibilities of the rest of life.

[15:10] I think there's real wisdom in these words from Philippians. Chapter 2, verse 3 and 4, which says this, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather in humility, value others above yourselves, not look into your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

Now, it's interesting, that little line in the middle there, value others above yourselves, that seems maybe a bit counterintuitive as to what we were talking about just now, but I don't think that line is talking about worth, rather the original word that's translated as value here might be better translated as esteem, or we might say regard others, regard others above yourselves.

So rather in humility, it seems, simply spend more time looking at and focusing on other people than we do on ourselves. Looking at everyone else?

Yeah? But, and here's the clincher, I think, who do we look to most of all? We fix our eyes on Jesus, because when our eyes are fixed on Jesus, they can't be fixed on ourselves.

following Jesus, looking at Jesus, regarding Jesus, esteeming Jesus. That is the best way, perhaps it's the only way to become truly humble.

[16:47] And you're going to play a little clip, a couple of verses from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11, verses 28 to 30. And it's a clip of Jesus calling us to look at him in our lives.

who Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Come to me, says Jesus. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Look to me, says Jesus, because I'm humble. Not a proud way, just an honest way. And how is Jesus humble? Well, in all sorts of ways, but mainly because he is the ultimate expression and example of someone who thinks of himself less in order to think of others more.

[18:53] In a way, that's the whole message. That's the whole truth of his life. His death is resurrection, that emptying of himself so that we can know life in all its fullness, both in this world and the next.

As it says again from that letter to the Philippians, which spoke of humility earlier, describes Jesus like this. It says he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And yet as a result of this ultimate act of humility, as a result of thinking of others more than himself, therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

You know, the more we look to and the more we point to Jesus, the less we look at and the less we point to ourselves. And so humility, almost by stealth, you know, almost unnoticed at first, will gradually become more of a lived reality in our lives.

If we're truly humble, we won't even notice it. But others will see in our humility the presence of Jesus, the one who our lives are pointing to.

[20:31] And so what does looking at Jesus, you know, regarding, esteeming Jesus look like in our lives, both as individuals, but perhaps more importantly today as a church?

How might humility become this value to which we aspire? We've got three quick suggestions for us to consider as a way of bringing all this together.

Firstly, I think, as that verse in Philippians encourages us, I'd say it means that we look to the interests of others. Our first thought is not for ourselves, our own interests or our comfort, but how we might serve others, and in particular, a wider community.

You know, we as a church, we as St. John's here, we're not our own. This building is not our own, because yes, ultimately everything belongs to God. But I'd say God has entrusted us as stewards of this church, this community, this building, to ensure that it belongs to our community.

We are St. John's community church for a reason. We are here not for our own interests, but for the interests of others. We're not a members club. We are a community church.

[21:47] As always, we're a work in progress on this, but that's why we are open and share our building with all sorts of groups and people. I think, on average, over 700 people come through our doors each week, because we strive to be a resource, you know, a space, a benefit to our community.

We try and keep the building and the grounds well looked after, not for ourselves, but for others, just as we try and be considerate neighbours to those on our street. Now, if you were here last week or you caught up online, as we were saying at the annual meeting last week, looking to the interests of others is really the motivation for all the groups and the events we hold.

You know, pretty much all we do, every activity, a hope, is with the needs of others in mind.

Ironically, thinking this through, the most challenging part of our life as a church to keep this outward focus in mind are perhaps these times, you know, the services themselves.

And so there's a constant need to ask for God's help in ensuring that we're not insular or smug or cliquey or self-absorbed.

But for everything we do, I guess the prayer and our aim is that we look to the interests and needs of others. And the added bonus, if that's a value, that humility of ours, is that in this way, my needs

will be met because you're looking out for me.

[ 23 : 25 ] And I hope your needs will be met because I'm looking out for you. It's a win-win. So that's the first way I suggest that humility might be a value for ourselves.

But secondly, I say humility as a value means this, that we look for Jesus in others. Indeed, one of the deepest foundations of our theology, you know, the way we understand God is that every human being is made in the image of God.

Every human being, not just Christians, not just good people, but every human carries in them the image of God. And that means that as we look around us, we should be able to see something of Jesus in every single person.

And for me, if we can grasp that truth, that makes a huge difference for how we do church. So when someone, anyone walks through our doors, it means not seeing them primarily as someone to be wary of, or as someone who needs converting or saving, or as a prodigal who has finally found their way home, but as someone in whom we might glimpse something afresh of Jesus himself.

It's a very different way of looking at people. It means seeing everyone as a gift, everyone as someone in whom the divine spark resides.

[ 24 : 55 ] And I think that means asking God of anyone we meet, what might I learn about you, God, through this person today?

How might I meet you, Jesus, through this gift of a person? And the more we ask that, the more we learn to see the face of Jesus in each other, I think the more we'll be inclined to serve and regard and esteem one another as people who are already precious and special in God's sight.

And the byproduct of that focus, I'd say, is humility. But then thirdly, and finally, for now, the value of humility means ultimately that we look to Jesus himself.

As I said earlier, we fix our eyes on Jesus. So when Jesus says, follow me, he means it. He wants us to look to him, not to ourselves.

We often talk about what that might mean for us in an individual sense, you know, the idea of personal discipleship and so on. But what might looking at Jesus mean for us corporately as a church?

[ 26 : 10 ] What is corporate question, I think, is particularly tricky because there's an expectation that we as a church will promote who we are and what we do as a church, publicity-wise, social media, word of mouth, and so on.

And I guess in some ways this promotion is an unavoidable part of modern life. And so we do do some of that, simply because we want people to know that we're here, that we're here to serve them.

And ultimately, because most of all, we long for them to know Jesus' love for themselves in their lives. That's what we do what we do. But here's the tricky bit for us.

Publicizing what we do can very easily slip into self-promotion. And I don't want us to fall into that trap. You know it when you see it, perhaps.

You know, churches or vicars who I'm sure inadvertently end up kind of making themselves the brand, even if they say it's all for Jesus.

[ 27 : 12 ] But when a leader's face or the church itself becomes the brand, becomes the destination, becomes the club to attend, then we risk taking our eyes off Jesus and onto our own preservation or success as a club.

I don't know what the answers are, perhaps, to resisting this, but I suspect it needs to begin by being honest with ourselves and with God about the temptation that we might face in this regard. But more importantly, it's simply about asking Jesus to help us keep our eyes fixed on him through our worship, our prayer, our giving, our serving, our welcoming, our esteeming of others.

You see, when we look to Jesus, we see the manger lying, sandal wearing, wilderness wandering, village living, outcast loving, donkey riding, foot washing, cross carrying, embodiment of humility. We don't even know what Jesus looked like. This is just a guess. This is a casting of a TV production. We don't know what he looked like, but we see someone who rejected fame and crowns and robes.

[ 28 : 27 ] We see someone who lived simply and who died in indignity. We see someone whose resurrection, the greatest event in history, was low key at best.

What's more, this Jesus is so humble that he gives us his invisible spirit and now works through us, through you and me. Someone whose presence in our lives is only evidenced by what he

empowers us to do rather than claim center stage for himself.

And yet, to quote the preacher Tim Keller, and I'll finish with this, in Jesus, we see that the way up is down. The way to be truly rich is to give away.

The way to rule is to serve. The way to become infinitely happy is to not seek your own happiness, but to seek the happiness of others. And that the greatest form of glory is to give away your glory for somebody else because Jesus, who had true glory, emptied himself so that we could be full.

I pray that we would know and value this same humility as a church as we look to the interests of others, as we look for Jesus in others, and as we look to Jesus himself.

[ 30 : 00 ] Amen. Amen.