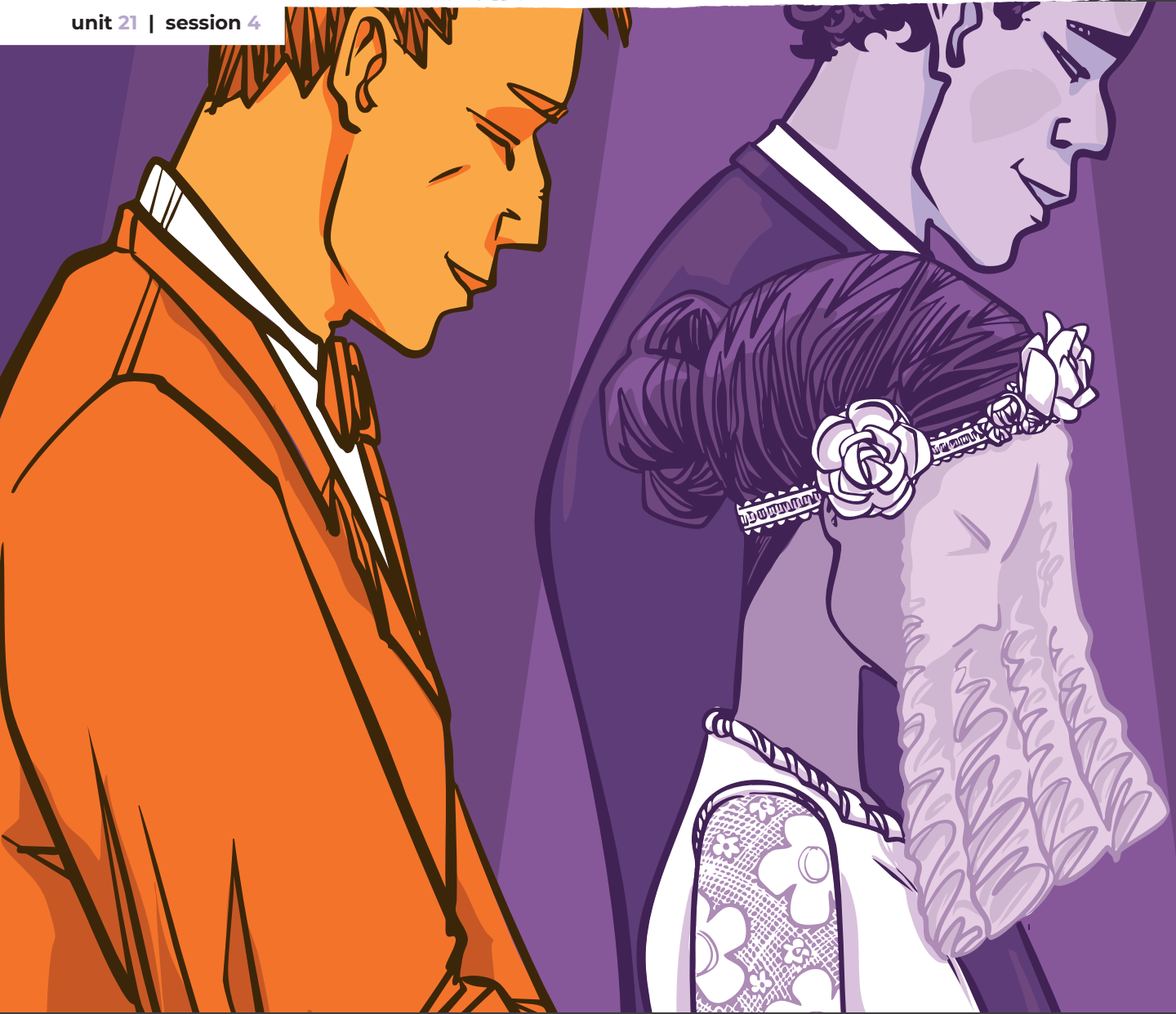


# THE GROOM'S FRIEND

unit 21 | session 4



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus showed us how to decrease when He lowered Himself in obedience to the Father's will and came to earth as a human. He took on our sin and paid our debt so that we could have right relationship with the Father and forgiveness for our sin. Jesus pointed all glory to the Father and took on the role of a servant.

# ELEVATING ONE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

John 3

## WE MUST DECREASE

### JOHN 3:22-30

22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went to the Judean countryside, where he spent time with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, 24 since John had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. 26 So they came to John and told him, "Rabbi, the one you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is going to him." 27 John responded, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

## CHRIST MUST INCREASE

### JOHN 3:31-36

31 "The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, and yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 The one who has accepted his testimony has affirmed that God is true. 34 For the one whom God sent speaks God's words, since he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. 36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him."

## MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.



## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

### BRIDE OF CHRIST

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

# DISCUSSION

## WE MUST DECREASE

JOHN 3:22-30

- How does fame change people? What pressures come with it?
- ♥ • How do John's disciples seem to feel in verses 25-26?
- ✝ • How do churches and believers get caught in the trap of influencer culture, in seeking worldly fame or influence?

## CHRIST MUST INCREASE

JOHN 3:31-36

- What does verse 31 show us about who we are in relation to who Jesus is? How should this impact the way we live?
- 📖 • Read verse 36. How does the world teach very different ideas about getting to heaven or having eternal life?
- 🧠 • How does our faithfulness to Jesus help Him "increase"? What does our unfaithfulness do?



**HOW CAN YOU USE YOUR INFLUENCE TO LIFT UP JESUS INSTEAD OF ELEVATING YOURSELF?**

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Why do jealousy and competition exist between believers and in the church? Real answer: People are sinful; people make up the church. Jealousy creeps in, even between friends who follow Jesus. Maybe a friend is making an impact on others, and you feel jealous because you know his faults. Jealousy urges you to point them out instead of celebrating how God is changing your friend for the better and using him to help others. Maybe you desire attention and applause. You see people receiving attention for their good decisions, and you struggle with bitterness. Feeling jealous or competitive reveals our motive: We want the spotlight. Jealousy and competition harm the church, causing division and bitterness and shifting our focus off of Jesus and onto ourselves. We all struggle with these feelings, but we must recognize them immediately instead of allowing the feelings to simmer. We can confess how we feel to God and to the other person and ask God to help us shift our focus onto Him. We can clap for others and celebrate their wins. The truth is that following Jesus isn't about attention or applause. Following Jesus means pointing to Him and away from ourselves because He is the One worthy of glory.



## DAY ONE

# MATTHEW 20:20-28

Have you ever watched small children form a line? If so, you probably saw several of them race and push to be first in line. Being the line leader is a high privilege when we're young! The position makes us feel powerful over our peers. Our world encourages us to elevate ourselves—to do whatever it takes to be first, to be seen, to be applauded. Jesus taught another way. In today's passage, the mother of James and John, two of Jesus's disciples, asked Jesus to promise that her sons would have seats next to His throne in the future kingdom. She wanted her sons to have the highest place of honor. Jesus used this moment to teach an important, radical truth: If we desire to be great, then we must serve and put others first. This concept was backwards and went against cultural norms. Jesus made the point that even He, the Son of God, came to serve and to give His life for others. He calls us to do the same—to lay down the desire for recognition in exchange for serving others, even when we receive no applause.

Think for just a moment about what happens when you receive attention from others. Sure, attention feels good and can encourage us to keep going, but more often, pride starts to sink in. We begin to make unwise decisions, hurting not only ourselves but others too. Now, think of a time when you served or helped others out of the desire for God to use you. Chances are not only did that feel better than becoming prideful but you likely felt greater peace and purpose. The Bible teaches us that Jesus should be elevated above all things. We can and should pursue great dreams and goals and strive for success. But we do these things to elevate Jesus and show Him to others. When we point to Jesus instead of to ourselves, we enjoy lasting satisfaction rather than fleeting applause from others.

- **THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU ELEVATED YOURSELF OVER OTHERS. HOW DID THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?**
- **WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT OUR MOTIVES IF SERVING OTHERS MATTERS ONLY WHEN OTHERS SEE IT AND APPLAUD?**

PRAY

**LORD, FORGIVE ME FOR PUTTING MYSELF FIRST,  
EVEN BEFORE YOU. THANK YOU FOR JESUS'S  
EXAMPLE OF HOW TO SERVE OTHERS. HELP ME TO  
POINT TO YOU INSTEAD OF TO MYSELF!**





## DAY TWO

# PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

What separates humans from every other creature is that we are made in God's image. It's not that animals, bugs, birds, fish and other things don't matter; they just aren't made in God's image! We're the only ones who get to be God's managers for everything on earth. Only humans love others the way that God does. How? Because of Jesus living in us. If this is true (and it is), then that means that every single human in the world matters!

In our culture, we are often tempted to elevate ourselves over others. We may think that we have more to offer or are better than other people because of the country, the town, or the neighborhood we live in. This is a very dangerous mindset because none of these things matter when it comes to our eternity. The car we drive, the shoes and clothes we wear, the perfect test scores, and the state championship can't make us right with God. Only a relationship with Jesus can do this. Jesus repeatedly called out religious leaders for viewing themselves as better than others. We must examine if we're guilty of the same.

Paul taught what this idea looks like. If we are walking with Jesus, then loving and serving others should come naturally. Why? Because walking with Jesus—really learning from Jesus—transforms us to live like He lived. Jesus modeled humility by coming to the world as a human, living a life of service and love to others, and then dying on a cross for our sins. If He is our example and He lives in us, then we should strive to live humbly too.

- **IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU CONSIDERED YOURSELF BETTER THAN OTHERS LATELY? WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM, ESPECIALLY FOR BELIEVERS?**
- **HOW CAN YOU IMITATE THE WAYS JESUS SERVED AND LOVED OTHERS THIS WEEK?**

PRAY

**LORD, I'M HUMBLED WHEN I REMEMBER THAT I HAVE A HEART PROBLEM ONLY YOU CAN FIX. PLEASE RID ME OF MY PRIDE SO I CAN LIVE A LIFE OF SERVICE TO YOU AND OTHERS.**



## DAY THREE

# PROVERBS 27:2

Have you ever been around people who brag constantly about the things they're good at? Even when everyone recognizes their talents, they still feel the need to announce them. Maybe you've struggled with this too. The truth is that we all fight this part of our human nature. We are designed to recognize glory—God's glory—but our common struggle is desiring glory for ourselves. You may be an all-star athlete or a straight-A student. Maybe you're a great reader or the best baker in the world! The truth is that we're all good at something because God placed within each of us certain abilities and gifts. How do we use these gifts and talents wisely and humbly instead of using them as billboards to announce our own goodness?

We can be confident in God's gifts without being prideful. Pride celebrates our ability but godly confidence points to God's ability. When we hoard applause for ourselves, we're standing on our own ability, and the truth is that we will fail at some point. Our ability is limited. But when we humbly use the gifts God has given us, we let go of needing people's approval. Instead, we stand on the firm foundation of God's ability that will never fail us and on His approval. We are confident only because we're not standing on our own goodness! When we do something really great, the glory should go to God's name. Jesus lives in us, empowering and strengthening us for good works. Other people may notice our success, but we will have greater impact on others when we direct their gaze to Jesus. Instead of announcing our wins, we can use any applause or attention to invest in eternity, in spreading Jesus's name. This week, walk in confidence because of God's good work and His ability!

- **IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING CONFIDENT AND BEING PRIDEFUL?**
- **WHAT ARE YOU ARE REALLY GOOD AT? HOW CAN YOU USE THIS TO POINT OTHERS TO JESUS MORE THAN YOURSELF?**

## PRAY

**LORD, THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME CERTAIN GIFTS AND TALENTS. I RECOGNIZE THAT THEY COME FROM YOU. HELP ME TO USE THESE GIFTS TO POINT OTHERS TO YOU.**



## DAY FOUR

# JAMES 3:13-18

Ambition is the desire and determination to reach a goal. Is having ambition wrong? Well, no—and maybe. James, the brother of Jesus, explained that bitter envy, which is the jealous desire for what others have, and selfish ambition lead to all kinds of evil. The key word is selfish. So, we can determine that ambition and selfish ambition are rooted in different motives: One strives to lift up God and the other strives to lift up self. We've established that pride is rooted in sin and that we need to rid our hearts of it each day. Sin directs us to look only at ourselves—at our wants and our needs. In other words, sin reinforces selfishness. We wrestle with selfishness on a daily basis—in the big and small choices we make in our classes, at the lunch table, with our teammates, in our friendships, in our homes, with our siblings.

James wrote about the dangerous outcome of a selfish lifestyle. He explained that ambition rooted in selfishness leads to “disorder and every evil practice.” As crazy as that sounds, selfish ambition lures us into doing whatever it takes, even when it's sinful, to look out for our own good. Selfish ambition leads us to comparing and competing against others. When we stop comparing our lives and successes to others, we fight feelings of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Why? Because we find fulfillment and peace in pleasing God, not in pleasing ourselves. This is the way forward: We center all of our ambition on lifting up Jesus's name.

- **IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH SELFISHNESS? HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THAT BRING YOU AND OTHERS DOWN?**
- **WHAT AMBITIONS DO YOU HAVE IN LIFE? HOW CAN YOU CENTER THOSE GOALS ON JESUS INSTEAD OF ON YOURSELF?**



## PRAY

**LORD, REVEAL TO ME THE GREATEST AREAS OF SELFISHNESS IN MY LIFE. SHOW ME HOW SELFISHNESS BRINGS ME AND OTHERS DOWN. GIVE ME GRACE TO MOVE FORWARD AND LIVE A DIFFERENT WAY.**



DAY FIVE

## PSALM 96

We've been studying how glorifying the Lord fulfills us more than glorifying ourselves. In case you need a refresher, to glorify means to elevate above other things. You may wonder how glorifying someone else could possibly feel better than glorifying yourself, but we were created for this! God designed us to glorify Him, so we are most satisfied when we do what God designed us to do. God made us to enjoy Him forever, but sin distorts our view and convinces us that chasing worldly comforts will give us peace. Worldly comforts will always disappoint us because we weren't designed to be satisfied by them. Let's think about technology for a minute. Technology can be a great tool, but being addicted to it brings us down and affects our personal well-being. We seek validation from social media, but instead, we're often left feeling like we're not enough and comparing ourselves to other people. We seek joy and escape in video games, but they all come to an end. Our feelings of depression and anxiety remain. The truth is that we won't—we can't—find satisfaction and peace in worldly pleasures.

The writer in Psalm 96 experienced God's goodness, especially in comparison to what the world offers. The writer was overwhelmed by God's glory and power in creation. The psalmist reminds us that everything except the Lord and His kingdom will fade away. If you've experienced God's goodness and His glory, then the worldly comforts you used to depend on won't satisfy you anymore. They'll come up short. Instead, you can look to God's glory and join with creation in worshiping Him and proclaiming His goodness!

- **HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED MORE SATISFACTION IN GOD THAN IN WORLDLY COMFORTS? THINK OF A SPECIFIC TIME AND REFLECT ON THAT EXPERIENCE.**
- **HOW CAN YOU DAILY REMIND YOURSELF THAT GOD IS BETTER THAN EVERYTHING ELSE?**

PRAY

**LORD, I'VE TASTED AND SEEN JUST HOW GOOD YOU ARE, BUT I'M STILL PRONE TO FORGET. BRING ME BACK TO WHAT I KNOW IS TRUE AND HELP ME TO BE A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.**