

The way to the top is always a step down.

Intro: Without a doubt, American Idol has changed our culture. We have come to know great singers like Carrie Underwood and Kelly Clarkson. Unfortunately, we've come to know some pretty bad singers, too. Here are a few from last season in New Orleans...
[PLAY VIDEO]

The obvious question is where did these people get the idea that they could sing? Would they have believed someone if they'd been told they couldn't sing? They have an elevated view of themselves, which sets them up to play the fool. Our culture encourages people to step up to the microphone, and often the people that do really shouldn't. What we'll learn in Phil. 2:1-11 is that the Christian culture calls us to step down to the microphone.

1. Something is better than nothing (v. 1)
 - a. Look at what they already had with Christ
 - i. Encouragement
 - ii. Comfort
 - iii. Fellowship
 - b. Look at what they already had with each other
 - i. Tenderness
 - ii. Compassion
 - c. They sound like some great people, don't they?
 - d. Who wouldn't want to be around a group like that?
 - e. But they didn't have everything they needed.
2. But it's not as good as everything (v. 2)
 - a. Paul said they needed completion
 - i. Same word used to describe fulfilled prophecy
 - ii. Means "to the brim"
 - iii. In other words, Paul wanted them to be full
 - iv. So complete in their faith and joy that they have to "unbutton" like we do after a good southern meal
 - b. Imagine hearing this letter read for the first time
 - i. "Oh, Paul says we need to step up our game; add another quality to our exceptional list of good things we're already doing."
 - ii. I doubt they were expecting to be told to step down
3. Having everything requires only one thing (vv. 3-5)
 - a. Paul throws out some things they should do
 - i. Be like-minded (not the same opinion as much as the same general outlook)
 - ii. Have the same love (from Christ for others...a one-another love)

- iii. Be one in spirit and purpose (basically have the same mindset with everything you've got)
 - b. Paul throws out some things they shouldn't do
 - i. Don't live with selfish ambition
 - 1. Cf. 1:17 - this causes trouble
 - 2. Word picture of a person clawing their way to the top at all costs
 - ii. Don't have vain conceit
 - 1. This is the only time this phrase is used in the NT
 - 2. Literal meaning is "empty glory"
 - 3. Not just a conceited person who may have a reason to boast
 - 4. Someone who boasts about something that they do not have
 - 5. Like all the Idol contestants who think they can sing and are shocked when they are told they aren't going to Hollywood
 - iii. Don't look only to your interests
 - 1. Ever sit at a table with a bunch of people who grab food, but don't pass it?
 - 2. That's the picture here - only concerned for themselves
 - 3. But Paul doesn't say not to be concerned for ourselves, only that humility will cause us to see the needs of others differently
 - 4. Perhaps for the first time
 - c. I imagine these 2 verses being read and the people getting that "deer in the headlights" look that we all get when we're overwhelmed
 - i. When Wendy asks me to stop by the store to get a few things, but she keeps naming things
 - ii. I end up asking her to write it down
 - iii. Paul knew this quick hitting "dos and don'ts" list could overwhelm them, so he simplified it in verse 5
 - d. Basically, he said everything boiled down to one thing - step down in humility like Christ
- 4. But that one thing demands everything (vv. 6-8)
 - a. Paul describes what stepping down looked like
 - b. Jesus was "in nature God", and had "equality with God"
 - i. He didn't "grasp" that position
 - ii. Only time this word is used in the NT
 - iii. Grasp doesn't mean "hold onto" as much as "snatching" or "taking"
 - iv. In total contrast to the demanding our culture does for our rights/way
 - c. Even though He didn't have to, Jesus stepped down
 - i. He gave all that up to become a human, a servant
 - ii. He didn't stop stepping down until He was on the cross
 - 1. Cursed by God (Deut. 21:23)
 - 2. The lowest He could go
 - d. Note that in these verses, the language is one of willingness
 - i. Jesus took these steps
 - ii. He wasn't pushed down them

5. Everything is given to those who do one thing (vv. 9-11)
 - a. “Therefore” - what’s it there for?
 - i. Jesus’ exaltation wasn’t a reward for his step down in obedience
 - ii. It wasn’t a carrot God dangled in front of Jesus to lead Him to the cross
 - iii. It was simply the natural outcome of the step down
 - iv. In God’s kingdom, down leads up (Mark 10:31; Matthew 20:16; Luke 22:25-27)
 - b. “God exalted Him”
 - i. Only time this is used in the NT
 - ii. Means “to super exalt”
 - iii. By stepping down, Jesus gave up everything and received it back again
 - iv. Knees bow and tongues confess
 - v. Jesus is now in the place of ultimate power, authority, and influence
 - c. It is not where we will end up when we step down
 - i. It is a place reserved only for Jesus
 - ii. But the principle is still the same
 1. If we step down, our obedient service will open the door of influence
 2. Proverbs 18:16
 3. Stepping down will bring us to the microphone, and allow us the opportunity to share with others the greatness of our Lord