

The Greatest Lock In: Jesus
Philippians 2:1-11
Sunday, October 19, 2025

The most common complaint from older generations leveled at the younger generations is that they are “lazy.” But it seems that (according to TikTok) Gen Z has discovered hustle culture, as this fall has been declared “the Great Lock In of 2025.” Using the term “lock in” as a synonym for focus is not new, but the Great Lock In is a movement to apply focus during the last four months of the year to change your life in whatever way it needs to be changed. During the Great Lock In, Gen Z is putting down their phones, turning off YouTube, perfecting their morning routines, and improving their sleep hygiene all in the name of “leveling up” their lives to accomplish the goals they feel are important. This idea itself is not new for 2025. Computer scientist and productivity guru Cal Newport suggested such an approach on his podcast in 2023.

Unlike most TikTok trends, I think this is a great trend! I have enjoyed watching my two teenagers focus on working out more, getting more sleep, and taking care of their grades. It’s been inspiring to me! I am looking for ways to level up, too! And...like many internet trends that come and go, this one is also missing something. For the believer, life is more than just leveling up our personal stats. The Apostle Paul recognized this over 2000 years ago, and has advice about the mindset we should “lock in” in Philippians 2:1-11.

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was ^[a] in

Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a human,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God exalted him even more highly

and gave him the name
that is above every other name,

¹⁰ so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father

Rather than the natural mindset of focusing solely on ourselves and what our mind say we need, Paul encourages us to have the mindset that Jesus had, to “lock-in” on Jesus as the example of the mindset of a disciple. What are some characteristics of that mindset?

A disciple of Jesus does not seek power or ambition for themselves. Philippi, the city to which this letter was written, was enormously wealthy, which would have been a source of pride for its citizens, considering it was also a small city. The city had an imposing forum on the main street, along with a large theatre for the arts and games. I bet the Philippi Philippians football team was quite the draw on Friday nights! If they were like the rest of Philippi, they were winners! (For you Cowboys fans, a win is when your team scores more points than the other team.) Philippi was called “a miniature Rome” because its layout was modeled on the city of Rome, and it was governed directly by two military officers sent from Rome. Citizens of Philippi would have been expected to climb the social ladder of Roman society and seek every advantage they could grab to climb that ladder. It is not a huge stretch to surmise that their whole culture was likely focused on this climb. They likely lived it and taught their children to continue it. Selfish ambition was the air they breathed. They were proud to be Philippians!

At this point, we should be asking how much our current standing as Christians mirrors that of the Philippians. Would a letter from Paul to the church at Salado and the church in America find a similar culture and mindset? When those outside the faith see Christians in our context, what do they see? Before we write this criticism off as “the world hates us,” we should examine ourselves and see if this critique rings true. Are our minds too preoccupied with how we can gain more power and control?

In contrast to this mindset, Paul uplifts the life of Jesus, who, while being God and having access to equality with God, did not use this power to further his own ambition but made himself human to serve others. The very creator of the universe was willing to be born in a dirty stable in a backwater province. Dr. Craig Hill, former dean of Perkins School of Theology,

in his work on Christian leadership, *Servant of All*, points to the humility of Jesus' life: He was born to an unwed mother and her fiancé, who was not ready to be a dad until an angel convinced him otherwise. He grew up in an obscure town at the backwoods edge of a backwoods province far from the seat of power. His occupation was blue-collar, working with his hands as a craftsman. He associated and ministered to outcasts at the edge of society, cheating tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers that no doctor would touch, foreigners like Samaritans, and the poor that would not be welcome at the rich man's table. When his own followers wanted to proclaim him as the Messiah, not in the spiritual sense, but as a literal king, he told them the greatest of HIS kingdom was the lowest servant. As a public proclamation of this fact, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, mocking the typical parade of a conquering ruler. Nothing Jesus did was out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but out of humility.

The mindset of a disciple should be rooted in humility. Jesus humbled himself to the point of ultimate obedience to the most severe and degrading punishment that could be meted out in his culture: the cross. We think of the cross as a symbol of our faith, our salvation, or for some of us, just a fashion accessory. But we have to remember that the cross is an instrument of a torturous death. Rome did not crucify just to kill, but to publicly shame and humiliate. In our culture, we often see humility as hypocrisy. You can see this in sports interviews. We exalt the athlete who says the right "nice" things about those around them, like their coaches or teammates. Yet, we secretly love it when an athlete mocks their opponents or treats others with arrogance and disrespect. (At least as long as it's a team we don't like that they mock.) Many of us live our lives the same way. We may say all the right things, but our hearts and minds are filled with contempt for others.

However, being humble also does not require us to be unkind to ourselves. This quote from Rick Warren summarizes it best. "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less." Jesus knew enough of his mission to be confident in following it, yet fulfilling that mission required the humility to come and live as one of us. Jesus did not give up his core identity as the divine Son of God, but humbly put others first.

Humility is foundational to living as a disciple of Jesus. We are not better than our master. As the opposite of pride, it is the soil in which other virtues take seed and grow. As Saint Augustine put it, "Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues; hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist, there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance."

We live out the love and humility of Jesus not in solitude but in community. We are called to participate with each other in the one mind and spirit of love. This entire passage is about the relationships within our communities, as Paul points out in verse 5 "In your relationships with one another..." Indeed, it is illogical to think that we can obey these verses in isolation. While we certainly should value and love ourselves, if all we have is self-love, then we have a stunted and incomplete view of what it means to have the mind of Jesus. The phrase "in you" in verse five is plural and better translated as "among you." The way we grow in love and humility is through participation in community. In our context, this means participating in worship, not just passively as a spectator, but actively as a participant. We join a Sunday school or discipleship group where we can share our spiritual life with others. We do all these things not just to learn more, but to love deeper. Notice that the mind Paul speaks of is not about unity through enforcing the correct belief, but about having the same love. As the old hymn reminds us, "They will know we are Christians by our love."

This was the heart of the early Methodist movement. John Wesley was putting people in discipleship groups long before the megachurches figured out this model. Wesley knew that to grow in holiness and likeness of Christ, we had to be in community. As he said, *“The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”* Wesley knew that to “lock-in” on Christ, you need the support of a community where one can practicing living out that humility.

Of course, this is very difficult. It goes against our own ego of self-preservation that wants to keep us safe and secure. It goes against our American culture that teaches independence and that the drive to grab as much money and power as one can dies is the ultimate measure of a life well-lived.

The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer that we pray together each December reminds us of the mind of Christ we are to emulate to the benefit of our community and world. Few words better reflect the mindset of Christ that his disciples are expected to have.

Lord, make me what you will.

I put myself fully into your hands:

put me to doing, put me to suffering,

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

let me be full, let me be empty,

let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and with a willing heart

give it all to your pleasure and disposal.