SCRIPTURE:
Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5–11 NASB)

MEDITATION:
Biblical scholars have often reflected on this scripture. Paul was reminding the local congregation of what was perhaps a familiar hymn, a creed, or a liturgical statement. In seminary, I read a wide range of interpretations of the passage—from a cosmic drama set against a mythological background to Paul's political critique of the Emperor Caligula. Two aspects resonate in my own spiritual journey. First, we see that it was Christ's strong sense of who he is that enabled him to lay down his life for others. Christ became a servant, not because he was forced to do so, but out of his own strength and free will. Thus we read, “He humbled Himself.” An individual must have confidence and a healthy sense of self in order to engage in self-sacrifice properly.

The second aspect of the passage is God's humility. The opening phrase is often translated “although he was God, he emptied himself.” In this translation, God is like an earthly monarch who gave up regal status. Recently, some scholars have suggested a more nuanced translation is “because Jesus was God, he emptied himself.” In this alternate translation, the all-powerful, all-knowing force behind creation is most authentically known, astonishingly, through God's humility. “He does not accept this role of humble servitude—in spite of who he is,” our ASA colleague Craig Higgins writes, “but because of who he is.” God’s truest self is demonstrated through God’s sacrifice for us.

There is a growing interpretation of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as a theophany—a visible manifestation that reveals God’s essential attributes to humankind. In other words, the Christ of Philippians 2 shows us who God is. The first-century Philippian church would recognize that God as demonstrated by Christ’s self-sacrifice on the cross stood in profound contrast to the values of ancient Rome. Caligula, although human, desired divinity. “Jesus,” ASA member Judith Toronchuk observes, “resolutely rejected the way of power in his
ministry." This was relevant in Philippi, a city known for emperor worship, and it is equally relevant in our lives today.

**REFLECTION:**
A few weeks ago I spoke with a group of students who were preparing for careers in the sciences. “Supervisors want to hire people who are confident, intelligent, and well-trained,” I explained. “But we also want people who are humble, teachable, and willing to be team players.” Most of us who have spent time in the workplace realize how disruptive a brilliant but intolerable coworker can be to any laboratory, academic department, or research study team. Sometimes, however, the difficult-to-work-with individual might be you or me.

I shared with the students that while I aspire to have confidence and humility, in reality, I struggle to cultivate these traits in my own life. I want to be confident, but I sometimes wrestle with feelings of inadequacy and “Impostor Syndrome.” I desire humility, but I know I can be prideful or arrogant. Perhaps you struggle with some of the same tensions. We can find comfort in Christ whose confidence and strong sense of self enabled his humble sacrifice on the cross. Rather than being a mark of weakness, humility in the light of Christ becomes a mark of strength. This Easter week, reflect on God’s essential attributes revealed through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and on our spiritual walk as Christians seeking to grow into the people God wants us to become.

Finding the proper spiritual balance of confidence and humility is a lifelong process. In the same way one does not obtain a degree and then stop learning, we don’t achieve a character milestone and not have to worry about it anymore. Instead, we must choose each day to recognize who we are in Christ and act humbly toward others.

1. Have ever felt guilty over times when you may have fallen short? Perhaps you lacked the courage to speak out, or you behaved in a way that was prideful or arrogant. We can accept God’s grace, forgive ourselves, and make amends to those we’ve offended when possible.

2. Do you have a tendency to focus on the negative and overlook the positive in your life? It is important to remember the good along with the bad. Reflect on a time when through the Holy Spirit, God enabled you to behave with Christ-like humility. We can ask God to amplify such traits in our lives.

**PRAYER:**
Gracious God, we thank you for your love and sacrifice for us, and for your character revealed through the cross. We confess the times when we fall short in our lives and ask for your grace in the struggle. Give us the wisdom to see beyond our own concerns. Enable us to forgive others, to accept the blame when we’re at fault, and to overcome petty disagreements. Above all help us to know you, to find ourselves in Christ, and to share Christ’s love with those around us. Amen.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Scott Santibañez, ASA member, is an infectious disease physician/scientist with a seminary background. He enjoys volunteering at the Good Samaritan Health Center of Atlanta’s Homeless Clinic, and serving as adjunct professor in the Doctor of Ministry program at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry where he helps clergy to better understand research and science. Scott lives in Decatur, Georgia, with his wife Tammy and their three cats, all of whom patiently tolerate Scott’s latest hobby—teaching himself to play the accordion. In his day job, Scott is the Chief Medical Officer at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Preparedness and Emerging Infections.