

Becoming Nothing: Humility and the Comparison Trap

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I want to personally thank everyone who came out for our **Ash Wednesday service**; it was a powerful night as we set our sights on Easter Sunday. I am super grateful to the staff for their hard work on this service. I hope we are all preparing our hearts for Easter! Super proud of our men, Thanks Jay and your leadership.

So last Sunday, someone said to me that it felt like I was living in his head, I said I don't know about that, but I am pretty sure that God might be.

Then one of you sent me this email...I am the guy who has spent his whole life becoming something, and in the process, I think I lost who God created me to be, and now I am worried what else I have lost. Here is the thing...**I don't think he is alone!**

You see the challenge in becoming nothing is that it is so **counter-cultural**, its counter-intuitive to everything the world says to us...**and the reality is that most of us have given our whole life to becoming something.**

I know some of you know this story, but when our oldest son was in college, he hurt his wrist skateboarding, and I sent him to see an old friend who was an orthopedic surgeon specializing in hands and wrists.

During my sons visit, he had to hear from my friend what a good guy he thought his dad was, and he went on about some of my accomplishments, it was a thoughtful **brag fest** dumped on my son.

After his appointment he called me and used what has now become a famous line in our family...**Dad, you used to be somebody!!** Yep, used to be...seriously.

Apparently, I have become so good at becoming nothing... **my kids don't even notice me.**

Anyway, the blind spot to this reality is that in the process of becoming something we also want the **lion's share of credit**, we want to be noticed for our something-ness. And this is the anti-thesis to humility...our pursuit of the spotlight puts **Gods glory on a dimmer switch**, and very soon pride occupies that space in our heart, reserved for God.

Proverbs 16 says, the one thing that precedes the downfall of every man is always pride, a lack of genuine biblical humility.

Life is full of tipping points, moments that become catalysts for change...God called me into **full-time ministry** when I was 38 years old, 3 years before that I had a **huge humility wakeup call**, and it changed how I understood my life as a Christian and my place in the kingdom. I know I have shared this before but thought it was too good to pass up here.

I was 35 years old and had climbed the **mountain of success pretty quickly**, I owned my own business, was making a healthy living, we had Orlando Magic season tickets and annual passes to Disney World, isn't this the worldly sign you have made it?

Funny thing is when we went into ministry, Chris was too young to enjoy that perk, but Kyle had lots of memories and would talk about them...and Chris would say...wait a minute we've been to Disney world, like he forgot or something, but he had never been...he did finally get to go but he may have been a teenager.

By 35 I had been inducted into 2 halls of fame, I had a number of “**man of the year**” awards from different organizations, endless plaques and trophies.

I had bowl rings and championship rings and all of it littered my office as a shrine to that fact **I used to be somebody**.

So, one night I have to go back to the office late to pick up something for an out-of-town meeting I was speaking at the next day.

It's about 10 o'clock at night when I get there, and as I arrive the overnight cleaning service is there, and when I come into my office, I saw a woman who was dusting all my glass trophies, and awards...one by one she would pick them up and dust them off, carefully placing them.

And it hit me...**what a gross waste of time this was...this is exactly the kind of stuff moth and rust will one day destroy**, and I wondered what she must have thought of all this meaningless stuff...**did she think I was important...**no, am pretty sure she was underwhelmed by my shrine to myself.

Then I thought, do I need this stuff to remind me that I was somebody, that I had become something from an El Paso nothing?

Listen, Because God never misses a teaching moment, my devotional the next morning came from ***Philippians 3:13-14*** ***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win***

the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

It hit me that morning, that I was an **immature Christian**, that I had been chasing the wrong things, finding my worth in **trinkets with my name on it.**

It was very evident that I **hadn't forgotten** the things of the past, I had enshrined them...the past was defining me, not the future kingdom, much less Christ.

Had I forgotten that everything I had achieved was simply a reflection of good stewardship of the gifts and talents God had given me in the first place. My name might have been on those awards, but it was finally clear to me that it was God who had done those things through me, so I could leverage it for his glory, not mine. **I was supposed to be building his brand and not mine.**

That weekend I boxed all that stuff up and put them in the trash. It would be 3 years later that God would say...**now you're really ready for me to use you**, drop what you're doing and follow me into full-time ministry.

A forgotten biblical principle of humility had become a **divine tipping point** at the hands of a midnight cleaning woman. Listen every award since then rides home in the car and goes right in the trash...**God already believes I am a somebody** and that audience of one is all I am playing too....**its all any of us should be playing too!**

Jesus says in **Matthew 5, verse 5 Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.** Is there any gain greater than getting the earth? The word inherit literally means that the meek

will possess the land, they will be stewards of it. But inherit isn't the word that messes people up...**it's the word meek.**

I think we have a **bad definition for meekness**, we see it as a doormat word, a word that means passive, or weakness, or timidity. But the truth is that it literally translates as humility, gentleness, and placing the needs of others before your own.

When I think of meekness, I believe it is **strength restrained**, it's when you could have flexed your power, your authority, your position but choose not to...**meekness is strength and power withheld for the sake of another.**

This is the very nature of Jesus who could have called down legions of angels for his defense, but chooses not to. I think most of us would choose the legion plan, **and have our enemies smited.**

I believe humility is choice, and we live in a world where way more people choose to stand by their pride, and it's a **death sentence to life as God has designed it.**

For some people when it comes to pride...**some of us aren't swallowing hard enough.** I firmly believe that Pride is killing relationships, the inability to forgive or express regret...to say I am sorry, to allow vengeance be the Lords. **Pride is poison!**

I remember in a pre-marital counseling session I asked the groom to be... when was the last time he told someone he was sorry...he said why would I do that, **I have never done anything I was sorry for...**I remember looking at the future bride and my eyes spoke...this is the guy... are you sure?

This was the very definition of pride and arrogance, and they are always found together.

Listen, **Pride is killing churches** who are too stubborn and selfish to change and reach the next generation.

Pride is creating a generation of entitlement in children because we won't hold them accountable and continually rescue them from their willful bad choices. We cover for them, so it won't reflect poorly on us.

Pride destroys everything in its path, and it shows up in lots of ways, like criticism, competition, stubbornness and superficiality. We live in an age as I said last week of **self-dependency**, which leads to **self-deception**, and humility is nowhere to be found.

I asked the question in the hook; would you rather be **Humble or Humbled**; it's amazing the difference one letter makes. And in some cases, you can be **humble, or you can be humiliated**, which is what pride tries so hard to prevent.

Being **humble** is a choice, **being humbled** is something that happens to us, that is often unpleasant and riddled with consequences.

Philippians 2 makes it clear...**Read 3-11 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, 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!**

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.

This is the very picture of humility, and if every knee is going to bow...better to do it by choice, rather than being humbled by **divine force**. This issue of pride is both a timeless and pervasive issue in our world.

- CS Lewis once wrote It is pride that has been the chief cause of misery in every nation, and every family since the world began.
- Pride was the tool of the world class salesman who closed thousands of deals with this simple line; “Let me show you something several of your neighbors said you couldn’t afford.
- It’s been said that the danger in too much pride, is that it feeds on goodness and like a locust will devour it all, leaving only bitterness in its place.
- Benjamin Franklin said, there is perhaps no greater human passion to subdue than pride. Beat it down, stifle it, and mortify it as much as one pleases, and yet it still lives. And even if I should overcome it, then I fall in danger of being proud of my humility.
- It’s been said that Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick but the one who has it.
- Think of it this way, God in his unique wisdom designed the human body so that we cannot pat our own backs...we should quit trying, we look silly doing it.

Listen this is such a big honking deal. That there is no shortage of biblical wisdom about this...Peter writes in **1st Peter 5:5** *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”*

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

When I read this passage and think about all the people who could ever oppose me...**I certainly never want God to be one of them.** How about you, do you really want to do battle with the God of the universe over who deserves credit?

I spent my whole life before ministry associated with athletics; no greater arena except Hollywood is there such an **overwhelming absence of humility.**

It’s refreshing to watch the culture of **humility Pastor Jason has created with the Mustang baseball team.** It sounds like you’re at a Christian concert with everyone’s walk-up songs.

I spent this past week trying to recall all of the professional athletes that I knew and worked with and how many were truly humble...**the list had a whopping 4 names on it.**

So few people see fame and fortune as a chance to leverage influence and impact, they fail to pour out blessings, to leave a legacy of integrity and character. I meet very few people who have tremendous success that have connected that success to the one who made them and gifted them.

I spent most of my sports medicine career around baseball players and a story **that gets passed around every minor league camp, tells of former baseball great Ralph Kiner** who after a season where he hit 47 homeruns went to Pirates General Manager Branch Rickey and asked for a raise.

When Rickey refused Kiners request, Kiner quickly reminded him that he had led the league in home runs. Rickey then asked, but where did we finish, Kiner replied in last place...Rickey said, **well I'm pretty sure we can finish in last place without you.**

I tell coaches all the time when you begin to **surrender character and integrity** in favor of **ego dependent talent**, **then that's the first step to destroying your team.**

I believe the real test of any great man or woman is their humility. I do not mean by humility, doubt of power or hesitation in convictions, or cowering passively in the face of the enemy.

Great men and women have a feeling that greatness is not in them, but is flowing through them, in order for God to be exalted. It's the **comfort and confidence** in knowing that they could be **nothing more or nothing less**, than who God made them to be.

The truly humble man and woman of the 21st century feels no jealousy, no envy, they are not threatened by the gifts of others, they can still praise God even when others are preferred and blessed before they are.

They can bear to hear others praised, while they are forgotten. They intentionally look for ways to elevate others and deflect personal glory.

How do we accomplish such monumental feats, because we are filled with the one who never sought his own glory or fame.

You see when we are clothed in Christ, then we have a heart of compassion, kindness, meekness, longsuffering, and humility. Humility is the kind of thing we should constantly be praying for, and never think we have enough of.

Last year a poll revealed that **Tim Tebow is the country's 5th favorite NFL quarterback....**I just want to point out that he hasn't played in the NFL since 2012, he is no threat to ever be inducted into the NFL hall of fame, but this means he is currently more popular than 28 starting NFL quarterbacks.

Humility and the fact that he constantly used his platform to elevate God and others is what makes him insanely popular...**we are a nation desperately searching for this kind of hero and role model.**

Jesus tells a story for us that exemplifies all we have been teaching this morning....go to **Luke 18: 9-14**

Humility is the great comparison trap. This is a **radical reversal** and sounds great to most of us; the overlooked ones, the ones most people tend to forget are in the room, the ones people look past...**these people finally get their day.**

While the loud ones, the demanding ones, the entitled ones, are **thrown under the Jesus bus...**we would love to put **Humble Guy Day** on the calendar but as soon as we do, humility has left us. **This is the comparison trap.**

In that day, people looked up to the Pharisees, these guys seemed to have it all together and if you forgot who they were, they were quick to remind you. They presented as educated, influential, righteous, and they used these things to **Lord it over people.**

The other guy is a tax collector, he is despised, remember the prostitute we talked about 2 weeks ago, **even she looked down on the taxman.** He collected taxes for the Romans and took an extra cut for himself, because no one really knew exactly how much the taxes were...**kind of like our country now.** He was basically a **traitor and a legalized thief.**

Who was Jesus audience that day, they were people who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else. The word **smug** comes to mind, so does condescending. Jesus throws a quick **one-two jab to their upturned self-righteous noses.**

We read this kind of story and realize Jesus is polarizing, he immediately calls us to make a comparison and ask... who am I?

Am I the **obvious sinner** or the **righteous guy** who doesn't accept that he is a sinner? Have you ever wondered why some Sundays I warn against hearing a sermon and instantly thinking of the people you think need to hear it...**it is to assume we are in right standing while others in our life need a correction.**

I do this because we frequently succumb to this trap of wanting to see ourselves in comparison to people who will make us look good. I think anytime we talk about **"Those People"** then we become the object of **Jesus' disdain...**and just like that we succumb to the comparison trap.

Don't miss this...two men walk into a temple to pray...sounds like a bad joke...and one guy's prayer is about how great he is, and then while praying he takes a peek around the room to make sure people can see and hear him.

Then he prays, thank you for the miracle of me. God, don't you wish you had more people like me. Four times during his prayer Pharisee uses the first-person pronoun "I". Can we agree if there is a pride index, it's the number of times we use the word "I" per hundred words in a week.

Now across the room, at a distance is stands a **tax collector** who clearly knows who he is, and just who God is!

His prayer is something of an ordeal, he is in touch with his unworthiness, he beats his breast, this is not a rote prayer, this is not lip service, he's not just going through the motions, this is an **Ashe Wednesday worthy lament of woe is me**, I am a man of unclean lips. His is a genuine prayer of **confession and repentance**.

The contrast is clear, the Pharisee stands and draws attention to himself, while the tax collector stands far away...you see when you are putting on a show for others, you never stand at a distance. The kingdom of God doesn't need any more show ponies; **it needs plow horses**.

One of my daily prayers, is Lord protect me from becoming a Pharisee, because I know how easy it is to get there. **Pride is a slope greased with Crisco....it will take you down in a heartbeat.**

You see the comparison trap trips on humility every time. Pride is the ultimate issue of the human condition-not just one of the deadly sins, **but the mother of them all**. I believe we all have an inner pharisee that we must subdue.

So, let me ask you, who is your role model for life? Who do you measure yourself against, emulate and want to be like.

I think if you're interested in becoming a better person, or better at your job, you always **compare "UP"** you look to someone who inspires you, someone who could teach you a thing or two. Someone who is giving their life away.

If you are prideful, this doesn't happen. The prideful always "**Compare down**", so they can be elevated. But Jesus finishes this parable by saying; for those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted....again its amazing the difference one little letter makes?

Jesus uses this parable to support the beatitude...Blessed are those who are meek, for they will inherit the earth. Here is what I believe about Biblical humility...

- To humble ourselves is to voluntarily confess our sin
- To humble ourselves is to ask for forgiveness frequently
- To humble ourselves is to give sacrificially and anonymously
- To humble ourselves is to admit we need help
- To humble ourselves is to always treat others better than ourselves...it is to have an ear towards heaven and an eye to the world looking out for the weak, the orphan, the widow, the refugee...the ones who are oppressed and marginalized by the world.

Let me share one more baseball story...My first little league coach taught us that when you messed up, made a bad throw, dropped a fly ball, missed a sign...you were to **tap your chest** and say **my bad**, it was to own your stumble and refocus on getting better. What he was doing was teaching humility...**I still use that phrase 55 years later.**

Listen, I believe **stuff rubs off, attitudes are contagious.**

You spend enough time with positive, happy people, you'll become more joyful. You spend time with grumpy, negative, whining, complaining people, you will eventually be crusty, critical and lonely, because no one wants to spend time with these kinds of people.

You want to have more humility then you have to spend more time with Jesus, because he has to become more, and we have to become less. Jesus is the model of humility, giving up heaven and coming to earth to live with us, to love us, to die for us,...this is what needs to rub off on us.

I want to close with **Micah 6:8 I love this passage...It says, God has shown you Mortal what is good and what does the Lord require of you? To act Justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.**

Humility is the requirement, but also our choice to put on every day. The bible invites us to not clothe ourselves in the apparel of arrogance, but in the garments of humility.

So, who are you walking with....do they help you avoid the comparison trap, or are they **laying the trap?** Everything in our culture invites comparison and it's a **dangerous game for your spiritual maturity.**

Again...Humility is a choice, it has no emotions, no feelings, it does not judge...**it is strength restrained.**

I had a mentor in Seminary, he was a retired Methodist Bishop named **Bevel Jones**, a Godly man about 5' 2" who had given 70+ years to serving God with every fiber of his body.

One spring he and I traveled together to a huge FCA prayer breakfast in downtown Atlanta, where he would be the keynote speaker.

I remember him being introduced in this room full of movers and shakers, the influential and famous, and they introduced him as the most esteemed and illustrious guest, a spiritual Giant among mortal men...Pretty heady stuff!

Bishop Jones got up and began his comments with this statement. **Dear Friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious master.** Man, wouldn't it be great if we could all see ourselves this way. But isn't this what it means to become nothing? What if the only applause we ever sought...**came from heaven?**