

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

March 8, 2026. "The Wisdom in Children's Stories. *"Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale"*. What does true humility look like?

I Intro.

We're zipping through March. The worst hopefully is behind us, and now we can look forward to warmer days. We hope you're having a good year so far. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening at NCC. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

Think about some of your favorite books from when you were young.

What were they, and why did you like them?

Amazing how something so simple, feels innocent, can be so profound, impacting. Many of the best, and most powerful lessons we learn are from when we were young. Many children's books are like the parables of Jesus. A compelling story that weaves in powerful truths and wisdom. Those stories and hidden truths stick with us.

Last week we did Pinocchio and the power of the process of transformation. We are all works in progress, and will always be works in progress. So we live in a community of grace and challenge to be about that work. Maturity is forged not granted.

Today it's the beautiful book; *"Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale"* Learning about the power of practicing humility and generosity. You can watch this story told in the service.

III Sunday.

Okay, this will be a trick question. These are the traditional 7 Deadly Sins; **Pride. Greed. Wrath.**

Envy. Lust. Gluttony. Sloth. They all overlap to some degree. But two of these are interconnected.

And this is how they're interconnected. They're opposites of the same sin. Here is the question.

Which two do you think are connected as opposite sides of the same coin? I didn't make up this answer. **Ready?** It's Pride and Envy.

Pride— is the relentless promotion and elevation of self.

Envy— is the relentless demotion and lowering of others.

Both seek self gain. Now there used to be eight deadly sins, (Sorrow and Vanity with no Envy).

Sorrow was moved into Sloth, because sorrow tends to sap energy. Vanity was moved into Pride.

Vanity is basically boasting, rooted in pride. Envy was created as the insatiable desire of vanity as the dark side of Pride. To show both sides of the same struggle. These two work hand in hand for

personal gain. Whether it's puffing yourself up for personal gain. Or tearing others down when you can't gain by just promoting yourself.

Today's story shows us in convicting detail the insidiousness of these two sins. How they work together. And how they will steal our peace and joy. In addition, this book reflects the conflict we see in our world today. This battle between those who operate from a place of humility and generosity. Where we as followers of Jesus are called to be. And those who operate from a place of Pride and Envy. They move through the world making everything about themselves. Constantly talking about how great they are, and making sure to bash others. And even if they're going through the motions of seeming good. It's for show. Performance vs Practice. It's the battle we see in this story, and in our world. And one we have to wrestle with and come to terms with how we will live out our daily lives. This book also should cause us to do some serious inner work to investigate our own ambitions, and what do we do to achieve what we want. Asking ourselves some serious questions.

What drives my desires and actions? Is it my personal gain, and position in the world, or the betterment of everyone.

How do my desires cause me to treat other people? With compassion and kindness. Humility and generosity. Or do I use others as a tool for my advancement or a barrier to be removed.

Performance vs. Practice. Here is what we're going to wrestle with from this story. The work is to understand; how we choose to live isn't performative but practiced. That's where the deep inner work is done. **Even if I live in humility and generosity, is it for my benefit, or for others?**

This is a very meta, (looking into myself, look at my motives) work. In Man Cave, we talked about the complexity and nuances of love. Often even in our attempt to show genuine, thoughtful love to others— we have to ask; was it for my benefit or for theirs? This passage gives us the prescription to this temptation of pride/arrogance, fighting off the temptations of pride of envy. And how to live the practiced life of humility. Genuinely, in the way Nyasha treated others.

Performance is for appearance. Fulfilling the expectations of religion. The Pharisees did all the right stuff, but for selfish reasons. We still see this in our society today. **Practice** is how we 'walk', move through life. With no agenda. We live humbly and generously because it makes for a better world.

This is how being Manyara rather than Nyasha is described in scripture.

Micah 6:6-8. *What can we bring to the LORD? Should we bring him burnt offerings?*

Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?

Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

This passage spells out specifically what we saw in the book. The difference between **performative** humility, spirituality. Putting on a good show to impress. And the **practice** of a life dedicated to living and being this way.

1. PERFORMANCE. This is the appearance of holiness, just doing religion. Doing all the right things, and we've convinced ourselves for the right reasons. We're obeying scripture, we're practicing piety, and purity. I tend to like these people. They really are good people. These kinds of people tend to give regularly, help get stuff done, and live respectable honorable lives. But— and you knew that was coming. They tend to let their performance (how well they do their beliefs and how good they are) be

the goal in their faith. It's not about a faith that transforms them. It's a faith defined by personally chosen behaviors to lift themselves up. They're doing all the right things. But there's little compassion, kindness, or generosity towards others who aren't as good as they are. Their works don't lead to humility, generosity, an appreciation of God's grace. Their walk and life grows out of the performance of their beliefs. This is Manyara. Beautiful... desirable on the outside. But not lovely on the inside.

2. PRACTICE. Practice is something completely different. In this passage, THIS is what God wants. This is what separates Nyasha from Manyara. Practicing this walk. because it grows out of a desire to truly live fully into the heart of God's teachings. Practicing them, not just performing them. That is the heart of humility and then the flow of generosity. It's not just about how you view or carry yourself. Although that's really important. It's how this humble walk, way of life, causes you to treat others in your world. A life of PRACTICE rather than PERFORMANCE. It's HUMILITY and GENEROSITY over PRIDE and ENVY. Here is the perfect dissemination between PERFORMANCE and PRACTICE. A painfully powerful judgment from God.

Amos 5:21-24 ***"I hate all your show and pretense— the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living."***

This passage needs no breaking it down. God doesn't want our stuff or a show, a performative checking the boxes of religion. God wants our heart. To mold and form us into the image of him.

3 specific things of practicing our faith in Micah 6:8. Here are the three specific things you can do to put into personal practice. Not to do for approval, recognition, leverage, or power. You do these three things because they are the antidote for the creeping sin of pride and envy. Of performative religion. This is God's economy.

1. Do what is right. (Do justly) You would think this one would be easy. In a tough, ambiguous, testing situation...what do you do? Just do the right thing. In our story Nyasha shares, helps, and sees everyone else as valued and worthy. Manyara hoards, humiliates and uses her power to elevate herself for her own gain. None of us are ever really confused about what the right thing to do is. **Are we?** In nearly any situation, when there are two choices, it doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out what the wrong thing and right thing are. When things are tough and complicated, sometimes all we can do is; *"Do the NEXT right thing."* That's so we don't have to think too much, or try to look too far down the road. In whatever situation you find yourself in, just take one little step towards doing the next right thing. Imagine a world where we filled it with just doing that next just/right thing.

2. Love mercy. (Unearned kindness) This one is especially difficult.. Let's define mercy. Mercy- going above and beyond showing compassion, kindness, or forgiveness toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. So, this is more than being compassionate and forgiving. It's not just doing mercy. It's seeing places that need an overflow of mercy, and loving when it happens. It's actually loving when mercy happens. It was out of an overflow of herself Nyasha showed generosity. She genuinely loved it. Manyara only performed these when it benefitted her. She didn't love them. She just used them. It's religion. It's just performance. When people receive compassion, when people are forgiven, we find joy in it. This isn't just practicing mercy. This is loving the practice of this in our world. Imagine a world where we practiced loving the work of mercy done well.

3. Walk humbly. This is the heart of; *"Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale"*. It's what makes this kind of life a **practice** and not **performative**. There is a way we carry ourselves, view the world, relate to others, that reflects the true heart of God. Get into some detail.

What does a humble walk look like?

Humility is always making room for others ... no matter who they are. We live in a culture that promotes the value, importance of some over others. Race, color, culture, orientation, economic status, gender. A humble walk is being so open to God, he softens your heart towards all others. Walking humbly is recognizing, accepting everything we have is a gift. We didn't earn it, and we treat everything as a gift. Both daughters were beautiful, worthy of being the king's wife. But Nyasha saw her beauty as a gift to steward. She didn't earn it, but she would use it well and with humility. Manyara lived as if she earned and was entitled to be beautiful. And her beauty gave her the right to use it for her own gain, which led her to treat others shabbily and poorly.

This is what it looks like to accept who we are in God's sight, and to walk humbly in it.

IV Challenge.

Practicing humility will be the constant work of choosing others over self. **What does that look like in our daily life?** We learn to live like Nyasha; doing right, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Rather than Manyara just wanting the crown and recognition. Every decision was for her own gain. Jesus spells it out pretty specifically. It looks just like this.

Luke 14:7-11 *When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: "When you are invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? The host will come and say, 'Give this person your seat.' Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table! "Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

I love this example Jesus used. This literally happened to Janet and me at a wedding rehearsal dinner. We didn't think we didn't deserve to sit with the bride and groom. Just that there were others who were closer to them than we were. Actually we didn't want to be in all the pics. Humility is a proper self-awareness of what God called us to be not self-hatred or being self-critical. It's just moving through the world figuring out how we live these truths out in our daily lives.

There is no having to dig into the Greek, give this some historical context, unpack the details and situation of the day. It answers the question about what does *"Walk humbly"* look like. Jesus just noticed everyone scrambling to be noticed, and perceived themselves as important. Jesus told them what true humility looked like. The secret? Choose the more humble path. Don't drift to the place where your beliefs become a performative religion, but there is no active real change happening on the inside. Let your walk be a practice of your beliefs no matter who is watching.

O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Pride demands to be recognized and honored. Humility waits to be honored.

Be Nyasha not Manyara.