



JoyFULL

Part Three: The Quiet Joy of Humility

Text: Philippians 2:1-11

Founding Pastor Ken Werlein

1. Pastor Ken shared some of his “heroes of humility” you might call them. Who in your life has inspired you through their example of humility? What was it about them that so inspires you?
2. Read Philippians 2:1-4.
 - a. What does Paul desire for the Philippian church?
 - b. How does Paul set this up in v. 1? In other words, how are the truths of v. 1 the grounds for the exhortations in vv. 2-4?
 - c. Where are you struggling to put the interest of others ahead of your own? How can you reframe your mindset and motivation in that area?
3. What were Ken’s three steps to practicing humility? Which step do you find most challenging?
4. Read John 13:3-4. Jesus is our greatest example of humility. This passage contains a practical example of Jesus’ humility. (See also Study Deeper)
 - a. How is it that Jesus, who is God, can humble himself to the point of washing his disciples’ feet?
 - b. How does understanding where you came from, where you are going, and your purpose free you to practice humility?
5. Jesus humbled himself to the point of death. While we are probably not called to humble ourselves to the point of literal death, humility will require dying; dying to our ego, plans, schedule, ambitions, etc. What areas of your life do you need to die to in order to practice humility? Practically, how will you die to self?

Challenge: Where do you need to repent of pride? Who is God calling you to serve? How can you imitate the example of Christ with someone in your life this week?

Prayer: Merciful Father,

Your truth runs counter to our self-exalting world: humble service is the path to kingdom greatness. This truth isn't weak or foolish as the world would think, but is a blessed and honorable gospel garment donned by those who fear You, the One who exalts the humble and brings down the proud. Oh, that the entire world would live in humility before You and each other!

While I aspire a life of godly humility, the pull of pride seems too strong to overcome. I so often desire to sit on your throne instead of bowing before You as the only true Sovereign and Holy God. I think highly of myself and my accomplishments and forget I am a man made of dust who at best can be called a servant of a great God. I even diminish the offense of pride by holding it lightly; forgetting that pride cast Satan from Your presence and brought the corruption of your creation. Oh, Lord, rescue me from foolish pride and help me learn from Your gentle and humble heart!

Gracious Father, reprogram my soul with your Word to remember the world is all about Jesus and not myself. Help me not think more highly of myself than I ought, but to delight in regarding others as more important. Rescue me from the self-deception of pride by giving me a realistic view of my life, talents, and relationship with you; always looking to the cross which reveals both the wrath I deserve and Your costly grace.

In my battle against pride, keep me from a false humility that fails to recognize Your gracious gifts. Rather, help me steward what you have given me as a faithful servant—a servant ready to wear the garment of humility and serve you in whatever way would most help Your Kingdom and bring praise to Your Name.

Lord, Your Son left the pleasures of heaven for a life of service on earth—and He gave his life for undeserving and ungrateful people. Help me have His attitude, remembering that You oppose the proud and give grace to the humble. You must become greater; I must become less—only then does the glorious reality shine forth that Christ is highly exalted above every name in heaven and on earth.

May my entire being bow before You in loving allegiance, confessing You as Lord over all of my life and all of creation, to the praise of Your glory.

AMEN.

<http://www.kevinhalloran.net/a-prayer-for-humility/>

STUDY DEEPER

The Advent of Humility by Tim Keller

Innumerable Christmas devotionals point out the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth—among shepherds, in a crude stable, with a feed trough for a bassinet. When Jesus himself tried to summarize why people should take up the yoke of following him, he said it was because he was meek and humble (Matt. 11:29). Seldom, however, do we explore the full implications of how Jesus' radical humility shapes the way we live our lives every day.

Humility is crucial for Christians. We can only receive Christ through meekness and humility (Matt. 5:3, 5; 18:3-4). Jesus humbled himself and was exalted by God (Phil. 2:8-9); therefore joy and power through humility is the very dynamic of the Christian life (Luke 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:5).

The teaching seems simple and obvious. The problem is that it takes great humility to understand humility, and even more to resist the pride that comes so naturally with even a discussion of the subject.

We are on slippery ground because humility cannot be attained directly. Once we become aware of the poison of pride, we begin to notice it all around us. We hear it in the sarcastic, snarky voices in newspaper columns and weblogs. We see it in civic, cultural, and business leaders who never admit weakness or failure. We see it in our neighbors and some friends with their jealousy, self-pity, and boasting.

And so we vow not to talk or act like that. If we then notice "a humble turn of mind" in ourselves, we immediately become smug—but that is pride in our humility. If we catch ourselves doing that we will be particularly impressed with how nuanced and subtle we have become. Humility is so shy. If you begin talking about it, it leaves. To even ask the question, "Am I humble?" is to not be so. Examining your own heart, even for pride, often leads to being proud about your diligence and circumspection.

Christian humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less, as C. S. Lewis so memorably said. It is to be no longer always noticing yourself and how you are doing and how you are being treated. It is "blessed self-forgetfulness."

Humility is a byproduct of belief in the gospel of Christ. In the gospel, we have a confidence not based in our performance but in the love of God in Christ (Rom. 3:22-24). This frees us from having to always be looking at ourselves. Our sin was so great, nothing less than the death of Jesus could save us. He had to die for us. But his love for us was so great, Jesus was glad to die for us.

Grace, Not Goodness

We are on slippery ground when we discuss humility, because religion and morality inhibit humility. It is common in the evangelical community to talk about one's worldview—a set of basic beliefs and commitments that shape the way we live in every particular. Others prefer the term "narrative identity." This is a set of answers to the questions, "Who am I? What is my life all about? What am I here for? What are the main barriers keeping me from fulfillment? How can I deal with those barriers?"

There are two basic narrative identities at work among professing Christians. The first is what I will call the moral-performance narrative identity. These are people who in their heart of hearts say, I obey; therefore I am accepted by God. The second is what I will call the grace narrative identity. This basic operating principle is, I am accepted by God through Christ; therefore I obey.

People living their lives on the basis of these two different principles may superficially look alike. They may sit right beside one another in the church pew, both striving to obey the law of God, to pray, to give money generously, to be good family members. But they are doing so out of radically different motives, in radically different spirits, resulting in radically different personal characters.

When persons living in the moral-performance narrative are criticized, they are furious or devastated because they cannot tolerate threats to their self-image of being a "good person."

But in the gospel our identity is not built on such an image, and we have the emotional ballast to handle criticism without attacking back. When people living in the moral-performance narrative base their self-worth on being hard working or theologically sound, then they must look down on those whom they perceive to be lazy or theologically weak.

But those who understand the gospel cannot possibly look down on anyone, since they were saved by sheer grace, not by their perfect doctrine or strong moral character.

The Stench of Moralism

Another mark of the moral-performance narrative is a constant need to find fault, win arguments, and prove that all opponents are not just mistaken but dishonest sellouts. However, when the gospel is deeply grasped, our need to win arguments is removed, and our language becomes gracious. We don't have to ridicule our opponents, but instead we can engage them respectfully.

People who live in the moral-performance narrative use sarcastic, self-righteous putdown humor, or have no sense of humor at all. Lewis speaks of "the unsmiling concentration upon Self, which is the mark of hell." The gospel, however, creates a gentle sense of irony. We find a lot to laugh

at, starting with our own weaknesses. They don't threaten us anymore because our ultimate worth is not based on our record or performance.

Martin Luther had the basic insight that moralism is the default mode of the human heart. Even Christians who believe the gospel of grace on one level can continue to operate as if they have been saved by their works. In "The Great Sin" in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes, "If we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good—above all, that we are better than someone else—I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the Devil."

Gracious, self-forgetful humility should be one of the primary things that distinguishes Christian believers from the many other types of moral, decent people in the world. But I think it is fair to say that humility, which is a key differentiating mark of the Christian, is largely missing in the church. Nonbelievers, detecting the stench of sanctimony, turn away.

Some will say, "Phariseeism and moralism are not our culture's big problems right now. Our problems are license and antinomianism. There is no need to talk about grace all the time to postmodern people." But postmodern people have been rejecting Christianity for years, thinking that it was indistinguishable from moralism. Only if you show them there's a difference—that what they rejected wasn't real Christianity—will they even begin to listen again.

Get Your Fresh Humility Here

This is the place where the author is supposed to come up with practical solutions. I don't have any. Here's why.

First, the problem is too big for practical solutions. The wing of the evangelical church that is most concerned about the loss of truth and about compromise is actually infamous in our culture for its self-righteousness and pride. However, there are many in our circles who, in reaction to what they perceive as arrogance, are backing away from many of the classic Protestant doctrines (such as Forensic Justification and Substitutionary Atonement) that are crucial and irreplaceable – as well as the best possible resources for humility.

Second, directly talking about practical ways to become humble, either as individuals or as communities, will always backfire. I have said that major wings of the evangelical church are wrong. So who is left? Me? Am I beginning to think only we few, we happy few, have achieved the balance that the church so needs? I think I hear Wormwood whispering in my ear, "Yes, only you can really see things clearly."

I do hope to clarify, or I wouldn't have written on the topic at all. But there is no way to begin telling people how to become humble without destroying what fragments of humility they may already possess.

Third, humility is only achieved as a byproduct of understanding, believing, and marveling in the gospel of grace. But the gospel doesn't change us in a mechanical way. Recently I heard a sociologist say that for the most part, the frameworks of meaning by which we navigate our lives are so deeply embedded in us that they operate "pre-reflectively." They don't exist only as a list of propositions, but also as themes, motives, and attitudes. When we listen to the gospel preached or meditate on it in the Scriptures, we are driving it so deeply into our hearts, imaginations, and thinking that we begin to instinctively "live out" the gospel.

So let us preach grace till humility just starts to grow in us.

Tim Keller is pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York, and author of *The Reason for God*.