



Day thirty-three

For the next 40 days we are offering us all a challenge to consider 40 things that are sucking the life out of us. The challenge is to examine these and through confronting God's word, his Spirit, and his community of faith as we seek to be filled with his life and his love again. At the conclusion of each challenge there will be an opportunity to engage about this with another person and/or the larger community.

Today the thing we are asking us to explore giving up is:

pride.

Confronting the text

Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they should be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.

I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written', so that none of you will be puffed up in favour of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! For I think that God has

exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day, (1 Cor 4:1-13).

Confronting my self with God

These thoughts come from a sermon I preached that were gleaned from Tim Keller pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York.

Our problem isn't pride. Our problem is the natural condition of our human self: . . . *I have applied all this . . . so that none of you will be puffed up (phusioō) . . . (1 Cor 4:6).*

"Puffed up" is a word picture meaning "being over inflated, swollen, and distended beyond proper size." It evokes an image of some distended part of the human body because it has too much air in it.

Paul says that's the condition of our natural human ego: bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. We're a Tardis.

But though it *feels full* it's empty. It's puffed up with that which isn't good for it so it is painful and fragile.

The normal human self has an emptiness it's trying to fill. But we're looking to be filled in all the wrong places.

Kierkegaard said . . . "It is the normal state of the human heart to try and build its identity around something besides God."

This makes us actors of spiritual pride living under the illusion that we're competent to run our own life, achieve our own sense of self worth, and find a purpose big enough to give us meaning . . . without God.

Our self is meant for God and anything that's put in there other than God is too small, so we overinflate it in our need to be full.

Think of it along the lines of eating too much junk food.

You can eat and eat and eat and never feel full, so you keep eating

stuffing it in.

That's what an overinflated ego is like: it's painful which makes us notice it.

Think about it like this: You all have a spleen, right?

Have you thought about your spleen today?

No?

Why?

Because there's nothing wrong with it. It's just sitting there minding its own business quietly giving an assist to your immune system.

We rarely think about the parts of our body until there's something wrong with them.

When thought of this way the ego must really have something wrong with it because it's *always* drawing attention to itself:

how do I look?

how am I treated?

When we ask these sorts of questions, we are evaluating the state of our self, of our ego.

If the evaluation is negative, we will often say . . . "My feelings are hurt."

But in reality, it's your ego that was hurt.

You're having bad feelings about your ego.

If our toes were having the same bad feelings as our ego, we would say . . . "I need to get to a podiatrist."

But when our ego is bruised, we say . . .

"I need to go to another church."

"I need to get a divorce."

"I need other friends."

Now there may be a real reason to get out of those places. But the trouble

may not be the church,
or the marriage,

or the people.

The trouble may be that we are trying to fill the emptiness that God has formed for himself with something that's simply taking up space.

When we ignore God, we become like a person in the middle of the ocean satiating thirst by drinking seawater.

Rather than filling our emptiness with Christ we try to fill our emptiness by comparing ourselves with others and boasting.

Again, I'm not talking about pride here. Pride isn't a sin. In verse six Paul says . . . "*Then you will not take pride **in one another over and against another** . . .*" It's not being proud; it's taking pride in comparison.

We may think we're proud of being successful, or good-looking, or wealthy but we are filling ourselves with the wrong stuff when we're proud of being *more* successful, or *better*-looking, or wealthier than the next guy.

By the way, the insidious nature of this works on the other side as well: you can be proud of *not* being a slave to your job, or *not* being concerned about your looks, or *not* having money. But what you're really proud of is comparing yourself to others.

Lastly, anything overinflated can always be deflated. If you're not filled up with something solid, you're in danger of collapsing.

Madonna once confessed in a Vogue magazine interview . . . "My drive in life comes from the fear of being mediocre; that's always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being . . . but then I feel like I'm still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I've become somebody I still have to prove that I'm somebody. My struggle has never ended . . . and I guess it never will."

She knows herself better than most of us know ourselves.

Every time we accomplish something the verdict comes back . . . "I'm somebody!"

But the next day we come to the conclusion that . . . "I'm nothing!"

Why?

Because our ego is filled with the wrong stuff and can't be satisfied. No matter how much I throw in there the cupboard is bare.

Madonna isn't neurotic . . . she has excellent self-knowledge.

So, speaking to people filling with the wrong stuff Paul says let me show you how I do it.

Verse three . . .

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court . . .

The word judge is a reference to what Madonna and all of us are looking for. Paul says . . .

"I don't care what you or anyone else thinks about me. I have come to the place where my identity owes nothing to what people say." I should not be judged by you or by any human court . . . I do not even judge myself.

Paul's saying "I don't care what you think . . . but I also don't care what I think. I have a very low opinion of your opinion of me . . . but I also have a very low opinion of my opinion of me."

Paul refuses to fall into the trap of high self esteem. Just because his conscience is clear doesn't mean he's innocent. Paul knew he was one of the world's most influential people, yet he said . . . *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief, (1 Tim. 1:15).*

Present tense. I AM chief of sinners.

He can have such confidence while owning his sin because he's aware of his need and what Christ has done.

He's saying "I know all about my sins but THEY are not my identity.

I've come to the place where my ego doesn't draw any more attention to itself than any other part of my body."

The essence of Gospel humility isn't thinking more or less of you.

The essence of Gospel humility is thinking of yourself-less.

The essence of Gospel humility is a blessed self forgetfulness. Not high self esteem, nor low self esteem it is stopping the game and listening for the

ultimate verdict. In Christ the trial is over, the verdict is in.

Listening to God's people

What pride do I struggle with the most?

What are some ways that God might fill that space?