

When I was in high school, I had a very unhealthy drive to succeed. I felt like I always needed to win, to be first, to be recognized. I didn't work toward a 4.0 because of my love for learning; I worked toward a 4.0 because I wanted to be recognized for being at the top of my class. I was the president of my class, the president of the math club, and the vice president of Habitat for Humanity. My motivation for doing those things had almost nothing to do with my interest in student government, or in math, or, sadly at that time, not even in building homes for people in need. I was driven by the desire for people to recognize me, and specifically, to pad my application for college. It was done for recognition from others. Twenty years later, I can look back and see these things, but at the time, I was entirely oblivious. Things really began to change for me with a conversation I had with a pastor the spring of my senior year. He asked me what sin I struggled with the most. And I thought to myself, "Well, I haven't been partying, I haven't been swearing, I haven't been crossing lines with girls." My identity was caught up in being very moral, so in my naivety I was actually being sincere when I said to him, "I don't think I'm struggling with any sins right now." And with compassion and care, but also with insight and wisdom, he asked, "How about pride? Do you think you struggle with pride?" In that moment, it was like a thousand different light bulbs were all turned on and pointed right at me—the selfish motivation, the self-focus, the self-centeredness went from being something I had never even thought about before, to something I was shockingly and painfully aware of. Over the coming weeks, with pride now on my mind, I realized pride was present in nearly every conversation, every interaction, and every decision. I sought out help from a mentor who encouraged me to pray for pride to be rooted out of my life and for God, in his grace and mercy, to replace it with humility. That began an arduous spiritual journey in my life where I prayed every single day, for seven straight years, for God, like a master surgeon, to identify and cut out every single expression of pride in my life and replace it with the humility of Jesus, exchanging love for self with love for him and love for others, exchanging my focus on myself with focus on him and focus on others.

I will be the first person to tell you I am still a very, very long way from where I hope to be. But on this journey, I have come to see just how pervasive and dangerous pride can be, and just how beautiful, lifegiving, and God-honoring humility truly is. Often when we are around someone who is arrogant, boastful, and self-centered, there is hesitancy in our spirit. Similarly, when we are with someone who is humble, selfless, and willing to serve, we are drawn to them. Jesus was the ultimate example of humility. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus said, "I am humble of heart." In Matthew 23:11 Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant." In Luke 22:27 Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves." There is no way to become more like Jesus without growing in humility. As I pray not only for myself, but as I pray for you and as I pray for this church, I pray for the humility of Jesus to pervade and characterize all that we do. As we continue in our study of the gospel of Luke and sit with the wisdom of Jesus, today we are going to give specific attention to what Jesus taught us about humility. I believe we learn from Luke that humility has three components to it. **Humility with God, humility with yourself, and humility with others.**

Let's begin by talking about **humility with God**. We see this clearly early in the gospel in an interaction Peter has with Jesus. Peter was a fisherman who had been working hard all night long

to catch fish. He didn't catch a thing. Now if you are a fisherman and someone asks you, how many you caught that day, the last thing you ever want to say is "zero." It just puts you in a bad mood to admit defeat. So Peter's already on edge. Then Jesus comes and tells him how to put his nets over there. Peter wasn't interested in advice. Peter thought he was the expert, and that Jesus didn't know what he was talking about. But reluctantly, he went along with it and put his nets where Jesus told him to. You can imagine he's rolling his eyes as he's doing it (like a husband who is doing something he doesn't want to because his wife asked him to—not that that has ever happened!), but he did it. Peter tried to pull the nets back up, but he couldn't. "They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink" (Luke 5:6-7). Think about what's happening in Peter's mind right now. He had done everything he knew how. He had worked with his strength, his intellect, his ingenuity—and got *nothing*. Then Jesus showed up. Reluctantly Peter did things Jesus's way, and he had the greatest catch of his entire life. What happened next? "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'" (Luke 5:8).

Do you see the radical shift from pride to humility? At first, even though Peter was in the presence of God in the flesh, he still thought he knew what was best. But then, in a moment, he caught a glimpse of just a sliver of the glory, greatness, and power of God. He fell on his knees, recognizing not only who Jesus was, but who he himself was in relation to Jesus. He declared, "Jesus, you are Lord, which means I am not. You are holy, and in light of your holiness, I see just how sinful I am."

William Barclay wrote of a trip that he took from his native Scotland down to England by train. As the train passed through the Yorkshire wastelands, he was impressed by a little whitewashed country cottage "which seemed to shine with an almost radiant whiteness." He did his business in England, and several days later returned to Scotland once again by train. During the days that he was in England there had been a heavy snowfall and the swampy wasteland that had been brown and green before had now been turned white by the snow. He looked out the window again and saw the same country cottage, but this time he wrote, "Its whiteness seemed drab, soiled and almost gray in comparison with the virgin whiteness of the freshly fallen snow."

If all we do is compare ourselves with other people, and compare ourselves with who we were ten years ago, we might end up thinking we are pretty special; self-righteousness and pride might set in. But if we see God in his splendor and majesty, if we see his holiness and purity, we see the one who the angels bow before, for whom they cover their eyes and their feet because they are unworthy to be his presence, unworthy to behold his greatness. Like a drop of water instantly turns to vapor on the surface of the sun, pride is eviscerated in the presence of God.

For anyone like me, if you are someone who is mindful of and convicted by the pride in your life and who is desperate for more humility, the first and most powerful step we can ever take is to redirect the focus off ourselves and turn our gaze to God. Look to God and you won't be impressed with how much you know; you'll be left speechless at God's matchless, limitless, eternal wisdom. Look to God and you won't be amazed by what you've accomplished; you'll be awestruck by the one who spoke a word and formed the galaxies. Look to God and you won't be hoping people recognize you, appreciate you, praise you; the only thing you'll want is for more

people to recognize, appreciate, and praise him. It all begins by taking the focus and attention off ourselves.

When John the Baptist was doing his ministry, he gained a large following. Thousands and thousands of people flocked to him. He was the most influential religious leader in the entire country. Then he baptized Jesus and people started following Jesus instead of John. John's friends came and said, "Do you realize that everyone is leaving you and going after him? You've got to do something about that." And John said, "You've got it all wrong. I'm not here to draw attention to myself; the only reason I came was to draw attention to him." And then he gave this iconic line: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30) That is the cry of every person who has truly met God.

The first area where we need humility is in relationship to God, which naturally leads to **humility with yourself**. What I mean by this is how we think about and relate to ourselves. What is the internal dialogue going on in our heads all throughout the day? We wake up and interact with our spouse or a roommate and perhaps think, "I sure am doing a lot more around the house than you." We go to work and interact with our colleagues and perhaps think, "I'm smarter than this person, I contribute more than that person. Why has it been so long since I've got the employee of the month award? They must just be trying to make other people feel better about themselves. No big deal. I know my value. But if they don't give me a raise soon to recognize my value, I might have to go to some place that will." Then you leave work and head out to dinner with some friends. You would hate it if all your friends on social media didn't have the chance to see the meal you ordered, so you take a picture and post it promptly. You check it every ten minutes and think, "Why are more people not liking this? I used the best filter. I put in a witty caption. But Suzy's post from yesterday has way more comments than mine. When are people going to recognize me for all the value I bring?" We have a tendency of thinking way too often and way too much about ourselves.

Jesus spoke about this in a parable he told in Luke 18:10-14. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" Like this Pharisee, the proud tend to think about themselves and talk about themselves an awful lot. The proud tend to compare themselves to others and assume they are much better, smarter, and morally superior to them. Jesus told us when it comes to good deeds, not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing, but the proud have a tendency of keeping track of their good deeds, tallying them up in their head, and then finding strategic ways of reporting them to others, something that of course social media has made much, much easier. Here I am, reading my Bible in the morning. Here I am, feeding the homeless. Here I am, on a mission trip. I sure hope everyone sees what a good person I am. Like this Pharisee, the proud think they are wonderful and love to tell others how wonderful they are.

But look at what comes next: "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'" (Luke 18:13). The tax collector, in true humility, stood at a distance, not feeling worthy of being in the presence of God. He didn't puff out his chest to boast of his accomplishments—he beat his chest in anguish

over his mistakes. He didn't rattle off a list of all the great things he had done for God, why God should be thankful for him and basically why God "owed" him. He cried out to God for mercy. As this man thought about himself, there he had true humility. And listen to what Jesus said: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). When we puff ourselves up, all we are doing is setting ourselves up for a really great fall. But when we humble ourselves, we allow God to come and lift us up.

True humility is not about living with a type of constant low grade depression. It's not about being a perpetual Eeyore, walking around dragging our feet and mumbling to ourselves, "Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, let's go eat some worms." That's not true humility. That is self-loathing. Listen to what Romans 12:3 says: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." It begins with a command not to think of ourselves more highly than we should, but we aren't told to think of ourselves as trash, rather to "think of yourself with sober judgment"—which just means accurately. Don't eat psychedelic mushrooms and try to give an accurate assessment of yourself; rather, think of yourself in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. By faith we see ourselves not based upon the sum total of our accomplishments and mistakes, not based upon how the world assesses our value, but based upon what God himself says. One of the priorities at this church is identity, which means we want to focus on who God says we are and live out of that identity—nothing more, nothing less. If you are a child of God, you have immeasurable value and worth, but it's not based upon anything you have done, so it can't puff you up. It's entirely based on his grace and mercy, so it brings even more humility.

Jesus' wisdom calls us to humility with God, humility with ourselves, and finally, **humility with others**. Pride and humility are ultimately manifested in the way we relate to people. One time Jesus was at a party where all the guests picked places of honor at a table. Ancient parties didn't have five or six different places for people to gather; they had one large room. In the room was a large U-shaped table. The host or the person with greatest honor would sit directly at the center, and then the people who had most esteem would sit closest to that person, with the least influential people sitting all the way at the ends. So you could tell, with just a quick glance, who was most important in any of these social settings. Jesus was at one of these parties when this was happening—people were jockeying for position, trying to elbow their way to the most important seats, and then Jesus spoke up to give them wisdom.

When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, "Give this person your seat." Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, "Friend, move up to a better place." Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Luke 14:8-11)

This is just real practical advice. In a social setting, don't presume that you deserve the most honor; don't promote yourself, otherwise you might end up looking like a fool. No matter your credentials, experience, or social standing, assume the position, give everyone else more honor than yourself—if you do, there is nowhere to go but up.

This is the same as the command given to us in Philippians 2:3-4: "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." True humility prompts us to look to the interests of others above ourselves.

Humble people let others go first in line.

Humble people let others eat first.

Humble people give up the best seat.

Humble people let others talk first, don't interrupt, and let others have the last word.

Humble people are quick to admit they are wrong and apologize.

Humble people are quick to forgive.

Humble people don't defend themselves.

This is what Jesus did. In John 13:3-5, we read this about the last night of Jesus' life—Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet. This passage doesn't say, "Jesus didn't feel as though he had any dignity, honor or value, so he took the role of a slave and washed their feet." It says, "He knew the Father had put all things under his power, he knew that he had come from heaven and was returning to heaven." So thinking of himself rightly, in accordance with faith, living out his true identity, he was able to serve.