

Spiritual Hygiene IV - Developing Humility

Sermon:

Good Morning/Afternoon! There is a note page in your bulletin so you can follow along with today's message; if you didn't get one and would like one, please raise your hand and one of our men will bring you one.

During a combat exercise at sea in bad weather, a radar operator suddenly reported a blip on his screen directly in front of the ship, 25 nautical miles away. The captain glanced at his radio operator, who immediately transmitted: *"Unknown contact, change course 15 degrees to the north. We are on a collision course."*

The radio crackled: *"Advise you change course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision."*

"Unknown contact, I say again, change course 15 degrees to the north to avoid collision."

"I say again...advise you change course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision."

The captain snatched his microphone from its cradle and snapped out: *"This is Gerald Hancock, captain of the United States Navy aircraft carrier USS Lincoln. We are accompanied by 2 cruisers, 3 destroyers and several support vessels. You will divert your course 15 degrees to the north immediately."*

A moment later, back came the reply: *"I am a seaman second class. I am accompanied by my dog, my dinner, a glass of lemonade and a parakeet that is currently sleeping. I'm not going anywhere. Change course 15 degrees to the south, and you'd better do it quick."*

The captain was furious. He bellowed into the radio: *"Change course seaman! I will take whatever means necessary to defend this battle group even if we have to run through you!"*

In the silence that followed the Captain's outburst, the reply rang out, *"I'm a lighthouse. Your call."*

The title of the message today is Developing Humility...something that Captain probably should have done...or *did*, after he realized what was going on...

Humility is an essential attribute. Even if you are a person of some station... someone that commands respect and has authority...if you don't spend some time developing humility...just about the time you think you're "all that", you're going to get schooled.

OK, I have to ask, have you enjoyed this series so far? The series title, "Spiritual Hygiene" is appropriate, don't you think? Because we know from our experience with our physical hygiene that if we don't clean ourselves up on a daily basis...yes teenagers... daily...we're gonna start to stink.

As we've gone through these messages, we've drawn attention to the things in our spiritual lives that start to stink if we don't purposefully take care of them. And maybe you can't smell 'em...but you can see 'em...maybe feel them...kinda like that scuzz that starts to form on your teeth after a couple days without a toothbrush... nasty.

I hope that the last few weeks have been helpful in shining a light on these areas and that you've begun to think a little bit about where it is that you could use some good soap and a little bit of pressure-washing. I know I have.

I referenced Romans 12:1 in the second installment, but didn't read it...here's how it reads in the Christian Standard Bible: *Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.*

The book of Leviticus talks a lot about the condition of a sacrifice. Sacrifices were to be clean, without spot or stain. They were to be healthy. You didn't bring a scrawny, or diseased or damaged lamb or bull for the priests to offer to the Lord, you brought the best you had. Something you had cared for and tended well to.

We've taken a pretty in-depth look over the past month at how we tend well to our minds, tongues and hearts, and today I'm going to try to pull all of that together as we wrap up our series.

17th century philosopher, jurist and scholar John Selden had this to say about humility: *"It is a virtue all men preach, none practise (sic), and yet everybody is content to*

hear. The master thinks it is good doctrine for his servants, the laity for the clergy and the clergy for the laity."

So...humility being a virtue I'm preaching...while simultaneously praying about and working on in myself, this one has been tough. But...according to Mr. Selden, this is something that relates to all of us, so I suppose I take comfort in knowing you probably struggle with it too.

As Pastor John moved through his message by laying out some of the things that keep us from having a right heart before God, naturally he came to the issue of pride.

So once again, I'm kinda playing second fiddle for the next half hour or so. But scripture has so much to say about developing humility, the challenge I face isn't so much where to look for where the Bible speaks about humility, it's where to start!

Open your Bibles this morning to **Luke chapter 14**; we'll start there. While you're heading there, I'm going to drift over to read a couple short verses out of...guess where... Proverbs. **Proverbs 25:6-7** provides kind of a backdrop to what we're going to read in Luke. Your pew Bible, the New International Version, translates this passage: *"Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among his great men; 'it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before his nobles.*

Solomon here pictures a royal feast in which guests are seated according to their social position and he writes, *"Don't exalt yourself in the king's presence."* In other words, don't honor yourself or claim honor. Solomon's words here should be understood to believers...as an urging to not to get puffed up with pride when they're among the world's famous and influential people.

Nor should we *"claim a place among great men,"* that is, strive to earn a place among society's rich and powerful people. We're not to show off or boast in the presence of royalty, or stand in the place of great men with arrogant coolness.

Jesus probably had this proverb in mind when he was speaking to the crowd gathered around him in **Luke 14**. Jesus had been invited to a Sabbath meal at the home of one of the leading Pharisees. Let's pick up the scripture in **verse 7**:

⁷He told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they would choose the best places for themselves: ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, don’t recline at the best place, because a more distinguished person than you may have been invited by your host. ⁹The one who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in humiliation, you will proceed to take the lowest place.

¹⁰“But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when the one who invited you comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ You will then be honored in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

What Jesus sees here is the jockeying for position that the Pharisees...the religious leaders of the Jews, are doing at this dinner...a social gathering. By now, Jesus has to be shaking his head at the way we behave. Luke records in **Chapter 9** the dispute that the disciples themselves have about which of them is the greatest...keep in mind this was not long after the transfiguration, so Peter’s out, right?

You remember the transfiguration story...Jesus took Peter, James and John with him as he went up on a mountain to pray, and while the disciples slept (WHY does it seem like the disciples are always sleeping when Jesus prays?), **verse 29** says “*the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.*” Elijah and Moses appeared and talked with him.

And I suppose there was some sort of sound or something that roused the 3 sleepyheads, but as they came to, they see what’s going on and Peter speaks. He says “Uhhh...hey. It’s good to be here...hey...we could build you guys some houses and stay up here, how cool would that be?” Then a dark cloud comes and surrounds them and they hear a voice in the cloud that says “This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him!”

The cloud goes away and Jesus is alone. Can you imagine the look on Jesus’ face? He’s over here talking to Moses and Elijah about what he’s about to go through on the cross, and then...”Really? This was gonna go on for another couple hours, but nnnooooo...”

So the disciples figure “Well, Peter’s number 10 obviously”, now they just have to figure out who’s 1 through 9. And in the middle of their dispute Jesus pulls aside a child...and tells them in **verse 48**: *“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. For whoever is least among you — this one is great.”*

Humble yourself. The same message he gives to the Pharisees at this dinner. “Guys. Why are you trying to position yourself in the place you think you deserve to be? Once all the “important” chairs fill up because of this self-seeking attitude going on, if someone that is more important arrives, the host may show him to the place you occupy. Then what? Think everyone else is going to move down one for you? No, they’re going to take great pleasure in watching you shuffle your way down to the cheap seats.”

Pastor Dan Chun of the First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu tells the story of being asked to pray at the retirement ceremony of one of his parishioners, Admiral Joseph Prueher. Adm Prueher was at the time of his retirement the Commander in Chief of U.S. Pacific Command, which means he exercised control and direction over every military person, soldier, sailor, airman and Marine, in the Asia Pacific Region. He was kind of a big deal.

At his retirement, everyone was there. Other joint forces commanders, commanders from every military service, Hawaii’s governor and senator...if you were high up the dignitary chain, you were at this function. Everyone stood up as Adm Prueher mounted the platform, and as he did, he spied Pastor Chun, some rows back on the stage, and the unthinkable happened. The Admiral...broke...protocol. He stopped, turned and strode to where Dan was standing muttering “This isn’t right.”, picked up his chair and walked it to the front row, placing it next to Senator Inouye’s seat.

That is a **Luke 14** moment, and exactly what Jesus was trying to say. How many people in attendance that day were thinking...“Whoa! Who is THAT guy?” That a 4-star Admiral would break out of the structure and ritual of his own retirement ceremony to make sure that the pastor that he invited would be seated in a place of honor?

when the one who invited you comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' You will then be honored in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Verse 15: *When one of those who reclined at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"* I'll bet Jesus looked to see if Peter was there. "Did you not hear what I just said?" And after that... you're going to assume that you're going to be seated at the King's table? So to drive the point home, Jesus goes on in **verses 16-23**:

¹⁶Then he told him: "A man was giving a large banquet and invited many. ¹⁷At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.' ¹⁸"But without exception they all began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. I ask you to excuse me.'

¹⁹"Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.' ²⁰"And another said, 'I just got married, and therefore I'm unable to come.'

²¹"So the servant came back and reported these things to his master. Then in anger, the master of the house told his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame.'

²²" 'Master,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, and there's still room.' ²³"Then the master told the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, not one of those people who were invited will enjoy my banquet.' "

Do you think that even then they got the point? "Hey...Pharisees! You are the invited...the supposed cream of the crop among God's chosen nation...but your arrogance is getting in the way. You think you're better than the average Israelite. Better than the beggar, the poor man, the sick man. Pious. Important. And when the master of the house calls you to his banquet, you're going to have more important things to do than take time out of your day for yet another dinner.

And you're going to miss it. So instead of the sickening display of "the important" rushing for the best seats, the master will have the joy of seeing his house

filled with the humble...who are happy to be there and will fill the place with rejoicing and praise for the one that called them.

In my mind, that's a picture of heaven. No pride...no posturing. Just a bunch of poor, maimed, blind and lame people that know they have no right at all to be there, but they are so grateful they were dragged from the highways and the hedges and brought in for the feast.

So where are you at today on that big sliding scale of humility?

Pharisee? My skill. My talents. My wealth.

Or beggar? Humble. Humble to a fault. Maybe in fact, you're so humble...you take pride in your humility. Careful...

Ever thought that humility could be prideful? We're a good bit into the message, maybe it's time we defined what it is we're talking about...

I was fascinated that most dictionary definitions of "humility" accentuate it as "a low self-regard and sense of unworthiness." So...they say humility equates to low self-esteem... I think not.

That's not "true humility", but "false humility"...which consists of being critical of one's own sanctity, gifts, talents, and accomplishments for the sake of receiving...or soliciting... praise or adulation from others.

And that's actually a form of pride. In putting myself lower than you I am more humble than you are...therefore, I am better than you. 'Cuz Jesus says the meek will inherit the earth. Lookamee...I'm so meek.

You will recognize legitimate humility by these behaviors and attitudes:

Submitting to God and legitimate authority.

Identifying virtues, talents or positions that others possess, particularly those that surpass your own, and giving due honor and, when required, obedience.

Recognizing the limits of your own talents, ability, or authority.

Mere Christianity is a theological book by C. S. Lewis, adapted from a series of BBC radio talks made between 1941 and 1944, while Lewis was at Oxford during the Second World War.

In it, Lewis makes this observation about true humility: *“Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call “humble” nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.”*

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud... If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.

Or as Rick Warren paraphrases in *A Purpose Driven Life*, *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”*

So what would the opposite of humility be? Most people’s first answer is “Pride”. But I really like what Pastor Chun (the same guy from the Hawaii story) says about this -- that the opposite of humility isn’t arrogance...it’s ignorance. Ignorance of who we are, and ignorance of who God is.

Let’s look at that for a minute. God is, well...God, right? If you’re a Christian here today, we acknowledge God as Creator, as Healer, as Father, ruler of all creation...Holy. The attributes of God have been the focus of many of our sermons over the past year.

And if we want to know what God’s stance is on pride and humility, an important thing to realize is that God speaks against pride. A couple of examples:

Micah 6:8 - *He has shown you, O 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.*

Proverbs 15:33 - *Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor.*

But it goes far beyond speaking against it. God actively works against pride:

Proverbs 16:5 - *Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.*

Isaiah 2:17 - *The pride of mankind will be brought low, and human loftiness will be humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.*

And Psalm 101:5 - *I will destroy anyone who secretly slanders his neighbor; I cannot tolerate anyone with haughty eyes or an arrogant heart.*

If pride is an issue in your heart (and in whose heart is it not?), these should be sobering words. We can't afford to be ignorant of who God is, considering that he is the source of these words. If you believe that God is who he says he is, that he opposes the proud and will humble the arrogant, then we need to know what he expects of us when it comes to developing humility, don't we?

It's not a mystery...God models humility in Christ Jesus. God himself, creator and ruler of all things known and unknown to us, came to this tiny speck of rock to live among us. He put on flesh that he had made from...dirt. Became a created being.

But even as a man, Jesus could have been proud. He could have been a rock star! He was doing things that no-one had ever seen, and had power that even the men that spent the most time with him couldn't begin to comprehend. When his motives were questioned by the Pharisees, he could have done some pretty horrible things to them to put them in their places and show them that he was who he said he was.

He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Kings don't ride donkeys! Conquerors ride war horses! Magnificent beasts! But not this King...this conqueror. Even his disciples didn't get it. They witnessed Jesus elevated by God the Father at least twice; at his

baptism and at the transfiguration. They confessed him as the Son of God. They listened as he taught them with scripture and through parables and through his actions who he was and why he was here...

He healed the sick. He raised the dead. Again and again he illustrated that faith was powerful; that belief was the key. He told them that children already knew everything they were struggling with and he encouraged them to become humble-minded, like a child, so that they would understand as well. He knelt to wash their feet.

Yet throughout the story of the gospels...they were waiting for the other shoe to drop. This teaching and healing and serving, yes...all good, but when does Jesus the Messiah get here? The one that was supposed to come in power and crush their enemies?

Ignorance. Ignorance of who God is. In the presence of the essence of humility they argued about which of them was greatest.

Ignorance. Ignorance of who they...were...led to pride. Just as it does for us today. We fall into the same trap. Even when we don't mean to.

I've had a bit of a mouse infestation in my garage, so I've set some traps out. I heard some scratching around that sounded like it might be coming from under the floor the other night, so I'm hoping I can get all of them before they set up residence for the winter.

And these traps are baited with peanut butter. Nice and tasty...hard to get off the catch without springing the trap. More than once I've checked the traps to find that all of them have done their job. These traps are within a couple feet of each other, so you know that these mice are strolling right past another mouse that's sprung a trap. But the bait is too enticing, and they end up being the next victim.

We don't mean to get caught in pride. At least I hope that we don't sit around at night studying about how to purposefully get ourselves into some of the situations we find ourselves in.

In over our heads in debt? It's pride. We need to have something we can't afford so we can look good or feel good...

Involved in an affair or an ungodly relationship? Pride. Something that other person said or did enticed us to think "Hey, she just gets me, or he just makes me feel..."

Maybe it's just that you're gonna run your life your way..."ain't no Jesus gonna be Lord over me"...so you live the way you want to live...in defiance of what you know God wants. You know better?

Isaiah 55:8-9 says: *⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Ignorance of who we are. As the hymn goes: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." We're wretches by nature: Miserable, profoundly unhappy, despicable. We're sinners.

But you know what else we are? We're loved by the God of the universe. We're loved in a way that no other of his creations is loved. If we understand the depth of that love, that God sent himself in the person of Jesus Christ to pay for all our sin...our response to that can be nothing less than true humility.

Let me bust out another hymn on ya:

Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way;
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Doesn't that sound like humility to you? Right there...we understand who we are. We're clay. Not in the sense of: "Oh man...I'm clay! Just a mixture of dirt and water...stick to everything and make a mess...just worthless!" That's...that false humility we were talking about earlier; running ourselves down to get someone to sympathize.

More like..."I'm clay! Yeah, I'm dirty and full of sticks and bugs and rocks, but God is working me...softening me...I surrender to him so that he is able to mold me and shape me...into whatever he wants me to be! I have value!

Loved ones, that's what true humility looks like...submission to God in all his plans for you. Complete surrender.

And understand who God is: the Potter. As he works and shapes you, in his mind, he sees you as what you'll be when you're complete...the finished project in all its beauty. It's God who has made you who you are for a reason that he has in mind...it doesn't matter if you can't yet see it!

Commit today to give yourself over to him...all that you are, all that you're still to become, everything you have...and let him clean you...mold you...and perfect you in every way.

Let's pray.