

Good & Beautiful & Kind

Chapter 5 ~ Beyond the Walls of the False Self

This chapter is based on the premise that we have all developed a false self as a way of protecting ourselves and with which we have learned to navigate the world around us, as well as the relationships we are in. Our false self has one goal: self-protection. A HUGE part of growing in Christ is to learn to stop relying on our false self and instead learn to rely on Christ. So please note, then, that “faith in Christ” goes far beyond agreeing to certain theological propositions or doctrinal points. It’s trusting Christ enough to be our true, authentic self, finding our security in Him and not in the validation of others.

“...humility is not just doing a lowly task; it’s a life committed to the hard task of lowering one’s defenses...the ability to live freely from protecting the false self—living free from the defensiveness that closes us in on ourselves.” (page 94)

The goal is to live from our true self. Rich explains, *“The true self is the place within us where we are found securely wrapped in God’s love and have no need to project or protect it. The true self finds its identity in something much deeper than human words of approval or criticism. The false self is incapable of this level of freedom, but it is where most of the world lives from. Humility, then, is the ongoing commitment to live from the true self.” (pages 95-96)*

- *When you hear the word “humility” what comes to mind? (Perhaps a person, a moment or memory, an idea?) What does it look like to see humility embodied in a person? Or, what do you expect to see in someone who is “humble”?*
- *How much of your life (your time and energy) do you spend in a defensive posture?*
- *Who do you know that seems to operate from their true self?*

It is important to note that what is required in order to let go of our false self and allow our true self to emerge is deep confidence and security in God’s love...or what we might call secure attachment to God. One of the key ways we can develop secure attachment is through last week’s practice of contemplative prayer. (Just wanted to make sure y’all see how the chapters build off each other.)

This chapter reminds me of something Dallas Willard used to say, *“A mature Christian is almost impossible to offend.”* That is because a mature Christian has learned to live from their true self. This leads to a question...

- *Generally speaking, how offendable are you? Similarly, how reactive are you? (If you’re not sure how to answer these questions, ask someone you trust who knows you well and get their perspective.)*

Speaking of Dallas Willard, and since we’re on the topic of humility, I was just recently reminded of his Three-Step Plan for Humility...

- Never pretend
- Never presume
- Never push

There's wisdom in that, my friends. It also offers us another question for self-reflection and assessment...

- *When have you recently pretended, presumed, or pushed? What was the root motivation in those instances?*

Dallas' words map pretty closely to what Rich offers as a path to humility...

- Nothing to Protect
- Nothing to Possess
- Nothing to Prove
- *What about you do you find yourself trying to protect (image, reputation, status, etc.)?*
- *What might you be overly attached to (as a substitute for God) that brings you a sense of comfort and security?*
- *When do you catch yourself trying to prove yourself?*

"The humble are those who live in the fullness of this kingdom because they have nothing to prove. Their lives are found in God's love. They have nothing to protect because they are not surprised by their own inconsistencies and contradictions. They have nothing to possess because they have been possessed by God's love, which makes grasping and clinging unnecessary." (page 100)

Humility sounds a lot like freedom. Ironically, our false self, which was initially created to protect us, becomes what entraps us and keeps us from living into the freedom and love God wants for us. As Rich says, *"Having humility enables us to live in freedom—the freedom from having to be perfect, knowing it all, and being it all. Humility requires us to admit that we don't see the full picture about ourselves, God, or the world."* (page 109)

"The world needs individuals and communities who can live from a humble center. It's a place of wholeness; it's the location where love gets formed...One of the marks of a healthy culture and a healthy soul is the willingness to be curious, open, teachable, and humble...wherever there is defensiveness in us, it reveals an area of our lives that is not crucified with Christ." (page 101)

We all know the great biblical command to love God and others. I'm sure we'd all affirm it. But as Rich (and many, many others) points out, without humility we really can't grow in love, nor can we give and receive love very well. So, if love is important (and it's paramount) then humility is the chief virtue to cultivate (which the Christian tradition has long held).

- *What are you/we doing (individually and communally) to grow in humility? Are there practices, postures, or attitudes you're leaning into in order to grow in humility?*

"The way of humility essentially says, 'I don't take myself too seriously; I have no need to project myself as something I'm not; I don't need to be in control; I'm open to things that are beyond my experience or understanding.'" (page 103)

- *Looking at the quote immediately above, how would you assess yourself based on that description of the "way of humility"?*
- *When are you most tempted to take yourself too seriously; to make yourself out to be more than you are; feel the need to be in control?*

"The humble person is one who repeatedly chooses the counter-instinctual way of vulnerability, honesty, and self-confrontation. The road to a life lived in this way requires a commitment to an ancient path." (pages 104-105) With that, Rich goes on to describe two core practices/habits that can lead us toward humility...

Praying the Jesus Prayer

If you're not familiar with the Jesus Prayer, it goes like this, *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."* It serves as a regular reminder that we need, and live by, God's mercy. Additionally, it can keep us from being judgmental. (I don't know about you, but I can use as much help as I can get with that one.) Rich puts it this way...

"In a blaming and scapegoating culture, the Jesus Prayer helps us confront our duplicitous ways. In an attacking and shaming society, the Jesus Prayer grounds us in our own inconsistencies. In a finger-pointing and judgmental world, the Jesus Prayer awakens us to the dark secrets we harbor within." (page 107) As this book is all about becoming whole in a fractured world, it is good and important to be reminded that we start with ourselves and our own brokenness, and the Jesus Prayer (like all prayer) takes us to the One who can, and wants to, heal/transform our brokenness.

- *In a culture/society that prizes self-reliance, how do you remind yourself of your need for God?*
- *What do you think about being in need of mercy? (Is that familiar to you? Foreign to you? What feelings does it bring up for you?)*

Receiving Correction

"Humility says, 'I know I have blind spots. Can you help me see?'" (page 109) Here's some good news...at least for our part, or what we bring to relationships, we can seek correction in our relationships. It's important to note that what will keep us from seeking correction, what will make us resistant to

it, is our false self. Remember, our false self seeks to protect us. But what is really hurt by correction? Nothing...except maybe our pride/ego.

- *Have you ever intentionally sought out feedback or correction from others? What was that like? What do you think about the idea of doing so? Whose feedback would you seek out (or whose feedback would be helpful to you)?*

An important thing to understand is that our false self is created by shame or as a way to protect ourselves from shame. When we experience shame, it is due to the influence of our false self. Really the only thing that can heal our shame is the love of God...which, again, draws our true self out from hiding. Our true self rests confident and secure in God's love. (Again, think: secure attachment that comes from spending time with God...abiding in God.)

Preview: Our theme for 2027 is going to be ABIDE

Soul Training Exercise ~ The Jesus Prayer & Seeking Correction/Feedback

Rich teed these up well for us this week, so we're just going to roll with it. This first invitation this week is to pray the Jesus Prayer multiple times per day.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Perhaps set a reminder (or a few) on your phone...when it goes off, pause, take a few deep breaths, and pray the prayer.

The second invitation, which is admittedly more difficult and involved, is to seek feedback/correction from a trusted person (or a few). Rich offers some good questions to work with...

- How do you experience me?
- How might I have done that differently?
- Where do you see an area of growth for me?
- Where am I missing it?
- How can I love you better?
- (Or come up with your own question that you'd like some feedback on.)

Now, should you choose to do this exercise, you need to be committed to not getting defensive if you hear something you don't like. (That's probably your false self responding.) Take whatever feedback you receive to Jesus and process with Him. His love is our safe place.