

Good Politics ~ The BE Campaign
BE Good ~ BE Just ~ BE Merciful ~ BE Humble

*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. ~ Micah 6:8

Week 4 ~ BE Humble

Think of the great heroes/heroines of the Faith...in Scripture and beyond. None of them were perfect. They each had their flaws/faults. But there was one quality they all have in common. They were all relatively humble. How so? They recognized their need for God; they welcomed God's Presence in their lives; they acknowledged God's authority in their lives; they understood their need for God's mercy in their lives. All of this points to the character of humility.

- *Who is a favorite Biblical figure, or figure from Church history? How did they demonstrate humility in their life?*
- *Who do you know (personally) that is an example of humility? What does that look like?*

What is humility/humbleness? And how important is humility/humbleness? Let's turn our attention to addressing these questions. To begin, please allow me to throw out some quotes from some greats, some BIG names in the faith...

"Humility is the proper estimate of oneself." ~ Charles Spurgeon

"If you are looking for an example of humility, look at the cross." ~ Thomas Aquinas

"Humility must always be doing its work like a bee making its honey; without humility all will be lost." ~ Teresa of Avila

"The more humble a man is in himself, the more obedient toward God, the wiser will he be in all things, and the more shall his soul be at peace." ~ Thomas `A Kempis

"It is no great thing to be humble when you are brought low; but to be humble when you are praised is a great and rare achievement." ~ Bernard of Clairvaux

"Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil's reach as humility." ~ Jonathan Edwards

"Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself." ~ T.S. Eliot

“Should you ask me: What is the first thing in religion? I should reply: the first, second, and third thing therein is humility.” ~ St. Augustine

“Because Christ Jesus came to the world clothed in humility, He will always be found among those who are clothed in humility. He will be found among the humble people.” ~ A.W. Tozer

“Humility is nothing but truth, while pride is nothing but lying.” ~ Vincent De Paul

“We can be humble only when we know that we are God’s children, of infinite value and eternally loved.” ~ Madeleine L’Engle

- *In your own words, how would you define and describe humility?*
- *What gives you perspective (particularly proper perspective on yourself) that fosters humility in you?*

The importance of humility/humbleness cannot be overstated. As far as a Biblical definition goes, Spurgeon’s quote above pretty much nails it. It is to see oneself rightly. Literally, and more picturesquely, in Hebrew it is to occupy your God-given space in the world (nothing more and nothing less...which requires seeing oneself accurately). In Greek it is lowliness of mind. While definitions are helpful, as apprentices of Jesus we want to know what Jesus had to say on the matter and/or how Jesus demonstrated it for us to follow.

- *How do you know if you see yourself rightly or inaccurately? What’s something you recently learned/discovered about yourself that you were unaware of?*

In Luke 14 Jesus tells a parable about not vying for a seat of honor at a wedding feast, but rather take the lowest place. Then, if the host wants to move you to a better seat, so be it. Jesus caps it off with the statement, *“For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”* (Luke 14:11) Jesus uses that exact same line when He tells another parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector in Luke 18. In that parable, the Pharisee stands up to pray and gloats about himself. While the tax collector can’t even look up toward heaven, but rather beats his chest saying, *“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”* (Luke 18:13)

In Luke’s account of the Last Supper we read about a dispute that broke out among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. (Can’t you just see Jesus shaking His head, and letting out a deep, agonizing sigh.) Jesus’ response to them lays out what “greatness” looks like in the Kingdom of God.

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who leads like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.” (Luke 22:24-27)

Then, of course, there's John's account of the Last Supper which includes a very important scene of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, after which He instructs them, "*You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, Your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*" (John 13:13-15)

Friends, let me say this as directly and emphatically as I can: We will absolutely, positively make NO progress in our spiritual lives without humility. The culture of the Kingdom is one of humility. That's what makes the Kingdom so wonderful, and so different from the world system. Or, perhaps another way of saying it, most of the terrible things we can identify in our world are rooted in pride, arrogance, and ego. The world we live in teaches us to make ourselves as great as possible, to make a name for ourselves, to do everything we can to have others think well and highly of us...or as Jesus warned us against, to exalt ourselves.

If you'd like to do a deeper exploration into the topic of humility, I would recommend the classic little book by Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Journey Toward Holiness*. In it Murray states, "*Humility is the only soil in which virtue takes root; a lack of humility is the explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a virtue along with the others, but is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God and allows Him, as God, to do all.*"

(Another book I'd recommend is Richard Foster's *Learning Humility: A Year of Searching for a Vanishing Virtue*.)

- *Where does one learn humility in our society? Is humility even valued enough to be pursued in any intentional/strategic way?*

Now, you might be thinking to yourself, "Isn't Love the most important thing?" Sure, but I would contend that it takes humility in order to love well. Love is wanting good for others and working toward that end. That's a hard thing to do if we're wrapped up in ourselves, if we're self-absorbed, if we're looking out for number one. Love requires humility.

Trust (which is just another word for faith or belief) also requires humility. Trust recognizes one's own limitations and demonstrates a willingness to rely on someone else. That kind of abandoning of self-reliance and independence that reaches out for help from another takes humility. So, to seriously take Jesus as our Lord, Savior, and Teacher requires a posture/attitude of humility. This is why it is not an overstatement to say, we will not grow in faith, in the spiritual life, without humility.

You may recall when we went through a series on Worship we remarked that the word "worship" literally means to bow down; to prostrate oneself. The act of worship, the heart of worship, is one of humility. So if the root of our ability to love, to trust, and to worship is humility, we can see how and why humility is such a BIG deal. Again, no progress will be made in the spiritual life without humility. Any hope for BECOMING what God intends for us, and chance at living the life God has for us, requires humility.

- *What are indicators to you that pride might be getting the best of you?*

Listen to what other New Testament writers had to say about humility...

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
(Philippians 2:3-11, emphasis added)

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” (Colossians 3:12, emphasis added)

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (James 4:10, emphasis added)

“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5b-7, emphasis added)

Just a few quick comments on these New Testament excerpts...

Each of these writers, Paul, Peter, and James had their own unique struggle with humility, as we all do. Peter was over-confident that he would never deny Jesus. We know how that turned out. James was the younger brother of Jesus who didn’t believe his brother was the Messiah. It took humility for him to come around. And then there’s Paul, who had to be humbled in order to see the truth of the resurrected Jesus. So all these guys are speaking from experience.

As the Colossians verse points out, our ability to be humble is intimately tied to our understanding that we are deeply loved children of God. Without the confidence and security of that understanding we will naturally sense that we have to look out for ourselves.

As the Peter passage implies, much of our fear and anxiety comes from either having to take care of ourselves or make much of ourselves...neither of which we were created to do. Humility, then, helps us to function in harmony with reality, with how things truly are. This provides health to our soul.

We know that God's Kingdom is a present reality. And His Kingdom is an upside-down Kingdom, meaning that the value system of the world is antithetical to the value system of the Kingdom. One of the primary ways we see this upside-downness is pride/arrogance/hubris vs. humility.

One good measurement of humility is teachability—an openness/willingness to learn, grow, and change. Being unteachable tends to indicate pride (a know-it-all attitude) or fear (a change-is-bad attitude). It is good to remember that as Christians we are “disciples” or “apprentices”...this denotes a teachable spirit...it's par for the course...Jesus has much to teach us, and it's a life-long course of study (and probably beyond). A good way to gauge how teachable we are is to examine how we take feedback/input...particularly criticism. If we chaff, bristle, or get offended by criticism or negative feedback, that's a good indication we're not very teachable...as well as a bit insecure.

- *How teachable are you?*
- *How do you handle feedback/input and criticism? Do you seek out feedback as a regular practice?*

To tie all this back to Micah 6:8, humility, or being humble, is what will lead us to being good, just, merciful/kind. I'll say it again, we will not make any progress in the spiritual life, the life of faith, Kingdom life, without humility. It is the prerequisite. Historically, the spiritual disciplines (prayer, worship, study, service, etc.) practiced individually and collectively are designed to cultivate humility in us. From there we can grow in virtue and be able to receive all the good God has for us. Additionally, to grow in humility takes a fair amount of self-reflection and self-examination...with God. This looks like paying attention to our inner feelings and attitudes towards others, and reflecting on our interactions and reactions with the people in our lives...with God. As we do so, we trust that the Holy Spirit will make us aware of what we need to know about ourselves, so we can see ourselves accurately, and so we can be guided in a course correction (in behavior, attitude, or relationships) that we need.

- *What form does self reflection/examination take in your life? How do you involve God in the process?*

As I've been saying throughout this series, God is the source and standard...of goodness, of justice, or mercy...and also of humility. Have you ever considered that? God is humble. When people think of the attributes and characteristics of God, I wonder if humble/humility makes the list. But think about it: Jesus is the clearest representation/revelation of God...and Jesus washed feet and willingly went to the cross. (Think back to the Philippians 2 passage above.) Consider also the word “*hesed*” that we looked at last week. Willing to stick with us even when we fail Him again, and again, and again. Grace, mercy, compassion, forgiveness...LOVE...these all come from a place of humility. We are to be humble, because God is humble and we are meant to be like God.

So how does humility connect to Good Politics? Jesus rightly identified it (see the Luke 22 passage above)...leaders tend to “lord it over”. A big part of politics is about the distribution of power. Bad politics is heavy-handed, and tends toward misuse/abuse of power, because it generally comes from a place of pride, arrogance, ego (which are actually indicators of fear, insecurity, anxiety). Good Politics, and good leadership, comes from a place of humility. It’s about serving others, not being over people. Also, please remember, “politics” and power dynamics are at play in any/all relationships, thus humility is always in order. Good Politics seeks the good of the other(s), not just the self or the in-group. Jesus is the example of Good Politics as He did not come to dominate but to serve. Leaders (be they in government, business, education, families, churches, etc.) need to remember that. But Christian, of all people, who are by definition followers of Jesus, need to resemble and emulate Him...and be called into account when we don’t.

- *How do we grow in humility? How do we learn to see ourselves rightly? What practices/habits do you do in order to cultivate humility in your life?*

P.S...As we wrap up this series, here’s a little bonus for you. Below are links to 2 different podcasts that you might find interesting, and fit the idea/heart of Good Politics.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/cats-and-dogs/id1289898626?i=1000670069499>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/why-is-everyone-so-anxious-with-steve-cuss/id1580807177?i=1000669920820>

Soul Training Exercise ~ Seek Feedback

The invitation this week is to seek out some good, honest feedback from people you trust, (and here’s the crucial part) who are willing to tell you what you need to hear...not just what they think you want to hear. Do you have such people in your life?

With the feedback/input they give you, take some time to sit with Jesus and reflect on it. Notice your reaction to the feedback. Do you get defensive or even angry? How does the feedback match with your assessment of yourself? What new insight does it offer you? But, again, the bigger issue is how you respond to something that might be hard to hear?

Here are some questions you can have people answer about you...though feel free to change or add to these...

1. Name one thing I do well without putting any effort into it.
2. What 3 words would you use to describe me?
3. Name one area of my life where you see room for improvement. Where can I be better?
4. If you were put in charge of the world’s resources, what would you assign me to do?