



The Life of Humility

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It had been a long day on Capitol Hill for Senator John Stennis. He was looking forward to a bit of relaxation when he got home. After parking the car, he began to walk toward his front door. Then it happened. Two people came out of the darkness, robbed him, and shot him twice. News of the shooting of Senator Stennis, the Chairman of the powerful Armed Forces Committee, shocked Washington and the nation. For nearly seven hours, the senator was on the operating table at Walter Reed Hospital. Less than two hours later, another politician was driving home when he heard about the shooting. He turned his car around and drove directly to the hospital.

In the hospital, he noticed that the staff was swamped and could not keep up with the incoming calls about the senator's condition. He spotted an unattended switchboard, sat down, and voluntarily went to work. He continued taking calls until daylight. Sometime during that next day, he stood up, stretched, put on his overcoat, and just before leaving, he introduced himself quietly to the other operator, "I'm Mark Hatfield. Happy to help out." Then Senator Mark Hatfield unobtrusively walked out. The press could hardly handle that story. There seemed to be no way for a conservative republican to give a liberal democrat a tip of the hat, let alone spend hours doing a menial task and be "Happy to help out." (Knofel Stanton, *Heaven Bound Living*, Standard, 1989, p. 35.)

Well, the definition of humility is, "the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, or rank" [*dictionary.com unabridged (v 1.1) based on the random house unabridged dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2006*] The synonyms of humility are lowliness, meekness and submissiveness while the antonym is pride.

We can talk about humility and what it looks like or we can find ways to truly live out a life of humility. Sometimes we can put a picture to humility or we can reflect what it may feel like and look like.

William Temple wrote in his book, "*Christ in His Church*" about what humility means. **"Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself one way or the other at all."** Today, we look at humility in how we live within community and in one's personal life.

The passage from James lifts up how the faithful are to live. He writes to the Jewish people of the twelve tribes who are displaced from Jerusalem and live in foreign lands as refugees. The writing he shares with them can just as well be the writings he sends to you and me today.

James writes to the faithful about how one lives their life and their faith. However, in more practical terms, he speaks plainly about what is the most constructive way to live a life of humility.

When he writes in verse 13 **¹³Who is wise and understanding among you?** He is questioning whether a person has wisdom that is God centered rather than a personal wisdom. The question is asked of the faithful as a matter of conviction and conscience. He then proclaims to **show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.** Again, he is stating that a person shows and works within their life to be gentle. With God's wisdom comes humility.

James gets right to the heart of the matter as to what exists in a person's life and within a community. He writes **¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.** For where there is "bitter envy," "selfish ambition," one must not be of arrogant personality and of insincere words. He even speaks to what happens with these active behaviors when unleashed within a body of believers. **¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.**

James makes it known that these behaviors are not from a godly wisdom but from an evil presence. He writes, **¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.** A person of lowliness, meekness, and peace making reflects a life of humility.

Now, James returns to the disputes and conflicts that permeate the community. He puts it right out there for a believer to answer the why of **¹those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²you want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.**

James wonders as to what is going on in a person's life when entangled in conflict and disputes. These writings are disturbing to us because in many ways they reflect on what has gone on within this body of faith.

Yet, James directs them and us to be someone else as we live a life of humility. He writes **⁷Submit yourselves therefore to god. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.** When a person of faith submits to God then the faithful, you and I, draw nearer and nearer to a life of mercy and humility.

Michael Patrick Lynch wrote an article back in June of 2017 in the Chronicle of Higher Education called *Teaching Humility in an Age of Arrogance*. He wrote this about our society in America today. "Humility" isn't a word that most academics — or Americans — identify with. Indeed, if there is a single attitude most closely associated with our culture, it's the opposite of humility. The defining trait of the age seems to be arrogance..." This comes from the academia arena. Yet, as Christians today, who is influencing our lives today? Is it political and cultural mores or is it the Lord and Savior's embodiment of love?

Jesus led a life of love and humility. Yet, he had to deal with his disciples then and us today when they and we were more concerned about who was and is the greatest among them. **33Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?"** Here was a time when the disciples should have learned something about compassion and humility from the Savior. **34But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35He sat down, called the twelve,** this is a come to Jesus moment. **And he said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."** Rather than be the greatest they needed to be the meek and lowly in spirit and in life.

Jesus **36Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."** A child was placed in their midst to state the truth about humility and meekness as well as hospitality. We must live a life that is innocent, open and full of grace. When that is achieved then one is in tune with the Savior who is the servant of all and the lord who welcomes all into his presence.

Friends, you and I must look carefully at how we go about our lives. I have said to many a person in my ministry that "One must self-monitor how one comes across to others." Someone once said **cultivate humility and a passion for praise if you want to grow in grace.** Cultivate humility. The lord shows us humility so our lives emulate him in this way of life. Otherwise, our lives will become a wreck in relationships because of stubbornness, arrogance, and pride.

As it says in Proverbs 16:18-19 (NRSV) **Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.** In the Living Bible, verse 19 reads, **better poor and humble than proud and rich.** In the modern idiom, "Pride comes before the fall."

My dear sisters and brothers, may we expand the ways of Christ by living in peace, gentleness, willingly to yield to others, full of mercy and good fruits. All these are characteristic of what it means to be humble and alive in God's love. The life we live needs to be without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. When we embody humility, we gain a harvest of righteousness that is sown in peace for those who make peace.

So Jesus teaches us to be servants to others just as he is a servant for his disciples, to you and me. He also teaches us to be loving, merciful, grace filled and most of all humble. So as we experience Christ in our lives let's move forward in our personal lives and in the life of this congregation with sincere welcome and humility. God gives us the wisdom. God loves us. Christ is showing

us how to be faithful servants in the world. Most of all he teaching us to be humble. And humble in a world that is full of hostility, arrogance and pride.
God loves us. God loves me. And I love you.
May it be so for us. Amen.

Supporting Scriptures:

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8 (NRSV)

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

James 4:1 (NRSV)

¹Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Mark 9:30-37 (NRSV)

³⁰They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, **“The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”** ³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, **“What were you arguing about on the way?”** ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, **“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”** ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷**“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”**