

The Quest for Character: Humility

Let's turn together to 1 Peter 5. This morning we are wrapping up our series called *The Quest for Character*. Next week we will be starting a series in the book of Joshua.

Talking about quests, Rafael Lozano is a man on a quest. Lozano, who legally changed his name to Winter, has made it his goal to drink a cup of coffee from every Starbucks in the world. He began his quest in 1997 and as of last year he has visited over 14,000 Starbucks, driven over a half million miles (that doesn't count the miles he's flown), and spent over \$150,000 on coffee.

I enjoy Starbucks and I admire Winter's determination, but if I ever have the chance to meet him, maybe have a cup of Starbucks with him, the question I'd like to ask him is *why*? Why is he spending all this time and money to do this? What motivates him? I get *what* he's doing, I don't get *why* he's doing it. With most big endeavors, it's not enough to know what we're doing, we need to know why we're doing it.

The character trait we're finishing up with in our Quest for Character is humility. It's interesting to me that when the Bible encourages us to seek humility most of the time it also gives us a reason *why*. The Bible doesn't just tell us be humble, it gives us really good reasons *why* we should be humble.

I think one of the reasons the Bible tells us why we should be humble is because humility goes against the grain. The definition of humility carries the idea of being lowly, of lowering ourselves, and that just goes against the grain. We are born with a built-in desire to promote ourselves and our interests above all others. I want that toy. Mom, why is Billy's slice of pie bigger than mine? Do you love him more than me? Our hearts and desires and instincts all revolve around ourselves. Like the old Beatles song says, All through' the day I me mine, I me mine, I me mine. All through' the night I me mine.

Then the Bible comes along and says we should purposely lower ourselves. Take the lower seat (meaning the seat with less honor) and let someone else take the seat with more prestige. Instead of seeking the limelight, we should seek the shadows of secrecy when we do good. We should advocate for other people's interests not just our own, we should rejoice, and not resent, other people's success.

Honestly, it'd be easier to drink coffee in every Starbucks in the world! Humility doesn't come easy or naturally. Jesus says we have to die to ourselves and dying to our pride is a big part of that. So when it comes to humility, God not only tells us *what* He tells us *why*. And 1 Peter 5 is a great example of this.

1 Peter 5:5-7

Notice that our humility is to go in two directions: horizontal and vertical – towards people and towards God. Peter's keeping it real here – if we say we're humble before God but that humility doesn't work itself out towards people, then we're not being real. Humble hearts will be humble in all directions.

In these verses Peter lays out three massive whys. Why a quest for humility? Three reasons why:

1. Humility opens us to receive God's grace

...for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. (vs 5)

God is so full of grace! He loves to give undeserved love and compassion and mercy and kindness! The problem of grace isn't on God's side – it's on our side. Pride refuses and blocks God's grace, humility opens us to receive God's grace. Jesus said without humility we will never even set foot in the kingdom of God.

“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 18:3

We aren't saved by humility, we are saved by grace, but it takes humility to open us to grace. It takes humility to get us to the point where we admit there's something wrong with us that we can't fix. To recognize we're not OK with God and there's nothing we can do to make it right. Jesus came to fix what we can't fix and bridge the chasm between God and us that we never could, and he did that by dying on the cross for our sins. That's grace!

But it takes humility to confess we are sinners. It takes humility to bow our knee and pray, “Lord have mercy on me, a sinner. Jesus come into my life and cleanse me, fix me, and reconcile me back to God. I can't do it, but I believe you can. Be my Savior.” A simple prayer, a simple plea, but pride will never do it. Humility opens us to God's amazing ocean of grace beginning with free and full salvation!

But becoming a Christian doesn't end our quest for humility – it's just the beginning. Peter isn't writing to unbelievers, he's writing to believers. God is for us, but He's fiercely opposed to the pride in us. The more pride in us, the more we experience the drag of God's opposition on our lives. I'm not talking about whether life is easy or hard. I'm not talking about trials or lack of trials. There are proud people for whom success seems to come easy and things go smoothly. And there are humble people who seem to have to fight for every inch and things often don't go the way they hoped.

What I've observed in humble people is that even when things are going wrong, even when things are really hard, even when they're barely hanging on for dear life, there's a centeredness in them that comes from their relationship with Jesus. God's gentle grace is at work in them and they know a richer fellowship with Jesus even in the hardship or struggle and that's worth more than anything in the world. Their relationships with people often go better too because their humility is good ground for healthy friendships. Their relationships go deeper because humility enables them to share more honestly as they're not consumed with protecting their image (pride). God's grace makes their lives fuller and more fruitful. Even if at times it's a tough slog.

On the other end of the spectrum I've observed – and experienced in my own life – pride makes things go hard even when they're going easy. Outward success can hide inward barrenness. Having a lot of things and making a lot of money can be a curse when relationships in the home and with friends are strained or non-existent. Because pride centers us on us, it's really hard on relationships and often leads to a pattern of conflicts and broken relationships. It's all pride can do to maintain superficial friendships. God's opposition to pride makes their lives empty and exhausting.

Let's be careful not to reduce this to a formula or try to judge whether someone else is humble or proud. God wants us to examine our own hearts and allow His Spirit to work on us. Lord, are there areas in my life that are meeting resistance because of pride in my life? Are there relationships that are suffering because of my pride? How can I clothe myself in humility towards others and towards You?

And why should we do this? Because humility opens us to receive God's grace. And there's nothing better than that! The second why Peter gives is...

2. Humility is the surprising path to greatness

⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...*

This principle of going up by going down is a consistent theme throughout scripture.

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. Proverbs 18:12

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matt. 23:12

While we were with our grandkids a couple weeks ago we watched a lot of kids shows with them and one show that we watched was the movie *Cars* and in it there's a scene where Lightning McQueen is on a dirt course and keeps wiping out on the turn and old Doc Hudson gives him some counter-intuitive advice: *I'll put it simple: if you're going hard enough left, you'll find yourself turning right.*

Lightning McQueen responds sarcastically, *"Oh, right. That makes perfect sense. Turn right to go left. Yes, thank you! Or should I say No, thank you, because in Opposite World, maybe that really means thank you."*

We kinda live in Opposite World. God says if you want to go up, go down. Go lower and God will lift you up. Be less about yourself and you will make more of yourself.

Think about the *why* Peter is suggesting: we will be exalted if we humble ourselves. The reward is being exalted by God and we should want that. The logical implication is we should want to be exalted. We should want to be honored, to be great. Humility isn't having no ambitions or goals, it isn't being a doormat or refusing to advocate for ourselves. Humility doesn't mean we can't have opinions or express them boldly. Humility isn't being a wall-flower or weak or wimpy.

Humility is about being real about who we are – having an accurate assessment of ourselves. And not being wrapped up in ourselves. Jesus said in Matt 11 that the Father had committed all things to him – total power and authority – and then invites all who are weary and burdened to come to him for, he said, "I am gentle and humble in heart." Jesus' response to power was humility.

Humility doesn't mean we don't want to live a great life. It's healthy to want to live a full and productive life. To make a difference. To have good friends and be loved. It's healthy to want to be exalted (not humiliated or ashamed). Peter tells us so. Jesus tells us so. If you want to be exalted, turn hard into lowering yourself. If you want to be great turn hard into humility.

Be less about yourself and you will make more of yourself.

3. Humility is the road to freedom from anxiety

The last why Peter mentions isn't something we expect. Read verses 6 and 7 again.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

We don't normally think of humility and anxiety as being connected but verse 7 isn't a new sentence, it's a subordinate clause. One leads to the other, like saying, "take good care of yourself, eating healthy" or "drive carefully, not texting while driving". Humble yourselves...casting your anxieties on him. Casting our cares on God is an expression of humility.

If we struggle with anxiety, we need to know that at least a part of it has roots in pride. It might be that we want to control things and when we can't we get anxious. Humility helps us recognize we don't control things. God does. Pride says if you can't control things, at least grip them tight with worry. Humility says I don't control things but I am trusting the One who does. I will cast my cares on Him, knowing that He cares for me.

Humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God means recognizing God's hand is mighty, and that at the right time, He will lift me up. Deeply rooted in anxiety is dread of being ashamed, embarrassed, damaged, undone. Humility trusts God is mighty and will be faithful and He will not let me be ashamed – He will in due season lift me up. So when this dread creeps up on me, I can throw it on God and let Him carry it.

For those who struggle with anxiety, this casting of our cares will probably be something we need to do over and over again, maybe even many times a day. But there's sweet encouragement in this passage for our souls: God cares for us. He's got this, and He's got us. He's got you. And He's got your situation.

What anxiety is gripping your heart this morning? Are you ready to cast it on the Lord?

Let's stand together and go to God.