

The Road to Spiritual Maturity: Part II
Swallow your pride, it's non-fattening!
Zephaniah 3:11-12; Philippians 2:3-11
April 25, 2010

As I thought about this message this past week, a funny song from 1980 by Mac Davis came to mind:

Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
when you're perfect in every way.
I can't wait to look in the mirror
'cause I get better lookin' each day.
To know me is to love me
I must be a heckuva man.
Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
but I'm doing the best that I can.

Songs like that amuse the American public partly because of their satirical nature; but, maybe more truthfully it's because we all know someone who actually thinks that way of themselves. They are kind of like business mogul, Ted Turner, who is quoted as saying, "If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect."

If you haven't guessed, our topic for today on the road to spiritual maturity is *humility*. The Philippians passage we read today reminds us that not only should we be striving to have the mind of Christ, but that mindset is characterized by humility.

Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

We're told in the scriptures that humility leads to wisdom and is a measure of our ability to trust and have faith in the Lord; therefore, it dovetails quite nicely with the teaching from last week on the spiritual discipline of tithing. When we are humble before the Lord, we are more willing to confess that we cannot know all that there is to know, and we are more willing to be obedient – especially when that obedience is based in trust.

In his book, Better Together, Rick Warren says, "We are able to be humble when we know who we are." I want to tell you this morning exactly who you are: You are the beloved of God – the redeemed. This knowledge comes to you as a gift from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us know how important we are to God and helps us receive assurance of the true depth of God's

love for us. When we understand who we are in relationship to God, then we are more willing to place our trust in Him.

Notice that all of this has to do with cultivating humility in yourself and discerning who *you* are. It has nothing to do with you deciding someone else isn't humble enough – that would be nothing more than an exhibition of pride on your part.

As we cultivate humility as maturing Christians, we have more faith and less pride. Why? Because as we come to embrace the concept of grace, we accept that nothing *we* have done has caused God to love us so deeply and so sacrificially. Therefore, there is nothing for us to brag about. Except... with the Apostle Paul we can say, *“As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified.”* (Gal 6:14)

With Paul, when we put aside our own pride and adopt a spirit of humility, our interest in the world and what it thinks of us is crucified. We only care who we are in relationship to Christ.

Christ knew His true identity in relationship to His Father and those he came to serve. When we gain the mind of Christ, we know our true identities and can begin to live lives of authenticity, instead of lives based on pretense and masks as we try to impress the worldly people around us.

Humility is a mark of a maturing Christian. Even if it only causes us to gain control over our tongues, as James teaches.

However, like anything else, even humility can be perverted. The face of what should be a character attribute which compels us to love God, others, and ourselves with an honest, agape love has been distorted these days. A way that false humility lives in the church is in denying one's own giftedness. I've spoken with many people over the years in regards to serving in one way or another. And I've heard more times than not, “You need to go talk to so-and-so; they're really talented. I can't do that...I don't have any gifts.” For many people, this sounds like a humble person—someone not wanting to toot their own horn. Unfortunately, this does *not* reflect humility. It represents unbelief and unfaithfulness. Actually, not serving in the church because you feel ill-equipped is not just based in unbelief and unfaithfulness, but also in pride.

Every person in this church is gifted in some way or another. I know this because scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit has gifted *every* believer in some way. Your gift is not for your own benefit, but for the benefit of the church and the Kingdom of God. So to not serve when called upon, is to profess the scriptures to be false. It is to be unfaithful in responding to God's call on your life as He calls you to help build up the church. And it's an expression of pridefulness, in that you would rather worry about what others might say about you instead of being faithful to

God. Remember, even though you may not *feel* gifted, God is fully aware of who you are and is fully aware of what your abilities are when He calls you. You are not a surprise to Him in any way.

In His spiritual maturity, Jesus recognized the source of *His* spiritual power and giftedness as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also your source of power and giftedness. So, trust not in yourselves and your own understanding; but humble yourself and trust only in the Lord.

As I close this morning, I want to lift up what can happen when you allow the Holy Spirit to cultivate a spirit of humility in your life. You will:

- Think of others as more important than yourself. You will take yourself less seriously and be willing to listen to the viewpoints of others.
- You will quit judging others. The truth is this: you are fallen and therefore your judgment of others is flawed. Remember, in the way you judge others, with that same standard will you be judged. Personally, I would rather be judged by God's perfect wisdom, than with my own flawed fallen understanding.
- You will gain a compassionate heart.
- Humility leads to a willingness to act sacrificially on behalf of others. You will be more willing to offer up your time and your money for causes beyond your own household.
- Humility leads to a thankful spirit – understanding that you don't deserve all of the blessings you have from God.
- Humility leads to a willingness to accept some tragedy in life. While none of us likes tragedy, humility causes me to realize that I am no more special than any other person, therefore I am not any less deserving of tragedy.
- Humility leads to an ability to respond to the call from Christ, "Follow me," knowing that your way is not better than the way He has for you.

Spiritual maturity is a process of becoming more obedient to God. It's making the choice to live by God's viewpoint, rather than your viewpoint.

And know this good news: the process of growing in spiritual maturity comes by grace. It is God who enables you to live in ways that you have not before. So, ask God to humble your heart. If you do, you will find that you will be able fulfill the command that Christ has given you to love others even as He has loved you.