

The Path to Humility

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One thing we can be sure of is that we all need to work on humility. It is an amazing thing to know that whoever reads these words, in varying degrees, is prideful. So how do we grow in humility? What is the path from pride to humility?

Humility comes from seeing God's bigness and our badness

In order to work on it we should know what it is. I've heard some define humility as rightly responding to who God is. I think this is a good start but we need to go further. We also need to rightly know who we are. These go together of course, because we cannot rightly know ourselves until we come to some biblical understanding of who God is. I like the answer given in the New City Catechism to the question "What is God?"

"God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice, and truth. Nothing happens except through him and by his will."

There has never been time that God could not say "I am" and in saying it he could say that "I am, perfectly holy, good, just, and loving." Therefore he is worthy of all worship.

Man on the other hand, while created with dignity and upright, fell in sin. Rebellious against God, we have earned wrath, separation, and ruin. You might say when you see God's bigness and see your badness then you may be truly humbled.

John Newton got it right in his hymn, Great God from Thee
Great God from Thee there's nought concealed,
Thou seest my inward frame
To Thee I always stand revealed,
Exactly as I am

Since I can hardly therefore bear,
What in myself I see
How vile and dark must I appear
Most holy God to Thee?

Humility comes from fasting from self

How do we get there? C.S. Lewis helpfully wrote in *Mere Christianity* that, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” The tendency to be preoccupied with ourselves is a sure sign of pride. A heart inverted upon itself is sure to cultivate suffocating pride. It expresses itself in a fixation on ourselves. This selfishness is expressed in terms of worry, anxiety, thin skin, gossip, slander, lying, being afraid of what others think of you, laziness, being a workaholic, harshness, and a relentless clinging to your rights (just to name a few). In short it is a preoccupation with gratifying the flesh. Lewis is encouraging humility by throwing away the broken compass that always leads us inward to the heart, the den of self.

But is this all? Do I just need to start thinking of myself less? This is a good start, but, I think there is more.

Humility comes not just from fasting from self but feasting on Christ

Remember the gospel. God, being rich and mercy, has sent Christ to be the sin-bearing, life-giving Savior. By his doing and dying we are saved from God’s wrath and given new life as adopted children (Eph. 1: 3-14; 2:1-10).

The Bible, and particularly the gospel, then gives us the proper perspective on God and us. When we see who God is and who we are then we are properly humbled before him.

Thus though a sinner, I am safe,
He pleads before the throne
His life and death in my behalf,
And calls my sins His own (Great God from Thee)

When the Apostle Paul wants to unfasten the Philippians’ kung-fu grip upon the mirror where they are gazing upon themselves, he writes,
“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

Pretty simple verse. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Got it. But how do I learn this humility?

In short Paul says, feast on Christ. In the following verses he backs up the semi-truck of Christ’s infinite merit and dumps it on the front porch of the Philippian church. There it is brothers and sisters.

When he shows us the depths of Christ's humble service (Phil. 2:6-8) he quickly shows us that no one could ever give up more to serve more unworthy people. We are the ones who have been served therefore we are to likewise serve in this humility.

When we sit in the shadow of the cross we learn that nothing is beneath us in terms of service. We have been served by Christ in this glorious way—he laid down his life for us! We then need to walk in humility, which is, at its core, what it means to follow Jesus.

If you want to learn humility, by all means, get your pride crushed by the Law of God. Do it. Do it often. When you see God as you ought then you will see yourself as you ought. This will certainly help with thinking of yourself less. But, please, don't stop there, keep going. Treasure Christ. Delight in his doing and dying for you. Feast on Christ as you fast from self.