

Growing In Humility

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth in humility and gentleness, rather than just acquiring knowledge. It highlights the need to learn from Jesus' humility and to evaluate our growth based on our attitude towards others. The speaker uses examples from Paul's life to illustrate the journey of deepening humility and the significance of recognizing God's presence in our lives.

Scripture: Matthew 11:29, Philippians 2:5, 1 Corinthians 15:9, Ephesians 3:8, 1 Timothy 1:15, Zephaniah 2:3, Philippians 2:3

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Humility and Gentleness"

Description

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Transcript

So I would like to continue along the same line that Tyler and Paul have spoken. When we come to December, which is the end of the year, there's nothing special about the month except that we remember that the whole year has gone by and it's God who ordained that the earth should go around the sun in 12 months and that is the time when our children move from one class to another and we don't want any of our children to fail, sit in the same class. We are really eager that all our children should not only be promoted but do well.

So it's also a good time for us to evaluate ourselves once a year at least to see whether we've been promoted, to see whether we have grown. That's what I mean by promotion to the next class and for us growth is not on the basis of knowledge. Very often I've found many Christians, they assess their growth by increase in Bible knowledge.

You know, you come to a church like this where you hear so many amazing truths and then you listen to messages online. We can grow tremendously in knowledge, but knowledge is not the test of our spiritual growth. Very important for us to remind ourselves and to have no illusion that increase in knowledge means we have become more spiritual.

It just means we are more clever which has no value in God's kingdom. So what did Jesus tell us to learn from him? That is the test of spiritual growth. Matthew 11 and verse 29.

There are two things particularly that Jesus told us to learn from him and so if this is the area in which we have to get our education, these are the two areas where we need to evaluate ourselves whether we got a promotion to the next class at the end of the year. He said in Matthew 29, take my yoke upon you and learn from me. That's the education word, learn.

What shall I learn? Gentleness and humility. Those are the areas where I know whether I have grown spiritually. Gentleness at home, especially in our speech, gentleness in our actions, and humility in our conduct and behavior, in our place of work, with our neighbors, with the people we encounter in daily life, and our attitude to difficult people on the road or elsewhere.

We have ample opportunity to discover whether we are growing in humility. So last Sunday I mentioned about the fear of the Lord and humility and I spoke a lot about the fear of the Lord. I thought I should share a little bit about humility this time.

In Philippians in chapter 2, this is one place where we are told to have the same attitude that Jesus had, and it's a challenge, you know. We're never asked to increase in Bible knowledge, because first of all in the first century nobody had a Bible. So how could you increase in Bible knowledge? There's no way to sit and study the Bible.

Very few Bibles existed handwritten, and mostly in the synagogues or maybe a few people had a copy. So there was no way to study and compare verses and all that. But they had heard about Jesus from the apostles, and that teaching had come down.

And so the exhortation is, Philippians 2.5, have the same attitude in yourself which was in Christ Jesus. And of course there are many characteristics in Christ's life, but particularly his humility. You've often heard me say the three secrets of the Christian life are humility, humility, humility.

And it's here. Have this attitude in yourself which is in Christ Jesus. Number one, that though he was God, he was willing to become a man.

Verse six, and as if that was not humility enough, as a man he became a slave. That's going further down. That's why he washed people's feet.

It's the job that slaves did. And as if that was the bottom, no, he still went further down and was crucified like a criminal. That's even lower than a slave.

So from God he became man, man he became a slave, and slave he became like a criminal, even though he was not a criminal. So it is humility, humility, humility. So that's why I say those are the three secrets of the Christian life.

And have this attitude in you. He went down, down, down. So my spiritual growth is evaluated in exactly the opposite way the world thinks.

The world thinks of going up and up and up in business or in your profession or from grade two to grade three to grade four to grade five, always going up. But in the Christian life, growth is the other way down. God's greatest blessings are on the lowest shelf, not on the top shelf.

And we don't get God's greatest blessings because we're always trying to look for somewhere up there when the blessings are down below. And we see a great example in the life of Paul. In chapter three, he says, you know, he's described here what spiritual growth is, and then he says in Philippians chapter three, verse 12, I have not yet obtained it.

What is it he has not obtained? He has not attained to the likeness of Christ in humility. He says, I'm not perfect. Perfect in what? I'm not perfect in humility yet.

So what do I do? Sit back and wait? No, I press on. He was really seeing to press on that downward path of learning gentleness and humility from Christ. And he wants to lay hold of it.

He says, that's why Christ laid hold of me. Christ laid hold of me that I might be completely humble like him. And I want to lay hold of that.

But if you don't have a passion for it, you'll never get it. And God won't show you the areas in your life where you are conceited and proud and hard. I think gentleness and humility go together.

And when he looked, because Paul had this passion, and he wrote Philippians probably when he was around 60 years old, and he was only six, seven years before he was executed, and he was still saying, I'm pressing on. He'd already been converted about 25, 30 years, and he's pressing on. So you see an example of the growth in his humility in three statements he makes.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, he says in verse 9, 1 Corinthians was written when Paul was around, let's say, 55 years old. And when he was 55, he'd already been converted about for 25 years. He says in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 9, I am the least of the apostles.

Now a lot of people say I am the least and all in an artificial humility. But remember, Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is inspired scripture.

He dare not tell a lie. And from deep conviction in the presence of God, he says when I compare myself with all the apostles, I'm the last, even though he had planted more churches than probably any of the others. And had written more scripture than any of the others, but he still thinks he's the least of the apostles.

Five years later, when he's around 60 years old, he writes in Ephesians in chapter 3. Remember, he was the least of the apostles. And now he says in Ephesians 3, 8, I am the very least of all the believers in the world. Which way is he going? From the least of the apostles to the very least of all the believers in the whole world.

Now, you know, a lot of people will say that today in an artificial humility. Oh, I'm just a small brother. I'm not so important.

It's all artificial humbug. But if a man can genuinely feel like that, the question is not whether you say this, it's a question of whether you feel like that deep down within. I look around in the church and I feel I'm the least of the Lord.

And then five years later, when he's 65, he saw what he said when he was 55 and 60. And now when he's 65, he writes 1 Timothy and says in 1 Timothy 1, 15, not just least of the apostles, not just least of all the saints. And you wonder, well, how much lower can he go? He says in 1 Timothy 1, 15, I am the chief of all

the sinners in the world.

I'm the greatest sinner in the whole world. Now, how in the world did he go that way? Now, we can read that and say, OK, I try to repeat those statements. It's empty, hollow.

He genuinely felt that. And the only way we can understand that is he was getting closer and closer and closer to God. The closer you get to Almighty God, you remember how Isaiah, when he saw the glory of God, he said, oh, I'm such a wretched man.

I'm a man of unclean lips. That's the mark of being in God's presence, a sense of awe in his holiness. I don't think we seek to recognize the presence of God.

For example, when we sing songs, you know, come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy praise. We just sang it today. Were you actually talking to Jesus? Oh, is it just a nice song, nice tune? We know the tune.

I've been often convicted times when I've sung and I've realized that, Lord Jesus, you said where two or three are gathered, my name, I'm in your midst, but I haven't recognized your presence here. I'm just singing a song. Does everybody listen? I sing it.

I know the tune. I don't even have to look at the words. I know it.

And I'm not actually singing to him, thou fount of every blessing. Tune my heart, Lord, to sing your grace. That's something we have to consciously remind ourselves when we sing hymns on Sundays.

Lord, ask yourself, check yourself, am I speaking to him? Now, there are some songs we just sing to each other, amazing grace, how great the sound and all that. There we're not speaking to him. We're just talking about each other.

But there are some songs we sing to him. Lord, thou art worthy. Do I actually recognize that I'm in the presence of the Lord, talking to him? So I'll conclude with one verse.

Habakkuk, I'm sorry, not Habakkuk, Zephaniah. Zephaniah chapter 2. I hope you all know where that is. I hope you read the book.

Zephaniah 2 and verse 3. It's an exhortation to all the humble people on the earth. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth. All humble people in the church, here's an exhortation for you.

Lower down in that verse. Seek for more humility. That's a great verse.

All humble people, seek for more humility. And in relation to one another, how shall we evaluate ourselves? Philippians chapter 2 again. It's not that I think that others are more spiritual than me.

That's not the test of humility. When Jesus said learn humility from him, Jesus did not imagine that Peter and John and Oliver were more spiritual than him. That's not humility.

Humility is not to look around at the church and say, well, everybody's more spiritual than me. That's an artificial humbug. Humility is, Philippians 2, 3, the last part, regard one another as more important, not more spiritual.

That would be artificial nonsense, but more important. That's what Jesus demonstrated when he washed people's feet. If you really consider others as more important, you'll be willing to do any lowly job for them, and you will not think that it's a great job you've done.

Amen.

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