

“Our Greatest Need: Humility”^{**2}

Series: *Killing Pride, Cultivating Humility*

Before sermon: Redeemed people...SING THE WORD (January - Jonah 2:8-9)

The stakes are high as we open God’s Word this morning. Last week we talked about our *greatest problem*, and this week it is our *greatest need*. Greatest? I don’t believe that is an overstatement. This morning, as we open our Bibles to Matthew 18, we have come to part two in our series, *Killing Pride, Cultivating Humility*. Let’s read.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:1-4

Back in the late 1800’s, a lady in London said to Pastor Charles Spurgeon, “Oh Sir, I pray for you every day that you may be kept humble!” Spurgeon observed that she was a fine looking woman and splendidly dressed. He replied, “Thank you very much; but you remind me of a failure in my duty. I have never prayed for you that you might be kept humble.” She responded, “Dear Sir, there is no need for such prayers, for I am not tempted to be proud.” Spurgeon later observed wryly, “How proud she was to have obtained such a delusion.”³

Last week, as we began our series, we reflected on three guarantees in James 4:6.

Guarantee #1: If I am proud, God is against me.

James 4:6 says, “God *opposes* the proud.” In point of fact, God *hates* pride. We’re told in Proverbs 6:16-17, “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood...”

Charles Bridges in his commentary on Proverbs says, “Pride lifts up the heart against God and **contends for the supremacy with Him**. How unseemly moreover is this sin? A creature so utterly dependent and so fearfully guilty, yet proud in heart.”

Guarantee #2: If I am proud, I will not receive grace.

God is so gracious. He loves to give needy people what they do not deserve. But which needy people? James 4:6 makes it clear that He gives grace *to the humble*. The proud do not receive grace. Frankly, they don’t think they need grace. This means that when it comes to dealing with the problems of life, the proud are on their own.

Guarantee #3: If I am proud, I need to humble myself.

Since God opposes the proud, *we need humility*. Indeed, if pride is our biggest problem (and I think we can make a good case that it is), then humility is our greatest need. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:10).”

Yet this raises some important questions for us. What is humility? How do you obtain it? How do you keep it? Thankfully, the Lord answers these important questions for us in His Word, and we’re going to look for those answers this morning.

We are committed to expositional preaching at WBC. Typically that means we work through passages and books in the Bible, seeking to expose what the authors said and how what they said applies to us. In this series we seeking to exposit what the Bible

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

² For a previous development of this important topic, please see the series at WBC in 2006.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 30, p. 141.

says about two topics, pride and humility, and to do so we're exploring not one text but many texts.

So here we go. If we are going to cultivate humility, the Scriptures make it clear that we must understand and get serious about three issues. They are the *root* of humility, the *fruit* of humility, and the *pursuit* of humility.

I. Get serious about the root of humility.

Humility is fundamental to a God-pleasing life, as the prophet Micah emphasized over seven centuries before Christ. Listen to Micah 6:8, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and **to walk humbly with your God.**"⁴

The concept of humility in the Old Testament is communicated by words that in essence mean, "*to bow low*," "*to crouch down*." That's what God wants His people to do in their hearts, to see themselves as servants, His servants.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for humble (*tapeinos*) basically means "*to be low*" (TDNT). We find this definition in the Greek-English lexicon: "of low position, poor, lowly, undistinguished, of no account." It's worth noting that for the ancient Greeks humility was NOT a commendable quality. It was a negative term. But God's Word elevates it and holds it up as something desirable and needed.

Let's address four root issues concerning humility.

A. Humility is not natural. To the contrary, pride is natural. Thinking of yourself first is natural. Getting offended when someone slights you is natural. But taking a low position, a servant's position, is not natural. Indeed, in Romans 7 Paul described his own internal battle by saying he did NOT do the good he knew he should do but often did the self-centered evil he knew he should NOT do. He concluded, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death (Romans 7:24)?"

Please know that if you do what comes naturally it will NOT be to exhibit humility. When I do what comes naturally, I do not help my wife with the dishes. I do not put down my phone and listen well when my children are talking. I do not spend time in fervent prayer for my church family. I do those things only when I (by the grace of God) do the *unnatural* thing and humble myself.

B. Humility is not optional. Listen to what God says about humility in Isaiah 66:1-2, "This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' declares the LORD. 'This is the one I esteem: **he who is humble** and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.'"

Who does God esteem? Not the person with the most degrees and money and worldly influence. Not the self-confident mover and shaker. Not the million dollar athlete. Not the powerful business executive. Not the teen who drives the most expensive car to school. It's not the one who is great in the world's eyes. It's the person who is *humble*. Pastor Brad Bigne elaborates, "What captures His attention? Humility. Humility is what captures God's attention. Nothing escapes God's notice. Not a thing. But one thing captures His attention. He's aware of all things – He's omniscient, and yet He's revealed here in this passage as searching for one thing. 'To this one I will look – he who is humble and contrite.'"

Let me be more specific. Humility is a bedrock prerequisite for three experiences.

⁴ Most of the quotations in this message come from the NIV1984.

1. *It is a prerequisite to salvation.* That's what the psalmist acknowledged in Psalm 18:27, "You **save the humble** but bring low those whose eyes are haughty." God is a saving God. He delights in saving lost people. But which lost people does He save? The humble, and only the humble.

Jesus made that point perfectly clear by using this visual aid in one of His sermons. We read in Matthew 18:2-4, "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever **humbles himself like this child** is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'"

To enter God's kingdom there is no payment required, no credentials necessary, except this one. You must acknowledge you don't deserve to be there. You must see yourself as being powerless, weak, and helpless.

Jesus came to save sinners. It's why He went to the cross and became a bloody sacrifice. He came to reconcile the alienated back to God, to rescue the perishing, to save the lost. But to benefit from His saving work, you must admit that fact (and this is something a proud person will not do). You must admit that you are helplessly and hopelessly *lost*.

You must become like the man Jesus identified in Luke 18:13-14, when He said, "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"

So humility is a prerequisite to experiencing salvation. That's not all.

2. *It is a prerequisite to fruitful Christian living.* Show me a proud Christian and I'll show you a frustrated Christian (and no doubt a lot of other very frustrated people around him). And when a proud person puts his head on the pillow at night, he does so with a gnawing sense that God is very distant.

The opposite is true, however, for the humble. We are told in Psalm 25:9, "He **guides the humble** in what is right and teaches them his way." God is personally involved in the life of the humble person. He's not only near them but He *guides* them.

"The Lord is my shepherd," said David in the twenty-third Psalm. But proud people don't need a shepherd. They'd rather fend for themselves. It's the humble who know the joy of the Shepherd's guiding hand.

Again, what we're talking about is a foreign concept to the world. The natural man does not think this way, for it's foolishness to them (1 Corinthians 2:14). But this is Christianity 101. According to Jesus, the *way up* is the *way down*. Listen to the Savior's words in Matthew 23:11-12, "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and **whoever humbles himself** will be exalted."

So you can't be saved apart from humility. And you can't experience a fruitful Christian life either. Humility is perquisite for these experiences. Here's another.

3. *It is essential for unity in families, churches, workplaces, and teams.* The need for humility is constant and continual and in every facet of life.

Did you have any controversy in your home last week, or at work, or school? What caused it? Somewhere there was a dose of pride.

Someone didn't ask you what *you* thought about the menu, or grabbed the remote before you could get it, or didn't ask how you were feeling, or got more playing time than you did (or your child did). Or your spouse used your razor, and you said, "Umm, excuse me. What are you doing dear? That's mine." And thirty minutes later the argument ended with a slammed door.

We've all experienced it. Pride destroys families, churches, workplaces, and teams. And it happens all the time and in a multitude of ways.

But here's the good news. Humility brings blessing to families, churches, workplaces, and teams. No wonder Paul gives this exhortation to the church in Ephesians 4:2-3, "**Be completely humble** and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Note the connection between *humility* and *unity*. There can be no true unity without humility. But there can be with it.

"How do humble people treat each other?" you ask. Paul addresses that question in the following chapter of Ephesians. He says in Ephesians 5:21, "**Submit to one another** out of reverence for Christ." To *submit* means, "to place in rank under." When people submit to each other they put their personal interests **under** the interests of others.

Again, this is not natural. Pride is natural, and it's one of the main reasons so many families, churches, workplaces, and teams are fragmented.

We have propane gas logs in our basement. They're great in the winter. But they're also a potential hazard. Several years ago a professional suggested we buy a unit to detect the presence of carbon monoxide. You don't want carbon monoxide in your basement. It's a killer and you can't see it or smell it.

Dear friends, pride is like carbon monoxide. Most of the time we're not even aware of its presence. We tell ourselves that the problem is the way the other person is treating us, when the real problem is our pride.

Pride is destructive. It is. Let that sink in. Your pride is. So is the pride of those around you is. Lou Priolo explains why in his book, *The Complete Husband*:

"The sin of pride carries with it God's swiftest and most severe judgment. It blinds you to other sins in your life and hinders you from repenting of them. Pride is the "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" or the (AIDS) of the soul. When a person dies as a result of acquiring AIDS, he doesn't really die of AIDS rather, he dies of an AIDS-complicated illness like pneumonia, tuberculosis, or meningitis. Not unlike a cataract, the AIDS virus somehow blinds the eyes of its victim's bodily defense system. This prevents his auto immune system from seeing and consequently destroying those deadly viruses and bacteria that ultimately kill him. Like AIDS, pride blinds you not only to itself, but to every other sin tucked away in the recesses of your heart and life. It causes you to hate correction and reproof. It hides your sin from you, it justifies your sin, it excuses your sin, and it keeps you from repenting of your sin. It deceives you into thinking that you're spiritually well when, in fact, you have deadly cancer and are in desperate need."⁵

This raises another question. If pride is bad and humility is good, are we supposed to live in never-ending soul search? Some people do just that, and quite frankly their version of humility is not very pleasant to be around. Actually, they have misunderstood humility.

C. Humility is not mere introspection. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones explains, "I suggest that we cross the line from self-examination to introspection when, in a sense, we do nothing but examine ourselves, and when such **self-examination becomes the main and chief end in our life**. We are meant to examine ourselves periodically, but if we are always doing it, always, as it were, putting our soul on a plate and dissecting it, that is introspection. And if we are always talking to people about ourselves and our problems

⁵ *The Complete Husband*, Lou Priolo, p. 21-22

and troubles, and if we are forever going to them with that kind of frown upon our face and saying: I am in great difficulty – it probably means that we are all the time centered upon ourselves. That is introspection, and that in turn leads to the condition known as **morbidity**.”⁶

Think of the person who says, “Oh I’m no good at that [it could be sports, or cooking, or even praying in public]. I’ll pass and let somebody else do it.” Is that humility? No, it’s quite possibly just another expression of pride, for the person *wants* to be good and is preoccupied with self.

What then *is* humility? Rather than a definition, let’s talk about the perspective of humility, the orientation of it, its posture.

D. Humility is choosing to focus on God and others, not yourself. Should we search our souls? Yes, the Bible commands us to examine ourselves.⁷ But not endlessly! The purpose of self-examination is so we can get our eyes off of self and focus on loving God and others.

One of the times we tend to become self-focused is when we go through trials. When we’re hurting, we want everyone to know. Peter offers this counsel in 1 Peter 5:6-7, “**Humble yourselves**, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Last week we investigated James 4:6 and learned that our pride must go. But how, in practical terms, do we get rid of pride? James tells us in the following four verses by laying before us ten very pointed commands which we’ll put into five responsibilities. According to James 4:7-10, to get rid of pride I must do the following.

1. *Submit to God and resist the devil.* The Puritan pastor Charles Bridges said that pride is “contending for supremacy with God.” Here’s the opposite of that. *Submit to God.* If you want to mortify pride you must let God be God in your life and then resist the devil who is the prime contender for the supremacy of God.

It’s worth noting that the last words of another Puritan, Richard Baxter, modeled this submission: “Lord, what thou wilt, where thou wilt, and when thou wilt.”⁸

2. *Come near to God.* Proud people don’t need God. But when I take steps to come near to God I am saying, “I need You!” Coming near to God begins when we approach the cross and receive God’s Son as our Savior. But coming near to God is a choice we must make on a continual basis. We’ll talk about that more a little later.

3. *Wash my hands and purify my heart.* In other words, if you want to mortify pride you must get serious about getting rid of every manifestation of sin in your life, both in deed (your hands) and thought (your heart). You need to be cleaned up and that by the power of Christ!

George Whitefield, the eighteenth-century evangelist observed, “Every man by his own natural will hates God. But when he is turned to the Lord by evangelical repentance, then his will is changed; then his conscience, now hardened and benumbed, shall be quickened and weakened; then his hard heart shall be melted, and his unruly affections shall be crucified. Thus, by that repentance, the whole soul will be changed, he will now have new inclinations, new desires, and new habits.”⁹

4. *Grieve, mourn, and wail.* To *grieve* comes from *talaiporeo* which means “to be miserable.” It’s the response of a person who feels the weight of his sin and

⁶ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 17.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 13:5 “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...”

⁸ Richard Baxter, quoted in *James*, by Kent Hughes, p. 185.

⁹ George Whitefield, quoted in *James*, by John MacArthur, p. 210.

the judgment he deserves. To *mourn* is what a person does when he's lost a loved one. To *wail* is the intense activity of a mourner. But God's Word says those are the activities of a person seeking to mortify pride.

Someone told an old preacher that in one of his services a certain woman had gotten "joy in the Lord" (meaning she was converted). He wisely responded with this revealing question, "Did she ever get any sorrow?" He knew that to experience real joy one must first experience real sorrow for one's sin.¹⁰

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "There is a vital connection between soul-distress and sound doctrine. Sovereign grace is dear to those who have **groaned deeply** because they see what **grievous sinners** they are."¹¹

But groaning deeply over our sin (and especially our pride) is NOT natural. Francis Fuller explains why: "To repent is to accuse and condemn ourselves; to charge upon ourselves the desert of hell; to take part with God against ourselves, and to justify him in all that he does against us; to be ashamed of and confounded for our sins... **For we naturally love and think well of ourselves**, hide our deformities, lessen and excuse our faults, indulge ourselves in the things that please us, are mad upon our lusts, and follow them, though to our own destruction."¹²

And that's why a proud person must grieve, mourn, and wail. Enabled by divine grace, he must feel the seriousness of his sin and express his desire to turn from it.

Is it easy to repent? It is not. Our pride will fight against repentance every step of the way. How can I overcome it? By doing this.

5. *Humble myself before the Lord.* James actually gives us a beautiful promise in James 4:10, "**Humble yourselves** before the Lord, and he will lift you up." If I humble myself (make myself low), God will lift me up.

Augustine put it this way, "**God gives what He demands.**" He gives grace, sufficient grace, tailor-made grace. But only to the humble.

Allow me to offer a practical suggestion. Something simple, yet something with significant implications. *If you're physically able, make it a practice to get down on your knees on a regular basis.* I'm not talking about in public, but in private. When no one can see you but the One who matters.

The journey we're on starts right here. Get serious about the *root* of humility. Humble yourself before the Lord. But not just the *root*. Then comes the *fruit*.

II. Get serious about the fruit of humility.

What does humility look like? The Bible addresses this question in a very helpful way. It doesn't just give us propositions. It gives us a person. Listen to what Jesus Christ said about Himself in Matthew 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and **humble** in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

A. Christ was humble. If anyone had a right to NOT be humble, it was Him. We're talking about the Lord of the universe who prior to coming to earth received the worship of angels. But He left that (and so much more) and came to earth.

If you want to see a stunning picture of humility, start here. Look at the incarnation. The incarnation is the greatest display of humility this world had ever seen, exceeded only by what the Son of God did thirty-three years after He took on human

¹⁰ As told by Kent Hughes, *James*, p. 189.

¹¹ Charles Spurgeon, quoted in *James*, by John MacArthur, p. 211.

¹² Francis Fuller, quoted in *James*, by John MacArthur, p. 212.

flesh. As Philippians 2:8 explains, “And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself** and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

What God commands us to do is what He Himself has done. God Himself *humbled Himself*. This is what love looks like, dear friends. For God so loved the world that He humbled Himself, that He gave His Son, that He gave His life.¹³

B. To receive Christ is to receive a call to humility. Do you remember what Jesus said when the crowds showed interest in Him. Here’s what He told them in Luke 9:23-24, “If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself** and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses his life for me** will save it.”

My friend, let there be no misunderstanding. If you have received Christ as your Savior and Lord (and I hope you have), then you have received a call to humility.

Let’s talk in specific terms about what this call looks like in day-to-day life. Let’s identify the *fruit of humility*. I’m indebted again to Stuart Scott’s booklet, *From Pride to Humility*, in which he lists twenty-four manifestations of humility. I’ve adapted it to twelve. *When I humble myself...*

1. *I focus on Christ.* “For me to live is Christ,” says Paul in Philippians 1:21. The humble love Christ. They see Him as their greatest prize and joy. There is no other person or thing that they *must* have and please except for *Him*.

2. *I trust in God rather than question Him.* A humble person keeps in mind that God is Creator, while he is a creature. “He does not see himself as even remotely qualified to pass judgment on God or what God does,” writes Dr. Scott. “He knows that his perfect and all-wise God can do whatever He pleases, and it will be the best for him.”

Listen to Romans 9:19-23, “... **Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?** “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”

3. *I pray a lot because I am so needy.* No wonder 1 Thessalonians 5:17 commands us, “Pray continually.” I’m ashamed to say how many times I have faced a challenge and my first response was NOT to pray. That indicates pride. Humble people pray a lot because they realize they are so helpless.

John Owen once said, “We can have no power from Christ unless we live in a persuasion that we have none of our own.”

4. *I think about grace a lot.* A humble person realizes he deserves hell. He really does. He knows that the only reason he is heading for heaven is because of God’s unmerited favor. *The ONLY reason*. So he thinks about grace a lot. And he thanks God for it. Though he works hard, when he accomplishes something he gives the credit to God and refused to contend for supremacy with God.

Paul models this in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the **grace of God** I am what I am, and **his grace** to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but **the grace of God** that was with me.”

“If there’s anything good in my life, it’s because of *grace*.” So thinks and says the humble person. Does that describe you?

5. *I thank God and others a lot.* Dr. Scott observes that humble people “expect nothing, so anything that is received is greatly appreciated.” And when they

¹³ This point is so important that we’ll devote an entire message to develop it (probably message six in this series), “Christ the Greatest Example of Humility.”

receive it, they express appreciation to the giver, whether the giver is God or another person. We're told in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Have you thanked your Sunday School teacher recently, and those teaching your children, and caring for the little ones up in the nursery? "Well, won't that tempt them to be proud?" you ask. God will give them grace to respond rightly to the encouragement. But the question for you is, if you're grateful why not express it? Do you think you deserve their efforts?

The same applies to the service the waitress gives you, and to the meals your spouse prepares for your family, and so many other blessings we enjoy every day. The humble say thank you a lot.

6. *I see myself as no better than others.* A humble person knows the truth about himself that others cannot see. His heart is sinful. For that reason and others, he refuses to look down on people, no matter who the other people are. He echoes Paul who said in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, "...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

7. *I have an accurate view of my gifts and abilities.* Some people boast about their accomplishments. Other people grumble because they don't have the accomplishments others have. Both responses are evidence of a heart that is filled with pride. Consider this exhortation in Romans 12:3, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

A humble person sees himself accurately. He doesn't take credit for what he is, and he doesn't try to be what he isn't.

8. *I am a good listener.* Last time we suggested that one evidence of pride is talking too much, particularly talking too much about yourself. This is the opposite. Listening. It takes humility to be a good listener.

Are you a good listener? If not, it's likely more than a hearing problem. It's a *heart* problem. Humble people operate with the understanding that other people have important things to say too. They have experiences too, and family stories too, and personal challenges too. So the humble person asks them good questions, and then *listens*. He or she take to heed James 1:19, "...Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

If you want to become a better listener this week, here are the first two steps to take. Step one, humble yourself. Admit your self-focused tendency to God and to yourself. Then step two, learn how to ask good questions (open-ended questions). During your devotional time tomorrow morning, write down a few good questions you plan to ask your spouse that day, and your kids, and the person you sit next to at school or work. I'm convinced this is not natural but *must* be learned and *can* be learned. So pray, practice, and watch other people who are good at asking questions, and learn from them.

9. *I am grateful for criticism or reproof.* Humble people admit they don't know everything. And because they know they are sinners, they aren't surprised when criticism comes from time to time. Proverbs 9:8 says, "...Rebuke a wise man and he will love you." Again, this is not natural, but it is a tremendous evidence that grace is at work. The humble view reproof as good and welcome it. They understand that God often works through people to correct us.

10. *I serve others.* Proud people love to be served, but the humble are constantly looking for ways to serve others. And they don't do this for human recognition or applause either, for there's another commendation that they are seeking.

Who are the first to volunteer for the jobs no one else wants? The humble are (Gal. 5:13). And they don't wait to be asked either. They see a need and they take action to meet the need, and they're not looking for a pat on the back either. Again, this is not our tendency, but it is evidence that we are tapping into the transforming power of divine grace.

11. *I am quick to admit when I am wrong.* Listen to Proverbs 29:23, "One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." Here are three sentences that humble people say that never come from the lips of the proud-hearted. "You are right. I was wrong. Thank you for telling me."

When was the last time you said those words to your spouse? "But if I admit I'm wrong, I'll lose respect, won't I?" Actually, you'll gain it. Who do you like to be around, a person who never admits they're wrong, or someone who does?

12. *I am quick to ask for and grant forgiveness.* This takes it a step further. Humble people not only admit they are wrong, but also ask others for forgiveness when they're wrong. They admit their sin rather than justify it because they have found a solution for their sin (all of it!) at the cross of Jesus. Humble people long to be peacemakers. They do everything they can to bring down walls.

When was the last time you experienced the painful joy of asking someone to forgive you? Painful? Yes it is, and pride-crushing. But oh how joyful too! What a sweetness of soul results when we humbly seek forgiveness.

Furthermore, humble people are quick to grant forgiveness too. Why? Because they know how much God has forgiven them. They take heed to Colossians 3:12-14, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, **humility**, gentleness and patience. **Bear with each other and forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you...**"

Have you ever given your spouse the silent treatment? That of course is what happens after your partner hurts your feelings in some way and instead of dealing with it in a God-honoring way, you close your heart and mouth. The silent treatment can go on for days, in some cases weeks, or longer. "I'll show them," you think. But what you really show them (and the all-seeing God) is that you have a proud heart, and what you desperately need to do is *humble yourself*.

This is what it looks like, my friend. This is the *fruit* of humility. Are you seeing this fruit in your life? Better yet, are others seeing it? Still better yet, is God seeing it? And if so, give Him the glory. If not, or if the need for more fruit is obvious, you're likely asking the question, *how?* In practical terms *how do I humble myself?*

III. Get serious about the pursuit of humility.

"The *pursuit* of humility?" you say. "You mean like it's a journey or something?" That's right. It is a journey. It's something we are *pursuing*. Hence the title of our series, *Killing pride, cultivating humility*. Cultivating. That's what a farmer does. He can't produce a crop, but he can prepare the soil for it.

How do we cultivate humility? It starts by doing what we are doing right now, by opening our hearts up to God's Word.

As I mentioned last week, I heard more feedback in response to that sermon on pride in 2006 than from any message I've ever preached before or since. People came to

me that first week and freely confessed, “Yes, I struggle with pride. I agree with what you’ve shared.” Many people came back that Sunday evening for small group interaction. And they kept coming back in the weeks that followed to learn about humility. That was good, and it’s good now if you’re finding this helpful.

But I must warn you of something, borrowing an observation by C. J. Mahaney, who said, “Here’s a scary thought. It’s possible to **admire humility** while **remaining proud** ourselves.”¹⁴

So listening to a message on humility, though good, is insufficient. We need a course of action, and I intend to offer one. I want to map out some practical steps that will lead you to the destination of humility. I’ll share three steps this week and more next time, once again borrowing several insight from C. J. Mahaney.

A. Study the attributes of God. Especially study God’s *incommunicable* attributes. Read a book like *Knowing God*, by J. I. Packer.

Listen to a statement from Psalm 50:21, “...you thought I was altogether like you...” That’s one of our problems. We think God is like us. But the more aware we become of the infinite difference and the infinite distance between God and us, the more humility we’ll exhibit.

This is what Job learned. Listen to Job 38:1-7, “Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ‘Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?...”

So do a study of God’s attributes. Here are a few for starters, identified in 1 Timothy 1:17, “Now to the King **eternal, immortal, invisible**, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

B. Meditate on the cross every day. The insightful theologian Carl Henry said it well, “How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?”¹⁵

We need to begin every day thinking about the cross, singing about the cross, thanking God for the cross, and preparing ourselves to spread the message of the cross. It’s hard to be proud when your mind is fixed upon our bloodied Savior hanging in midair on two pieces of wood.

Here is Paul’s resolve in Galatians 6:14, “**May I never boast except in the cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Make it your aim to read sermons and good books on the cross regularly. Read John Piper’s *The Passion of the Christ*. Or C. H. Spurgeon’s *Twelve Sermons on the Passion and Death of Christ*. Or Arthur Pink’s *The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross*. Take advantage of our sermon transcripts available at wheelersburgbaptist.com. Go back and read the messages from last year’s Passion week series, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.

And listen to sermons on the cross. Listen again to our 2022 Passion week series, *The Puzzle of the Cross: Learning from Jesus’ Seven Sayings*. Or listen to the series from several years ago, *What Happened on the Cross?*

The point is, do whatever it takes to keep the cross front and center in your thinking. Heed the exhortation of Hebrews 12:2-3, “**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...** who for the joy set before him **endured the cross**, scorning its shame... **Consider him** who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

¹⁴ C. J. Mahaney, *Humility*, p. 63.

¹⁵ Mahaney, p. 68.

But don't just think about the cross. Sing about it. Incorporate songs about the cross into your daily devotional time. Sing...*alas and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die. Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?*

Let's talk about one more practical way to pursue humility.

C. Learn to laugh at yourself (others do!). The Lord gives us plenty of opportunities to put this into practice. Some of you might have noticed that I misspoke in last Sunday's sermon, and someone came up right after the service and let me know. So for the record, it's not George Frazier but Joe Frazier that fought Muhammad Ali 😊.

Preaching is a humbling experience. So is raising kids, and being married, and serving in a ministry in the church. Brothers and sisters, we will make mistakes. And if we can't laugh at ourselves after we have done so, normally the root issue is pride. But if we can, it's a grace-produced evidence that we are learning to turn the spotlight off of ourselves and put it on the Lord and others where it belongs.

In a moment we'll sing a song together. But I'd like for us to hear the words of verse 3 even as I finish this sermon with prayer.

*I take, O cross, thy shadow
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss;
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.*

Closing Song: #183 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" (all four verses)

Right Hand of Fellowship

Community Group Discussion:

1. Today we are continuing our series, *Killing Pride, Cultivating Humility*. What is pride? What did you learn about pride from the first two messages that stood out most to you? Is it ever appropriate to be proud (justify your answer with the Scriptures)?
2. How did you see pride raise its ugly head in your life this past week? Think of an example and share it with the person sitting next to you. If you can't think of any examples, that may be your example 😊.
3. What is humility, and what does God say about humility in His Word? Take time to find and read several passages that express God's assessment of humility.
4. Pursuing humility is a humbling experience. How so? What challenges will we face? What incentives should motivate this pursuit?
5. What practical steps can we take this week to mortify pride and cultivate humility in our lives? After sharing, take time as a group to pray about these commitments.