

I. Introduction

- A. I'm not sure what to say after that. A number of things come to mind:
1. Last week I noted that though technology is brilliant on some fronts, computers lack common sense and so we still do not have anything like Rosy on the Jetsons. You can see, it's not from lack of trying.
 2. I'm curious as to how long they had to look to find an IT guy who wears a suit and tie.
 3. And who thought it was a good idea to use a British guy to set up a sermon on humility?
- B. As I said, I'm not sure what to say about that video so let me say welcome to you.
- C. Today's topic is humility.
- D. I would imagine that over the last thirty years I've warned against pride and advocated for humility more than twenty times. In fact, when it comes to humility you might say that I'm an expert. I, of course, would never say that because I realize what that sounds like. But, as I've noted before, I do sort of think it. I'm quite taken with what I know about humility. Which causes me angst and leads me to wonder if I know anything about it at all. In fact, it leads me to wonder if I am unqualified to speak about pride when I'm so proud of what I'm going to say about it. And it doesn't stop there. I'm actually proud of my distress – I'm quite taken with how deeply suspicious I am of my own motives.¹
- E. The challenges with pride go on in almost every direction. To state this in reverse, humility is a shy virtue. As soon as you start to talk about it, it goes away.² Pride is just the opposite. It may make itself invisible for a while, but it never leaves. It just adapts. It finds another angle from which to attack.^{3,4}
- F. The question to ask is: in what ways is my view of myself off? It is off. We are broken. Bent. And one of the most obvious ways this is true is that we are self-centered as opposed to God-oriented. But this is true in varying degrees. And there is more than one way to get it wrong. So, in what ways is my view of myself less than spot on? That is the question we take up today as we continue to think about how to live well into the day, months, years ahead.

II. We turn to this topic for a few reasons today.

- A. For starters, I suspect that humility is going to be more important as we attempt to navigate the future. And I'm hardly alone in this. Many now argue that humility is an important quality for people to embrace. Jim Collins – the management writer – identifies humility as one of the two characteristics always present in the best companies and the best leaders. And Harvard Business Review notes that one in 2 in five new CEOs fail within 18 months of starting – and the principle reason is not lack of competence or experience: it's hubris and ego.⁵
- B. Past that, humility is a big topic in the Bible.
1. Jesus was humble. Though God He served.
 2. Peter tells us to be humble. In 1 Peter 5:5 he writes: “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

3. In Phil. 2, Paul tells us that we are to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.”

4. James 3:13 reads: “Who is wise among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”

C. There are plenty more where those came from. Today we are looking less at chapter and verse and more at the contrast we get in the book of Daniel – between Daniel himself and two vain idiots Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

1. On the one hand we have Nebuchadnezzar, the leader of Babylon. He leads Babylon to become the largest and most powerful empire on the planet. And it is quite amazing.

a) Its capital is so beautiful and spectacular that it was recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

b) Its military was so powerful that Nebuchadnezzar not only won all of his battles, he slept well at night. And why not, there are two walls around the capital. The outer one is 17 miles long and wide enough for two chariots to patrol on top of it, riding side to side. And the inner one is 150’ thick.

c) Years ago I attended a workshop on self-leadership that featured a man who had risen out of poverty and was now making one million dollars per week. He had some good ideas, but he was a little hard to take. Why? Well, he had all of the humility of someone who makes one million dollars a week.”

d) That would be Nebuchadnezzar. There are moments where he seems to understand who God is and who he is in comparison, but there are other times when he doesn’t. You heard his comment at the beginning of chapter four.

e) “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

f) Well, God humbles him. Nebuchadnezzar takes a several year leave of his senses. He goes insane – thinking he is a wild animal. The medical term for this is boanthropy.⁶

g) Let me read that section: The chapter opens when the king has a dream that he wants interpreted. The dream begins with a huge tree that was beautiful and strong and provided food and shelter for all kinds of the animals. But an angel comes down from heaven and cuts it down. And all that remains for seven years is a stump.

h) The king calls Daniel in and asks him to interpret the dream. Daniel is horrified when he hears it and explains to the king that bad things are headed his way. Daniel says that the tree is Nebuchadnezzar, strong and mighty, but he is about to be humbled. He says things are going to be very bad for you for seven years. He then pleads with the king to humble himself right away to avoid the seven years of disaster.

i) Nebuchadnezzar does not. I am reading now from Daniel 4, beginning with verse 29:

(1) Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

(2) 31 Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

(3) 33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

j) He is in that state for seven years before he is restored. Nebuchadnezzar is object lesson one.

2. Belshazzar is object lesson number two.

a) In case we missed the point the first time around, we get it again with a different leader.^{7, 8}

b) Towards the end of Daniel’s life there was a regime change. As powerful as Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were, they fell to the Persians. And Belshazzar is the one who fumbles the kingdom.

c) In contrast with Nebuchadnezzar – who seems to have had pride issues for a long time before God struck him down – Belshazzar is taken out on the first night.

d) He comes off as being a clueless fraternity boy. While the city is under siege he throws a big party. It’s unclear whether he thought this was a way to advertise how much confidence he had in the gates or if he was just a complete loser.

e) Whatever the case, at one point just to go all in he has the sacred vessels from the temple brought over for him to use.

f) In the middle of the party a hand writes on the wall. No one can read it. Daniel is called in. The statement “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Pashin,” means, “Numbered, numbered, weighed and divided. In other words, “You have been ‘weighted in the balance’ and found wanting. You’re out. Your kingdom will now be divided – with part going to the Medes and part to the Persians.”⁹

3. So down he goes.

D. On the one hand we have Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. On the other hand, we have Daniel, who is great but who deflects the praise to God.

1. When he interprets the King's dream in chapter two, something none of the other wise men can do, he says, "I didn't know the King's dream because I'm smart. I'm not better than his other advisors. I know this because God revealed it to me."¹⁰ In other words, God is the hero here.

2. And in chapter nine we hear his prayer for forgiveness.

a) As you may know, Daniel is unique among Biblical characters. As a rule, other than Jesus, most everyone who gets much ink is revealed to have significant flaws:

b) Abraham lies; Moses has anger issue; David sleeps with another man's wife and then has her husband killed; Peter denies Christ; Paul gets in a fight with his best friend.

3. Everyone has issues. But not Daniel. This is a bit of an argument from silence.¹¹ Nevertheless, it's pretty surprising when he makes a very public confession of sin. This occurs in Daniel 9. We are headed there eventually, and also to communion.

E. Do not miss this. One of the big themes from Daniel is that humility is a good idea. One of the reasons Daniel and his amigos make it, is because they have a right understanding of themselves.

III. So, what exactly is humility.

A. The standard dictionary definition is: the quality of being humble. Which is not very helpful.

B. The Cambridge Dictionary goes in a slightly different definition. It describes humility as "the feeling or attitude that you have no special importance that makes you better than others; a lack of pride." This is better, but not quite there.

C. Biblically speaking, humility = a grounding in reality.

1. Being humble means we have an accurate assessment of ourselves.

2. The call to be humble is a call to right thinking. We see ourselves more like God does.

D. This is different than the way the term is often bandied about. So let me push on this for a bit.

1. Being humble does not mean we hide our talents or claim to be worse than we are. C.S. Lewis says, if you are a great bridge player and someone asks you if you good at bridge. It is not being humble to say you are not it is being dishonest. The right response would be, "I play a lot of cards."

2. Being humble does not mean we cannot take pleasure in being affirmed by others. Jesus will say to some, "Well done good and faithful servant." It will be a good thing to hear that and find joy in it. Likewise, it is not wrong for a child to be pleased when they are praised by their parents or teacher. In fact, the prouder the person the less they care about the opinions of others.

3. Being humble does not mean we cannot be proud of our son or daughter or school or company. This kind of pride is not a sin. Anytime we love or admire something outside of ourselves we are taking a step in the right direction.¹²

4. Being humble does not mean we must have low self-esteem. Humility is not to be confused with self-abasement.^{13, 14} Being humble does not mean we cannot have strong opinions or that we should act like a doormat. Humility does not require us to actively dislike ourselves. That is actually quite selfish. Loving our self and hating our self are not opposites. In both cases we are still quite consumed with ourselves. We are thinking about ourselves. Hating yourself is more selfish than selfless.

a) Part of the goal is to be self-forgetful not self-referential. Pride is the ultimate self-referential orientation. It may look like Mohammad Ali's "I'm the greatest in the world" claims, but for cultural reasons it seldom does. Few openly, brashly talk like that today. It's not acceptable. But at deep levels – hidden levels, there is a disordered self-importance that seeks that which belongs only to God and which, in a tragic way, blocks the grace of God.¹⁵

E. Humility is not self-abasement or low self-esteem as much as it is "an ability to live as close to the truth as possible: the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, the truth about the world we live in."¹⁶

IV. There are a few other things worth noting about humility?

A. People's attitude about humility has changed over the years. It was not considered an admirable quality by the Greeks and Romans. To them, life was about honor, and humility was a sign of weakness. Jesus changed that in a dramatic way.¹⁷ And following him most people saw humility as a good thing. Not everyone.

1. Nietzsche thought it was foolishness.¹⁸ Ayn Rand writes against it.¹⁹ There are a few others. There is not universal agreement that humility is the right path. But most think that today.

B. At the moment there is a lot of confusion because we advocate both humility and high self-esteem. I'm not sure many think this through. It is actually an area rich in irony.

1. In the 1950s there were zero articles on self-esteem. In 1992, the first year I did some research on humility, there were 2,500. The Google search I did today showed 44 million. We didn't used to say much about high self-esteem. Perhaps as a result, in 1950, 12% of American High School students thought they were very important. In 2005, 80 percent thought they were. And we also think we are smart. The US is now 36th in math performance, but we think we are first. We are really good at thinking we are really good in math.

2. Some of this is a gender problem. Men tend to think more highly of themselves than women do. As Sheri has pointed out, her friends may be doing Iron Man competitions in Hawaii but will not say they are athletes, whereas a guy, who played football in high school forty years (and 120 pounds ago), still thinks of himself as an athlete.²⁰

C. Theologically it's worth noting that:

1. No one is naturally humble.²¹ Sin bends us. We are curved inward. We have a self-centered orientation rather than a God-centric one.

2. Many (not all, but many) theologians believe that pride is the genesis of all that goes wrong. That pride was the first wrong turn and remains the principle sin.^{22, 23} This was the thinking that led Gregory the Great, the 6th century Bishop of Rome, to remove pride from the list of Eight Evil Thoughts (which was in circulation at the time) and place it as the foundation from which all sins emerge. Technically, pride is not one of the Seven Deadly Sins, but all discussions about them generally start or end with pride because it's in a class all its own.^{24, 25}

D. Men and women, pride is not just poor form. It's dangerous. Perhaps it's one of the most dangerous things you are ever around. You want to be humble.

1. Solomon makes this point several times. Proverbs 11:2 reads: When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Prv. 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Pride is ugly.

2. Once we realize that someone is "full of themselves" – that they view us as a prop in their story, they are the star – we think less of them. We think they are jerks.²⁶ We don't think they are better than we are, we suspect they are either clueless or insecure. Neither is very attractive. The posture makes them look small and desperate.²⁷

3. So, I think we can all agree. Pride is poor form.²⁸

4. The bigger point here is that it's deadly. Pride is dangerous.²⁹ But the bigger theological point here that we need to see is that it's more than dangerous, it's deadly.

5. And it's deadly because it blinds us of our need for God. It turns us into Pharisees who rest in their own merit. It leads to a self-sufficiency that is opposed to the Gospel.³⁰

E. There is a lot more to say about pride.

A. It's worth noting that being humble solves a lot of problems and being proud causes them.³¹

B. There are some interesting things to note when we think about pride and the future. Kevin Kelly argues that the future will include a series of constant tech upgrades that will mean we are always newbies and may keep us humble.³²

V. There is more that could be said about pride. But we know enough. The question is: What is the plan going forward? I want to suggest three things:

A. Serve Others

1. One of the things we are told in the Bible is to "humble ourselves." We are not told to pray for humility. I'm not sure I am brave enough to do that. We are told to humble ourselves.

2. One of the ways to do that? Serve. Serve others.

3. Do something that an earlier version of you – a prideful version of you – would think is "beneath you."

B. Focus on God.

1. If we right-size God, a lot of things fall into place and many of our problems go away. For starters, we do not need to be told to worship – it will happen. Get that picture of the cosmos out and start your day reminding yourself of the one who created the galaxies. Learn to look at God. If we do that we will not need to be told to be humble – it will happen. In Isaiah 6 we read that Isaiah saw God. And he immediately does two things: First, he declares that God is holy. Second, he confesses his sin.
 2. God is awesome. He is bigger, better and more powerful than we can even begin to imagine. We need to stop making gods out of other things and focus on God.
- C. The third thing we need to do is confess our sins – which we are going to do corporately in just a second. But let me pause here for 30 seconds to explain something.
1. Most people do not get the essence of the Christian faith. In fact, it's worse than that. Most get it exactly backwards. Most think it's about reaching up to God when it's about God reaching down. Most think it's about being good enough when it really starts when we face the fact that that can never happen. We are not the hero of our story, God is.
 2. The good news is, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.
 3. The first step forward with God is to see this and to not hide from it.
 4. And one of the ways we do this is to confess – the word means “to agree with God” – that we are broken.
- D. Right now I am going to turn things back over to the campus pastors.

VI. CAMPUS PASTORS

- A. Confession means that we agree with God
- B. The Bible makes it clear that God embraces everyone who is humble, but has little time for those who think they are great.
- C. To say this differently, Jesus is never upset with sinners who ask for help. But He is angry with those who pretend they are not sinners.
- D. In the set up I noted that we do not know of any problems Daniel got into. There are no obvious sins. But that in chapter 9 he leads his people in a prayer of confession.
- E. We have modified Daniel's prayer a bit – dropped the references to Babylon and Judah. Updated the language just a bit. But the substance of this prayer is basically what we find in Daniel 9. I want to invite you to stand and join with me in reciting this prayer.
 1. O great and majestic God. You never waver in your commitments, never give up on those who love. Yet we have sinned in every way imaginable. We've done evil things, rebelled, dodged and taken detours around your clearly marked paths. We've turned a deaf ear to your instruction. We are guilty, broken, vain and selfish.

2. Compassion is our only hope, the compassion of you, the Master, our God. We acknowledge that because of our rebellion we've forfeited our rights. We paid no attention to you when you told us how to live. We defied your instructions and did what we pleased. So listen, God, to this determined prayer of your people. Have mercy on us. Act out of who you are, not out of what we are. Hear our prayers for mercy. You are our last and only hope: Master, listen to us! Master, forgive us!

VII. Transition to Communion

VIII. Wrap up

A. In Acts 18 we learn about Apollos, who is described as a remarkable and influential teacher. He came from Alexandria—the great center of learning and philosophy in Egypt, and he was an eloquent speaker and a powerful teacher of Scripture. Apollos employed his impressive intellectual and rhetorical skills to teach boldly about Jesus Christ and debate those in the synagogue who opposed his gospel. He proved to be such a dynamic teacher that believers in Corinth later became divided over who was the more important leader—Paul or Apollos?

B. All of that to say that Apollos was a rock star in the early church and his popularity could have gone to his head. Thankfully, in Acts 18 we see that Apollos embraced humility. Although he knew a lot, it became evident to Priscilla and Aquila that Apollos lacked some insight on a few things, so they approached him to correct him.

C. They were not great philosophers from Alexandria like Apollos. They were tent makers from Corinth. The fact that Apollos could receive correction from ordinary business owners, and a woman—no small thing in the first century, reveals the great teacher from Alexandria did not consider himself superior to other believers.

D. Apollos was full of knowledge, but he was not full of himself. That is what we are after.

E. Your future will go a lot better if you think about yourself less.

IX. Announcements

A. Next week the talk is on Faith. Don't miss it.

X. Quotes

A. No sooner do we believe that God loves us than there is an impulse to believe that He does so, not because He is love, but because we are intrinsically lovable. C.S. Lewis

B. Vanity is so anchored in the heart of man that...those who write against it want to have the glory of having written well; and those who read it desire the glory of having read it. Blaise Paschal

C. It is much easier for me to imagine a praying murderer, a praying prostitute, than a vain person praying. Nothing is so at odds with prayer as vanity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

D. We are all worms, but I do believe I am a glow worm. Winston Churchill

E. It used to be that we were humble in terms of our character and firm as it relates to truth. Now we reverse it. We take ourselves seriously but not truth. GK Chesterton³³

¹ Can someone actually think they are qualified to speak on humility? I mean, if I think I'm an expert on humility that almost certainly means that I'm not. But would you want to hear from someone who didn't think they were qualified? Because, while claiming to be humble likely means you are not, the opposite is not true. Not thinking you are humble doesn't mean that you are. You might be right. You might not be humble. Both the humble and the arrogant are likely to think they are humble.

² About all I can say by set up is, I did not entitle this sermon, "Humility and How I Achieved It." And, with the possible exception of my wife, few people think I am less qualified to speak on this topic than I do. John Dickson writes about the paradoxes that plague anyone attempting to write or speak about humility in his very good book, *Humilitas*, from which I have borrowed heavily. Dickson is well aware of the challenges. A friend of mine – who does not lack ego-strength – was goaded into studying humility by many of his friends. He did, only later to claim that I should borrow his notes on humility because he had done such a good job compiling them.

³ I learned early in ministry that I could never have totally pure motives. For a while I was paralyzed by my awareness that part of the reason I wanted to do good things was so people would think highly of me. And so for a while I stopped doing god things. Until I realized, my motives will never be pure. That shouldn't stop me from doing the right thing. I should do my best and confess that my motivation is suspect. In a similar way, I realize that I will seldom operate outside of the self-centered orientation that is, at its core, the definition of pride. All I can do is confess it and move on. It's insidious.

⁴ C.S. Lewis notes, "A man is never so proud as when he is striking an attitude of humility." But he goes on to note that "as long as one knows one is proud one is safe from the worst form of pride. But, in the end pride is like a hydra, there is no end to it. "Depth under depth of self-love and self-admiration.

⁵ Stephen W. Smith, *Inside Job: Doing the Work Within the Work*. IVP, 2015, p. 11.

⁶ According to modern mental health text books, it is: a "lack of an integrated relationship with environmental reality in which the victim imagines himself to be a cow or bull."⁶

⁷ For the record, Belshazzar is the King of Persia and he shows up later in the book. And it's important to note that his name is very easy to mix up with the Babylonian name for Daniel (Belteshazzar). This is one of the many times where I wonder, "Really God, this seemed like a good plan. We get Elijah and Elisha; Abijah and Ahijah, Zimri and Dimri, Azariah and Amaziah. We're supposed to keep these people straight? Are you trying to confuse us?"

⁸ As an aside, this passage is noteworthy for another reason. Belteshazzar is in a long line of Biblical characters (or places) for whom there was no external record (which led some to say the Bible was not historically accurate) but there now is. In fact, from archeological digs there are now over 30 references to him. See P. A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 b.c.* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 90). Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus (on the historicity of Bel, see Lesson #1, pp. 2-3; and especially Robert Dick Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 (1917)], pp. 96-127). It was during Nabonidus's repeated and extended absences from Babylon that Bel ruled as co-regent, thus rightly deserving the title 'king predicated of him by Daniel in chapter 5. According to Dan. 5:7,16,29, Bel promised that he who could interpret the handwriting on the wall would be appointed 'third ruler in the kingdom, i.e., promised to make him a triumvir. If this is the correct interpretation of the verse it would harmonize well with the historical evidence. (Sam Storms, *Enjoying God*, Daniel 5:1-31).

⁹ The New Testament has one of these passages. In Luke 12 there's a story Jesus tells about a rich man who dies, "This very night your soul is required of you."

¹⁰ Daniel 2:27

¹¹ The fact that we are not told about any flaws doesn't mean that he doesn't have any.

¹² Now, it is a problem if we love or admire our children – or our school – more than God.

¹³ There is a certain dignity among those acting in humility. They are not “lesser people” who simply know their place. The exact opposite is true. They are operating out of a position of strength. Also, humility has an active quality about it. You are not being humble if you simply remain silent – i.e., if you fail to assert yourself or don’t brag about your accomplishments. Not talking about yourself is modesty but it is not humility. Humility is actively redirecting your power – your assets – for someone else. It is much more about how we treat others than it is about how we think about ourselves. (See John Dickson, *Humilitas*, p. 24).

¹⁴ Pride is not self-esteem. As the JB Philippi’s translation of the prayer of confession says: We need a sane estimate of ourselves.

¹⁵ Philip Brooks wrote, “The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is.”

¹⁶ Carolyn Arends, “Lessons from an Usher,” *Christianity Today*, Dec. 2011. She is citing Richard Foster.

¹⁷ A few years ago Dr. Dickson, who has a PhD in ancient history, who serves as a pastor in Sydney, Australia, and who is the author of several books, including *Humilitas*, was involved in a study with other ancient historians designed to determine the source of “the humility revolution” that occurred in the first century. As I note elsewhere in the sermon, under the Greeks and Romans, humility was despised. Honor was the most important thing. You were expected to be proud of your accomplishments. But something happened to change all of that. The question this group set out to determine was, what? Dickson notes that the date of the humility revolution was easy to establish. “You just read the writings of the ancient world and identify the first time humility and greatness were ever linked – that connection was made in Jesus.” Interestingly, they felt that it was not his teaching as much as it was his crucifixion. Crucifixion was the worst way to die at the time. It was a heinous form of death that Roman authors would not even write about it. The crucifixion of Christ initially presented the followers of Christ with a massive problem. They were forced to go in one of two directions: To admit that Jesus was not as great as they thought because no great person could be crucified, or to redefine greatness. They decided that they had to rethink greatness. That if the greatest man ever known had willingly died as he had, then greatness must exist when people sacrifice for others. Today almost everyone admires humility. This is just one of the many ways Jesus changed the world. This does not mean that you have to be a Christian to be humble or appreciate it. Nor does it guarantee that those who follow Christ are humble. But humility is a Christian virtue and it has shaped western culture.

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th century German philosopher famous for declaring that God is dead, thought that same way as the Greeks. He argued for self-love, self-promotion at all costs. All that matters is power. If you don’t think you are better and more important than others you’ll be stepped on.

¹⁹ Ayn Rand, the novelist famous for *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*, endorsed a lot of what Nietzsche said. She taught that humility was for fools. We should not only push ourselves to be our best, we should push ourselves to the front of the line – we should make sure others know how good we are. Pride is a good not a bad thing.

²⁰ I think one of the reasons we have problems here – and a lot of low self-esteem among people – is because we tell people they are great (and even give them a trophy) when they are not. I suspect offering unconditional love and speaking the truth might help people more. Whatever the case, I think we can agree that this is not an age that celebrates humility. Also, we should note that the knowledge and confession of humility are rare. Most of us would be hard pressed to identify with Jonathan Edwards, who once acknowledged his sin by confessing, “What a foolish, silly, miserable, blind, deceived poor worm I am, when pride works.”

²¹ We are bent, to quote Luther, we are not straight, we curved in on ourselves. This means, our problems are not superficial. We generally act more humble than we feel. Becoming humble is work. Many have written about this – not always as Christians. I read an interesting account of the steps George Washington took to be humble. He described it as an arduous process. As a young man his ego was enormous. Though his reputation is of being thoughtful, even stony, he was reportedly a man of intense passions and volcanic temper for whom vanity was a

constant threat. (He reportedly knew how good he looked in a uniform). (See: David J. Bobb, “Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and the Power of Humility in Leadership,” *Leadership Now*, Sept. 2013).

²² C.S. Lewis says pride is, “the essential vice, the utmost evil. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that are mere fleabites in comparison. Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” Others who argue this way note that: It’s through pride that the devil becomes the devil. (We are not told much about how Satan becomes Satan, but it appears to have been due to pride. In Isaiah 14 we read an account that is attributed to the King of Babylon but also understood to be linked back to Lucifer. There we read of His desire to, “ascend to the heavens, raise his throne above the stars of God... to make himself like the Most High.”). That same self-promoting mindset is behind the events of Genesis 3, where mankind falls. They were enticed by pride – by the belief that they could “be like God.”

²³ Pride is the ground in which all other sins grow, and the parent from which all other sins come.” William Barclay.

²⁴ There are hints of this in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as well. As you may know, this epic poem describes Dante’s travels through the various realms of the dead. With the Roman poet Virgil as his guide he goes everywhere from Paradise (heaven) down to the Inferno (hell). At one point he describes the concentric layers of hell. (He lists nine levels, they sort of line up with the Seven Deadly Sins.) At the bottom is treachery which is understood to be motivated by pride.

²⁵ By the way, one of the punishments for pride – each punishment is designed in light of the sin – the punishment for the proud is to be forced to walk (or crawl) with great weights on their back so they are forced to look down not up.

²⁶ People who think they are great treat others as props to their own life. They are, by definition, not as important. This is offensive. Humility – the opposite of pride – is about actively redirecting your power, assets, attention to someone else. It’s much more about how we treat others than about how we treat ourselves. Pride leads us to ignore or look down on others.

²⁷ A couple years ago, when Austin – our oldest son – was working at a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic, Sheri and I went down to visit him and, rather than staying with him in the tool shed he was living in, we opted to stay at a nice resort about twenty minutes away. And this resort had lots of exotic birds on the grounds: parrots in the trees, flamingos in the pond and a flock of peacocks that hung out right next to the food court. Well, apparently it was mating season because the male peacocks were doing their best to attract the attention of the females. They were fanning out all of their feathers and hopping around to try to stay in their line of sight. The first time I saw a male all fanned out I was quite impressed. I’d seen pictures before but never seen a live peacock on display. At first it was impressive. But as time went on it stopped being impressive and started looking desperate. These guys were strutting around saying “Look at me. Look at me” while the females were completely ignoring them. I tried coaching one of the guys, saying, “Dude, you are trying way too hard here. Subtle. You are embarrassing yourself.” I asked Sheri if she thought the guy was over the top and showing off, and I believe her words were, “Typical male.”

²⁸ Correspondingly, humility is beautiful. We are more attracted to the great who are humble than to the great who want us to know how great they are. People who brag end up looking small. People who are great who act small look big – in fact, they look bigger. I read a story the other day about another man who was humble – and as a result, who made you like him more. He was a black man sitting in the back of a bus in the middle of the last century when three young white boys got on and started to taunt him. They mocked him. Threatened him. Said they were going to beat him up. He said nothing. Road quietly to his destination and then got up to get off. As he did he took out his card and handed it to one of them. It said, Joe Lewis, professional boxer. It might have said, “Joe Lewis, greatest fighter of all time.” Lewis – AKA, the Brown Bomber, was the heavyweight champion of the world for 12 years. Experts say that despite Mohammad Ali’s claims to be the greatest, Lewis was probably the greatest fighter of all time. His punch was supposedly so powerful he could knock out a horse. He would have destroyed those punks. The fact that he did not – the fact that he actually acted in their best interest – makes us like him more. Humility is beautiful.

²⁹ The Titanic sank because of pride. If you read the promotional material for the ship you see the captain thought she was unsinkable. Not long before her ill-fated maiden voyage her captain, Edward Smith, said: “Modern shipbuilding in the 20th century renders sinking a near impossibility. ‘I cannot imagine any condition which would cause a ship to founder. I cannot conceive of any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that’” That attitude led him to take inappropriate risks: 1) He didn’t have enough life boats on the ship for all the passengers; he didn’t slow down after receiving transmissions from other ships stating that there were ice floes in the vicinity; 3) he didn’t stop after he hit the iceberg, which led to her sinking more rapidly. (Kaylor). Harland and Wolff, the parent company of the White Star Line, had suggested using a different kind of davit (the small crane used to launch lifeboats) in the ship’s design, which would have allowed Titanic to carry 48 lifeboats with more than enough room for passengers and crew. But while the White Star Line spared no expense in the ship’s amenities for its wealthy passengers, the company cut costs by mounting only 20 lifeboats on Titanic — only enough for 52% of the people on board.

³⁰ See Luke 18:9

³¹ High self-esteem leads to greater public debt; High self-esteem leads people to take bigger risks and place bigger bets; Higher self-esteem leads to greater political polarization.

³² He points out that the lifecycle of an app today is 30 days, so we do not have time to master many things before they are gone. (Kevin Kelly, *The Inevitable*, p. 11).

³³ Humiliation is the beginning of sanctification; and as without this, without holiness, no man shall see God, though he pore whole nights upon his Bible; so without that, without humility, no man shall hear God speak to his soul, though he hear three two-hour sermons every day. John Donne