The Practice of Humility

How do you respond when someone corrects you, when there's a job nobody wants to do, or when God asks you to do something you didn't expect? That's where humility gets practical. Today we'll look at what humility asks of us in moments like these. Let's start with Naaman, a commander who came looking for healing and nearly walked away because he didn't like the instructions.

1. Humility receives instruction even when it challenges our expectations and status.

Naaman — 2 Kings 5:9–14

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. [10] Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

[11] But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. [12] Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

[13] Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" [14] So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Initially offended that Elisha sent a messenger and instructed him to wash in the Jordan, he eventually listened to his servants and obeyed. He was healed. Sometimes we need to listen to our servants. It's also good when servants are courageous enough to speak truth to power.

1. **He had status, but he still had a need.** His achievements could not cure his leprosy.
2. **He expected a particular method.** His imagined encounter almost caused him to reject God's instruction.
3. **He needed to listen to people below his rank.** His servants helped him reconsider.
4. **He had to obey a simple instruction.** He went down into the Jordan and washed seven times.

"Naaman almost allowed his expectations of how God should work to stop him receiving what God wanted to give."

Reflection

- **Have you ever dismissed good advice because it came from someone younger, less experienced, or lower in rank than you?**
- **Where are you resisting what God is asking you to do because you expected Him to handle things differently?**
- **What simple step have you been putting off because it feels too small, too ordinary, or too embarrassing?**

2. True greatness is willing to serve.

Jesus — John 13:12–17 *12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

Philippians 2:5–11 *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Knowing His identity and authority, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet. He humbled Himself in obedience, even to death on a cross.

Reflection

- **What task at home, at work, or at church do you quietly think is beneath you?**
- **How do you respond when you serve faithfully and nobody notices?**
- **Who could you serve this week in a way that would actually lighten their load?**

***3.* Humility can pray for the person who has attacked you.**

Moses — Numbers 12:1–13

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the Lord heard this.

3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

4 At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them went out. 5 Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the

entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, 6 he said, "Listen to my words:

"When there is a prophet among you,

I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions,

I speak to them in dreams.

7 But this is not true of my servant Moses;

he is faithful in all my house.

8 With him I speak face to face,

clearly and not in riddles;

he sees the form of the Lord.

Why then were you not afraid

to speak against my servant Moses?"

9 The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them.10 When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous[a]—it became as white as snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, 11 and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."

13 So Moses cried out to the Lord, "Please, God, heal her!" He is described in scripture as exceptionally humble. Moses interceded for Miriam after she spoke against him and suffered judgment.

What causes you to pray for those who hurt you and do good to those who persecute you? There is a type of humility that understands were it not for the grace of God, I would not be here.

Reflection

- **When someone criticises you, how much time do you spend replaying the conversation or planning what you wish you'd said?**
- **When someone who hurt you runs into trouble, what is your first reaction?**
- **What would you ask God to do for that person if you were praying for their good today?**

4. Humility takes responsibility without hiding behind position.

David — 2 Samuel 12:1–13

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it,

and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.
4 "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."
5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."
7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'
11 "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"
13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."
Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.

Psalm 51:17 My sacrifice, O God, is[a] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

When Nathan confronted his sin, David acknowledged that he had sinned against the Lord. His repentance did not remove all the consequences.

Reflection

- **When someone tells you that you hurt them, how quickly do you start explaining what you meant?**
- **Who can tell you the truth about your behaviour without having to manage your reaction?**
- **Is there someone who needs to hear you say, "I was wrong. I hurt you. I'm sorry"? What would taking responsibility look like after that conversation?**

5. **Humility appeals to God's mercy instead of presenting a record of superiority.**
The tax collector — Luke 18:9–14 *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "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.'*

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

In Jesus' parable, he stood at a distance and asked God for mercy. Jesus said he went home justified before God.

Reflection

- **Whose mistakes do you use to reassure yourself that you're doing fine?**
- **What are you more comfortable talking to God about: what you've done well or where you need His mercy?**
- **If you prayed as honestly as the tax collector did, what would you say to God today?**

6. Humility celebrates God's work even when someone else receives the attention.

John the Baptist — John 3:26–30 *They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."*

27 To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less."

When others drew attention to Jesus' growing following, John rejoiced in Jesus' prominence and accepted his own supporting role. John was clear about his purpose. Sometimes we are unclear so we get upset when we are overlooked.

Reflection

- **How do you respond when someone you helped begins to receive opportunities you would have loved to have?**
- **Whose success is hardest for you to celebrate, and what does that reveal about what you want for yourself?**
- **Where could you give someone else a chance to lead, speak, or receive credit this week?**
- **How do you respond when someone else receives the recognition you were hoping for?**

You see this in families when a husband is being praised by people and instead of the wife reinforcing how amazing her husband is she tries to stop them from saying nice things stating that his head is going to get big. I have seen husbands reminding people of how great their role was in a scenario where their wife is being praised. **When the spotlight is on you, how freely can you use it to honour someone else?** Look what Messi did:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlQZCEqFwX4

7. Humility recognises an authority greater than its own.

The centurion — Matthew 8:5–13

5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." 7 Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?" 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

Despite his rank, he acknowledged that he was unworthy to have Jesus enter his home and trusted the authority of Jesus' word.

The Word reminds us that even the rich and famous have to remember that they too have a Judge in heaven. We are all ultimately accountable to God.

Reflection

- **Where has being the person others rely on made it hard for you to admit that you need help?**
- **What are you trying to control because you're afraid of what might happen if you entrust it to Jesus?**
- **Where would taking Jesus at His word change a decision you're making this week?**

8. Humility allows God's Word to correct us.

Josiah — 2 Kings 22:10–20

10 Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.11 When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.12 He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: 13 "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."14 Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.15 She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,16 'This is what the LORD says: I am

going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read.17 Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.’18 Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard:19 Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people—that they would become a curse and be laid waste—and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.20 Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.’ ” So they took her answer back to the king.

Josiah became king of Judah at just eight years old and reigned for 31 years. His father, Amon, had been assassinated, and Judah had a long history of idolatry. Josiah began to seek God at about sixteen and started removing idols from Judah at about twenty (2 Chronicles 34:1–7). At about twenty-six, Josiah ordered repairs to the temple. During the work, the high priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law. When it was read to Josiah, he tore his robes in grief. He realised how far Judah had strayed from what God had commanded and sent officials to seek the Lord. Through the prophet Huldah, God told Josiah that He had heard him because his heart was responsive and he had humbled himself (2 Kings 22:8–20).Josiah then gathered the people, read the book aloud and renewed the covenant before the Lord. He carried the reforms further and led Judah in celebrating the Passover (2 Kings 23:1–25).

Hearing the Book of the Law, he tore his robes and humbled himself before God. God acknowledged his responsive heart.

Reflection

- **When a passage of Scripture challenges you, is your first thought about your own life or about someone else who needs to hear it?**
- **What habit or attitude have you been defending because it’s normal in your family, workplace, or circle of friends?**
- **What is one thing you already know from Scripture that would change how you treat someone this week if you acted on it?**