

Get Over It Already!



Don't you just hate self-promotion in the people bent on climbing the company ladder where you work? The phoniness of the photo-ops set up by politicians and celebrities at homeless shelters or drug rehab centers? Don't you get tired of having people tell you what you owe them? That they're not getting what they want out of their marriage or church or job? Do you ever just want to get in somebody's face and scream, "Get over it already"?

Now can you give me three good reasons that prove your situation is different? Why you need to promote yourself? Why you're entitled to be angry that somebody slighted you or didn't invite you or ignored your opinion? Why you're sick and tired of a mate or child who doesn't appreciate all the things you do?

If you are one of these people, why not try this prayer today:

Heavenly Father, forgive me of the destructive pride that infects my heart. Guard me from the jealousy that makes me resent the person who is smarter and more capable, who gets noticed and appreciated. Teach me to rejoice with those who rejoice – and never to begrudge their happiness by wishing it had only been me in their place. Help your people to abandon pride for humility, to give up self-promotion for humble service. We pray in the name of the one who emptied Himself completely for your sake and for ours. Amen.

Life in the Kingdom of God

When Alice stumbled into Wonderland, she was disoriented by the fantastic characters and strange experiences she had. But the world she encountered there pales by comparison to the upside-down world we encounter in the Kingdom of God. Deity became human, King became peasant, and Creator God became Suffering Servant. When He could not hide His true identity any longer, He still claimed no special privileges – living a selfless, obedient life and dying a selfless, obedient death. God the Son lived in humility and submission to God the Father. Now He has been exalted and proclaimed Lord of All – in the good timing of the Father (cf. Philippians 2:6-11). Our challenge is to follow His example.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves,” wrote Paul. “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5). Or, in The Message Bible, “Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.”

Sinful human nature cries out for the right of self-rule. The life goals that spring from the I’ve-gotta-be-me creed are always selfish and frequently result in others being manipulated and used, hurt and cast aside. For someone with that mindset to consider what it would mean to live under God’s rule is abhorrent.

Life apart from kingdom rule in our lives is focused on getting and using things for personal advancement – money, power, education, sex, name-recognition, awards, you name it. Worldly leadership is conceived on the model of giving orders and enforcing compliance – in a home, at work, in a church. If others have to be coerced or stepped on, so much the worse for them. And “winning” is the obsession that drives every decision and every relationship. **It’s all about me!**

One who does not live in the kingdom reign of God – even if he or she is a good church member – must have the last word. Push others around. Strut in victory. Pout in defeat. She is seldom honest with others and never with herself. He cries for himself but not for others. She wants to be heard but cannot listen. He is angry and finds fault with practically everything and everybody. She forgives nothing and remembers every slight – whether real or imagined – that ever came her way. **It is all about me!**

When Christians petition God and pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are asking God to help us get over ourselves. To have the attitude of Christ Jesus that allowed Him to be humble, selfless, deferential, obedient – and to leave vindication and honor to God the Father, in His own good time. Love and peace, kindness and gentleness, patience and joy, humility and goodness, self-control and righteousness – these are the Spirit-generated features of a world so different from the ordinary that it looks upside-down to everybody who sees it. More bizarre and unreal than anything Lewis Carroll pictures in *Alice in Wonderland*. But they are not illusions. They are the ultimate realities of the Kingdom of God. After all we are the ‘Body of Christ’ for goodness sake!

Jesus’ Teaching on Humility

One day Jesus watched the sort of jockeying for attention and position that is so common among human beings. He had been invited to a sabbath meal at the house of a top Jewish figure in a Galilean town He was visiting. Here is what He saw and said:

When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, He told them this parable: **“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If**

so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:7-11).

Pride, status, and recognition are issues in every culture – and the one within which Jesus moved was no exception. He watched as guests arriving for dinner moved around the U-shaped dinner table. Since the positions of greatest honor were naturally the ones closest to the host's chair, everyone was elbowing toward those choicest seats. So He imagines an even bigger social event with an even larger table and the sort of seat-jockeying that would generate. Then He pictures the humiliation someone would suffer when, after getting a choice seat, his host "demotes" him when a really significant guest shows up. Why, the only seats left by that time would be the ones at the greatest distance from the host. What utter humiliation for a seat-jockey; what regard for the late-arriving but genuinely important person who gets his seat.

Jesus' point here is hardly that His disciples should be conniving! Was He saying, go late to get noticed. Or take a lowlier seat than you know your host is going to grant in order to be called to a better one. To the contrary, He is trying to make us see that honor in the Kingdom of God is not for the taking. It is God's to award by grace. So it is out of character for His followers to worry about or jockey for it. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" is another way of saying that **the way up for you is down or that the surest way for me to crowd God out is by being too full of myself.**

The Gospel of Luke has a theme many scholars have noted and to which they have called attention. It is called "eschatological reversal" – when the end comes, things will be very different than they are now; high things will be brought low, and lowly things will be honored; rich and proud people will be in spiritual poverty, while the humble poor will be given honor and wealth and status. The disciple who cannot imitate Christ's

selfless obedience will miss in the joy of His exaltation to the Father's right hand.

A Psalm About Humility

One of the shortest of the Psalms is attributed to David and appeals for Israel to have unwavering faith in God. It anticipates this teaching from Jesus: "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" (Matthew 18:3-4).

My heart is not proud, O LORD ,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
But I have stilled and quieted my soul;
like a weaned child with its mother,
like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and forevermore (Psalms 131:1-3)

This psalm goes against everything Modernity has trumpeted for more than two centuries now. We do not have to submit ourselves to God and trust Him amidst life's uncertainties; we are autonomous people who can trust only ourselves! Pure Hogwash!

Walter Brueggemann comments on Psalm 131 and writes:

"The piety reflected in this psalm is directly opposed to modernity with its drive toward independence, self-sufficiency, and autonomy. It is worth noting that the Psalms deny the Oedipal inclination that there can be freedom only if the controlling, authoritarian father-god be slain or denied. The myth of modernity believes that real maturity is to be free of every relationship of dependence. But when the metaphor is changed from a harsh controlling father to a gently feeding mother, it is evident that the human goal need not be breaking away, but happy trust."

What strikes me from this psalm is the figure of a "weaned" child as opposed to a still-nursing infant. Looking ahead again

to the New Testament, being a Christian begins with being “born from above” (John 3:1-5), proceeds through a gradual process of growth toward maturity (Hebrews 6:1-3), and moves toward an adult state of faith and life (James 1:4). And it is interesting that both Hebrews and James – epistles that deal with the desirability of growth toward maturity – do so in the context of teaching believers how to respond to hardship.

So the unnamed writer of Hebrews counsels us to “endure hardship as discipline” (12:7), and the brother of Jesus says that trials test our faith in order to teach us perseverance (1:2ff). Hardship and trials are for the sake of testing, refinement, and maturity; they are not ‘allowed’ in human experience to destroy us – though satan would like to see that outcome from them. If we react to them in authentic submission to and trust in God, they become the means to growth. They make us stronger. They build character. They mature us into the very image of God’s perfect son who learned obedience through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8-9).

But too many of us seem never to get beyond the nursing baby who is totally self-absorbed and self-centered. Now, mothers, don’t get me wrong here! There’s nothing wrong with a tiny baby being what tiny babies are. But you are not going to want your cute, demanding, squalling-when-ever-hungry baby to be that way at three or nine or sixteen! And it is part of your responsibility as a good mother to bring your baby girl to the point over a period of time that she can – while not renouncing you or failing to understand your importance during the move from infancy through adolescence to adulthood – learn that the world does not revolve around her. In other words, part of your job is to teach your baby not to be a baby forever. To help him understand that your role in life is not to spoil him but to train him for life in the real world. The weaning process for an infant is excruciatingly difficult. A baby is suddenly denied the right to on-demand feeding, on-demand comfort, on-demand meeting of my needs. And it is no easier a few years later when it is the cutting of apron strings for an adolescent or the shutting down of cash flow for the young adult. But these are all stages in growing up.

Isn’t it possible that some of us are insisting on the right to perpetual infancy in our faith-lives? Why do we complain so bitterly when life disappoints us? Why is it “unfair”? Why is

God suddenly unworthy of worship when I am denied the instant gratification of a suckling baby and expected to learn that the world can be hostile sometime? **That it's not all about me?** Psalm 131 says that we will not be allowed the immature state of being spoiled brats in God's house. A weaned child is no less dependent on his mother than a nursing one, but the weaning process is designed to move God's children away from self-centeredness to trust. Just as an infant must learn that his mother does not exist only as a means of satisfying his desires and needs to learn to love her for her own sake, so must the people of God grow up enough that we love God for His own sake and not simply for the sake of being a wish-granter in my self-centered universe.

Conclusion

So what is humility? What does it mean to get over ourselves? For one thing, it is realizing the true nature of human life. The universe doesn't revolve around me. And God doesn't exist to pull rabbits out of a hat for you. For another, as we live with the harsh realities of light and darkness, good and evil, we live with the sure confidence that God is not far from us. He is sovereign and will not let us be destroyed by anything below, for He has higher, eternal plans for us. Finally, we experience God not just in the moments of joy and contentment but in the times of great stress and intense struggle. We walk by faith and look to the example of Jesus as one who endured with an eye to the goal. Honoring God. Trusting His grace. Knowing that He does not forget His promises.