

A girl came home from school one day and was very excited. She had been voted “prettiest girl in the class.” The next day she was even more excited when she came home, for the class had voted her “the most likely to succeed.” The next day she came back and told her mother she had won the third contest, being voted “the most popular.”

But the next day she came home extremely upset. The mother said, “What happened, did you lose this time?” She said, “Oh no, I won the vote again.” The mother said, “What were you voted this time?” She said, “most stuck up.”

Sometimes over-confidence turns into pride and arrogance. An arrogant person thinks, “I am better than you, and I know more than you.” If we are not careful, pride can affect every aspect of our lives.

Today, Jesus teaches us about humility in the parable in Luke 18:9-14. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

A Pharisee entered and was standing in the center of the temple. The reason he stood there was that it was where he could be heard the clearest and seen the best. He let everybody know just how wonderful he was. First of all, we read that he fasted twice a week. The Old Testament only required a Jew to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement. But this man fasted 103 times a year more than he was required. He tithed everything that he possessed. The Old Testament only required that you tithe your income. But this man tithed everything that he earned and everything that he bought. In other words, he was a double tither. There is nothing wrong with fasting more than once a year, and there is nothing wrong with giving more than a tithe. Rather if we can make these disciplines in our lives, it would be helpful for our spiritual journey.

But the problem was that the Pharisee was proud. He went to the center of the court and stood in the sunshine, where people would notice him. He prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people.” He thought that God would be impressed with all that he was doing. He was satisfied with his work. His heart became proud.

C.S Lewis called pride “the great sin” in his book, *Mere Christianity*. He wrote, *“According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. It is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”*

On the other hand, the Tax collector stands in sharp contrast to the Pharisee in the parable. Tax collectors were considered traitors to the nation of Israel in Jesus’ time. They were so despised they could not hold public office or even give testimony in Jewish court because their word was considered worthless. The tax collector stood on the outer edges of the court of the Gentiles in the shadows, not carrying to let people see him pray. He said, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” The tax collector was not trying to impress at all, he was humble of heart, and that impressed God immensely.

Ernest Kurtz wrote a book about the history of Alcoholics Anonymous entitled “Not-God” because he says, “the fundamental problem alcoholics have is that way down deep, they refuse to acknowledge limitation, weakness, being finite, being

fallen. They tend to live under the delusion that they are in control of everything, when the truth is, they can't even control ourselves. Thus to say, "I am not God", is to say, I have weakness and limitations, I am not in control of everything in my universe, I need help from a power far greater than myself. As obvious as that sounds, friends, this, "I am not God" illusion is not limited to alcoholics. It is a spiritual problem that we all share."

Humility means that we realize, "I am not God" and have faith that God will lead us in the best way to live and what to avoid in temptation.

As Christians, we know the dangers pride has, and the benefits humility has. We misunderstand what humility means. Some of us have picked up the idea that thinking we are worthless to God and others is humility the Christian thing to practice. But God doesn't want us to think we are worthless to God and others.

You can ask, "Did the Apostle Paul warn us to not think of ourselves more highly than we should think?" Yes. He said it in Romans 12:3, but If you read the whole chapter, you would understand he said about our ability, not our worth.

God wants us to think we are awesome! God wants us to realize that with him, we have tremendous potential. God wants us to be confident in who we are as Christians because, more than anything else, we are the beloved and valued children of God.

Unlike the Pharisee in the parable, How can we stay humble and at the same time, remain confident in who we are and what we have?

First of all, we need to ask for feedback. We need an accurate view of ourselves to be humble. We need to be open to feedback and give people permission to tell us

what they honestly think. You can ask several close friends to be honest about three things they appreciate about you and three areas where you might need some growth. When we get feedback, we can be proud of our strengths and accomplishments, and also we can know and work on our weaknesses. When we are open, we can be humble and grow.

Secondly, we have to confront our prejudices.

If we think we are an expert in a specific area and have nothing more to learn, we probably lack humility. Humility involves knowing as much as we can about something and then being humble enough to check the other side.

I believe that it's difficult to understand something until we understand its opposite fully. We understand happiness because we know sadness. When we are humble, we are open to knowing more so that we can grow up like Jesus Christ in everything. We never know everything. We need to be always looking for more knowledge and deeper experiences.

Thirdly, we have to practice gratitude

We have to realize that every good and perfect gift is from above. God gave us breath. God gave us our personality and talents. There is nothing for us to get prideful about our abilities.

Thus, gratitude is the overflow of a humble heart, just as surely as an ungrateful, complaining spirit flows out of a proud heart.

Humble persons think much of God and others, and they recognize that anything they have is better than they deserve. They do not feel anyone owes them anything. They do not feel entitled to have more, or for life to be easy, or for everyone to love him and treat him well. They ask, "How can I contribute to the world for what

God wants to do? When we practice gratitude, we can focus on God and others more than the self, and we want to give back and strive to contribute to the greater good.

Humility is our greatest friend. It increases our hunger for God and opens our hearts to others. It leads to intimacy with God. However, developing the attitude of a humble servant does not happen overnight. Someone said, “Humility is not a grace that can be acquired in a few months: it is the work of a lifetime.”

As we ask feedback, confront our prejudices, and practice gratitude, we would be humble like Jesus Christ. I want to close the sermon with Luke 18:14, “Jesus tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”