

EQUIP South Africa 2012

Session 3

Humility

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If you want to have a good laugh, look up Mohammed Ali quotes on the Internet. He really had the ability to talk himself up. His pride and arrogance is amazing.

“It's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am,” he said once. “You got to fake it 'til you make it!”

He really believed what he said. One time, after he had won a boxing match, he was on a plane pacing up and down and proclaiming how great he was. A stewardess tried to get him to sit down and put on his seat belt and he said to her, “I'm Supernan, I don't need no seat belt!” The stewardess replied, “Well, Superman doesn't need a plane. So please sit down!”

Ali also once said: “It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out; it's the pebble in your shoe.” That's worth thinking about. It's the little things that get into our system that wear us out.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, had an amazing life story. Once he was invited to Melbourne to talk at a Presbyterian church leadership gathering. The person who introduced him began to boast of Taylor's pedigree and all the things he had achieved.

But Taylor stood up and said in front of this vast crowd: “Dear Friends, I'm the little servant of an illustrious master.” He recognised that something bigger than just his own efforts was at work within him.

William Temple was the archbishop of Canterbury during World War II. He was a very prayerful man and became passionate about raising awareness around what was happening in the concentration camps in Germany. At an event he was invited to speak at they acknowledged his humility and in reply he said:

“Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gift. Humility is not thinking about yourself one way or the other at all.”

What a challenge! In this session I want to focus on humility and the need for us, as leaders, to live in it.

God favours the humble

I've been leading a local church in some way or other for the last 25 years. In this time I've seen really good people rise up and fall. I've seen people with great, dynamic gifts that spark a light in the life of believers eventually have double standards in their life revealed. Those that sat in the auditoriums that packed the gatherings these people spoke in have walked away disillusioned and broken.

It's a responsibility, privilege and joy most of the time to lead in the life of the local church. Hebrews 13 challenges the church to make it a joy. In the same breath of making it a joy for those that lead you, there's also a challenge that we're responsible in God.

1 Peter 5: 1 – 11 (NLT)

And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: 2 Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. 3 Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. 4 And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

5 In the same way, you younger men must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, serve each other in humility, for

“God opposes the proud
but favors the humble.”[a]

6 So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. 7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

8 Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. 9 Stand firm against him, and be strong

in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters[b] all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

10 In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. 11 All power to him forever! Amen.

The Word is the light and life of man, says John's Gospel. This book is life and is full of life; it's full of God's story. I pray that as we read it the Father would flood our hearts with light.

We see instructions coming through here – elders towards the flock, young men towards the elders, others, and personally towards God. Here are some key points we need to note:

1. God opposes pride in people (vs 5). When pride begins to well up in our heart God opposes that. In some ways that's bad news. But It's also good news as God's approach towards us is for redemption. His approach is restorative, not punitive, as we heard from Terry earlier on.
2. God says he will give grace to those who are humble. That's great news!
3. Here's more good news. God will use His mighty hand to exalt the humble in due time. In the process of life, He is going to exalt you in due time; lift you up; elevate you; grow you; mature you; bring you into the fullness of everything that he planned and purposed you for.
4. And in the interim, He will use his mighty hand to care for you. He is going to open up the opportunities of life for us in due time.

Peter and a request

Let's look at Peter's story from Luke 22: 31 – 32 (NLT).

31 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. 32 But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.”

What's the context of this? What's the lead-in? See verse 21 and 24 (below). At the last

supper, Jesus had just told His disciples that someone's going to betray Him.

21 “But here at this table, sitting among us as a friend, is the man who will betray me. 22 For it has been determined that the Son of Man[c] must die. But what sorrow awaits the one who betrays him.” 23 The disciples began to ask each other which of them would ever do such a thing.

24 Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. 25 Jesus told them, “In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called ‘friends of the people.’ 26 But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. 27 Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves.

After the disciples display their shock and proclaim how they will not betray Jesus, their discussion jumps to a very different tone. They begin to argue about who will be the greatest among them. In the midst of a crisis of a friend, the tone of the conversation moves from “It's not me” to chests poking out. Accusations start flying. Self-promotion starts coming in. Then that leads up to verse 31 above.

Why did Satan feel like he had permission to ask to sift them as wheat? In Isaiah 14 we see a prophetic picture of Lucifer, prior to the creation of mankind, as one of the three arch-angels. He was the charismatic and beautiful one, the musician. Then he aspired to make himself greater than God. Pride came in. His greatness had risen up. That pride led to His expulsion from heaven. And he was persuasive, taking a third of the angels with him.

So Satan must have been listening in on the conversation here at the last supper and he hears something going on in their hearts of these leaders, the future apostles of the church, and he recognises it. And he probably said something like, “Aha, they're just like me. They like their own greatness.” He knew Proverbs 16:18, which says that pride comes before a fall. And so he heard this and requested to sift them.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* you see the White Witch ride into Aslan's camp with boldness and confidence, with a sort of righteousness, demanding the blood of young Edmund. She demanded it because she had a right – a law had been broken and on the basis of that she could make an appeal. Here in the scriptures, Satan heard what was going on in the hearts of these leaders and knew there was grounds. So

he requests to sift them as wheat.

But let's take a weight off Peter's shoulders. In verse 31 it says that Satan asked to sift each of them, not Just Peter. We know Peter goes on to deny Jesus three times as per the prophecy. But it wasn't because he was a wimp – remember, he was the one who cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant in the garden. He was the guy who got out the boat and walked on water.

Rather, something had got into him. Pride had begun to take root and destabilise his state of grace. And in the moment when He should have risen up, he fell.

God saw us

I love Terry's picture of the dad in the Prodigal Son story. I love the song we sing about the Lamb being slain before the foundation of the earth. That speaks of how God knew, he saw and he planned.

A standard greeting in New Zealand when you walk into someone's house is *Tēnā koe*. It means, "I see you". I love the picture of this. God looked at us and said *Tēnā koe* – he saw us before the foundation of the earth. And isn't it great that we have a need to see Christ, which Tyrone spoke about in the first session?

The redemptive process

There's a redemption process in Peter's story and in his life you can see how God works with us. In John 21, Jesus, after doing all that he did – dying, rising from the dead – is back on the beach looking for his boys. That's our saviour, redeemer and King. And in Luke 24, where disciples are on the road to Emmaus, you hear a sense of earnest longing in their conversation. And Jesus couldn't hold himself back but had to come reveal himself to them, talk to them, open life to them. He doesn't leave us lost and broken. No, he looks for us.

Jesus had prophesied life over Peter when he said, "Upon this rock I'll build my church" (Matthew 16:18) but after that declaration Peter fell a few times and God's redemptive process was at work in his life. John 21:15 highlights this redemptive, restorative process, with Jesus saying to Peter, "feed my sheep."

We see some of the fruit of that process in Acts 3:12, where Peter defers any sense of responsibility on himself but gives glory to God for the healing of the man by the gate

Beautiful. Something had shifted. He was no longer pushing for greatness but acknowledging the greatness and goodness of God. See, the redemptive process was at work in his life.

In 2 Peter 5 Peter says that God has given us everything we need to live a godly and good life. Everything we need! Then he says you can add to your faith many other things. What do we see here with Peter? You see a the fruits and gifts of the spirit finding voice and life in him. The process and maturing of God is bearing fruit. Then Peter says if you can grow and develop all these tools he is talking about and press into the life of who God is and do life with Him, and participate with God, you will mature and produce fruit that lasts.

That's the whole thing about the Gospel. It's not about serving God in ministry, it's about learning how to do life with Him. Anything God asks us to do he is expecting to do with us. God invites us to join Him, not the other way around. So how do we do that? By participating in the divine nature. And by participating you escape the corruption in this evil world. There's a process.

The point?

Jesus must rule in our hearts as leaders and He will dislodge elements in our life that can give grounds to the devil to ask to sift us as wheat. One of those elements is pride. With pride the devil can say that something in our hearts sounds just like him. As leaders we begin to lead and gather people, and then we fall, and we must realise that it's not just about us – it's about our city, community, kids, friends, our kids' friends, neighbours, our church. It's about others. There are always people waiting on the other side of our responses to God's prompting on our hearts.

There are people waiting for you, that Jesus gave his life for. Peter writes that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, belonging to God, that we may display the splendour of Him who has called us out of darkness. He said that with passion. Why? Because he had to acknowledge elements of darkness within his own life.

We live in a world where there are spiritualities and powers. Remember we're at spiritual war. Jesus came to kick hell out of our nations. Satan is at work but he isn't omnipresent. The cross cancelled out sin and death and it brought victory to us. But we are in an age where evil and darkness still have some dominance over our nations because they get access to the human heart.

I've heard it said that the true secret of success is to be successful in our secret life. Where

does Satan live? He lives in darkness. I've had to understand in my own life that there are elements of darkness that want to trap me. I came into the light at 18 years old and have done my best to follow Jesus with every ounce of my being with passion but I haven't kicked the sin habit. I'm still challenged to live in the grace of God. I still recognise that in most weeks there are plenty of opportunities for me to fall every day. I've done that many times in my walk. I'm still a sinner in need of a saviour, getting saved.

Satan lives in darkness. And that darkness is not always out of my life. And it wasn't out the life of Peter.

Luke 11: 34 – 35

34 “Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when it is bad, your body is filled with darkness. 35 Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness. 36 If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight were filling you with light.”

If you deal to the corners of your house the rest of the house will take care of of itself. Jesus is saying here that we must deal to the corners in our life – letting light penetrate into the corners of who we are. Don't hide. Let the light penetrate into those corners. Then with no dark corners, your life will radiate as though a floodlight were filling you.

Remember Jesus also talks about being salt of the earth and a city on a hill (Matthew 5). Let the Gospel and Kingdom get into you so it can get out of you.

Pride is a doorway to darkness

Pride is a doorway to darkness. In Genesis 4:7 we see Cain and Abel fighting over whose gift is greater. The heart of the matter is always the matter of the heart. Here's what the verse says (NLT):

7 You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

There were two ways of responding here. God comes and speaks to Cain in verse 6, asking him why he is so angry and dejected. Here in verse 7 God shows his care for him. Cain heard the care, concern and love of the Father and went out straight away and

murdered his brother.

There's a little bit of Frank Sinatra in each of us. Remember Sinatra's song, "I'll Do it My way"? We hear truth and say, "That's nice, but I'll do it my way anyway."

Jesus needs to rule in our hearts as leaders. Here I stand but by the grace of God. I'm 50 years old and have run out of excuses. When we compromise it's not just about us, it's about others and the community and our wives and more. It's about what it does to the credibility of what God is doing.

What I've realised over time is that if you really want to transform a community you need a strong transformed community. Not just in mouth or outward appearance but in life and freedom. You need a community that can speak of the darkness with confidence because they've learned how to walk in the light.

Pride is the doorway that can take us out. Humility is the doorway that allows Christ to rule in our life. In humility there is saving grace. We overcome. God gives grace to the humble. In humility we're perfectly placed for grace, even though we're not perfect. God wants us to grow in this life but we've got to learn to break through.

Where we stand

Here's another Māori word: *Tūrangawaewae*. It means "Where we stand." When the Māori do the haka, part of it is showing where they stand, their *Tūrangawaewae*. They're standing on this ground and bringing their challenge.

Our *Tūrangawaewae* is in Christ. Our *Tūrangawaewae* is in God's saving grace. Our *Tūrangawaewae* is in his redemptive process in our lives. Our *Tūrangawaewae* is in His light and liberty. It's not the bullets that shoot at us that take out the best of us it's the bullets within us that we've never brought into the light.

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