

“Thrive”: Forging a Vital Faith
From Self-Reliance to God-Reliance (Humility)
2.3.19
Text: Genesis 12:1-4; Hebrews 11:8-9



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

In today’s teaching, we consider the first of the “*From-To*” Flourish Markers: the movement from **Self-reliance to God-reliance**. In this movement, we are losing confidence in ‘self’ and gaining confidence in God.

If you are not familiar, do a web-search of the Greek mythological figure Narcissus.

“How would you define self-reliance? In what ways does it characterize our inherent posture as humans? How does it characterize our culture?”

“How would you describe God-reliance? What are some of the characteristics of those whose lives are demonstrating a confidence in God and his ways?”

“When you hear the word, ‘humility’, does a name/face come to mind for you? If so, why would you consider them to be humble?”

“Why is it difficult for us to come to terms with our own brokenness? What do you think we are afraid of?”

“Besides those offered in the teaching, can you think of any other practices in which we might participate which would allow us to cultivate humility in our lives?”

Teaching Notes...

Our journey has always been offered to us within the imagery of this movement “from” something, “to” something, primarily centered in the Exodus story--- from captivity to freedom.

We have somehow managed to take a faith that was centered in risky-belief and offer it as a systematic and standardized set of practices.

“You need only stand still” (Exodus 14). “Send out the marching band around Jericho” (Joshua 6). “You’ve got too many people. 32,000 to 300. I can win with that, but you’ll think you can!” (Judges 7).

Everything that God created is dependent upon him for life and functionality.

Paul offers Abraham, not as some random sampling of characters, but as a means of placing us in this environment of ‘faith’. As we seek to understand this notion of ‘faith’, what we get is not a dictionary definition or its etymology, but a story. Stories of God acting, God inter-acting. Stories of humanity inexplicably responding. *“Go. So, Abram went” (Genesis 12).*

Abram must “leave home”.

The blessing that God desires for Abraham **cannot** come from within that world itself (it’s values, systems, structures). Abraham must relinquish all that keeps him connected and identified by Babylon (monument to human arrogance). Babel (self-reliance; self-sufficient) can never be the source of the solution.

The Bible is not a book about irrevocable destinies or determinations. It is a book of “decisions”.

It is not a book about ‘chance’ or people’s irreversible ‘fates’, but about the life-trajectory that their choices establish.

God’s initial promise to Abram was unprovoked in the sense that it did not depend on the fulfillment of any prior expectations. On the other hand, the experience of the promise involved an implied conditionality.

We have identified (6) “Flourish Markers” (movements) which we believe identify us on “the way/journey with Jesus” and that help become more fully human:

Self-reliance to God-reliance

Isolation to Belonging

Fear to Trust

Duty to Delight

Insignificance to Purpose

Brokenness to Wholeness

“We can all learn to live a life where we rely more and more on our own capabilities. With honest self-reliance you can put the effort in, be honest with yourself and all that life has to offer you will be there for you. Be willing to accept the challenge.” (from web)

Pride: the heart turned in on itself. It is the root of all human dysfunctionality.

Self-reliance is to see yourself as your own “point-of-reference”; the “axis” around which everything and everyone else revolves. It is over-estimating ourselves and underestimating God.

I suppose this “self-reliance” (pride) shows up in a variety of self-destructive ways:

When things are “going well”, pride is there to take the credit. When things are going off-the-rails, pride is there to distribute the blame.

Comparison. Ranking. Unwillingness to change. Dominating conversations. Never let people finish a sentence. Never able to say you’re sorry. Squeezing out the gifted people in your life or the ones who challenge you to “become”.

You can see how self-reliance chokes out the possibility of ever being in healthy relationship.

The antithesis of self-reliance is God-reliance. Humility.

‘humus’— earth; dirt. When God decided to create a creature in his image and likeness, he chose the most common material available and made it glorious.

Humility is not to be confused with “humiliation”.

“**humiliation**”--- having your indecencies exposed

“**humility**”--- seeing them for yourself

Humility is to admit that the resources for which we long are not resident within us apart from God.

“poor in spirit” [Matthew 5] (Gr. ptokos: completely empty and dependent upon someone else for provision)

It is to consider yourself spiritually impoverished; no leverage, no solid footing upon which you could make claims on God.

We hear Jesus say, *“Hey you! Yea, you... the broken one! Welcome. Come on in.”* It is out of that invitation--- that indiscriminate grace--- that you can now be accepted, but loved into transformation.

“Humility: that virtue by which a man recognizes his own unworthiness because he really knows himself.” (Bernard of Clairvaux, 11th century)

It’s difficult to talk about humility because we have relatively few examples in our lives of those we believe are worthy of the identifier.

“How many voices in your life are urging you toward self-denial as your highest good? How many sessions has your PR Dept offered on considering your co-workers

needs above your own? How many of you, at the top of your personal mission statement, is listed, "Above all else... humility?"

It was not until Jesus that history had seen someone so confident in their identity and worth, yet so wonderfully self-emptying (Philippians 2; John 13). We didn't know what to do with him. He was so appealing, yet his message so offensive to us.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am humble... and you will find rest." Matthew 11:29

Humility is the quality necessary for healthy inter-dependence.

There are (2) love-expressions: 1) the Lord, your God, 2) your near-ones as yourselves. Both de-centralize us [Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5].

Loving God is a response, not an effort. Loving ourselves is a confession, not an arrogant declaration. Loving others is the inevitable expression of having been loved well by God.

Interestingly, we are never instructed to pray for humility. We are to humble ourselves.

Life will present you with plenty of opportunity to come face to face with your determination to make life work on your own and your obvious failure to do so. Simply be aware of all the self-defense mechanisms you put in place to fend off your need of grace.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble". James 4:6 (1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10).

Grace has nothing to offer the person who thinks they can do life without God.

It doesn't mean that God stands "defiantly against us". It simply means that God cannot provide what we are unwilling to receive.

Humility is what I will call "transformative vision": *seeing myself, seeing God, seeing God seeing me, seeing others with God.*

In the process, something wonderful happens: I become more "self-aware", but less "self-absorbed".

Seeing myself: CONFESSION

Humility is "not" self-deprecation. It's not speaking ill of yourself; just speaking honestly. It's the willingness to allow God to say who you are and why you are.

Seeing God: REVERANCE ['fear'; 'awe-inspiring respect'; 'deference']

Seeing myself, then seeing God, and recognizing the difference. Honoring his uniqueness and rightful place. Deferring to God in all-things life.

“You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other--- there never has been, and there never will be” (Isaiah 43).

Seeing God seeing me: IDENTITY (centers us)

“Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you”. 1 Peter 5:7

Herein lies the dignity in our dependency. God created us to need him. He desires to give us what we need. He longs to give us himself.

Seeing others with God: COMPASSION

“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way that I have loved you.”

John 15:12

Cultivate humility.

Some practices for moving from self-reliance to God-reliance:

Keep bringing who you are to God, not who you would like to be.

Live your own story. It's contentment with what you have been given and honest admission of your limitations. You can't do it all. You can't have it all (Philippians 4:12).

Give thanks. *“What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?”* 1 Corinthians 4:7

It doesn't mean that you didn't contribute, but that you are not ultimately responsible.

Be okay with anonymous. Find a place to serve, even if no one notices.

Give without telling anyone.

See the needs of people, not needy people. Make the capacities and resources you do have available for the good of another.

Ask for something you need. Receive something someone wants to give.

Allow yourself to be inconvenienced (Do you realize how much of Jesus' service took place on the way to someplace else?)

Be teachable. Read the Bible. Let the Bible read you. *“Do nothing out of self-ambition...”* Instead of seeing others in that scenario, can you recognize yourself?