



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

June 2024

Humility

Wisdom Story



mit one of the seven classical sins, and that is pride, which is usually first on the Sin List. Pride can be healthy, an honest appreciation of one's positive character traits and behavior. But when pride is excessive, it becomes a sin. Such pride is grounded in an attitude of superiority, which leads to arrogance and a sense of entitlement. In turn, this can result in alienation and isolation, difficulty in accepting feedback, the inability to admit mistakes, resistance to change, and a lack of empathy and compassion.

Introduction to the Theme

Etymologically, humility is grounded in the Latin root *humus*, which means "earth or soil." Yet, the Latin *humilitatem* is defined as "lowness, small stature; insignificance; baseness, littleness of mind." Accordingly, humility is not regarded as a positive attribute. It is associated with meekness, being unable to defend oneself, getting walked all over, and being weak. The image of Clark Kent comes to mind instead of Superman. Ironically, in terms of human relationships, humility is a superpower. The problem, in part, is that we confuse humility with being humiliated.

A biblical proverb, "Pride goeth before a fall," reminds us that the consequences of excessive pride can be disastrous. Some people who become too prideful are fortunate to be humbled by life. Humility can help reground a person, connecting them with what is really important, including relationships with others, the ability to appreciate one's limitations, imperfections, and strengths, and the willingness to learn from others. When this happens, they respond with

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Green Beans or Pinto Beans?

Rachel was a kind and curious nine-year-old who loved learning about people who lived in different parts of town. Her class had been studying poverty and how people survive with little food and resources. They decided to collect groceries and take them to a neighborhood where many people lived in poor conditions. Rachel's mom helped her collect food from their neighbors, and she was amazed by how much kindness strangers showed towards them.

On a sunny Saturday, Rachel and her classmates arrived at Julio's neighborhood. Julio was eight years old and lived with his family, including his grandmother, who only spoke Spanish. Julio's family had a small garden in their backyard, but the soil was hard and didn't grow much food. Julio's dream was to turn a nearby vacant lot into a community garden where everyone could grow their own vegetables.

Rachel got out of the car and saw Julio sitting on the front steps of his house. She introduced herself and gave him two bags of groceries. Julio's eyes lit up as he began to take out each item and show it to his grandmother. But as he pulled out canned green beans and white flour, his grandmother shook her head. "We need pinto beans for refried beans and jalapeno peppers for cooking," she said.



Rachel felt a pang of disappointment and humiliation. She had assumed the food she collected would be loved and appreciated, but it seemed like she didn't really understand

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Humility & Reimagining the Common Good

If we are to reimagine the Common Good, then we must support the cultivation of humility. Its opposite, arrogance, is a recipe for selfishness and a race to the lowest common denominator and common good. In the West, humility has not been a virtue. In the East, it is central to Buddhism and Confucianism. In Buddhism, humility is implicit in the concept of right view and right intention. Confucian emphasis on modesty and respect for others are central to humility. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre highlights humility as being crucial for moral development and living in community. Humility promotes collaboration, emphasizes integrity and accountability, counteracts selfishness and entitlement, and cultivates a culture of respect and inclusion. All of these are necessary to forge the Common Good with others.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Reimagining the Common Good

Don't Assume

(Continued from page 1) **Green & Pinto beans** what Julio and his family needed. Julio thanked her, but Rachel felt like she had failed.

Feeling sorry, Rachel asked Julio what he thought would really help his family. Julio's eyes sparkled as he told her about his dream for a community garden. Rachel was inspired and asked Julio if she could help. Together, they came up with a plan to convince the City Council to turn the vacant lot into a community garden.

Rachel shared Julio's idea with her class, and they all decided to help. They wrote letters to the City Council, made posters, and even spoke up at a city meeting. It wasn't easy, but together, they finally convinced the city to give them the lot.

Finally, the day came to plant the seeds for the community garden. Julio invited Rachel to help, and she was excited to be a part of it. They planted corn, pinto beans, jalapeno peppers, and many more vegetables. Rachel was amazed by how much she had learned about community and hard work.

As they worked, Julio's grandmother told him to tell Rachel that she appreciated her for listening to their needs and helping them achieve their dream. Rachel realized that she had learned a valuable lesson: don't assume what people need; get to know them and let them tell you how you can help.

From that day on, Rachel knew that even small actions could make a big difference. She and Julio remained good friends, and every Saturday, they would meet at the community garden, surrounded by the beautiful colors and delicious smells of fresh vegetables.

Rachel's adventure taught her that kindness and compassion could change lives and that even the smallest of us can make a big impact. She also learned the value of humility, not assuming that she knew best. Instead, she understood how important it was to learn from others. And every time she looked at the community garden, she was reminded of the power of working together.

Source: Touchstones

Humble & Wise

The Humble Path

David Brooks

The self-effacing person is soothing and gracious, while the self-promoting person is fragile and jarring. Humility is freedom from the need to prove you are superior all the time, but egotism is a ravenous hunger in a small space—self-concerned, competitive, and distinction-hungry. Humility is infused with lovely emotions like admiration, companionship, and gratitude. "Thankfulness," the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, said, "is a soil in which pride does not easily grow."

There is something intellectually impressive about that sort of humility, too. We have, the psychologist Daniel Kahneman writes, an "almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance." Humility is the awareness that there's a lot you don't know and that a lot ...you think you know is distorted or wrong.

This is the way humility leads to wisdom. ...The people we think are wise have ...overcome the biases and overconfident tendencies that are infused in our nature. In its most complete meaning, intellectual humility is accurate self-awareness from a distance.



...Truly humble people ...{use a} journey metaphor to describe their own lives. But they also use, alongside that, a different metaphor, which has more to do with the internal life. This is the metaphor of self-confrontation. They are more likely to assume that we are all deeply divided selves, both splendidly endowed and deeply flawed—that we each have certain talents but also certain weaknesses.

...Truly humble people are engaged in a great effort to magnify what is best in themselves and defeat what is worst, to become strong in the weak places.

Source: *The Road to Character* by David Brooks

Humble & Strong

Overcoming Narcissism

Jean M. Twenge & W. Keith Campbell

In many ways, humility is the opposite of narcissism. Some people misconstrue humility..., equating it with shame or self-hatred. Humility is not the same as humiliation. True humility is a strength: the ability to see or evaluate yourself accurately and without defensiveness (notice we said "accurately," not "negatively"). ...Julie Exline ...found that humble people are often surrounded by friends and family who support them and allow them to see themselves accurately. Sometimes this support comes through religion.... Overall, humble people are more connected to others. When you don't concentrate on pumping up the self, it is easier to relate to other people and the wider world. Many people think that humility is a virtue that only great leaders possess, like Gandhi or

Mother Teresa, but everyone can practice humility by honestly appraising themselves, remembering the people who



have helped and supported them, and truly valuing the lives of others.

Another treatment for narcissism comes from a surprising source: compassion for yourself. ...Compassion for yourself isn't about admiring or esteeming the self or making excuses for shoddy behavior—it means being kind to yourself while also accurately facing reality. "With self-compassion, you don't have to feel better than others to feel good about yourself," writes Kristin Neff. People who practice compassion for themselves experience less anger, fewer uncontrollable thoughts about themselves, less self-consciousness, more positive emotions, more happiness, and more constructive responses to criticism. It also predicts curiosity, wisdom, ...and a growth in compassion for others.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/19943>

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: “Even if you be otherwise perfect, you fail without humility.” The Talmud

Day 2: “Humility is the only true wisdom by which we prepare our minds for all the possible changes of life.” George Arliss

Day 3: “We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility.” Rabindranath Tagore

Day 4: “Humility means accepting reality with no attempt to outsmart it.” David Richo

Day 5: “I’m nothing special. I’m just an ordinary monk.” 14th Dalai Lama

Day 6: “It wasn’t until quite late in life that I discovered how easy it is to say, ‘I don’t know!’” Somerset Maugham

Day 7: “...In the school of the Spirit man learns wisdom through humility, knowledge by forgetting, how to speak by silence, how to live by dying.” Johannes Tauler

Day 8: “If you aren’t humble, whatever empathy you claim is false and probably results from some arrogance or the desire to control. But true empathy is rooted in humility and the understanding that there are many people with as much to contribute in life as you.” Anand Mahindra

Day 9: “‘Thank you’ is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.” Alice Walker

Day 10: “We learned about gratitude and humility—that so many people had a hand in our success, from the teachers who inspired us to the janitors who kept our school clean... and we were taught to value everyone’s contribution and treat everyone with respect.” Michelle Obama

Day 11: “Humility, I have learned, must never be confused with meekness. Humility is being open to the ideas of others.” Simon Sinek

Day 12: “The greatest friend of truth is Time, her greatest enemy is Prejudice, and her constant companion is Humility.” Charles Caleb Colton

Day 13: “To me, having the courage to tell your own story goes hand in hand with having the curiosity and humility to listen to others’ stories.” Sarah Kay

Day 14: “It’s wonderful to be back ...among the mountains that remind us of our vulnerability, our ultimate lack of control over the world we live in. Mountains that demand humility, and yield so much peace in return.” Alex Lowe

Day 15: “Honesty is grounded in humility and indeed in humiliation, and in admitting exactly where we are powerless.” David Whyte

Day 16: “What humility does for one is it reminds us that there are people before me. I have already been paid for. And what I need to do is prepare myself so that I can pay for someone else who has yet to come but who may be here and needs me.” Maya Angelou

Day 17: “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.” C. S. Lewis

Day 18: “There is nothing I can do to undo what I did. I can only say again how sorry I am to those I let down and then strive to go forward with a greater sense of humility and purpose, and with gratitude to those who stood with me during a very difficult chapter in my life.” David Petraeus

Day 19: “I think humility—which I think is a very good value to adopt—is basically an extension of understanding your own ignorance.” Mark Manson

Day 20: “Anyone who is humble but still super accomplished, super recognized, renowned, has status, and has every reason to not have to be humble if they don’t want to, but they still choose to be humble because they value that humanity is connected—that we’re all on the same level as humans—that humility is what wins my heart.” Jay Shetty

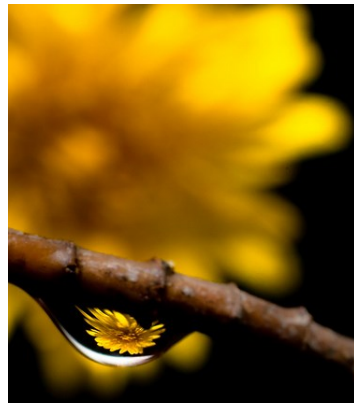
Day 21: “Modern science has been a voyage into the unknown, with a lesson in humility waiting at every stop. Many pas-

sengers would rather have stayed home.” Carl Sagan

Day 22: “Ancient societies had anthropomorphic gods: a huge pantheon expanding into centuries of dynastic drama; fathers and sons, martyred heroes, star-crossed lovers, the deaths of kings—stories that taught us of the danger of hubris and the primacy of humility.” Tom Hiddleston

Day 23: “Humility is born of the spirit, humiliation of the ego.” Alan Cohen

Day 24: “I would hope that, for me, regardless of what happens in my career in the future, I always want to maintain a level of humility. I think it’s so important to not lose yourself and to just understand that you’re a conduit.” Paul Wesley



Day 25: “Humility is becoming a lost art, but it’s not difficult to practice. It means that you realize that others have been involved in your success.” Harvey Mackay

Day 26: “If every moment is sacred, and if you are amazed and in awe most of the time when you find yourself breathing and not crazy, then you are in a

state of constant thankfulness, worship and humility.” Bernice Johnson Reagon

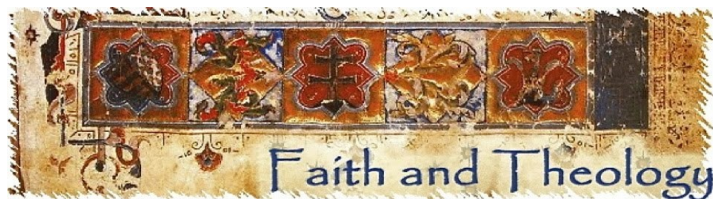
Day 27: “The antidote to white fragility is ongoing and lifelong and includes sustained engagement, humility, and education.” Robin DiAngelo

Day 28: “Humility is not something that comes naturally. But it is a cardinal virtue that should be pursued more than any other.” Joyce Meyer

Day 29: “When I worked with wildlife..., I learned the meaning of patience. And when I worked with trees, I learned the meaning of humility.” James Balog

Day 30: “Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of self.” T. S. Eliot

Day 31: “It ain’t the heat, it’s the humility.” Yogi Berra



viduals accept failures and mistakes with neither self-blame nor denial. This resilience allows them to learn from

A Theology of Humility

A liberal theology of humility is grounded in the recognition of human fallibility, the recognition that we are imperfect and prone to error. Human fallibility and the idea of individual superiority are incompatible. Going further, the delusion of superiority of an individual, group, nation, or race is not a position of strength but a mask for weakness, for a character flaw, that gets expressed through hubris and arrogance.

David Brooks, in his book, *The Road to Character*, explains human fallibility through the metaphor and fact of stumbling. He writes, "We are all stumblers, and the beauty and meaning of life are in the stumbling—in recognizing the stumbling and trying to become more graceful as the years go by.

"The stumbler scuffs through life, a little off balance here and there, sometimes lurching, sometimes falling to her knees. But the stumbler faces her imperfect nature, her mistakes and weaknesses, with unvarnished honesty, with the opposite of squeamishness. She is sometimes ashamed of the perversities in her nature—the selfishness, the self-deceit, the occasional desire to put lower loves above higher ones.

"But humility offers self-understanding. When we acknowledge that we screw up, and feel the gravity of our limitations, we find ourselves challenged and stretched with a serious foe to overcome and transcend." In this case, the foe is ourself.

Not only do we stumble from time to time, but Life trips us using an accident, serious illness, job loss, the end of a relationship, the death of a loved one, unexpected failures, and more. Whether stumbling or being tripped, we are humbled and then saved from hubris and arrogance. For the lesson is less in the falling down and more in the getting up, though both are hard.

Because of humility one can be resilient in the face of failure. It helps indi-

viduals accept failures and mistakes with neither self-blame nor denial. This resilience allows them to learn from their experiences and move forward, rather than being paralyzed by the need to protect their ego.

Liberal theology is informed, not by doctrine or dogma, but by experience. Through those experiences that humble us, we recognize our limitations and our spurred to personal growth, which requires an openness to learning. As we learn humility, our self-esteem is not lowered, but it is balanced as our view of ourself avoids both arrogance and self-deprecation. In this sense, humility is the middle way between these two extremes.

However we are humbled, we come to



value what we have in common with others. We become more inclusive and accepting of others as our respect for diversity grows. Recognizing and appreciating the diversity of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds of others helps in understanding that no single viewpoint is superior. Diversity and inclusion are hallmarks of a theology of humility.

Humility involves looking outward with compassion, solidarity, respect, and wonder at the Other and then going inward to ask what is required in this moment. Often, it is the human Other, especially the marginalized and oppressed, and committing to work for a more equitable world. Occasionally, the Other is the Earth and her Web of Life, and committing to caring for the planet. In both cases, the posture is one of care and service. As C.S. Lewis noted, "Humility isn't thinking less of yourself,

but thinking of yourself less."

Humility invites critical self-reflection of one's beliefs, actions, and motivations. This introspection helps identify areas where one might fall short of their ideals and encourages personal and spiritual growth.

There is not a set formula for taking on the mantle of humility, and it certainly is not a one-and-done. It is a life-long cultivation that ironically involves being humble about one's capacity for humility. Humility, in part, is grounded of gratitude, which recognizes and values the contributions of others to one's success and well-being. Humility counteracts feelings of entitlement and self-importance by cultivating a sense of gratitude rather than expectation.

We have important exemplars of humility. The prophet Micah asked,

"And what does the Lord require of you but to do mercy, love justice, and walk humbly with thy God." In this regard, Jesus was the embodiment of humility. He was born in a humble setting, lived a modest life, and

associated with the marginalized and outcasts of society. Jesus taught about humility and servanthood as exemplified in his washing of the disciples' feet.

Siddhartha Gautama, who was born a prince, renounced his title, status, and wealth to begin his search for enlightenment. As the Buddha, he emphasized the importance of overcoming ego, desire, and attachment, teaching the importance of humility for achieving Nirvana.

Humility is also critical for creating and sustaining the Beloved Community. Here a theology of humility moves from individual aspiration to collective practice. Humility involves recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every person. It helps dismantle hierarchies and power imbalances by encouraging individuals to see others, as M. Scott Peck wrote, "Not with the hard eyes of judgment, but with the soft eyes of respect."

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Family Matters

Teaching Humility

James M. Barrie, the author of the play *Peter Pan*, wrote, "Life is a long lesson in humility." While he meant that we will experience humility over and over again in a lifetime, it is also true that it takes effort to understand humility and its value. By teaching children humility, we can instill in them values like empathy, compassion, and respect for others.

Model humility: Children can learn humility from their parents when it is consistently modeled by demonstrating a concern for others and themselves through both actions and words. In a

sense, it is practicing the golden rule: "doing unto others as we would have others do unto us." Children have a keen sense of fairness and can understand why this is important.

Build self-esteem: Building a child's self-esteem is a key to humility. To the extent that a child feels good about themselves, they can begin to recognize the inherent worth and dignity in others. Humility is enhanced when children realize that they are valued for who they are and not solely for what they do.

Encourage children: Encourage literally means "putting heart into." Doing well at most things requires effort. As children make links between effort and result, they have a better appreciation for accomplishments, both theirs' and others.

Cultivate understanding of others: Part of our ability to understand others is based on empathy, the ability to imagine what it would mean to be in someone else's shoes. Being "other-focused" can also be cultivated by having a child recognize and name what they value in others, even pets.

Tell stories of those who exhibited humility: Telling stories of people like Jesus, Mother Teresa, Buddha, Gandhi,

the 14th Dalai Lama, etc., helps children understand the positive role that humility can play in a person's life.

Teach children praise: Children learn praise by being praised and by praising others. Humility becomes an asset as a child discovers that praising others does not diminish their value or accomplishments.

Teach children to serve: In serving others, children's natural compassion is awakened. Care should be taken to emphasize the value and worth of those being served rather than just the circumstances that cause them to be in

need. It is also helpful to invite a child to reflect on the benefits that come back to the child through acts of service.

Help children admit mistakes and apologize: We all make mistakes. That is part of being human; it is also one of the ways in which we learn. Making a mistake does not diminish our inherent worth and dignity. Understanding that making mistakes is OK can be freeing to a child. Related to this is supporting a child in apologizing and helping them understand how an apology can help restore a relationship. Often, the desire to be right gets in the way of apologizing. Our Universalist ancestors understood the difference between being right and being good. When possible, help your child choose goodness.

Teach children respect: We teach respect by respecting children, expecting respect from them, and engaging in respectful language and behavior in a loving but firm manner. By encouraging mutual respect, we cultivate the capacity for humility in our children.

Invite children to express gratitude: Tony Dungy writes, "A genuinely grateful heart is a key building block for humility. Gratitude, practiced and eventually owned, enhances humility at every turn. The person saying 'Thank you' affects a

posture that is unassuming and modest. ...It's the kind of response that eventually soaks in, grows roots, and blooms humility." Source: Touchstones, Informed by <http://www.allprodad.com/10-ways-to-teach-your-children-humility/>

Family Activity: *Who will be first?*

Invite a discussion with your children about who should go first in a game or activity. Ask what is nice about going first and why they or others would want to. How can we determine who should go first if more than one wants to go first? Why might we be willing to go second?

Before the Fall

(Continued from page 4) **Theology of Humility**

In the Beloved Community, where equity and justice are foundational, humility ensures that actions and policies are designed to uplift everyone, especially the marginalized and oppressed. Humility encourages individuals to listen to others and appreciate their perspectives and experiences. This openness can bridge divides and create a more inclusive and compassionate community. By acknowledging that one's own experiences are not universal, individuals can better understand and empathize with the struggles and aspirations of others. Likewise, humility fosters collaboration over competition, promoting a cooperative approach to problem-solving. By prioritizing collective well-being over personal ego, individuals can work towards healing and restoring relationships, which is crucial for maintaining harmony within the community. Humility is at the heart of service, a key component of the Beloved Community. It inspires individuals to serve others selflessly, prioritize communal well-being, and work towards the greater good. Finally, leaders who embody humility tend to act in the best interest of their community rather than for personal gain. This type of leadership builds trust and respect, essential for guiding a community towards the ideals of the Beloved Community.

Source: Touchstones PS: *The photo of flowers on page four are violets, a symbol of humility.*



More Humility, Less Arrogance

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

gratitude. It is in this experience that the value of humility is revealed.

Still, humility is considered a liability. Humble people are viewed as having low self-esteem, which has to do with one's sense of worth and dignity. Ironically, humility supports high self-esteem by encouraging a realistic understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, which is crucial for personal growth. Further, humility moderates one's sense of self-importance, thus mitigating against a tendency toward arrogance and, as above, superiority.

In a culture obsessed with winning, humility is associated with losing, as the saying "nice guys finish last" suggests. This obsession creates poor losers who are unable to accept responsibility for their performance. Humility allows a person to be a good loser and, more importantly, a good winner. It is impossible for a poor loser to be a good winner because they lack the perspective that both winning and losing have are valuable in terms of one's sense of self. A poor loser has no motivation to become better, nor does a poor winner.

Where an overemphasis on individualism undermines teamwork, humility strengthens it by appreciating and supporting the abilities and contributions of others while understanding and valuing one's role in teamwork.

As mentioned above, humility is the opposite of arrogance, and comparing them reveals the nature of humility. Humility requires self-awareness in order to align one's behavior with one's values. This includes understanding one's abilities and limitations and being open to feedback. Arrogance typically involves overestimating abilities and resisting feedback.

The role of gratitude is significant in distinguishing between the two. The arrogant person rarely acknowledges or is grateful for the help or contributions of others. In some cases, they take all of the credit for success. By contrast, a humble person knows that success is often a collective effort. When this is the case, it is natural to acknowledge the contri-

butions of others and express gratitude. The difference between the two is driven by respect or its absence. Humility involves treating everyone with respect and kindness regardless of status or position. Arrogant individuals tend to look down on others and are often dismissive or condescending. Muhammad Ali once said, "I don't trust anyone who's nice to me but rude to the waiter. Because they would treat me the same way if I were in that position." But this goes deeper. Respect is informed by empathy. A humble person is empathetic and compassionate due to the ability to walk in another's shoes and to be open to their perspectives and feelings. Arrogance is so much about "me" that empathy is impossible.

Humble individuals tend to be service-oriented. This is reflected in making the needs of others and the Common Good a priority, which is in tension with the self-centeredness of arrogant people.

While it is not immediately apparent, arrogance is often a cover for insecurity, causing people to overcompensate for these feelings by acting superior. Humility is grounded in confidence without conceit. Secure in their abilities, a humble person does not need to prove their worth constantly.

While there are still other differences, being open versus being closed is notable. Arrogant people tend to be close-minded, close-hearted, and close-handed. Humility invites an open stance toward life where mind, heart, and hands are open.

Arrogance and humility are on continuums. While we may not like or respect arrogance, we can understand human frailty and what it can lead to. Finally, humility is always imperfect, from the Latin *imperfectus* meaning unfinished or incomplete. Cultivating humility is a

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Difficult to Do

Cultivating Humility

Robert A. Emmons

Paul T.P. Wong, president of the International Network on Personal Meaning, provides a set of ...humble practices for daily life:

- ◆ Acknowledging our wrongdoing
- ◆ Receiving correction and feedback graciously
- ◆ Refraining from criticizing others
- ◆ Forgiving others who have wronged us
- ◆ Apologizing to others we have wronged ...
- ◆ Thinking and speaking about the good things of other people
- ◆ Rejoicing over other people's success
- ◆ Counting our blessings for everything...
- ◆ Seeking opportunities to serve others
- ◆ Being willing to remain anonymous in helping others
- ◆ Showing gratitude for our successes
- ◆ Giving due credit to others for our successes
- ◆ Treating success as a responsibility to do more for others
- ◆ Being willing to learn from our failures
- ◆ Assuming responsibility for our failures
- ◆ Accepting our limitations ...
- ◆ Treating all people with respect regardless of their social status

You will see gratitude sprinkled throughout this list as well as a focus on the concerns of others and a sense of acceptance of self and others. ..Humble people do not deny their talents but rather keep a proper perspective. They do not need to denigrate others to feel better about themselves. Others do not have to lose so they can win.

Why did Wong suggest so many practices? Because humility is one of the most difficult virtues to cultivate. It does not come easily or naturally, particularly in a culture that values self-aggrandizement.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/24818>



Seeing Accurately

Humility: Antidote to Pride

Christopher Peterson & Martin E.P. Seligman

In the time of Thomas Aquinas, pride was considered sufficiently evil to be included among the deadly sins. Some even considered pride the ultimate sin, the root of all others. Yet—in the guise of self-esteem—modern Western culture encourages the pursuit of pride. ...The crusade to raise self-esteem has spawned countless self-help books.... If people can only feel better about themselves, the logic goes, they will be happy and behave well—and society will benefit. ...

But society's eagerness to facilitate positive views of the self at all costs has created a dangerous imbalance. By focusing attention on the benefits of positive views of the self, we can easily overlook... the benefits of some rather unassuming virtues [like] humility....

...June Tangney identified a number of humility's key features:

- An accurate ...sense of one's abilities and achievements
- The ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations...
- Openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low focus on the self or an ability to "forget the self"
- Appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world.



...Humility involves a non-defensive willingness to see the self accurately, including both strengths and limitations.

Source: Peterson, Christopher & Seligman, Martin E.P., *Character Strengths and Virtues*, Oxford University Press. 2004.

Seek Alone Time

Reframing Humility

Robert J. Wicks

Humility as a value has a long history that needs to be revisited and valued anew for what it truly can mean in the way you live your life. A simple reflection on the concern with humility held by fourth-century Northern African and Persian Desert Fathers (Abbas) and Mothers (Ammas) bears this out. With respect to this group, poet Kathleen Norris, in her book *Acedia and Me*, notes,



"[These early desert monks] valued humility as a tool for maintaining hope. While today the word humility may connote a placid servility in the face of mistreatment, its Latin origins suggest strength and fertility. The word comes from hummus, as in "earth." A humble person is one who accepts the paradox of being both "great and small" and does not discount ...hope.... ...Peter France ... adds ...that for this group of early monks, humility "was simply the rejection of self-centeredness. It was, and is, a powerful means of getting right with the world."

One of the ways such early monks sought to achieve this ...is by setting aside periods of "alone time." I define this term as those periods we spend in silence, and possibly solitude, to be mindful or meditate as well as when we are simply quietly reflective even when in a group. During such times, the goal is to be nonjudgmentally present to ourselves. Because of this we see our foibles as well as our gifts with a sense of clarity and equanimity. When this happens, we open the door to humility because honesty gets an opportunity to come to the fore....

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28492>

Creation Stifled

The Necessity of Humility

Wendell Berry

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world—to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity—our own capacity for life—that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled.

We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be



good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

Source: Berry, Wendell. *The Long-Legged House*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press. 2012.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Humility

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of *Touchstones* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "Who is more humble? The scientist who looks at the universe with an open mind and accepts whatever the universe has to teach us, or somebody who says everything in this book must be considered the literal truth and never mind the fallibility of all the human beings involved?"
Carl Sagan

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."
Rabbi Tarfon

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

Have you encountered humility in another person? If yes, what was it like? Pride? Arrogance?

How did you regard humility growing up? Why? Now?

What are the key characteristics of a humble person?

Our society does not consider humility to be a virtue. Why? Do you regard it as a virtue? Why or why not?

Can you recall a time when you acted with humility? What was the situation and how did it feel?

Everett L. Worthington, Jr. writes, "We cannot fully reach humility by striving for it." Why do you think this is so?

Can humility be taught? Or must it be learned? If yes, how can we learn to be humble?

Does humility enhance relationships? Why or why not?

Who have been the people that you have known that seemed to possess humility? How did that quality shape who they were? How can one balance self-confidence and humility without falling into arrogance or self-doubt?

How does humility help in acknowledging and learning from mistakes?

What role does/can humility play in your congregation?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Truly Human

(Continued from page 6) **Intro to Theme**
lifelong process that involves self-awareness, intentional actions, and a mindset geared toward learning and growth. There is the ongoing falling down and getting back up again, the experience of missing the mark more often than not but persisting. While there can be a genetic predisposition toward humility, it is more nurture than nature.

Not only is humility not one thing, it is an outcome shaped by many things, including self-esteem, empathy, being cooperative and open to feedback, feeling gratitude and expressing it, respecting people for who they are and what they do, understanding and accepting one's strengths and liabilities, being open, and more. While humility is not always explicitly listed as a core component of emotional intelligence, it is crucial to both emotions and intelligence.

Humility is an essential spiritual attribute that promotes personal well-being while promoting social harmony.

Humility makes us truly human.

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