

Making an Idol of self-esteem may seem the answer to our problem of a deep and persistent feeling of inadequacy, but instead it leads to a life of conflict with others, disappointment, and bitterness. The surprising answer the Bible gives to this intractable problem is to embrace humility, which is not quite as easy as it seems. Over the next five days we will work to bring a greater sense of humility to our lives.

Day 1

The starting place in scripture for a greater sense of humility in our lives is an uncomfortable one. In Psalm 36:1-12 we are informed indirectly that a lack of humility comes from a lack of the proper fear or respect of God. This was a well-known fact for Christian monks throughout history and they worked hard at developing a proper fear of God in their thoughts, words, and actions.

To begin to develop a proper fear of God in our thoughts, we continue to read Psalm 36 and find some interesting truths to ponder. First, the Psalmist takes note of the fact that the person who does not fear God believes his sin cannot be known and hated by God. This can be a troubling truth to meditate on. In being tempted to sin, if we would stop to ponder the fact that not only will this be known by God but hated by him is sobering. God's righteousness in judgment is a sobering thought for the Psalmist. This is especially true considering the next fact noted by the Psalmist: God's abiding love for us!

It is interesting that the Psalmist spends so much of the Psalm pondering God's love when the goal is the fear of God. And yet this is undeniably an important part of developing a proper fear. If our sin can be known and hated by God, that alone is not enough to keep us from it. In fact, it may lead us to greater sin! We might be tempted to sin just to spite God. However, considering God's love we must have a great fear of disrupting the relationship we have with him. Spend some time today meditating over this powerful Psalm.

Day 2

Fearing God in our thoughts is an important starting place to gain a better grasp on the humility we so urgently need. The next task is to fear God in our words. Words are much more powerful than we realize. They shape not only our reality, but influence the shaping of the realities of those around us. In Genesis 1:3-5 God creates with a word. God organizes, sets the boundaries, and forms the content of reality with his words. In Genesis 2:19-20 he brings the animals before Adam to be named. In essence, Adam's job is to see the creation, discern the "thoughts" of God through that creation, and put a word that captures the reality that God has made. Therefore, putting the right words on things is essential to life. Matthew 5:21-22 and James 3:1-12 reinforce this sobering fact. To pursue humility and change your life you must change your words. Spend today meditating on these scriptures and think about how changing the way you speak can lead to greater humility and to a better life. How do your words impact your interactions with others? In what ways are you using words falsely? Are you tempted to raise your image to others by using words falsely? Do you ever bring others down by using words falsely? Is there a need in your life to use fewer words? Kinder words? More honest words?

Day 3

Fearing God in our actions was the next task for the early Christian who wanted to have greater humility in his life. This comes from a surprising discovery. Humility presupposes dignity. To the ancient Christian it was necessary to presuppose the presence of resources, strength, honor, or dignity if one was to lay those down in the service of others. We see the same truth at work in Philippians 2:1-11. Jesus must first have glory, honor, and dignity in order to lay those down so that he might be obedient to the Father and take on the nature of a servant in order to save us. What gifts do you have that need to be acknowledged so that they might be used in service to others? How can a false humility lead to a lack of service and even to pride? In meditating over these verses today, what do you find most surprising? Most confusing? Why might Jesus be seated at the right hand of the Father and glorified after laying down his honor to serve fallen humanity? How might strength, power, wisdom, honor, and influence find their greatest achievement in serving others? How might our disparities provide an opportunity for love and beauty? How might our weaknesses be redeemed and love grow through the embrace of humility? In what ways do you need to show a greater fear of God in your actions?

Day 4

Developing the fear of God in our will was the next task for the early Christian. We often have great plans for our lives and spend time developing a whole host of hopes and dreams for the future. Often, when the hopes and dreams are dashed we struggle to find the drive necessary to really engage in life and make the most of it. When we are young and we find obstacles to achieving our hopes and aspirations we can live in anger and resentment. Later, many people begin to just go through the motions in life as they age and find that many of their aspirations will never come to fruition. In John 6:35-40 Jesus states that he is the bread of life and that he has submitted his will to the Father. Bread is something that gives strength, vitality, and life in the bible. It seems strange that Jesus would say that he is strength and vitality and that he has given up his will at the same time. How is it that Jesus could be strength and vitality to us even as he has given up his will? Do you think it was easy for Jesus to give up his will? Before you answer that check out Luke 22:39-46. Why do you think it was such a struggle for Jesus? Physicians say that a person under great emotional stress can sometimes sweat blood. What is the most stressed you have been? Why do you think Jesus is so stressed? How does the upcoming crucifixion go beyond just dying? In what areas do you struggle to respect the will of God over your own will? How can you get better at this? What role does joy, celebration, and worship play in this? What role does meditating on the love of God play in this?

Day 5

Finally, the ancient Christians worked to develop what they called discretion, or a fear of God in their assertiveness. Monks were often forbidden in their orders from taking sides in a quarrel. This was a very strictly enforced rule (note: this not for discussions but for genuine arguments- see Proverbs 26:17). We often believe we are right without all the facts or without expertise. We think that nothing can be settled without our voice being heard. Many early Christians found that asserting their prerogatives, rights, and class lead to an attitude that was antithetical to an attitude of humility. They would guard their thoughts, speech, and behavior for signs of sarcasm and anger. They were careful not to aggrandize themselves (Luke 14:7-11). Meditate on ways you might be more careful in asserting your rights, your importance, or your opinion. Think about ways you might consider others above yourself (Philippians 2:3).