declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Let’s pause there for a moment. If you’re giving these three verses a humble score, you may have to deduct points for Jesus casually mentioning that the sovereign creator of the universe had turned over everything to him and that no one can know the sovereign creator of the universe except through him. Listen to what he says next.

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Although Jesus’ status was incredibly high, he was lowly in heart. It wasn’t that he pretended to be anyone other than who he was. He simply did not value other people based on his relative merits or accomplishments compared to him, and as such, he didn’t try to shape everything to suite him. He was unassuming. He didn’t have an attitude of entitlement, even though he would actually have been completely justified in doing so.

Application To Prayer

So you might be wondering how all of this applies to prayer. Let’s talk about that for a few minutes. The first connection is this: since God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, we should give serious thought to the attitudes of our heart before we pray. Psalm 138:6 says that “although the Lord is exalted [high], he looks upon the humble [low].” Do you want God to incline himself to you before you ever pray? Do you want him to pour out grace into your life before you even ask for it? Then humble yourself before him, remembering that God “is scornful to the scornful, but to the humble he gives grace (Proverbs 3:34).” In prayer, we “approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).” To approach the throne of grace with humility starts the flow of grace before we ever arrive. To approach the throne of grace with pride sets us in opposition to God before a word is ever spoken.

Two, because God opposes the proud, even when their pride is evidenced in their relationship with others, we should ask God to help us walk humbly with one another. 1Peter 5:5 says, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” I think sometimes it’s easy for us to come to God with what we feel like is humility, which turns out not to be anything more than our recognition that God is better than we are. And that’s a great start. The problem is that we can recognize that we are not God and still be filled with pride because all the while we can be incredibly pretentious and entitled in our relationships with other people. We compare our strengths to the weakness of others and feel good about ourselves. We notice the failures of others. And there are areas in our lives where we are more skilled or knowledgeable than others, but that’s not the point. If it were the point, then Jesus would have been absolutely unbearable to be around because everything everyone did he would look down on. Humility in our relationships with other people affects our prayer life, so be humble.

Three, since genuine humility helps us to see our own weaknesses and the depth of our need, genuine humility makes it much easier to pray. When we realize our own limitations, it makes it easier to go to others for help, in this case God. It’s easier to pray for wisdom when you can see the limitations of your own understanding. It’s easier to pray for power when you can see the limitations of your own strength. It’s easier to pray for reconciliation when you can see the weaknesses in yourself that others have to bear with. But genuine humility not only helps us to understand our weaknesses, but also the limitations of our strengths. Can we be so wise and smart that we don’t need God’s insight? Can we be so strong that we don’t need God’s strength? We might assume so, even if we don’t think so, especially when we’re young, but when enough life happens we realize that all of us are out of our league.
Prayer & Fasting
February 9, 2020
Pastor Jared Stoner
Humility

Introduction
Again today we’re going to continue working through a series of messages related to prayer. This morning, rather than talk about one particular passage of Scripture, I want to talk about a topic related to prayer, namely humility. In order to talk about humility, I’d like us to spend a few minutes looking at some Scriptures together. Before we do that, let’s just talk briefly about what Scripture means by humility because it can be a slippery word.

Poverty, Oppression, Weakness
Whether describing an individual or a group, the idea of humility conveys the idea of being lowly. In fact, our word humility comes from the Latin word. But not only does God defend the humble, he humbles the proud. After affirming that God saves the humble, 2Samuel 22:28 concludes, “but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.” In Exodus 10:3, Moses and Aaron bring this message from God: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?” God humbled Pharaoh, and the whole land of Egypt, by bringing the plagues against them. God brought them low. God even humbled his own people when he needed to. In Deuteronomy 8:2, Moses says to the Israelites, “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart…”

Before we move on and talk about humility in more figurative terms, it’s important to recognize that God cares deeply about humility, and that he orients himself toward us based in part on our humility, and that our humility is judged in part by how we behave toward the poor, the oppressed, and the weak. If we neglect them, let alone contribute to their suffering by taking advantage of them, we set ourselves up in opposition to God. Peter tells husbands to live in an understanding way with their wives so that their prayers will not be hindered. Likewise, our behavior toward the humble—the poor, the oppressed, and the weak—has the potential to hinder our relationship with God.

Meekness
More figuratively, then, the second concept of humility describes someone who is not physically or economically low, but someone who is meek or lowly in spirit, someone who is not pretentious, or we might say, puffed up. It’s someone who, no matter their socio-economic status, or the power or influence they wield, does not think of themselves or present themselves as better than other people. That humility then, gets expressed in relationships with other people and with God.

To the first of those two things, the Bible addresses the topic humility toward other people. In the Greek-Roman world of the first century church, humility was not considered a virtue. It was considered a weakness, as something that was lowly or servile. However, things were different in the church. In Ephesians 4:1-2, Paul says, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; he patient, bearing with one another in love.” Complete humility leads to gentleness and patience and should be common in relationships between believers. To the Colossians, Paul writes, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).”

I mentioned briefly before that in the New Testament, the ideas of meekness and gentleness overlap with humility to a large extent. Not only do we see those words used together in such places as Ephesians 4:2, but the idea behind them is evident as well. In Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is listed as, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” When you have been filled, and are being filled, with love, joy, and peace, you start to exhibit things like patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Patience, kindness, and gentleness require humility because humility helps us to recognize our own need for the patience, kindness, and gentleness of others.

Before we consider its implications on prayer, it’s worth noting that humility is not about the relative level of our attainment in any particular category when compared to another person. Humility is an attitude that should be displayed whether we are accomplished or incompetent in some area of life. Even before we think through why that might be, it’s worth remembering that Jesus himself was known as a humble person.

Matthew 21:5 recounts the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 and applies it to Jesus. It says, “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘Sec, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” Jesus was humble in the more literal sense that he did not come from a prominent family, did not enjoy a high standard of living, and was not particularly important in any of the systems of the world that people think of as important. But he was also humble in the sense that he was not pretentious or puffed up or inaccusable. He ministered to children and the poor and the sick.

Jesus’ humility becomes abundantly clear in Paul’s description of him in Philippians 2:3-8, which says, “3Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus’ humility allowed him to make himself literally humble in order to do the Father’s will and bring us salvation.

Jesus even self-identified as a humble person. Matthew 11:25-30 says, “25At that time Jesus