

Attitude Adjustment, Week 1 – Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of Lent,
and to mark the occasion,
we're beginning a brand new message series
that we're calling **Attitude Adjustment**.

And we're looking at
a particular attitude adjustment
that everybody can use
and that every single one of us
needs to make.

In fact, the less you think
you need to make this adjustment,
the more you probably do.

And as soon as you think that you've mastered it,
and rest comfortably in the knowledge
that you have it, you've lost it.

And over the next five weeks,
we're going to look at its application
when it comes to living out the Christian life
more successfully.

What we're talking about
could be called the most important,
the most fundamental virtue
because it stands before, it lies beneath
every other virtue
What we're talking about is **humility**.

And while humility
is vitally important,
it is often misunderstood.

See, many people think of humility
as weakness, low self-esteem,
a conscious effort to minimize
or downplay our accomplishments,
a low opinion of yourself.

None of that is humility.
Neither is that a virtue.
It is also not a mark of spiritual maturity.
It's a mark of insecurity
that we have to work our way out of.

Humility is **not a low** opinion of yourself.
It's a clear opinion of yourself.

St. Bernard said, "**Humility is knowledge of
yourself as you really are.**"

It's derived from a Latin word,
humilitas, which gives us our English word,
ground or grounded.
To be **humble is to be grounded, to be rooted**.

In his book, "Good to Great,"
Jim Collins studied companies
that successfully moved
from good performers
to become great performers in the marketplace.
His study discovered what he came to call
level five leaders.

Every company he studied
that moved from good to great
did so under the leadership
and direction of level five leaders.

Level five leaders represent
a rare combination of sincere humility
and strength of will.

He said that these leaders
are absolutely ambitious,
but they channel their ambitions
into the company or project
that they're leading and serving,
and not into themselves.

People who live the virtue of humility
are like that.
They're not weak.
They don't lack ambition.
Instead, they channel their strength,
their ambition, their creative energy,
their intellect,
and all of their resources
into something beyond themselves,
something greater than themselves.

Let's begin to unpack this important topic
by taking a look at the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible
and it picks up where the book of Numbers
leaves off.

Deuteronomy is about reform and restoration,
looking to the past with an eye to the future.

In relation to our reading today,
we find Moses appealing to the Israelites
who are preparing to finally enter
the Promised Land.

It is part of the final teaching of Moses
to the Israelites before his death.

We read that Moses urges the Israelites
to remember their humble beginnings,
to offer their first fruits to the Lord
in thanksgiving for their abundance.

God's intention was to lead them
directly to the Promised Land.

But due to their impatience and ingratitude
and in their arrogance,
they sinned before God.

And so as a penance, a week's journey
turned into many years of wandering in the desert.

And at this point in the story,
God is calling the Israelites,
teaching them about the past,
and shaping a vision for their future.

And so in gratitude,
when they get to the promised land,
they are to make an offering to God
their first product, their first margin of profit
from a harvest.

This was about giving back to God,
giving to Him first
as a reminder that everything comes from Him.

Moses then teaches them
what to say before the Lord.
The declaration is all about remembering the past;
about remembering God's faithfulness to them.

They were to remember
their humble beginnings;
their slavery in Egypt
and how God heard their cries
and delivered them.

They were to remember how God
parted the Red Sea,
and fed them in the desert.
And now it is God who is going to give them
blessings and abundance in the Promised Land.
So Moses concludes by again urging them
to humble themselves before the Lord; they should:

"bow down before the Lord your God"

Deuteronomy 26:10

And so even as they experience
the triumph of their entrance
into the Promised Land,
they are to do so with utter humility.

Well, as we begin this series,
it might help to be honest.

Honestly, humility is difficult.
It's difficult for all of us.

Our pride, our ego, get in the way.
We like to be in control;
we like to be right.
It's hard to be humble even
when we want to be.
And a lot of the time,
we don't want to be.

We want payback
And so we may be in need
of an attitude adjustment.

We need to learn to see humility,
not as something that lessens
or diminishes us,
but something that strengthens us,
something that builds us up
to be the people we want to be,
the people that God calls us to be.

We can view humility
in at least three different ways.

First, humility grounds us
in the basic reality that there is a God
and it's not us.

Everything we have comes from God.
Yes, we've worked hard for these things
and our efforts are incredibly important,
but they must be recognized
and understood in the context
of what God has given us,
of what God has done for us,
of what God is doing for us right now.

Second, humility grounds us
in the basic reality
that we are made for relationships.

We need one another.
And humility is a basic ingredient for success
in any kind of relationship.
If we are humble, then we are kind,
because we can put the needs of others
ahead of ourselves.

If we are humble then we are merciful to others
because we see our own faults and failures first.

If we are humble then we are compassionate
because we will take the time
to understand someone else's situation.
Humility fosters and heals relationships.

Third, humility grounds us
in the basic reality that God insists on it
before he's willing to act in our lives.
You can be successful with God
without being highly intelligent,
clever in business,
outstanding in finances.

You can be successful with God
and not be graceful in appearance
or skillful in athletics.
You don't need any of that
to be successful with God,

but you do have to have humility.

Case in point, the Israelites in the desert.
God opposes the proud,
but he gives grace to the humble.
God humbles those who exalt themselves
but lifts up those who humble themselves.
That's just the way things work.

So over the next few weeks,
we're going to take time
to look at the virtue of humility.

Next week, we're going to look at
the importance of prayer in growing humility.

The following week, we're going to look at
some of the obstacles,
including the biggest obstacle of all to humility.

In week four, we're going to look at
how humility helps us turn our lives
around if they're headed in the wrong direction.

And we will wrap up this series, just before Easter,
by looking at how God lifts up
and blesses and favors the humble.

So, this week's challenge to you
is to commit to this series
for the next five weeks,
which is easy to do because you can catch
the series at any of our weekend *masses*
here at Good Shepherd.
You can also check out the messages
on our website.

One of my all-time heroes is Saint John Paul.
He was a man of incredible courage
and great accomplishments.

He stood up to the communists in Poland.
He helped to bring down the Iron Curtain
in Europe.
He provided hope and courage
to people who lived in fear.

And he inspired people around the world
to greater faith,
in large part by his humility.

PJP visited Baltimore in 1995.
During the course of his day in that City,
there was an opportunity to break after lunch,
to give the pope a chance to rest and re-charge.

A suite of rooms was provided for him
and his entourage to use.
There was hospitality provided in the form
of a cold buffet.
The pope and his entourage entered the suite

for their time of respite.

Those who organized the event
waited outside patiently in case
there was something that needed to be done.

It wasn't long before the door to the suite opens and
the pope's assistant
pops his head out,
looking for one of the organizers.

As one of the organizers steps forward to assist,
Fr.(pronounced "Father Jivish") says to him,
"The food in there.
The pope wants to know,
can we have some?"
In that moment, beyond his rock star status
and obvious virtues and world-class talents,
at heart, the man's greatness
was his humility.

You know, humility isn't thinking
less of yourself.
It's just thinking of yourself less.