

The Yoke of Meekness: The Way to Freedom and Joy

INTRODUCTION

Turn to Matthew 11. Matthew 11. Father, we thank You in the name of Jesus for the grace of God. We thank You for Your Word. Lord, I ask You for living understanding. I ask You for inspiration in our spirit even now. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, this morning I want to talk about a very important subject—the yoke of meekness, which is a concept that Jesus emphasized, a truth that Jesus emphasized in Matthew 11:28-30. What Jesus is really talking about is the way to freedom. But another way to say it is “the way to have a vibrant spirit,” or “the way to have a happy spirit,” the way to walk in joy. And He gives one of the clearest teachings in the Scriptures right here in these three simple verses. And really it’s the teaching on how to have a happy spirit, a free or vibrant spirit. And it’s linked to the subject of meekness, which is the same as humility. I’m using *meekness* and *humility* interchangeably.

Now the Lord has been very gracious to us over the years by the Holy Spirit emphasizing this truth of humility in various ways and dreams and visions to different ones on our teams. I remember a very unique experience in my life that had a corrective tone to it; but it was very, very gracious of the Lord. I heard, I actually heard the audible voice of the Lord like thunder. It was very powerful. It was a very unique experience in terms of my thirty years of ministry. And the Lord highlighted the importance of humility to me and for this movement. Again, it was a bit corrective, but it was an encouragement.

He was making a statement about His care for us: that He wanted to plumb line us on the subject of humility.

MEEKNESS IS THE MAGNET THAT ATTRACTS GOD’S FAVOR

I’m going to give you just these two examples. I could give you several others from our leadership team through the years. I woke up one morning at 4:00am, wide awake. This was in May 2005. I just came out of a dead sleep and I was prophesying. That’s happened just a few times over the years. And I woke up and I proclaimed, “Meekness is the magnet that attracts God’s favor.” And for a moment I thought, “What?” But I said it so clearly and so boldly, and the presence of the Holy Spirit was resting on me. And the Lord was speaking to me for my own benefit. Again, it had a corrective tone to it, but it was also, when I look at it, a very gracious intervention of the Lord. And there have been a number of testimonies throughout the years where the Lord has spoken to us as a community about the value of meekness, the value of humility.

Well, it’s not just an important virtue in its own right; it’s the pathway to liberty. It really is the way to freedom at the heart level. And many believers long for freedom, but they approach it, they pursue it devoid of meekness, apart from seeking meekness. And liberty only comes in the context of meekness, a choice from our hearts to live in this kind of lifestyle.

“COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN”

Let’s read this passage. Matthew 11:28. Again, this is His clearest teaching on how to have a vibrant spirit, a happy spirit. He says, “Come to Me” (Mt. 11:28). He says, “I’m the source of the instruction, but I’m also the power source. Come to Me. Connect with Me and I’ll teach you about meekness; and I’ll empower you to walk it out.” It’s the all-important, “Come to Me.” He uses that invitation several times through the Gospels.

He says, “Come to Me, all that labor and are heavy laden” (Mt. 11:28, paraphrased). And of course it’s the whole human race. To be heavily laden means you have a heavy spirit. You’re weighed down in your emotions. You’re weighed down with things. He says, “I will give you rest” (v. 28b, NKJV). Now *rest* is a term that involves many things. He’s talking about our emotions. He’s talking about giving us the power of a vibrant spirit, a free spirit. He’s talking about a joyous, happy spirit. And He said, “Now I will tell you how to enter into rest. I’ll tell you how to get free from the heavy spirit.” And there are many different expressions of a heavy spirit. We all know them. I mean, we’ve all experienced a heavy spirit many times throughout our life.

“TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN OF ME, FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY”

But Jesus says in verse 29, “Here’s the way to freedom. You have to take My yoke. You have to yoke yourself to Me. And you have to learn from Me because I’m gentle and lowly in heart” (Mt. 11:29, paraphrased). “Lowly in heart” is translated in other Bible translations as *humble* or *meek*. It’s lowly of heart. And He says, “If you do this, you will find rest for your souls” (ibid). He repeats the promise that you’ll enter into rest. You’ll have a vibrant spirit. The spirit of heaviness will lift off of you over time.

HIS YOKE IS EASY, HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT

Then He goes on in verse 30 and He gives an encouragement: “Stay with the process, because if you stay with it, you’ll find out that My yoke is easy” (Mt. 11:30, paraphrased). Now the illustration of a yoke is very, very important. It’s central to this teaching of how to live in freedom and liberty. In the ancient world, as today, the farmer would put a pair of oxen or another pair of animals inside a yoke. And sometimes there would be two and sometimes there would be many oxen yoked together with a wooden yoke. And the yoke would be around their neck—both the lead oxen and the newer oxen that was just being broken in and trained in how to plow the fields. They would be yoked to an experienced ox, and that ox would lead the yoke.

We’re the new; and when we put that yoke on our neck, that yokes to Him. In the agricultural world, the “beginner ox” would tend to go either to the right or to the left. But they couldn’t get off the path because they were yoked in this wooden yoke next to the experienced ox that remained on the path. Jesus said, “Put that yoke on you,” because we’re chaining ourselves, we’re yoking ourselves to His pathway of meekness.

He says, “I’ll walk the path. Yoke yourself to Me. And when you want to go right and left, the yoke will keep you in the center. And that yoke is your commitment to learn from Me and to walk with Me in this pathway.”

Now it’s the yoke of meekness. And no one will put that yoke on you. God won’t put it on you; we have to put it on ourselves. We put it on ourselves by making a commitment to learn from Jesus in the realm of meekness and to follow it through with Him. And so we put that yoke on us and we begin the process of learning from Him.

Now the challenge of being yoked is this: in the earlier days of being yoked, the beginning stages of being yoked, the new ox feels the sores and the blisters of this new yoke. And it’s uncomfortable; it’s awkward. The new ox wants to get off the path and resist it, and so he kind of bucks the system and doesn’t like it at first. But over time, he gets into a rhythm. And the new ox adjusts to this new pathway, this new way of life. And so it’s a process. It takes time. There’s a resistance. It’s awkward at first. But Jesus is telling us in verse 30, “My yoke is easy” (Mt. 11:30). In other words, “If you stay with it: if you’ll stay yoked to Me in this pathway of meekness, eventually your heart will find rest. You’ll carry your heart in a new way.”

EXCELLING IN HUMILITY SHOULD BE ONE OF OUR HIGHEST AMBITIONS

Now here's what the process of being yoked to the Lord is about. We start off being aware that humility is an important virtue. But our natural response to humility is to dodge it, to find ways to escape the yoke of humility. We'll use Bible verses or the grace of God or social maneuvering to get out of having to face the issue of humbling ourselves in relationships with people. We don't like that yoke. But once we decide to take it on and wrestle, then over time, it becomes a primary life goal. I mean, it's not just something we're enduring; it's not something we're trying to escape. It's actually something we settle in on. Our life goal isn't just comfort or more blessing or more honor; our life goal is to excel in humility. And when that happens, the yoke becomes easy and we carry our heart in a different way.

THE MEEKEST MAN EVER TO WALK THE EARTH

Something happens on the inside when one of our primary life goals takes hold of meekness. Because it's not natural to any of us to make that a primary goal in our life, but it's the Lord's agenda for our life. He's the meekest Man that ever walked the earth, but He also had the freest and the happiest spirit of any man that ever walked the earth. And the two are related to one another.

Now this is the only characteristic Jesus ever proclaimed about Himself. He gave Himself titles; but He never, ever described a character trait about Himself, except here in verse 29. He said, "I'm meek," or, "I'm humble," or, "I'm lowly." Use whatever word you want. The Lord commits Himself to training us in meekness if we will go with Him. He says, "Take the yoke; sign up for the class." He won't make you take this yoke. And again, putting on that yoke means we're training ourselves or binding ourselves to a life of meekness according to His terms. That is what it means to take the yoke. Taking the yoke doesn't just mean we ask the Lord to forgive us for our sins; we're born again and we're taking the yoke! No, that's only the beginning of the beginning. The yoke of meekness is the call to discipleship.

As a matter of fact, in this very chapter, Matthew 11, earlier in verse 12, Jesus talked about spiritual violence: this radical abandonment to God. This is actually the yoke of meekness that He's talking about. He described it just a few verses earlier referring to John the Baptist. He's laying out the spiritual violence of the forerunner ministry. It's living the yoke of meekness: not the occasional expression of humility, but humility defined as one of the primary goals of what we want to attain in this life. It's violent, but once we settle that, it becomes easy. This doesn't mean that the life externally is easy. But our heart comes to peace. There's an enjoyment of God. There's a vibrant spirit in coming to peace with this new alignment of our life, when our goal is to walk in the meekness and the yoke of humility that Jesus walks in.

THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF OUR HEARTS IS TOWARDS PRIDE

Well, we never graduate from this class. Sign up for the class, the yoke of meekness. And it's a seminary course. It's an internship that you'll be in all your days. We need to assume that pride is strong in our being. Some folks have the opposite opinion. When someone suggests they're proud, they're scandalized. It's exactly the opposite. Of course we're proud.

I've had people tell me that over the years: "You're proud!"

And I say, "Yeah..." I'm assuming that. The gravitational pull of all of our hearts is towards pride. And the assumption that we're free from it is presumption on steroids. I'm talking about when people are troubled or offended that someone hints that you have pride! The reality is that it's the biggest disease in the human heart,

even in the midst of the family of God. And it's the biggest battle we will fight all of our days. But it's a battle that we can win. It's the pathway of meekness. It's this course we never graduate from. We spend all the days of our life learning this from Jesus.

TAUGHT BY CHRIST IN THE SCHOOL OF HUMILITY

Now I want to encourage you: look at verse 29. He says, "Learn from Me to take up that invitation of Jesus and make it a part of your life routine." I've placed this on my personal prayer list. I have a teaching, "Ten Prayers that Strengthen the Inner Man." And I take the ten-letter acronym, F-E-L-L-O-W-S-H-I-P and assign a theme and a Bible verse to each one of the letters. And I try to pray through that list on a regular basis for my own life and heart, and the "H" in F-E-L-L-O-W-S-H-I-P is humility. It's this verse.

Or I do this. As often as possible, I take a few minutes and say, "Lord, teach me. Teach me the way of humility." Now I want to ask you this question. Don't raise your hand! Do you actually ask Jesus to teach you? Because He committed to teach you if you want to learn. Because if it's not intentional, you won't do well in this class. If you don't know you're in this class, you probably won't do well in the class. But if you're intentional and you're committed to going the distance, this class will go well for you.

But it's not even an issue of praying once or twice. I urge you to make this a prayer that you pray about as close to daily as possible. "Teach me, Lord. I want to come to You to learn this yoke. Give me insight on how it's to be expressed." Because humility has so many facets to it. I'm only going to identify a few today; there are any more than I could identify in one teaching. I don't know all the facets; I only know a few of them. But pride has many, many tentacles that work beneath the surface in our heart. And so it's a lifelong journey to learn from Him. We sign up for the course; we stick with it all the days of our life. But as we grow in it, our heart gets freer and freer.

Now let me say this to anyone who trains others in how to get free in the heart. There are different counseling ministries, which I really appreciate. I want to encourage you to make Matthew 11:28-30 your main source of curriculum, because there's no liberty apart from this yoke. Anyone who promises freedom from the heart without the yoke of humility, without yoking himself to Jesus in this in a long-term way, sees only a mirage of freedom. It's never going to happen at the heart level. Those people will live continually weighed down, heavy-laden in their emotions.

YOUR PRIMARY ASSIGNMENT IS TO GROW IN LOVE AND MEEKNESS

Let's look at paragraph 4. I'm still here in page 1. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy." Now He's not talking about external circumstances: "Your life will be externally easy!" That's not what He's saying. He's talking about the internal condition, the state of your heart. You'll enjoy your walk with God once you settle in that one of your primary assignments in this life is to grow in meekness.

Your primary assignment is not to be rich and famous. That's not your primary assignment. You may end up rich and famous, but that is incidental. Your primary assignment actually is to grow in meekness, to grow in love. Now meekness and love are interchangeable. Meekness and love are interchangeable. If I had to come up with a distinction, I would say, "Meekness focuses on our attitude. Love focuses on the action, deeds, and words that are expressed to others." They're two sides of one coin; two tributaries out of one river, or, I don't know what analogy you want to use. But we have a humble spirit, so we express deeds and words of love to other people. But in reality it's essentially the same thing.

So the easy yoke is the ability to enjoy God: the ability to have greater grace to obey Him, that's the yoke. That's the internal yoke that Jesus is promising the people.

A PRACTICAL TEACHING ON HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Paragraph B. Now the humblest Man who ever walked the earth gives a teaching on how to live called "The Sermon on the Mount." And the Sermon on the Mount begins with eight Beatitudes. He gives eight statements in Matthew 5 that begin with, "Blessed are..." And He starts with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3). Then He says, "Blessed are those who mourn" (v. 4). And He goes right down the line. He gives eight statements and He gives a blessing. And that's why we call them the *Beatitudes*, because the word *beatitude* connects to the word *blessing*.

But here's the point I want to make. The beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the first of the eight Beatitudes, begins with humility, poverty of spirit. Humility and poverty of spirit is the same thing. Well, that's where humility begins, with poverty of spirit. Poverty of spirit is not the full flower of humility, but it's the beginning point.

"BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). When He said, "Theirs is the kingdom," He means they'll be positioned to experience the reality of the kingdom in an ongoing and deeper way. That's what this means: it means the kingdom blessings, the kingdom experiences, the transforming grace of the kingdom is within their reach. It's theirs if they walk in poverty of spirit.

Now the day we're born again, it takes a certain measure of poverty of spirit to admit our need for the Savior, but that's only the beginning of the beginning of the beginning of this beatitude. To be poor in spirit means that we have a deep sense of our need, a deep sense that we're poor. We don't have the resources in ourselves; we need to be helped. That's what "poor in spirit" means; to be rich in spirit in this analogy would be pride. To be poor in spirit is to see, "I don't have the resource of myself. I don't have the wisdom. I don't have the resolve. I don't have the focus. I don't have the follow through. I don't have the ability to do this without help." That's the posture that begins our experience of the kingdom.

But beloved, we never graduate from this beatitude, from poverty of spirit. This is the fundamental beginning of the flower of humility. Now humility has many more expressions, but this is the beginning point of it. We have a need to be taught. We have a need to be helped. And we will take the help of God in any way that He sends it. And I'm talking mostly about instruction and inspiration. And often, God will send instruction to our heart through the voice of one not qualified to give us that instruction. He does it on purpose. But if we're so eager to learn, we will take the nuggets of truth from any voice through whom God speaks. We need to be eager to learn, from the ten-year olds, the twenty-year olds, from unbelievers who would criticize us. Let's learn from them. Let's find the nugget of truth in what they have to say, that God would teach us in, because we have need of instruction.

DON'T BE OFFENDED AT YOUR CRITICS, BUT LEARN FROM THEIR REPROACH

We all have critics. They're actually a blessing to us. Many people look at critics as something to be rid of. But if God takes away a few critics, we need Him to raise up more! Because critics speak to us in a way that friends don't, even faithful friends. And though the critics may have a wrong spirit and they'll give wrong information,

often there are nuggets of truth in what our critics tell us, and if we're eager to learn because we don't believe we have it all ourselves, and we need outside help, we won't despise our critics, but will actually benefit from them.

I encourage people, whether the critics are friends or enemies, "Don't be offended at your critics. View them as being helpful. It's like a free research team." For real! I mean, I've had a research team over the years. And some of them can be expensive. But a critic is free research. They give it for free! There's often a wrong spirit in a lot of what they say, and some of the information might be wrong, but there's a nugget of truth and it's yours for the taking. Take it. It would cost you thousands of dollars in a professional setting to get some of that information. I'm being serious.

So when someone comes up and criticizes you, whether friend or foe, walk away saying, "Lord, speak to me; I'm listening. I'm so eager to learn. I'm listening. Anything! Give me any bit of adjustment that You can give me through what they just said."

PRIDE IS THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF OUR UN-RENEWED MINDS

Well, being poor in spirit is the way of the kingdom. Paragraph C. Now we're all, by nature, proud. It's the gravitational pull of our un-renewed minds. When we're not exerting effort to walk in humility, pride is our default. Don't be scandalized and offended when someone hints that you're proud. Say, "Of course." Say, "You don't know the half of it."

Now you don't have to say that. You'll probably offend them. But in your own heart don't say, "Can you believe they said that I'm proud? They don't know the half of it!" The truth is that *we* don't know the half of it about our own heart. But it's the gravitational pull of our life and if we line up with humility, we find freedom in our emotions. It's called *rest*; it's called *liberty*.

And we have greatness in the age to come. And the Scriptures tell us that He beautifies those who will walk in humility. It's the grace of humility, and it brings so many benefits. So therefore, take it from anyone who can help you. It doesn't matter what the source is; take it and make it the pursuit of your life to grow in this, because there are so many dynamic benefits to walking in humility. But because our gravitational pull is towards pride, we need to zealously seek for humility all the days of our life: not as a casual thing that we pray about twice a year or even once a month; I'm talking about putting that thing on your daily prayer list: "Jesus, You said You would teach me humility; I'm asking you."

And the Lord says, "Well if you'll put My yoke on you..." Don't audit the class! Pay for it; go all the way. And don't bail out when the class gets tough. Stay in it until the day you meet the Lord face to face.

RELENTLESSLY PEELING THE ONION OF UNPERCEIVED PRIDE

Now the problem with our pride is that it's unperceived. The tentacles are varied and deep below the surface of our emotions and our thought life. We can't even define all the tentacles of pride. It's unperceived and it's hidden beneath the surface; and it has many layers. For those reasons, it's a very dangerous enemy, and it's hard for us to get a grip on it.

I think of it like peeling an onion. You pull a layer off and you actually gain a little ground, but not much. So you pull off another layer, and another. Hours later—this is a big onion!—you're still peeling off layers, and you're thinking, "Am I ever going to get to the end of this?" And you're crying all the way through it, and it

seems like you're never going to come to the end of it, and it's the same thing over and over. That's what addressing pride is like. That's called the yoke of humility: it's peeling off layers and layers and layers, with tears. But we stay with it all the days of our life; that's what we're committed to doing.

PRIDE: A PERPETUAL PREOCCUPATION WITH THE SELF

Now some people have a wrong idea about pride. They don't know how elusive and how evasive pride is. I mean, many are the tentacles in our mind and emotions, with complicated layers of pride. And so they have a pretty simplistic view of pride: they might view a proud person as being someone who overtly struts. Now that is pride. But 99 percent of the pride isn't the guy who overtly struts and brags. And the reason it's important to get this is because if that's our definition—if we think we don't overtly strut and brag, and therefore must be humble—we're wrong, wrong, wrong!

Why? Because the gross expressions of pride aren't the essence of it. The real essence of pride is a preoccupation with ourself that is bound to many thought processes and many negative emotions that are all tangled up together in a complicated way. That's what pride is: it's a preoccupation with our self. I mean, there are many diverse, many binding emotions: we have fears and complaints and bitternesses and jealousy and envies and comparisons, and the approval of man, and the fear of being left out, of being promoted too early, or promoted too late. There are so many emotions all tied up together in this fixation of preoccupation with our self. We're all born that way. We come by it honestly. We inherited it from our great-, great-grandfather Adam all the way through. So don't imagine that if you avoid blatant strutting and bragging that somewhere you're mostly humble. No. That's a completely wrong view of humility.

Many people have enough social protocols and etiquette to know how to be polite in the right settings. That doesn't mean their heart is humble at all. I mean, it's good to be polite in the right settings; but that doesn't mean they're humble. Humility is taking the yoke of Jesus at the heart level for a lifetime—living in humility by His definition.

PRIDE GIVES US A CONFIDENCE THAT IS INAPPROPRIATE

Now the enemy tempts us with pride. I'm still on paragraph C. The enemy tempts us with pride that lies subtly underneath the surface. And it's in our attitude. What pride does is this: pride gives us an inappropriate confidence about different subjects related to our life. It's a confidence that is inappropriate. It's not based in truth. And that confidence emboldens us in a proud way to have attitudes and actions and words towards people who are opposed to love. And that's the devious, complicated, elusive nature of pride.

THE MAIN STRONGHOLD OF PRIDE IS KNOWLEDGE

Now the main stronghold of pride—and I'm just going to hit the one—is knowledge. And that's clear from the Bible. The main stronghold of pride is knowledge. The idea that we know more than others places us in a position of superiority, no matter what area we're talking about. Therefore it emboldens us with a confidence that we operate in pride instead of love in our words and our actions. It's that attitude.

Let's look at Roman numeral II. We're going to break this down a little. I have seven evidences of humility; and we're only going to look at a couple of them. Humility has many different expressions. It's a diamond with many facets. I'm only mentioning seven because I like the number seven. I mean, there could be fifteen of these here.

“KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP, BUT LOVE BUILDS UP”

Here’s the first one—and they’re not necessarily in the right order, because again, the list could be much longer. Number one: having a teachable spirit. Knowledge is important; it’s powerful in a positive way, but Paul makes it clear that knowledge is also dangerous because it puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1). Knowledge has an intrinsic ability to puff up the human heart. I’m talking about good knowledge. And so knowledge isn’t neutral. Though it’s beneficial, it’s dangerous to the human spirit. But we’re to pursue knowledge. But we’re to pursue it knowing there’s a danger that goes with it. It emboldens our spirit in a confidence that is inappropriate. And that confidence spills over in our attitudes and actions towards people, which the Bible calls *pride*.

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1, NIV). Love is the action; humility is the attitude. Love edifies people. Love edifies the kingdom. Love edifies your own life when you walk in love.

So the first evidence of a humble spirit that I’m highlighting is the ability to be taught—to be eager to learn from others, even those who are less qualified. That’s the key phrase. It’s easy to learn from someone more qualified. A teachable spirit is quick to hear and easily corrected. It’s slow to instruct others.

“LET EVERY MAN BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH”

One of the best verses on humility I know of in the New Testament is James 1:19. This is such a practical teaching on humility. James says, “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jas. 1:19)—or anger, or exasperation. Now we don’t like the word *anger*, or even the word *exasperated*. So put the word *frustrated*. *Frustrated* we can live with because if we’re frustrated, it’s not as bad.

“So I’m really frustrated with *that* guy...”

“Oh, so you’re angry?”

“No, no, I’m not really angry at them.”

“You’re exasperated.”

“Well no, no. I’m not that. I’m just really frustrated.”

“You’re angry.”

“There you go. Thank you.”

I like *frustrated*. That makes me feel better about myself. But James says, “Be quick to hear.” Now in this context, it means, “Be quick to receive instruction. Be quick to receive correction. Be quick. And be slow to give out instruction to others.” Don’t be the know-it-all. Don’t be in the setting where you have all the answers time and time and time again. Don’t be that person, James is telling them.

BE SLOW TO YIELD TO THE FRUSTRATION THAT LEADS ON TO ANGER

Now I have to include a qualifier, because there are formal settings where teaching is essential: in a classroom, as coach of a team, the leader of the worship team, the head of a ministry, the head of the business, the head of a department. Teaching is critical. We’re not talking about teaching in its appropriate, biblical context; because

there's a teaching role in life that is critical to have. It has to do with leadership. Even if you're giving leadership to three, there's a teaching dimension. You're called to disciple new believers. You must teach them. Be a teacher. So I want to emphasize that. That's not the context James is talking about. He isn't criticizing that, that you're quick to want to impart to other people. No, that's good. James is talking about, informal, social, relational settings. You know, there are those people who always have the answer that the other ten need to know. They have a condescending spirit. They don't know it, of course. And they're always showing the people the better way. And what James says is, "Go in the opposite direction." Be quick and eager to receive from others, for them to teach and correct you. Don't be eager to correct them; go in the opposite direction. And when you do it, do it in a tender spirit. Be very slow to yield to the frustration that continues on to wrath and to anger.

Now this attitude of teaching, of the one who knows the way—again, there's a balance. There's a tension, because we want to teach; we want to help, but we don't want to have a know-it-all spirit. Of course, I've never met anyone with a "know-it-all spirit" who thinks they have one. So it's almost like a wasted sentence, because no one thinks they have that. I've never met a human being, ever, who thought that.

FORTRESSES OF PRIDE ARE BUILT WITH STRONGHOLDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Paul addresses it in 1 Corinthians 3:18 in a very direct way. He's talking about the stronghold of knowledge, and how it has a tendency to fuel pride. Again, knowledge is very helpful; that's the challenge of it. And knowledge is extremely helpful. But that very knowledge that is helping others emboldens the spirit of man. It's dangerous if we don't understand that it's dangerous. There are some chemicals that are very helpful, but if mishandled are extremely dangerous. So many things that are helpful are also dangerous if mishandled.

Well, Paul addresses the subject of knowledge again in 1 Corinthians. He just finished saying that knowledge puffs up; and now he's discussing the subject again. He says, "Let no one deceive himself." He says, "And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). He says, "Don't be deceived. If you think you're wise; if you think you really have the insight on a regular basis that the others need; here's what I challenge you to do: become a fool."

Now he doesn't mean, "Be foolish." He means posture yourself, attitude-wise, as though you're at the beginning of the learning curve. Become a fool; become in spirit as one who is in need of such learning. He said, "Change your posture dramatically, from the one who typically has the answer that the others need to the one who sees themselves as needing the answer from others." It's an attitude shift that he's talking about.

He says, "If you do that, you'll become wise. You'll have a spirit of wisdom. You'll have a teachable spirit. You'll have a learner's heart, and it will benefit you." He says, "But you can't really have wisdom, a learner's heart. Because wisdom has to have a teachable spirit or it won't really be wisdom." You can have a lot of knowledge, but not have wisdom. He says, "I urge you: don't be deceived." Because it's a very, very deceptive area, a very deceptive area.

RECOGNIZE YOUR PERSONAL FLAWS AND TAKE SPECIFIC ACTION

So the first issue, the issue I wanted to spend most of our time on, is the issue of having a teachable spirit. The second evidence of humility—top of page 2—is being quick to see our personal flaws and to take responsibility in a very specific way. Pride is really slow to take responsibility for personal flaws. I mean, pride was the very first thing that showed up after the fall. Adam said, "It's the woman! She did it" (Gen. 3:10, paraphrased).

Instantly he blame-shifted, instantly; the first evidence of sin on the planet was pride, was blame-shifting, refusing to take responsibility for the error into which he had stumbled.

Now you can tell the confessions of a proud person and a humble person are very, very different. Here's the confession of a proud person. They're a believer; they love Jesus. Here's how they confess their sin in a relational conflict.

"I'm sorry..." It starts out well!

"...if..." Getting bad already!

"...you're offended." Oh, no! "I'm sorry if you're hurt. I'm sorry if you misunderstand." So it's an apology based on the fact that you're so fragile and confused that you're easily dizzied by their brilliance. "So I'm sorry. I want to apologize to you."

"OK, good."

"I'm sorry if you're hurt. You're confused. I'm sorry if you misunderstand."
That is a really lame apology.

Now let me tell you how a humble person apologizes. "I'm sorry that I spoke wrongly to you. I apologize that I sinned against you."

Now in my home, the "I'm sorry that you're hurt" apology doesn't go down as an apology. Long ago, we decided that was just rhetoric. If we're going to apologize, we acknowledge the thing we're apologizing for. And that's the way it works.

NOVICES WON'T UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF THEIR OWN HEART

Paul talks about the novice—and I'm putting this in relationship to personal faults—in 1 Timothy 3:6. He's talking about leaders in the church. But this could be leaders in any place of life: any kingdom business, any position in the kingdom of God, in the marketplace, in the school. He's warning those in leadership not put a novice in leadership too quickly. He says, "Don't put a novice in," because they'll be tempted to be puffed up with pride, and then they will fall (1 Tim. 3:6, paraphrased). They'll be tempted to fall into the same condemnation into which the devil fell.

Now this is an interesting, a very profound pastoral warning. The novice is not a novice in their skill or in their craft. They know their skill set. They know it well. So they don't lack knowledge in their area of responsibility. What they lack knowledge in is the dynamics of their own heart.

They're a novice with themselves because they haven't had this position of authority. And if they get into a position of authority and they don't know their hearts, they're novices with their heart. They may know their skill and their craft very well. But in their new position of authority, there will be positive dimensions of blessing and increase, and there will be negative dimensions of criticism and uncertainty. And the positive and negative, that whirlwind, will create a storm in their emotions and they'll end up falling. Falling doesn't mean they'll commit a scandalous sin. Paul isn't saying, "They'll steal money or they'll run off in an adulterous affair." He doesn't mean fall that way, because the devil didn't fall that way. He means they'll be dizzied by the

positive and the negative emotions, the exhilaration of good things happening, and the criticism, the expectations, the fear of failure, and all these things will hit them in a whirlwind on the inside. And they'll end up in that dizzy place, making decisions that will hurt their life. They'll be emboldened in that dizzy place. And they'll make decisions that take them out of the will of God. And they'll hurt their life and they'll hurt others. He says, "They're novices with their own heart. That's the issue."

THE PROUD MAN FEELS MISTREATED, BUT THE GRATEFUL ONE FEELS BLESSED

Evidence number three of humility is a grateful spirit. Now, a humble man, a humble woman, sees that they're getting a better deal than they deserve if all the information was really on the table. If all the information about your life was really presented, we don't deserve any of the good things we get. But the proud man only sees the one area of their life they've worked hard in, and how they deserve promotion related to that. They don't see the whole of their life. And they're kind of mad at God, mad at the church, mad at the business leader over them because they're not getting the promotion they deserve because they think they're getting a bad deal.

And the Lord could whisper, "No, I want to give promotion in a way that helps you in your meekness. I'm not interested in a promotion related to one area of your life that you've been working hard on."

"But I've been diligent in that one area, so I deserve to be promoted."

The Lord says, "No, in the whole of your life, I'm still giving you a really good deal."

But the humble man says, "Thank you"—regardless of his station or his lack of promotion.

The proud man feels mistreated and bitter. Again, Christians don't use the word *bitter* because *bitter* is such a bad word. They use the phrase "burnt out" or *mistreated* or "not valued." It means *bitter*. They're getting a bad deal; they deserve better. Again, we all come by this very, very naturally. Now I want you to know where I'm getting this, because I've sinned in every one of these areas so many times. And when I make this handout, I have blood littered on this page—my own!—by my own sin and folly. So this is my third service going through this. This is torturing me because I'm having memory of the times where the Lord has corrected me over and over on these subjects.

"IN LOWLINESS OF MIND LET EACH ESTEEM OTHERS BETTER THAN HIMSELF"

Let's go down to number seven. Let's go down to number seven here, really quickly. It's a servant spirit; that's really what it is. It sees the benefit of others. Again, a proud man may love Jesus; but he doesn't look out for the interest of others. Paul said, "With lowliness of mind or humility, pay attention to the benefit of the other guy, not just your own benefit" (Phil. 2:3-4, paraphrased). Figure out what their agenda and try to serve their agenda and their benefit, even if you lose out in the deal. That is the way of lowliness.

But what happens is that a humble man uses his place of influence to help other people get the benefit. A proud man uses his place of influence for self-protection of his agenda and for a show of power. "Hey, I'm in charge and I want everyone to know it. I'm the guy in charge." And they use their position of authority: "Hey, that guy can't get in the way. All I have to do is fire him or get rid of him. I'm in a position of power. I can protect my own self-preservation. My own agenda I can protect!"

Paul says, “Don’t use your place of authority that way. Don’t do it that way. Use your place of authority with meekness.”

“The poor man uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly” (Prov. 18:23).

So the poor man goes to the banker and says, “Would you give me a loan? Please!” He makes an appeal with meekness and tenderness, with a kind and servant spirit. And the rich man walks into the bank and says, “I own the bank. I will fire you! I can fire anyone I want.” He answers roughly.

Now using this in the spirit of humility, Jesus had more authority but lived in greater poverty of spirit than anyone. He lived; He answered with entreaties. And so you may be the top of the list of the authority structure, but operate as a poor man. Don’t be a bully; don’t be a show-off. Don’t use your authority to put people in their place, to show them your power, to make sure no one blocks your agenda or distracts what you want to do. But operate as a poor man, even though you have the authority. Operate with entreaties.

But the rich man in this context would be a proud man. He’s rough. “No one can fire me! I’m the head so I don’t need to answer to anyone. No one is going to catch me anyway. I’ll fire this guy and move onto the next thing!”

And Jesus would tell us, “Don’t answer roughly just because you can get away with it structurally in the system that you’re in. But look before the gaze of heaven and answer in tenderness.”

SUBMIT YOURSELF TO EVERYONE, BOTH OLD AND YOUNG

In the next few moments, I want to cover just one more passage—1 Peter 5.

We’re a young people movement, and Peter talks to young people. And I want our young people to be the evangelists of this message to other young people. He says, “Younger people, submit yourselves to your elders” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Then he pauses, and he expects them to say, “What?”

He says, “Yes.”

Then he brings it up a notch. He says, “Well, the truth is that that’s not that odd because we ought to have a teachable spirit. That’s what *submit* means. We ought to have a teachable, cooperative spirit with everyone: not just our elders, but even our peers and those under us. Submit to everyone, even the younger ones” (1 Pet. 5:5b, paraphrased).

So these young guys are thinking, “What?”

“Be teachable and cooperative. But beyond even that...” He says, “Clothe yourselves with humility” (1 Pet. 5:5c, paraphrased). And here’s why—because God will resist the proud, but He will give more grace to the humble spirit because humility is in agreement with Him.

“Therefore humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due season” (1 Pet. 5:6, paraphrased). Now here’s the reason the young people are told to submit to elders first, and then not only them,

but the younger ones as well. “Submit to the unqualified ones, too, young men. Submit to everyone. Have a teachable spirit, eager to learn.”

Now young people don’t submit to older people because the older people are wiser. You’ve heard that over the years: “Well, older people are wise...” Well, a lot of times the older people are not wise. I’ve seen many times when the older people are more confused than the young people. I’ve seen it many, many times. And it’s not because the older people deserve more honor. I mean, there’s a case for that. But that’s not really what Peter is saying. He’s telling young people to submit, to develop a submissive, teachable spirit because they’re in the strategic season of their life when the wet cement is drying. They’re in this season of their life where they’re going to determine whether they will live with pride or with humility. It’s that critical fifteen-to-thirty time frame where they exercise the muscle in their spirits of a teachable, humble spirit. Because whatever they land on, however that cement dries in that season of their life, they’ll take it into their marriage; they’ll take it into their business; they’ll take it into their child-raising. They’ll take it into their leadership style. They’ll take it into their friendships. He says, “Young people: this is a critical hour in your life. Excel in submission, not in having all the answer. Go in the other direction.”

“IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN TO BEAR THE YOKE IN HIS YOUTH”

Let’s look at Lamentations 3:27. Now Jeremiah was a prophet in his youth. He wrote Lamentations. So we’re talking about a young man who had a national ministry, who is now an older man, looking back. He said, “It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth” (Lam. 3:27). He’s talking about the yoke of humility, the yoke of restraint. And specifically he’s going to identify restraint in speech. Now this is Jeremiah who had a national ministry, who had to talk to the older guys when he was a young man by the command of God. So this man has a lot of wisdom. He says, “Bear the yoke of restraint, particularly in your speech.” He says, “Let him keep silent” (v. 28).

The man says, “I have the burden of the Lord.”

He says, “No the real burden the Lord has laid on you is the yoke of meekness. That’s the more important burden He has laid on you.”

Then, in verse 29, he brings it up a notch. “Let him put his mouth in the dust” (Lam. 3:29). In other words, let him humble his speech and come to a place of reserved language. Say little; learn much. Even though you might know more, don’t say much in those kinds of settings. He says, “Maybe there’s still hope for you if you do this.” Again, you can see Jeremiah thinking a little of himself.

“LET HIM GIVE HIS CHEEK TO THE ONE WHO STRIKES . . . AND BE FULL OF REPROACH”

He says, “Let’s take it up to the next level.” He says, “Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach” (Lam. 3:30). Now the striking of the cheek means an insult. He says, “Let them insult you, and bear the reproach. Don’t even answer it, even though you have the answer. Bear it.”

So what Jeremiah is addressing is two of the primary issues of youth—their speech and their identity. And he says, “Bear the yoke of meekness in this season of your life, and it will be good for you if you do this.”

Now in our setting, we’ve encouraged our young people to challenge every thing they hear. And I’m talking about everything they hear from the pulpit—to challenge it to make sure it’s in the Bible, that they see with

their own eyes what's being preached in their own Bible. But there's one thing I've said strongly, and I'll end with this, is that we challenge with a meek spirit. We don't answer roughly. We don't have a know-it-all spirit. We don't meet in the classroom and then later tell our friends how wrong the teacher was and how right we were and we're twenty years old. "I read it on the Internet. I know that guy is wrong. I just read it on the Internet last night and I know what's going on."

Jeremiah says, "Bear the yoke."

Peter says, "Young men, have a humble spirit. Be learners. Don't be teachers right now," even though you might know more. Yes, challenge everything, but with meekness, with entreaties, without criticism, without making sure that you tell the group later how right you were and how wrong the others were. That's the pride of youth. We all have that pride, but youth has a chance for the cement to harden in a different way.

And so I'm just putting this young-people application here at the very end because I want our young people to call young people, not just in Kansas City, but wherever they go, to humility and meekness, so that the cement dries in their twenties, and then when they're in their thirties, forties, and fifties, they'll bring this into their marriage, into their ministry, into their friendship, into the marketplace, into their leadership style.

Amen and amen. Let's stand.