

Abundant Life: Aim Low

Abundant life in Christ Jesus is not about beating yourself up or making lists of things that you do not do, but it is about living the greatest life possible. Somewhat counter to our expectations, this involves humbling ourselves so that God can lift us up. When we elevate God and lower ourselves, we see the person of God as glorious and value who he is, allowing us to more completely image him in all of our ways. Let's spend some time this week working on practices that can help us with our humility.

Day 1

Be Dumb(o)

There were a few cartoons I didn't like as a kid, and Dumbo was one of them. It just didn't connect, I guess. But as a rule of life, talking less and listening more is a great idea, even if it is incredibly hard to live out. Listening is a skill that most of us could use a little more of, and in our culture, it is a bit of a lost art. We live in an age that amplifies our voices, and we sing anthems about being heard. The problem is, many times we don't have much to say that is edifying or uplifting. How do we listen more? First, make a habit of speaking less. Try to pay attention in your conversations to who is doing most of the speaking, and try to see if you can say half or less of what the other person is saying. This will get very awkward, unless you develop some new skills. Ask questions, and really try to understand the answers. Ask clarifying questions and follow up questions to go deeper. If you learn to ask the proper, open-ended questions, your relative silence will not seem weird, and you will gain a very useful skill. Learn to turn off the noise. We are often uncomfortable with silence, but the noise keeps us from truly learning to listen. We cannot hear the voice of God when so many other voices are competing for our attention. If you really want a challenge, fast from speaking any unnecessary words, and turn off the "artificial" voices, and spend an entire day listening to God and the people around you. Hear what happens.

Verses: James 1:19, Revelation 3:20, Luke 11:28

Prayer Topics: Focus, Awareness, Attentiveness

Day 2

Learn to Praise

Learning to praise that which is worthy of praise is an important part of learning humility. We all face the difficulty of defining what is worthy of praise by the standard of ourselves. We have a tendency to give ourselves extra points, while denying those points to others. This further isolates us from the true standard of glory. One way this can be seen is the way we tend to favor those things that we know, because they are closer to us. Our cousin is the best baseball player ever, or my neighbor is the greatest

woodworker. My city is the most beautiful, or my team is the best of all time. It is one thing to love what is near to us, and another to define greatness by it. Learn to praise those things that are truly worthy of praise, those things that most closely resemble the glory of God. Learn to praise those things for no other reason than they are worthy of praise. Do not use your praise for ingratiating yourself to others, or to manipulate people. Praise your enemies when they deserve it, and withhold it from your friends when circumstances warrant it. Look out for opportunities to praise, and educate yourself on what is worthy of praise in as many areas of life as you can. What can you find to praise today? What does the act of praising do to help you to be humble?

Verses: Isaiah 25:1, 1 Peter 1:3, Hebrews 13:15

Prayer Topics: Humility, Wisdom, Gratitude, Joy

Day 3

Pride the Enemy

Spend some time today considering these famous Christian quotes on pride:

In God's program, growing means becoming smaller. As Jesus put it, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Greatness in His kingdom is a gift God gives to the humble, not a prize to be grasped by the proud. - Iain Duguid

Pride is the worst viper in the human heart! Pride is the greatest disturber of the soul's peace, and of sweet communion with Christ. Pride is with the greatest difficulty rooted out. Pride is the most hidden, secret, and deceitful of all lusts! Pride often creeps insensibly into the midst of religion, even, sometimes, under the disguise of humility itself! - Jonathan Edwards

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. – C.S. Lewis

It was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the completely anti-God state of mind. – C.S. Lewis

There is no pride so dangerous, none so subtle and insidious, as the pride of holiness. – Andrew Murray

Our hearts are desperately proud. If there is one sin which God hates more than another, and more sets Himself against, it is the sin of pride. Like a weed upon a dung-heap, pride grows more profusely in some soils, especially when well fertilized by rank, riches, praise, flattery, our own ignorance, and the ignorance of others. We all inherit pride from our fallen ancestor Adam, who got it from Satan, that "king

over all the children of pride.” Those, perhaps, who think they possess the least pride, and view themselves with wonderful self-admiration as the humblest of mortals, may have more pride than those who feel and confess it. It may only be more deeply hidden in the dark recesses of their carnal mind. – J.C. Philpot

In what way are these quotes true? Do you disagree with any of them? Which ones are most applicable to you? What can you do to benefit from the wisdom of these quotes?

Verses: Galatians 6:3, 2 Corinthians 10:17-18, Romans 12:3, James 4:10

Prayer Topics: Ego, Worth, Truth, Reality

Day 4

Humility the Friend

Take a look at these quotes by Christians and see what you can learn about humility:

The way to exultation is always through humiliation. If that principle was true for the Son of God, how much more is it true for His followers? - John MacArthur

The very design of the gospel is to abase us; and the work of grace is begun and carried on in humiliation. Humility is not a mere ornament of a Christian, but an essential part of the new creature. It is a contradiction in terms, to be a Christian, and not humble. – Richard Baxter

To fear God is to nurture an attitude of awe and humility before Him and to walk in radical dependence upon God in each area of life. The fear of the Lord is similar to the mindset of a subject before a powerful king; it is to be under divine authority as one who will surely give an account... Fearing the Lord relates to trust, humility, teachability, servanthood, responsiveness, gratitude, and reliance on God; it is the exact opposite of autonomy and arrogance. – Kenneth Boa

Whatever we think valuable ought to be acknowledged as received from God. If then all the excellency we have is God's gift, it is very strange that we do not learn humility when God thus binds us to Himself; but that, on the contrary, we abuse His bounty by making it the occasion of pride. This ingratitude has nevertheless ever prevailed in the world. This then is the reason why [God] reduces to nothing all the boastings of the world. – John Calvin

Without faith we are not fit to desire mercy, without humility we are not fit to receive it, without affection we are not fit to value it, without sincerity we are not fit to improve it. – Stephen Charnock

A lamb is a meek creature. It hurts none, is hurt by all; it hangs not back, when it is led to the slaughter; it cries not when it is pierced; no greater emblem of patience to be found among irrational creatures. To this the prophet likens our Savior, when he said, “He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth,” Isaiah 53:7. How strange was His humility in entering into such a life! – Stephen Charnock

How can we make progress in humility this week? Spend some time pondering how to profit from the words of these brothers in Christ.

Verses: Colossians 3:12, Micah 6:8, 2 Chronicles 7:14

Prayer Topics: Obedience, Willingness, Peace, Unity

Day 5

Spend some time today in your favorite Psalms. If you don't have a favorite, just pick one and start reading. Think carefully about the words that are said, and about the heart of the person who wrote them. What was God saying to them, and how were they answering? What can you learn from how someone else related to God? Can you spend some time today listening to God? Can you use the Psalms that you have read as a template to respond to God?

Verses: Psalm 23; 121; 138; 62; 46

Prayer Topics: Gratitude, Joy, Wisdom, Inspiration