

## YOU CAN'T GO WRONG IF YOU START THE YEAR RIGHT—WITH HUMILITY!

How many of you like New Year's Day—the first day of a **new year**? I do! In fact, I believe I mentioned last week that I wished Christmas and New Year's Day weren't so close together so I could spend a little more time **preaching on both!**

**Why** do I like the New Year? Although New Year's Day is not in the Bible—and consequently is not a holiday with any **spiritual significance**—there were certain times **in the Bible** when people got a “fresh start” in life, so to speak. One such day was the Day of Atonement in the Year of the Jubilee. According to Lev 25:9, the year of Jubilee occurred after **seven sets of seven years** were completed—meaning the 50<sup>th</sup> year. “All prisoners and captives were set free, all slaves were released, all debts were forgiven, and all property was returned to its original owners.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Jubilee.html>)

If being freed from prison—and becoming debt-free—is not a “fresh start,” I'm not sure what is!

Even though nothing like that happens at the end of **our** calendar year, I think you'd agree that it is a good time to **make an evaluation**—to take inventory—of our **spiritual** lives. It is good to **look back** and determine if we need to make some changes in our life—and it is good to **have a start-point** as to when we are going to make those changes. New Year's Day provides such an opportunity.

What I want to focus on this morning is one of the **key ingredients** we need to have if we are going to make an accurate **evaluation of the past**—and if we are going to have **God's assistance in the future**. What is that? You already know from your bulletin and outline that I am referring to the attitude of **humility**.

Take your Bibles and turn to I Peter 5; please follow along as I read verses 5-11. In the middle of vs 5, we are commanded to be “clothed with humility;” in vs 6 we are commanded to “humble ourselves.” God commands us to be humble, **but why?** That is what we will be looking at this morning.

First, what is **humility**? If you have a super good memory, I gave you the following definition from E.M. Bounds on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021: “**Humility is just feeling little because we are little. Humility is realizing our unworthiness because we are unworthy, the feeling and declaring ourselves sinners because we are sinners.**”

Spurgeon defines humility simply as having the **right estimate** of ourselves. There are two kinds of pride—one where we “over rate” ourselves—and another where we “under rate” ourselves. Both are wrong.

I Peter 5 is not the only place where God reminds us of the need to **humble ourselves**. Here are a couple of others: **II Chron 7:14** “If my people, which are called by my name, shall **humble themselves**, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” **Micah 6:8** “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to **walk humbly** with thy God?”

**James 4:6** “But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God **resisteth the proud**, but **giveth grace unto the humble.**” **James 4:10** “**Humble yourselves** in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.”

Back to our question: Why does God require humility? Why is it necessary? What will humility do in your life? I came up with 6 things; we will be looking at 3 this morning.

### **1. Humility leads to salvation**

What is the question we should ask ourselves when we hear the word **salvation**? Salvation **from what**? The salvation I'm talking about is being saved from the **penalty of our sins**.

--It is going from a state of **being condemned already** to not being condemned.

**John 3:18** “He that believeth on Him [Jesus] is **not condemned**: but he that believeth not is **condemned already**, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

--It is going from having **the wrath of God awaiting** you after you die to having everlasting life.

**John 3:36** “He that believeth on the Son hath **everlasting life**: and he that believeth not the Son **shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.**”

--It is being spared from **everlasting punishment**—and having eternal life instead.

**Matthew 25:46** “And these shall go away into **everlasting punishment**: but the righteous into life eternal.”

So **how** does having humility lead to salvation?

Take your Bibles and turn to Luke 18, beginning vs 9. We’ve looked at this a number of times in the past, but that’s good! Wouldn’t hurt my feelings at all if you remember that the parable of the praying Pharisee and publican is found in Luke 18!

--vs 9 spells out why Jesus was giving them the parable

--vs 10 tells us about the two men who went to pray

--In vs 11-12, we see the **pride** of the Pharisee—an outwardly “religious” man who thought what he was doing would get him to heaven!

--In vs 13, we see the **humility** of the publican

--And in vs 14, Jesus declares which one went home **justified**—meaning declared forgiven and right with God. Which one was it? The humble one!

**Psalm 10:4** “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” **Pride obviously stops** someone from seeing their sinfulness and their need to be forgiven.

**Humility**, on the other hand, leads us to see our **need to be forgiven**...and that we **can’t save ourselves**...and that we need to **trust in Jesus**—and Jesus alone—to save us!

**Titus 3:5** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but **according to His mercy He saved us**...”

Humility not only leads to salvation, **2. Humility leads to soul-searching**

What is soul-searching? I’m using it interchangeably with **heart**-searching.

--Does heart searching **end** when we become a child of God? No; it doesn’t!

--Does God want us to search **our own hearts** after we are saved? Yes, He does!

--Does God want us **to want Him** to search our hearts? Again, yes, He does!

First, let’s consider what the Bible say about the ... **A. Need to search our own hearts**

This afternoon, we will be participating in the Lord’s Supper, also known as communion. In Paul’s instructions regarding the Lord’s supper, we have these words: **I Cor 11:27-28** “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But **let a man examine himself**, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”

**II Cor 13:5** “**Examine yourselves**, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...”

And **I John 1:9** reminds us that “If we **confess our sins**, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Pretty safe to say that if we are to **confess our sins**, God expects us to see sins in our lives!

But...our hearts are deceitful, aren’t they?

--We can spot the **tiniest sins** very quickly in other people’s lives—but miss **major sins** in our own!

That’s why in Mt 7:3-4 Jesus tells us to get **the beam** out of our own eye before trying to remove **the mote**—meaning “speck”—that we see in someone else’s eye!

Not only do we need to search our own hearts, we also... **B. Need to ask God to search our hearts**

That’s what we **really need**, isn’t it? We can deceive **ourselves**—but we can’t deceive God! God knows the **truth about us**—and knows exactly what the “measuring stick” is. God knows the standard because He created the standard!

After I retired from the military, I still worked for the military as a civilian contractor and was the supervisor of 10 other contractors. Part of my responsibilities as their supervisor was to do evaluations of their work performance.

One of the guys I supervised was someone I had known for 20 years and went to Desert Storm with. I couldn't let **our friendship** sway my evaluation of his work. I **couldn't show favoritism to him** because he was my friend—and I couldn't show **favoritism to others** just because they **brought donuts** to the office!

I had to have **objective, measurable criteria** to evaluate what they did or didn't do.

God has objective, measurable criteria that He evaluates us by, doesn't He? What is God's standard? What does He use to "measure" us? His Word—the Bible—of course!

But God doesn't just see our **outward activities**, does He? God sees our **heart**...He sees our **motives**... He sees **why** we do what we do! **Hebrews 4:12** "For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**"

And because God knows **the standard** perfectly—and knows **our hearts** perfectly—we should **want Him** to be the One to search our hearts! Here's **another illustration** from my military career. In 1995—after having been in the military for 16 years—I left the medical field and became **a recruiter**. The first boss I had as a recruiter **was not very good**. In fact, he was probably the **worst I had ever had!** Why do I say that?

Because **his evaluations were not evaluations** at all! They were "eyewash;" they were what we call "pencil-whipped!" They were a joke, a farce! Not sure what they did for him—but they did nothing for me!

--Too many of us, I'm afraid, want evaluations like that from God!

--Too many of us aren't serious enough about our relationship with God. We just want Him to pat us on the head and tell us we are doing a good job—whether we are or not!

--Not enough of us have the **heart of David** as seen at the end of **Psalm 139:23-24** "**Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:** <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Change will not come until we are **dissatisfied** with where we are at. And the **best way to be dissatisfied** with where we are at is to have **God search us**—and not just us search ourselves!

**Will God search you** if you really want Him to? He certainly will!

Humility will lead us to **search our own** hearts—and humility will lead us **to ask God** to search our hearts. But **what then?** What are we supposed **to do** with what we find? We are supposed to do what a farmer—or gardener—does **if they are serious** about growing a crop.

What is that? **Work the soil**; prepare the ground for planting!

In the spiritual realm, God calls it "breaking up our fallow ground."

We see that phrase twice in the Bible—both in the OT. Please turn to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 4. Feel free to use the table of contents. Please follow along as I read Jeremiah 4:1-4. In the end of vs 3, we see God telling His people to "Break up your fallow ground..." How do we know God is **not talking about** the breaking up of **literal soil**? Because in vs 4 we see God is speaking to them about their **heart!**

### **3. Humility leads to heart-breaking!**

Let's consider first, the ... A. Pronouncements regarding heart breaking

We already saw one pronouncement in the end of vs 3. Notice on your outline the other ref in the OT: **Hosea 10:12** "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; **break up your fallow ground**: for it is time to **seek the Lord**, till He come and rain righteousness upon you."

Although we have farming language being used again —sow, reap, break up fallow ground, and rain—**seeking God** is obviously the focal point of the verse. But what is meant by "breaking up" fallow ground?

"Fallow ground" is land that **once** grew crops but was now being left uncultivated and unplanted.

What happens when land that was previously planted sits idle? Weeds take over, right?

--What do you have to do to get it ready for seed? Break up the ground—and remove the weeds!

--What is the spiritual application? God wants us to break up **our hearts**—to repent and get rid of—the things in our lives that are **displeasing to Him!** Humility, then, will lead to **ground-breaking changes** in our lives!

Next, let's consider... B. The process of heart breaking

So how do we go about the process of breaking up the fallow ground of our hearts? Please know that I'm not—nor am I claiming to be—a trained, professional, Biblical counselor. That being said, I believe the Bible outlines a simple, 5-step process. Let's turn now to Ephesians 4.

1) Identify the sin. How do we know what sin is? **Eph 4:17-18** says we are not to walk—meaning to live—like the Gentiles (meaning the unsaved) walk. In vs 20-21, we learn what sin is when we compare ourselves to Christ and listen to the teachings of His Word.

2) Agree with God that the sin must go. In Eph 4:22, God says we need to put off our former lifestyle which is corrupt.

3) Ask God to change you so you want the sin to go. In Eph 4:23, we see our need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Our **thinking** needs to change—and our **heart** needs to change. Our heart and minds need **to be changed** so that we do not desire that wrong thing any more. How does that happen? By the Spirit of God through the Word of God! **Phil 2:13** "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." God works in our hearts to change **our** "want-to's" into **His** "want-to's!"

4) Get rid of the sin! Just agreeing with God that the sins **need to go** doesn't make them go—we need to get rid of them! God wants us to put them off—so we need to stop doing that thing—or things—that God is displeased with and wants out of our lives.

5) Replace them with something else. We see that in Eph 4:24 "And that ye put on the new man..." In the plant world, we get rid of the weeds to plant flowers or some kind of plant. In our spiritual lives, we get rid of old habits and replace them with new ones.

Here's a **personal example** that I believe will help illustrate these steps. I grew up in the 70's and loved Rock music. Not the heavy-metal, head-banging kind of Rock music, but bands like "The Moody Blues," "Fleetwood Mac," "Jackson Browne," and "The Eagles." As I grew in **my love for God** and desire to please Him, I came to realize **two things**. The first was a Bible verse: 1 John 2:15 "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man **love the world**, the love of the Father is not in him."

The second thing I learned was this: **music—all by itself**—with or without words—has a message! Rock musicians are very open about it—**they know** their music carries a message! Christians, on the other hand, are kind of naïve about it. Many Christians tend to think that you can **take bad music**—then add good words—and it will **become good music**. It doesn't work that way. Bad—plus anything—still makes bad!

So when God convicted me about needing to stop listening to the music of the world, I did! And even though I quit "cold turkey," so to speak, I didn't stop listening to music altogether. I replaced it by listening to godly music; music that appealed to **my spirit** and not my flesh.

Back to the 5 steps. Which do you suppose is the **most difficult step** of those 5? My guess is that it may vary from person to person, but IMO the most difficult step is #2—Agreeing with God that the sin must go! We are oftentimes so slow to do that. Instead...

--We make excuses and blame our sin on other people. In our minds, we tell ourselves that we wouldn't get angry so easily if so-and-so didn't do this or that.

--OR, we know it is kinda-sorta bad—but not as bad as what other people do (we think)—so we aren't too serious about getting it out of our lives.

--OR, we know it is sin, but we **love it—and us**—too much so we hang onto that which hurts us and those around us.

--OR, we don't **value a right relationship** with God enough. I'm not meaning to make this sound disrespectful, but it is almost as if we treat God like our ever-loyal dog who would never leave us.

Aren't you glad that God is still full of grace and truth like we talked about last week? Aren't you glad that the ocean of His grace doesn't run dry and that there is mercy and forgiveness with the Lord?

What kind of 2023 are you going to have? We don't know exactly, do we. But we do know this: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. We can either have God's resistance—or His assistance.

I'm going to choose to humble myself under the mighty hand of God. What about you?

So what does God want us to do with what we've heard this morning?

1. First, God wants us to humble ourselves. What will that look like? It will vary from person to person.

--For some, you need to see that you are rebelling against God by trying to ***earn your way*** to heaven. If that's you, you need to come to God in humility, admitting you can't save yourself and need Christ!

--For others, you need to do something about the sin that is in your life. You know it is there; why hang onto what you know is wrong? God resists the proud—and will continue to resist you!

--For still others, we need to admit that we are not where we should be. We need to have a holy dissatisfaction in our lives; we need to want Him to search us and change us—not be content with our current state.

2. In addition to humility, though, God wants us to hope in Him. God wants us to look to Him. He is the answer for our every need. So humility should not drive us to despair—it should drive us to Him!