



The Better Way to Live

What defines for You the Good Life?

I've gone to Moscow several times and each trip was amazing. My first opportunity to teach there was an eye opener for many reasons. One moment in particular was especially memorable. I was with a group of fellow visiting professors and a student serving as our guide walking along a major street taking in the city scenes. We came to a cross street and the light turned green, so I stepped out to cross. All of a sudden the student grabbed my arm and pulled me back to the sidewalk. "Dr. Walkup", she warned, "you do not just walk across the street without looking for traffic. Russian drivers do not stop for pedestrians! You will get hit if you keep doing that!" Of course she had seen other American visiting professors make the same mistake in Moscow. There is a certain arrogance to stepping out into a cross walk assuming all drivers will wait for you. In Moscow, and perhaps in other countries, the right of way goes to the more powerful, the metal machine and the person driving it. We pretend we are kings in the US when it comes to walking in the city. The pedestrian strolls with the power of the law and the legal system enforcing it. "I am in charge of when I cross the street", we brashly proclaim to all drivers who approach us. "Not so", say the Russians. "We who drive the car or the truck decide when you shall cross."

Arrogance takes many forms and is found in every part of the world. It is foundational to wars, most arguments, splits between friends and nearly all crime. I recently saw a video of an elderly woman berating a young Asian American woman at a restaurant, accusing her of not paying for the food she was bringing to her table and insulting her in a wide range of verbal attacks. What was at the root of this person's bad behavior? It was arrogance. Before the time of cars, there was a pastor who while riding his horse down the road would yell out at anyone approaching to get out of the way because he was the pastor and they needed to let him pass. One day he did this, but the person coming toward him did not move to the side of the road but in fact stayed in the middle and kept coming. As the two began to pass each other, neither budging to move out of the way of the other, the pastor realized to his horror that it was the king he had ordered to move aside. The two looked at each other and the king sternly told the pastor to come to the palace the next day and if he could not answer three questions, he would lose his position as pastor.

The pastor, quite frightened of having to answer the king's questions because he was very good at making others feel lowly and unimportant but not so great at theology, asked the church gardener if he would go in his place because the gardener was quite wise. The gardener arrived at the palace dressed in the pastor's preaching clothes and the first question the king posed was, "How far is it from east to west?" "That's a day's journey", the gardener replied. "How is that" asked the king. "Well, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west and that always happens in a day" was the gardener's response. "All, right", said the king. "How much am I worth?" "Hmm", came back the gardener. Christ was valued at thirty pieces of silver; I'd better not put it any higher than that...twenty-nine silver coins." "Well" noted the king. You are pretty wise. Tell me what I'm thinking now!" "Oh, I would guess you are thinking it's the pastor talking with you but in fact you are wrong. I am actually the church gardener." "Ah" came back the king. "Go home then and you be the pastor of the church and let the former pastor be the gardener."

The best life is one lived in humility. We may get all sorts of stuff through pride and arrogance, but it is only in humility that we find ourselves beloved and right with God and His people. James makes this strong statement. **But he continually gives us greater grace. God continually opposes the haughty but gives grace continuously to the humble.** (James 4: 6) The Greek term translated haughty, “huperafanos” describes someone who is haughty, arrogant, puts himself first. God is always working against those sorts...fights them in fact. However, the Lord is always finding ways to bring grace to those who are humble or poor or even depressed. So what is grace? Often the way it’s described in Bible discussions is “unmerited favor”. This is how we might see it, from a human’s perspective. We gain what we don’t deserve, are treated better and with more love and compassion than we have earned. From God’s point of view, it would be “the overflow of God’s goodness”. Grace is the spilling out of His kindness and generosity upon each of us sinners. Think of it as a lovely waterfall pouring down on you after working long and hard in the field. God treats with special kindness those who are humble and not trying to push their agenda and wants upon others.

There is an amazing example of humility described in the Bible that is rarely recounted. Deborah, who was a prophetess during the time between Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land and her first king, a period of roughly four hundred years, faced a critical crisis. She was serving as spiritual leader of Israel, making judgments on matters of the law and settling disputes. Deborah had great respect and power in the land, but she humbly went to Barak with God’s mission for him. She gave him the charge of leading the Israelites in battle against the Canaanites who had been cruelly oppressing the Israelites for twenty years. **She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor.** (Judges 4: 6 NIV) Compare Miriam the sister of Moses and Deborah. Miriam nearly started a revolt against Moses because she convinced herself she was as qualified as Moses to lead Israel, if not more so. Her arrogance almost cost her severely when God struck Miriam with leprosy for her insolence. Deborah on the other hand, despite the respect and authority she already enjoyed as prophetess and judge, freely handed over the reins of leadership to the almost unknown Barak without batting an eye. To show how widely revered Deborah was, Barak refused the commission as general over Israel’s army unless Deborah went with him. He was convinced her talents were required for their success. Deborah agreed to go with Barak but not because she wanted the acclaim or power. She did so out of a desire fit into God’s plan wherever He wanted her. We all would do well to follow her example.

If you are going to make the most of your life and find yourself blessed by God, then humility is the route to take. What made Moses stand out, both in his relationship with God as well as those around him was his humility. **(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)** (Numbers 12: 3 NIV) If you want God to pour out grace upon you, then stay on the road Moses and Christ traveled each day, the path of humility. Here are some suggestions for you if you want God to continually share His overflow of goodness with you. 1. Don’t give in to the temptation to judge others. Your friends and peers don’t need it from you and God certainly isn’t pleased by a judgmental attitude. 2. Stop trying to prove how right you are. Let God uncover your goodness or intelligence or talent or creativity. You don’t need to self-promote when you are not believed or followed. 3. Never mock another child of God. We can have fun with each other, teasing in a gentle way but making others the butt of your jokes is never acceptable to God and bleeds off the respect others have for you. 4. When a choice is given you, take the place of least honor and the lesser option, even if you are the oldest and most deserving person in the crowd. 5. Always be willing to admit you are wrong, and not just willing, actually doing it. The brightest and wisest people in the world are more than willing to confess to their failings. 6. Much like 5, repent of the wrong you do. Never hold back here. We will look at this more closely when we come to it later, but James is spot on. **Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.** (James 5: 16 NIV) Humility is the high road for you. If you have a choice at any point this week, choose to be humble and watch as God pours His good gifts into you and your circumstances.