

Walk Humbly with Your God

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Arriving at Evangelical Seminary in 2002, I came equipped with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Bible and Religion along with a Masters in Christian Ministry. As a pastor with fourteen years of experience in two churches—one in southern Michigan and the other in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was 36. Then, with good training and proven experience as a spiritual leader, I walked onto this campus completely unaware that God was about to forever change my personal understanding of him, even wreck my personal identity, yet positively impact my life and ministry. The disorientation came early. The reorientation will take a lifetime.

The Assignment – *Does God Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly?*

My first course was *Biblical Hermeneutics* Dr. Buckwalter was my professor. I found him to be knowledgeable, gentle, and soft-spoken. His catchphrase — “Not to worry” — continues to echo in my mind. After stumbling out of the gate with a B- on the first assignment, I began to think, “Start to worry.”

The second assignment required students to write a “background paper” on one verse, Micah 6:8. Now reading from that syllabus assignment:

Micah 6:8 declares that God’s people are “...to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” But why has God commanded them to behave this way? First, determine and demonstrate from the OT that such attributes are true of God himself. In other words, does God act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly? Then discuss the implications of why God would command such behavior of His people.”

The first requirement – “act justly.” **Check.** God established the rule of moral goodness and holds humanity appropriately accountable to his known standards. He has the power to condemn or to acquit. He treats offenders fairly. **God is just.**

The second requirement – “love mercy.” **Check.** God is merciful. He is compassionate to the most undeserving, forbearing punishment even when justice is demanded or deserved. I’ve seen God extend mercy to many. I, myself, am a repeat recipient of divine mercy. **God loves mercy.**

The third requirement – “walk humbly.” **Hmm.** I was sure that God was humble, but for some reason that word did not resonate with my understanding of him. Examples did not

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readily come to mind. So, like any student who just wants to finish the assignment, I typed a bunch of words, pecked out a period, hit print, and turned in my paper. Dr. Buckwalter's critique was kind, yet appropriate. "Todd, thank you for these good examples; [the section] on humility could use some clearer examples and perhaps a definition of humility to help [the] reader understand how God is humble."

That grade – "B" – was a prophetic, Spirit-inspired stimulus for me to know God better so that I could behave justly, mercifully, and humbly.

The Ultimate Example – *He Made Himself Nothing*

"God is great and God is good." Even from the prayers of children, God's attributes can be categorized according to his greatness and his goodness. It is a comfort for one to know that God is great enough to create the world, yet good enough to care for me. However, the words for humility used in both the Old and New Testament did not necessarily draw an immediate correlation to my understanding of a great and good God. The biblical words suggest that humility is akin to being "low to the ground." Used negatively, *humble* means "to be put low" or to be humiliated. Positively, it can mean "to lower yourself" or to be humble. Humiliated? Put low? Lower oneself? I see how these terms relate to me in relationship to God; *but God in relationship to me?*

Aha! Jesus – The face of God in flesh!

Saint Paul points our attention to Jesus as the great and good face of God. "He [Jesus] is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation" (Col. 1:15 paraphrased). We know from Paul's 'Christ Hymn' that "though He was God, [Jesus] did not demand and cling to His rights as God. He made himself nothing; He took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. In human form, He obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6–8 paraphrased). Jesus is the visible image of the great and good God. He not only reveals to us that God is humble, but he is the perfect example of how to walk humbly with our God.

An Everyday Assignment – *Walk Humbly with Your God*

In just a few moments, your name will be called. You will step forward to receive your diploma from President Blair. This award will certify personal achievement. You have fulfilled the educational requirements for your particular Masters Degree. Congratulations! However, lest you think your assignments are truly completed, let me give you one more to take with you as you walk out of Christ Hall: *Walk humbly with your God.*

Some of you will serve as ministers, equipped to lead, able to teach, and ready to preach the Word of God in season and out of season. *Walk humbly with your God.*

Some of you will serve as therapists, equipped to listen and able to help the confused find answers, the hurting find healing and the broken find wholeness. **Walk humbly with your God.**

Some of you will serve as teachers, armed with knowledge and equipped to enable others to know and apply Truth. **Walk humbly with your God.**

Some of you will serve as leaders, equipped to develop organizations that are structured to provide staff members, clients, and customers with services that benefit and bless. **Walk humbly with your God.**

This assignment will never be completed. You will find the course work in the normal stuff of everyday life. When engaged in important and/or mundane tasks. When resisting intense temptations. When battling for ideas. When caught in inane conversations. When plowing through a season of doubt as others are sailing through their season of immense hope. When enjoying a season of plenty as others are suffering through a season of want. When required to say, "I'm sorry," hoping that "I forgive you" will be returned. In all this and more, walking humbly with your God.

Yes, you will need help with this assignment. To this end, God gave us Jesus' own example in Scripture. What is more, God sent his indwelling Spirit to actively transform and inform you from the inside-out. He has the perfect vantage point to help you walk humbly with your God in each and every situation, circumstance, or relationship.

Dr. Dallas Willard, author, philosopher, church statesman, and apprentice of Jesus, has a perspective on Jesus that is fundamental to relying on him. Willard says "Jesus is 'the smartest Man in the world.'" After building and resting his case on Scriptures as Colossians 1, . . . Jesus "created all things" and is literally "holding all things together," Willard engages our common sense logic. Our commitment to Jesus can stand on no other foundation than the recognition that he is the One who knows the truth about our lives and our universe. It is not possible to trust Jesus in matters where we do not believe him to be competent.¹

Three Disciplines for Walking Humbly – *Turn. Tune. Take.*

Jesus is not only the humblest person in the world, he's the smartest, also. Typically, we do not associate the smartest with the humblest, or vice versa. Keeping this association in mind, I will close giving three disciplines that I have found are required to fulfill the daily assignment of walking humbly with my God.

The first discipline – *turn* your eyes upon Jesus each and every day. See him for who he is. Look into his glorious face.

The second discipline – *tune* your ears to Jesus each and every day. Hear what he has to say to you.

The third discipline – *take* Jesus with you each and every day. Offer others what he has to give. Let your ministry done in Jesus' name, flow from your intimacy with him.

¹Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 94.

Stay Close to Jesus

Every December, I read Henri Nouwen's book, *In the Name of Jesus*, as a way to take stock of my inner and outer life. Last December, this particular sentiment from Nouwen caught my attention, . . . "*Did becoming older bring me closer to Jesus?*"² While I cannot say that becoming older set me on course to pursue Jesus and love Him well, I can say that my education at Evangelical did. May it be true for you too. My prayer for all of us this evening is that we leave Christ Hall determined not to leave Christ here.

Walk humbly with your God, each and every day.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Tune your ears to Jesus.

Take Jesus with you.

May you be a blessing to those you serve.

²Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 19.