



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

January 15, 2017

"Humility for the New Year" (Real Faith for Real People Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

James 4:1 *Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves.*

James 4:2 You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you?

James 4:3 And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.

James 4:4 You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way.

James 4:5 And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "he's a fiercely jealous lover."

James 4:6 And what He gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find.

It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble."

James 4:7 So let God work His will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him scamper.

James 4:8 Say a quiet yes to God and He'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field.

James 4:9 Hit bottom, and cry your eyes out. The fun and games are over. Get serious, really serious.

James 4:10 Get down on your knees before the Master; it's the only way you'll get on your feet.

Today's message is about humility. Before I start, I want to say that we are launching the ROOTED course this Wednesday. It's 11 weeks of Bible study. More than 200 of our congregation are signed up for it! Yes! Our Sunday sermons will continue on the study of the *Book of James* in the New Testament that we started last year, but as God would have it - these sermons will also parallel the same themes that *Rooted* Bible studies will be looking at.

Our passage today has the haunting verse in James 4 6-7: *"God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble." So let God work His will in you.*

Or, in the New International Version it reads even harsher: *"God opposes the proud but favors the humble. So humble yourselves before God."*

Being humble is core and critical to the faith of a follower of Jesus.

The primary way we grow is to know that we don't have all the answers, and that we need God.

A base line of humility is understanding that God has created this earth; not us. But our job is to preserve the goodness of the earth. Sustainability is key. All of the beautiful mountains of the Ko'olau, the clean water, the clean air, the beauty of animals, God gave all of that to us.

None of us created the air, the land, the sea, and the creatures. None of us. God did all that.

And if you're taking ROOTED, you'll see that the first lesson is about the creation of the world.

God gave it all to us to use but also to care of it and not exploit. Christians should be the greatest environmentalists because in humility we know that we didn't create earth or the creatures that inhabit it. God did and He is asking us to take care of it. We need to take care of the *aina*, the animals, and the atmosphere. That is why I try to be careful of what I eat, to be diligent in recycling, and be supportive of those who protect the the environment.

The scary thing is that verses 6 and 7 say that God will oppose the proud—those who think they are greater than God or His land, air, and sea and those who live in them.

That should shake us up that it's not that God puts up with the proud, or that He excuses the proud, or just sighs when He hears from the proud. No, He actually OPPOSES the proud.

The proud can be self-centered. The proud think they are greater than they are. That's why we always need to pray for our leaders who lead the land. All of us need to work on our humility: whether pastors, presidents, princes, princesses, police, painters, pro players, or people in general, God opposes the proud.

You know, we can think we are hot stuff, but the fact of the matter is, as we get older, we should know that we are not as strong or as cool as we once thought we were.

Susan Murray created the content of a presentation slide for a talk she gave recently, and I loved it so much I asked her permission to use it. This slide zeroes in on the fact that baby boomers once thought they were so great, so cool. But now that they are older, they see things so differently.

- In 1973 boomers thought they were cool with long hair. Now in 2017 they LONG for hair.

- In 1973 they were into KEGs, but in 2017 they are into EKG.

- In 1973 they were into acid rock, and now they think about acid reflux.

- In 1973 they, the original organic granola generation, were into seeds and stems. Now they are into roughage.

- In 1973, they were hoping for a BMW. Now many just hope for a BM.

- In 1973, boomers loved going to a new hip joint. Now in 2017 many are RECEIVING a new hip joint.

And I add, in 1973, you couldn't inhale a joint. But in 2017, joints are

legal in some states (if you know what I mean).

So you, millennials, who think you are cool stuff now, just know that in a decade or two, humility will start to creep in. But you don't have to wait decades to be humble. God calls us to be humble now.

The take-away for us all is that there may be a part in our lives where we are coming to realize that pride is ruling us rather than humility. Maybe it is in a relationship or in our job or a family or in our walk with God.

One of the reasons it is important to come to church every week, in addition to the reason that Tony Campolo gave last week, is that in coming to church and seeing everyone here, we are reminded that it's not all about us. We are part of a COMMUNITY that we should serve and serve with. The Christian faith is all about relationships (community) and in order to make the community work, we need humility.

Let me share some church history, not our church history but American church history. In the 1800's there was a great revivalist, evangelist, and preacher named Jonathan Edwards. He wrote a book called *On Revival*. As you know, revivals are times in the church history when many give their lives to Christ and the church grows at an immense rate. It's like a tsunami of conversions.

Edwards wrote the book because he experienced two or three revivals, and he noticed how they ended because quarrels erupted inside the church. People felt that THEIR way of being a Christian was better than other people's ways.

What did it say in our Bible passage today?

James 4:1 Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves.

Whether it's James the Apostle or Jonathan Edwards, it bothered their hearts to see Christians squabbling and arguing.

According to Presbyterian pastor Tim Keller, Edwards described in his book spiritual pride versus a spiritual humility. According to Keller, Edwards said there are six marks of spiritual pride and humility.

1) Spiritual pride makes you more aware of others' faults than your own. Humility makes you more aware of your own faults.

I normally like TV journalism because, as many of you know, I used to be a news broadcaster. But I'm cutting back now on watching TV news because the news shows are becoming more about pointing out the faults of the other person or their party and not about what do I need to work on or what does MY PARTY need to work on? Where am I failing?

2) Spiritual pride makes you speak of more contempt and disdain for others while humility makes you speak of mercy as you think of others faults.

Mercy is the theme of this year's HIM Conference in two months. Would that our churches and our lives would be known for mercy even for those who don't believe what we do or act like we do.

3) Spiritual pride makes you separate from people who criticize you or who you've criticized. Humility means you stick with people to work it out.

Pride makes us separatists. Humility looks for unity in the midst of diversity.

4) Spiritual pride makes you dogmatic and certain about everything you believe. Pride makes you blind to what are the main things versus the minor things to disagree on. Humble people know which battles to fight and which to walk away from because they're unimportant squabbles.

5) Spiritual pride makes you want to confront because you like winning, but humble people confront only when necessary. It's not about win-lose but about how can we both win. "How can we get to Yes" instead of "No, you are completely wrong and I'm right."

6) Spiritual pride makes you unhappy and sorry for yourself. You believe you deserve a better life. You know how life ought to be. On the other hand, Humble people think, "I don't deserve any better, but by God's grace I have much to be thankful. I don't know what's best for me, but by God's grace, I'll make it because God is with me."

Prideful people will always fall into self-pity of poor me, poor me. Humble people seldom have self-pity because they know they don't deserve a comfy life, and many in this world have it a lot worse than we. They don't say in suffering, why me? But rather why not me?

Humble people realize that blessings come not because of our perfect planning. Humble people know how hard it is to control events because so many things can go wrong that are out of our control.

You hope you have found the best job. When you are dating, you hope you have found the right possible spouse. In humility, you should know ultimately it is in God's hands. We

should do our best but God does the rest. It is not that easy, for example, to find the right spouse.

Did you know that in New York City there is a store that recently opened where you can find a husband? I learned that from a Joyce Meyer talk. It's called *The Husband Store*. It's amazing. If you want a husband you can go there and shop for one. But here are the guidelines.

There are six floors in the store. Once you visit a floor and leave it to go to the next floor, you cannot go back to an earlier floor. In other words, no looking at "merchandise," or "potential husbands," and deciding to go back down and look at other candidates.

So one woman went to the first floor of *The Husband Store*, and found that all of the men there have jobs! Not bad at all considering that there are many couch potatoes in the world. It's great to find a working, competent husband. But she said, "No, I have to see if there is more."

So this woman went to the second floor.

There, she found men who have jobs AND love kids. Whoa, no small thing. They will help in parenting and play time. But she went for it and went to the third floor: And she discovered men who are extremely good looking. Wow, guys who work, love kids and are super handsome.

Should she stop? No, she kept going.

On the fourth floor: men who help with the housework. This woman could hardly stand it.

But she had to go to the fifth floor: Men with a strong romantic streak. Oh, man! House work AND romance! Keeps getting better, so

the woman went for it all. She said, "I have to go for the top floor."

Sixth floor: She walked in and saw a digital sign that said: "You are visitor 50,360,049. This floor exists to show that women are impossible to please and that there are no men who exist on this floor."

To avoid gender bias there was a *Best Wives Store* across the street. Same rules. Six floors. First floor: You can have wives that love sex. Second floor: Wives who love sex and they have money.

Floors three to six have never been visited.

Now true you can find a great spouse by going to a store like that or by reading a great book like *How To Pick A Spouse*. Tell me if you want a copy. I know the author. You can get one here at the Life Ministries Table.

But if you ever think that finding a good friend or finding a good job or finding a good spouse doesn't involve God, then you are fooling yourself. And you may be too proud if you think you can do it on your own. God opposes the proud and raises up the humble. In fact, proud people in marriage hurt the relationship and not help it.

If you really think about it, humility is the gateway to all understanding of God. When we fully admit we don't know everything, when we fully confess that we are much weaker than stronger, much dumber than wiser, God can infuse more of His Holy Spirit in us.

Conversion is basically realizing that one needs God. That God is worth following. That all that Jesus stood for and taught about is far better than anything we could have created.

In essence, our prayer is “Give Me Jesus.” He is worth following and trusting.

But get this, if we are truly humble, then we would want to tell other people about Jesus. We wouldn’t keep it to ourselves. Keeping good things to ourselves is a form of pride. When we don’t share, that is not humility. And we should share our faith of Jesus with others. We should be one beggar telling other beggars where to find food.

I close with a true story. One hundred thirty eight years ago in 1879, there was a man named Charles Peace. He was hung in England for being a burglar and murderer. On the day of his death, a prison chaplain walked with him to the place for his hanging. As they walked together, the chaplain for some reason read from his religious book (The Consolations of Religion) and talked about the fires of hell.

I wonder if that chaplain was a Wesleyan or an Anglican. If he was a Wesleyan he might have read this passage from this 1855 Wesleyan writings:

“Then again we propose to you the momentous question, will you come to Christ? It requires an immediate answer; for it is an important subject. There is no time for delay. Life is uncertain; death is sure: tomorrow you may have drawn your last breath, and heaved your last sigh; yes tomorrow you may be a corpse.

“Them come to Christ, and come now, Embrace the present opportunity. Come now before your life-blood ceases to flow within your veins. Come now before your pulse refuses any longer to continue its beating. Come now, before the brittle thread of life be snapped asunder.

“Come now before these solemn

words are repeated over your lifeless body, ashes to ashes and dust to dust. Come now before the fire of hell folds it flames around you.

“Yes come now, sinner! What do you say? We urge the question; for your eternal destiny depends upon your determination. It is a matter of life and death. Your immortal soul is at stake. Heaven or hell must be your portion.” (The Christian Miscellany and Family Visiter Vol 4, 1855?)

Charles Peace asked the clergyman if he really believed what he read. And the chaplain said yes. And then Peace said these remarkable words:

“Sir, if I believed what you and the church of God say that you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it, if need be, on hands and knees and think it worthwhile living, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that!” ¹*Ravenhill, Leonard (1987) [1959]. Why Revival Taries. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publish. pp. 33–34. [ISBN 9780764229053.](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9780764229053)]*

If we were truly humble we would have this boldness to share the gospel of Jesus with others, wouldn’t we? Wouldn’t we want to share about the mercy and love and grace of Christ rather than condemn others? Did not our Bible passage today say:

James 4:8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

James 4:9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up in honor.

When we come to Communion, it is saying two things: We are sinners. And we have tears for what we have done. We come in humility knowing we need God. But second, we thank Jesus that He forgives us. He died for our sins. And so we need not be burdened or live with guilt for what we have done. And Jesus is the greatest model of humility.

And so as we prepare our hearts for Communion, I read from the second chapter in a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a church in Philippi where he said:

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

Phil. 2:4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Phil. 2:5-6 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

Phil. 2:7-8 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Phil. 2:9-10 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Phil. 2:11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.