

in Guatemala just broke her foot. That's bad, because her mom is responsible for three of her kids—ages 11, 8, and 6—who live in Guatemala. So I asked why she left three children in Guatemala. She said, "You've got to understand, the people who come just want to eat. It's not the rich people who come. It's just the people who want to eat." She's an illegal immigrant, which means that she does not exist. She lives her life in the shadows. No one is protecting her. No one is concerned about her. And a whole lot of people who have never met her hate her. She just rocked in her chair, sobbing, "The people who come are just the people who want to eat."

What do we think about people like that? We don't ever think about them! We exclude them. We ignore them. And if they ever have to come up, we complain about them. It doesn't matter what side you're on. What do we hear about "those people" today? On one side, you've got the big "basket of deplorables," right? "How can those peoples' opinions possibly matter?" On the other side, you've got the illegals and the welfare queens. "What are they even doing in our country?" Every time we use those words, what are we doing? That's our empty, busy, fragile, hurt ego trying to fill ourselves up by tearing others down. This is how we live, right? This is why we feel so empty. Because we're empty!

So what would Jesus say about that woman? He would invite her to his banquet. Because our God is a God of grace. A God of underserved love. Jesus came for the deplorables. For the poor and the lame and the weak and the illegals and the sinful. And if you proudly refuse to put yourself into any of those categories, then I guess Jesus didn't come for you. But if you recognize who you really are, then you recognize Jesus' grace. He's got a spot for you at his table. He wrote in his own blood your invitation to God's feast. "Come on up here and sit by me!" Jesus has a spot for you.

Jesus breaks us down, he shows us how deep our sin goes, so that he can show you how deep his grace is. So that you know what it is to be forgiven, to be loved. When I believe the lie that who I am depends on what I make myself, life becomes either an enslaving competition to prove my greatness or an enslaving spiral into self-pity. So when I feel disappointed or depressed or snubbed, I need to stop thinking about myself. I need to think about Jesus. Because when I believe the truth that who I am depends on what Christ thinks of me, I am free to not think about me. Free to not impress everyone else. Free to not have to win everyone else's approval. Free to not have to drag others down so I look better. Free to be filled by Jesus and his love. Free to think of myself less.

And when I get that, when I'm free from thinking about me, when I'm filled with God's grace, I'm going to have a lot of time to think about all the people who need God's grace in their lives. You're free to remember those in the shadows. Free to place others over yourself. Free to stop competing. Free to stop hating. Free to love. *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* You are free not to think more of yourself or less of yourself, but free to think about yourself less, because Jesus thinks about you a lot. Free to be humble.

Luke 14:1,7-14
Pastor Nathan Nass

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¹ One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched... ⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

The Freedom of Humility

"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." I don't know about you, but that doesn't seem to describe the world I live in! Doesn't it seem like if you want to get anywhere, you've got to "exalt" yourself? We live in a society that teaches people to believe that it all depends on you. In America, we praise the self-made person—"who you are depends on what you make yourself!" How much of what we hear is focused on empowering people to do it all themselves? "Don't take no for an answer." "Pull yourself up by the bootstraps." "Put yourself out there." "You can do it!" It's the people who think very highly of themselves who seem to push the world forward.

But I think as Christians we realize there is something off about that. That sounds pretty proud. So to counter pride, we often go out of our way to think less of ourselves. How many of your thoughts actually tear yourself down? "I'm no good at that!" "I could never do what she does." "I'm so ugly." "I'm not good at anything." You know what I'm talking about, right? And when we tear ourselves down, we almost feel this righteous satisfaction: "It's good I'm being humble."

But is that really what being humble is? Tearing yourself down? The Christian author C.S. Lewis wrote a lot about humility. He once said that if you were to meet a truly humble person, you wouldn't come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would certainly not keep telling you that they were a nobody, because—as he put it—a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a very self-absorbed person. The thing you would remember from meeting a truly humble person is how much they

would seem totally interested in you. Because the essence of humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it's thinking of myself less. That has stuck in my mind. Humility is not thinking less of myself. Humility is thinking of myself less.

On the outside, high self-esteem and low self-esteem seem to be polar opposites. What if I told you that they are really the same thing? Thinking more of yourself or thinking less of yourself have one very important thing in common: Thinking about yourself! Pride thinks about *me*. Self-pity thinks about *me*. How much of your life is spent bouncing back and forth between those extremes? There is no freedom in thinking more of yourself. There is no freedom in thinking less of yourself. In fact, there is nothing more draining and exhausting and depressing than to keep thinking about yourself! Today Jesus wants to help you find freedom in true humility—thinking of yourself *less*.

He does it at the expense of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the kings of this idea that “Who I am depends on what I make myself.” Jesus saw that when he was invited to a Pharisee’s house for supper. “*He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table.*” You can imagine what the thought process of these proud men was like: “Who I am depends on where I sit.” “Who I am depends on what they think.” “Who I am depends on what they say.” As self-centered as pride is, it’s really slavery. It makes us the slaves of other people and their opinions. There is no freedom in being pride, just slavery.

So Jesus told this parable: “*When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.*” Ouch! How would you have liked to have been one of the other guests at that dinner? Putting yourself out there may seem like the best way to succeed. Not in Jesus’ kingdom! He states things so matter-of-factly, like this should be obvious. “Don’t think too much of yourself. You’re only going to get hurt.”

Why is that good advice so hard to believe and follow? I read a book recently that really hit home for me. It’s called “The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness” by Tim Keller. In it, Keller talks about what our human egos are like by nature. Our egos are empty, busy, painful, and fragile. *Empty*. If you try to base who you are on anything other than Jesus, you’re going to feel empty. Like a rattle with a few beans bouncing around inside. Empty. To fix that, you’re going to be very *busy*. You’re going to try everything to prove your worth, so you can stop feeling empty. “If I get the best seat at the party, then I’ll feel full.” “If I just get that promotion, then I’ll feel full.” Constantly *busy*. Fighting to find fulfillment somewhere.

But you won’t, because nothing other than Jesus can fill you. So that empty, busy ego gets *hurt*. Just think: Your ego is part of your body, like your brain or your toes. When is the only time you feel those parts of your body? When there is something wrong with them! You don’t feel your toes, unless they hurt! So if you feel your ego, there must be something wrong. You got snubbed. You got disappointed. It doesn’t take much, because our egos are so *fragile*. Just one word sometimes can crush us. When I believe the lie that

who I am depends on what I make myself, life becomes either an enslaving competition to prove my greatness or an enslaving spiral into self-pity. I know it’s hard to hear this, but if you are going through life feeling depressed and disappointed and snubbed, you need to stop focusing on you! Empty, busy, hurt, fragile...that’s me!

And that’s what Jesus wants to save you from—you! He says, “*But when invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.*” In that parable, who is it who honors you? The host! So in life, who is it who gives your life worth and value? Jesus! Isn’t that freeing? You don’t have to think about yourself, because there is someone much greater than you already thinking about you—Jesus! Who you are doesn’t depend on where you put yourself. It depends on what your God thinks of you. To put it another way, your identity doesn’t come from any effort of your own, it comes from Jesus!

I hope you realize how wonderful this truth is. Jesus has already determined your worth. You are worth his life and his death on the cross. Jesus has already determined your place. He has prepared a room in heaven just for you. He forgives you. He loves you. In humility, Jesus spent his whole life totally interested in you. So you don’t have to be! When, by God’s grace, you believe the truth that who you are depends on what Christ thinks of you, then you are freed to take the lowest place. Humility is not thinking less of myself, it’s thinking of myself less, because Jesus thinks about me a lot. That’s freedom!

So here’s the next question: If I don’t think about me, what am I going to think about? If you were to stop thinking about yourself and your disappointments, how much free time would you have every day? You could do some serious thinking about something! What are you going to think about? Jesus helps you out. He tells another parable. “*When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*”

Whom does Jesus encourage us to think about? Since Jesus is thinking about you, you are freed to think about the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.... So why don’t we do that very often? The truth is, our pride and self-pity spills over into everything in our lives, including our relationships. How often don’t we pursue relationships for our own personal benefit? “What am I going to get from him? What am I going to learn from her?” As if the relationship were all about me! Jesus says not to hang around all the people you can benefit from. Hang around the people you can be a benefit to!

But maybe you say, “I really don’t know anyone poor or crippled or lame or blind.” In our society, we have done everything possible to hide the poor away, so that we rarely have to see them. People with needs are always somebody else’s problem. But they are here. In the shadows. I talked with one this past week. She was invited to a Bible study I was teaching in someone’s house, but before we could begin, she started crying. Her mom