



A Posture of Dependence

It's hard to honor someone who doesn't want to be honored," quipped Linda Cannell, academic dean at North Park Theological Seminary. The occasion was a recent banquet recognizing the contributions of C. John Weborg, recently retired long-time professor of theology. In gratitude to God for John's immeasurable impact championing the lacing of both heart and mind in the development of students, the Center for Spiritual Direction at the seminary was named in his honor.

It was clearly a distinction he was much more reticent to receive than those in attendance were eager to bestow. In acknowledging bewilderment with the designation, he noted all he ever did was what was asked of him by his dean (deans, really; sequentially Glenn Anderson, Rob Johnston, John Bray, and Jay Phelan). He characteristically focused his comments not on any individual accomplishment, but instead on the contribution of the entire seminary community.

When he returned to the table, university president David Parkyn turned to him and said, "Now I understand the 'we' in Weborg."

A.W. Tozer once wrote, "A true and safe leader is likely one who has no desire to lead.... I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the one who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader." By that standard, John was fully qualified for this recognition.

There is irony to humility. Its nothingness is its somethingness. It becomes more evident the less evident a person cares to be. It attracts attention because it deflects attention. Humility increases the esteem in which a person is held by others. In contrast, one is diminished the bigger one tries to project oneself.

Humility is the way of Jesus. The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that we are to imitate the example of our Lord, who did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage, but who instead humbled himself, taking on the very nature of a servant.

Jesus uses a young child in Matthew 18 as an object lesson, saying whoever humbles oneself like that child is great in the kingdom of God. The image points us to a posture of dependence as a precondition for humility. The child trusts

for what it cannot do, looking to the elder for provision, safety, and direction.

That dependent posture can originate in many ways. One is through the pain of brokenness and deep disappointment. Brokenness, when humbly embraced as a merciful gift, carries us to that dependent place where we find deeper dimensions of life with God, self-understanding, and empathy with others.

John Wenrich, who gives leadership to congregational vitality ministries in the Covenant Church, talks about different types of brokenness. Not all brokenness is the same. Yes, there is brokenness that leads to disuse. The car breaks and can't be used, and likewise the light bulb, the computer, and the plumbing. When they are broken they are of no use.

But other things have no usefulness until they are broken. A horse is no good until it is broken. A baseball mitt is no good until it is broken in. In case of emergency, break glass. And what does it say on your medicine bottle? Break this seal.

God uses broken things. In fact, our faith is built on this statement of Jesus about his sacrifice on the cross: this is my body, broken for you. And what does King David say is an acceptable offering to God? A broken spirit and contrite heart.

Are you in a season of brokenness? Grieve, yes. But pride stops at, "look at what has been lost." Bitterness and disillusionment set in, choking life from our soul. Humility, expressed in dependence, ultimately moves on to "God, use even this." As painful as it may be to pray that, humility receives brokenness as a severe mercy, something God will use to purposefully and redemptively reshape and reorder our lives.

Dr. Weborg was stricken with polio as a child, which left him with a limp. He never spoke in complaint about it. If saying anything at all, he would note it as a marker of dependence on God's mercy, a tangible reminder of the New Testament truth "when I am weak, then I am strong."

We all have our limps. Some are just less visible to others. May your own limp remind you of God's mercy as you walk humbly with your God. ■

Gary Walter is president of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

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