

I was watching *another* great documentary by Ken Burns –

This one was on *Benjamin Franklin*.

His *accomplishments* have become *legendary* –

I'll speak for *myself* when I say that my *favorite* heroic figures,

Are those who are also very *human* –

Very *relatable* to the *common* person.

Franklin was a *staunch* believer in *self-improvement* –

So, every *week* he took a piece of *paper*,

And across the *top* he headed *7 columns* – one for every day of the *week*.

And down the left *margin*,

He created *12 rows* –

One for each *virtue* he wanted to strive for.

And each *day*, he'd make a little black *spot* in the box

Every time he made an *infraction* against a virtue.

When he *did* this, he said he was *surprised* he wasn't as virtuous as he *thought* he was.

But *one* week, his sheet of paper was pretty *clean* – *free* of those little black *spots*.

So, he went around to some of his *friends* to *boast* of how *well* he had done.

One friend considered Franklin's success in the twelve virtues *listed*:

Things like *temperance, frugality, industry, sincerity, and justice.*

And the friend said:

“You’re **missing** a virtue you **might** want to **try.**”

To which *Franklin* said:

“Oh? What’s **that?**”

And his friend simply replied with just *one* word:

“**HUMILITY.**”

My friends,

Jesus’ *parable* today is for *each* and *all* of us.

And it *hinges* on our need for *humility.*

The character who’s *supposed* to be the model of *holiness* – the *Pharisee* –

Lacks this humility.

While the one we think we’re *supposed* to look down on –

The *tax collector* – becomes our *hero* of the virtue.

Humility is the great *antidote* to the *father* of all sin –

The sin of *pride.*

Ben Franklin was *not* too proud to *listen* to his friend.

And this is what *Franklin* said about pride:

“*In reality, there is perhaps no **one** of our natural **passions***

*So hard to **subdue** as **pride**.*

***Disguise** it; **struggle** with it; **beat it down**; **stifle** it;*

***Mortify** it, as much as one **pleases**, it is still **alive**,*

*And will every now-and-then peep **out** and **show** itself.*

*Even if I could see that I have **completely** overcome it,*

*I should **probably** be **proud** of my **humility**.”*

For the proud *Pharisee*,

Prayer was a time to *brag* about himself to all who could *hear* –

Even *God* was being used as a thing to *stand* on and *exalt* himself.

Notice his prayer focused on *his* achievements –

As if he *earned* his place above *others*.

I thank you, Lord, because *I* am better than everybody *else*!

I fast; *I* pay tithes; *I – I – I – I – I!*

His *pride* makes him so *full* of himself,

There is *no* room for *God* to enter his heart.

Prayer more *properly* takes the focus off our *own* accomplishments –

Or even our *failure* to achieve –

And directs our hearts to *God* to complete us.

The tax collector would have been the *lowest* of the *low* in society –

A *despised collaborator* with an oppressive *regime* –

One who *preys* on the weak.

And *yet*, even this *lowlife* knows his place before God.

Humility is not self-*abasement*.

Humility is not *humiliation*.

God doesn't want us to be *doormats*.

Humility simply means being *ourselves* –

Who we *truly* were made to be.

And that's the same for *all* of us.

If we're *human* we're *completely* dependent on *God* for the goods and *good* in our lives.

A *humble* person *knows* this in their heart –

And they very *naturally* enjoy the grace of *gratitude* –

Seeing their accomplishments *not* as theirs *alone* –

But thanks to a gracious and generous *God* who *loves* us.

God *Himself* models humility –

Becoming *one* of us –

And giving us His very *life* so that we can truly come *alive*.

And He *forgives* sinners –

And *loves* even the *prideful*.

But love is something we *cannot* manufacture on our *own*.

The *prideful* **close** themselves *off* from receiving it as a gift.

While the *humble* **open** themselves to **be** filled.

So let us *not* be afraid to *ask* God to free us of the pride that will only *destroy* our thriving.

And *ask* him; *beg* Him to *gift* us with *humility* –

That *attitude* that makes *room* for *God's* love and mercy to *fill* us and make us *truly* happy.

On our *own*, we'll *never* be satisfied.

No matter *how* much we accomplish –

It'll *never* be enough.

And no matter *how* much better we *think* we are than those *neighbors* of ours we judge –

We'll *never* be *satisfied*.

May we *see* ourselves as *God* sees us –

With great *honesty* – as His *beloved* –

And with great *mercy* and *love* –

Regardless of whether we deserve it or *not*.

And when we let *God* fill us up, rather than our *pride* –

Our hearts will look upon *others* as *He* has looked upon *us*:

With *love*; *respect* for our common *dignity*;

And our common *need* –

For the common *bond* –

The bond of *communion* with the God of love and *compassion* –

Poured out – so we may *truly* live.

It's up to *us* whether we will *accept* His outpouring or *not*.