



### Humility and Parenting: Taking an Accurate Look at Yourself

This past year has been a difficult parenting year for my wife and me. Our children have provided some unique obstacles for us. They gave us ample opportunity to grow in parenting virtues. One lesson that we learned came from a rather abrupt statement from a Christian parenting coach whose audio program we listened to. He said, “Your children push your buttons because you have so many buttons to push. That’s your problem, not theirs.”

As He often does, the Holy Spirit let that statement hit me hard. He led me to reflect on my own character flaws, pride, and selfishness that get in the way of me becoming the best parent I can be. It was a painful process. But in the end, my wife and I grew in our ability to respond to our children more calmly and rationally. We grew in the virtues of patience, fortitude, and prudence. But it all started with the virtue of humility.



**Humility** is a commonly misunderstood virtue. People often assume that humility means thinking yourself small and unworthy. In reality, humility does not mean having a low opinion of yourself. Rather, it means having an **accurate** perception of yourself. A humble person recognizes his or her strengths and gifts as well as the weaknesses, vices, and sinfulness. The opposite of this part of the virtue of humility is pride. Sometimes pride means seeking a disordered amount of honor and regard from others. Other times, pride means assuming that disordered honor and regard for yourself.

Parents who want to grow in the virtues we discussed this past year need the virtue of humility and an accurate self-perception to know which virtues they need to develop. They need the ability to look at their parenting objectively, without the bias of pride. They need to be able and willing to admit their weaknesses, and even to allow others to point them out. Without humility, I would never have heard the message that I needed to face my emotional triggers and learn to control my responses.

The other part of humility is that you think of others more than you think of yourself. The opposite vice of this dimension of humility is self-centeredness. Self-centeredness isn’t quite the same as selfishness. Selfishness refers to a choice to put yourself above others. Self-centeredness refers to a pattern of thought where you think only about yourself and are unable to see others. Self-centered people fail to see how their actions and words affect others. They don’t see the needs of others. They aren’t able to consider how other people may think or feel. Their own needs,

concerns, and desires just scream too loudly. Humility is the virtue of quieting the clamor of the self so you can “hear” others.

Parenting is a great tool for overcoming self-centeredness. Just needing to think about the needs of a baby or a young child teaches us to think of someone else. However, there is always room to grow in selfless love. It takes the clarifying vision of humility to see where in your life you are still putting yourself before others. For me, the challenging words that my selfishness was allowing my children to frequently push my buttons forced me to face my need for a greater transformation of my heart.

Humility is a difficult virtue to adopt. It requires the willingness to admit our own weaknesses and sinfulness. However, if you want to grow in virtue as a person or as a parent, you need to first be willing to see what parts of yourself need to be corrected and strengthened. When we face a difficult task, we know that we can rely on God to help us. Start with this prayer.

*Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind and shine your light into my heart*

*That I might know myself as You know me.*

*Remind me always of my value as a child of God.*

*But also reveal to me my weakness and sinfulness*

*That, with your help, I might replace them with the virtues I need*

*For my own sanctification and to lead my family to holiness.*

*I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

*Amen.*



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