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DAY 1

BE HUMBLE

*The best work comes when
we don't take ourselves
too seriously.*

Spiritual Development

Now, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

MICAH 6:8

WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE of us? Only three things. Do right. Love mercy. Walk humbly with our God.

There's a lot packed in those three statements. Let's focus on that third one: walking humbly. Humility.

Many of us see humility as a masochistic act. If we beat ourselves down enough and think lowly enough of ourselves, we achieve humility. So we walk around with frail self-esteem

and a fear of putting ourselves out there. We don't want to seem proud, after all.

Artists—especially in the church—are geniuses at this masochistic humility. I used to excel at this. When I'd hop off the stage after leading worship, I'd almost stiff arm any compliment heading my way. And when I wasn't repelling the compliments, one of the pastors on staff made it his business to keep me humble.

There are far too many downtrodden and frail artists in the church. That's not what humility is about.

I love how *The Message* paraphrases the last part of our verse: "And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously."

That's humility! Chill out and don't be self-absorbed. When we take God seriously it stops being about us and starts being about Him. It's no longer about our ego but about His glory.

But so often we take ourselves too seriously.

We've all seen the obvious example of this. I'm sure you've had a friend or two who are minefields. You have to tiptoe through your conversations for fear of upsetting the delicate balance of their psyche and setting them off. If you touch on the wrong topics or say the wrong things, they explode!

They're obviously taking themselves too seriously. That's not humility.

A less obvious example is the bashful artist. They're afraid to put themselves out there because they're afraid of what people will think. "What if they hate my work and reject me?"

They, too, are taking themselves too seriously.

When God calls us to do something, we have no business being bashful. Think of Jesus—the ultimate example of humility. He wasn't bashful about speaking to the thousands. He wasn't bashful about telling us to be holy like He is

holy. He wasn't even afraid to demonstrate His humility with words. He was and is humble.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. It's having an accurate picture of yourself and realizing it ultimately doesn't matter. Only what glorifies God matters. Humility is taking God seriously without taking ourselves too seriously.

So it's time for a life checkup. How are you doing at walking humbly with your God? Are you taking yourself too seriously? Are you worried more about your ego than about doing what God's called you to do?

Prayer Starter

God, I choose to start taking You seriously. I'm tired of taking myself too seriously. Help me to walk humbly before You and to do what You've called me to do. Help me have an accurate picture of myself and realize it ultimately doesn't matter. You matter.

Change the Way You Think

Now to your work. Have you been confusing humility for self-deprecation? Perhaps the leaders in your life have even led you to believe that's what humility means.

Clear that false idea from your mind. It will only taint what God called you to do. If you're an artist, He called you to create. If you're a writer, He called you to write. If you're a speaker, He called you to speak. Do everything without holding back.

Our best work comes when we don't take ourselves too seriously. It allows us to take risks. To be brave. To try something new. We're willing to explore and to bring others into the exploration with us.

The world desperately needs people who know what it means to be humble. Stop taking yourself seriously and start taking God seriously.

Challenge

Whatever your unique outlet, create something intentionally horrible. And have fun doing it! Then share it with your friends and family. Let them enjoy the atrocity.

Don't take yourself seriously as you create. You might just find some beauty or a new technique you hadn't discovered previously.

DAY 2

BE LIMITED

*Limitations force
creative solutions.*

Spiritual Development

God said to Gideon, “You have too large an army with you. I can’t turn Midian over to them like this—they’ll take all the credit, saying, ‘I did it all myself,’ and forget about me. Make a public announcement: ‘Anyone afraid, anyone who has any qualms at all, may leave Mount Gilead now and go home.’”

Twenty-two companies headed for home. Ten companies were left.

God said to Gideon: “There are still too many. Take them down to the stream and I’ll make a final cut. When I say, ‘This one goes with you,’ he’ll go. When I say, ‘This one doesn’t go,’ he won’t go.” So Gideon took the troops down to the stream.

God said to Gideon: “Everyone who laps with his tongue, the way a dog laps, set on one side. And everyone who kneels to drink, drinking with his face to the water, set to the other side.” Three hundred lapped with their tongues from their cupped hands. All the rest knelt to drink.

GOD said to Gideon: “I’ll use the three hundred men who lapped at the stream to save you and give Midian into your hands. All the rest may go home.”

JUDGES 7:2-7 (MSG)

GIDEON WAS CALLED TO fight a battle. Gideon and the Israelite army were grossly outnumbered: 32,000 Israelite troops to 135,000 Midianite troops. And if that wasn’t enough, God shrank Gideon’s army down to 300!

Imagine Gideon’s terror. This battle was a matter of life and death. And God wanted to limit Gideon’s army to only 300? But God had a plan—a creative plan.

Through a bit of crazy misdirection and some shock-and-awe antics, the Midian army defeated themselves! Hollywood script writers still struggle to invent clever plot lines like this! The Midianite army got confused, and they literally turned on each other. Then the battle was over.

300 men + God’s creative plan = victory.

The coolest part about the creative plan was this: no Israelite casualties. If Gideon had stormed the enemy with his 32,000 troops, he would have lost many men. Even if he’d done it with 500,000 men, the losses would have been devastating. Our creative God—by limiting the army to 300—forced an outside-the-box idea. And God got the glory.

Many of us equate limitations with hindrances. When we don’t have enough time, finances, or resources, we resort to complaining and wishing we had more. But God has given you everything you need to do His will. When we’re willing to work within the limitations and we find success, He gets the glory—not us.

That’s what life is all about—bringing glory to God. So why should we worry when there isn’t enough money in the

bank account? Why should we complain when we don't have all the resources we think we need?

Give the situation to God and let His creativity take over. Trust Him completely and let Him do something awe-inspiring in your life.

Prayer Starter

God, I choose to see limitations as an opportunity rather than a hindrance. Instead of complaining or wishing for more, I want to trust that You can do the miraculous and intervene. You can take my limitations and do something amazing with them. You are the author of all creativity and there is nothing beyond Your grasp. I trust in You.

Change the Way You Think

There's such beauty in this story for those of us who make things. It illustrates an amazing facet of creativity—limitations force creative solutions.

This would be a completely unremarkable story if Gideon had the resources he thought he needed. Anyone can win a battle with a well-staffed, well-funded army. Because when the going gets tough you simply throw more resources in the mix. No creativity needed.

The same is true for what you produce. If you had all the necessary resources at your fingertips, you wouldn't be forced to think creatively or outside the box. Consider an advertising executive with a multimillion dollar budget. Instead of relying on creativity for his ads, he hires ten celebrity spokesmen. These ads simply fade into the white noise of endorsements featuring celebrities. Instead, when you think of some of the most famous ad campaigns, they didn't rely on big budgets. They relied on creativity.

Limitations force creative solutions.

So instead of complaining about your lack of resources today, look at the opportunity for creativity. You might even avoid some proverbial casualties in the process.

Challenge

Choose one project you're working on. Then cut your resources for that project in half. Move your deadline closer. Cut the budget. Remove some technological resources. Create some limitations.

Now think creatively. Look for unique ways to accomplish the same goal. Decide what's really necessary for the project. You'll find many of the resources were unnecessary for accomplishing your goal.

DAY 3

BE A DANCER

*A life of meaning is dynamic.
It can't always be lived in
neat, straight lines.*

Spiritual Development

The Holy Spirit kept them from preaching the Word of God in the countries of Asia. When they came to the city of Mysia, they tried to go on to the city of Bithynia but the Holy Spirit would not let them go. From Mysia they went down to the city of Troas. That night Paul had a dream. A man was standing in front of him crying out, "Come over to the country of Macedonia and help us!"

After he had seen this, we agreed that God told us to go to Macedonia to tell them the Good News.

ACTS 16:6-10 (NLV)

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND his entourage were on their missionary journey. They were trying to decide where to go next. The above passage makes it seem as if their progress was a lot like a pinball machine. They headed to one region, then

hit a wall. So they bounced on to the next location. Another wall. They bounced on and on until Paul finally had a dream. That's when they finally realized where they needed to go.

Imagine how frustrating that would have been! They felt called by God to preach the gospel, but they kept meeting with resistance. That resistance was the Holy Spirit Himself. I know they got discouraged. They were people, just like you and me. They got discouraged, but they still obeyed.

When things like this happen to us, we can choose to see it in one of two ways. We can either see God playing games with us like we're in a pinball machine, or we can see God dancing with us.

I encourage you to see it like a dance.

Good dancing requires a leader and a follower. God is a great leader. How are we at following?

If the follower chooses to take control, the dance can easily fall apart. That's when people's toes get stepped on. That's when folks bump into each other. There must be a leader and a follower. And God will not follow.

But when the follower chooses to trust the leader, the dance becomes beautiful. It becomes exciting and unpredictable. There's harmony and beauty.

So as you follow God, I encourage you to dance. Don't get discouraged when God takes you in a new direction. He knows the music and He knows where we need to be. Follow Him and He'll take you there. It will be beautiful.

The world is a dance floor. God wants to dance with you. Will you let Him take the lead?

Prayer Starter

God, I choose to trust You in this dance. I choose to let You lead. Though I can't always anticipate the movements, I know You are a good leader. I can trust where You lead me,

knowing You have the big picture in mind. I pray You would make my life a beautiful dance.

Change the Way You Think

The attitude of the dance doesn't just apply to our walk with God. It also applies to the things we create.

Great work—work that impacts others—is dynamic. It requires a push and a pull. It can't always be made in neat, straight lines. It needs to adapt to the music—to the world and the lives around us.

I encourage you to create like you're dancing. Be willing to adjust at a moment's notice. Don't be afraid to get out of control. Let the world swirl around you and relax. Enjoy it. Create in the dance.

Challenge

Create something inspired by the passage in Zephaniah 3:17—“For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

Especially focus on that last sentence. In the original Hebrew, the word *rejoice* is translated more literally as spinning around under violent emotion. So look at that last sentence as—He spins around under violent emotion—dancing over you with joyful songs.

Through your preferred medium, create something that captures the essence of that passage. If it's dance, what would that verse look like as a dance? If it's paint, what would that scene look like? If it's music, what song would God be dancing to?