

Character Matters: *Humility*

Seeing ourselves rightly

How's Your Vision?

“Honey, you are SO smart!” cries the adoring grandmother. Smugly, the 5-year-old replies, “Yes, Granny, I know.” Anyone who has spent much time around children has witnessed such a scene. For many of us, it was our own child whose cool self-exaltation has caused us to blush and whisper fiercely, “Say ‘thank you!’”



But the honesty of childhood simply reveals what lies within all of our hearts. Pride is a fact of human nature. The 5-year-old simply lacks the social skills necessary to understand that the world generally disapproves, if not of pride itself, at least of *unconcealed* pride.

True humility is hard to find, but there is more than one counterfeit. Some have mistaken a low sense of self-worth for humility. These people wallow in miserable self-consciousness, often paralyzing their usefulness in the world by being unwilling to attempt anything significant. Then there is the humility of hypocrisy. This is the self-abasement which prompts us to say, “Oh, I’m not really very good at that” - when we know that we are. These polite nothings are usually attempts to disguise the obvious, and they are of no use in getting rid of the swellings of self-centeredness in our hearts.

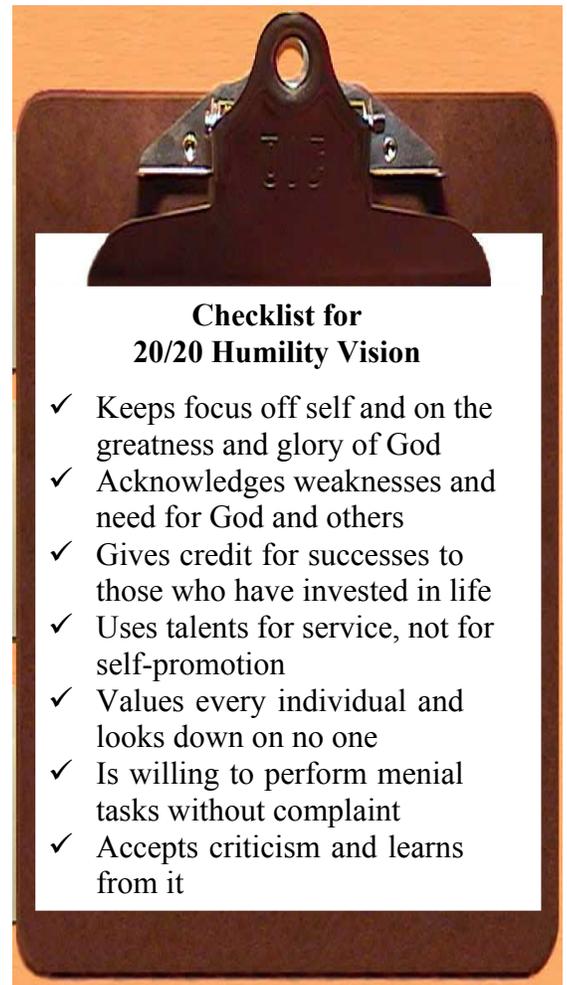
What, then, is the secret of true humility? How can we learn this trait ourselves, much less teach it to our children?

“The more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have.”

~ Norman Vincent Peale

Before we can answer that question, we have to take a close look at the opposite of humility: pride, or self-focus. Pride is a conscious or subconscious attempt to place ourselves at the center of the universe. It is “the-world-revolves-around-me” syndrome. We all tend to be the heroes or heroines of our own mental novel. The ultimate crime of humanity, from which stems all others, is self-worship.

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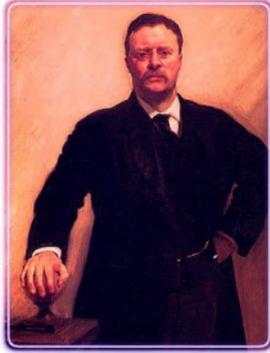
Checklist for 20/20 Humility Vision

- ✓ Keeps focus off self and on the greatness and glory of God
- ✓ Acknowledges weaknesses and need for God and others
- ✓ Gives credit for successes to those who have invested in life
- ✓ Uses talents for service, not for self-promotion
- ✓ Values every individual and looks down on no one
- ✓ Is willing to perform menial tasks without complaint
- ✓ Accepts criticism and learns from it

Humility -In- History



Theodore Roosevelt and his friend, naturalist William Beebe, got their “vision” adjusted on a regular basis. They would gaze into the sky at night until they spotted a certain small patch of light. “That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda,” they would say together. “It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our own sun.” Savoring the awesome thought, they would stand in silence until, finally, Roosevelt would turn to Beebe and say, “Now I think we are small enough. Let’s go to bed.”



From *Carry a Big Stick: The Uncommon Heroism of Theodore Roosevelt*, by George Grant. Cumberland House Publishing, 1996.



Balance

Humility

with

Initiative

Responsibility

Virtue

Boldness

- **Initiative** is “recognizing and doing what needs to be done without being asked.” Humility is not being oblivious to our ability to make significant contributions to others’ well-being. It is aggressively pursuing the good of others, with pure motives - not for personal glory or benefit.
- **Responsibility** is “accepting the consequences of my own actions.” While humility is

quick to acknowledge the contributions of others in successful endeavors, it does not attempt to shift the blame when things go wrong.

- **Virtue** is “the moral excellence evident in my life as I consistently do what is right.” A humble person will listen to criticism and seek to learn from it, but when he knows an accusation is unfounded, he

will also seek to clear his good name.

- **Boldness** is “confidence that what I have to say or do is true, right, and just.” Humility is not timidity. Because a humble person has his eyes on God, and not himself, he boldly confronts falsehood and wrongdoing, and seeks to defend truth and justice wherever he can.

(*Vision, continued from p. 1*)

The problem, of course, is that none of us actually IS the center of the universe. That position belongs to God alone.

Think of pride as a vision problem. In order to adjust our eyesight, we have to focus on the right things. Humility is a lack of focus on *self* - either self-glorification or self-debasement. After gazing at the brilliance of the sun, a flashlight is scarcely worth our notice. In the same way, when we begin to glimpse the beauty and majesty of God, we will lose sight of ourselves and become consumed in something far higher and greater than ourselves.

This “eyesight correction” puts the world into perspective, and frees us to live for a purpose beyond ourselves. We are no longer concerned about making sure we look good, or about who gets the credit for our actions. We are able to acknowledge our weaknesses, learn from others, and admit our dependency on God for strength. Because we know that He is the Source of our power, we can be bold to attempt great things for Him.

Humility matters - because the world revolves around God (not me).