

Increasing Our Humility, Increases Our Joy

By Rev. Chris Harris and Amy Ryberg

This is the second in a series of blog posts are adapted from [The Book of Joy](#) by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and The Dalai Lama. **Join us for our ongoing forum series on “The 8 Pillars of Joy” – Sundays at 9am on Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/410135064>**

“For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.” — John the Baptist (John 3:29-30)

Humility reminds us of our fundamental sameness

Humility comes from the word “humus” or earth. Consider the words spoken on Ash Wednesday, upon the imposition of ashes, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” No matter who we were in life, whether we were rich or famous, poor or unknown, educated or not, white, black or brown, in the fullness of time, Ash Wednesday is a powerful reminder that all of us will return to the exact same place: as dust in the hands of our creator. In the same way, humility is an ongoing reminder that we are all the same; just one human being relating to another human being, one child of God relating to another child of God. Humility is a key path to joy because it frees us to be real and truly connected to others. We no longer have the pressure to ‘keep up appearances’ and we are freed from the stress and anxiety of trying to be someone we are not.

Warning: Humility cannot be claimed

Humility is not something we can claim for ourselves, because it is a contradiction in terms. After all, how can we brag about being modest? As Archbishop Tutu says about joy itself, it is a byproduct. If we seek it out, we will miss the bus. Seeking to be thought of by others as humble, achieves the opposite result and only feeds our ego and a self-centered, superior posture toward others. True humility, as opposed to ‘false modesty,’ does not seek to place ourselves above others nor create a one up/ one down relationships. Humility keeps us all on the same level and reminds us that whatever titles we may have, whatever roles we play, whatever authority or celebrity we might have achieved — is all temporary and not descriptive of our true natures. Practicing humility helps us to remember that

whatever success we might have achieved in life, that we never confuse the roles we play, with the person we truly are. As the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Insecurity – the primary obstacle to Humility

Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama remind us that the biggest impediment to humility is our own feelings of inadequacy and shame. We live in a consumer culture where advertising messages bombard us daily with all the ways we don't measure up (so we will be motivated to buy whatever product that's being sold). We live in a dog-eat-dog world of competition and comparison, where we are always trying to catch up with the "Joneses" but invariably feeling further and further behind. Our solution? Double down on our pride, ego and arrogance for protection. We become perfectionistic in the hopes that no one discovers our little secret frailties and spend enormous amounts of time and energy trying to project that we are in control and on top of things. "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!" But they are all smokescreens; like the great, powerful image of the "Wizard of Oz" it is merely the 'false self' we create to deceive ourselves and others.



Get real by reminding yourself that you ARE God's gift

A healthy way to overcome the insecurities that keep us from being humble is to remind ourselves that we are a beloved child of God — as we are, for who we are. No one is a divine accident. We may not be special in the ways of the world, but we are essential in the eyes of God. No one can fill our shoes in the divine plan or karmic unfolding. As Paul

reminds the early church over and over, we are each a unique work of art and we each have an essential place in the Body of Christ. Reminding ourselves of that divine truth, can give us the confidence we need to be ourselves. We don't need to be someone we are not to cover up our true self, because God made us and loves us and needs us, just the way we are.

Humility isn't timidity

Humility therefore doesn't mean you have to deny your own gifts or shrink from using them, quite the opposite. By leaning into our gifts, by letting God's light shine through us, we are able to be humble because we are not threatened by or envious of the gifts of others. God uses each of us in our own way, and even if we are not the "best," we may be the one who is needed or the one who shows up. This also helps relieve us from the fear of failure or of not being 'good enough.' We may be anxious about stretching beyond our comfort zone, embarrassing ourselves or failing, but, again, if it's not about our egos, we can allow a God to use us. Freed from the fear and shame, we can learn from our failures and recognize our limitations, and allow them to inspire effort and growth in a positive way. As the Archbishop says, we should strive to always be in a 'beginners' mind', even in old age. When we have humility, we can live easily, and don't have to be so hard on ourselves – we can even laugh at ourselves! After all, if we can't be kind to ourselves, how can we extend these to others? Humility opens the door to kindness to self and kindness to others.

Created for interdependence and mutual support

As The Dalai Lama summarizes, too much self-focus leads to fear, insecurity, anxiety (which leads to arrogance, independence & isolation). Humility frees us to focus on others as we take our place in the Body of Christ, loving and serving others in whatever ways God's gifted us, which in turn leads to authentic relationships and true joy.

Questions for further discussion:

- *Why is it so difficult to live in humility ?*
- How can we ask God to help us trust that we are " enough"?
- How can we try to support one another in trying to live more simply, more genuinely, less pretentiously, less defensively?

Practicing Humility:

Here are some little ways you can do to cultivate humility in your daily life.

- Perspective – Go back and read the summary of taking the perspective of others [link the first blog post] – the birthplace of humility.
- Become aware of your flaws AND your gifts – Ask your closest friends — they will help you!
- Practice listening more than talking
- Admit when you are wrong or do harm (even if you're not sure)
- Apologize with sincerity and without condition (don't qualify)
- Choose to go last (whether it's the line at the grocery store, in traffic, or in the game of life. "The first will be last.")
- Ask for advice (Even if you don't think you need it. We honor others by asking and if we listen carefully, we will learn something even if we think we know everything.)
- Praise others and give compliments (Make it a daily practice to surprise and delight others with unexpected praise!)
- Volunteer and give to others (And when you do, try giving anonymously. As Jesus reminds us, 'When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you...give in secret' not in public as the hypocrites do.)

Lojong: A Tibetan mind training practice using meditation to increase your humility. Find a quiet place and sit comfortably. Concentrate on your breathing and then close your eyes as you move through these six steps:

1. Think of your parents, who gave you life, and tried to protect you and care for you, your teachers, who taught you, and shared their life experience and wisdom they've accumulated, with you, the people who grew your food did they, and delivered it to your table, the people who made your clothes through your whole life, think of employers or your customers you've had over the years, who put trust in you – think of all the countless people, who have added to your life in some way, and helped to make you the person you are today...
2. Now think of all those who discovered and created all the things we take for granted, our homes, our crops, our phones, our computers, the lightbulbs, the medicines we depend on, the technology of this meeting...
3. Now think of all the ancestors who had to live, and survive, so that you could be born, who lived in different times, and braved unimaginable hardships and injustice, who lived without all those things we take for granted, so that you could have the life you do;
4. Now think of the family and friends who give your life meaning and purpose...and who had your back when you least expected it and least deserved it

5. Now allow your heart to open and experience the love and appreciation you are having for ALL of these people. Experience the enormous joy and appreciation that comes from being in touch with all that has been given to you, in realizing how dependent we are on others
6. Notice the countless blessings that come from our togetherness and from our dependence on others, and notice the loss from separateness and independence

If you would like to explore the practices of lasting joy, join us Sundays at 9am for our ongoing forum “The 8 Pillars of Joy” which will draw upon the wisdom of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We will be using the best-selling book, “The Book of Joy” as our guide. [Purchase the book here.](#)

- **From a computer or tablet: <https://zoom.us/j/410135064>**
- **To join by phone: (312) 626-6799, then enter 410 135 064**

Questions, comments? Email Fr. Chris at charris@christchurchcranbrook.org