

Sermon Title: A Most Important Lesson, March 21, 2010 (Scripture is from ESV)

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 18:12

Introduction

Good afternoon church. My name is John-Michael Becker. I am one of the deacons of the church and I serve full time in the orphanage ministry. I will be leading the church plant team to Itaewon and our first service will be on April 4th, which is in two weeks. I'm thankful for this opportunity to speak to the church before I go.

There has been a message stirring in my heart for some time now. It started when I was in America last November meeting with different churches and fellowships sharing about the ministry here in Korea. I remember sharing about the orphanage work, about the prayer movement at this church, about the church mission trip to Myanmar last summer, and other cool things with some excited college students. Then one of them asked me with a big grin, "What do you feel has been the most important thing God has taught you since you went to Korea?"

My answer to his question surprised him, and it actually seemed to deflate him. But what I answered I meant from the bottom of my heart. I think he expected me to say something about God's love for the orphan, or learning how to pray in the power of the Spirit, or learning how to cast out demons or learning how to direct an orphanage ministry. I think he expected something fun, exciting, or touching. But instead this was the response he got...

"The most important lesson I feel God has taught me since I came to Korea... **humility... and submission to authority... they go hand in hand.**"

The title of this message is, "A Most Important Lesson." What I'm about to share today might not be THE most important lesson, but if you don't get this message at some point in your life then I doubt you will ever be able to fulfill God's perfect plan for your life. Jesus says that in order to become the greatest in the kingdom of heaven we must become like a child here on earth.

Matthew 18:4 – Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

You are destined for greatness. I am excited to give this message. There are some keys in this message that are going to enable you go through doors that were previously closed all your life. Special keys. If you desire these keys and you are ready to receive, please repeat after me... **"Give me my keys!"**

Before I go on, let me say a prayer for us...

Pray Welcome the Holy Spirit. Invite His light.

Call to North Korea

If you all didn't know, God has given me a calling for going into North Korea to establish children homes there. North Korea is one of the darkest places on earth and most of the country is starving for food. Orphans are all over the nation as a result of the famine and the oppressiveness of the regime. When North Korea eventually opens up, there is going to be a

great crisis because of all the starving people who will seek to leave the country and because of all the street children who will need provision.

Over the years I've met many excited and enthusiastic people who want to see North Korea open. Whenever I share my stories and visions with them, they will ask me, "So when North Korea opens, are you going to go right in?" My response tends to catch them off guard. I tell them, "Not a chance. There is no way I'm going into that dark country until God makes it completely clear that it is time to go." You see, I've watched other ministries and even friends with callings for North Korea or for other causes such as sex trafficking or orphan work get completely slammed by the enemy. They go into the work with such passion, but then end up jaded, tired, and even bitter. The reason is that they were being led by their own passion and good intentions, and not by the Holy Spirit. Good intentions are great, but if they are the only weapon you have when you enter a war then you better watch out.

I've come to understand that there must be a time of preparation for such an undertaking. Many Christians would label this time of preparation as a, "desert experience." Moses was in the desert for 40 years until God called him to deliver Israel. Many scholars believe David was in the wilderness for 11 years before he became king. John the Baptist was in the wilderness for most of his life. **God uses these times to bring us into deeper trust and intimacy with Him.** The difficult circumstances can be humbling and teach us to not rely on our flesh but to rely on God. It's usually not the most fun time of our lives, but it's a precious time that truly refines us.

Turn with me to Song of Solomon, the book of love. At the couples height of their growth in love we have this verse...

Song of Solomon 8:5 – Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

As they come out of the wilderness the love between the couple is so strong that others can't even recognize them. That is how powerful the wilderness is for us. **We learn how to fully rely on God and how to lean on Him in love and in trust.** We become secure in Him.

I've learned to treasure this wilderness experience, or this waiting time before my calling is fully revealed. Joseph had to endure 13 years of slavery and prison before his dreams were fulfilled. Abraham had to wait 25 years wandering before having Isaac.

God teaches us many things during this time and leads us into humility. And now I want to share with you three of the keys that God has taught me over the years of my wilderness experience. The quicker you learn these keys, the quicker you can grow and step out of the wilderness into the calling God has for you. Otherwise you can end up like the Israelites who wandered in the desert for 40 years before eventually dying off.

Get Over It

I feel the first key to walking in humility is getting over yourself. **You have to get over yourself.** Whether you think you are all that, or you feel completely insecure, both are rooted in pride. Let me share from some of my experiences...

After my 1st year in college I worked as an electrician's helper for the summer. It was basic construction work and I felt very out of place. I was a skinny 19 year old kid who had no experience and wasn't used to such rough language and anger issues among coworkers. I would run around and do the best I could but I would still get criticized and demeaned. I

learned if I worked smart and hard the criticism would be lessened, but it still had to be expected and I just needed to get over it.

I remember driving into work one morning and arriving at 6:28am. Work started at 6:30am and usually everyone would arrive a little early to talk and to smoke. I always made sure to be early so I wouldn't get yelled at. This day I was surprised to see all the workers already going inside when I parked. I jumped out of my car, grabbed my bucket of tools, and began to walk in but my boss was waiting for me outside. And he didn't look happy one bit. He yelled at me and asked me what time it was. I told him cautiously, "6:28." That caught him for a moment and then he showed me his watch and asked, "What does that read son!?" "6:35." And he then proceeded to blow up at me. It was a whole lot of loud and angry coming at me. I just had to nod my head and take it. I felt bitterness springing up in me and I wanted to yell back, but I felt I needed to just let it go. I was frustrated inside for most of the day. Near lunchtime my boss yelled for the workers to take a break and one of them yelled back, "Boss, your watch is 7 minutes fast!" and others also said the same thing. He responded, "Oh yeah? My bad." But he didn't look at me or ever apologize. I imagine he had already forgotten about the morning. **I realized I had a choice**... do I hold onto the frustration, or do I just get over myself and let it go? I had to let it go. I forgave him in my spirit and kept working. This was something God would continue to drill into me... the need to just get over myself.

Four years later after I graduated I went back to working construction as a temporary job before coming to Korea. I remembered how much I had endured as an insecure 19 year old and was curious how much stronger I would be. This time around I took all the criticism and demeaning in stride. Why should I get upset by their words? **Why should their words affect me?** I had become secure in who I was.

I remember one day I was drilling screws into a box on the wall with my hand next to the drill holding up the small box. I had to press the drill hard to get the screw into the wall. The drill skipped suddenly as I was pressing it and the drill bit went right into my hand, between my thumb and my finger. It happened so fast that I was in shock for a moment. I then looked at my hand and saw a hole in the flesh in the corner between my thumb and my finger. More than the pain, just the look of it was gross.

I went to the superintendent to get first aid and as I approached him he responded with the typical, "What do you want? I'm busy." despite not being busy at all. I told him what had just happened and he responded incredulously, "Well what did you do that for?" All I could do was shake my head and smile sheepishly in return. He looked at the hole in my hand and said, "Bah, that's nothing!" but then proceeded to get me the first aid. When my coworkers saw my hand they all said the same thing the superintendent had said, "What did you do that for?" There was no sympathy, only teasing and annoyance that I'd be so dumb to drill a hole in my hand. I had to toughen up and keep working until quitting time. Thankfully I'd get my hand treated at night and it would be fine.

Its memories like these that I've learned to just man up and get over myself. My pride and my insecurity want me to defend every mistake and keep face, but as I've become more confident in who I am in God and who He has made me to be, enduring such things has become much easier.

Please understand that to be humble isn't to degrade yourself or to constantly praise others. **To truly be humble is to fully know your identity in Christ and be secure in God.** Let

me say that again, “To truly be humble is to fully know your identity in Christ and be secure in God.” We are then no longer performing for our own pride or for others. And we are no longer deterred when others try to cut us down or question our calling. **Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.** I’ll say that again, “Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

A test of your humility comes when there is criticism, teasing, or even demeaning of you. Are you crushed? Are you angry? Do you want to cry?

Or how about when you receive praise? Do you live off of peoples’ affirmation? Do you get scared of pride and try and reject any compliments that come your way? All of these reactions are wrong. Turn with me to Romans 12...

Romans 12:3 – For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith God has assigned.

Sober judgment. What does that mean? It simply means that you need to know who you are in God.

I know who I am in Christ. I am a new creation. I am redeemed. I belong to God. I’m a son of God. I’m a friend of God. I’m sealed and anointed with the Holy Spirit. I’m fearfully and wonderfully made. I’m created for God’s glory. These identities grant me stability. **I’m not reliant or susceptible of others shaping me with their words. There is also no reason for me to compare myself with others because I’m secure in who I am in God.**

Moses first step of coming out of his own wilderness experience was getting over himself. He would tell God, “I’m a nobody, why me? They won’t believe me. I’m not educated enough. I can’t speak well (Exodus 3-4).” All of his excuses were based on his own identity, not the true identity God had given him. Moses had to learn to get over himself. By the end of his life Moses was speaking so eloquently and powerfully before the Israelites that the first 28 chapters of the book of Deuteronomy is basically one long speech he gives to the people. And I thought Moses said he didn’t know how to talk? It’s after Moses gets over himself and learns to walk in the identity God has given him that he is able to fulfill the calling on his life.

So your first key towards stepping into God’s true call for your life is to get over yourself and fully receive the identity God has given you.

This leads to God leading us deeper into the wilderness where we learn the next lesson... submission to authority.

Submission to Authority

This is a lesson that is critical for our generation and for the next one. Probably all of our teachers here understand just how wicked rebelliousness can be and just how much it can damage the youth and their development. But it’s not just the youth that are bound by a spirit of rebellion and pride, sadly a lot of the church struggles with this as well. Why is that? Why can it be so difficult to consistently submit to authority? The answer is simple...

Are you familiar with the background of Satan? Most Bible scholars believe that he was once a high level angel in heaven who became filled with pride and tried to exalt himself

above God. Turn with me to Isaiah 14. Let's check out Satan's submission to authority issues...

Isaiah 14:12-15 – How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, '**I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.**' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Because of Satan's lack of humility he began to think he was just as good as God. He could no longer submit to God's authority because in his mind he no longer saw God as above him. And his pride has now cost him an eternity of Hell. **Satan's initial sin was allowing pride inside him that caused him to no longer submit to authority.**

Satan's initial sin continues to wreck havoc in the world today. So many church splits are caused by pride rising up in the leaders of the church and a refusal to submit to the proper authority. So many Christians wander church to church because they refuse to fully submit to the leadership of the churches they visit. So many churches are crippled by gossip and complaining. But God's Word clearly tells us obey and submit to our leaders. Turn with me to Hebrews 13...

Hebrews 13:17 – Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

This is a lesson God is going to hammer into your life. **If we cannot be humble enough to submit to our leaders, then why should we expect anyone to humble themselves and submit to us?** All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). There is no one perfect, not even one. If you expect your leader to be perfect, then you are setting an extremely difficult standard for yourself for when you start to lead.

If you read the Bible you'll see that God likes to use the shepherds, the former prostitutes, the fishermen, the tax collectors, and other people that society would usually never respect. He does this so that our obedience is never based on man but is based on God. He does this to test our hearts and bring out a childlike humility.

For me God set me up to learn this lesson during my last two years in college. I was serving in a college fellowship and was one of the head leaders. There was a problem though because all of our staff were led to leave the fellowship before my fourth year. There was one alumni though who decided to return to help staff and lead the fellowship. Our fellowship wasn't a well known ministry, so the staff requirements are basically, "Christian" and "Available." While she had a big heart to serve, she had only become a Christian a few years earlier and had very little ministry leading experience.

During my two years of serving there would be times when she would make decisions that I would really struggle to follow. There were a few moments where I felt 100% that I knew the better way, but she would choose to lead another way. I would go home so frustrated in those moments. But like what I learned working construction, I knew I needed to get over myself. I would begin to bring it all before the Lord in prayer. God would never tell me

whether she was right or I was right, but God would always tell me this, “Bless her.”
“**Submit to her authority and bless her.**”

I’m not going to lie, it wasn’t easy every time, but as I would bless her in prayer and in prayer declare obedience to God and to her, I could feel my pride gradually fade. The issues that I had felt were so important became much smaller in my eyes. I could see God’s grace over her, over me, and over the fellowship. And I want to tell you I genuinely loved that sister and I still do. And I am so thankful for her. God used her in blessed powerful ways while she staffed those two years.

Who am I to exalt myself over the leader that God has put over me? I don’t care how they got there, who am I to exalt myself? Who am I to say that I know what is best and that it all hinges on whether things go my way or not? Who am I? Nothing hinges on me, it all hinges on God.

I’ll tell you the moment you begin to let your pride come in and you foster any disobedient or critical spirit towards your leaders, **you aren’t relating to God, you’re relating to Satan. Bless the leaders God has set over you!** I don’t care if they are a shepherd, a former prostitute, or a fisherman. You bless them, you pray for them, and you submit.

You study Joseph, David, and Daniel and you’ll see that they didn’t just choose to submit to some of the most sinful leaders, they chose to bless them! Joseph served Potiphar, a prison ward, and then Pharaoh, who was a leader of Egypt and considered himself a god. David submitted to Saul’s leadership to the point that after Saul tried to kill him once, David continued to serve him! And even when David was running for his life from Saul he still chose to bless Saul whenever he saw him. Daniel, he had to serve the man who had killed his family and destroyed his homeland. He had to serve the king of Babylon, who also claimed to be a god. And yet if you read the book of Daniel, you will see that Daniel submits not just to this king, but to every leader over him and even prays for them and wants the best for them. These men chose not just to submit to authority but to bless their authority figures no matter what. **And these same men were used to greatly influence three of the greatest kingdoms known to man.**

So key number two is that we not just submit to our leaders but we bless them. **And when I say leaders I don’t mean just your Christian leaders, but also your boss or other people who have authority over you.** Unless they are trying to get you to do something immoral or illegal, you need to be submitting to their authority and praying for them and blessing them. God will bless you, just as He blessed Joseph, David, and Daniel. Amen!

Don’t Vomit On Your Leader

Now, I want to say something as an aside for members of this church, particularly those of you in here who are now in a small group. A danger in the small groups is that members will get together and one, or all of them, will share all of their struggles every week. They will basically just vomit all their junk on their leader. Now, please understand that I think sometimes we need to share certain struggles or stories to help others understand us, but this should never be something done consistently. **The focus shouldn’t be so much on your problems and your identity in those problems, but the focus should be more on who you are in God and what He is calling you into.** He has called you out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. Don’t look back, look forward.

If you want to have some fun next time you read the Bible, go through all the Gospels and highlight the times the disciples speak. It's actually pretty comical. The disciples words aren't mentioned much at all and I think there was good reason why. Just listen to a sampling... "How will we ever feed these people? That lady pouring perfume on your feet is wasting money! Don't just wash my feet, wash my whole body! I will never deny you! Unless I see the nail marks and place my hand in his side I will never believe." Nearly every time they speak Jesus either has to rebuke them or Jesus just chooses to ignore their words. There are only a couple times in all four Gospels where the disciples say anything right. And the one time Jesus praises a disciple for a good word, the disciple gets filled with pride and says something stupid and Jesus has to shout at him, "Get behind me Satan!"

The disciples' words only became powerful after they stepped fully into the identity that God had called them to walk in. And this was after consistently being put into place by Jesus and submitting to His authority. You can also see that the only disciple to not submit to Jesus, Judas Iscariot, was destined to destruction.

So with this said, I want to encourage the small group members of this church to submit to your leaders. Bless them. And instead of talking the whole time about yourself or your struggles, I want to encourage you to listen to your leader and learn your identity in Christ. Allow your leader to direct you forward. Bless them. God will bless you.

Be Thankful, Show Honor

The last key is a very simple, but powerful one. You have become secure in your identity in God and gotten over yourself and walked through that door. You have learned to submit to your leaders and bless them and walk through that door. But there is one more door to go through. This is the door that removes bitterness. This is the door that creates strong relationships. This is the door that creates family. Its name is, "Thankfulness."

The third key for walking in humility and submission to authority is learning to be thankful, especially for the people God has put around you. And especially for those who treat you the worst. And when I say be thankful, that includes showing honor. A great part of honor is acknowledging something about someone and showing respect, *or thanks*, for that person. You might have noticed that whenever a big name Christian messes up, they tend to get slammed really hard. Christians, *Christians*, are extremely critical of leaders in the faith, especially when the leader does anything controversial or commits a sin. There seems to be no grace. And there especially is no expression of thanks.

But if you turn to 2Samuel chapter 1, you will see one of the most beautiful songs ever written. It's a song that David writes in remembrance of King Saul and Saul's son Jonathan right after hearing of their death. David writes this song for the man who has tried to kill him repeatedly, for the man who has been chasing him for eleven years, for the man who has taken his wife from him, for the man who has ordered the death of innocent priests and has even consulted a witch. David writes a song of thankfulness on behalf of this man, his former leader.

This was a true mark of humility. The man who has made life so difficult for David, and has blocked David from fulfilling his call to become king, has finally died and gotten out of the way... **and David weeps for him.** David expresses thanks and honor for King Saul.

I believe one of the signs that a Christian is ready to walk into their calling is when they are able to genuinely thank and praise God for every person who has tried to hinder them or

upset them. Be thankful church. Thank God for those who are in your lives that you struggle with. Honor them! Whenever a critical thought comes to your mind towards someone, before you choose to entertain it first say something in thanks for that person. You'll then usually find you are able to show grace and overlook any offense. Honor them church!

The Greatest Example

I want to close this message by showing you all the greatest example of all that has been shared with you today. Please turn with me to Philippians 2...

Philippians 2:5-11 – Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus, who is God, made Himself nothing. He lived a life as a humble carpenter. He disciples twelve difficult men, knowing all along that one of them would betray Him to death. On the night before His betrayal, torture, and death, Jesus ate with these twelve. He knew that they would abandon Him, **yet He chose to wash their feet**. In His last prayer before being betrayed He thanked God for His disciples (John 17), these same twelve who were about to desert Him. Jesus blessed these men. He blessed and expressed thanks for the very ones who would abandon and deny Him. Jesus was ready to fulfill His call. He was ready for the Cross.

Jesus knew their flaws, their sins, and their weaknesses all along. He knew the mistakes they would make. But Jesus also knew that once they got it, once they understood their true identity, they would take nations. And I want to tell you that Jesus knows your flaws as well. He knows your struggles with insecurity and He knows your struggles with pride. He knows these things and yet He still died for you and praises God for you. He loves you dearly! He sees the same hope in you as He saw in His disciples. In Isaiah 62:3 God calls you a royal crown in His hand. You all are fearfully and wonderfully made and God has mighty plans for each of you. You are worthy of the cost that He paid. And as you get it, as you understand your true identity in Christ and live as a blessing, you too are going to take nations. Amen!

Pray