

# CHAPTER 8, SESSION 19: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT VAINGLORY

At this point in the year you may want to begin conversation about future plans for your group. This should be an on-going discussion over the remaining weeks. For insight from previous groups' experiences see the document, "What Next?: Life After The Apprentice Series."

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Vainglory is a struggle for folks who are relatively mature on the Christian path and may only be evident to those who are very mature in their faith. However, it is easily present for someone who has grown up a Christian. For these reasons it is difficult to identify in our own lives. When all of these factors come together, it is easy to see why some people would be confused by this chapter. They might be wondering, "How is it possible to have a vice that only happens because of a virtue?"

To be prepared for this chapter, be aware of your own areas of vainglory and be willing to share those areas with the group. Also plan on evoking wisdom from those in your group who have been on the journey long enough to wrestle with their vainglory. If people aren't able to grasp the idea, don't fret. If they keep on the journey, they'll see it eventually.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Paper, pencils and a fire if you will do the confession silently rather than with partners
- ☞ A bell or chime to notify the group when to switch roles during the confession
- ☞ Three photocopies of Isaiah 42:3-4 for the "Engaging the Word" section

## WELCOME

### RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

### PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may offer a prayer of your own, ring a chime, or say "Amen" to end the silence.

### SOUL-TRAINING [10-15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of serving in secret.

1. What was the most challenging aspect of serving in secret?
2. How did you feel as you were doing your secret acts of service? How did you feel after they were finished?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?
4. Discuss with your partners any previous soul-shaping exercises that continue to shape you.

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [20 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that vainglory is the need to be thought well of by others; it is driven by the notion that the opinions of others determines our worth. When this vice is fully grown in our hearts we find ourselves more interested in others' opinions of us than actually being a genuinely good person, or doing good for the sake of doing good.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author writes, "The world measures our worth on the basis of our appearance, production and performance—which seem to be the only thing that counts. This narrative says, 'Your value is determined by others' assessment'" (p. 139). With a partner, discuss ways you allow your value to be determined by others.
2. Have you ever caught yourself doing some good deed not for the sake of helping others but for the prize of praise? If you are comfortable, talk about it with your group.
3. The author gives us this great insight into Jesus' teaching:

Giving money to the poor. Praying. Fasting. All three activities are some of the most spiritual activities a person can do. So what about Jesus' harsh words? Actually, he is not speaking against these *practices*. He is attacking the way in which they are *being practiced*. He is not concerned with the *method* but the  *motive*. As we have seen, Jesus starts with the world's standard of rightness (not murdering, not lying under oath) and then peels off the veneer to see if the heart is good. The same is true here. He takes three righteous and holy actions and then shows how the condition of a person's heart determines whether or not the discipline is a blessing or a hindrance (pp. 144-45).

To explore our motives, have individuals write down their three favorite spiritual practices. Then have them silently consider these questions:

- ☞ Do you long for approval and praise through any of these practices?
- ☞ Based on this chapter, what could you do to purify your motives regarding these disciplines?
- ☞ How could you apply the Puritan saying to "live for an audience of One" to your spiritual practices?

Invite the group to discuss their insights.

## ENGAGING THE WORD [10 minutes]

The author writes, "No matter how many worldly 'trophy' we acquire, we won't be able to lay our head down in peace because we are only as good as our last success. But our loving Father—the only One who matters—tells us that we are loved, that we are of immeasurable worth" (pp. 148-49). Utilizing a group *lectio divina* approach, follow the steps listed below to read Isaiah 42:3-4 and encounter God's love for you.

1. Have a volunteer read aloud Isaiah 42:3-4. Simply hear the words and spend a minute in silence following the reading.
2. Have a second volunteer slowly read Isaiah 42:3-4 again. As you listen to the passage, pay attention to any word or phrase that resonates in the deepest places of your heart. Repeat this word or phrase to yourself during a few minutes of silence.
3. Have a final volunteer read the passage once more. When the reading is over, spend a few minutes in silent conversation with God. Give thanks, share concerns, or just listen. Savor this time of being with God.
4. End the silence by having someone in the group say a prayer or simply say "Amen."

ISAIAH 42:3-4 (NIV)

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
taking them by the arms;  
but they did not realize  
it was I who healed them.  
I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with ties of love;  
I lifted the yoke from their neck  
and bent down to feed them.

BREAK [5 minutes]

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION—CONFESSION

This week's experience is one that was done during the first half of the study: the practice of Confession. To remind yourself of the key ideas of this practice, read "Confession" from *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster. It is an inspiring chapter.

Confession is a powerful tool against vainglory because it gives us the opportunity to be honest and open about our struggles. At the same time, as we are reminded of God's forgiveness, we can take the focus off of ourselves and turn it towards God and God's grace.

You will have two options for your group based upon the level of trust and intimacy that exists within your group. The first option is for the members of your group to partner off (you could establish the partners yourself or have them find a partner) and confess to one another. In order to do this, you will need a large open room where people can share without being heard. Set chairs in pairs around the room.

To have your group do verbal confession requires tremendous maturity on their part. Decide in advance if your group has two very important characteristics in order to do this activity. First, is everyone in the group mature enough to hear the flaws and struggles of the others in the group? If not, then do silent confession. Second, is everyone in your group mature enough to recognize that while our struggles and sins may be different, we all live in relationship with God by his grace alone? Again, if this is not the case for your group, then do the second option, which is a time of silent confession.

A second, much less intimidating approach is silent confession, inviting each participant to write down the sins the Holy Spirit brings to their mind and then bring those forward. It is best to have a contained fire (a chiminea for example) to put the confessions in to watch their destruction.

Following are thoughts regarding confession as well as some additional practical ideas to be shared with the group.

*In the struggle with vainglory, we are tempted to hide behind a mask of holiness. One of the most powerful ways to take off our masks AND to experience God's healing forgiveness is confession. Here are a few important and practical teachings on confession.*

*We must be careful when we confess our transgressions or weaknesses to someone else. We need to be sure that the person receiving the confession is someone who lives "under the Cross," meaning, they are aware of their own depravity and weaknesses and will not judge us when they hear our confession.*

*It is also important to know how much to confess. The general rule of thumb is that we should only confess what the Spirit leads us to confess and no more. We do not need to begin confessing our sins from childhood, just those that the Spirit seems to be pressing on us to confess, because it will break the power of that sin as always happens when the sin is brought to the light.*

*When we confess we are not looking for advice or even counsel. Avoid getting into lengthy discussion about it and watch out for any tendency to rationalize the thing confessed. "Well, I struck back in anger because I was having a really bad day" or "Sure I have some lust*

*in my heart, but it isn't enough to need to mention." Just confess it. Say, "This is what I thought/said/did . . . I am ashamed of it, and I don't want to carry the shame for another day."*

*Your confession does not need to be some giant sin, but it should also not be so trivial as to have no effect. Let the Spirit lead by asking, "What, if anything, would it be good for me to confess to someone else?" Remember James 5:16, which teaches, "Confess your sins one to another that you may be healed." Confession is the path to healing and wholeness.*

*The listener should simply respond with these words, "By the blood of Jesus, you are forgiven."*

*Spouses should not confess to each other. Find a partner and begin. You will have about 10 minutes of silent reflection. Then you will have 20 minutes with your partner. The first person will have 10 minutes to confess; the second person will then have 10 minutes to confess. I will let you know when 10 minutes have passed.*

*When the time is over, we will regroup for our closing prayer.*

Give everyone 10 minutes to reflect on what they will share during confession. Ring the chime when these 10 minutes have passed and it is time for them to share with a partner. After they have met with their partner for 10 minutes, ring the chime again so they will know to switch roles. After 10 minutes, ring the chime again to bring the group back together.

## GO IN PEACE

Conclude by having one person in your group say this prayer which is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

O divine Master, grant that I might seek  
not so much to be consoled, as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
and not so much to be loved, as to love another.  
Amen.

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 9, "Learning to Live Without Avarice."
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week is de-accumulation.