

ALWAYS BE HUMBLE

As you know,
this semester of Quest is titled: The Rules and When to Break Them.

Some of us love rules;
some of us hate rules.
Regardless of how we feel about them,
rules are important.

Rules give us direction and
keep what we're doing from turning into chaos
whether we're talking about
a child's game of kickball,
professional boxing,
a chess match,
parliamentary procedure,
grammar, or
the new American pastime of – cornhole.

Did you know that there is now a professional American Cornhole League?

video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jVxi6ps0dk>

1.12 – 1.33

It's shown on ESPN.
And evidently people are serious enough about it
to get upset when things don't go their way.

And there are rules.

Here they are.

<https://ultimatecornhole.com/pages/simple-cornhole-rules>

Here's a rule for you:

When cornhole becomes a certified, professional sport in your country,
and people are getting paid to throw a bag into a whole
and corporate monies are involved –
the rule is your time as top dog on this planet is limited.
It's a sign that the end is near.

Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson titled his recent best-selling book:

picture

12 Rules for Life An Antidote to Chaos

And that's one thing that rules do –

they help games and lives and communities work well,

they help keep the peace, and

they prevent chaos.

Get rid of the rules and whatever we're doing devolves quickly

into something that is messy and unmanageable.

So, usually, it's good to follow the rules.

I told you last week that I am a rule follower by nature.

However, I do like pushing the limits a little bit.

Story about balancing the weight on a plane.

But normally, I like following the rules,

especially God's rules,

because the rules that God gives us

don't keep us from the fulness of life,

but enable us to live a life that is truly good and fulfilling.

But sometimes it's best if we break the rules.

I know that's a dangerous thing to say

because people who break the rules,

almost always do so for their own benefit.

And once you say there are times when it's ok –

even right to break the rule –

it's like opening Pandora's Box.

People will always find reasons why they are justified in breaking the rules,

and all kinds of mischief and evil can result.

Last week I gave you three times when it's right to break the rules

that Christians are expected to live by.

1. When life is more complicated than a single rule.
2. When the rule isn't really Christian,
even though it may sound like it is.
3. When the rule doesn't mean what we think it means.

The first rule we looked at was:
Always Put Others First.

This week the rule is:
Always Be Humble.

That sounds like a Christian rule,
doesn't it?
That's because it is.

Let's go back to the passage we looked at a bit last week.

Philippians 2.3-8: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, **in humility** value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who ... made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Have the same mindset that was in Christ Jesus –
who did what?
Who humbled himself.

That's a command;
it's a rule for living the Christian life:
humble yourself in the same way Jesus did.

Ephesians 4.1-2: I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **Be completely humble** and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

If we are to live a life worthy of God's calling upon us,
the text says: we must be completely humble.

Two other passages that teach the same rule.

1 Peter 5.6: Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

James 4.10: Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

So, it's a rule:

we are to be humble.

And just as we saw with the rule we looked at last week,

Always Put Others First,

the command always to be humble is clear and consistent.

In case you're wondering,

I checked the original Greek.

There's no asterisk in any of these verses,

telling us to check out the footnotes for exceptions to the rule.

Let's start by looking at why this is a good rule and

a rule that we should follow.

And then we'll explore whether we should ever break it.

Let me see if you are good with this assumption to kick things off with.

We all need help.

We are all,

at least at times,

ill-informed, misguided and wrong-headed.

We are often

blind to our faults and

oblivious to the traits

that keep us from being as successful as we might be

in our professions,

as husbands and fathers, and

as followers of Jesus.

And to get better we need help.

We need God's help and

we need the help of other people.

Are y'all good with that?

Ok, here are three reasons why humility is so important for our growth and our success in life.

1. Humility Opens Us to Correction

“I could be wrong.”

Say that with me:

I could be wrong.

I could be wrong when it comes to what I think.

In fact,

when it comes to what I value,

when it comes to how I react to difficult people

and challenging problem,

when it comes to how I spend my time, my energy and my finances –

I could be wrong in all of these areas –

and never know it.

And if I'm going to get better, and become more successful,

I will need to be corrected.

And if I'm going to be corrected,

I will need to be open to correction.

And that requires humility.

Proverbs 12.1: To learn, you must love discipline; it is stupid to hate correction.

Listen to me: Pride hates correction.

And so do prideful men.

Prideful men hate being corrected.

Prideful men hate being told they're wrong.

Prideful men hate crucifying their egos,

admitting they don't have it all together,

asking for help, or

receiving advice when they haven't asked for it.

And the Bible says: That's stupid.

Humility is the ability to receive correction.

Even when we don't ask for it.

Even when it comes from someone who may know less than we do.

Even when we're doing pretty well in that area already.

Humility says,

I could be wrong,

I could get better,

I could grow from what this person is telling me.

One area where we are often oblivious

and that's very important is

how we impact others;

how we come across to others.

Very few of us think,

I'm really a jerk and

I'm pretty sure I'm offensive to people.

Most of us think,

I'm easy to get along with,

people like being around me; and

if they don't, it's because they have a problem.

In other words,

we are often lacking in self-awareness.

I am sarcastic by nature.

I enjoy being sarcastic.

And if it's a good one,

I enjoy people being sarcastic at my expense.

Our church and you guys are very affirming and complimentary.

This June I will have been on staff here for a total of 25 years.

I've preached literally hundreds of sermons

and received thousands of compliments.

The one that I remember the best and enjoyed the most

was given to me by Jay Wendell.

I had preached my little heart out.
People were in line shaking my hand
and saying nice things.
Jay walks by and with a smirk on his face mutters:
Marginal.

It was a perfect compliment for someone who enjoys sarcasm the way I do.

But, sometimes it's really hard to know when you go over the line
with sarcasm.
Or to remember or be aware that not everyone appreciates it.

When I was in college at Rice,
Dave came to see me.
He was a very bright electrical engineering nerd.
I didn't know it,
but he had come to correct me.

He spoke slowly and carefully,
and told me that
my sarcasm was too much,
it hurt people's feelings and
people didn't appreciate it.

My first response was not good.
I thought to myself:
"Sure, you think I'm too much.
That's because I have a personality and a sense of humor
and you don't have either."
I didn't say that,
but I thought that,
and I didn't receive his correction.

What's it called when you hate correction?
It's called being stupid.

Fortunately, God's Spirit went to work on me through his words.
And I became convicted that what Dave said was absolutely correct.
And I turned my sarcasm way down.

It's still there.

But I'm aware of it

and how a small amount goes a long way

and how offensive, even hurtful it can be to many people.

And I really try to watch the line.

Here's all I'm saying.

You and I need to be open to correction

because we may not be aware how we come across to people.

You may know the line by

Richard Needham: The man who is brutally honest enjoys the brutality as much as the honesty, maybe more.

The guy Needham is describing would never see himself as brutal,
just honest.

He wouldn't see himself as having a problem;

he'd describe the problem as other people not being able to handle the truth,

and he would be an absolute pain to be around,

and a terrible witness for Jesus.

We all have blind spots:

how we come across,

what our real motives are,

when we're selfish,

what we value,

how we respond to difficult people and problems –

we assume that we're doing things right when we're not.

Kathleen Madigan is becoming my favorite comedian.

Here's an old bit she did when George Bush was president

about Saddam Hussein.

Video

Our normal reaction is not – is it me?

I'm all alone,

my three wives have all left me,

my kids don't want anything to do with me,

my old friends don't call anymore, and

HR says people are complaining that I'm hard to work with.

Wow – what's wrong with all of these people!

Our normal tendency is to think we don't have a problem.

And when people try to correct us,

our pride makes us defensive,

when what we need is the humility that says, "I could be wrong."

Without that humility we will continue to think, act and be wrong.

Here's a challenge – ask your wife or a friend or one of your older children –

what's something I do or a trait that I possess

that's a problem for others

that you think I might not be aware of?

And then listen without defending yourself.

2. Humility Opens Us to Curiosity

"I can learn something from everyone."

Say that with me:

I can learn something from everyone.

And the more I learn from others,

the better I will be as a man, a husband, a father, a friend, a follower of

Jesus.

Here's what happens in our conversations with others

when we're proud.

The conversation becomes my telling you

what I think is important.

Or it turns into my trying to convince you that I'm right.

Or I start critiquing your ideas,
and immediately I determine if your thoughts are smart or stupid,
worthwhile or a waste of my time.
Or I try to impress you with how much I know.

If that happens,
what do I get out of the conversation?

Well,
I might get frustrated if you don't understand me.
I might get angry if you challenge me.
I might get bored if you don't interest me.
I might get my ego needs met
if you agree with me.
I might get the feeling of being dominant and superior,
if I can undercut your ideas or
dismantle your arguments.

But I don't get better.
Why?
Because when I'm proud,
I'm not really interested in listening to you and learning from you.
When I'm proud,
I'm not curious enough to look at another human being and
realize I can learn a great deal
by shutting my mouth and opening my ears.

Here's the good news and the bad news.
People are different than you are.
They have different backgrounds,
different experiences, and
different perspectives.

They see the world very differently than you do.
And that means sometimes it's really hard to communicate well
and understand each other.
That's the bad news.

But the good news is:
 every person you meet contains a world of knowledge
 you do not possess.

Every person has something to teach me,
 if I am curious enough to ask questions and listen.
 But that kind of curiosity –
 and the knowledge and the wisdom that come from being curious –
 are possible only if I am humble enough to believe you have
 something to teach me.

I've shared this line with you before.

If you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room.

And usually we say the point is
 we should surround ourselves with people who know more than we do
 and can make us better.

But the real point is – everyone in the room is smarter than we are,
 just on different topics and in different ways.

But we'll never learn or grow
 if we're not humble enough to realize
 they have much to teach us.

Miles University

KJV/RSV

Who knew more –
 the guys who thought one version was better than the other?
 Or the simpleton
 who seemed to be the only in the room who knew
 the debate is foolish if you're not going to read the version
 you decide is best?

Everyone has something to teach us.
 Humility allows us to be curious enough and learn what that is.

So, the next time we're having a conversation that's frustrating,
 we need to realize it's probably because of our pride.
 We need to humble ourselves
 listen, ask genuine questions and
 try to understand what the other person is telling us and why.
 And we just might learn something we didn't know.
 And just maybe we won't leave the conversation
 as stupid as we were before.
 And we won't bump into the sharp edges of reality
 quite as hard as we have in the past.

3. Humility Opens Us to Counsel

"I could make a mess of things."

Say that with me.
 I could make a mess of things.

Humility makes us properly cautious.
 And it tells us that we would do well to seek the advice of others
 before we make a big decision.

Proverbs 12.15: The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel.

Proverbs 19.20: Listen to counsel and accept discipline that you may be wise the rest of your days.

We all make mistakes
 and for all kinds of reasons.
 But usually behind our biggest mess ups,
 the reason is usually pride.

The pride that doesn't allow us to
 recognize our true motives,
 consider other people's feelings or
 ask for help in determining how to move forward.
 The pride that doesn't feel the need or is too arrogant
 to ask for counsel and advice from others.

And we keep doing the same dysfunctional, destructive things
we've always done.
And we never get better.

Apologies to those of you who go to Loft and
heard this story a month ago.

A man, in our church,
I'll call him Bill,
was the president of a large company
that provides services for the majority of Fortune 100 companies.

It was an impressive position.
It was very lucrative financially.
And it was demanding.

Bill found himself traveling constantly.
Always available to the 20,000+ people in his organization.
And he found himself struggling.

This is a good man.
He loves Jesus.
He loves his wife.
He loves his children.
He said they come first in his life.

But the job
and the time it demanded was overwhelming,
and he felt guilty that he wasn't there for them as much as he
wanted.

To make matters more complicated,
Bill's company had recently been taken private and
he had been promised an unimaginable amount of money
to stay onboard through a future IPO.

Early one Sunday morning he was on a run with one of his best friends –
a man who lost his Dad unexpectedly just a couple of years prior.

As Bill shared his struggle,

his friend asked him a simple question:

“Do you have enough money to live the rest of your life
the way you want to?”

Bill replied he did assuming nothing terrible happened.

Then, his best friend said,

“It seems to me your kids are the only ones who should be worried
about

your job.

If you have what you need,

then you are only working for what your kids will receive.

And as someone who lost his Dad,

I’m pretty sure your kids would rather receive more of your
time

than more of your money.”

The next morning Bill walked into his office

and told his CEO and the private equity firm that he was leaving.

He didn’t know what was next.

He didn’t care.

Because through the counsel of a friend

he knew who he,

what his priorities were, and

what he needed to do.

When he told me this story,

he said, “Since resigning, we’ve had some real struggles

and my wife and my kids have needed me.

And I have been able to be there for them in ways that never would have
been possible in with my old job.”

President of a large company.
Wealthy.
Successful.
A real stud.

And open to the counsel of a friend –
open enough to step away from his pride and
change his life.
That’s humility
and that’s the way of wisdom.

Be humble – always.
That’s a rule for Christian living.
It opens you to correction, curiosity and counsel.

Why would I ever say we shouldn’t be humble?

I wouldn’t.
I wouldn’t ever say we should break that rule
in the sense that it’s ok to embrace a spirit of pride and arrogance.

But I would say this:
Do not sell yourself short.

When it comes to
being used by God,
spreading his Kingdom, and

doing real spiritual work in the world,
I would bet money you think you are less than you are.

You may think you're being humble.
But I think you're underestimating who you are, what you can do,
and how God has gifted you to do his work.
Don't be humble that way.

Do not deny
the strength God has placed within you,
the gifts you possess,
the difference you can make, and
the calling on your life –
and call that humility
because it's not.

Instead of denying who you are and all your gifts,
I want you to
claim your true identity,
be confident in your God-given abilities, and
raise your vision for who you can be and what you
can do for God's kingdom.

Three ways I want to encourage you to stop letting a false humility
control your life.

1. Stop Aiming Low.

When it comes to what you can do for God and his kingdom,
stop aiming low.
Stop thinking that the goal of your life
is to be a good guy
who helps out here and there the best you can.

Jesus did not
die on the cross,

save your soul and
 give you a second chance at life
 so you could be
 a nice guy,
 doing a little good here and there,
 hoping to get through life without screwing up to badly.

He saved you so you would
 live a great life,
 serve God in powerful ways and
 make a real difference in the world.

Raise your vision for who you can be and what you can do
 for the glory of God and the good of others.

God did not send his Spirit into the world and into your heart
 so you would have the same vision for your life
 as people who don't know him.

On the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit comes upon the people of God,
 Peter says this is the fulfillment of what God promised in the Old
 Testament.

Acts 2.17: God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and
 daughters
 will prophesy, your young men will see visions, our old men will dream
 dreams."

Young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams.
 Special young men,
 certain, particularly deserving old men?
 No, it says – he will pour out his Spirit on all his people.

All of us are to have a God-given vision,
a Spirit-inspired dream for our lives.
And that includes you.

You guys –
at work you have a vision of
what you can do,
who you can become, and
how high you can rise.
And you would be disappointed in yourself
if you aimed low and settled for too little.

But spiritually,
most of us,
we have no vision for ourselves.

At work, you have great dreams,
you're entrepreneurial,
you're willing to take great risks.

But spiritually we settle for a life that is small and safe.

You may say,
Well, isn't it presumptuous to think I can do great things for God?
And I'll ask you,
Don't you think it's faithless to tell God you can't live the life
he has called you to live?

Jesus did not die on the cross so you could live an average life,
doing what everybody else does,
living for what everybody else lives for.

He died to
change your heart,
change your life, and

change your vision of what you can do and who you can be.

You can have as much of God as you desire.
 You can accomplish as much for God as you wish.
 You can be as great for God as you want to be.

He doesn't set the limit.
 We do.

Ephesians 3.20: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory ...

God can,
 God will,
 God wants to do more in you and through you
 than we dare ask or imagine

Do not aim low
 and think you're being humble.
 God has a great vision for your life.
 Claim it,
 embrace it and
 walk into it.

2. Stop Saying, "I Can't."

Sometimes God calls men to do his work,
 and they say "no" because they won't.

They won't be bothered;
 they won't make the necessary sacrifices;
 they won't change their lives.

But more often, maybe,

men say “no” because they think they can’t.

They can’t be the person God is calling.

And even if they are,

they are pretty sure they can’t do what God is calling them to do.

Guys, this has always been the case.

When God called Moses and told him to go to Pharaoh and say,

“Let my people go,” how did Moses respond?

Exodus 4.10: Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

Some commentators believe Moses is saying,

“I stutter.”

Other think he’s simply saying,

“I’m not quick on my feet.

I won’t be able to respond to Pharaoh’s objections well.

I’ll be outwitted and outmatched”

Basically,

God, I don’t speak good.

I’m not up to this.

You need to get someone else.

When God told Gideon to lead an army and deliver Israel from the

Midianites, what did Gideon say?

Judges 6.15: But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in our tribe and I am the least in my family.

God, I don’t know anything about war or about leading men.

Nobody will follow me.”

When God called Jeremiah to preach repentance and pierce the heart of

his people, what did Jeremiah say?

Jeremiah 1.6: Then I said, “Alas, Lord God! Look, I do not know how to speak because I am a youth.”

God, I’m just a kid.
 No one will pay any attention to me.
 I’ll mess this up.
 Get someone else.

We read about the men that God called in the Bible
 and what they did for the Kingdom,
 and we think these men were exceptional.

The great men of God,
 they were, well, great men of God.
 They were holy and gifted and they had great faith.

That’s why they were called,
 and that’s why they were able to do so much for God.

That’s not how the great men of God thought about themselves.
 They said, “I can’t, God –
 Get someone who’s more worthy.
 Get someone who’s more capable.
 Get someone who knows more and is more.
 Get someone who’s not so ordinary.”

Get this, men.
 Everyone is ordinary until he does something extraordinary.

The great men of the Bible were not extraordinary before God called them,
 they became extraordinary by doing what God called them to do.

You want to feel good about yourself,
 read the four Gospels, and
 check out the disciples

as they were walking around with Jesus.
 Ordinary would be kind
 to describe them and how often and how badly they screwed up.
 But they were the same 12 guys who would later change the world.

Listen,
 God has always used ordinary men to do extraordinary things.
 God has always used people like you and me to spread his kingdom
 and change the world.

You may be an ordinary guy.
 But you do not have to live an ordinary life.

To do something extraordinary for God,
 you do not need extraordinary talents, intellect or personality.
 You just need to want it.
 You just need to want more.
 Stop saying, "I can't,"
 and think you're being humble.
 You can live an extraordinary life for God and his Kingdom.

3. Stop Believing You Don't Have What It Takes

Here's what the Bible says about you.

1 John 4.4: Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world

The Spirit of God lives in you.
 There is a power within you
 that can do everything God has called you to do.

Can I do it?
 The question is only:
 Has God called me to it?

If so, you have the Spirit of God working on your behalf,
 and you have what it takes.

That's why Paul says,

Philippians 4.13: I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.

We look at ourselves –
 our weaknesses,
 our failures,
 our inadequacies –
 and we think

 I don't have what it takes to do great things for God.

Many of you will remember years ago when we spoke at some length
 about William Wilberforce who did more than any single person
 to end slavery throughout the British Empire.

It was a battle
 that would take nearly 50 years
 and that was completed only after great suffering
 and just a few days before his death.

William Wilberforce: When I consider the magnitude of the subject which I am to bring
 before the House – a subject, in which the interests, not of this country, nor of
 Europe alone, but of the whole world, and of posterity, are involved: and when I
 think, at the same time, on the weakness of the advocate who has undertaken this
 great cause – when these reflections press upon my mind, it is impossible for me
 not to feel both terrified and concerned at my own inadequacy to such a task.

This may be too much for me,
 Wilberforce says.

The task is huge,
 and I am small.

My enemies are great,
 and I am weak.

Shortly before his own death,
 John Wesley wrote Wilberforce this letter.

John Wesley: Unless the divine power has raised you up, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Wesley got it.

The question is not: Do you have what it takes?

The question is: God has called you to it.

And if so,

go forward in faith and you will overcome in his power.

Don't tell me you don't have what it takes

and think you're being humble.

Tell me what God has called you to do,

and God will give you what you need.