

# Humility and hospitality

## What Does This Mean?

Western culture often works from a series of implicit assumptions:

- The West is superior to other cultures; modern times are superior to the past.
- Youth is superior to age, and the new is superior the old.
- Civilization only counts in terms of technological advancement.
- Material poverty counts more than other types of poverty.
- Western scientific thinking is superior to all other ways of knowing.
- The individual's choices and opinions matter most (i.e., individualism).

These attitudes can make it difficult for students to learn from peoples of the past and from other cultures. In contrast, biblical prophets condemned advanced societies that ignored justice. In the Bible, respect for the elderly and listening to the wise matter.

If the wealthy seek only to assist the poor, looking only to give and not also to learn from them, their assistance can be rooted in condescension and pride. The Bible recognizes a variety of riches: people can be wealthy in terms of relationships, wisdom, faith, love, good deeds, and in relationship with God (Proverbs 16:16; James 2:5; Psalms 145:8; 1 Timothy 6:18; Luke 12:21). Wealth is something to be thankful for, but we are not defined by what we own (Luke 12:15). Similarly, people in the West often underestimate what they can learn from those in other cultures.

*It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich or poor according to what he is, not according to what he has. Henry Ward Beecher*

Humility is essential if we are to learn from others. Humility is not groveling self-abasement; it is the opposite of pride and arrogance, not being untruthful about our abilities. True humility is a generous attitude of mind that values others and sees oneself

realistically. Jesus modeled humility throughout his life. Differences in culture, age, or material wealth are not to be seen as grounds for pride.

*Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self. Charles Spurgeon*

The Bible teaches that we should love both neighbors and strangers as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Leviticus 19:33-34) and calls us to exercise hospitality toward strangers (Matthew 25:34-35; Hebrews 13:2). Be aware that it is still important to teach children about safety when approached by strangers—the biblical teaching is about attitudes and behavior toward people who may be different from us, not about abandoning appropriate caution.

## What Does This Mean in School?

Fostering humility and raising awareness of learning from others is something that can cross all curriculum boundaries. We can

- seek to model humility and a stance of openness to learning from diverse others, and draw attention to the achievements of other times and cultures;
- encourage students to look beyond the lack of modern technology in some settings to see other strengths, and acknowledge ways of learning other than scientific reasoning (through symbols, art, etc.);
- encourage students to learn other languages and cultures not just because of their pragmatic benefits (e.g., knowing French will yield a better job) but because of the call to love those who are from other cultures; and
- use personal narrative examples (especially when teaching about other cultures and languages) that can help students go beyond facts and create personal connections.

Think of an instance when you experienced students' failure to see the riches of another culture because they could not see beyond the lack of technology and material wealth, or because of an implicit attitude of superiority. How could you teach that lesson differently? For example, you might focus on the quality of community life or use a narrative to create a stronger sense of personal connection.



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