



ALL THESE THINGS MY HAND HAS MADE, AND SO ALL THESE THINGS ARE MINE, SAYS THE LORD. BUT THIS IS THE ONE TO WHOM I WILL LOOK, TO THE HUMBLE AND CONTRITE IN SPIRIT, WHO TREMBLES AT MY WORD. **ISAIAH 66:2**

At the base of the cross are the feet of Jesus – the feet of a man who washed feet. The blood, sweat and grime of the cross were not entirely new to our Lord. He had spent his whole life in service to others, in the humblest of circumstances. This overwhelming humility was not reserved for the temple or religious people. Quite the contrary, Jesus was humble wherever he was, even in the presence of complete strangers.

Humility is a common word, but it is not often common to our daily life. Humility acknowledges God's authority over us and over the whole world. Several articles in the fall 2007 *Reflections* consider that this virtue, while necessary for religious devotion, is something we need to reconsider in terms of our civic roles.

For many of the authors, it is humility that stands behind our constitution and must guide us as a nation. As David Price notes, "Claiming divine sanction for our own power or program does not merely undermine American pluralism; it also flies in the face of our religious understanding of human sinfulness and divine transcendence."

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

To consider the role of humility as it applies to our identification as a Christian nation. To discuss whether or not American exceptionalism is compatible with humility, paying special attention to our own lives. *Are we living in humility when we claim our desires and reasons are God's? How can a centered vision of humility inform our civic roles and responsibilities?*

In Search of Christian America -Harry S. Stout

1. Have each person create a definition for "American exceptionalism." Share that definition with the group and list ways you see this exceptionalism in your day-to-day existence, including economics, religion and politics.
2. Have someone read **LUKE 14:7-11** aloud. Discuss how this narrative applies to American exceptionalism. List ways this passage can apply to our own civic responsibilities.

3. Identify how Stout distinguishes between a national covenant and a covenant of grace. List qualities of each type of covenant. Are there dangers of identifying with a national covenant?
4. *"To understand the Puritans, you have to adopt their attitude: Life is a great adventure. The Puritans saw themselves on a group mission,"* said Stout in a 2001 interview with *Christianity Today*. Discuss how adventure relates to the "American dream." Is our tendency for personal missions linked with our nation's "missions?"

Paul's Primer for Politics -John Danforth

1. "When we vest our personal opinions with the trappings of religion we make religion the servant of our politics. By confusing faith and politics, we become conformed to this world." Make a drawing, diagram or physical representation of this statement. How does Danforth see faith and politics interacting?
2. Read **ROMANS 12** aloud as a group.
3. Compare Danforth's idea of "countless unique minds" with the biblical image of the body in verses 4-8. Draw a body part that can represent what you have to offer. Name ways in which this kind of civic cooperation is needed for the peace Paul speaks of.
4. Read **1 CORINTHIANS 7:17**. Compare this idea with Romans 12's idea of the body.
5. Recalling Danforth's experience in the Senate gym, suggest circumstances where humility with others is probable for you. Recall the physical situations Jesus was in where he was humble.
6. *VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.* Have several people suggest ways humility before God helps us step away from our divisiveness with others.

Close your time in prayer, meditating on the feet of Jesus and the earth the cross stood upon, the same earth we all share.

"Red in Claw" - Billy Collins

1. Have someone read the poem on page 63 aloud.
2. Describe ways the animal pecking order can relate to politics.
3. Read **MATTHEW 6:28** aloud. How does the idea of trusting God compare to the concern of the hawk in this poem? Name ways Jesus' humility connected with his faith in God's provision.
4. Name ways that trusting God to care for us should affect our civic actions.

Reclaiming America's True Power -Gary Hart

1. Make a time line of your life. On it, mark responsibilities you have gathered. If applicable include marriage, work, church, civic responsibility and any other responsibilities you hold. Where do you place civic responsibility? Why?
2. Hart lists expediency as the reason for abandonment of ideals. Think to your time line of responsibilities. List other reasons people neglect their ideals and their responsibilities.
3. Reread **ROMANS 12:12**. Name ways expediency relates to Danforth's emphasis on Romans 12. How can humble civic duty offer an alternative to expediency?
4. Break into groups of two or three. Have each person name at least two things they can do to perform civic duty from the place they occupy.

GOD, GIVE US WISDOM TO LIVE WITHOUT HAVING ALL THE ANSWERS OR BEING TOTALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT. WE NEED YOU. LET US NOT FORGET THAT WE NEED OTHERS. HELP US TO LEARN TO BE CITIZENS WHO LISTEN, WHO VALUE DIFFERENCES FOR WHAT THEY CAN TEACH US ABOUT WHO YOU ARE. FORGIVE US FOR NOT TRUSTING YOU TO TAKE CARE OF US. TEACH US TO SERVE YOU IN THE PLACE YOU HAVE GIVEN EACH OF US.