

HUMILITY

INTRODUCTION

All of us know and understand that humility is a virtue of the Christian life that everyone is to exhibit. But it is both one of the most valuable virtues, and one of the most difficult. One politician joked about himself. He said he took a lie detector test because he wanted to understand what they were all about. He reported that he flunked the test when he started a sentence with, "In my humble opinion...." Yes, we all know how to put on the surface traits of humility, but how do we actually become humble?

Benjamin Franklin, a well-known early American statesman, made a list of character qualities that he wanted to develop in his own life. When he mastered one virtue, he went on to the next. He did pretty well, he said, until he got to humility. Every time he thought he was making significant progress, he would be so pleased with himself that he became proud!

Let's look at what it means to have humility.

I. DEFINITION OF HUMILITY

Humility is recognizing and acknowledging my total dependence upon the Lord and seeking His will for every decision.

Several Hebrew words are translated humble. One is *anah*, which means, to look down, to abase oneself, to afflict and chasten, to deal harshly, and to weaken." King David expressed humility of soul by wearing sackcloth and by fasting: "*My clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting*" (Psalm 35:13).

Another Hebrew word for humble is *kana*, which means, to bend the knee, bring into subordination, to subdue." God used this word in II Chronicles 7:14: "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face . . . then will I hear from heaven.*"

Another definition of humility is building life around God and others rather than around myself.

II. REWARDS OF HUMILITY

The greatest reward of humility is becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ. He identifies His character as that of being "meek and lowly in heart". The word *lowly* means, not rising far from the ground, brought low with grief, low in spirit, of low degree."

In Proverbs 3:34 we are told that God gives grace to the humble. And there are several Scriptures that tell us if we will humble ourselves, God will exalt us.

David says that God "*... leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way.*" Psalm 25:9. What a beautiful thing, to be taught by God.

We are told it brings wisdom in Proverbs 11:2 "*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*"

God promises to live with those who are humble and give them encouragement: "*For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, but also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite."* Isaiah 57:15

Other rewards of humility are what every person longs for—true riches, high honor, and abundant life. «*By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life*» (Proverbs 22:4). And this is not just the minimum. In Psalm 37:11 it says, "*But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.*" This is not from grasping and climbing and struggling, but a blessing of humility.



III. PRIDE

Pride is believing that we have achieved what God and others have done for us and through us. Pride is building all of life around me and my wants. Pride is reserving for myself the right to make final decisions. Often a believer will dedicate his life to the Lord but keep one small area in which he can be the boss. That is a stronghold of pride in our lives.



A. God's swift punishment of pride

God's swift punishment on pride is illustrated in the lives of King Herod and King Nebuchadnezzar. God did not immediately punish the Herods for slaughtering babies or killing the Apostle James, but when Herod gave a great oration to the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they fell down and worshiped him as a god, *"Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory"* (Acts 12:23).

When King Nebuchadnezzar boasted, *"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"* God immediately punished him. While the word was in the king's mouth, God struck him with a mental breakdown and took away his kingdom until he worshiped the King of Heaven. (See Daniel 4:30-37.)

The reason for God's startling swiftness of punishment on pride may very well be the fact that it was this sin that caused Satan and a third of the angels to be cast out of Heaven. Satan said in his heart, *"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ... I will be like the most High"* (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Pride was the same sin that caused Adam and Eve to fall. Satan tempted them to violate God's command so that they, through their own efforts, could be on an equal level with God. Satan said, *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:5).

Pride is putting ourselves on an equal level with God-given authority over us. Humility is abasing ourselves and submitting to the righteous rule of God and His authorities.

B. Pride Is Taking Credit for What God Gave Us

If we fail to recognize that everything we have and do is because of the mercy and grace of God, we will tend to think that we are responsible for our achievements. Thus, we will lift up our hearts in pride.

- When King Uzziah became strong, "his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (II Chronicles 26:16).
- When Nebuchadnezzar's "heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne" (Daniel 5:20).
- When the prince of Tyrus became prosperous, God observed, "By your great wisdom and by your traffic have you increased your riches, and your heart is lifted up because of your riches . . . and you have said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (Ezekiel 28:5).

IV. OUR CHOICE: HUMBLE OURSELVES OR BE HUMBLLED BY GOD

God appeals to all of us to take the initiative to humble ourselves. If we fail to do this, He will humble us through circumstances, opposition, infirmities, or weaknesses.

- "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10).
- "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (I Peter 5:6).

Notice that we are first and foremost to humble ourselves in the eyes of the Lord, not necessarily in the eyes of others. He can see the true condition of our hearts, whether we are flattering ourselves with compliments or sincerely abasing ourselves and exalting Him.

King Nebuchadnezzar learned what happens when a man fails to humble himself. However, after being humbled by God, he did give proper glory to the Lord, *"At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him*

who lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation”(Daniel 4:34).

V. HUMILITY BEGINS IN OUR SPIRITS — PRIDE BEGINS IN OUR HEARTS

When our spirits are in full fellowship with the Spirit of God, we will have humble hearts.

- *“For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, but also with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones”* (Isaiah 57:15).
- *“Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud”* (Proverbs 16:19).
- *“A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit”* (Proverbs 29:23).

The Scriptures on the other hand often speak of a proud heart. God hates a proud heart and will not tolerate it.

- *“Whoso privately slanders his neighbor, him will I cut off: him that has a high look and a proud heart will not I suffer”* (Psalm 101:5).
- *“A high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin”* (Proverbs 21:4).
- *“He that is of a proud heart stirs up strife: but he that puts his trust in the LORD shall be made fat”* (Proverbs 28:25).
- *“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you that dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that says in his heart, who shall bring me down to the ground?”* (Obadiah 1:3)

Here is a chart that gives us the contrasts between pride and humility:

Symptoms of a Proud Heart

1. Focus on power
2. Emphasis on freedom
3. Concern for gain
4. Desire for immediate fulfillment
5. Yearning for the approval of men
6. Aspiration to be served
7. Longing for self-gratification
8. Need for pushing ahead
9. Striving to lead men
10. Interest in competition.

Signs of Humility

1. Focus on submission
2. Emphasis on responsibility
3. Concern for giving
4. Desire for lasting achievement
5. Yearning for the approval of God
6. Aspiration for serving others
7. Longing for self-control
8. Need for patience
9. Striving to follow God
10. Interest in cooperation

VI. GOD’S CHECKLIST FOR HUMILITY

The clearest guidance we could receive on how to humble ourselves is to follow Biblical instruction on how to do it and to learn from God’s biographies of what others did to humble themselves. Humility must begin with a contrite spirit, as explained in Colossians 3:12: *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind.”*

James 4:6-10 speaks of humility and gives a checklist for achieving it. *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

1. Submit yourselves to God with total, unconditional surrender to His will.
2. Resist the devil, allowing no secret sin or hindering weight.

3. Draw nigh to God by seeking His face through the Scriptures.
4. Cleanse your hands by confessing all sin and making restitution.
5. Purify your hearts, making sure there is no secret desire to continue sinning.
6. Be afflicted and mourn and weep. Grieve over the awfulness of sin.
7. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness.
8. Do all this in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

VII. GOD HEARS THOSE WHO COME TO HIM IN HUMILITY

A passage parallel to that of James 4 on humbling ourselves is given in II Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and . . .”

1. Pray

This means acknowledging our sins and God’s holiness.

2. Seek My face

That is to set aside every distraction that competes with Christ,

3. Turn from their wicked ways

Have a change of life as well as a change of heart.

“Then will I hear from heaven. . .”

True inward repentance and contriteness will have outward evidences. God paid attention to the following expressions of humility and responded to them.

- Ahab – “It came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (1 Kings 21:27). Then God responded, “Did you see thou how Ahab humbled himself before me? Because he humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days” (I Kings 21:29).
- Josiah— “It came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.” He also acknowledged the iniquities of his fathers: “Because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book.” The Lord responded, “Because your heart was tender, and you did humble yourself before God, when you heard his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbled yourself before me, and did rend your clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard you also, says the LORD” (II Chronicles 34:19, 21, 27).

Humility is the natural response of being in the presence of God.

The fear of the Lord is the awareness that we are continually in the presence of the Lord. Thus, humility and the fear of the Lord are interdependent.

VIII. HOW TO DEVELOP HUMILITY

A. Recognize and confess pride

Pride is inherent in human nature. It is therefore difficult to actually recognize pride or its many symptoms. Sometimes it is valuable to have trusted friends or fellow workers point out aspects of pride that they see in us. This in itself can be very humbling! We like to think that people don’t see our faults. What a shock to have people list them. But if it helps us to recognize pride in ourselves, it is well worth doing.

B. Find Biblical ways to humble yourself

The following ways can be used to humble ourselves:



1. Welcome criticism and thank your critics.

Critics have a way of spotting deficiencies in our character that we do not see. They may be cutting in their criticism, yet we are to tell them how God has used it for our benefit. *“Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not.”* (Romans 12:14)

2. Volunteer for menial tasks.

The essence of a humble heart is serving others, especially in menial tasks. Jesus demonstrated this by washing the feet of His disciples.

3. Ask others about blind spots.

The book of Proverbs tells us, *“Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise”* (19:20).

There is a fountain of insight and information in those around us, especially those who are in daily contact with us. One famous man said, *«The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.»* — Thomas Carlyle

4. Express gratefulness for all things.

Gratefulness is telling others how they have benefited our lives. *“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* (I Thess. 5:18)

5. Listen to others instead of talking about yourself.

This is a means of showing deference to others.

6. Fall on your face and kneel before Him.

The leper fell on his face before Jesus to symbolize his unworthiness. David states, *“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.”* (Psalm 95:6)

7. Let authorities make final decisions.

Since rebellion is rejecting God-given authority, a humble heart is the opposite. God has established four authority structures that we are to honor and obey (unless we are instructed to do evil): parents, government officials, church leaders, and employers.

8. Confess wrongdoing and ask forgiveness for wrongs you have done.

A proud person justifies what he has done wrong. A humble person admits that he was wrong, asks forgiveness of those he offended, and makes restitution wherever necessary. Scripture says, *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another...”* (James 5:16)

9. Praise and honor others.

Our goal should be to help others become successful, passing on praise to others whenever we receive it. *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another.”* (Rom. 12:10)

10. Take time for prayer and fasting.

Fasting denies the flesh. David humbled his soul through fasting. (Psalm 69:10)

11. Give sacrificially.

Remember the widow who gave all she had? Who can imagine a humbler picture than the one of this lady giving sacrificially to God?

12. Give testimony of God’s grace.

When we are giving honor to God and what He has done in our life, it is hard to lift up our hearts in pride. Humility is realizing that we ourselves are nothing, but we are everything in Christ.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing.” (Romans 7:18)

The famous English preacher C. H. Spurgeon said, *“The higher a man is in grace, the lower he will be in his own esteem.”*

13. Deflect praise.

Proverbs 27:2 says, *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.”* But don’t take praise too seriously. Whenever you can, turn that praise to someone else. This does not mean you should put yourself down. Thinking too little of yourself is false humility and is just as wrong as thinking too much of yourself.

14. *Be a servant.*

Christ said, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matt 23:11) This is the path to true greatness, and it is Jesus' example: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45) The best test of whether or not we view ourselves as servants is how we respond when treated like one. Humility is expressed by a servant's spirit that is excited about making others successful.

IX. PERSONAL EVALUATION

How humble are you?

- When people disagree with you, do you argue for your position?
- Do you tend to cut off those who ignore you?
- Are you hurt when those whom you dislike are honored?
- Do you find it difficult to admit you are wrong?
- Do you inwardly react when people criticize you?
- Do you give your opinions before being asked for them?
- Do you enjoy sharing about your accomplishments?
- Do you talk more than you listen?
- Are you more concerned about your reputation or God's?
- Do you give the impression that you have no problems?
- Do you seek ways to humble yourself?
- Do you do things for praise and compliments?
- Do you accept praise rather than deflecting it?
- Are you quick to correct others when they make mistakes?
- Do you react when you do not receive the credit you are due?
- Do you feel important?
- Do you compare yourself to others rather than God?

CONCLUSION

The great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, said, "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God, because they reckoned on God being with them." These great men never thought that they could accomplish something great for God. They knew it was only God.

I Peter 5:5 says, "*Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble.*" Are things not going right in your life, in your family, in your ministry? Do you need to examine your heart and see if God is "resisting" you because of pride in your heart?

Before you leave today, spend time in prayer and bring these things to God:

- Ask Him to give you humility
- Surrender **every** area of your life to His control.
- Purpose to look for ways to humble yourself every day.
- Yield all of your rights to God.

When someone asked St. Francis of Assisi why and how he could accomplish so much, he replied: "This may be why. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the earth and said, 'Where can I find the weakest, the littlest, the meanest man on the face of the earth?' Then He saw me and said, 'Now I've found him, and I will work

through him. He won't be proud of it. He'll see that I'm only using him because of his littleness and insignificance." God wants to use you in a mighty way. Fellowship with Him! Find out how little you are and how great He is.

F.B. Meyer once said: "I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves one above the other, and that the taller we grew in Christian character the easier we could reach them. I now find that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other. It is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower; we have to go down, always down, to get His best gifts."

Go "down" today and receive God's very best for your life.

We dismiss with 15 minutes of quiet personal prayer. (Be sure NOT to neglect these 15 minutes) Enjoy the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

- Write down five practical, concrete steps that you plan to take this month to becoming a more humble person. Give a copy to your group leader and be prepared to share with him at the next seminar how you have grown by taking those five steps. Each day of the week choose a different item to focus on.