



Spiritual Disciplines: Humility

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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The Spiritual Discipline of Humility

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

1. Discover what is and is not godly humility
2. Find the Bible admonitions concerning humility
3. Learn about humility from Christ's life
4. How humility and leadership function together
5. Understand God's promises for learning to be humble

Content Outline

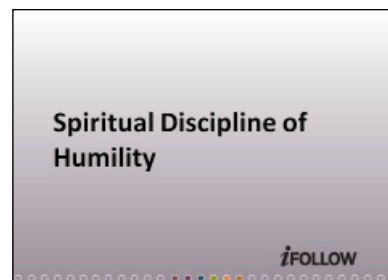
1. What is humility?
2. Five Bible passages that exhort us to humility
3. The extremes; what humility is not
4. Five principles from Christ's humility
5. Eight Bible promises of the rewards of humility
6. Practical Application

Background Material for the Presenter

According to *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, humility is "the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc." Interestingly enough, at the bottom of the page is this list of synonyms: "Humility; bashfulness; distrust; suspicion; doubt; fear; timidity; apprehension; hesitation."

And there we have the problem with humility in a nutshell. What is it *really*? Here are five admonitions from God's word concerning humility:

1. "It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud." (Prov. 16:19)



2. “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

3. “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:3)

4. “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” (Col. 3:12)

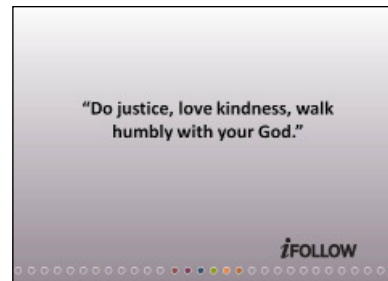
5. “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. ... Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.” (1 Pet. 5:5-6)

What would happen if we put any of those suggested synonyms into these verses? “It is better to be **fearful** in spirit. ... Walk **distrustfully** with your God. ... With **suspicion** of mind, regard one another as more important.” This can’t be right! The original definition, “a modest opinion or estimate of one’s own importance” seems much closer. But we shouldn’t go on “seems.” A Christian can’t just look for the definition he likes best, when rightly dividing the Word of truth. And besides, we’ve seen experienced Christians display all of the above attitudes and more, and label them humility.

One of the most surprising Bible texts on humility says that even God humbles Himself! “Who is like the Lord our God, who is enthroned on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?” (Psalm 113:5-6) One of the things the Hebrew word includes is a lowering of the eyes, usually in submission. The Psalmist is pointing out that it is a deliberate lowering of God’s eyes to look down to us. This planet is so messed up, we could add that it is a lowering of His standards, too, to be willing to look on all this sin and pain when He could keep His attention on heaven and let us cease to exist. God is clearly not fearful, doubting, or suspicious.

The Two Extremes

Perhaps it will be easier to see what humility is not. As with most things, one can go off the road in either direction, and the extremes on either side of humility are easier to see. To the one side, we have conceit in all its snobbishness. We know for sure God doesn’t want us to go around considering ourselves lords of humanity. In fact, more than one of those texts above speak of false pride as well. Proverbs 16:18 says famously, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.” Phil. 2:3 has it right there in the verse: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.” The ellipse left in the middle



of the 1 Peter 5:5, 6 passage left out “for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” And several different texts promise the proud that if they don’t humble themselves, God will do it for them. So in one direction, humility is **not** arrogance, false pride, and conceit.

In the other direction, things get a little murkier. There is such a thing as false humility, too. It’s hinted at in Col. 2:18, 23. Verse 18 talks of “delighting in self-abasement.” Verse 23 admits that such things as self-abasement and “severe treatment of the body” have “the appearance of wisdom.” But they are only “self-made religion,” and “of no value against fleshly indulgence.” In Martin Luther’s time, and in some places still today, it’s considered pleasing to God (or the gods) to beat oneself, lie on nails, cut the flesh, and so on. We’re more enlightened than that, right? Yet there are some beloved children of God among us that appear to believe that God is pleased when they deny their bodies by being so unbendingly strict about dietary laws and restrictions that they look thin and unhealthy to everyone but themselves. Jesus, by contrast, was forever being called a drunkard and a glutton. We know He was never guilty of license or fleshly indulgence. Yet His lifestyle looked that way to some. Note His comments in Luke 7:33-35.

There is another region of what humility is **not**: the martyr. It’s easy to mock and make jokes about the “doormat” or “Mr. Milktoast” who mopes through his life letting everyone walk all over him and never stands up for himself. But this is a real, painful issue for far too many Christians. They’ve been taught that Paul told the Corinthians to **always** consider others more important, to look out **only** for others’ interests and never stand up for their own.

The ugliest version of this is the abused wife who believes, and may even be told by her pastor, that if she can only hang in there and be a good enough, loving enough wife, things will change. The unexpected thing is, learning to respect ourselves can actually be the key to others’ learning to respect themselves, as well as us. A question to ask an abuse victim: Who is the abuser hurting worse, you or himself? If the victim can see that the abuser is damaging his own soul as much as he is damaging those he abuses, she may be able to see that the most loving, self-denying thing she can do is to stop enabling him to continue that pattern another minute. Her standing up for herself, leaving the situation, may be the only chance the abuser, who is still a beloved child of God and for whom Jesus died, will ever have to see the truth and get the help he needs to change. But is this humility? Where, in the middle of all this confusion, is the genuine article that God wants each of us to have?

Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild

Whenever we have trouble understanding some facet of Christian life, it always behooves us to go straight to the source. What can we learn about humility from Jesus?

Obviously, the ultimate demonstration of humility was Jesus’ incarnation itself. Jesus

“although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6-7) We will never, not in millions of years, be able to really get our minds around what it meant for the Creator to become small enough, concrete enough to become the created. It’s impossible. It’s one of those things that can’t happen, but did. Once upon a time, on a certain day, in a certain geographical place, a newborn crinkled a damp face and made funny little squeaks and jerky motions with tiny hands, as all newborns do, only this one was God.

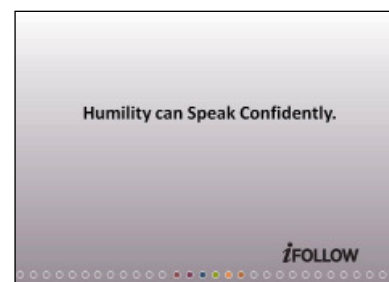
How can we possibly relate to this? Well, we could ask ourselves, when was the last time we stepped out of our comfort zone and became something that felt somehow “less,” for the sake of someone else?

This is Lesson Number One: Humility is being willing to be smaller, less smart, less able, less beautiful than we really are, so that someone else may be bigger, smarter, capable, and beautiful.

As if that were not enough, the Creator then lived three long decades, long after He became officially and legally a man and a “son of Israel,” at home, “in subjection to” His parents. (Luke 2:51) We have just the one story, also there in Luke 2, of the time, at twelve, He began to grasp His identity and mission. He asked His parents, “Didn’t you know I would be doing My Father’s business?” Was this humble? It must have been, because then He went back home and back to being a dutiful son.



So Lesson Number Two must be that: Humility can speak confidently, without fear. Those suggested synonyms we saw were never seen in the life of the Son of God. He spoke the truth. A humble person doesn’t have to be hesitant or mealy-mouthed. He did so gently, though. Mary might have been a little taken aback by her Son’s question, but we can be sure her face didn’t turn red with embarrassment because of His tone.



When Jesus finally did leave home, the first official thing He did was to go to John to be baptized. John thought this might be taking humility a little too far. “Lord, You’re kidding! You should be baptizing me!” Jesus said it was fitting, and would “fulfill all righteousness.” (Matt 3:15.) There has been a deal of commentary on all that He might have meant, but one of the things He seemed to mean was that He wanted to be a good example. Then He promptly went out to the wilderness to be tormented by an enemy who used to be His best friend, because the Holy Spirit led Him there.

Lesson Number Three: Humility is willing to go above and beyond what is expected, and follows the leading of the Spirit.

From these humble beginnings, Jesus went on to lead a life in what we would call “humble circumstances.” He didn’t have a home of His own, He depended on the generosity of His friends for the food He ate, and He never appears to have worried at all about money. These things all fit well with what we tend to think of as humble. Yet it’s interesting to consider the leadership of Jesus.

The Bible says that one of the things that amazed the people about Jesus was that He taught with authority, unlike the scribes. (Matt. 7:29.) The custom among rabbis, then and now, was to carry a debate, say about a particular Bible passage, by saying, “Rabbi So-and-So says this, but Rabbi Thus-and-Such says that. Then again, it might mean the other thing.” Through many centuries, the Talmud and other writings have kept a faithful record of this ongoing conversation. The purpose was, in fact, humility. No rabbi wanted to put his own opinion above that of the others, particularly above that of a well-respected sage of days gone by. But he could state his own opinion. So the attempt was to keep all these ideas and insights on as level a ground as possible and give everyone a respectful hearing. This is a good example of humility.

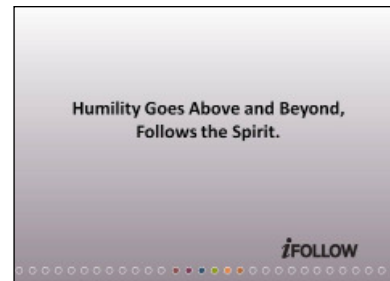
Jesus, however, talked like someone who knew what He was talking about.

He insisted He had come from heaven and knew the Father personally. He said without roundaboutation that He was the Messiah, the Bread of heaven, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. “If you won’t believe me about earthly things, how can you believe me about heavenly ones?” He asked Nicodemus. (John 3:12) If these things had not been true, they certainly could not have been seen as humble in any way, shape, or form! And, by the way, one who does not believe these things has to either believe that Jesus was not at all humble, (was, in fact, insane or criminal) or that His disciples made this all up and He never said any of it.

If, however, we accept it as true, then we must also accept

Lesson Number 4: Humility can lead and teach with authority.

This seems counterintuitive. We know that a leader ought to be humble, that Jesus even said the one who would be leader must be servant of all. It’s tricky to put that together with strong leadership or authority. In fact, the only way to manage it at all is to keep watching Jesus. There was a tenderness about His authority. The implication, when Matthew says He spoke with authority, is that the people loved that—yearned toward it, warmed themselves in it. It would not have had such an effect on them if it had had even a hint of lordliness or



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tyranny in it. It must have been like the tender authority of a mom or dad, gentle and calm, who is patiently keeping a toddler out of mischief. The baby may sometimes feel thwarted, and may show its frustration, too, but clearly it feels safe.

There were times when Jesus' authority was of a sterner variety. When He made a whip of cords, there probably wasn't much humility in His voice or face. When, near the end of His life, in utter despair at ever reaching the priests and rabbis He loved so much, He uttered the "Woes," there were tears in His voice, but they weren't humble ones. So the most humble person on earth was not necessarily *always* humble. The question to ask ourselves is, When we sometimes lay aside humility, is it for our own sake, or for love of someone else?

During the last week of His life, Jesus grew more and more forceful. He cursed the unfruitful fig tree, rebuked the leaders, refused to answer lawyers' questions, and dealt out some stern warnings. Then came the climax the universe had been waiting for, the series of events we have come to call The Passion. Why that particular word?

Would you believe that our meaning for it today, of strong emotion or obsession, is only a few centuries old? It actually comes from the Latin **passus**, past participle of **pat**, to suffer, and originally meant "an undergoing," or "the state of being acted upon or affected by something external." (*Webster's*) Passive, in other words. A passion was the opposite of an action. Eventually, it was used in the sense of giving up one's control to an emotion, "flying into a passion," and from there it became what it is today.

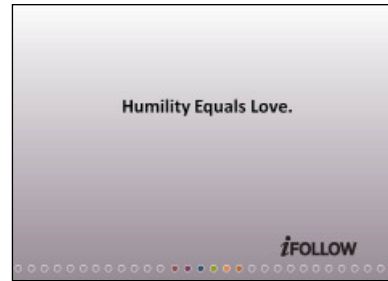
Once upon a time, on a certain night, in a certain geographical spot that we can mark fairly precisely today, a man fought a superhuman struggle against his own will, his own longing for survival. Unbelievably, this Man was God. He fought between the two horns of His own particular dilemma, His survival or ours. Incomprehensibly, He chose us.

"Thy will, not Mine, be done," He gasped, and gave Himself up to go passively to slaughter, meek and silent as a sheep. From that moment on, humble was all Jesus was. He let Judas kiss Him, let the soldiers take Him, let Herod mock Him. He didn't answer the priests or Pilate or the false charges. He didn't fight the cross or the thorns or the nails. He accepted the humiliation (a different thing entirely), and drank shame to the bottom of the cup. He submitted His soul to God. He died. "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:8)

M. Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, offered a very interesting definition of love. Love, he said, is "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." (p. 81)

Lesson Number Five: Humility equals love! Love to the thousandth power, love carried to its furthest, highest limit.

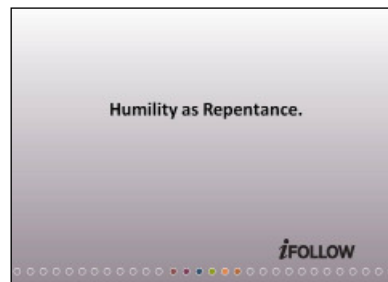
“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11)



The Rewards of Humility

There are more passages in the Bible which promise rich rewards to the humble than there are admonitions to be humble. We'll look at eight of them, moving more or less in order through the Bible. The promise phrases in each passage will be highlighted.

2 Chronicles 7:14: “If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I **will hear** from heaven, will **forgive their sin** and will **heal their land.**” This is arguably one of the most famous Bible passages on humility. It brings up a subject we have not yet addressed - humility as repentance.



In context, this verse is talking about people who have rebelled against God and are now facing painful consequences. Frequently, texts which speak of “humbling oneself” are talking about recognizing sin, confessing it, accepting the responsibility for it, and submitting to both the consequences and God’s authority. This is indeed a “lowering of the eyes,” even a downcast face. “I was wrong. I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” These are some of the most important words in the world. They are important between people, but even more so between a person and God. Nothing hurts so badly as being out of step with one’s Creator. That’s precisely why so many people in this world hurt so badly. Most of them don’t even know why.

Then a Christian comes and tries to tell them why, and makes things worse than ever because he forgot he too, like every human, is out of step with God. Maybe not so badly, right now. Maybe right now he can see well enough to recognize the dissonance, the out-of-balance, irregular rhythm of his friend’s life. If he humbly remembered his own irregularities, he could probably make connection with his friend and help bring a reconciliation without causing even deeper wounds. Maybe together they could go to the throne of mercy, cast down their eyes and the crowns of their self-consequence, humble themselves, and pray. Seek God’s face together, and ask the Spirit for power to recognize and turn from their wicked ways.

Because, if they do, the promises are amazing. “I will hear.” Not “I might hear,” or “I’ll think

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about it.” Not “You had it coming, don’t come crawling to Me!” “I **will** hear, I **will** forgive.” And not only that, “I will heal their land!” This is surprising, and easily open to misinterpretation. Without a clear view of Bible prophecies, or for that matter, a careful reading of the context, there are many who believe this means God will turn a particular nation into a moral, peaceful kingdom of God on earth. Remember, the context is a drought. God is saying He will heal the *land*, not the political entity. We should also bear in mind that as we near the end and the earth wears out “like a garment” (Heb. 1:11), as those who “destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18) continue their selfish pillaging, God will be less able to make this a reality globally. He does promise that His followers’ bread and water will be sure, (Isa. 33:1) and if we are careful stewards, He will preserve and restore the health of our land as long as possible.

Job 22:21-29: Here is quite a treatise on humility and its rewards. In this case, the context is Job’s friend Eliphaz, insisting that Job would not be in trouble if he hadn’t somehow deserved it. We know from God’s response at the end of the book that Eliphaz was wrong in his estimation of Job’s guilt (speaking of a well-meaming judgmentalism and lack of humility,) but there are still some very comforting principles in this passage.

First, verse 21 says, “Yield now and **be at peace** with Him; thereby **good will come** to you.” There are two rewards here. First and most important, humility brings peace with God. As noted above, being out of step with God is the worst feeling there is. And it’s true Job was in some very deep trouble, and certainly did not feel understanding of or understood by God. That’s another way of being out of step. In the end, even though he knew, and God agreed, that there was no open sin in his life, Job did, in fact, humble himself and thereby gain peace. “I retract,” he said, “I repent in dust and ashes.” (42:6)



Secondly, peace brings “good.” This is a pretty broad term. The good that comes into our lives as a result of humbling ourselves before God may be visibly wonderful things like Job getting all his riches back and having more children. Not that more children can ever replace the loss of those that are gone. But they are a blessing. Or the good that comes may be in new spiritual strength, and not as visible, except to others. But good will come.

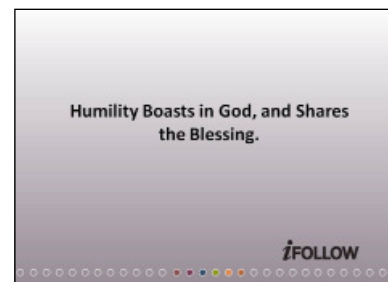
One of the most surprising rewards of humility is found in verse 29: “When you are cast down, **you will speak with confidence**, and the humble person **He will save**.” Interesting! When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence? This is even more definitely stated than the principle we drew from Christ’s life, that a humble person can still speak with confidence. It doesn’t seem to us as if the two go together at all, and yet in this verse, it’s as if they have a cause and effect relationship. How can this be?

Is it possible that having a “modest estimate” of our own worth makes it *easier* to rec-

ognize the immense value God puts on us (more valuable than His own life!) and gives us **more** confidence than we would have if we valued ourselves in the usual way, by counting money or achievements or looks or power or whatever? It does clearly have to do with salvation: “The humble person He will save.”

In the midst of all his anguish, loss, confusion, and anger, we do know Job could still say, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him” (13:15), and “I know that my redeemer lives” (19:25). That is a picture of godly humility. And it includes the confidence to argue, even with God. Just look at the rest of 13:15: “Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.” Godly humility bows before God’s greatness, but also trusts enough to draw close as a loved child and tell God the whole truth, knowing He will listen and understand.

Psalms 34:2-3: “My soul will make its boast in the Lord; the humble will hear it and rejoice. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.” So humility does have something to brag about, God! This time, David is pointing out that other humble people may be blessed by one’s humility. The blessings will spread around. In other places, such as Psalm 69:32, he praises God for some delivery or mercy, and says “the humble have seen it and are glad.” Humility shares the blessing.



There is a story about the popular personality types, choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholy. It says if someone is standing on a bridge contemplating suicide, the laid-back phlegmatic will walk on by, the forceful choleric will order him to “Snap out of it!” the lively sanguine will try—for a few minutes, anyway—to cheer him up, and the sympathetic melancholy will listen to his story and then jump off with him!

Of course, this story intends, in a tongue-in-cheek way, to show what these personality types might do if they are not in connection with their Creator. What if the redeemed phlegmatic, naturally calm, tried to pour oil on troubled waters; the choleric, naturally strong, offered some practical help; the melancholy, naturally sensitive, listened lovingly to his story; and the sanguine, naturally cheerful, started a praise service? If they worked together in Spirit-led community, and if they praised God together, sharing times He’d gotten them through some hard spot, then, according to the rest of Psalm 69:32, the lonely heart would revive. Now there’s a reward for some humble, shared praising of the God who is bigger than all of us, but near enough to hold us!

Proverbs 22:4 and 29:23: “The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life.” “A man’s pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor.” It is a truism, even in contemporary society, that being humble will actually bring honor. That’s where much false humility comes from: “Oh, no, you shouldn’t have. ... It was nothing. ... No problem.”

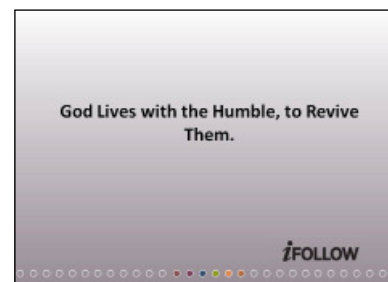


“I didn’t do much,” we say, hoping to be contradicted. James says to choose the lower seat, and the host will give you a better one. It’s doubtful that he meant we should do it for that reason. Hang back, waiting for someone to notice and draw you forward. People can usually tell when we have that attitude. If we do succeed in fooling them, it won’t be for long, and it won’t happen next time. In fact, it’s likely to backfire.

That said, this is a promise of God. Jesus, the Bible teaches, gained even more honor and exaltation than He already had, if that’s possible, because He willingly reduced Himself to the lowest of the low in order to save us.

Humility, with reverence for God, brings “riches, honor and life.” This is one of those texts that’s a little confusing on first sight. Most of the truly humble people we know are not, in fact, rich. They don’t necessarily live longer, and their faces aren’t in the news. What kind of riches, honor, and life? This must be the treasure one stores in heaven, the abundant life Jesus promises, the honor of knowing one’s name is in the Book of Life. As for long life? Well, you can’t beat eternity!

Isaiah 57:15: This is a beautiful passage. “For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and 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.’ It’s amazing, when you think about it. The unimaginably great God, the “high and exalted One,” who dwells in a place we can’t begin to imagine, in “light unapproachable,” (1 Tim. 6:16) humbles Himself to come and *live with* the lowly, or humble ones, the contrite, or repentant ones. Why? So that He can revive our hearts and spirits. What more is there to say?



Matthew 18:4: Jesus knew we understand best with good audio-visual helps. When He wanted to be sure His disciples understood what true humility was, He called a child to Him. The Greek word is a neuter-gender term, so it could have been either a boy or a girl. It is translated in *Strong’s Concordance* as a “childling” or infant. (“Infant” did not mean baby in arms, as we use it in North America. As recently as the late 19th century the term meant a small child. And in Europe today infant schools, for example, include preschools and primary schools, and the term may be used for children up to seven or eight years old.) It was a little one. Why is this important?



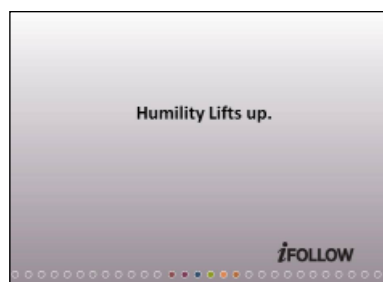
When Jesus said, “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the **greatest in the kingdom of heaven**,” English doesn’t make it clear enough that He meant a **small** child. Our children are born into a sinful world, and it is a shockingly short time before they begin to display tendencies that are anything but humble. But a little one who has been

loved and cared for, who still trusts that the world is going to be a good place, a toddler who smiles the grumpies out of every tired adult in the grocery store, a preschooler whose hug makes the cares of the world melt away, that's an example worth emulating.

The problem is, *we* know better. We haven't always been loved and cared for. We know very well the world is often not a good place at all. We even know what this same child looks like when she's tired and cross, when she doesn't get her way, when she doesn't feel like sharing. Where, then, do we get smiles and hugs that banish grumpies and melt the cares of the world?

It seems that the concept of humbling oneself "as this child," might begin with forgetting what we know. Go back. Turn back the pages, look under all the practical things we learned on the way to adulthood. Remember what we knew before that. Remember when we were certain that we had come from God and were going to God, and He always, always loved us, no matter what. Look at the world as a new and exciting place, full of adventure and mystery. Look into the faces of the other dwellers here and watch for the twinkle that gives away that deep inside, they know, too. Smile. Wait your turn. Hug people. Share. Then, believe it or not, God will treat us as "the greatest in the kingdom." This is the way Kingdom Citizens act, He says. They love. Because humility equals love. And then the promises start to come true, right before your eyes.

A cluster of reference to the same promise—Matthew 23:12, Luke 14:11, Luke 18:14 and James 4:10: "Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (Matt. 23:12, Luke 14:11, 18:14) Jesus said this a lot! "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." (James 4:10) "Exalt" just means to lift up. We will be uplifted. Every time we return the smile of a child, every time we hug when we felt like turning away, every time we share something precious, we can feel the beginning of the tilt, the change, the realignment. The paradigm shift. Smile because God loves you.



1 Peter 5:5-7: Peter knew about paradigm shifts. Did he ever! He knew about brashness and conceit, and he knew about pride going before a fall, and he knew about humbling himself. Peter could have taught Judas a thing or two, if Judas had been disposed to learn. On the night they both betrayed their Lord, Judas gave up. Peter flung himself headlong on the ground where Jesus had humbled himself, and did likewise. After that, he learned to feed lambs.

Peter's letters to the church are powerful examples of the fine art of humble leadership. At the end of the first one, in 1 Peter 5:5, 6a we already read one of his exhortations to humility. Now let's read the rewards, in verses 6 and 7. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, **that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.**"

Now, at first, this may seem yet another repetition of what is apparently one of the guid-

ing principles of God's New World Order; nice guys and gals will finish first!

"At the proper time" indicates that sometimes there are rewards right here and now, such as the immediate uplift of sharing giggles with a child, and sometimes we have to wait for blessings. And one blessing in particular, we know we have to keep waiting for. Peter may be speaking, at least in part, of the indescribable uplift we'll receive when Jesus comes back for us. Then, the humble will **really** be exalted, to their own amazement, because truly humble people have learned to know themselves very well. They know they are in God's kingdom at all entirely because of His grace, and not because they played the humble game best. That's when the crown-tossing and the falling on faces and the crying will begin. Or continue. It may take awhile for God to dry every tear. . .

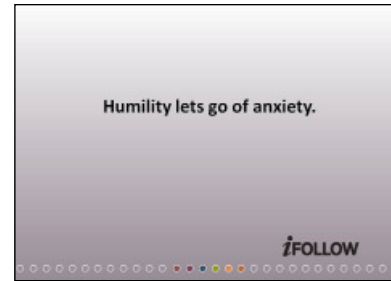
But the next verse is a surprise. We've all heard it a million times—"Casting all your cares on Him, for He cares for you," is probably the most familiar rendition. Have we realized that beloved verse was in this context? It's part of the same sentence! "Humble yourselves under that mighty, tender hand, and cast your anxieties and worries on Him, knowing He'll lift you up." He'll lift us up in His hand the minute we do that, but we might have to wait for uplifting in the eyes of others. That's OK. We won't mind what anyone else thinks of us if we can learn to live our lives under that hand, like a sleeping baby.

Practical Application

We live in a time of extreme individualism. To a greater degree than at any other time in human history, North American society today values individual rights and responsibility over all other values. "To your ownself be true." The concept of "the greatest love" being love of self. Hyper concern about individual freedom and responsibility, and a growing belief that responsibility for others is a suspect category. These are all indicators of how emphasis on self has become more pronounced in contemporary society than ever before.

The spiritual discipline of humility is a call for Christians to stand against this trend in our society today. Christians are called to put less emphasis on self, to work to become less self-centered than the average person in our society. Christians should be the first to question our opinions instead of insisting on them. Christians should be the first to take responsibility for others in need and put aside concerns about enforcing personal responsibility on others in order to reduce expenditures or for other economic or political reasons. Christians should be the first to defer to others in public debate or disagreements—not to let go of their hold on truth, but to publicly allow for the possibility that their interpretation, their opinion might be wrong, even if they hold to it completely.

When Christians insist on strongly holding their own in an individualistic world, "standing up for truth," they actually run the risk of bearing a false witness in the eyes of nonbeliev-



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ers. The Barna Research Group has documented this problem in contemporary surveys. See the book *unChristian*. The lack of humility may cause Christians to think they are conveying a message for God when, in fact, they are presenting a false image of God's character. Remember the Pharisees thought they were doing God's holy will when they crucified the Messiah. When devout people ignore the discipline of humility, they set themselves up for the worst kind of spiritual failure.

The blog "Be Inspired Every Day" suggests the following steps in the practice of Christian humility:

- 1. Be grateful for your assets.** In humility, we recognize the great qualities and assets that we have, but we don't boast about them. Instead, we are grateful for them as gifts we have been given. Think about all the things you like about yourself and those things others like about you. Do you have intelligence, motivation, charm or some other great qualities? Express gratitude for those qualities and you will find humility.
- 2. Be grateful for your challenges and shortcomings.** If you struggle with feeling that you are less motivated, less attractive or less intelligent than others, be grateful for the perspective and learning experience that apparent shortcoming offers you. Life is about growth and change. Every challenge we face builds our character and our assets. When we express gratitude for the challenges we face, those challenges lose their power over our perception of ourselves and become building blocks we can grow on.
- 3. Do not compare yourself with others.** Human beings are the most diverse and variable creatures on the planet. Comparing one person to another is like comparing apples to green beans. It is this uniqueness that allows us to learn and grow from one another. You were created like no one else in the universe. You were created with a purpose that is shared with no one else. When you compare yourself with someone else, you could not possibly see what God sees in you.
- 4. Be teachable.** The key to wisdom is to be teachable, to realize that you do not know everything, that many things you believe to be true may be false, and that you have much to learn from others.
- 5. Practice kindness anonymously.** When you practice kindness, you transcend the high-anxiety world of selfishness and experiencing the fulfilling sense of oneness with others. When you practice kindness anonymously, you share the vision of your kindness only with God without the distractions of pride and self-importance which may result from sharing your kindness publicly.
- 6. Loosen your expectations.** No matter how good you are at making plans or predicting outcomes, no matter how strong your belief is that something should be a certain way, life will often produce results you did not expect or did not want. When we hold tight to expectations, we become easily frustrated, disappointed, angry and humiliated. When we take ourselves and our expectations less seriously, we can more easily handle what life hands us and move out of God's way as we are guided on our unique life journey.

Handouts in this Package

1. Characteristics of Humility
2. A Bible Study on James 4:6-12



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Renovare is a Christian parachurch organization devoted to providing information and education about spiritual disciplines: www.renovare.org/

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Discussion Questions

1. What preconceptions of humility do you have? What synonyms would you list for it?
2. What extremes have you seen at work in your life or the lives of others?
3. Toward which extreme do you tend to go off the track? How do you safeguard against this?
4. Tell about a time when someone's humility was a blessing to you.
5. Talk about childhood modeling in your life and how that affects your understanding and practice of humility today.

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Discussion
Questions

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Group Activity

Activity 1

Purpose: To ponder humility and self-love.

Preparation: Give each person writing materials. Put this on the board or in a hand-out sheet:

M. Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, wrote love is “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” (p.81) Notice Peck says to nurture one’s own spiritual life too. From the early Old Testament to today’s psychologists, we are urged to “love ourselves.” We have a hard time knowing what that means, tending to be either self-indulgent or self-mortifying and self-defeating. Write your thoughts and reactions to this concept.

Assignment: Divide into small groups. Each person will first write privately, then share what thoughts they wish, in their groups. Some possible questions: Does a humble person love himself or herself? Could Peck’s definition of love be a safety against the extremes mentioned? If so, how? Which way do your personal definitions and actions of self-love tend to go off track? What can you do to keep yourself in the center of God’s will on this subject? What does it mean to “extend yourself”? What are some ways someone has extended himself or herself to help you? What were your responses to this? How do leadership and humility fit together?

Time: Ten minutes for private writing, 15 for sharing, 15 to 20 minutes for sharing with the group as a whole.

Group Bible Study

Purpose: To study and find promises as rewards of humility.

Preparation: Each will need a Bible. You will need space for small groups, each of which will need a board or poster and markers. Tables would be best. If the group is not too large, this could be done together.

Assignment: Have the group(s) take the whole passage, Job 22:21-29, and pull it apart verse by verse, listing all the promises they can find on a board.

Questions to get started:

1. What are some of Eliphaz' other descriptions of what it means to yield to God?
2. What does he mean when he suggests trading our gold for God's gold?
3. What relation do casting down the face in humility and lifting up the face (v. 26) bear to each other?
4. What do you think of verse 28, or even the startling thought in verse 30?

Time: Allow 15 minutes for finding and listing promises, then 15 or more for sharing insights and reactions.

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Group
Activities

**Spiritual
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Handout 1

Characteristics of Humility

Willing to be smaller, less smart, less able, less beautiful, so someone else can be bigger, smarter, capable, and beautiful.

Can listen to others' views without defensiveness of one's own beliefs.

Goes above and beyond, follows the Spirit.

Can speak confidently and without defensiveness.

Equals love to the nth degree.

Can be repentant.

Brings peace.

Boasts in God, and shares the blessing.

Brings honor to others without consideration for one's own honor.

Lives with God, Who revives the humble.

Approaches life like a little child.

Lifts up others and the community at large.

Lets go of anxiety.

"Love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." (M. Scott Peck)

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HANDOUT

**Spiritual
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Handout 2

A Bible Study on James 4:6-12

There is one passage on humility that contains some odd things on first reading, but is full of rich spirituality on closer study. It is found in James 4:6-12, given here in its entirety, one verse at a time, with study questions. The promises are italicized.

Verse 6: “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

What kinds of grace does God give to the humble?

Why is it “greater”?

Verse 7: “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Write about your feelings when you realize the devil will flee from you.

What does this have to do with humility?

Can you determine when this is more true in your life, when it is less true, and what makes the difference?

Verse 8: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

This verse seems somewhat in opposition to itself. Does a sinner or double-minded person draw near to God? Or are we all sinners and double-minded?

If so, what does it mean to you that God will draw near to you even when you are a sinner and double-minded person?

Which are we instructed to do first—draw near to God, or cleanse and purify?

Verse 9: “Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.”

Here is where it starts to seem hard to understand. Have you met people who took this passage to mean Christians should be gloomy and sorrowful to show they are aware of their sins? Do you think this is what James means?

Does verse nine appear to be general counsel to all, or specific counsel to the sinners and double-minded people in verse eight?

Verse 10: “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

What part does sorrow and mourning play in repentance?

When is it turned to joy? When does God exalt, or uplift, the repentant one?

Verse 11: “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.”

If someone were to say to you that you need to “be miserable and mourn and weep,” that your attitude of celebration in Jesus seems to imply that you take your sin lightly, what would you reply?

Is there ever a time to correct each other?

How can we be humble while doing so?

Verse 12: “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?”

Why is it comforting to know that there is one Lawgiver and Judge?

What can you do to prevent yourself from trying to take over that job?

Write about what you learn from this passage about Christian humility. What are some practical things you can do to develop your capacity for humility?

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