



# The Character of a Disciple

## Humility



### Introduction

Everything about His life teaches the meaning of humility. The King of all the earth was born in a stable. The wisest man to ever live was trained to work with His hands as a carpenter. He whose wisdom exceeded Solomon's was a friend of fishermen. He had no house of His own, no business, no wife or children. He took pity on those who were sick and washed the feet of his students. Jesus was humble.

Humility was woven into the fabric of His life. He wants to impart that quality to you. This study will help you understand humility and how you can put it into practice in your life.

### Understanding Humility

To the Greek philosophers, humility was a weakness. Many modern day thinkers equate being humble with lack of dignity or worth. Jesus, on the other hand, placed humility as an essential virtue. It was a key word he used to describe himself.

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

**Matthew 11:29**

- Circle the two activities to which Jesus invites us.
- *A yoke is a tool used to link a laboring animal to a useful implement, like a plow. Jesus invites us to put on His yoke and pull with Him.*
- Underline the two words Jesus uses to describe himself.
- *If you want to learn humility, Jesus is a good place to start. In fact He invites us to learn from Him.*

Paul describes the humility of Jesus in the following way:

*<sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!*

**Philippians 2:5-8**

- In verse 5, circle the thing in Jesus that should be in us also.
- In verse 6, underline the nature with which Jesus began.
- In verse 6, draw a box around that which Jesus did not hang onto (grasp).
- In verse 7 underline the nature that Jesus took.
- In verse 8 circle the quality that accompanied his obedience.

Jesus willingly gave up the best of heaven to live and die for our sake. His love for us was enabled by his humility. It was because he loved us that he humbled himself. And, because He humbled himself he was able to express His love for us by dying on the cross in our place. His love and humility are intertwined together.

Humility is often defined in negative terms:

- Not proud
- Not haughty
- Not arrogant
- Not assertive

While those statements may reflect a portion of the meaning of humility, looking at the life of Jesus reveals much more. Humility is not only what we refrain from but also what we do.

This verse describes the descent of Jesus from the place of equality with God to increasingly more demeaning positions. He took on human likeness, became a servant, submitted to death of the lowest kind, a criminals death.

Perhaps the best description of humility is found in the verses immediately preceding the example of Jesus' humility.

<sup>3</sup> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* <sup>4</sup> *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

**Philippians 2:3-4**

- Circle two attitudes we should avoid.
- *Selfish ambition in the Greek comes from a root word meaning **hireling** or **one seeking to win a following**. A hireling is one who is concerned with the increase that comes to him rather the welfare of the employer. It is a self-focused person.*
- Underline how we are to consider others.
- Draw a box around the one whose interests we should help.
- **Why do you think that looking to the interests of others is a mark of humility?**

---

***When it comes to humility, self-exaltation spoils everything***

***W. L. Walker***

---

## Why be Humble?

The natural question for any thinking person to ask is why should I be humble? The Bible gives us some good answers.

*Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.*

**Proverbs 22:4**

- Underline the three results of humility and the fear of the Lord.
- Draw a circle around the one outcome of humility (either wealth, honor or life) that you would most like to see in your life.

If you humbly put the interests of others ahead of your own, you will experience wealth, honor and life. It may not happen immediately, but over the course of time all three will come to you.

*For this is what the high and lofty One says--he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

**Isaiah 57:15**

- Underline the kind of person with whom God chooses to live.
- **Lowly**, as translated in this verse also means **humble** in the Hebrew.

God singles out humble people as the ones with whom He likes to dwell.

Everyone is better than you in one way or another. While you may have better abilities in one area of life, that other person will have better abilities in your area of weakness. The key to esteeming others is to identify their area of strength.

In one sense, looking for the reward from humility can become a self-centered activity. If I focus on the reward, then I am really focused on myself.

But, if I am focused on the lives of others, doing the thing that pleases God, then He will take care of the reward. It is not something I have to seek.



Besides choosing to dwell with the humble person, the Lord also wants to help the one who is humble.

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

**James 4:10**

- Circle how a person is to become humble.
- Underline how the Lord will help the humble person.

Another benefit of humility has to do with guidance.

*He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*

**Psalms 25:9**

- Circle the nature of the guidance God gives to the humble.
- Underline the thing that He teaches the humble.
- *Receiving guidance and being taught the way to go are essential instructions for one wanting to be a disciple.*

Paul uses a conflict in the Corinthian church to describe another reason for humility.

*<sup>6</sup> Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. <sup>7</sup> For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

**1 Corinthians 4:6-7**

- *Paul asks three questions in verse 7. Each question has a reasonable response.*
- **"For who makes you different from anyone else?"** can be answered only with the word "God". God is the one who made us each different.
- **"What do you have that you did not receive?"** is answered with the word "nothing". Everything and every ability that we have was either present at birth or came to us because of God's grace and kindness.
- **And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?** has no reasonable answer. *If what I have is all a gift, then I have no reason to boast.*

So if you were to ask him, Paul would say a reason to be humble is because you cannot take credit for any of your abilities. God gave them to you as a gift.

## The Problem of Pride

Scripture makes it clear that pride and humility are opposites. Pride always has self as the focus. Humility never is focused on self. Pride seeks to look good compared to others. Humility seeks to make others look good.

When a person becomes proud, rather than humble they find themselves in direct opposition to God.

Notice that humility is not a gift, nor is it something that God does for you. Each one is to humble themselves.

A hard working person might be tempted to say "the things I have and the position I have attained is purely a result of my own efforts." But a deeper inspection of the things we take for granted might lead you to a different conclusion. For instance:

- > **Who gives a healthy body?**
- > **Who gives the ability to think clearly?**
- > **Who gives the ability to make wise decisions?**
- > **Who gives you favorable circumstances?**
- > **Who taught you to read?**
- > **Who taught you the skills you have?**

When you take into consideration the multitude of factors needed for success, everything we achieve is dependent upon the grace of God in our lives.

John the Baptist had a humble attitude when he heard that more people were all going to Jesus.



John 3:27-30

*But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

**James 4:6**

- Circle the one God opposes.
- Underline the one who receives grace.

<sup>5</sup> *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* <sup>6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

**1 Peter 5:5-6**

- Draw a box around the spiritual clothing we are to put on.
- Circle the one God opposes.
- Underline the one who receives grace.
- In verse 6, circle the command.
- Underline the thing God will do to one who humbles himself.

Jesus states the principle in a different way.

*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

**Matthew 23:12**

- Circle the one who will be humbled.
- Underline the one who will be exalted.

There is a strong desire in every person to be recognized, praised and exalted. We all want to be looked up to and admired. **So Jesus' words become a real test of faith.** We can both believe Him and choose the path of humbly seeking the best for others, or, we can ignore His warning and seek our own exaltation. The outcome is certain. It is dependent upon the choice we make.

## A Next Step

Jesus gives an object lesson to illustrate how one can grow in humility.

<sup>2</sup> *He called a little child and had him stand among them.* <sup>3</sup> *And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* <sup>4</sup> *Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 18:2-4**

- Circle in verse 4 how we are to humble ourselves.
- Underline the rank one has who humbles himself as a child.

In the world of adults, children are physically, socially and intellectually inferior. They are dependent upon adults for food, clothing and shelter. They have nothing to offer except child-sized efforts. Children delight in imitating adults but can never attain to the accomplishments of an adult. They know their abilities and live within them. They perfectly reflect humility. Jesus says those who become like children are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is the perfect illustration of the outcome of one who is humble. Paul describes the result of Jesus' humility in Philippians 2. (You may want to refer to Philippians 2:5-8 at the beginning of this study for the context).



<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11



We know from other scripture that Jesus is not saying that humility is the key to getting into heaven. Eternal life and entry into the kingdom is a result of faith in the risen Lord.

However, it is reasonable to assume that those who place their faith in Jesus will soon have a desire to share in His humble nature.

Humility is a result of salvation, not a requirement for salvation.

Though he doesn't use the word "humble", Paul provides some final encouragement concerning humility.

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

**Romans 12:3**

- Underline how we are not to think of ourselves.
- Circle the kind of judgment we are to use in thinking about ourselves.

When we get caught up thinking about ourselves, we run the risk of missing humility.

## Summary

From the verses in this study write a brief summary of each section of the study.

**How would you describe humility?**

**Why should we be Humble?**

**Why should we be concerned about pride?**

**What are some steps we can take toward humble living?**

## Application

**Has God indicated some area of need in your life concerning humility?**

**State your need.**

**What is your plan for addressing that need?**

**How will you check up on yourself?**

Paul is not saying to think of our self as worthless. Each of us is of so much value that Jesus was willing to die in our palce. Humility is not thinking of yourself as worthless. Rather humility is simply not thinking of yourself.

## Writing a Summary

It is always a good exercise to attempt to summarize key thoughts from a study into concise statements. Try to make your comments fit in the box.

**Don't give in to the temptation to not write down an application.**

The benefit of God's Word is not how much you know it, but how much you live it. Application is the key to incorporation of God's Word into your life.