

## *Be Humble --Trust God Instead of your own Ambition*

### *1 Peter 5:5-6*

The first time I went bowling was in junior high school. I remember the bowling alley. I remember the people I was with, none of whom had any experience. I remember especially the classmate who swung back the ball and let go, hitting me so hard that I didn't think I would ever want to bowl again. In fact, I wasn't sure I would ever walk again. But I learned some lessons about bowling that day. I learned that the goal of bowling is to stay on the wooden lane in the middle and to stay out of the gutters on either side.

Life is like bowling. On one side is the gutter of pride and on the other side is the gutter of low self-esteem. Down the middle is the lane of correct self-understanding. To avoid the gutter of low self-esteem the Bible repeatedly tells us how much God loves us. It also tells us that we have eternal value and that God has positive plans for our lives. To keep out of the gutter of pride the Bible tells us to be humble.

Humility is difficult to describe and almost impossible to define. Even the dictionary definitions seem inadequate to me. Our English word "humble" is related to the word "humus", which is the word for dirt. The idea is that to be humble is to have a low perspective that looks up at other people. Actually, humility is better demonstrated than talked about.

Humility is being under-impressed with ourselves and over-impressed with others. It is building up other people rather than building up ourselves. In truth, humility is not thinking less of ourselves; it is hardly thinking of ourselves at all.

In many ways, humility assumes that there are good things about us. Humility is often rooted in strength, not weakness. Humility may grow out of the soil of self-confidence, power, competence, strength, good looks and overall success. From

the position of strength the humble person chooses not to brag, not to be proud and not to flaunt success.

Often the apparent lack of humility is a cover-up for weakness, insecurity, incompetence and failure. Those who lack humility are in the gutter of low self-esteem and are trying to crawl out by pulling others down and maybe stepping on their shoulders to get out.

When St. Peter wrote to suffering first century Christians, you would not think he would exhort them to be humble. After all, they were persecuted, discouraged and going through the toughest of times. But Peter wanted them to bowl strikes—to be victorious—in their Christian lives. That is why he taught them to stay out of both gutters in the alley of human experience. His earlier principles are most about avoiding the gutter of low self-esteem and having hope in Christ. But he didn't want them to get out of one gutter and cross over to the other gutter. So, in 1 Peter 5:5-6 he gives the seventeenth of his 20 principles on successful living in difficult times: Be humble and trust God instead of your own ambition. Here's how he tells us to be humble:

*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." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

***The Bible repeatedly tells us how much God loves us. It also tells us that we have eternal value and that God has positive plans for our lives.***

The first way to be humble is to submit to maturity. Peter had previously talked about the responsibility of elders, telling those with experience and maturity to use their leadership to bless and benefit others. Now he explains that "*in the same way*" elders are to use their experience for the good of others, younger Christians are to sub-

mit to the maturity of those who are older. So he says in 1 Peter 5:5, “*Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.*”

Peter touches on an obvious example of potential lack of humility. Sometimes young people think they know more than those who are older. Some children think they are smarter than their parents. Newcomers may act like they are better than those who have been around for a long time. New employees may think they can do it better than the old-timers. Our generation often assumes that we are superior to all previous generations.

All this may be true. Some children are a lot smarter than their parents. Sometimes those who are new to a business have insights after three days that those who have been there for thirty years can't see. Some people in the early years of their Christian lives soar in terms of their spiritual relationship with God eclipsing those who have been Christians for most of a lifetime.

But the Christian starting point is always submission. As Christians, those who are younger are to respect those who are older. Those who are newer submit to those who have been around longer. If we are children, we submit to our parents. This is not an absolute rule without exceptions; this is a principle for how we approach those who are mature with humility.

Let's take humility test Number One. Think of three people who are more mature than you are and probably older than you are. These are people to whom you would go with respect, seek advice and will do what they tell you. If you can immediately think of the names of those persons, you get an “H” for “Humility”. This is a very good grade.

I remember one Christian who was asked to name someone he respects to whom he would go for advice. He thought for a moment and replied, “I can't think of anyone.” In other words, he rated himself at the top. He assumed he knew more than anyone else. He would submit to no one else. He flunked the humility test and, as we read on, Peter says that is a dangerous place to be. So, be humble. Submit to maturity.

The second way to be humble is to serve others. Peter doesn't want to give the false impression that humility is only for the young, so he says,

*“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.”*

The clothing we wear says a lot about what we're doing and how we do it. The Greek expression translated “*clothe yourselves*” refers to the kind of apron that is tied together with strings in the back. It is a worker's apron. It is for serving others. It is for getting dirty. Proud people put on fancy dress clothing. Humble people put on work aprons. If you serve somebody else you need to be dressed the way a servant is dressed.

There are two biblical pictures that come to mind here and they are both pictures of Jesus. For an eternity before that first Christmas Jesus was the Son of God who created the heavens and the earth. He is described in the Bible as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. When he was born into a human family he was still as much God as ever before, but he chose to come into a home where the dad was a carpenter. We picture Jesus putting on a carpenter's apron and taking orders to build tables and chairs, cabinets and doors. The Master Craftsman of the universe wore an apron and built three-legged stools.

The second biblical picture is toward the end of Jesus' life when he hosted his last dinner meal with his friends and followers. Jesus took a towel and wrapped it around him as a servant's apron, took a bowl of water, got down on the floor and washed his followers' feet. This was the lowest, most undesirable job for any servant or slave in that culture.

Jesus was described in Philippians 2:6-8 in the following manner:

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

I was with a group of Christian leaders at a conference center on the South Island of New Zealand. The conference center didn't have enough staff to serve the meals so the host stood up in the dining room and asked for eight volun-

teers to set tables, serve food and clear the dishes. Before he finished asking at least twenty hands shot up to volunteer. These people were leaders. They had come a long way. They had already paid for somebody else to do the things they were now volunteering to do. They were humble and they were anxious to serve.

If you want to be humble, serve others. Offer to work in the church nursery. Volunteer to deliver Meals on Wheels. Sign up to help out at the next AIDS Walk. Ask to take care of your neighbors' dog when they are away on vacation this summer. Think of something that you don't need to do and offer to do it. Think of something below your perceived rank in society. Think of something that will bless and help someone else that no one else wants to do.

If our first responses are, "I'm too good for that" or "Been there; done that!" or "Let someone else have a turn" or "I have better things to do than be somebody else's servant"—consider yourself proud. You just threw a gutter ball. It's time to get out of the gutter of pride and humbly serve others.

The third way to be humble is to fear God.

Read carefully Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:5, words that are based on Proverbs 3:34: "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" God doesn't like pride. Pride is sin. Pride is selfish. Pride is arrogant. God is disgusted with proud people and their proud behavior. So much so that God actually opposes the activities and the attitudes of those who are proud.

The way I figure it, I need God on my side. The last thing I need is to have God against me. Life is hard enough without God trying to trip me up. Imagine what it must be like when God is determined to squeeze the pride out of you, when God turns against your business, your dreams, your relationships, your happiness in life. How much better would it be to have God on our side helping us out, giving us direction and granting gifts of grace to relieve our suffering, solve our problems and help us succeed!

When we choose pride over humility we are choosing to make it alone in life without the help of God. We are communicating to God that we are smart enough, good enough, strong enough, rich enough and successful enough to make it on our own without God. There could not be a worse mistake to make. When we go on our own and lose our health, our wealth, our hope and our happiness we realize that we were foolishly proud and have turned our lives into unnecessary disaster.

Should we fear displeasing God and triggering his opposition with our pride? Absolutely yes! Just the thought of turning God against us should help us become and stay humble.

Let me make this personal. One thing that scares me most in life is preaching every week. Not a weekend comes that I don't tell God I'm "dead meat" if he doesn't help me out. I dread the thought of having to teach the Bible on my own. If ever I am tempted to think I am good enough or experienced enough to pull this off by myself I slap my head and realize that I fear the prospect of ever losing God's grace and triggering God's opposition. What goes for preaching also goes for parenting, marriage, health, money and everything else in life!

Isn't it the same for you? It must be! To realize that "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*"

*If you want to be humble,  
serve others.*

The fourth way to be humble is to trust God. This is the other side of fearing God. They are actually complementary and meant to go together.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:6, "*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*"

The expectation of every Christian is that God will eventually make everything good. If we quit trusting ourselves and leave the ultimate outcomes of life to God he will make sure that we succeed. He will eventually lift us up to a height that we never could have achieved on our own. In other words, if we leave the eventual rewards of life to God we will come out further ahead than we ever

could have by ourselves. This is the same idea that is taught by St. Paul in Romans 8:28 where he says that “*we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*”

Do you believe this? In the depths of your heart and mind do you really believe that if you are a humble servant of God you will come out ahead in a way that you would never experience if you are self-sufficient and proud? If you truly trust God for the outcomes of life then that is a major mark of your humility.

But, when does all this happen? Let me be totally honest with you. The promise of God is a guarantee for eternity, not for time. God promises that on the other side of this life he will bring everything together for an ultimate good. In other words, God will make sure that we are eternally lifted up to a success that rewards in heaven our humility on earth. We will have eternal happiness and joy that cannot currently be described or understood. In bowling terms, we will have a score of 300 in heaven.

But let me make a more immediate observation. I have repeatedly seen God give previews of heaven to thousands of people on earth. I have watched humble Christians serve others and trust God and be lifted up and honored by God in peace, joy, happiness, relationships, job, friends, business and many other ways. It is not a guarantee, but God does it all the time.

I am intrigued by the Bible’s choice of words in 1 Peter 5:6 because we are told to humble ourselves: “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*” The implication is that proud people just don’t make it in life. Sooner or later pride comes around and gets you. Pride is like a corrosive acid on the soul or like mildew on all of life. So, those who insist on thinking they are better than they are, those who want to be served rather than serving, those who are arrogant toward God, those who are proud will be humbled eventually by their own self-destruction. The far better way is to just humble yourself. Don’t wait for life to humble you. Don’t provoke God to humble you. Humble yourselves!

How do we humble ourselves so that God can honor us and lift us up?

*Submit to maturity.*

*Serve others*

*Fear God*

*Trust God*

*Our great God,*

*We thank you for who you are and for what you*

*do in our lives.*

*We apologize to you for our pride and our arrogance.*

*We are sorry for the times when we assumed ourselves to be*

*better than others.*

*Lord, help us in this matter of humbling ourselves.*

*Don’t let pride take us down.*

*And, God, please don’t be our opponent. Be our*

*helper and friend. We look forward with great joy to your*

*hand reaching in, touching us, lifting us up and giving to us*

*present and eternal victory in Jesus*

*Christ.*

*Amen.*

*Faith Matters®* is the Broadcast Ministry of Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church

6630 Shady Oak Road

Eden Prairie MN 55344

952-944-6300

[www.faithmatters.fm](http://www.faithmatters.fm)

©Leith Anderson