

Thoughts on Humility: Biblical and Other

While I know a variety of definitions – secular and biblical – most days I question whether I have much real understanding of biblical humility.

The noted preacher, Charles Spurgeon, defined humility as, “*(making) a right estimate of one’s self.*” Honest, good, bad, and ugly

The 2 explanations that follow help explain what a “right estimate” of myself would be:

To be humble, we must have faith that God will lead us in the best way to live and what to avoid in temptation. We are to put complete trust in the Lord and not deceive ourselves with vanity or lust. We should lean on the understanding, wisdom, and divinity of God to show us the righteous path through prayer, meditation, fasting, and other faithful practices. In order to do this, we must have the humility to open our hearts and withdraw from the arrogance of our ego.

When we come to Christ as sinners, we must come in humility. We acknowledge that we are paupers and beggars who come with nothing to offer Him but our sin and our need for salvation. We recognize our lack of merit and our complete inability to save ourselves. Then when He offers the grace and mercy of God, we accept it in humble gratitude and commit our lives to Him and to others. We “die to self” so that we can live as new creations in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). We never forget that He has exchanged our worthlessness for His infinite worth, and our sin for His righteousness. The life we now live, we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us ([Galatians 2:20](#)). That is true humility.

Biblical humility is not only necessary to enter the kingdom, it is also necessary to be great in the kingdom ([Matthew 20:26-27](#)). Here Jesus is our model. Just as He did not come to be served, but to serve, so must we commit ourselves to serving others, considering their interests above our own ([Philippians 2:3](#)). This attitude precludes selfish ambition, conceit, and the strife that comes with self-justification and self-defense. Jesus was not ashamed to humble Himself as a servant ([John 13:1-16](#)), even to death on the cross ([Philippians 2:8](#)). In His humility, He was always obedient to the Father and so should the humble Christian be willing to put aside all selfishness and submit in obedience to God and His Word. True humility produces godliness, contentment, and security.

Bible References regarding humility

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;” (Prov. 3:5) is an excellent summation of the biblical meaning of humility.

To be humble, we must have faith that God will lead us in the best way to live and what to avoid in temptation. We are to put complete trust in the Lord and not deceive ourselves with vanity or lust. We should lean on the understanding, wisdom, and divinity of God to show us the righteous path through prayer, meditation, fasting, and other faithful practices. In order to do this, we must have the initial requirement of humility to open our hearts and withdraw from the arrogance of our ego.

"Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life." Prov. 22:4
Not only does being humble consist of trusting God and following his will, but furthermore fearing the consequences of neglecting His commands for truth, love, work ethic, mercy, and beyond. Humility is recognizing the magnificent power of God and the potential retribution He will condemn upon us if we do not aim our purpose towards righteousness.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [Philippians 2:3-11](#)

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” [James 4:6](#)

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." [Luke 14:11](#)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. [1 Peter 5:6](#)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. [Colossians 3:12-14](#)

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. [Proverbs 11:2](#)

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. [Proverbs 18:12](#)

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If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. [2 Chronicles 7:14](#)

Biblical humility:

The Bible describes humility as meekness, lowliness, and absence of self. Jesus said that those who are “poor in spirit” would have the kingdom of heaven ([Matthew 5:3](#)). Being poor in spirit means that only those who admit to an absolute bankruptcy of spiritual worth will inherit eternal life. Therefore, humility is a prerequisite for the Christian.

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God has promised to give grace to the humble, while He opposes the proud ([Proverbs 3:34](#); [1 Peter 5:5](#)). Therefore, we must confess and put away pride. If we exalt ourselves, we place ourselves in opposition to God who will, in His grace and for our own good, humble us. But if we humble ourselves, God gives us more grace and exalts us ([Luke 14:11](#)). Along with Jesus, Paul is also to be our example of humility. In spite of the great gifts and understanding he had received, Paul saw himself as the “least of the apostles” and the “chief of sinners” ([1 Timothy 1:15](#); [1 Corinthians 15:9](#)). Like Paul, the truly humble will glory in the grace of God and in the cross, not in self-righteousness ([Philippians 3:3-9](#)).

Twelve Ways to Humble Yourself

1. Routinely confess your sin to God. **(Luke 18:9-14)** All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. However, too few of us have a routine practice of rigorous self-honesty examination. Weekly, even daily, review of our heart and behavior, coupled with confession to God, is an essential practice of humility.
2. Acknowledge your sin to others. **(James 3:2, James 5:16)** Humility before God is not complete unless there is also humility before man. A true test of our willingness to humble ourselves is being willing to share with others the weaknesses we confess to God. Wisdom, however, dictates that we do so with others that we trust.
3. Take wrong patiently. **(1 Peter 3:8-17)** This has been a difficult one for me. When something is unjust I want to react and rectify it. However, patiently responding to the unjust accusations and actions of others demonstrates our strength of godly character and provides an opportunity to put on humility.
4. Actively submit to authority...the good and the bad! **(1 Peter 2:18)** Our culture does not value submission; rather it promotes individualism. How purposely and actively do you work on submission to those whom God has placed as authorities in your life? Doing so is a good way to humble yourself.
5. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously. **(Proverbs 10:17, 12:1)** In the Phoenix area, a local East valley pastor was noted for graciously receiving any negative feedback or correction offered. He would simply say "thank you for caring enough to share that with me, I will pray about it and get back to you." Look for the kernel of truth in what people offer you, even if it comes from a dubious source. Always pray, "Lord, what are you trying to show me through this?"
6. Accept a lowly place. **(Proverbs 25:6,7)** If you find yourself wanting to sit at the head table, wanting others to recognize your contribution or become offended when others are honored or chosen, then pride is present. Purpose to support others being recognized, rather than you. Accept and look for the lowly place; it is the place of humility.
7. Purposely associate with people of lower state than you. **(Luke 7:36-39)** Jesus was derided by the Pharisees for socializing with the poor and those of lowly state. Our culture is very status conscious and people naturally want to socialize upward. Resist the temptation of being partial to those with status or wealth.
8. Choose to serve others. **(Philippians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 23:11)** When we serve others, we are serving God's purposes in their lives. Doing so reduces our focus on ourselves and builds the Kingdom of God instead of the Kingdom of self. When serving another costs us nothing, we should question whether or not it is really servanthood.
9. Be quick to forgive. **(Matthew 18: 21-35)** Forgiveness is possibly one of the greatest acts of humility we can do. To forgive is to acknowledge a wrong that has been done us and also to further release our right of repayment for the wrong. Forgiveness is denial of self. Forgiveness is not insisting on our way and our justice.
10. Cultivate a grateful heart. **(1 Thessalonians 5:18)** The more we develop an attitude of gratitude for the gift of salvation and life He has given us, the more true our perspective of self. A grateful heart is a humble heart.
11. Purpose to speak well of others. **(Ephesians 4:31-32)** Saying negative things about others puts them "one down" and us "one up"...a form of pride. Speaking well of others edifies them and builds them up instead of us. Make sure, however, that what you say is not intended as flattery.
12. Treat pride as a condition that always necessitates embracing the cross. **(Luke 9:23)** It is our nature to be proud and it is God's nature in us that brings humility. Committing to a lifestyle of daily dying to self and living through Him is the foundation for true humility.

Andrew Murray:

“Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you.”

“Humility is simply the disposition which prepares the soul for living on trust.”

“Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil.”

“Our humility before God has no value, except that it prepares us to reveal the humility of Jesus to our fellow men.”

“Humility is the only soil in which the graces root; the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all.”

“Use every opportunity of humbling yourself before your fellow-men as a help to abide humble before God.”

“Pride renders faith impossible.”

“As much as you have pride within you, you have the fallen angel alive in you. As much as you have true humility, you have of the Lamb of God within you.”

“It is necessary to understand that it is not sin that humbles most, but grace.”

“faith and humility are at their root one, and that we can never have more of true faith than we have of true humility. It is possible to have strong intellectual convictions and assurance of the truth while pride is still in the heart, but it makes living faith, which has power with God, impossible.”

“Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord, where I can go in and shut the door, and kneel to my Father in secret, and am at peace as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and above is trouble.”

“know the law of human nature: acts produce habits, habits breed dispositions, dispositions form the will, and the rightly-formed will is character.”

“And here it is that the teaching is needed: If you would enter into full fellowship with Christ in His death, and know the full deliverance from self, humble yourself. This is your duty. Place yourself before God in your helplessness; consent to the fact that you are powerless to slay yourself; give yourself in patient and trustful surrender to God. Accept every humiliation; look upon every person who tries or troubles you as a means of grace to humble you. God will see such acceptance as proof that your whole heart desires it. It is the path of humility that leads to the full and perfect experience of our death with Christ. Beware of the mistake so many make. They have so many qualifications and limitations, so many thoughts and questions as to what true humility is to be and to do that they never unreservedly yield themselves to it. Humble yourself unto death. It is in the death to self that humility is perfected.”

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“Prayer of an Anonymous Abbess”

Lord, you know better than myself that I am growing older and will soon be old. Keep me from becoming too talkative, and especially from the unfortunate habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject and at every opportunity.

Release me from the idea that I must straighten out other peoples' affairs. With my immense treasure of experience and wisdom, it seems a pity not to let everybody partake of it. But you know, Lord, that in the end I will need a few friends.

Keep me from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point.

Grant me the patience to listen to the complaints of others; help me to endure them with charity. But seal my lips on my own aches and pains -- they increase with the increasing years and my inclination to recount them is also increasing.

I will not ask you for improved memory, only for a little more humility and less self-assurance when my own memory doesn't agree with that of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong.

Keep me reasonably gentle. I do not have the ambition to become a saint -- it is so hard to live with some of them -- but a harsh old person is one of the devil's masterpieces.

Make me sympathetic without being sentimental, helpful but not bossy. Let me discover merits where I had not expected them, and talents in people whom I had not thought to possess any. And, Lord, give me the grace to tell them so.

Amen

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Quotes regarding humility:

“As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you.”

— **C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity**

“I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.”

— **Abraham Lincoln**

“We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

— **C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain**

“In a very real sense not one of us is qualified, but it seems that God continually chooses the most unqualified to do his work, to bear his glory. If we are qualified, we tend to think that we have done the job ourselves. If we are forced to accept our evident lack of qualification, then there's no danger that we will confuse God's work with our own, or God's glory with our own.”

— **Madeleine L'Engle**

“True humility does not know that it is humble. If it did, it would be proud from the contemplation of so fine a virtue.”

— **Martin Luther**

“The more humble and obedient to God a man is, the more wise and at peace he will be in all that he does.”

— **Thomas à Kempis**

“There is no such thing as a great man of God, only weak, pitiful, faithless men of a great and merciful God.”

— **Paul Washer**

Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.

— **Saint Augustine**

It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.

Saint Augustine

Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.

- **Thomas Merton**

A grateful heart is a beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being.

- **James E. Faust**

A Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts, which elevate and ennoble the most sacred message that has come to our world.

- **Ellen G. White**

“If pain doesn't lead to humility, you have wasted your suffering.”

— **Katerina Stoykova Klemer**

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“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.”

— **Ernest Hemingway**

“A true genius admits that he/she knows nothing.”

— **Albert Einstein**

“True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”

— **Rick Warren**

“If anyone tells you that a certain person speaks ill of you, do not make excuses about what is said of you but answer, “He was ignorant of my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these alone.”

— **Epictetus**

“No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven.”

— **Orson F. Whitney**

“It’s important that what thoughts you are feeding into your mind because your thoughts create your belief and experiences. You have positive thoughts and you have negative ones too. Nurture your mind with positive thoughts: kindness, empathy, compassion, peace, love, joy, humility, generosity, etc. The more you feed your mind with positive thoughts, the more you can attract great things into your life.”

— **Roy T. Bennett, The Light in the Heart**

“There are two circumstances that lead to arrogance: one is when you're wrong and you can't face it; the other is when you're right and nobody else can face it.”

— **Criss Jami**

“A man should never be ashamed to own that he has been in the wrong, which is but saying in other words that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.”

— **Alexander Pope**

“There are two things that men should never weary of, goodness and humility; we get none too much of them in this rough world among cold, proud people.”

— **Robert Louis Stevenson, Kidnapped**

“When a man truly sees himself, he knows nobody can say anything about him that is too bad.”

— **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

If anyone tells you that a certain person speaks ill of you, do not make excuses about what is said of you but answer, “He was ignorant of my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these alone.”

— **Epictetus**

With pride, there are many curses. With humility, there come many blessings.

- **Ezra Taft Benson**