

Humility

1) Why is humility important in the life of a Christian?

A) Humility is essential to successful Christian living. The Bible tells us that God promises to:

- Save the humble (Ps 18:27; 149:4).
- Lead and teach the humble (Ps 25:9).
- Exalt the humble (Ps 147:6).
- Give grace to the humble (Prov 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).
- Give wisdom to the humble (Prov 11:2).
- Honor the humble (Prov 15:33; 18:12).
- Reward the humble with riches, honor and life (Prov 22:4).
- Dwell with the humble (Isa 57:15).

B) Humility is the proper response when you are in the presence of someone greater than yourself. We should be humble because He is God and we are not. Pride, the opposite of humility, is the first and greatest sin—it is putting yourself in the rightful place of God.

2) What is the biblical definition of humility?

A) The Bible defines humility with respect to your relationship with God, your interaction with others and your opinion of yourself.

(1) Humility in your relationship with God means:

- Submitting your will to God's (James 4:6–7; 2 Chr 7:13–14; 1 Pet 5:5–7).
- Obeying God's commands (Zeph 2:3).
- Repenting of sin and making restitution (Luke 18:9–14; Lev 26:40–42).

(2) Humility in your interaction with others means:

- Submitting to spiritual authority (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5).
- Submitting to fellow believers (Eph 5:21).
- Being a servant (Matt 23:11–12; Phil 2:7).
- Valuing the gifts, talents and abilities of others (Phil 2:3).

(3) Humility in your opinion of yourself means:

- Recognizing that you are only one part of the body of Christ (Rom 12:3–5).
- Evaluating your gifts and abilities objectively (Gal 6:3–5; Rom 12:16).

3) How did Jesus model humility?

A) By Word—Jesus modeled humility in what He taught His disciples:

- Be humble like a little child (Matt 18:1-4).¹
- Be ministers and servants instead of kings and princes (Matt 20:25-28).
- Be servants instead of masters (Matt 23:11-12).
- Be last in order to be first (Mark 9:33-35).
- Be least in order to be greatest (Luke 9:46-48).
- Be lowest in order to be highest (Luke 14:7-11).
- Be humble like the tax collector instead of proud like the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14).

B) By Deed—Jesus modeled humility by the way He lived:

- He submitted to the Father's will (1 John 4:14; Phil 2:5-8).
- He set aside His wealth and privilege for a life of poverty (Phil 2:5-8; 2 Cor 8:9).
- He became a servant (Phil 2:5-8; Matt 20:28).
- He submitted to the authority of His parents (Luke 2:41-51).
- He submitted to the authority of the Holy Spirit (Matt 4:1-2).
- He depended completely on the power and grace of the Holy Spirit (John 5:19, 30).
- He washed His disciples' feet (John 13:3-5, 12-17).
- He obeyed the Father unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:5-8).

4) What are some practical steps I can take to grow in humility?²

- A) Examine your life and confess and forsake any sin (Ps 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9; Prov 28:13). Cultivate the practice of self-examination. A regular evaluation of your attitudes and actions is an essential part of growing in humility.
- B) Acknowledge your sin to other believers (James 5:16). Find a mature believer who is trustworthy and be accountable to them. It will keep you humble and help you resist temptation.
- C) Admit when you are wrong and ask for forgiveness (1 Sam 13:1-14; 2 Sam 10; 24:1-10; Acts 23:1-5). How hard it is to admit when we are wrong! Yet so many hurts and divisions could be prevented if we would humble ourselves and say, "I was wrong, please forgive me."
- D) Submit to authority, both the just and the unjust (1 Pet 2:18). It's easy to submit to the authority of someone who is good and just, but it takes humility to submit to the authority of someone who is harsh and demeaning.

¹ The context is that of rank and position within a kingdom. What rank or status does a child have within a kingdom? None—and that is Jesus' point. "Children are not innocent or selfless, nor do they consistently model humility. Rather, children have no status in society; they are at the mercy of adults" (David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Publishing Group, 2008): pp. 432-33).

² See also Jack Munday, "Twelve Ways to Humble Yourself," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Online: <http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=1745>. Cited 9/17/2013.

- E) Receive criticism and correction graciously (Prov 10:17, 12:1). When others criticize you, tell them: “Thank you for caring enough to share that with me. I will make it a matter of prayer.” Look for the kernel of truth in what people say, even if it is hurtful. Ask God to reveal areas in your life that need to be corrected or improved.
- F) Cultivate a teachable spirit (Ps 119:33–37; Prov 16:16; 1 Cor 8:1). A teachable spirit welcomes instruction. Ask yourself, “Am I more inclined to offer my own opinion rather than listening to what others have to say?”
- G) Repay evil with good (1 Peter 3:8–19, 17–18). When you are treated unjustly, the natural response is to retaliate. But responding with kindness to the anger and cruelty of others demonstrates godly character and helps you grow in humility.
- H) Forgive (Eph 4:32; Matt 18:21–35). Forgiveness flows from the recognition that God has forgiven you. The proper response to His mercy is to gladly forgive others. Forgiveness does not exact payment from those who wrong us—it is a humbling denial of self.
- I) Serve others (1 Pet 4:10, 2 Cor 4:5). Serving others is the heart and soul of being a disciple of Jesus. Look for ways to build up other believers by using the talents and gifts God has given you.
- J) Spend time with those who are less fortunate (Luke 14:12–14; Romans 12:16). It is natural and proper to spend time with your friends and loved-ones. But God also wants us to associate with “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.” He promises to reward us when we give to those who cannot repay us.
- K) Cultivate a grateful heart (1 Thess 5:18). Remind yourself regularly that you do not deserve or merit God’s mercy. Be grateful for the gift of salvation and the blessings of God—it will keep you humble.
- L) “Sit in the lowest place” (Luke 14:7–11). Do you find yourself wanting to be in the limelight? Are you irritated when others are honored or chosen instead of you? If so, pride is present. Ask God to help you accept a lowly place—it is the place of humility.
- M) Remember that you can do nothing apart from Jesus (John 15:4–5). It is easy to fall into the trap of self-reliance. But the truth is that we cannot make it on our own. We need God’s grace every day. Make this part of your daily mental thought and you will grow in humility.
- N) Say “God willing” when making future plans (James 4:14–16). How can you boast about the future when you don’t even know what will happen tomorrow? Only God knows and controls the future. Humble yourself and acknowledge your daily dependence on Him.
- O) Learn from the lives of others.
- (1) Examples of those who humbled themselves:
- Hagar (Gen 16:8–9).
 - Ahab (1 Kgs 21:20–24, 27–29).

- Josiah (2 Kgs 22:10–13, 18–20 | 2 Chr 34:26–28).
- Men from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun (2 Chr 30:6–11).
- Manasseh (2 Chr 33:9–13, 23).
- Ezra and the remnant (Ezra 8:21–23).
- David (Ps 69:10–11).
- The people of Judah (Isa 58).
- Daniel (Dan 10:2–3, 12).
- Paul (Acts 15:37–40; 2 Tim 4:11).

(2) Examples of those who refused to humble themselves:

- Pharaoh (Exod 10:3–6).
- Asa (2 Chr 16).
- Zedekiah (2 Chr 36:11–16).
- The exiles in Egypt (Jer 44:1–10).
- Belshazzar (Dan 5:18–23).

(3) Examples of those whom God humbled:

- The exodus generation (Deut 8:2–3, 11–16).
- The nation of Judah (2 Chr 28:17–19).
- Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:28–37).
- Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2–3).