

# Humility

vs. Pride

**Humility is recognizing and acknowledging my total dependence upon the Lord and seeking His will for every decision.**

## Definition

Several Hebrew words are translated *humble*. One is *anah*, which means “to stoop, be down-cast, bow down; to be afflicted; to weaken oneself; to mishandle.” King David expressed humility of soul by wearing sackcloth and by fasting: “My clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting” (Psalm 35:13).

Another Hebrew word for *humble* is *kana*, which means “to bend the knee, to be brought into subjection, subdue.” God used this word in II Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven . . . .”

## Rewards of Humility

The greatest reward of humility is that of becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ. He identifies His character as being “meek and lowly in heart.” The word *lowly* means “not rising far from the ground,” and expresses being brought low with grief, lowly in spirit, of low degree.

Other rewards of humility are what every person longs for—true riches, high honor, and abundant life. “By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life” (Proverbs 22:4).

## The Swift and Severe Punishment for Pride

Pride is believing that we have achieved what God and others have done for us and through us. Pride is reserving for myself the right to make final decisions. Pride is building all of life around me and my wants.

God’s swift punishment on pride is illustrated in the lives of King Herod and King Nebuchadnezzar. God did not immediately punish Herod Agrippa for killing the Apostle James and imprisoning the Apostle Peter, but when he gave a great oration to representatives from Tyre and Sidon, and they fell down and worshiped him as a god, “immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory” (Acts 12:23).

When King Nebuchadnezzar boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?”, God immediately punished him. While the word was in the king’s mouth, God struck him with a mental breakdown and took away his kingdom until he worshiped the King of Heaven.

(See Daniel 4:30–37.)

The reason for God’s startling swiftness of punishment on pride may very well be the fact that it was the sin that caused Satan and a third of the angels to be cast out



**H**umility is building life around God and others rather than around myself.

*“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” —I Peter 5:5*

**“All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God, because they reckoned on God being with them.”**

—J. Hudson Taylor



**I**f we refuse to humble ourselves, there are many others who are eager to help us do it.

Thinking too little of yourself is false humility and is just as wrong as thinking too much of yourself.



The **turkey vulture** has repulsive features, yet it plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of nature by devouring carcasses that would otherwise spread disease and death.



**H**umility is realizing that we ourselves are nothing, but we are everything in Christ.

*“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.”*  
—Romans 7:18

**“The higher a man is in grace, the lower he will be in his own esteem.”**

—C. H. Spurgeon

**“The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.”**

—Thomas Carlyle

of Heaven. Satan said in his heart, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:13–14).

Pride was the sin that caused Adam and Eve to fall. Satan tempted them to violate God’s command so that they, through their own efforts, could be on an equal level with God. Satan said, “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5).

Pride is putting ourselves on an equal level with God-given authority. Humility is abasing ourselves and submitting to the righteous rule of God and His authorities.

## Our Choice: Humble Ourselves—or Be Humbled by God

God appeals to all of us to take the initiative to humble ourselves. If we fail to do this, He will humble us through circumstances, opposition, infirmities, or weaknesses.

- “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10).
- “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

Notice that we are first and foremost to humble ourselves in the eyes of the Lord, not necessarily in the eyes of others. He can see the true condition of our hearts, whether we are flattering ourselves with compliments or sincerely abasing ourselves and exalting Him.

King Nebuchadnezzar learned what happens when a man fails to humble himself. However, after

being humbled by God, he gave proper glory to the Lord: “At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:34).

## Humility Begins in Our Spirits; Pride Begins in Our Hearts

When our spirits are in full fellowship with the Spirit of God, we will have humble hearts.

- “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).
- “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Proverbs 16:19).
- “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).

## Pride Is Taking Credit for What God Gave Us

If we fail to recognize that everything we have and do is because of the mercy and grace of God, we will tend to think that we are responsible for our achievements. Thus, we will lift up our hearts in pride.

- When King Uzziah became strong, “his heart was lifted up to his destruction” (II Chronicles 26:16).
- When Nebuchadnezzar’s “heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne” (Daniel 5:20).
- When the prince of Tyrus became prosperous, God observed, “Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God . . . Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers” (Ezekiel 28:2, 10).

## God’s Checklist for Humility

The clearest guidance we could receive on how to humble ourselves is to follow Biblical instruction and to learn from God’s biographies how others humbled themselves. Humility must begin with a contrite spirit, as explained in Colossians 3:12: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind.”

James 4:6–10 speaks of humility and gives a checklist for achieving it. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

1. Submit yourselves to God with total, unconditional surrender to His will.
2. Resist the devil, allowing no secret sin or hindering weight.
3. Draw nigh to God by seeking His face through the Scriptures.
4. Cleanse your hands by confessing all sin and making restitution.

5. Purify your hearts, making sure there is no secret desire to continue sinning.
6. Be afflicted, mourn, and weep. Grieve over the awfulness of sin.
7. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness.
8. Do all this in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

## God Hears Those Who Come to Him in Humility

A passage parallel to that of James 4 on humbling ourselves is given in II Chronicles 7:14, “**If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and . . .**

1. **Pray**—Acknowledge our sins and God’s holiness.
2. **Seek My face**—Set aside all distractions that compete with Christ.
3. **Turn from their wicked ways**—Have a change of life as well as a change of heart.  
“**Then will I hear from heaven . . .**”

True inward repentance and contriteness will have outward evidences. God notes the following expressions of humility and how He responded to them.

- Ahab—“It came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (I Kings 21:27). Then God responded, “Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days” (I Kings 21:29).



**H**umility is the natural response of being in the presence of God.

The fear of the Lord is the awareness that we are continually in the presence of the Lord. Thus, humility and the fear of the Lord are interdependent.

*“By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.”*  
—Proverbs 22:4



“A man who clings to his own righteousness is like a man who grasps a millstone to prevent himself from sinking in a flood.”

—C. H. Spurgeon

“Those who think too much of themselves don’t think enough.”

—Amy Carmichael



If you are holding others back so you can get ahead, you will never go anywhere.

Those who look down on others miss the joy of looking upon the face of Jesus.

We must become nothing before we can become something.



Humility is expressed by a servant's spirit that is excited about making others successful.

The best test of whether or not we view ourselves as servants is how we respond when treated like one.

*Christ "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."* —Philippians 2:7

- Josiah—"It came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes." He also acknowledged the iniquities of his fathers: "Because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book." The Lord responded, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD" (II Chronicles 34:19, 21, 27).

## Specific Ways to Humble Ourselves

1. Welcome critics—bless those who curse you.
2. Volunteer for menial tasks.
3. Ask others about blind spots.
4. Express gratefulness.
5. Listen to others instead of talking about yourself.
6. Kneel in prayer.
7. Let authorities make final decisions.
8. Ask forgiveness for wrongs you have done.
9. Praise and honor others.
10. Take time for prayer and fasting.
11. Give sacrificially.
12. Give testimony of God's grace.
13. Deflect praise.
14. Be a servant.

## Personal Evaluation

### How humble are you?

- When people disagree with you, do you argue to defend your position?
- Do you tend to cut off those who ignore you?
- Are you hurt when those whom you dislike are honored?
- Do you find it difficult to admit you are wrong?
- Do you inwardly react when people criticize you?
- Do you give your opinions before being asked for them?
- Do you enjoy sharing about your accomplishments?
- Do you talk more than you listen?
- Are you more concerned about your reputation or God's?
- Do you give the impression that you have no problems?
- Do you seek ways to humble yourself?
- Do you do things for praise and compliments?
- Do you accept praise rather than deflecting it?
- Are you quick to correct others when they make mistakes?
- Do you react when you do not receive credit you are due?
- Do you feel important?
- Do you compare yourself to others rather than God?