# THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

## INTRODUCTION

Can you be a confident, take charge kind of person and still be humble? Can you think highly of your abilities and accomplishments and still be a humble person? Today we want you to know that we've got a kind of mixed up image of what it means to be humble.

## COMMENTARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

Here's the conventional wisdom: *Humble people should never think of themselves too highly*. They should always deflect attention, have an "Aw shucks" reaction to any compliment, never present a confident air or speak about anything they're good at. It's as if humility is a stern parent always watching and warning us to make sure we don't get "too big for our britches."

What if we've got that all wrong? What if humility is not about taking a low position by putting ourselves low, but by lifting others up? It's like C.S. Lewis wrote, *A humble person will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.*

That's the irony. When you're trying to be humble, trying to take a low position, you're still thinking about yourself, monitoring yourself, making sure you don't come off prideful. But think about this: You can arrive at the same position in relation to others not by thinking about how to lower yourself, but how you can lift other people up. Same result. That's why a good working definition of humility is this:

**Humility is *exalting others above yourself.***

In other words, don't worry about lowering yourself or raising yourself. Instead, focus on lifting others up to receive the attention, respect, recognition, appreciation and value they deserve and not about putting yourself down beneath anyone.

Perhaps there is nothing more Christlike than humility. After all, that seems to be the theme of one of the earliest hymns of the church whose words are found in Philippians 2:3-8.

> ***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [****and here comes the hymn****] 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!***

Now in one sense it does kind of sound like Jesus humbled himself by putting Himself down. He "made Himself nothing." He went from being equal to God to the lowest possible position.

But look at the context. It says "considering others better than yourselves." It doesn't say "consider yourself worse than others." Look up to other people. Elevate their interests, even above your own. Look at things the way Jesus did. Even when He "lowered" Himself it wasn't about thinking poorly of Himself, but about lowering Himself to where we are so He could lift us up. He stooped beneath us to raise us up. That's Christlike humility. And it is reflected in what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29.

> ***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.***

"Only what is helpful for building others up…" And Paul follows up that example of humility immediately with, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit." When we aren't building others up as we should, we are grieving the Lord.

**REFLECTION:**

Can you imagine how different any person's relationships would be if they practiced this kind of humility? When we act in true humility — like Jesus — we become so much more beneficial to other people, because we will be giving them the kind of esteem, worth and value all people long for. That makes all our relationships so much more pleasant and fulfilling.

On the flip side: Most relationships begin to go sour when we expect others to lift us up. To be sure, in a perfect world other people would be giving us the attention, respect, position, opportunity, recognition, praise, or gratitude we need. But when they aren't and we begin to focus on the edification we're missing rather than on the attention, respect and value others deserve, our hurt takes over and spoils things.

So here's something to think and pray about. Like we have already seen in the case of generosity and gratitude, character traits often complement each other and work together as partners. That's definitely the case with honesty and humility.

Right now you can prepare to practice humility by honestly answering this question…

- ***Is there someone that you are frustrated with because they aren't regarding you with as much respect, kindness, appreciation or attention you deserve?***
  There's your "target" person for practicing humility. Set aside that frustration and look for an opportunity—maybe even today—to lift them up with an expression of encouragement or appreciation.

- Based on this refreshing and freeing angle on humility, **who would you say is the most humble person you know?**

**PRAYER:**

**Dear Jesus, I am directing my prayer specifically to You today, because You are the epitome of humility. I want to emulate You as much as possible. You showed us how humility behaves when You had supper with the scorned tax-collector Zacchaeus. Or when You did the unthinkable and touched an untouchable leper before You healed him. Or when You rebuked Your disciples for trying to keep the little children from interrupting You while You were teaching adults. Or when You healed ten lepers when You probably knew that nine of them would not even say thank you. I want to be like that. Could You help me prize this kind of humility so much that I never forget how to practice it? But don't only help me keep it in my mind; please help me keep it in my heart. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.**