



FAITHFUL LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD

A SERIES IN FIRST PETER



HUMBLING OURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD

1 PETER 5:6-14

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INTRO

Humility is an often misunderstood virtue, and we are sometimes better at exhibiting false humility than the real kind. And yet, humility, true humility, seems to be vitally important if we are going to serve God with gladness and receive the reward of an unfading crown of glory, as Peter mentioned a few verses earlier.

Peter gives the following instruction in 5:5:

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Peter is likely referencing Proverbs 3:34, which says of God:

Toward the scornful,
but to the humble he gives favour.

And this is a constant theme throughout Scripture. Proverbs 29:23 tells us about the ultimate end of pride:

One's pride will bring him low,
but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honour.

Psalm 138:6 tells us that God keeps his distance from the proud:

6 For though the Lord is exalted, he regards the lowly,
but the proud he knows from afar.

James quotes similar words in James 4:6-8:

6 But he gives more grace. **Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Mary in the Magnificat in Luke 1:46-56 says in v. 52:

52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

And finally, in Matt. 23, Jesus sums up a block of teaching with the following words in v11-12:

11 The greatest among you shall be your servant.
12 **Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.**

The theme is as consistent as it is clear: Pride is not good. Humility is good. If we are prideful, God will oppose us. But if we are truly humble, God will give grace, he'll give favour, he'll give honour, he'll draw near to us, he will exalt us in good time.

There is a lot riding on either the manifestation of our pride or the incarnation of humility in our lives.

John Calvin, in response to this common thread of teaching in God's Word, encourages us to imagine that God has two hands. With one, like a hammer, he "beats down and breaks in pieces those who raise themselves up." And with the other hand, he "raises up the humble who willingly let down themselves, and is like a firm prop to sustain them."¹ The teaching is clear and repeated: Pride brings God's judgment and opposition and ultimate humiliation, while humility brings favour and grace and ultimate exaltation.

But if we are going to "put on humility" and if we are going to "humble ourselves," then we need to know what humility is. We need to know, especially because humility is often misunderstood, and false humility is both too prevalent and too easy for us to present to others.

False Humility

So what is humility? Humility, first, is not giving yourself a beating or thinking of yourself as worthless or useless or without value. It is not a constant verbalizing of your inadequacies. It is not comparing yourself to others and always saying how much better other people are compared to you, as if self-loathing and self-pity were themselves virtues.

These are all manifestations of false humility, and you'll notice that all the ways of thinking that go along with false humility are entirely self-centred. Even though they are all derogatory statements about oneself, the irony is that all these statements are made with only one reference in mind: yourself. And that, of course, having yourself always at the centre of your own thoughts, is the very opposite of true humility. Humility, as someone once succinctly said, "is not

¹ Calvin, John. The Complete Biblical Commentary Collection of John Calvin (Kindle Locations 517334-517336). . Kindle Edition.

thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”² The journey toward humility is the process of becoming increasingly less self-centred.

True Humility

Biblical humility, on the other hand, has God as its reference point. Biblical humility means to have a realistic opinion of oneself compared to God. It is to have a deep sense of one’s smallness compared to God. As one commentator put it, biblical humility is “an inside-out virtue produced by comparing ourselves to the Lord (rather than to others).” He goes on to say that “This brings behaviour into alignment with this inner revelation to keep one from being self-exalting...”³

If we go back to an earlier passage in 1 Peter (3:8), we find these words:

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Peter mentions a humble mind, by which he means that we are to have a modest opinion of ourselves. The key to Christian humility is to avoid comparing oneself to others (you can always find someone “worse”) and instead compare oneself to Christ (the ultimate and consistent standard). When we do this, it will bring our behaviour into alignment with reality as we realize that, compared to Christ, there is nothing in us worthy of exaltation, and this will keep us from acting and speaking in self-exalting ways.

Remarking on Peter’s teaching on humility in this letter, Peter H. Davids says that “This does not mean a poor self-concept (‘I’m no good’), but a willingness to take the lower place, to do the less

² <https://aaronarmstrong.co/what-cs-lewis-wrote-is-better-than-what-he-didnt/>

³ HELPS word-studies

exalted service, and to put the interests of others ahead of one's own interests."⁴

Notice that true humility takes action - it takes the lower place, raises its hand for the less-exalted service, and serves the interests of others instead of self.

A pastor friend from Orillia wrote a helpful article for The Gospel Coalition a handful of years ago that explained biblical humility as three components:

1. Utter dependence on God's mercy

"...to be 'humble is to be aware of your own sin and unworthiness and to cast yourself entirely upon the mercy and undeserved kindness of Almighty God."

2. Unconcern for power, prestige and position

"According to Jesus, humble people are not scrambling for power, prestige and position. They take the lowest seat, and they are content to function as servants... To be humble – in a biblical sense – is to disregard all concern for rank and privilege and to live one's life in service to the least of Christ's disciples."

3. Unquestioning acceptance of God's Word

"Jesus is the ultimate example of biblical humility... There is no biblical definition of humility that does not include absolute, unquestioning obedience to the Word of God."⁵

To restate Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:5:

To all of you, whether elder or pastor or church member young or old - put on humility like a slave's garment and serve one another. Depend completely on God's mercy, disregard the pursuit of power and position, and practice unquestioning

⁴ - Peter H. Davids, p125

⁵ <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/3-things-biblical-humility-is-and-isnt/>

obedience to God's Word. God is gracious to those who do this but he works against those who do the opposite.

Ok, so now, hopefully, with a clear view of what biblical humility is and is not, let's look at this, the final section of Peter's first letter.

Humble Yourself

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

Humble yourselves, therefore - therefore, because the preceding is true, now do this. In light of what I've just written, here is your best course of action.

Humble yourselves.

Depend completely on God's mercy. Put to death any thought of yourself that casts you in a light where you are so amazing that God owes you salvation. Put to death as well any thought that keeps a record of your good works that you will one day present to God for repayment.

Humble yourselves.

The people of this world, and too many in the church, run in pursuit of power, prestige and position. Run in the opposite direction. Use every bit of authority and notoriety that God gives you, but don't pursue it for yourself, for your own self-serving ends. Seek the kingdom of God and let him worry about your reputation and position and exaltation.

Humble yourselves.

Seek to better understand and obey God through His Word. As it says in 2 Tim. 2:15 (NLT) - **"Work hard so you can present yourself to God**

and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.”

Work hard and pray often to understand the truth of God’s Word and then obey every command that is clear to you - even the ones that are clear but don’t make sense to you. Pray often in the spirit of the Gethsemane prayer. This means that you will face circumstances that look unpleasant that you would rather avoid, but at that moment, you cry out to God, declaring that it is his will that should be done, not yours.

We are to clothe ourselves in this posture, taking the lower place, stepping forward for the less-exalted service, and serving the needs of others before our own. This is the battle plan and survival plan of the Christian community at all times, especially during times of hardship and persecution.

That is what it means to humble yourself, and we are to do all of this recognizing that we are under the mighty hand of God.

That He May Exalt You

And we are to do all of this for another reason, “**so that at the proper time he may exalt you...**” Here we find the core of the paradox of Biblical teaching about humility. Our exaltation at some point in the future utterly depends on our efforts at humility today.

Let me ask you. I don’t know if you’ve ever thought of this, and if you haven’t, maybe you should... How does it feel to know that you will someday be exalted by God? He’s going to exalt us, it says right here. He’s going to cause us to be held in high regard “at the proper time” - in other words, at *his appointed time*. Not at our requested time, but at *his appointed time*. If you’ve been a Christian for any length of time, you know that God’s timing is almost ALWAYS different from our timing. Have you noticed? We want everything *now* or five minutes from now, and sometimes God knows that we don’t need it at all, or that we do need it, but we also need not five minutes but

five years of preparation before we can use it wisely. And so we must go forward knowing that it is for him, in his time, to raise us up, not for us to raise ourselves up.

Do you see the difference? This means, for example, that you might have two equally recognizable pastors - “celebrity pastors” for lack of a better term - one of whom was raised to that position of visibility and notoriety by God *in his time* and the other who has raised himself to that position by various methods and schemes. One takes the path of humility, leaving his exaltation in God’s hands, and the other the path of pride, taking his exaltation into his own hands. Do you see the difference?

In the case of two equally well-known pastors, how can we know which is which? One way is that over time, one will be known for bearing good fruit and the other for reaping bad fruit. Now, some of these bad-fruit-bearing pastors are simply bad fruit to begin with, but are able to hoodwink enough people over a long period of time to get themselves raised up into the positions they’ve been seeking. I think for others, the bad-fruit-bearing happens because they have good intentions, but then try to force their own accelerated timeline that is not in line with God’s timing. They have good motives to start, but they become impatient with God’s timeline and begin to impose their own will onto God’s plans. This never goes well.

Whether you are a pastor or not, for every follower of Jesus, humility is the only legitimate path to exaltation. We see far too much of the opposite in today’s Evangelical church.

Peter is clear on this:

Submit yourselves in a lowly spirit to the power and will of God so that at his appointed time he might raise you up in dignity and honour. (V6)

He says next that we are to do this:

⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Anxiety here is a Greek word meaning to be drawn in different directions. A close equivalent to this word is the word distraction. Think about anxiety this way, as being drawn in different directions, of being distracted or pulled apart. It's like your thoughts, or your mind itself, is being divided, fractured into parts.

Have you experienced anxiety like this? Have you had these racing thoughts that go in all directions, most in the direction of some potential catastrophe that seems to be just around the corner? That's often what anxiety feels like, isn't it?

Defining anxiety this way makes sense for me, of a practice that I started many years ago when I was feeling anxious. I would stop to write down all those thoughts that streaked across my mind like so many comets. I would pull them down onto paper and organize them there since I couldn't seem to do that inside my head. But what are we to do with them once we have them collected - or even if we don't?

We are supposed to cast them onto God. What does it mean to cast our anxieties or cast our distractions on him? It means putting them all in the hands of one who can deal with them better than we can.

Is there a person you go to when you've hit the limit? When you think you're at the end of your rope, so to speak, and that person has a calming effect on you? How do they do that? Don't they often do you the great favour of bringing a sense of clarity and focus, and comfort to your distractions and anxieties? Don't they often listen to you verbalizing your anxieties, and your streaking thoughts, and then help you to organize them? We need this kind of help sometimes.

I can remember many times meeting with my now-deceased mentor, Arthur Cairncross, in this state, and he would listen compassionately and then remind me and centre me on what was most important. In my life during those times, what mattered most was not the difficult present state of the church but what God was doing in the church without my awareness by way of these difficulties. Arthur reminded me that I couldn't fix every broken area, but I could focus intently on the Scriptures and preach the word, in season and out of season. And these were great remedies for my anxieties applied by Arthur over time, and eventually, I was able to do a much better job of self-application.

So if our earthly spiritual and/or biological fathers and mothers are able to do this for us when we bring our anxieties and distractions to them, what might our perfectly just and sovereign heavenly Father be able to do for us? Psalm 55:22 encourages us to:

Cast your burden on the Lord,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved.

Peter says to do this “because he cares for you.” God cared for me through Arthur, and he continues to care for me through my wife, my daughters, my parents, and through many friends. It comforts me to know that I am the object of God's care, that he is the ultimate listener when I pray, and that I can trust that he has good things planned for me, regardless of how my present circumstances appear.

Next, Peter gives us two instructive commands.

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil
prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

As Christians, we have an enemy. That enemy is known as the devil, which we often take as a name, but it is really more of a description. This is the Greek word *diabolos*, which will help you make sense of

the Spanish word diablo (which means “devil”) and the English word diabolical (which means demonic, evil, wicked, unholy).

When used as a description, the word diabolos means a slanderer, a false accuser, one who works deviously, diabolically to sever relationships. This is what human gossips and slanderers do as well, following the very pattern of the devil.

When used as a noun - as in *the Devil* - we refer to the one also known as Satan. And this is because Satan is the master slanderer, the expert false accuser, the one who works deviously and diabolically to sever our relationship with God. He is also called here an adversary, and that word carries a meaning of a cruel, underhanded, corrupt prosecuting lawyer - the kind that knows people are not guilty and does whatever he can to cause them to be found guilty anyway.

What is his method for doing this? Peter tells us that he prowls around, and again, the Greek word choice here is significant. The words for “walk” and “comprehensively around” are combined to describe his methods. He walks in circles around his prey as a powerful lion on the hunt would do. He goes full circle, peering, examining, looking for weaknesses and gaps in your armour. And sometimes, if we’re honest, he finds these weaknesses, doesn’t he?

This is why Peter urges us to be sober-minded, to be calm and collected in spirit, to build an immunity to the type of strong emotion that would cause us to act in irrational ways, and to be cautious and guarded. And also watchful - to keep an eye on our surroundings, knowing that until Jesus returns, the lion is always prowling, looking for weakness, offering us paths of disobedience.

Not the Spirit of Fear

But wait! Let this not cause us to live in fear! That is not the point of Peter’s pleadings. For even as the devil prowls around, making accusations and condemnations against us as Christians, they are -

every one of them - false accusations because as Christians, we have been declared by God as “not guilty” and we are righteous and acceptable in his sight. Romans 5:1 says that “**since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

The good news is that Jesus became sin so that we could become righteousness. He took the undeserved disapproval of God so that we could experience the undeserved approval of God by way of his shed blood and his sacrifice. So we need to be sober-minded and watchful, awake and alert to the devil’s schemes, but we must not live in fear.

Be calm and collected in spirit, not so influenced by emotion that you become irrational; pay strict attention to your life and surroundings. The slandering accuser (aka the devil) is doing all that he can to sever your relationship with God. He prowls around like a lion, walking full circles around you, looking for your weaknesses - and when he finds one, he attacks!

⁹ Resist him, Peter says, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Peter continues to give instructions about how to deal with our adversary. Resist him, he says, stand your ground against his accusations and oppose him. In this, we should follow the example of Jesus when the devil was prowling around him as he was being tempted in the desert, looking for a weakness to exploit. Jesus resisted (a *defensive* manoeuvre) and quoted scripture (an *offensive* manoeuvre). We are to follow his example in this. The faith of Jesus in God the Father was firm, steadfast, and stubborn - it was immovable, and we should model our faith after his.

What often gives us both strength and courage is to know that we are not alone in our struggles. We should regularly make time for ourselves to share about joys and struggles and accomplishments,

and hardships. When we know that others are struggling as we are, it makes us feel less alone.

Peter assures these persecuted Christians to whom he writes that they are not alone. Throughout the known world at that time, wherever churches had been planted, other believers were similarly suffering. You are not alone - the same struggles are being wrestled with on battlefields far away.

In a more general sense, this has been true in all of human history after the fall. The devil has been prowling, making accusations, encouraging doubt in God's promises, and enticing us to compromise. This suffering tempts us to lose faith by doubting God's goodness and therefore ceasing to trust him by finding our own solutions to problems only he can resolve. But instead, Peter says...

Stand your ground against his accusations, with a steadfast, stubborn faith, knowing that others throughout the world who are in Christ are experiencing the same kinds of suffering you are.

And then, finally, v10, this promise...

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Peter now looks to the future hope, to a time that is beyond this present period of persecution.

These are words for them, his original audience, but they are also words for you, dear brothers and sisters who live in this place and at this time. So listen close: In a little while, after you have endured what Paul was able to call "these light and momentary afflictions" (even though, for him, the suffering was far beyond what any of us have experienced) - in a little while, the God of all grace, the one who has invited you into the blessing of the heavenly kingdom, he himself

will make you what you ought to be. He will complete the work that he started in you. He will make you steadfast and strengthen you for his service, and bring stability to your soul that you have never before experienced.

Listen: you're going to be perfectly strong someday! Do you feel all the weakness in your mind, in your body, in your flesh, in your brain, in your faith? If you are in Christ, someday every weakness will be cast out and eliminated. Ultimately, we will stand together in the presence of God with no struggle to believe, no battle against sin, with incorruptible flesh in which no sin will dwell. I hope that when you think of that, you desire to taste it - and let that future perfect steadfastness fuel your struggling imperfect steadfastness now.

He's going to do all of that for those who by faith have trusted in his Son. And so indeed, we say together with Peter...

¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Final Comments

Peter finishes his letter with a few common letter-ending notes. **Silvanus** is mentioned, and he is either the carrier of the letter Peter wrote, or he is the secretary of the one to whom the letter was dictated, or he is the secretary himself. We don't know exactly, except to say that he was somehow involved. Commentators and Bible translators seem to agree that the "she" who is referred to in v13 is the church itself, not an individual who is a woman. In the New Living Translation, it says, "Your sister church here in Babylon sends you greetings..." In the Holman Christian Standard Bible: "The church in Babylon, also chosen, sends you greetings..." Mark, whom Peter calls his son (not biological), has an interesting biblical backstory, but for now, we'll just note that he is a faithful fellow worker with Peter.

Peter then gives this instruction:

¹⁴Greet one another with the kiss of love.

This means that when you exit today, we'll be kissing instead of shaking hands. Just kidding. This is not an instruction that is prescriptive in a way that transcends culture. A kiss at that time was an outward sign of unity and love. Our sign today would be a handshake and/or a hug.

And finally, to end his letter, Peter says:

Peace to all of you *[point - you]* who are in Christ.

CONCLUSION

First Peter is a letter of encouragement to Christians undergoing persecution. They are suffering discrimination because of their faith, and Peter instructs them to live as Christians in a hostile world, to live lives worthy of their calling. He admonishes them to resist the pressures of society as they persist in pursuing a godly life by following Jesus.

He writes to Christians who are discouraged because of the persecution they are experiencing and encourages them to live faithfully in a fallen world. He urges them to continue to trust God, living in obedience to him regardless of their circumstances, and to keep their hopes fixed on God and his promises of salvation and deliverance.

The main theme of his letter has been suffering for the sake of Christ. That was the main teaching and encouragement needed by those to whom Peter wrote this letter.

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore,

confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:10)

For Us Too

We too will live with afflictions and experience ill-treatment, but only, just like these Christians, for “a little while.” We must receive all that we endure in the same way that Paul did, calling his trials “light and momentary afflictions” (2 Cor. 4:17). And we do this not, certainly, because they seem either light or momentary as they are underway. We do this because we trust by faith that what is coming is so far superior to what is that we will look back on our trials as but a short time of discomfort compared to the eternal glory that we will experience. Our trials are temporary, but in God’s presence, there is fullness of joy. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

And after we have suffered a little while, he will restore us to our unspoiled condition so that we are in flawless working order, returning even our minds to perfect peak condition. He will make us strong with an energy that will not wane, and he will bring stability to our often-volatile souls.

This last point is something I often long for. I find that my soul is tossed to and fro with a regularity that frustrates me. It’s not that I can’t explain why this is, but that I hoped I would be more stable by now. Does anyone else feel this way?

I feel that I fail Jesus so often! I need regular reminders that God has called me to carry a lot of weight. I need regular reminders that the measure of “success” is not a flawless technique that leads to an absence of strain, but that the strain itself, the daily submission of obedience to his call, is itself the measure. And I need regular reminders that he is satisfied with my imperfect efforts because what is lacking is made up for by the perfect efforts of Jesus Christ.

“God won’t give you more than you can handle...” It’s one of the worst junk clichés ever created. It is closer to the truth that every day, it seems, God gives us more than we can handle so that we realize we cannot survive without his strength. This humbles us, it encourages our humility, especially if we willingly acknowledge it as true!

And he is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us, as it says in Jude 24-25: “blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.” “To the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen”.

LET’S PRAY

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, a pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit:
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