

"A Humble Heart"

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Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 5:5-7, ESV

Shepherd the Flock of God

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

The naturalist, William Beebe, used to tell a story about Theodore Roosevelt. At Sagamore Hill, after an evening talk, the two would go out on the lawn and search the skies for a certain spot of starlight light near the lower, left-hand corner of the great square of Pegasus. Then Roosevelt would recite, "That is the spiral galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of one hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our own." Then Roosevelt would grin and say, "Now I think we are small enough. Let us go to bed!"

My aim, in this study, is we would leave smaller than we came; that we would find our inspiration not only from the measurable enormity of Creation, but from the immeasurable enormity of our Creator.

Phillips Brooks made this apt comment, "The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is." Of course, that higher nature we stand up against and look to is none other than God Himself. As we gaze upon God and see Him as He really is, we will understand the smallness of our greatness.

Peter's main point in writing this section is to call us to be a humble people. He wants us to see the real smallness of our greatness. Even a cursory reading of these verses unveils the central idea Peter is driving home. Three times he will command us toward humility. In Verse 5, he commands younger men to be humble in their relationship to their elders in the church. He continues by explicitly telling us to "clothe ourselves with humility", specifically in relationship to one another. In Verse 6, he commands us to humble ourselves "under the mighty hand of God".

When you were younger and your mom or dad repeated a command three times, did you pay attention? I know I did. A three-fold repetition of the same instruction meant my mom or dad was "serious" about this. Three times, in rapid-fire succession, Peter is giving us the very same command. He wants us to understand, humbling ourselves before God and clothing ourselves with humility in relationship to one another is not merely an add on to the spiritual life which is sort of nice, a nice, little decoration. No, humility is fundamental to the spiritual life of the Christian; it is absolutely essential.

No one pursues God without also pursuing humility. We cannot have spiritual life without it. We must become humble, as children, if we are to have a part in the Kingdom of God. We will chase after a humble heart in this study. We will begin by considering the nature of a humble heart. We want to understand what it means to have a humble heart,

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

God sets humility and pride in contrast to one another and God's responds to those two character traits inside of a person's life. Then, He says,

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God...

If we would successfully clothe ourselves with humility, we first must know what humility is. There are many who have bent views of humility. Humility, in the Bible, is not a weak trait, but it is a strong one, but yet we tend to possess inherently wimpy ideas about this character trait. Some confuse humility with a quiet, reserved personality. Yet, Moses is called the most humble man on earth, but he is bold, forceful, and a leader. Some confuse humility with a commitment to quiet acts of service. It is a godly thing to be willing to serve others in whatever capacity God calls us, but this does not define humility, for we can serve out of pride just as easily as we can fail to serve out of pride.

Remember the story of Mary and Martha and Jesus' visit in their home? Mary was praised and not Martha. Some confuse humility with a lack of drive for ambition, so a humble person is a person who does not seem to be going in any direction fast. And yet, Paul is a man of incredible energy and drive and vision. Being humble does not mean we have a certain kind of personality or a certain lever of energy or a certain skill set.

Humility is within reach of each one of us. Humility has to do with our soul's response to God. Humility grows out of a correct and clear understanding of who God is in His greatness, and a correct and clear understanding of who we are in our smallness as we stand before Him. Humility is simply seeing the world as it really is. It is seeing the world with God as Sovereign Lord and the rest of us as dependant creatures. Humility does not cause us to compare ourselves unfavorably with other people so much as it causes us to compare ourselves unfavorably with God.

John Calvin defines humility this way: As an unfeigned submission of our heart, stricken down in earnestness, with an awareness of our own misery and want. I like that. It is not fake. It is not imitated. It is an "unfeigned" submission of the heart and a genuine submission, "Lord, I am going to bow to You. I am going to obey You regardless of the cost." It is coupled with an awareness of how miserable we are in our natural state before our Lord and how much we need Him.

There is beautiful picture of humility which Jesus paints for us in Luke 18. He is telling of how two men went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. In 1st Century times we have made Pharisees evil men and Jesus uses them often as an illustration as to how not to live, yet, in the 1st Century, if we were to look at these two men, you would say, "That is the guy I respect," and point to the Pharisee. You would say, "That is the guy who is dishonorable," and you would point to the tax collector. They both went to the Temple to pray,

¹¹ *"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'**

The Pharisee was truthful about what he said; he is not like "them". He lives a much more moral life. The humility is in the tax collector and it is a recognition of our own great need and the recognition of God's holiness, His righteousness, and His sovereign power.

Jesus then said,

¹⁴ *"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

The principle we want to learn from Scripture is: Humility begins with a profound sense of our own weakness and sinfulness, as well as a deep confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to meet our every need. It is that combination of both of those things together - a sense of our need and a sense of Christ's absolute sufficiency.

Humility deepens and grows as we learn to renounce our own glory and to seek after His glory in everything. C.S. Lewis writes: Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less. In other words, we think less about our own agenda and our own praise and our own glory and our own advancement and we think more about Jesus and God's glory and God's advancement and God's name, all of these things. Humility bends our thoughts upward toward God.

A humble man or woman is a man or woman who is passionate about Jesus' name. His name, His will, His praise, His advance, His authority, His glory, these are the things which matter to such a one.

This humility is not our natural state. It is not mine. Is it yours? Scripture says it is not for any of us. We are proud by nature, which is to say we are self-focused. We tend to look at ourselves often. We are prone to see God as small and ourselves as really big. We are prone to seek after our own praise, our own glory, and our own agenda. That is the reason why Peter says, "Clothe yourselves with humility". We do not find it inside of ourselves and pull it out of us. We need to receive it from God and then put it on. God, in His grace, is willing to give us this grace and humility, but we still have a responsibility to take that humility God is willing to give us through Christ and clothe ourselves each day with it.

To "clothe" means to "tie something" onto yourself with a bow or a knot. It was used in the 1st Century of a slave tying on an apron so as to ready for service. If we are to have humility we must not look inside of ourselves to find it, but we are look upward toward to God and say, "Lord, would you grant me the garment," and after the Lord grants us the garment of humility, the sense of who He is and His greatness, and the sense of who we are and our smallness and failures, we tie that on everyday and we do something with it. We are consciously and actively pursuing that mindset.

Some of you might say, "Okay, pastor, as we talk about what humility is, you are using many abstract ideas to help us understand. Do you have something more concrete?" Yes, we do. To paraphrase Forest Gump's mom, "Humble is as humble does."

Peter helps us with two concrete actions to see humility at work. The first is found in Verse 5: Humility joyfully submits to human authority. Humility does not resentfully spurn such authority, but it joyfully invites it into our lives. Peter plies humility in this direction specifically to young adults in reference to their response to spiritual leaders,

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

The phrase "to be subject" is a military term which means to "place one's self under another's authority and leadership". In this context, Peter is talking spiritual leadership. In talking about elders he is not talking about older people so much as he is specifically addressing leaders in the church. We know that from Verses 1 and 2, when he addresses fellow elders and tells them to shepherd the flock God has given to them to oversee and lead. Peter is telling them, "Here is a response and an action a person takes when they clothe themselves with humility."

We notice he is specifically addressing young adults. Does this apply, though, to everyone? Yes, it does. Why does he only address young adults and not just address everyone? Perhaps it is because young adults, by their nature, tend to believe they do not need spiritual authority to help them, but they feel confident in their own decisions and wisdom and callings. Perhaps they believe the older generation is out of touch and they do not know what is going on in the world anymore. They are more tempted, then, to spurn and not invite that counsel. If you are a young adult and you are offended the text is addressing you specifically, blame Peter and not me! Granted, we all need this encouragement though.

A submissive spirit towards spiritual authority includes two primary characteristics. First, what does it mean to be subject. It means we invite the counsel of godly leaders into our lives and we look forward to it. Humility recognizes the need to seek wisdom outside of ourselves. God, in His greatness, sees us in our smallness and we recognize God is the God of wisdom and we are a people of foolishness. We need God's wisdom and we need to go to places and people who have received wisdom from God throughout their lives. We need that because, otherwise, we are operating in a vacuum of foolishness and we are going to make bad decisions.

Proverbs 15 says,

²² Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

Humility recognizes the need to seek wisdom outside of one's own experiences and thoughts. Being submissive means we invite counsel of godly, spiritual leaders into our lives. Secondly, it is what we then do with that counsel, that we maintain a teachable spirit, that when a godly, spiritual leader shares with his counsel and wisdom from God which contradicts our thoughts and our own desires, we do not say, "Let me go look for another counselor who will agree with me." We need to have a teachable spirit willing to bend to the will of the Lord.

That does not mean every counsel will be accurate, but it does mean we say, "Let me see if this person's counsel lines up with Scripture. If it does, I am going to believe it and I am going to act upon it." We are looking for spiritual leaders to teach us not what they know from their experiences, but to teach us what they know from God's Word. And, if they can show us, on the basis of Scripture, their counsel is sound we are going to, with humble hearts, say, "I need that wisdom. That wisdom will protect me against myself and against my own foolishness."

Humility rejoices in counsel which contradicts our own opinions when it is shown to be revealed based upon God's Word. Young adults, God's Word can save you from so much heartache and so much trouble if you become humble. In Proverbs 11, we read,

² When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

So often I have seen young adults seek after wisdom and have a teachable spirit and be blessed from it. This is always exciting to see. They sought after counsel and when they were given counsel, even though I knew it went against what they wanted to do and hear, they embraced it and God blessed them.

On the other hand, I have also seen so many times, when a young person is going off in a direction and godly, spiritual people to speak to them in their life, not only was it not invited, but they spurned it and when it was given they said, "No, that is not what I am going to do." Then I see heartache, difficulty, and tragedy ensue. Do you seek counsel from godly, spiritual leaders in matters which impact your life, or are you fearful they may tell you something you do not want to hear? Do you heed counsel if it contradicts your own thoughts and desires when you are convinced it is based upon Scripture, or do you walk your own path in contradiction to such counsel? This tells us whether we are humble or proud.

The second action Peter mentions is humility casts all of our cares upon God,

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

Humility, rather than trying to solve problems independently of God, leans completely upon God, particularly in prayer. The greatest sign of pride in our life is the lack of meaningful prayer. Think of the times when Peter, and I believe he is writing from his own experiences as well as what the Holy Spirit has shown him, experienced pride getting in the way of his casting his care upon the Lord and then what happened.

We remember when they were on the stormy seas and Jesus was asleep in the boat. They were freaking out over the danger they were experiencing; they were filled and consumed with anxiety and worry. When they went to Jesus they did not go to Him to cast their cares upon Him, but they went to Him and said, "Jesus, wake up! How can you be asleep?" Jesus speaks and says to them, "O, ye of little faith."¹ He could have gently said, "Jesus, would you take care of this? We are going to cast this upon you because you are here with us."

We think of Peter, concerning a huge crowd of over five thousand men, along with women and children, and he was concerned they were not going to get fed and they would become disruptive because they were hungry. He was worried about that and he said, "Where are we going to get the food to feed all these people?" Jesus took a little boy and did what Jesus does.²

We think of Peter huddled around a fire the night Jesus was betrayed. There were all kinds of emotions of fear and despair were going through him. A little girl comes to him and says, "You are one of them. You are His disciple, aren't you?" Peter answered, "No, I am not!"³ Again, rather than responding in humility and say, "I must cast this care upon the Lord," he embraced himself and sought his own solutions to his own problems and it lead to great trouble.

That is what pride does to us. It seeks our own solutions to our own problems rather than saying, "Lord, I am going to cast this care upon you. The word "cast" is an interesting word. It means to "throw an object upon to another object". For instance, this word is used when the Disciples took off their cloaks and they threw them upon the donkey. It is an energetic word indicating we are flinging a weight away from us and onto another.

This sounds as though it is real easy to cast your care upon Him, to take that fear, that anxious thought, that disappointment, that failure, that heartache, that frustration, that confusion, or that pain and simply cast them from your soul upon to the Lord. It sounds easy, but it is a difficult work of the soul to do this. It is more than simply saying, "Lord, help me." Humility says it is a taking of the burden and when you cast it you will entrust Him with it rather than having it land back into your lap. This is hard because we want to keep and maintain the burden because we feel as though we have some control in that area.

Peter says, "No, cast it completely away from you and completely upon the Lord because you know He is mighty, but He also cares for you. You do not have to worry whether He will have less care over that concern than you do. He will not. He will have a greater concern and care over that."

When I think of this kind of casting, I think of Hannah casting the care of wanting a child upon the Lord. She went to the Temple to pray and at the Temple she cast her care upon the Lord. As she did this, Scripture says, when she got up, she left the Temple and her face was no longer sad.⁴ This is before the Lord gave her a child. What changed? Her burden of being childless and barren no longer rested in her own soul, but it rested completely upon God. She was able to walk up and say, "I do not carry that burden anymore." That is what it means to humbly cast our burdens upon the Lord.

Pride holds onto our burdens. Humility says, "Lord, here is my fear. Here is my burden. I am casting them onto you."

Why should we humble ourselves before the Lord? Peter gives us three incentives, blessings, and encouragements which take place for holding onto a humble heart. The first is a negative,

⁵ Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility...for "God opposes the proud..."

¹ Mark 4:37-40

² Mark 6:30-44

³ Mark 14:66-72

⁴ 1 Samuel 1:8-18

Peter is constantly referencing other Scripture. Here, I believe he is referencing Proverbs 3:34. How scary it is to have the omniscient, sovereign Lord oppose us. What Peter is warning us, not just unbelievers, of which it is true, but it is also true of believers. There is a sense we can create an environment in which God must oppose us if we do not clothe ourselves with humility.

Pride ruined Lucifer when he said, "I want to be like God. I will be like the Most High," and God opposed him. God created him as the leader of the angels, but cast him out of Heaven forever. Pride ruined Adam and Eve. Created in God's image to walk with God and love God, in pride they doubted God's truthfulness and His goodness and they believed they could provide for themselves a condition better than what God was providing for them. They were opposed by God and cast out of the Garden.

Remember how Peter was opposed? I think back to this event in Matthew 16. Peter has just given this great confession,

¹⁵ He said to them, "*But who do you say that I am?*" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Then Jesus goes on to explain how the Son of Man must suffer many things and then die upon the cross. Peter stands up and says,

²² "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan!*"

Because he was unwilling to submit himself to the Truth of the teaching of Christ as to what is real and true, Peter resisted that because it did not jive with his thinking as to how the future should go. Jesus had to oppose him and say, "Get, thee, behind me, Satan!"

God opposes the proud. Friends, let us not put ourselves in a position in life where God opposes us in every turn, because God wins.

The second incentive is a positive: God gives grace to the humble. Let us not in pride seek to fix the problems in our own lives. That is what people do; they look to this counsel or that book, or they join this therapy group or that accountability club, they drink in this philosophy or that religion, or they go to this meeting. In all of this, they fail to do the one thing which will truly help them. I am not saying it is wrong to go to counselors or to read books, but the one thing which will truly help us in the problems we face in life is we humble ourselves before the Lord because God gives grace. Grace is God's resources and His strength to help us overcome any obstacle which would rob us of our joy in Him. Our joy in Him is what life is all about. He gives grace to us so we can hold onto our joy in Him.

I do not know the problems you face, but I do know you need God's grace in order to hold onto your joy in Him. I need God's grace everyday. For you it may be a marital conflict, a sin habit, a depression, an emotional state, some specific fear or anxiety. I want you to know God's grace is available to you; it is not far. He gives grace freely. We read in Isaiah,

^{57:15} For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

^{66:2} But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

This is the one He will look upon with favor, one with a willingness to obey.

The third incentive is also a positive: God will exalt the humble.

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

There are several hard conditions in this verse because we all like to be exalted. Notice what he says as to what it means to humble ourselves, first, under the mighty hand of God. The Mighty Hand of God is used in the Old Testament to describe God's sovereign workings in the affairs of men. Sometimes God's sovereign working is working to deliver His people from difficulty. Sometimes God's might hand is seen sheltering a believer in the midst of difficulty. Sometimes God's mighty hand is seen chastening a believer through difficulty. All three ideas are in view: that we humble ourselves under the Mighty Hand of God and we look for His deliverance to free us from the difficulty; that we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand even when it includes His mighty hand telling us, "No, I am going to keep you in the difficulty, but I am going to protect you and provide a fortress for you so that, even while you are going through that particular trial, I am not delivering you from it or out of it, but I will keep you in it. The last category is one in which it is truly hard to humble ourselves: when God is taking that difficulty and saying, "This is my design to chasten you and refine you and help you."

Job, who was a righteous man, was refined by the Lord in this way. Listen to what he says, in Job ,

²⁰ I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. ²¹ You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me. ²² You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.

Job is struggling with this and he is recognizing, though, it is God's mighty hand which is bringing this affliction, and God could have easily liberated him from it.

Peter is calling us to humble ourselves under God's sovereign hand, whether His hand at the moment is delivering us, sheltering us, or even when God's mighty hand is refining us. I believe it is the third aspect which is dominant in this letter of Peter and because to whom he is writing. He is writing to people who are under the mighty hand of God, those whose God's hand has designed specific trials to refine them. That is the theme of the book. It is easy for us to humble ourselves when God is delivering us out of trouble, or when God is preserving us in trouble, but what about when God is keeping us in painful, difficult moments for the purpose of refining us so we might a faith pure and that we might become like Jesus.

I think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when I think of this particular action. We remember the story of these fine men who lived very long ago. They were called by Nebuchadnezzar to bow before this image and idol Nebuchadnezzar made. They said they were not going to do that, so Nebuchadnezzar becomes furious and threatens to burn them alive in the fiery furnace. He confronts them and they answer him, in Daniel 3, and they are speaking to the emperor who is the most powerful man on earth, but they recognize he is small because they had been living in the presence of the Sovereign Lord and they are not afraid of him,

¹⁶ ...“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

That is humility and that is what it means to humble ourselves under the Mighty Hand of God. Nebuchadnezzar sees them preserved and a fourth man walking with them. At the end, he says,

²⁸ “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.”

This is obedience at any cost! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were exalted and we will be exalted at the proper time, that time God deems appropriate. That is hard because we want it to be on our schedule.

Finally, we want to consider the evidence of a humble heart and the three pieces of evidences we need to obtain in our pursuit of a humble heart. How do we know our heart is moving toward humility and we are being clothed by it? First, such a heart possesses a glorious view of God. In Scripture, when anyone has an experience when they see God and His glory, they are always humbled by it. In Isaiah , we read,

¹ "... I saw the Lord sitting...high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple..."³ (The angels) called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!'

⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am...a man of unclean lips..."

This happens all of the time when people encounter the Living God and it is what will happen to us. The evidence of humility is, first, a huge, expanding view of God. God is infinite and He is incomprehensible so we are always growing in our understanding of His greatness.

The second evidence is a high view of Scripture. A person is truly humble before God and will be humble before God's Word. I think of Josiah when he had decided to make repairs to the Temple and the Book of the Law was found and it was read. King Josiah tore his clothes as he listen to the Word of God. He recognized, in repentance, "We need to follow what God is saying."⁵ When we listen to Scripture on Sunday morning or in our devotions throughout the week and we say, "I need to hear what God has to say to me. This Book is my authority. It reveals what is good and right and true."

The final evidence is a dependent view of God's grace. It is a view we need God in our lives and we need His grace. Our own pride, wealth, and goodness is nothing. We need Christ as being our Sufficient Savior and Lord.

Let us clothe ourselves with humility. We know humility grows out of a right understanding of God's greatness and a right understanding of our own smallness. Humility is simply seeing the world as it truly is. It is sanity defined. Pride is insane when we come to understand the reality of God's greatness and of our smallness.

Let me close with a simple application: as you seek to humble yourself before the Lord and clothe yourself with humility before one another, make it your goal to think great thoughts of God and then worship Him for it. Do not be content with a children's Sunday school understandings of God. That is great if you are a child, but praise God you are beginning. If you are an adult, your thoughts about God should ever be growing and expanding. In order to have our thoughts about God expanding, we need daily time in His Word so we might come to experience God and to know Him and to walk with Him.

The larger our view of God the more we discover how small we are and how dependent we are and how much we Him. May God help us as we seek to walk with Him in humility, that we might receive His grace, that we might avoid His opposition, that at the proper time He exalts us to the glory of His name.

⁵ 2 Chronicles 34:8-21