

## **This Exiled Life – Part 5**

### **Be Humble and Pray**

1 Peter 5:5-7

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*<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,<sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:5–7 (ESV)*

In our all staff meeting last week, we talked about the culture of our church and of our staff. The topic of culture is really important. As we think about helping Fishers move toward self-governing in the next two years, as we think about launching our Castleton congregation into the facility on 91<sup>st</sup> and Allisonville, and as we think about how to reach our neighbors through the Next Door Mission, culture protects the ministry and propels it forward.

If you were to step into our staff conference rooms, you would see these words: Trust, Encouragement, Accountability, and Mission. These are the words that we want to characterize our staff culture. When you step outside the sanctuary at North Indy, you will see our Core Values: Pre-eminence of Jesus, Authority of the Word, Redemptive Community, Extravagant Grace, Unity in Diversity, and the Call to Go. These values represent the unique way in which we live out our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus.

Tonight, as we gather for our Worship-Based Prayer Night and Members Meeting, there is a particular culture that we are trying to achieve. The topics that we pray into, the items that we bring before you, and even your questions all contribute to the culture of our church.

Last week we talked about how our Elders are living out 1 Peter 5 in terms of a culture of shepherding. I wanted you to understand how we are thinking and what we are doing with the important command to “shepherd the flock of God . . . exercising oversight.” I hope that you were encouraged with what you heard.

### **Humility in the Exile**

We are coming to the end of 1 Peter, and you can feel the letter becoming more personal and more reflective. Our text today addresses a very important reality that should characterize the culture of the community of exiles. This reality is not a new concept, but it is significantly tested when the pressure of circumstances or opposition is increased.

What is that important reality? Humility.

Humility is vital to the life and culture of the church. It is what makes everything in the church work. Just think of how many problems arise due to pride. Consider the last church conflict that you were around. Wasn't pride a part of it? And wouldn't it have been easier if humility was part of the culture? Humility is the oil that makes the Christian life work.

When is humility tested? This is why Peter is raising this issue in his letter. The people who are receiving this letter are under increasing pressure and opposition. And isn't that the time when it is easiest to throw humility "out the window." Whether it is a relationship with a friend, a conflict with your spouse, challenges with your kids, difficult circumstances, or cultural opposition, humility is the hardest to live out when the pressure is on.

And yet humility, in those moments, is most important. Especially for the church.

So, let's look at 1 Peter 5:5-7 to see what we can learn about humility and its applications.

### **Defining Humility**

There are some words in the Bible that are really important, and yet they are so familiar that they can lose their impact. Humility is one of those words. Even if you are not a Christian, I'm sure that you know, at some level, what humility means. And I would suspect that you know it's good to be humble.

But I'd like to help all of us understand what this word means and how it is so closely connected to the gospel.

Let's start with the meaning of the actual words for humility in verses 5-7. We find the word three times in our text:

- "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility" (5:5a)
- "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (5:5b)
- "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God" (5:7)

In every use in 1 Peter, the word is the same, but the form is different. Humility is commanded, and it is to characterize their lives. Humility is to be practiced, and it is something that should describe the follower of Jesus.

When it is a command, the word "humble" essentially means to make low or to bring down. It can be used for the physical act of bowing, of being embarrassed, or of circumstances that are inglorious.

<sup>12</sup> *I know how **to be brought low**, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. Philippians 4:12 (ESV)*

But the word can more actively mean to make the heart small.<sup>1</sup> The sense is not that one falsely creates a condition or mindset that is inaccurate. Rather the idea is one of re-leveling or bringing something into alignment into reality. A great example of this is Matthew 18:3-4.

<sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and **become like children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3-4 (ESV)

Therefore, humility is directly connected to your understanding of who God is. And humility is connected to your understanding about God's grace to you. Humility means that you have an appropriate view of who you really are. This is where the gospel becomes really important.

The Bible tells us that God is the creator of the universe and that He is holy. It tells us that God alone is worthy of praise, worship, and adoration. And it tells us that mankind has rebelled against God's holiness, that we've fallen short of God's glory, and that there is no hope for forgiveness and reconciliation in ourselves. Humanity is in a dangerous position of rebellion with no hope in ourselves.

And yet the beautiful story of the gospel is that God rescues helpless sinners. Here is how Romans 3 positions this and connects it to boasting:

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . <sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded . . . Romans 3:23-24, 27 (ESV)

You see, the gospel message is essentially that God "graces" people who deserve condemnation. He rescues them from the judgment by giving them the righteousness of Christ. And the effect is that boasting is excluded because everything we have, we received (1 Cor. 4:7). If everything we have is something that was given to us, then we should never boast about anything as if we did something or deserved something.

In other words, the entire Christian life, or all of Christian culture, is to be marked by a God-centered, grace-receiving humility. And it seems to me that this involves three things: understanding, reminding, and responding.

First, humility requires a fundamental **understanding** of what I've just said. You have to know who God is and what God's grace is all about in order for there to be any true humility. There can be no humility unless a person understands a biblical view of himself, his gifts, his sins, his God, and grace.

Second, humility requires **reminding** ourselves about what we know to be true. The problem with most Christians is *not* that they don't know about God's grace. No, the problem is that something causes us to temporarily act as if it doesn't matter. Other things take up the space of God's glory. Or, in

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<sup>1</sup> Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 747-748.

the case of 1 Peter, the pressure of something causes us to believe that our prideful feelings, thoughts, or actions are justifiable.

Third, and finally, humility requires **responding** humbly. It is true that humility starts in the heart and is an attitude. But it must be lived out in real and tangible ways or it is not humility. You cannot be theoretically or philosophically humble. It has to show up. But it shows up as the absence of self.

Tim Keller, in his very helpful little book *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*,<sup>2</sup> quotes C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, by saying:

*If we were to meet a truly humble person, Lewis says, we would never come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would not be always telling us they were a nobody (because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person). The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.*<sup>2</sup>

Keller goes on to provide an excellent summary of true humility, something he calls gospel-humility:

*True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings. . . . A truly gospel-humble person is not a self-hating person or a self-loving person, but a gospel-humble person.*<sup>3</sup>

Humility is understanding who we really are, reminding ourselves about this reality, and responding practically in a manner that fits with this definition. Humility means that I understand who God is and what He has done. It means that my attitude and actions are connected to this reality.

Let me just encourage you to do a quick internal inventory:

- How often did you think about God's glory versus your own glory this week?
- Did you spend time getting your mind and heart around who God is through reading the Word and through prayer?
- How many times did you have to fight self-centered thoughts this week?
- Did you face any conflict or problems this week which are really a problem with a lack of humility?
- Did God place anything in your life this week in order to show you your pride?
- Have you allowed circumstances to give you a "justification" for being self-concerned?

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<sup>2</sup> Keller, Timothy. *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* (Kindle Locations 228-230). 10Publishing. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Keller, Timothy. *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* (Kindle Locations 241-242). 10Publishing. Kindle Edition.

The problem of pride is so central to our humanity that understanding our pride, reminding ourselves who we are, and responding in humility is something we probably need to consider more than we may even know. But that is especially important when the pressure starts to mount.

### **Applying Humility in Three Realms**

Now that we've got a good understanding of the meaning and nuance of humility, let's see how Peter applies it to three key realms. Humility is vital for the church in regard to authority, attitudes, and anxieties.

#### **Authority**

Verse 5 is a command to those who are young to be submissive to the elders. There are a number of things to note here:

- The word "likewise" connects this command with what Peter said in verse 4 in regard to elders (spiritual leaders) understanding their place in light of the Chief Shepherd. In other words, elders need to know who they are in light of who Jesus is. They are to follow the Chief Shepherd. And in the same way, those who are younger are to follow the elders. More on this in a moment.
- The reference to "elders" has to mean the same people who Peter was addressing in 5:1, so it doesn't just mean older. It means those who are spiritually mature, and specifically, those who are in spiritual leadership.
- Once again, we see the verb "be subject." We saw this in 2:13 in reference to earthly authorities, in 2:18 in regard to employers, and in 3:1 as it related to wives and disobedient husbands. Hopefully you will remember that it means a posture of normative obedience. To be subject means that your first inclination is to joyfully follow those who are in authority.

Now, I know that the word "humility" is not mentioned specifically. But I think it is clearly implied by the rest of the passage. But why would Peter single out the "younger" for this command?

Well, let me ask you what you were like when you were younger? How did you view authority? How did you view spiritual authority? I know that as I look back on my own life, there is a pretty clear pattern in myself and in those who were my age. Younger people, in general, can be quick to allow their zeal and their lack of life experience to cause them to be disrespectful, dismissive, or disobedient to those in authority.

I felt this when I was a youth pastor. I saw things that the Senior Pastor did or things that he refused to do, and I would think, "That's not what I would do. Why does he do that? Does he know what he's doing?" But I also remember the moment, after becoming a Senior Pastor, that I looked out my office window and said out loud "I had no idea how hard and complicated this job really was."

So, young people (however you want to define that), let me encourage you that one of the ways that you express humility is how you respond to those who are spiritually more mature than you and to those in spiritual leadership. Last week I encouraged our young men to aspire to be an elder. Let me encourage all of our young people to be careful about how you respond to those who are spiritual

leaders in your life and to seek out the influence or mentoring of those who more spiritually mature than you. Don't write off people who are not in your peer class. And be careful about being sinfully critical of those who are in authority. One of the most common expressions of pride for young people is how they respond to those in authority, especially spiritual authority.

### **Attitude**

Peter then expands the application to everyone and specifically to relationships within the church. And he also gives a strong warning to those who were not inclined to follow his instruction.

When verse 5 says "clothe yourselves," the idea is to have something so characteristic of you that you are "wearing it." Further, the tense of the word would indicate that humility should or is already a part of who you are. But they needed to live like it in regard to one another. Some commentators point to Jesus' example in John 13, where the already "humbled" Jesus took the posture of humility by washing the feet of the disciples. Jesus "clothed Himself" humility. We are to do the same.

It is important to note here that this humility is specifically directed toward people. The text says "with humility toward one another." I'm sure you know why Peter would say that. Is it not true in your life that the biggest struggles with humility and the greatest manifestations of pride happen in the context of relationships? Without humility, the church is a very hard place to live.

Without humility, there is no unity, no peace, no reconciliation, no forgiveness, no repentance, no acceptance. Humility is the one thing that makes a difference in nearly everything inside the church and inside the heart of the follower of Jesus. Tim Keller gives another good example related to how we handle criticism:

*The self-forgetful person would never be hurt particularly badly by criticism. It would not devastate them, it would not keep them up late, it would not bother them. Why? Because a person who is devastated by criticism is putting too much value on what other people think, on other people's opinions. The world tells the person who is thin-skinned and devastated by criticism to deal with it by saying, 'Who cares what they think? I know what I think. Who cares what the rabble thinks? It doesn't bother me.'*

*The person who is self-forgetful is the complete opposite. When someone whose ego is not puffed up but filled up gets criticism, it does not devastate them. They listen to it and see it as an opportunity to change. Sounds idealistic? The more we get to understand the gospel, the more we want to change.<sup>4</sup>*

Now that's just one example, and I'm sure that you can think of so many more. I can tell you from over 20 years as a pastor that very few church issues would be issues if everyone would be humble. And the pressure of difficult circumstances makes it harder to be humble.

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<sup>4</sup> Keller, Timothy. *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness* (Kindle Locations 251-253). 10Publishing. Kindle Edition.

In order to really make this point stick, Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34 – “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” He quotes this as a promise and a warning. It is a promise that God will help those who choose a path that in the flesh seems like it will make you lose. Humility is choosing to believe in God’s ability to help you rather than going your own way.

But it is also a warning. God allows our pride to reap its nasty fruit. Do you know what it means for God to oppose you? Here are some examples: on-going conflict, words that do not help, difficult circumstances, sleeplessness, a troubled spirit, some forms of depression, or a sense of distance from God. Any of these could be a sign that pride is getting the best of you.

Is there any relationship that is marked by pride and not humility? Are there particular people or issues where you’ve not responded humbly? Why not stop the opposition of God right now?!

### **Anxieties**

The final realm where pride surface is specifically how we handle worrisome issues. Verses 6-7 are loaded with some important truths:

- “Humble yourselves” is a command, but it is something that is already completed. In other words, we are commanded to live out who we really are. Be humble because you are humbled. Or think of it this way: embrace gospel-centered humility.
- “Under the mighty hand of God” – part of the humbling is recognizing that God is mighty and that we are not like Him. One of the first steps in embracing humility is acknowledging that you are not God.
- “At the proper time he will exalt you” – God determines when the trial is over, and this text may even mean that the final exaltation does not come in this lifetime. Regardless of when, the point is the same: God is the one who does the exalting, not you.
- “Casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you” – a critical part of humility is taking our worries and casting them in prayer upon the Lord knowing that He really cares for us.

Do you know what anxiety is a form of pride? It is taking things that we cannot control and emotionally responding as if our actions, our thoughts, or our concerns were somehow able to do something about them. Anxiety flows from self-trust. Anxiety acts as if God is not in control and as if He doesn’t care.

What’s more, the phrase “casting all your anxieties” is a participle that is connected to the verb “humble.” Do you know what that means? When you cast your anxieties, you are humbling yourself. By praying, you create humility.

That is why proud people do not pray. They do not want to acknowledge their need. They do not want to admit their powerlessness. They would rather work or worry or be angry or be anxious because it feels like they are in control again. But the real problem is pride.

This is what opposition of any kind does. It surfaces the latent pride in us. And this is one of the reasons why the subtle opposition of the culture can actually be good for you and good for the

church. The pressure provides the opportunity for us to really demonstrate that we know who we are and who our God is.

So, where does God find you today? Are there issues with authority in your life? Are there attitudes toward others that are creating problems? Are there anxieties that need to be laid at the feet of Jesus?

Are you realizing that you need to become a follower of Jesus today and that your pride is ruining your life and putting you in eternal jeopardy with God?

No matter where God finds you today, I just want to remind you that God gives grace to the humble. So why not turn to Him for the first time or maybe the 1,000<sup>th</sup> time?

And finally, let me encourage all of us. The church is supposed to be marked by a unique humility, something that is different than the world and its culture, so let's be a people at College Park Church who live out the gospel through our humility.

God opposes the proud church. But He gives grace to the humble.

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