

Acquiring Humility

By Al Ells

"He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and
to walk humbly with your God."
-Micah 6:8

You probably heard the story of the parishioner who received recognition for being the humblest man in the church. As an award, the congregation gave him a pin to wear. The following Sunday, the parishioner wore his new pin, and the congregation took it away from him for being too proud. Sometimes humility is like this: As soon as we think we are humble, we are not.

Humility can conjure up depressing images of self-abasement and groveling, however, this is not the true meaning of humility. Perhaps we can best understand humility by attempting to see ourselves through God's eyes rather than our own.

Preacher Charles Spurgeon defined humility as making "a right estimate of one's self." Another noted speaker stated, "Humility is not denying the power or gifting you have, but admitting that the gifting is from God and the power comes through you and not from you." After World War II, Winston Churchill embodied humility when he said, "I was not the lion, but it fell to me to give the lion's roar."



To truly repent from, or "put off", pride requires that we embrace, or "put on", humility. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you." I have compiled a list of 12 suggestions that I have gleaned from others regarding how to humble yourself. Since humility is a godly trait, you will find that they are all parallel to the most basic tenets of the Christian faith.

1. Routinely confess your sin to God (Luke 18:9-14)
All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. Still, too few of us routinely practice rigorous self-honesty and self-examination. A regular inventory of our heart and behavior, coupled with confession to God, is an essential practice of humility.
2. Acknowledge your sin to others (James 3:2; 5:16)
Humility before God is incomplete without humility before man as well. A true test of our willingness to humble ourselves is whether we share our weaknesses with others. However, wisdom dictates that we do so with those we esteem as trustworthy.
3. Receive wrongs patiently (I Peter 3:8-17)
This has been a difficult one for me. When I am aware of an injustice, I want to react and rectify it. However, patiently responding to others' unjust accusations and actions demonstrates strength of godly character and provides an opportunity to put on humility.
4. Actively submit to authority-both good and bad (I Peter 2:18)
Our culture devalues submission and promotes entitlement and individualism. How actively do you submit to the authorities that God has placed in your life? When you make it a point to do so, you humble yourself in a godly manner.

5. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously (Proverbs 10: 17; 12:1)
A Phoenix-area pastor was noted for how well he received negative feedback or correction. Rather than being defensive, he would simply say, "Thank you for caring enough to share that with me. I will pray about it and get back to you." There is usually a kernel of truth in any criticism, even if the source is dubious. Pray that God will reveal His lesson for you instead of reacting negatively.
6. Accept a lowly place (Proverbs 25:6-7)
Wanting to sit at the head table, wanting others to recognize your contribution or becoming offended when others are honored or chosen before you indicates the presence of pride in your life. Actively support the recognition of others who have been spotlighted rather than you. Accept and look for the lowly place; it is the place of humility.
7. Proactively associate with people of lower state than you (Luke 7:36-39)
The Pharisees derided Jesus for socializing with the poor and unwanted members of society. Our culture is very status conscious, and people naturally want to socialize upward. Resist the temptation to be partial toward those with status or wealth.
8. Choose to serve others (Philippians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 23:11)
When we serve others, we also serve God's purposes in their lives. Such service builds the Kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of self. When our service requires little or no sacrifice on our part, we should question whether it is truly servant hood.
9. Be quick to forgive (Matthew 18: 21-35)
Forgiveness is one of the greatest acts of humility. When we forgive, we acknowledge that a wrong has been done to us and relinquish our right to compensation or retaliation. Forgiveness is self-denial; it is resisting the temptation to exact justice on our own terms.
10. Cultivate a grateful heart (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
The more we develop an attitude of gratitude for God's gifts of salvation and eternal life, the truer our perspective of self and others becomes. Humility has everything to do with a proper perspective of self. A grateful heart is a humble heart.
11. Speak well of others (Ephesians 4:31-32)
Saying negative things about others rearranges our mental "ladder," moving others down a rung, while moving ourselves upward. It is simply another manifestation of pride. Speaking well of others edifies them. Just be careful that your words are not intended as flattery.
12. Treat pride as a condition that can only be cured by embracing the cross (Luke 9:23)
Pride is not a problem that is easily fixed and goes away. It is a condition. It is our nature to be proud, and it is God's nature in us that brings forth humility. The foundation of true humility is laid on a commitment to a lifestyle of dying to self-daily and living through Christ.