

The Humility Test

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James 4:6-10 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Several decades ago, heavyweight boxer Muhammed Ali used to proudly brag, “I am the greatest!” Ali claimed he was the greatest. The apostle Paul claimed to be the least (1 Cor. 9:12, 15:9). Perhaps the most deceptive thing about pride is to think that it’s not a sin. A Hollywood celebrity said, “I don’t think pride is a sin. I think some idiot made that up.”

What exactly is pride anyway? First let’s define what pride *isn’t*. If we define humility in the wrong way, we will search for wrong ways to humble ourselves. Pride isn’t having healthy self-esteem. Nor is it the desire to do the best of our ability, or being promoted to a higher position. **Think of pride as selfishness.** It takes personal credit for abilities given to us by God. It makes us think that we’re somehow better than others. Pride forgets God made everyone of equal value and no one is better than anyone else.

In James 4 we discover that God is opposed to the proud but He gives grace to the humble. He resists those who are proud. Now, let’s think about that for a moment. How would you like to have God opposing you in everything you do? I don’t want God opposing me. Could it be that the reason some people are experiencing constant turmoil in their lives is because God is opposing them? Maybe if they would humble themselves, they would receive God’s favor and things would be better.

James 4:6 says, “God is opposed to the proud, BUT He gives grace to the humble.” The first part of the verse says God gives a greater grace. Greater than what? Greater than my SIN. Greater than my PROBLEMS.

It’s no accident that the apostle Paul began every one of his letters, wishing GRACE to the readers. He said may grace be **with** you, may grace be **multiplied** to you. Why did he say that? Was it because he needed a cute, flowery word to start his letters? I don’t think so. I believe Grace is something real that God gives—It’s His favor and His blessing to those who are humble. If we want God’s favor on our lives, we must first humble ourselves. We must get our hearts in the right position if we want to hear from God and be blessed by Him.

Numbers 12:3 says, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.” Do you know who wrote the book of Numbers? It was Moses! I’ll bet it was hard for Moses to tell everyone he was the humblest man on the face of earth. That was an honor he could be proud of. This verse tells us 2 things:

1. God MEASURES our humility.
2. God knows who the most humble person is on earth.

A church realized the importance of humility, so a committee was formed to find the humblest person in the church. Many names were submitted and evaluated. Finally, the committee came to a unanimous decision. They selected a quiet little man who always lived in the background and had never taken credit for anything he had done. They awarded him the “Most Humble” button for his modest attitude. Unfortunately, the next day they had to take it away from him because he pinned it on.

Humility means we see ourselves as God sees us. No matter how big we may look in this world, we are still really tiny when compared to God.

The problem is, it's hard to detect pride in our lives. We have tests for everything in this world, but there's no test to check for areas of pride. So, I've come up with a little test that will help us examine the spiritual condition of our hearts. Check the box after the question.

The Humility Test

Question #1: Do you depend on your own abilities and strength instead of on God?

YES ___ NO ___

Freedom is not independence, but a change of dependence. We stop depending on ourselves and start depending on God. Whatever you trust in and what you are controlled by is what you depend on. Are you self-dependent or GOD-dependent?

One of the first indications pride has slithered into our lives is we are no longer dependent upon God. Whenever we think we can stand on our own, we are getting ready to fall. First Corinthians 10:12 says, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

A pastor was traveling on a bus down a bumpy road seated next to a college student. The young man noticed the minister was reading his Bible. The minister asked him, "Are you spiritually ready for the temptations that you will face in college?"

The student replied, "I don't have a problem with temptation. I have strong will-power."

The minister took a pencil from his pocket and said, "I can make this pencil stand up on the cover of this Bible even though the bus ride is bumpy."

The young man said, "I'll believe it when I see it. I don't think you can do it."

"Look, I'm doing it," he replied as the young man watched.

"Yeah, but you didn't tell me you would hold the pencil up with your hand."

The pastor said, "I didn't have to tell you. Have you ever seen a pencil stand up on its own without someone holding it?"

The minister then let go of the pencil, which immediately fell over. He said, "Son, let this be a lesson to you. The only reason you can stand is because God is holding you up with His hand." The only reason we stand is because God is holding us up with his hand. Romans 5:2 says that we stand by God's grace. If God were to remove his hand of grace, we will fall too. Humility means that we have complete dependence upon God, realizing that He upholds us by his grace.

Question #2: Do you crave recognition and get upset when you don't receive it?

YES ___ NO ___

Pride craves recognition and is greatly offended when it is overlooked. Jesus asked the Pharisees, "How can you believe when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?" (John 5:44) The Pharisees loved the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues. They thrived on glorifying themselves.

One late night talk show had a body builder as one of its guests. The talk show host asked if he would show off his muscles to the audience. The body builder faced the audience and cameras, flexing his muscles with a big smile on his face.

The host said, "Boy, you sure do have the muscles. What do you use all of those muscles for?" The body builder didn't answer, but continued to show off to the audience.

Again, he asked, "What do you use those muscles for?" The muscle man again remained silent while continuing to show off. The answer was obvious. He didn't use his muscles to do any useful work, but only to glorify himself.

Everything goes back to the heart. What's in our hearts? Anything that is a strength can be used to glorify ourselves. We can use our looks, intelligence, job status, and personal accomplishments to glorify ourselves. We can even use our spiritual gifts to exalt ourselves rather than the God.

If God has blessed you in a high position or in a certain way, just keep your head on straight. If someone compliments you or encourages you, kindly accept it and give God the glory.

God tells us that we need to encourage one another. If someone is serving faithfully in a ministry, we should tell that person that they are appreciated. That's a good thing. We are not called to glorify each other, but we are all called to encourage one another. "Encourage one another, and build up one another" (1 Thess. 5:11). "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'today'" (Heb. 3:13).

Question #3: Do you have a problem submitting to authority?

YES ___ NO ___

Romans 13:1-2 says to submit to governing authorities because God has established those authorities. First Peter 2:13 says to submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution. Some people might claim they're submitting to the Lord in heaven, but that just have a problem submitting to all those human institutions He's established on earth. But submission always works from the bottom up, not the top down. No government can make you submit—it must come from yourself.

Some people say, "Well, I don't like my boss because he makes decisions I don't like." But God says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters (boss) with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable" (1 Pet. 2:18). If we only submit when we agree with the boss, we become the authority. It's a loophole for rebellion. However, we don't have to submit if the employer wants us to do something unethical or against Scripture. Acts 5:29 says, "We must obey God rather than men."

It's possible to obey without submitting. Obedience is an outward action, while submission is an inward attitude. A mother told her disobedient son to sit in a corner. After a couple of minutes of sitting, he told his mother, "I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside!" He obeyed, but he didn't submit. The only way we can submit to unreasonable authorities is to have a humble heart.

Years ago when we planted our church in Kansas, I had to work as a bi-vocational pastor until I eventually went full-time at the church. I worked part-time for UPS loading trucks early in the morning. On UPS trucks, every package is loaded in a particular order according to the driver's route. His first stop will have the first package he unloads at the front of his truck, every package in order, on down to his last stop.

I was loading packages off the conveyor belt one day when the supervisor came down and told me I need to rearrange my packages and move most of the boxes to the wrong places. I tried to explain to him they would be totally out of order, which would mess up the driver's delivery. He told me to do it anyway. I started arguing with him about it, because I knew I was right (and I was.) My supervisor wasn't asking me to do something spiritually wrong, he just wanted me to do something technically wrong.

Then the Holy Spirit convicted me that I was supposed to submit to him—even though he was wrong—and do what he said. The issue wasn't about loading the packages in the wrong places, but submitting to my boss when I disagreed with him. By submitting to my boss, I was actually submitting to the Lord.

When the driver came in later that morning, he exploded because dozens of packages were in the wrong places. I told him that I obeyed the supervisor's orders, and that he needed to talk to him if he had a problem. Then he went to the supervisor and they had a heated argument about it as I quietly kept doing my job.

Now please understand this—because what I am about to say is really important: I kept my attitude respectful toward my boss. It would have been easy to think, "I hope that driver really lets my boss have it!" No, I didn't want the driver and supervisor to get into a fight. I just

prayed, “Lord, I’m loading these parcels in the wrong places because I know my attitude toward my boss is more important to You than whether these packages are loaded in right places.”

Do you have a submissive heart toward your employer or supervisor? Colossians 3:23-24 says, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men...It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Question #4: Do you think you deserve a higher position?

YES ___ NO ___

Psalms 75:6 says, “For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation; but God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.”

King Nebuchadnezzar reigned over the Babylonian Empire which ruled the world. One day he walked on his royal palace roof and said, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). Immediately God spoke from heaven informing him he would live among the beasts and eat grass like cattle for seven years “until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes” (Dan 4:32). Nebuchadnezzar failed to recognize God is the one in charge of promotion and he resists those who are proud of their high positions.

Diotrephes is described as “someone who loves to be first,” meaning he promoted himself to prominence (3 John 9). The late A.T. Robertson once wrote an article about Diotrephes for a religious publication. He renamed him, updated his story using present day terms, and labeled him as the “church boss.” Dr. Robertson later reported twenty deacons had written the editor canceling their subscriptions because they thought the article was a personal attack on them!

When we humble ourselves, we understand God determines who gets promoted and who doesn't. That means we don't envy those who are promoted and we aren't the least bit upset if we are passed over for promotion. Moving to a higher position is ultimately in God's hands.

Alex Haley, the late author of *Roots*, had a unique picture in his office wall of a turtle sitting on top of a fence post. When people asked him why he had it hanging on the wall, Haley would say, “If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he had some help. Any time I start thinking, 'Wow, isn't this marvelous what I've done!' I look at that picture and remember how this turtle—me—got up on that post.”

Just like a turtle can't get on top of a fence post without a hand picking it up and putting it there, we can't receive promotion without the uplifting hand of the Lord. It's His choice whether he wants us in a high position or a low one.

Question #5: Are you unwilling to do servant's jobs?

YES ___ NO ___

Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as ruler of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44).

In the Greco-Roman world, pride was an attribute to be admired while humility was something to be shunned at all costs. When Jesus taught we should humble ourselves and become servants and slaves, people thought he had lost His mind. After all, no one had ever taught humility was a virtue and pride was a sin.

Jesus' statement was disappointing news to most folks back then. It isn't very exciting to most people today, either. In our hi-tech society where status and position are in, servants and slaves are definitely out. Paul Moody said, “Greatness is not measured by how many people are your servants, but how many people you serve.” Humility is willing to do any job God asks no matter how small or undignified it might be.

When I first enrolled in seminary, I made an appointment to talk to the Dean of Men to see if I could get a room in the dormitory. When I walked into his office, the first thing he asked was, "Are you applying for the janitor's job?"

"No," I replied, "I'm here to see if any rooms available in the dorm."

He answered, "I'm sorry, the dormitory is full. We will put you on the waiting list. If you know anyone who wants a janitor's job, please send him to see me."

I told him I wasn't interested in the job and thanked him for his time. When I walked out of the dorm, God stopped me on the sidewalk and spoke loud and clear to my heart, "Go get that janitor's job." There was no mistake about it. This was God speaking. I had no desire for that job until He spoke.

Immediately I did an about face, walked into the dean's office and said, "I'll take that job if it is still available." He hired me on the spot.

At first, I battled with my pride. I thought about how over-qualified I was, having a college degree and was now working on my Master's. But then I thought about how Jesus was over-qualified to wash people's feet, which was a slave's job. He said, "If I then, the Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. For I gave you *an example* that you should do as I did" (John 13:16-17). If Jesus would have taken the janitor's job, and I was following Him, shouldn't I be willing to the same?

I was given a seminary janitor's shirt and a little cart to push, containing soap, gloves, toilet paper, toilet bowl cleaner, and a brush. The dormitory was completely full of men preparing to become pastors, so I was in a sense washing the feet of my brothers in Christ. Every day I vacuumed the hallway carpets, dumped trashcans, scrubbed showers, and cleaned toilets. But as I cleaned bathrooms every day, I discovered God speaking to my heart clearer than I had ever heard him before. As I meditated upon Scripture while I worked, I made notes about the insights God was giving me into his Word. Working as a janitor was an important part of my training for ministry. If I wasn't willing to obey him as a custodian, how could I obey him as a pastor?

I spent my three years in seminary working as a custodian and attending classes. Half of what I learned in seminary was in the classrooms, while the other half was in the bathrooms. I learned that having a servant's heart was something I had to keep, no matter how much "success" I might achieve in the future. Being a servant doesn't necessarily mean having a lowly position, but have a lowly heart. That last thing that God wants are pastors who are full of pride and think they are better than the people they're serving. I also learned to respect and thank janitors for the work they perform.

Question #6: Do you look down on anyone?

YES ___ NO ___

"Let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Phil. 2:3).

The Pharisees were a religious sect who looked down on anyone who didn't follow their strict codes. A Sunday School teacher was sharing with her children's class about the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer praying in the temple (Luke 18:10-14). The Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank you that I'm not like other people," while the tax-gatherer said, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." The teacher explained how the pious, self-righteous attitude of the Pharisee caused him to look down on the tax-gatherer. At the end of the class, she asked one little boy to close in prayer. He prayed, "God, I thank you that I'm not like that Pharisee!" We can very subtly look down on others without realizing it.

The Bible doesn't teach others are more important than ourselves, but that we are to *regard* others as more important. Humility doesn't mean we put ourselves down, but we lift others up. Although all people are of equal value in God's eyes, from our viewpoint others should be considered as more important.

Question #7: Do you brag about your strengths instead of your weaknesses?

YES ___ NO ___

“Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Admitting our weaknesses opens the way to receiving the power of God. Pride likes to boast in its strength, while humility boasts in its weakness. Although it's tempting to brag about our own achievements, it's better to keep silent and let the accomplishments speak for themselves. “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth. A stranger, and not your own lips” (Prov. 27:2). A chicken lays one egg and cackles about it, but a salmon lays ten thousand eggs and doesn't say a word.

Our educational accomplishments can also be a source of pride. Someone once said a diploma is like the curl on the tail of a pig. It does not mean very much, but it does tickle the ham to which it is attached. Paul said he counted all these things as dung in order that he might gain Christ (Phil. 3:8). Humility acknowledges we are weak but He is strong.

How did you do on the Humility Test? If you answered *yes* to any of the above questions, then those are areas of pride in your life. The solution to the pride problem is to humble yourself.

Humble Yourself

“Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but give grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:5-6). Notice that the only one who can “humble yourself” is yourself! But we aren't just humbling ourselves, we are humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand. This was the same mighty hand that...

- Created the world. (Isaiah 41:20)
- Delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. (Deuteronomy 5:15)
- Split the Red Sea. (Joshua 4:23-24)
- Controls the heart of kings. (Proverbs 21:1)
- Controls people and nations (Jeremiah 18:6)
- Received the spirit of Jesus (Luke 23:46)

God's hand is sovereign and all-powerful. When we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, we submit ourselves to his control so that he may guide our lives in any way he wishes. We recognize how little we are compared to Almighty God and that he deserves all our praise and glory.

A rooster named Chanticleer was a vain sort of bird who prided himself on his accomplishments. He was most proud of the fact that his crowing each morning caused the sun to rise. Every morning, he crowed. And every morning the sun rose.

One morning Chanticleer overslept. When he awoke, he was surprised to see the sun was already up—and that it happened without any help from him. He then realized he could not honestly take credit for the rising of the sun each day. However, there was something else he could do. Chanticleer said to himself, “If by my crowing I cannot bring in the dawn, then by my crowing I can celebrate its coming!” And that should be our response as well. We can't take credit for the things He does, but we can celebrate what He does by giving him the glory.

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