

## A Portrait of Humility

A portrait is a verbal picture or description of a person. We tend to be familiar with portraits when we are referring to just the picture of an individual, that captures their shoulders and above including their facial features and so on. Sometimes however, when we are referring to the description of a particular entity we also call that a portrait. **Humility is not a nice to have that we add to our characteristics. It is vital for effective Kingdom Living.**

**Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** Jesus described Himself as humble. Many people talk about being humble and humility, but what does that actually look like? Is being humble using everyone's title and calling them "Chief"? Is being humble muttering, and crouching down in deference, before you do whatever you have to do in relation to the people around you? It is so important for us to define humility so that we understand what the Bible means when it says that, **"God resists the proud, But gives grace [shows favour] to the humble."** James 4:6 NLT. Grace and favour are when God raises you up but it is unmerited. You can pray as much as you want for favour and breakthrough but the Bible gives us this "key" where it tells you that you ought to be humble. When you walk in humility it affects your prayer life. Instead of claiming things from God in self-righteousness you cry out for His mercy. Many people demand rewards from God based on their deeds whilst heaven is trying to show them the gaps in their deeds. **How can God reward you for something you had already sought the reward from man?** Sounding humble and being humble are not the same thing. **There are different shades of pride and these affect our effectiveness in ministry and life. His strength is only made perfect in weakness. Humility will protect you from making quick judgments.** That's why I like Denzil's response to the Will Smith Slap. "Were it not for the grace of God where would I be?" One of the shades of pride is slander. We tend to bad mouth others when we are proud. I loved the Wahl values I saw last week; one of them was "We Lead with Humility." One by one your clients can say they don't want to do business with you. What will you do? We need God's grace. **Pride blinds you. You are not conscious of your own ignorance. Remember Jesus told the parable ending: so is he who lays up treasures for himself but is not rich toward God. If your love for God is bigger than your love of money, then god can trust you with His wealth.**

**James 4:10 NIV "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time [season]."**

Christians generally struggle with the expression "due time" or "season", because most do not want to *wait* for that season.

Some people who come across as confident are in actual fact humble. They are confident enough to believe that what God has said, will happen, that "it will come to pass". They tremble at His Word in all its application. It's possible to look at that kind of confidence and think that those individuals are arrogant. No, they are not. That's a misinterpretation, often these people are humble enough to embarrass themselves in front of people. Take for example, when I get up and I'm praying for the sick, I know that sometimes the sounds that I'm making are funny, and that the groans sound strange. A humble person, in such a situation would approach me and say, "Paul I want to know what's going on, I want to learn about that and find out what's actually taking place." Sometimes I'm praying for people and I can sense that I am dealing with a demonic spirit, and I have to take authority (when you're taking authority you don't have to be cute and nice). If a thief comes into your house do you say, "Excuse me sir, you are trespassing on my property." You don't do that! There's something in your spirit that is repulsed by what you are sensing in the spirit and there's something that you have to release from your inner person to deal with that, so you take authority. The Bible talks about "prayers and groans", so sometimes when you hear people being prayed for and there is groaning, something is being birthed in the spirit. And it is people who are humble, that are willing to do that. On the other hand, proud people want to look cute and nice, and do not want to feel uncomfortable.

What is true humility? Is true humility saying, let me wear ugly clothes? Humility is a foundational virtue. Pride is the root cause of sin. If someone tells you that they fell, into a particular sin pattern, somewhere along the line you can trace that sin back to pride. When the Devil was kicked out of heaven he had said (paraphrasing), "Why can't I get as much praise as Jesus in this place. Look how beautiful I am, look how wonderful my singing is. I can do this thing." He was therefore, exalted in his own eyes. Pride causes us to believe our own press. Pride was the root of the Devil's rebellion, and it is the same root of our rebellion toward God, when we fall into sin. But in the same instance we talk about humility as the foundational virtue. When we talk of loving people, you have to be truly humble in order to look

at someone and say, "Even though this person is treating me badly I'm going to love them." In order to be patient, you also need to be humble. If you see an impatient person, it is possible to trace their impatience back to pride, because in their heart they are most likely saying, "God, my timing is better than your timing." Or "God, I deserve much better than this." The humble person is patient because they are able to say, "Lord, I am a sinner saved by grace."

Paul, arguably the greatest apostle of all time also said, "I am the Chief of Sinners." You wonder why Paul say that; he had been delivered of his sin and he moved on with God. So why did he say that? **When we walk in brokenness before God, and when we are continuously in His Presence in comparison to His glory and His holiness we know that we are just undone in God's Presence and we can't boast.** Therefore, God is taking us to a place of humility where we are carriers of His Presence. Where we walk in God's Presence with that consciousness of, "I am a sinner who was saved by grace. There is nothing that I can demand from God, as if it were because of my righteousness, as if I deserve it."

There was a man who was a farmer who decided to go and reach the lost and do some work as an evangelist. He spent a large portion of his time preaching, and when he had returned to his farm; he hadn't sown all of his seed, and he was upset with God, because while other people were beginning to reap their harvest, he didn't yield much in the way of harvest. In his disappointment he said, "God you should have seen all that I was doing and given me a supernatural harvest." That's pride and self-righteousness, which God will resist.

What is humility? Is it speaking softly all the time? Is it addressing people using fancy titles when you interact with them?

*Matthew 18:1-5 "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.""* The root of the question, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus's response was to call a little child to Himself, and he said to them "unless you change..." So the keyword here is change. It's uncomfortable and people don't like change, but if we're going to be humble then it's going to require some kind of change.

Are you like a child? *Matthew 18:4, "Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* The child referred to in this passage is actually an infant (*paidion* - Gk). In those days children were not highly respected. No. When the child had their Bar Mitzvah that is when their name would change to *hyios*, which means heir, and that's when a child was more respected. Prior to that they were merely a child not really afforded much respect. But Jesus said that we are to take "lowly" position of a child.

What are the lowly positions in society that God might be saying we must take up that lowly position?

Your humility will be seen in how you become like a child and how you welcome children. When Jesus is talking about children he's not just referring to an infant but he's using it as a picture - **an illustration of how when you become a humble person, it's seen by who you welcome into your life.** Are you thus, a person who only likes being seen with certain types of people? Are you a person who looks down on the people you consider the "nerds"? **Jesus doesn't just look at who you are, He also looks at who you welcome.** We cannot be people who want to take position as a lowly child and not welcome children. That is contradictory. We cannot say I will take on the guise of a servant and then at the same time not welcome servants. **How do you measure who is welcome in your inner circle and who is not and how do you rate the people around you? Are you basing these qualifications on their wealth or their position in society?**

Could it be that we are so desperate for God's Presence, and we are saying, "Holy Spirit you are welcome." But we've divorced the Holy Spirit from people? Could it be that the Holy Spirit is saying, "You have welcomed me into your presence but you have not welcomed that little infant." There's a link between welcoming those who are low and marginalized in society and the Presence of God.

**"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." Matthew 18:10 (NIV)**

Note that we have angels that have been assigned to protect us. We have angels that have been assigned to work on our behalf when the word over us has been decreed. So, Jesus is saying be careful when you are dealing with these lowly ones, because they have angels that are looking at God the Father. What would happen when we walked out of the church building and started looking at people differently? They must be important to God if they have angels that protect them. God protects what He values just like we do.

### Characteristics of Children

#### They are not self-conscious

**If we want to experience Kingdom dimensions we can't be self-conscious.** If we want to walk in the power of God we as Christians cannot keep making everything all about ourselves. Supposedly strong Christians in high school, talk about how they are so embarrassed and they would never be caught "wearing that", but children do not spend their time worrying about such things, they only learn this later on. The only fear that kids have when they are born is the fear of loud noises and the fear of falling. They say that all the other fears have been learned. If you figure out how you learnt that behaviour (that fear), then it's possible to unlearn it.

#### They do not worry

Little kids don't worry. It's only as they get older, they start to think ahead. Jesus tells us not to worry.

#### They are dependant

They are comfortable with someone else cooking for them or asking you for cash and the like. When God takes us on a journey of humility, one of the marks is that you are able to be dependent on someone else. When you are mature you will see that you are interdependent. You're not just independent. Being interdependent means that there will be times when someone is dependent on you, but there are also times when you will be dependent on others. **If you are currently in a place where you find it difficult to ask for help, then it means that there is pride in you because your journey to humility is going to be a journey of dependence.** A child is comfortable being dependant, even when a child goes somewhere with a family friend, they don't seem to mind asking for things even if they are expensive whereas you as a parent would be uncomfortable with that scenario. As grown-ups, we are the ones that get embarrassed but in contrast, children are humble. They ask boldly with faith and they literally believe that you can afford anything! Jesus says that you won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless you are like a child. He is talking about childlike faith, childlike innocence, being willing to be embarrassed and he's also talking about childlike forgiveness. If you have ever looked closely you will see how easily little children forgive but we as adults hold on to things and tend to quite easily write other people off, telling them that we are "through with them". You'll also notice just how easily children believe, almost to the point of being gullible. Kids just believe what they're told (e.g. Santa), but for many of us when we get given a word and there are 3 or 4 scriptures relating to that word that confirm it, we still find ourselves doubting its authenticity without searching the scripture.

What does it mean to welcome a child? Who do you welcome into your home, how do you assess who to welcome into your inner circle? On what basis do you receive people. I remember someone coming to me who had given some good advice to their boss, and the response had been, "With you I can't receive anything you say, because you lack experience". Could it be that the person God wants you to welcome, the person that God is sending into your life for your breakthrough, is someone you've despised? Could it be that this person is from a different cultural group that you've despised and you've doubted their capability based on a stereotype?

Are some of the people being sent into your life by God to be your close friends, people that you may not like to associate with generally because of your own pride? Are they people you don't like to be seen with? What is interesting about the disciples is that they asked who is the greatest in the Kingdom, but they didn't ask, "Lord what qualifies us to be the greatest in the Kingdom?".

Perhaps you are aspiring for leadership greatness, but you haven't asked the question, "What is the responsibility going to be?" Many people are consumed with the position but they forget that position goes hand in hand with responsibility. People want to be "Senior Pastor", heading up an "International" ministry, but do you know the level of responsibility that goes with that position? People also romanticise entrepreneurship, the idea of starting their own

business, and them being at the top really captures them. But there is such a weight of responsibility that goes with it.

In the beginning of Matthew 18, Jesus uses the example of a child but further along he begins to use the picture of a servant.

#### **Matthew 20:17-28 (NIV)**

**“Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day, he will be raised to life!”**

**Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”**

**“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”**

**When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.””**

In the quoted passage Jesus was talking about suffering, but the mother of Zebedee’s sons comes to him talking about positions. Jesus asks the sons of Zebedee, whether they are able to drink his “cup of suffering” and they answer that they can. In this instance, we see a “face” of pride, which is an over estimation of one’s own abilities. These men, as Jesus responded, didn’t know what they were asking nor what he was talking about, really. They had a skewed view of what they could and couldn’t do.

Jesus tells James and John that it is not up to him to decide who sits next to him in Heaven. Most Christians tend to get upset about such things, because their mentality is one of entitlement. It’s a mentality where they feel they are better than everyone, and that it’s about time, they get their promotion! And they don’t realize that they’ve just disqualified themselves from God raising them up, because they have a mindset of entitlement. Elsewhere Jesus talks about when you’re a servant and you have just served don’t expect a thank you (this is what the biblical posture is but you are not taught this in the corporate world), rather say to yourself, “I am a servant, I’ve just done my duty.” The moment we start to seek acknowledgement and question why were not thanked after something that we helped to put together (and we mention this to our Pastor and he apologises) we’ve stepped into the realm of pride and God resists the proud, as well as a proud family, school or church.

God also opposes nations that are prideful. Verse 24 says that, *“When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.”* Why? Probably because the other ten disciples had the same selfish ambition within them. If you’re a humble person and someone is always elevating themselves and showing off, it shouldn’t phase you because you are not competing with that.

When “Jesus called them together”, he didn’t just call James and John because they were not the only ones with issues that Jesus had to address. Perhaps, one might even ask whether it was their mother who was causing them to stumble. This is an example of how parents may cause their children to stumble. Sometimes when we are cheering our children on, we do it such a way that we are also looking down on other people at the same time. We should always be the kind of parents that also congratulate or encourage the children of other parents. I used to be an athlete so when my kids were at primary school, I would give tips to the other kids. I make it priority to congratulate other parents when their kids are doing well. Sometimes when we bad mouth other children and only raise up our own, we literally “birth” a spirit of pride in our children. “Let me win at all costs”- we start to teach them those attitudes. Think about it, what

was James' and John's mother doing asking Jesus, why did she not leave them to find out for themselves if they wanted to ask him? Why was she the one making the request?

If you had to make a request to God, what would you ask for? If you had to make a request on behalf your children or on behalf your siblings, what would you ask for? This mother just wanted her sons to have top positions. If she was a wise woman maybe she would have said, "Rabbi, thank you so much that you chose my kids to be your disciples – to be in your inner circle – they have told me so much about their encounters and their journey with you. My request to you is, please keep them from falling, please keep them close and intimate with you, that's all I ask." Which would have been a humble request. The prayers that we pray to God must be prayers of humility that's why He says, **"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."** 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV). Humility precedes prayer, you can pray very strong prayers from a place of pride and then no breakthrough takes place.

**"Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles laud it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant..."** Matthew 20:25 -26 (NIV) The one area where Christians are called to be different (from the way the world does things), is in the area of leadership and the area of servanthood. There is nothing wrong with becoming great. Jesus thus, is saying that if you want to be the greatest evangelist or pastor and so on, you need to come as a servant. If we truly catch the revelation of what Jesus said, then we would be desperate to find areas, even within the local church of lowly positions to serve.

**If you believe that you are called to greatness in the Kingdom of God, then I encourage you wherever you are to figure out how best you can serve.** It's as simple as that. There are different forms of service; service to your local church and service to society. When you figure out the "technology of servanthood", God exalts you. You should be entering into spaces such as the Church or society and identifying gaps and cracks and asking yourself, "What can I do to make a difference?" In African society often the mentality is, "I want to be a father one day, where everyone is just waiting on me and doing stuff for me." But how is this mentality looking to serve those around you with this attitude? Fathers, how are you serving your family?

A facet of servanthood is being able to do menial tasks. Is there anything that you believe is beneath you? If we want God to raise us up and promote us, we have to humble ourselves, take on the guise of a child and take on the guise of a servant, **"...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** Matthew 20:28 (NIV)

People who are proud don't serve. "Ah no, well that's going to inconvenience me," they would probably say. People who are proud don't wait. **When you respect and value someone's knowledge above your own understanding, you are willing to wait for them, just as you do when you sit in the waiting room of a doctor you value and respect, without getting upset that your time is being wasted.** Are you therefore, willing to wait on God's timing? Are you willing to wait in His Presence, and to linger there? Because you realise what you are going to get out of that, you are unable to get out of your own strength? Humble people wait.

### **A Checklist for Humility**

Here are some things to consider if you want to discover whether you are a humble person or whether you are not. Do you possess these characteristics?

1. You are willing to get correction from anyone, even if you see them as less experienced.
2. You recognize your own frailty before God
3. You are not presumptuous (e.g. conference seating)
4. You do not have an entitlement mentality
5. You are grateful, even for the small things in life.
6. You honour everyone around you, recognizing that they are a fellow human being, created in God's image
7. You enquire of the Lord and don't trust your own ability or intellect.
8. You do things for the audience of One (God); you would still do it even if no one was going to find out.
9. You know that better men (or women) than you have fallen

10. You know that no sin is beyond you
11. You know that you are not beyond deception
12. You receive those that the Lord sends to you
13. You recognize your ignorance and your limitations
14. You are obedient even if it causes humiliation on your part (some people are too proud to accept certain jobs)
15. You pray from a place of humility and allow God to guide you
16. You are full of faith because you take God at His word
17. You can boast of your weaknesses like Paul – 2 Corinthians 11:30 (NIV) Pauls says, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” Are you willing therefore to expose (disclose) your weakness, or is your whole life full of you hiding the things that you are weak in and just projecting what you are strong in?