

MAKING A FASHION STATEMENT

1 PETER 5:5B-6

Just after Jesus and His disciples arrived in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover, the Apostle John makes a startling declaration in his gospel account. He said, *“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power”* (13:3). In other words, Jesus was fully aware that He was absolutely sovereign. He wasn’t just the leader of this band of disciples; He wasn’t just Israel’s Messiah; He wasn’t merely the head of a new religion. Jesus had been given *all* power and *all* authority, meaning that everything in the entire universe—seen and unseen, material and immaterial—is subject to Him.

But immediately after making this declaration John tells us that Jesus did something that seems to contradict His status as the supreme and sovereign ruler of all. Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way: *“Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything...so he got up from the supper table, took off his robe, and put on an apron”* (John 13:3-4, *The Message*).

Did you notice the irony? Knowing He was in charge of everything, Jesus put on an apron, and then began to perform what may have been the lowliest, most demeaning task in the ancient world. He washed His disciples’ feet.

Knowing He was in charge of everything, Jesus did not try to prove how great and powerful He was. He did not demand that everyone applaud Him or serve Him or bow down to Him, as though His ego needed to be massaged. He *knew* that He was in charge of everything, therefore He began to serve others.

The King of kings and Lord of lords assumed the role of a lowly slave. The One who ranks above every creature in the universe voluntarily put Himself in the *position* of someone with no rank and no status.

What was He doing? He was reconstructing our concept of true greatness, showing us that greatness in the kingdom of God—greatness in God’s eyes, is love expressed by humble service.

The Apostle Peter, who was present in that room, and who initially resisted Jesus’ attempts to wash his feet, was deeply impressed and impacted by this event. And when we come to chapter 5 of his first letter, when he tells us how to relate to each other, it could very well be that Peter had this event in mind when he says in **verse 5b**. *“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another....”*

Most scholars believe that when Peter says *“clothe yourselves with humility”* he was using a metaphor that his readers could easily picture with their mind’s eye. There was a piece of cloth in the first century that was called a “garment of humility.” It was a very plain, simple, versatile piece of cloth that a household servant would tie around the waist in order to perform his tasks of dusting, polishing, scrubbing, wiping, or cleaning. We would call it a *towel*.

Does it sound familiar? *“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power...so he got up from the table, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist”* (NIV). The garment of humility.

We live in a culture in which one of the ways we try to impress others is by the clothing we wear. Some people go to great lengths to make sure the garment they are wearing is a cut that fits well and a fabric that wears well and a style that is up-to-the-minute.

Or, in a metaphorical sense, we try to impress others by wearing things that will make

others take notice of us—things that will set us apart and make us stand out. Things like confidence, self-assurance, winsomeness, assertiveness. We call it “putting on airs.”

But let me tell you what to wear that will impress the Lord of heaven. Let me tell you what to put on that never goes out of style and that looks good on anyone who wears it. *Humility*. God loves humility. In the book of Isaiah He says, “*This is the one I esteem: He who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my Word*” (66:2).

Nowhere in Scripture are we ever told that God is impressed with a man’s wealth, or strength, or athletic ability, or IQ, or talent, or skill. Nowhere in Scripture are we ever told that God is impressed with rulers of nations, or leaders of industry, or professional athletes, or renowned philosophers, or prolific authors, or even theologians. But we are told that God esteems the humble.

If that’s true, there’s nothing I’d rather be.

We’re going to explore this subject of humility—we’re going to discover what it means, why God likes it so much, and what it looks like. But before we do, we need to look at what He says about the opposite of humility. **Verse 5b-c.** “*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’*”

In the sixth chapter of the book of Proverbs, there is a list of attitudes and behaviors that we would do well to avoid at all costs. It’s the passage that says, “*There are six things which the Lord hates, yea seven which are detestable to him...*” (6:16).

Notice, it does not say that He merely disapproves of these things, or that He is displeased by them. That would be bad enough, and reason enough to avoid them. It says He *hates* and *detests* them. Those are strong words—words that ought to get our attention. Because there is nothing quite so dreadful and dangerous than doing or being something that God detests.

The first thing on that list is “haughty eyes.”

Haughty eyes. Someone who looks down on others; someone who thinks he’s better than someone else. It’s a look that reflects an attitude—an attitude of superiority or self-importance. The Bible calls it *pride*, and God detests pride.

Peter, in verse 5, is actually quoting Proverbs 3:34, when he says, “*God opposes the proud.*” The word “opposes” literally means, “to set oneself up against” or “to line up against.”

Imagine that you are asked to substitute for an offensive lineman in an NFL football game, and you’re in a three point stance waiting for the ball to be snapped. Directly across the line of scrimmage is a six foot eight inch 350 pound defensive tackle that was just selected to the Pro-Bowl. And there’s about twelve inches separating your head from his head. You can see that he’s gritting his teeth; you can see his flared nostrils, and his blazing eyes.

How would you like to do that?

No one who is not an athlete of similar size and strength would voluntarily line up against someone like that. He would flatten you in a New York second.

Peter is saying that proud people are lining themselves up against God and saying, “Hey, no big deal. I can handle this. I’m good enough and tough enough and strong enough to stand on my own two feet. After all, I’ve gotten myself this far on my own.”

Which demonstrates the real problem with pride, and the two reasons why it is so detestable to God. First, pride is evidence of a severely distorted concept of oneself. It is a skewed self-perception, and by skewed I mean it is exaggerated.

Let me illustrate in a way that might help you to remember. Think of a bicycle tire pump. Does it remind you of a letter in the alphabet? It looks like the letter “I”. Now, take the handle of that letter “I” and start pumping. Here’s the definition: Pride is an over-inflated “I”—an overinflated ego.

Pride is the result of someone who has been deceived into thinking that they are good enough or powerful enough or smart enough or resourceful enough to determine their own fate or be in charge of their destiny. It is the result of someone who has been deceived into thinking that their wealth or achievements or even such things as their family heritage have given them a status that puts them ahead of others, and makes them worthy of honor and praise and applause and recognition.

I say “deceived into thinking” because it *is* deception. You see, the truth is that everything we are and everything we have and everything we have achieved ultimately points back to one thing. God’s grace. This is even true for someone who doesn’t believe in God. Their abilities, skills, opportunities, resources, and advantages all come from God, so that no one can boast.

But pride is not only an evidence of a severely distorted concept of oneself, it is also evidence that one neither knows nor understands God. And I’m not saying, necessarily, that the person doesn’t believe in God, or the person is ignorant of God. Some of the proudest people on earth are theologians—even good theologians. They can quote Scripture and they can identify and explain God’s attributes. But for them it’s just information. It’s academic. It doesn’t translate into their own self-awareness of who they are before God.

A great illustration of this is Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, both of whom went up to the temple to pray. ¹¹ *The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ (Luke 18:11-12).*

The Pharisee is addressing God in this story, but he’s not really aware *who* he is addressing—he’s totally oblivious as to who God really is. If he really knew and understood God he wouldn’t have said what he said. Because what he said was entirely focused on his own self-importance and self-righteousness. And if a person is truly aware of the living God it’s impossible to focus on your own self-importance and self-righteousness, except to confess those things as lies. To be truly aware of God is actually to be aware of your own sinfulness and spiritual poverty. Just like the tax collector in the story.

¹³ *“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ (18:13).*

Jesus concluded this story by saying that this tax collector went home justified before God, but not the Pharisee. Why? Because *God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble*. Proudful people have an over-inflated ego, an exaggerated view of their self-importance. Even worse, they neither understand nor know God. And that’s what makes pride detestable to God. It’s insolence. It’s a total disregard and a total lack of respect for Him.

But it’s just the opposite with the humble person. Not only does God esteem the humble, according to Isaiah, but He *“shows favor to the humble,”* the end of verse 5.

That word *humble* is derived from a word that means *low, flat, or close to the ground*. It literally means “lowliness of mind.”

But please don’t confuse humility with a low opinion of oneself. It is not a reference to someone who lacks confidence or has a low self-esteem or doesn’t like the way they are.

One of the most genuinely humble people I've ever met, a missionary friend in Africa, scored off the charts in one of those personality tests on self-esteem. He was also one of the most confident, gifted, winsome persons I've ever met.

But he was humble in the biblical sense. He was "lowly of mind." We would say it this way: He was "down to earth." And when you hear that phrase, down to earth, what comes to mind? He's real. He's authentic. And that's the root of true humility.

Just as pride is the result of a distorted view of oneself, humility is the result of seeing oneself in truth. It is the attitude that comes from understanding who one really is before a holy God.

God said through Jeremiah: "*Let not wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD*" (9:23-24).

Just as there was irony in John's statement when he said that Jesus, knowing he was in charge of everything, put on an apron, so there is irony in Jeremiah's statement as well. Because anyone who understands and knows God cannot possibly boast that they understand and know Him. They realize that the only reason they understand and know Him is because He has, in His grace and mercy, chosen to reveal Himself to them. He has opened their spiritual eyes to see Him as He really is; they have responded to His invitation to know Him as He really is. So all they can do is humble themselves before Him and say, "Thank you! You have been merciful to me, a sinner."

I would submit to you that this is what Peter is describing in **verse 6**. *⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

The verb "humble yourselves" is an imperative, meaning that this is a command from God—this is something He is telling us to do. And so this is the application of this passage. Knowing what we know about what God likes and what He doesn't like, we need to humble ourselves under His mighty hand.

But *how* do you humble yourself?

Is it by being self-effacing? Is it by acting humble? Is it by trying to be humble or by doing humble things?

I was at a pastor's conference several years ago where the keynote speaker, the pastor of the largest church in that city, was talking about being a humble servant of Christ. He said, "Let me give you an example of humility. I was at an elder board meeting the other day and I saw a piece of paper on the floor. I got up from my chair, picked it up, and put it in the trash can, and I made sure everyone saw me, because I wanted to be an example to them."

In case you're wondering, that is *not* humility. *Acting* humble is not the same as being humble, and being humble, I assure you, has nothing whatsoever to do with trying to get other people to *think* you're humble. Trying to call attention to yourself, even if others interpret something you've done as an act of humble service, is actually an insidious form of pride.

A humble person never tries to call attention to himself. A humble person doesn't particularly *want* to be noticed, and certainly doesn't *care* if he is. She would rather not hear the applause; she would rather not be in the spotlight. Humble people don't feel compelled to protect or promote their reputation, honor, or status, and they couldn't care less about getting recognition.

Here's why: A humble person sees himself for who he *really* is. To say it another way,

she has an accurate, truthful view of herself.

Let me explain: Not long ago I golfed with my nephew who had only golfed twice before. I was tempted to come away from that outing thinking I was a pretty good golfer, since I beat him by thirty strokes. But all I have to do is remember that I have also golfed with Steve Goodell, a professional golfer, who beat me by thirty strokes, even though I got the same score with him as I did with my nephew. What's the difference?

It's all a matter of perspective. When I'm with my nephew I can have an over-inflated view of my golf skills; when I'm with Steve I have an accurate, truthful view.

In Acts 20, when Paul is giving a farewell address to the Ephesian elders, he said, *"From the first day I came into the province of Asia, I served the Lord with great humility"* (20:18). In saying this, he wasn't being proud, he was being truthful. That's because Paul had had a dramatic, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus which had given him a permanent attitude adjustment. Paul's spiritual eyes had been opened to see the Lord in His brilliant splendor, His incomparable majesty, and His blazing holiness. Paul also saw *himself* in relation to the Lord, and in comparison to the Lord Paul was a speck of dirt. In comparison to the Lord, Paul was not the least bit impressive, and there was nothing about him or in him about which he could boast; there was nothing he had ever done that was worthy of any real honor and glory.

Which is why Paul would say, "I am what I am by the grace of God;" and about his apostleship, "I am less than the least of all the apostles." He also called himself the "chief of sinners." Humility, for Paul, was the attitude that came from seeing himself in relation to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is significant that whenever a character in the Bible had an encounter with God in which they saw Him for who He really is, they responded in exactly the same manner. Each of them fell down on their faces and lay prostrate on the floor. For a while they could not speak. They could not move. They were terrified. They were acutely conscious of their own mortality, their own finiteness, and their own unworthiness to be in the presence of the Lord.

Moses, Job, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Paul, John. Different personalities with different life experiences, yet with one and the same response.

For those of us who have never had a visible, audible encounter with Almighty God, there is something to learn from the responses of those who have. You cannot truly encounter God without being humbled by the experience. Let me say it another way: If you truly understand and know God you will be humble.

Yes, God invites us to call Him "Daddy". He is delighted with any attempt to sit in His lap and spend time with Him. He wants it so much that He sent his Son to die for us that we might be able to come into His presence freely and boldly, 24/7.

But God is infinite, eternal, holy, and transcendent. And if, right now, He took the spiritual veil off our eyes so that we could see Him as He really is, we, like all those men in Scripture, would be on the floor face down.

That is the natural, inevitable response of any person who really sees God in truth. So if you want to obey the admonition to humble yourself under God's mighty hand, I can only think of two things that you can actually do, and both of which must be done together at the same time. First, pick up His Word and read it, for the express purpose of knowing and understanding the Lord. And second, as you are reading His Word, ask the Lord to reveal Himself to you. Ask Him to open your spiritual eyes so that you can know and understand Him as He really is.

There is nothing He would rather do for you, and when He does, you will become genuinely humble, and genuinely happy. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 5:3). And “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matt. 5:5).

When God lifts the humble up in due time, their reward will be out of this world.

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MAIN IDEA: WE SHOULD BE HUMBLE BECAUSE GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE

CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY (5B)
THE METAPHOR

THE MEANING

GOD'S FAVORITE FASHION

LINED UP AGAINST GOD
THE MEANING OF PRIDE

WHY PRIDE IS DETESTABLE TO GOD

- AN EVIDENCE OF A SEVERELY _____ CONCEPT OF ONESELF
- AN EVIDENCE THAT ONE NEITHER _____ NOR _____ GOD

FAVORED BY GOD

THE MEANING OF "HUMBLE"

- THE ATTITUDE RESULTING FROM _____ WHO YOU ARE BEFORE A _____ GOD

THE COMMAND TO BE HUMBLE

THE WAY TO BE HUMBLE

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

1 PETER 5:5B-6

1. PRIDE IS INSIDIOUS, WHICH MEANS IT CAN BE EASILY DISGUISED, OR WE DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHEN WE HAVE IT OR EXHIBIT IT. WHAT KINDS OF BEHAVIOR ARE EVIDENCES OF PRIDE? (I.E. GOSSIP IS AN EVIDENCE OF PRIDE BECAUSE IT STEMS FROM A JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE OR AN ATTITUDE OF SUPERIORITY)
2. WHEN YOU DISCOVER PRIDE IN YOUR LIFE, WHAT CAN YOU DO IN ORDER TO "KILL" IT AT ITS ROOT?
3. HUMILITY IS AN ATTITUDE THAT RESULTS FROM UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU REALLY ARE BEFORE A HOLY GOD. HOW DO YOU "CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH HUMILITY"?