

Humility: Our Greatest Friend

1 Corinthians 4:7-13

November 8th, 2020

1. Apply the Word to _____ first (4:6)

2. See blessings as _____ you received (4:7)

3. Don't make _____ what is still
_____ (4:8)

4. Don't assume _____ is only for others (4:9-13)

5. How does this apply to my life?
 - a. Do my expectations about life align more with the
_____ or _____?

 - b. What have I _____ that I can thank
God for and _____ well?

Questions for Discussion/Reflection

1. "Pride is the sin we most despise in others and most tolerate in ourselves." (C.S. Lewis) Do you think that's true? What bothers us about pride in others? Do you think we tolerate it in ourselves or just *don't see it*?

2. Read Ezra 7:10. Why is the order set forth in this verse important? How can we practice each part of it?

3. What are some ways we can be guilty of "exceeding what is written" in the Word? (4:6)

4. How can we recognize gifts as blessings we received without downplaying personal responsibility and self-discipline? (4:7)

5. In the context of the passage, why does Paul give such a detailed list of his personal sufferings? (4:9-13)

6. Which of the examples of personal suffering would you find most difficult to endure without bitterness? Why? (4:9-13)

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Big idea: Christians should be marked by humility as receivers and a willingness to suffer with Jesus.

Intro

"At every stage of our Christian life, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend." John Stott

Few topics are given as much real estate as humility in the Bible. It is the humble that God...

Sees (Is. 66:2)

Isa. 66:2 "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Saves (Ps. 76:9)

Psalm 76:9 To save all the humble of the earth.

Accepts (Ps. 51:17)

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Pardon (2 Chr. 7:14)

2 Chronicles 7:14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Live with (Is. 57:15)

Isa. 57:15b "I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit

Revive (Is. 57:15)

Isa. 57:15c In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite

Leads (Ps. 25:9)

Psalm 25:9a He leads the humble in justice,

Teach (Ps. 25:9)

Psalm 25:9b And He teaches the humble His way

Grace (Jas. 4:6)

James 4:6 "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

Exalt (Jas. 4:10)?

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

And yet just like David was blind to personal application of Nathan's rebuke until Nathan pointed out "you are that man," we can often overlook pride in our own lives.

Even if we do see it, we may wonder how we can practically change in order to grow in humility.

God's grace flows downhill to the low places, not uphill to the pompous and put-together places. (Scott Sauls)

As 1 Corinthians continues to urge for unity in the body, the attention turns to humility. In these verses we can learn four practical ways we can grow in humility ourselves.

1. Apply the Word to ***yourself*** first (4:6)

a. Paul applied these things to himself, not just to the Corinthians.

i. He seems himself as a farmer in God's field (3:6-9), as a builder of God's building (3:10-15), as a servant and a steward (4:1-5).

ii. **Ezra 7:10** For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

1. It starts with the heart.

2. It moves into study.

3. From study to practice.

4. From practice to teaching.

a. If you are involved in teaching the Word in any capacity – SS, JR Ch, Awana, Youth, Small group, Discipleship, filling the pulpit in a rural church, preaching here, opening the Word with your kids – the pattern is the same.

b. If not, the result is hardness of heart, hypocrisy, undercutting the message.

b. By his example of applying it to himself, he wanted the Corinthians to learn not to exceed what is written in the Word.

i. Five times already in 1 Corinthians he has appealed to the Old Testament to make his argument.

1. Depending upon your translation, they might have this phrase “do not go beyond what is written” in quotes. Some think this was a motto of the early church.

ii. Our job is to interpret and apply the Word, not go beyond it.

1. That’s true of all of us as believers.

2. That’s especially true of those who teach.

a. The authority is the Word, not me.

b. Like the Bereans, you are wise to check what I say against the Word.

i. **Acts 17:11** Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

ii. I would also like to point out that they “received the word with great eagerness,” so this isn’t a license for being overly critical!

c. A teacher of the Word is a waiter not a chef. He doesn’t prepare the meal, he delivers it.

iii. We exceed what is written when we add to scripture with legalism.

1. Prohibiting something that is a grey area. You may have personal convictions on it, but if they aren’t spelled out in scripture, then we must be careful about going beyond what is written.

iv. We exceed what is written when we bind Christians consciences with debatable applications.

v. We exceed what is written when we apply scripture to others but not ourselves.

vi. “Exceeding what is written” is a prideful act because we are placing our opinions on par (or above) God’s Word.

1. We were given the Scriptures to humble us into realizing that God is right, and the rest of us are just guessing. — Rich Mullins

2. See blessings as **gifts** you received (4:7)

a. Series of 3 questions designed to point out the error of their self-sufficiency and boasting.

- i. Gordan Fee - Grace leads to gratitude; self-sufficiency leads to boasting.
- b. This cuts against the grain of our assumptions about success.
 - i. If we are successful it is because we have worked hard, studied hard, and disciplined ourselves. All of that is likely true in a way. And we shouldn't see in this an excuse for fatalism or laziness.
 - 1. **Proverbs 10:4** Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
 - 2. **Proverbs 21:5** The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty *comes* surely to poverty.
 - ii. However, consider all the things that are outside of your control.
 - 1. The family you were born into.
 - 2. The intelligence you inherited.
 - 3. The nurture and care you received (or didn't receive) as a child.
 - 4. The country you were born into.
 - 5. The education you received.
 - 6. Medical conditions that you had or didn't have.
 - 7. The encouragement or model of discipline that you had in your life.
 - iii. An athlete may work hard in the gym, guard his diet and sleep, put extra time in studying plays and all of that hard work may pay off with a championship.
 - 1. But in another country or at another time, he might have been a naturally athletic child soldier or day laborer.
- c. In 1 Chronicles 29 the people are raising money and collecting valuables for the future building of the temple. In seeing their generosity and God's provision, David prayed:
 - i. **1 Chronicles 29:10-16** So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ¹¹ "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. ¹² "Both riches and honor *come from You*, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. ¹³ "Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. ¹⁴ "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. ¹⁵ "For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. ¹⁶ "O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours.
- d. Intentionally redirecting glory to God even in our successes can help us grow in humility.
 - i. Doesn't mean we have to be like the athlete that at the beginning of every interview wants to thank his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ whenever we receive a compliment (although that's actually a neat commitment)
 - ii. Talent is God-given. Be humble. Fame is man-given. Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful. — John Wooden (1910–2010)
- e. Primary context though is not material success but salvation.

- i. This phrase was a primary argument that Augustine used in the 4th century arguing against Pelagius. Even the best that we are “giving to God” through service to the body, financial generosity, a life of God-glorifying obedience...all are gifts from Him first that we are merely responding to by giving back in a small way. Why boast in such a thing?

3. Don't make **present** what is still **future** (4:8)

- a. Notice the dripping irony and sarcasm in these verses – they're rich, kings, filled! I wish it were so so that we could reign with you!
- b. Christians do look ahead to the reign of Jesus on earth.
 - i. The second to last verse in Revelation is a plea for the Lord Jesus to come (Rev. 22:17)
 - ii. We look forward to a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13)
 - iii. Yet all authority has already been given to Jesus (Matt. 28:18) and we have already been brought into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13-14)
- c. Kingdom of God – God's people in God's place under God's rule.
 - i. It's a present, spiritual reality with an eventual literal fulfillment.
- d. But when we assume too much about our present experience we can actually buy into a false view of the gospel.
 - i. The error of the prosperity gospel is that God always demonstrates His favor with financial wealth and personal health.
 - ii. “You're a child of the king, live like it!”
 - iii. They point to examples like Abraham, David, Solomon, and Job (well, at the end of the book of Job) to show how God blesses with material wealth.
 - iv. Big name traveling evangelists seem to demonstrate it with their own lifestyles of big homes, expensive cars, and private jets.
 - v. Rev. 21:4 tells us that there will come a day when there is no more pain, no more crying, no more death. But today isn't THAT DAY.
 - vi. Don't confuse future glory with present experience
 - vii. We call that an “overrealized eschatology” – eschatology refers to the end times and the future reign of Christ. An overrealized eschatology means reading too much of that future into the present.
 1. Overrealized eschatology – not “already but not yet” but “already” – already rich, become kings, etc.
- e. Their assumption of their position was more similar to the Laodicians in Revelation 3
 - i. **Revelation 3:17** 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

4. Don't assume **suffering** is only for others (4:9-13)

- a. In stark contrast to the Corinthians “reigning as kings,” Paul describes his own experience of suffering as an apostle.
 - i. Exhibited us apostles last of all - Last of all – like criminals lead into the arena to die by wild animals, the last ones brought in were the grand finale.

- ii. They are a spectacle, weak, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, reviled, the scum of the world and dregs of all things.
 - 1. “scum” and “dregs” are synonyms for the stuff that people clean off and throw away, like what you scrape off your shoes or sweep off the floor.
- iii. “To this present hour” and “even until now” – in contrast to the Corinthians who thought they “already” reigned, Paul was still suffering.
 - 1. Undercuts the argument that the early apostles were in it for power and money. They suffered greatly. They were exhibited not as powerful people but as men condemned to death, as “last of all,” as fools for the sake of Christ.
 - 2. All the apostles died a martyr’s death, according to church history, with the exception of John who merely died in exile in his 90s.
- b. This is the weakness of the prosperity gospel – it is disconnected from the real and present suffering of believers.
 - i. We can and should be grateful for the peace and prosperity we have experienced as American Christians (while remember that our church is not made up solely of American born and raised Christians – some people here have very different experiences).
 - ii. But we can’t assume that all faithful believers around the world experience the same thing or if they don’t then they aren’t “blessed.”
 - iii. That’s one reason why I thought it was so helpful to hear from A two weeks ago.
- c. Paul advocates a Christ-like response to suffering and mistreatment.
 - i. Reviled – bless; persecuted – endure; slandered – try to conciliate
 - 1. Our temptation is to respond back the same way
 - a. Revile (hurling verbal abuse) then respond back with a sharp, witty comeback
 - b. Slander – point out their dirt or wrong doing.
 - 2. Instead, we are called to love our enemies in tangible ways.
 - a. Paul describes his own response but in a few verses he calls the Corinthians to follow his example. (v. 16) In 11:1 he will say to imitate him as he imitates Christ.
 - ii. **1 Peter 2:21-23** For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;
 - iii. Slander/conciliate may be the most challenging command.
 - 1. Conciliate has the idea of responding graciously, entreating, answering kindly. How hard is that if we think we have been misunderstood, misrepresenting, even slandered?
 - 2. Paul speaks about himself first as a leader. Leaders aren’t unique in experiencing this, but there are unique aspects of leadership that make it more common. Leaders are more public, they make more decisions, they speak more . . . all of those give more opportunities for disagreement, criticism.
 - iv. Jesus modeled and experienced this and we’re invited to join Him in suffering.
 - 1. **Isaiah 53:2-3** He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of

men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

2. **Romans 8:17** and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.
3. **Philippians 3:10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
4. A call to Christ is an invitation to suffering. A call to leadership is an invitation to suffering.

5. How does this apply to my life?

a. Do my expectations about life align more with the *Corinthians* or *Paul*?

- i. We might read this and assume if we were in the room when Paul read this that we would be on his side as he scolds the Corinthians on the other side. But is that true? Might we identify more with the Corinthians here?
- ii. We are relatively rich compared to the world – so rich that we name shopping days (Black Friday, Cyber Monday).
- iii. We might be accustomed to power in the culture after having a majority Christian culture for much of our history as a nation.
- iv. We likely haven't suffered for the gospel in the way Paul describes – hunger, homelessness, poorly clothed, roughly treated. We should be grateful for that! No need to have a martyr's complex that creates suffering where it isn't. But do I *expect* to be free from suffering?

b. What have I *received* that I can thank God for and *steward* well?

- i. **1 Corinthians 4:1-2** Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.
- ii. Natural intelligence? Drive? Athletic ability? Personal charm? Good looks? Musical ability? Tenderness? Wealth? Spiritual gifts?
- iii. Look at the end of v. 5 – then each man's praise will come to him from God.



1

"At every stage of our Christian life, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend."

~ John Stott

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It is the humble that God...

Sees

Isa. 66:2 "But to this one I will look, To him who is **humble** and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Saves

Psalm 76:9 To save all the **humble** of the earth.

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It is the humble that God...

Accepts

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; **A broken and a contrite heart**, O God, You will not despise.

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It is the humble that God...

Pardons

2 Chronicles 7:14 and My people who are called by My name **humble** themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

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It is the humble that God...

Lives with

Isaiah 57:15b "I dwell *on* a high and holy place,
And *also* with the **contrite and lowly of spirit**

Revives

Isaiah 57:15c In order to revive the spirit of the **lowly** And to revive the heart of the contrite.

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It is the humble that God...

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Psalm 25:9a He leads the **humble** in justice,

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Psalm 25:9b And He teaches the **humble** His way

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It is the humble that God...

Graces

James 4:6 "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE **HUMBLE.**"

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Exalts

James 4:10 **Humble** yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

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Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

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1 Chronicles 29:10-16

¹² "Both riches and honor *come* from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. ¹³

"Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.

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1 Chronicles 29:10-16

¹⁴ "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.

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“Talent is God-given.
Be humble.
Fame is man-given.
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~ John Wooden

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Revelation 3:17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

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Romans 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

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Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

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