Humility

Do you consider yourself to be more spiritual than other people because you know many Bible stories and verses? Maybe you feel superior because of your abilities. Remember that everyone, including you, comes into this world with nothing! Every person is born helpless and totally dependent upon someone else for food, clothing, and protection. Everyone is also born with a sinful heart. God wants you to see your true condition—you need His forgiveness of your sin and His grace to live the Christian life. (See John 15:5.) Rather than striving to impress God or others, repent of your self-reliance. Rest in the forgiveness and love of the Lord, Who knew your true condition yet gave His life to redeem you. This salvation shows how gracious God is! (See Ephesians 2:4–8.)
Humility Overview

What Is Humility?

Read aloud and discuss what humility means and how it applies to life.

The operational definition of humility is “recognizing that without the help of God and others my achievements in life would not have been possible.” Without God, you would not even have air to breathe! Without the care of others, you would not have been able to survive. Every person on the planet is dependent on God and others, so there is no reason to feel more important than anyone else. In contrast to us, God is self-sufficient, all-knowing, and all-powerful—He reigns over all the earth, now and forever! Do you see how lowly we all are compared to the greatness of God? “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:4). May we respond with praise to God for Who He is and thank Him for His many blessings.

The opposite of humility is pride. Pride is an exaggerated view of oneself. Did you know that all conflict is rooted in pride? (See Proverbs 13:10.) A proud person thinks he is better than other people. He does not want to acknowledge his need for God or anyone else. He talks about his own strengths and downplays others’ abilities. A proud person assumes he has the right to make his own decisions. Pride was first expressed when Lucifer said in his heart, “. . . I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14). His intention was to compete with God and to receive praise that belongs only to God. Therefore, God cast Lucifer to earth, where he became Satan and tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Since the Garden of Eden, people have pridefully wanted to live independently of God and have their own way. Pride is an abomination to the Lord that will not go unpunished. (See Proverbs 16:5.)

Putting ourselves down or comparing ourselves with more successful people may give the appearance of humility. However, as we exhibit that false humility, our focus is still on ourselves, which is pride. If we are honest, we will realize that these actions are actually efforts to gain attention, affirmation, or sympathy. When we focus on Christ, we will find freedom from thoughts that are self-condemning or self-promoting. Once we trust Christ for salvation, our minds can be renewed as we meditate on God’s Word and obey the Holy Spirit’s promptings. Then our motives, attitudes, and actions will reflect the Lord’s humility and draw attention to Him, not us. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

A puffer fish enlarges his body to appear larger than his normal size. Similarly, a person who is “puffed up” with pride attempts to present himself as better than he is.

Washing dirty feet was regarded as a lowly task in Biblical times. A humble person will lovingly serve others, even in menial ways.
Humility in Scripture

As you read and study God’s Word, see Who He is, and allow Him to work in you, your life will become a radiant expression of Him. God will be glorified as His character is seen in you.

The Character of God

We see examples of humility in God’s character in the following ways:

- God Almighty humbles Himself to consider things in Heaven and on earth.
  (See Psalm 113:5–6.)

- Jesus submitted to both His Heavenly Father and His earthly parents.
  (See Mark 14:36, Luke 2:51.)

- Jesus humbled Himself to become human, dwell on earth, and even die on a cross for our sin.
  (See Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:6–8.)

- Christ’s works caused people to glorify His Father.
  (See Luke 18:42–43.)

- Jesus willingly took on lowly tasks such as washing His disciples’ dirty feet.
  (See John 13:14–15.)

- The Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself but speaks only what He hears from the Father.
  (See John 16:13.)

- The Holy Spirit demonstrates humility by dwelling in unworthy human vessels.
  (See I Corinthians 3:16, II Corinthians 4:7.)

Humility in My Life

Now let’s examine some ways God wants us to live out humility daily.

- How does God respond to humble people?
  (See Psalm 10:17.)

- What does God think of pride?
  (See Proverbs 6:16–17.)

- Whose responsibility is it to be humble, and whose responsibility is it to exalt?
  (See Psalm 75:6–7, James 4:10.)

- Who is great in God’s Kingdom?
  (See Matthew 18:4, Luke 22:26.)

- What is my role if I desire to see God heal my nation?
  (See II Chronicles 7:14.)

- What can I “put on” that is precious in the sight of God?
  (See I Peter 3:3–4, 5:5.)

- Whom am I to honor as better than myself?
  (See Philippians 2:3, I Peter 2:17.)

HUMILITY KEY VERSE

“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” JAMES 4:6
Bible Story
The Publican Pleads for Mercy

Prayer was an important part of Jesus’ life on earth. His public ministry began with prayer to His Father when He was baptized by John the Baptist. On the cross, Jesus concluded His earthly ministry with prayer when He said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Prayer is conversing with God, knowing that we are dependent on Him and that He is worthy of praise. Often after Jesus preached and worked miracles, He would retreat to a quiet, secluded place to talk to His Father. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He taught them to approach God reverently, repent of their sin, forgive others, and trust God to provide for their needs. Another time, Jesus told a parable which illustrated that His Father rewards persistent prayer. In the parable, a widow pleaded with a judge and would not stop until she received justice. Jesus also told a parable about two men who went to the Temple to pray. The two men were opposites: one was a despised tax collector and the other man was a religious leader. How would each man approach God in prayer? Would each recognize his true spiritual condition before God? Which person would be justified by God?

Let’s read the Bible story in Luke 18:9–14 and then discuss the following questions.

1. **To whom was Jesus telling the parable of the Pharisee and the publican?** (See Luke 18:9.)
   When do you tend to view yourself as being better than someone else? How does God say you are to view yourself? (See Romans 12:3.)

2. **To whom did the Pharisee compare himself?** (See Luke 18:11.)
   What faults or habits do you criticize in others? Is it wise to compare yourself to others? (See II Corinthians 10:12.) What does your judgment of others reveal about yourself? (See Romans 2:1, 3:10.)

3. **How many times did the Pharisee use the word “I” in his prayer?** (See Luke 18:11–12.)
   Do you talk about yourself a lot? When you do good deeds, are they done for your glory or for God’s? How did Jesus say to do good deeds for God’s glory? (See Matthew 6:1–4.)

4. **In what was the Pharisee trusting?** (See Luke 18:12.)
   Do you try to make yourself look good in front of others? Why is it difficult to admit when you are wrong?

5. **What four things did the publican do and say that revealed he knew his true heart condition?** (See Luke 18:13.)
   When have you asked God for mercy? What heart attitude will God receive? (See Psalm 51:17.)

6. **According to Jesus, which man was forgiven and made right, or justified, in God’s sight?** (See Luke 18:14a.)
   If you have asked Jesus for forgiveness, what is your true condition now? (See Galatians 4:4–7, II Corinthians 5:17.)

7. **What did Jesus say about those who exalt themselves and those who humble themselves?** (See Luke 18:14b.)
   What does the Bible warn about pride? (See Proverbs 16:5, 18.) How does God respond to the humble? (See Isaiah 57:15, James 4:6, 10.)
Memory Verse
James 4:6

“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

JAMES 4:6

Memory Verse Game: Volume Control

Say the verse together several times. The teacher is the first “volume controller.” As the children say the verse, the volume controller stretches his arms forward and moves them to adjust the volume. When he wants the children to say the verse loudly, he lifts his arms above his head. When the children are to say the verse softly, he lowers his arms down toward the floor. The children watch closely and adjust the volume level at which they are saying the verse to match the motions of the volume controller. Play until a child thinks he can quote the verse from memory by himself. If successful, he becomes the volume controller for another round of quoting the verse. After everyone has had a turn to say the verse alone and be the volume controller, end the game with the group saying the verse together from memory.

Doers of the Word: James 4:6

In the blank below, write how this verse could be applied in your life, e.g., “admit my need for You,” “confess my prideful thoughts,” or “be content even if my accomplishments are not praised.”

“Dear Lord, I yield to You and am willing to apply this verse. Help me to ____________________________

_______________________________________________.

I ask that You would develop humility in my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

When the Lord gives you an opportunity to apply this verse, write it in your journal to later recall God’s working in your life.
James 4:6
“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Humility
Recognizing that without the help of God and others my achievements in life would not have been possible.
Activity

Let’s Make Playdough!

Introduction

During this character study, we are asking the Lord to develop humility in our lives. What a privilege to respond to the work He is doing to change us into the image of His Son! Today we are going to make playdough, which will help to remind us to be humble and teachable instead of being proud and stubborn.

Supplies:

- A whisk
- A saucepan
- A plate
- Waxed paper
- A wooden spoon
- A variety of food colorings
- An airtight storage container
- A rock
- Plastic gloves
- Play-dough ingredients:
  - 1 cup flour
  - 1 cup water
  - 1/2 cup salt
  - 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
  - 1 tablespoon cooking oil

Instructions

Watch me as I make playdough for us to play with afterward! (You may want to make the playdough ahead of time.) Playdough is pliable and easy to shape. Working with playdough reminds us to be humble and responsive to God’s work in our lives.

In a saucepan, mix all the ingredients, being sure to whisk or remove any lumps of flour. Cook the mixture on low or medium heat for 3–5 minutes, stirring constantly. Stop stirring when the mixture has turned from liquid to dough. Remove the hot playdough from the pan, place on a plate, and allow it to cool for 5–10 minutes or until thoroughly cooled.

While the playdough cools, set a rock out for everyone to observe. Look at this rock. It is hard, solid, and stiff. Would you be able to squeeze it with your hands and mold it into something else? No! Just as this rock is unyielding to our efforts to change it, similarly a stubborn and resistant attitude hinders the gracious work of God and brings His discipline in our lives for our pride.

Divide the playdough into balls. Set a ball on a sheet of waxed paper before each child. (Give the children plastic gloves if you are concerned about the dye staining their hands.) Ask each child what color he wants his playdough to be, and apply approximately 10–20 drops of food coloring to his playdough. Add more for deeper color. Gently knead the food coloring into your ball until your playdough is one color throughout. Notice how easily the playdough can be shaped! A humble heart before the Lord is pliable like this playdough. When might you be tempted to be proud, rebellious, or resistant? In what ways could you instead show a willingness to listen and change? What does God’s Word say about being teachable? (See Proverbs 4:10, 15:31–32.) The pliability of the playdough reminds us to be humble and moldable in God’s hands.

When you are finished playing with the playdough, store it in an airtight container.
In a Nutshell

2. Our sin separates us from God (Romans 3:23).
3. God sent His Son, Jesus, to provide the way for our sins to be forgiven and for fellowship with Him to be restored (Ephesians 1:6–7). Jesus accomplished our salvation through His crucifixion on the cross, His burial, and His glorious resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).
4. We can do nothing to earn salvation. It is a free gift from God that we receive by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9).
5. We receive that gift of salvation by confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9–10).

Christ Our Righteousness

You will need the following items: sticky notes, pen, and a white bed sheet.

The Bible tells us about God. He is the Creator of the universe and He is holy. God loves us and created us to have fellowship with Him. (See Revelation 4:11.) Select a volunteer who would not mind standing to represent the sin of all people. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Sin is anything we think, say, or do that breaks God’s Law. Can you name some examples of sin? As the children answer, write their examples on sticky notes and place them onto the volunteer’s clothing (e.g., speaking unkind words, stealing, disobeying, doing good with wrong motives).

Because we have all sinned, and God is holy, we are eternally separated from Him. However, because God loves us so much, He sent His Son, Jesus, Who died on the cross to pay for our sin and Who rose again to conquer death! Now we can have fellowship with God forever through Christ. (See John 17:3.) If we accept God’s gift of salvation, Christ’s blood cleanses us from sin, and His righteousness is put upon us! (See II Corinthians 5:21.) Remove the sticky notes and wrap the white sheet around the volunteer to represent Jesus’ robe of righteousness.

Isaiah 31:10 describes what has happened this way: “My soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness. . . .” In Romans 10:9–10, we are told how we can accept this gift: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Are you trusting in Jesus Christ for your salvation? If so, your sins are forgiven and Christ is living in you! Your new, inward identity is one of righteousness in God’s eyes. The more you realize that you are a new creature in Christ and walk in the Spirit, the more your outward actions will demonstrate Christ living in you. Just as the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, you can also say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” God gives us eternal life—sweet constant fellowship in the Spirit with our Savior—and then His righteousness is seen in us for His glory. (See John 15:4–10.)
“Amazing Grace”

Sing “Amazing Grace” and read about the humility in the life of the hymn writer, John Newton.

The fierce, stormy sea violently rocked the ship. White-knuckled sailors clung to wooden spars and ropes. The young captain, John Newton, despaired. Surely they were all about to die! Recently he had been reading The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis. In response to the book’s influence and the realization that his life might end during the tempest, John Newton fervently prayed, “O God, if Thou wilt get me safely ashore, I will serve Thee forever.”

John Newton was a hardened man. He had worked on ships since age 11. He had been kidnapped by a British press gang and forced into naval service at age 18. After leaving the navy, he worked for a slave trader who treated him brutally. Now, helpless in a terrifying storm at sea, the 23-year-old man totally surrendered his life to God. John Newton later recorded in his journal:

That tenth of March is a day much remembered by me; and I have never suffered it to pass unnoticed since the year 1748—the Lord came from on high and delivered me out of deep waters.

John Newton’s conversion was genuine. His new life reflected humility. Brashness and rebellion cast aside, he became a man who understood the tremendous grace of God that had been manifested in his life. He never wearied of praising God for His goodness and love. John Newton wrote many hymns, among which “Amazing Grace” is best known.

The profound sense of his own unworthiness and of God’s greatness were the predominant themes of John Newton’s life in his preaching and writing. Reflecting on his darkest days, he marveled at “the providential care and exuberant goodness of God” toward him in his sinfulness. He expressed that sentiment in “Amazing Grace”:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

John Newton humbly wrote the inscription for his tombstone to denote God’s grace to him. The epitaph reads:

John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and Libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.

We do not need to have experienced the depths of sin or have a dramatic conversion experience in order to appreciate God’s grace as this hymn writer did. However, we do need to realize our true wretched condition before God and His amazing grace toward us. As we recognize that we are indebted to God, we will be motivated to joyfully proclaim His goodness.
Amazing Grace

John Newton (1725–1807); st. 6 anon. 19th c. USA melody

1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved;
3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;
4. The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;
5. And when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease;
6. When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun,

I once was lost, but now am found Was blind, but now I see. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed! 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home. He will my shield and portion be As long as life endures. I shall possess within the veil A life of joy and peace. We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we first begun.
“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are . . . . And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, . . . saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:11, 13).
Crossword Puzzle Answer Key

Recommended Resources

- 2021 Biblical Character Illustrated Calendar
- Hymns for the Family CDs ("Amazing Grace" is sung to piano accompaniment on Volume 2.)
- The Power for True Success
- Understanding Spiritual Gifts
- Character Cards
- Character Cards Memory Game
- Character Sketches, Volumes I–III
- Achieving True Success
- Heroes of Faith: Oswald Chambers audiobook (CD) and booklet
- “Discerning the Difference Between Pride & Humility” (message by S. M. Davis, available at embassymedia.com)
- “The Spiritual Battle” (message by Jamie Lash, available at embassymedia.com)

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Hymn History Bibliography


