

# Embracing Humility

Kevin Freeman / General

Some Final Lessons on Neighboring / Humility / 1 Peter 5:5b–7

Humility leaves a deep impression on those around us, which makes it one of our “final lessons on neighboring.” Humble Redlanders will leave a deep impact on their neighbors. So how do we inject humility into our neighboring? Peter's words give us practical understanding, showing us what humility involves and allowing us to see how a humble person can neighbor well.

---



Around 240 years ago a mounted traveler came across a group of soldiers who were struggling to move a large log that was blocking the path. The rider approached the officer who was overseeing these men, and, noticing the officer remained on his horse, the rider asked why he wasn't helping his men. “I am the corporal,” the officer responded. “I give the orders. My men carry them out.” Without a reply, the rider dismounted and walked over to the soldiers. He bent low and lent his own strength to the log-moving task. With his help, the task was made easier, and within a couple moments the log was clear of the path. Then the rider remounted his horse and spoke to the officer. “Next time your men need help, send for the Commander in Chief.”



The rider was George Washington, and his humility had just humbled one of his subordinate officers.

(Source: <https://baybusinesshelp.com/2013/02/15/2-stories-of-george-washington-and-the-power-of-humility/>)

Last week I had the opportunity to travel to Mount Vernon with Trinity's 8th grade class. We toured the property of our nation's first president and looked out on the beautiful Potomac just as he did in his time. I learned more about Washington's humility while there and also afterward, as my curiosity was piqued. For example, the Battle of Yorktown ended on October 19, 1781. This battle



effectively ended the war for our nation's independence, but it was almost two years later that the Treaty of Paris was signed. This meant the Continental Army was still "on duty" but with a lot less to do. It allowed these soldiers to focus on other issues, like getting paid. Because of the structure of our nation's first constitution, The Articles of Confederation, the national government had no power to tax the people. Around mid-April, I'm sure some of you will wish this were still true. It also meant Congress could not come up with the money to pay the army unless states sent in the cash.

This situation frustrated Colonel Lewis Nicola, who had been an instrumental help during the war. Nicola wrote Washington in a letter dated May 22, 1782, expressing frustration and suggesting the nation would be better off if the army simply helped Washington become king. Washington rejected the idea outright



with a response dated the same day. In the letter he wrote, "I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my Country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself,

you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable."

Before the Treaty of Paris was even ratified, Washington addressed congress and resigned his office as commander in chief over the army. Amid the height of his popularity, he withdrew in order to not hold too much power.

In your Bibles, navigate to 1 Peter 5.

George Washington, great man that he was, was a portrait of humility. **Humility**

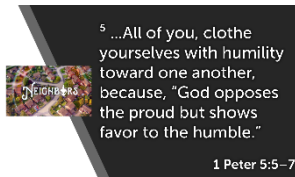


*Embracing Humility*

**leaves a deep impression** on those around us. For this reason, we're covering humility as one of our "final lessons on neighboring." Humble Redlanders will leave a deep impact on their neighbors. So how do we inject humility

into our neighboring? 1 Peter 5:5b-7 gives practical understanding. We'll see what humility involves and how a humble person can neighbor well. Please stand out of respect for God's Word and follow along as I read.

**1 Peter 5:5b-7** ESV



... Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

## What does humility involve?

We don't always pick up in the middle of the verse, so I want to give you just a little context. In chapter 5 of this letter, Peter spends 4 verses explaining what the elders should do. At Redland, you could think of this as the pastoral staff. Then verse 5 gives a quick command that the younger should be subject to the elders. There are different theories about who those younger ones are. Are they young people or new believers? That's not for us to flesh out here. What I want to emphasize is that in the middle of verse 5, Peter switches to a command for “all of you.” Elders, younger ones, and everyone in between. After all, the



*What does humility involve?*

greatest expression of humility is found in our Savior, and all of us are called to walk in his footsteps.

So what does humility involve? Our passage suggests three things. The first is **an others-focused posture**.

### An others -focused posture

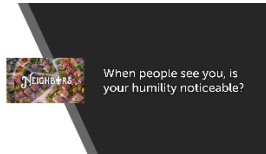


*An others-focused posture*

Peter literally says we are to “clothe ourselves” with humility. This is about clothing. You are getting fashion advice from a 2,000 year old fisherman! The best part is this look never goes

out of style. If I have to clothe myself with humility - if I have to put it on - this tells me two things. First, humility is not a natural part of you. Most of you already knew that. Turn to your neighbor and say, “You are not naturally humble.” This is universally true. My wife through her medical schooling has studied a lot of human anatomy over the past year, and I have helped her study

with some flash cards. I can tell you there is no humility gland. The pores in your skin do not produce humility. Whether you have a high metabolism or low, your body does not convert food into humility. If you want to produce humility, you'll need to take supplements. Peter says to apply topically. More to the point, clothing covers us up. It is what people see. When you come to church and people see you, they don't want to see *all* of you. They want a good bit of you to be clothed.



When people see you, is your humility noticeable?

Do people come away with a positive impression of your spiritual fashion sense, or do they think you seek to be prominent, to be more noticed?



The second thing this comparison to clothing tells me is that humility can be taken off. We have to clothe ourselves in humility daily. Our 4-year-old is finally picking out his own clothes and putting them on every morning. He goes into the bathroom, and he's super slow. I don't know what takes him so long, but he's occupied for a bit, which is nice. But every day he does this. We have to clothe ourselves with humility daily. Some of us guys were joking the other week that we don't really know if we wear the same thing to church one week from the next. We pick something out and wear it with the vague sense that it probably isn't too fashionable to wear the same shirt and slacks every Sunday. The problem is we'd never know whether we're guilty of this fashion faux pas. We just don't pay attention to what we wear.

Humility doesn't work like that. It should be the same thing you wear day after day. No one sees you clothed in humility again and says, "Hey, you wore that yesterday!" Humility is always refreshing.

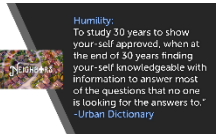
While we're on the topic, you might be wondering about other virtues God tells Christians to "clothe themselves" in. When we look at terms in the New Testament that either say, "clothe" or "put on," we find in Colossians 3 that believers should also wear compassionate hearts, kindness, meekness, and patience. So, yes, your seaside Galilean fashion designer would agree with his cosmopolitan counterpart - that'd be Paul - that you should accessorize. Above

all, we're told in various passages, to put on love, or Christ, or the new self. So humility is one virtue among many that we should wear as new creations who embody the love of Christ.

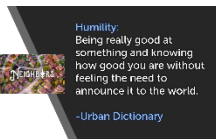
Let's pause, then, and make sure we understand what humility is.



Merriam-Webster says it is "freedom from pride or arrogance, the quality or state of being humble."

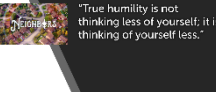


On Urban Dictionary, which allows user-submitted definitions, I found one cynical definition: "To study 30 years to show your self approved, when at the end of 30 years finding your self knowledgeable with information to answer most of the questions that no one is looking for the answers to."



A better definition on that site said humility is "[b]eing really good at something and knowing how good you are without feeling the need to announce it to the world."

My favorite quote about humility states, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."



It might help to know that the root of humility is the Latin term *humus*, meaning earth. Someone who is close to the ground, or lowly of mind, has humility.

Humility is not a poor self image. That is an imposter humility. It also isn't false modesty. This imposter reduces humility to a social technique that some master to appear humble.

When I was in college, I learned to scuba dive, and I discovered the various pieces



of equipment used in diving. There are buoyant items, such as the air tanks or vest, which inflates, but there is also a weight belt. Despite the weight of the other equipment, taking large quantities of air below the surface of the water makes it pretty

easy to float. The weight belt adds the 10-15 lbs necessary for the diver to be of any use under the water. Without my weight belt, I'd be of no use to other divers, because I'd be up at the surface. With the belt a diver can gain a critical component to scuba diving: Neutral buoyancy. That allows a diver to stay at the

same vertical level, neither rising nor sinking. Only then can the diver truly explore his or her surroundings. Humility allows us to maintain neutral buoyancy.

## God-fearing submission



Peter shares a second aspect of humility: **God-fearing submission**. Quoting Proverbs 3:34, he declares, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” The humble receive God’s grace, his favor. The proud, however, are resisted by God. This term is one of head to head opposition or opposing battle grounds. It is the same term used as a command to believers who are to “resist” the devil who prowls like a roaring lion. So we are called to humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand and trust God to exalt us if and when the time is right. Notice the progression of terms. We see humility, the object; the humble, as a person; and then humble, an action we take. Humility should be seen on us, noticed in us, and observed through our actions.

King Canute ruled over Denmark, Norway, and England more than one thousand years ago. A wise ruler, he worked diligently to make the lives of his subjects better. As is often the case, he was surrounded by those who sought to gain influence and prominence with him, and according to the ancient story, he grew tired of their continual flattery and determined to put an end to it. He ordered



that his throne be carried out to the seashore and gathered his courtiers about it.

By the sea, the king commanded the tide not to come in. Yet soon the waters were lapping around his legs as the tide did not heed him. According to one historian’s account, King Canute rose up from his throne and said, “Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom Heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws.”

(Source: *A Primary History of Britain for Elementary Schools*, William Smith. Accessed from [www.ministry127.com](http://www.ministry127.com))



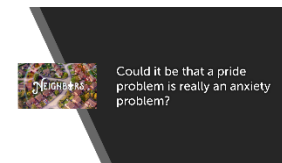
Humbling ourselves under God involves recognizing his infinite power and wisdom.

When we humble ourselves under God, we recognize our own limitations and the utter absence of those limitations in God. How does God exalt us? Psalm 149:4 points to salvation only being available to the humble. It reminds me that Jesus said no one can enter the kingdom of God without first humbling himself like a child. Scripture shares God's guidance, help, and physical and emotional rest, all resulting from humility.

## Freedom from anxiety

One surprising hallmark of humility is the **freedom from anxiety**. If you're looking for one practical way to become humble, Peter says to cast your anxiety on God. As a matter of fact, this is *the* way we are told to humble ourselves. The word "casting" describes a true leap of faith. It is not hanging on to our own branch while reaching for God's branch. It's a no-plan-B leap toward God with all we are.

This is how you go from anxiety to exaltation, by turning your worries, your concerns, your wants, and, yes, your self-image completely over to God.



Could it be that a pride problem is really an anxiety problem?

Think of it this way: My main barrier to being a good neighbor is me. My schedule, my needs, the things I'm concerned about. Whatever God tells me to do, I may counter with something I believe is more important. But if I can relinquish my cares and concerns, I'm free to stop being me-focused. I can trust God that when I seek his kingdom first, those other things will be added to me; they will be handled. Otherwise, I'm self-important. Too important for my neighbor.

Is it possible that our hurried and harried lifestyle reflects a refusal to throw our cares upon God? Do we instead simply share them? We tell God our concerns without actually giving them over. If we're like this, we would rather handle our concerns, thinking we're better suited to handle them than God is. That's the opposite of humility. That's pride.



If you can begin truly casting your anxieties on God, you will be able to humble yourself under God's mighty hand, not in fear

but in delight, because God's got this. Then you can adopt a posture of humility toward others.

## How does a humble neighbor "neighbor"?



*How does a humble neighbor "neighbor"?*

So how does a humble neighbor "neighbor"? I want to briefly suggest three ways your humility can help with your goal of neighboring.

### The humble neighbor sets aside personal needs for neighbor needs

First, **the humble neighbor sets aside personal needs for neighbor needs.** If we



**Humble neighbors**

*Set aside personal needs for neighbor needs*

can give our own concerns to God, we are freed to identify our neighbor's concerns. This reminds me of retired police Sgt. Byron Endsley. This Topeka, Kansas neighbor is known for helping to shovel out other neighbors when the

snow hits. His neighbor, Vicki Arnett, shared, "He has cleared my driveway for many years, including Christmas morning 2009. He never accepts any money for this work and rarely accepts gifts of homemade food, stating simply, that he 'just likes the snow.'" That's the way to be a good, humble neighbor, and fellow neighbors can see your spiritual fashion sense. I don't know Byron's faith background, but if Byron were to invite Vicki to his church, don't you think she'd respond with a resounding YES?

### The humble neighbor doesn't have to be the best



**Humble neighbors**

*Don't have to be the best*

Second, **the humble neighbor doesn't have to be the best.**

What I mean is that sometimes people feel the need to always look the best or be the hero. They might always want to have the final say or win the argument. I've come to view this sort of behavior as one that generally results from insecurity. It points to a "look at me" mentality. Some Christians will carry this concept to a self-righteous concept of serving that makes them feel like reaching out to their neighbors means doing everything. Part of neighbor outreach means allowing



neighbors to contribute. For example, if you want to hold a cookout for the neighborhood, you should first consider waiting five or six months, when the weather is warmer. You should also consider which neighbor might be best suited to host the event, because maybe it's not you. A humble neighbor will allow other neighbors to shine, which makes them more open to hearing about God's love.

Winston Churchill once made a comment that showed he didn't want to think too highly of himself. He was once asked, "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?"

"It's quite flattering," replied Winston, "But whenever I feel that way, I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big."

Winston reminded himself that drawing the best crowd would likely be hazardous to his health. In humility, we need to let go of any desire to be the best and instead focus on involving our neighbors.

## The humble neighbor shares God's grace



*Share God's grace*

Finally, **the humble neighbor shares God's grace**. Many people in the Bible were blessed by being around those who had God's favor. Joseph had this kind of influence. Whether he was with Potiphar, the jailer, or Pharaoh, it was apparent that God's blessing flowed out of Joseph and into the lives of those around him. It reminds me of the saying, a rising tide lifts all boats. When God exalts us because of our humility, those around us - neighbors included - receive collateral grace.

But a humble Christian neighbor cannot stop there, because neighboring also involves sharing the message of God's grace. Consider a way you can get together with your neighbor and share that message with him or her. We are headed into a holiday season that involves increased openness toward humble conversations about spiritual things.

There's one final line in your notes section of the worship guide. Consider writing the name of the neighbor you plan to talk with this week. Commit to praying for that neighbor in the coming days, too.

---

As you do that, I want to close with one final story about George Washington. He was already very prominent - a household name in the country. One day he was riding with several friends of his. To get where they were going, they had to jump their horses over the stone fence of a neighbor. One of the horses knocked down some of the stones, but the riders chose to keep going. After they got to their destination, Washington turn back and went to the fence. He dismounted and began to pick up the stones and replace them in the fence. One of his friends went with him but discouraged him from the task. He told Washington, "You don't need to do that. You're much too big," referring to Washington's



*Embracing Humility*

prominence and popularity. Without skipping a beat, Washington replied, "On the contrary, I'm just the right size."

You are just the right size to influence your neighbors for God's kingdom. Through your humility, your neighbors will be able to see more clearly who this God is who loves them and longs for them to know him.

Let's pray together.