

James: Where Faith Gets Real: Humility
Glen Elliott - October 8, 2017

Message Big Idea: There is something that is critical to having a real faith and meaningful relationship with God and others. Humility is foundational to being like Jesus and allowing us to experience true spirituality. And the opposite of humility is pride which is the source and root of all sin which robs of the life God wants for us. Pride causes us to put ourselves before both God and others. It is only in humility that we can allow God and others to speak into us to help us. We can't or won't listen without humility. And here's a sobering truth that we learn in James - God will oppose us until we are humble. God can't fully bless us in our pride for in our pride we think we know what's best. None of us want God to oppose us.

Main Idea: Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Main Text: James 3:13-4:10

Links:

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Who do you know who is really humble? What makes that person humble? How have you experienced them being humble? How do you know they are humble?
2. James says (James 3:13) that we'll know wise people by their good life and good deeds done in humility. Why do you think that James connects wisdom and humility?
3. What is humility? How do you see humility in yourself or others? What are the practical actions that demonstrate humility?
4. Why do you think that God opposes the proud? How does he do that? How does God show favor to the humble?
5. Do you think humility is a choice? How is humility a choice?
6. James says that when we choose humility, God will lift us up (James 4:10). In what ways will God lift us up?
7. Why is humility a foundational quality to live life well?

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Message:

All through history salesmen have promised miracle cures. I love the old snake oil ads. This ad promises that snake oil will cure headaches, cold, cough, sneezing, hiccups, gout, gonorrhea, diphtheria, mumps, measles, whooping cough, TB, and the rattlesnake oil version will cure blindness! What a deal!

I haven't changed much in how I look over the last 20 years and people ask my secret of looking younger than my actual age. I just returned from visiting Ukraine and the people who knew me 20 years ago wanted to know my secret for looking the same. I told them about the snake oil I use...NO! I have no secret. It is all genetics. But we all want to know the secret to living well. Ads and infomercials promise things that will help us feel good, be healthy, live long, be admired and generally live well. Oh that it were as easy as buying the right product, following the right program or going to the perfect seminar.

But there is a secret to a great life. It is at the heart of true spirituality. First, it is no secret. The Bible, from cover to cover, speaks about it. And what's crazy is that this recipe for living well is a paradox. On one hand it is free. On the other hand it is very costly. Today we are looking at humility. We are in our sixth week of a series called *Where Faith Gets Real*. We are looking at a faith that is real and helps us live well in a real world. Today James speaks about something that is core to living well. We can't live well without it. It's that critical. So today I want to jump to James' conclusion about this and then we'll go back to where he started. So here's the conclusion about this - Turn to James 4:10 (pg. 827 - NIV). **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

What does it mean to be humble? First, this is what humility is not. It is not being a doormat and letting others just walk all over you and abuse you. Humility is not trying to disappear and never be seen. Humility is not having a low self-esteem. In fact it is the opposite.

Humility operates out of a high self-esteem and it shows up as we take what we have and make it available to others. Humility in all the languages of the Bible has the same root idea - a willingness to lower ourselves to raise others higher. So James, in verse 10 is actually making a profound spiritual truth by using a play on words. If we humble ourselves or lower ourselves, then he will take the person who has bent over and lift them up.

How does God lift us up? It is only in lowering ourselves, first before God, then before others, that we'll discover all the really good gifts God wants to give us. When we lower ourselves, it is only in that position that we'll know the depth and power of how much

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God loves us. It is only in that lowered position that we'll move from trusting our way to surrendering to God's ways which are always better. In our lowered position we know we all that we lack in our character, strength, wisdom and so on and ask for help. And God loves to lift up those who have lowered themselves before him.

It is as we lower ourselves that we make a decision to be humble and humility then acts. Humility is taking what we have - knowledge, skills, time, energy, experience, possessions, money, power, whatever - and giving it to help others to live better. It is a belief that drives our actions, with or without words, that says we don't put ourselves first, but we put others first. Humility believes deep in the heart that we are not the most important people in the room!

We saw humility displayed again this week in Las Vegas story after story of people who humbled themselves to save others. People laying on top of people to save them. Risking their lives to carry others to safety. Taking off their shirts to apply pressure to a wound while bullets whizzed by. Yes, there are lots of words to describe these heroes - brave, sacrifice, love, service and more. But the foundation of all of these traits is humility. It is the ground from which courage, service and love grow and become gifts we can give away. In a world of darkness and tragedy, we need more and more people who out of humility, will give themselves to put others first. Today, churches all over this country are praying for the victims and those affected by the loss of life in Las Vegas.

Would you join me in **PRAYING**. *God so many today are suffering from such a horrific event. You God are the God of all comfort. We ask you to be present in a real and powerful way with those who have suffered themselves and lost loved ones. And God, as we talk about humility, I'm asking you to raise up an army of humble people who will give whatever they have to help and comfort those who have suffered and lost so much. God use this tragedy to bring about a powerful response of love and good. Only you can take a tragedy like this and transform it into something that results in a lasting good. We ask this in the name of the one who was the model of humility - our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Humility is deciding moment after moment that you exist for the benefit of others. You are not the one who matters the most. What you want is not the most important thing. A humble person seeks to use whatever they have to protect others and make others successful or better. Humility is the absence of pride because pride destroys our ability to freely give love, sacrifice ourselves and offer service. But that is so hard, so difficult. We are inherently selfish. The powerful focus on "ME" dominates my life. I'm pretty sure that is true of you also. Frankly, truly humble people are far too rare. People who are consistently humble are hard to find. It is so difficult to truly be humble deep in our hearts.

James knows that and address that. So now we go back to where he started in James 3:14-18 (pg. 826-NIV) - **14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come**

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down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. Wow this is deep. He now speaks to what makes humility so hard and what hinders humility. He speaks about what keeps humility at bay in our lives. He's talking about pride. Pride creates chaos and gives birth to behaviors that hurt everyone around us. If you experience chaos and are hurt by someone, guaranteed they are operating about of some level of pride. When you create chaos and hurt others, it is out of pride.

Notice what James says. Pride has as its root that which is worldly, unspiritual and even demonic. The core idea of pride is that such a person is full of themselves and they want to promote themselves. In the end they care most about what is good for them way before they even consider what those around might need or want. Pride is the opposite of humility. In humility we lower ourselves. In pride we seek to stand tall or even tallest among others. We want attention. We want to be served. We want our way. We are stubborn. We are right. And it even shows up as envy in our hearts where we focus on what we don't have but think we deserve. Selfish ambition is a life of promoting myself.

So that's pride. Now James gives us a picture of what humility that comes from spiritual wisdom looks like in James 3:17-18 - **17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.** Does this describe you? Do you see yourself in this description? This is who we are to become. You see, this is a great description of the one who is the model of humility - Jesus. As I read these words, this describes the kind of person I want to be.

Let's read the words again and I'll give a brief comment or explanation of each quality that flows from humility **17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven** (Wisdom that gives us humility is godly, it comes from God) **is first of all pure** (this is the word holy - pure is full devotion to God and his ways); **then peace-loving** (We will only seek peace in humility. Humility is the only path to unity. Our divided country is divided because of pride which won't let us listen to each other), **considerate** (This means the ability to reason with people), **submissive** (This literally means "easily persuaded, but not a pushover. It means being willing to listen and when appropriate defer to others), **full of mercy and good fruit** (Humility is always practical action), **impartial** (Never prejudiced) **and sincere** (No hypocrisy). **18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.**

There is a wisdom that comes from God and God's ways. It is the basis of true humility. It is lowering ourselves to put others first and helping others live well. It is the path to the best life possible on this earth. These are the kind of people you want to hang around with. This is the kind of person you want to marry. I am so grateful I married a person like this. This is how you want your kids to grow up. This is the kind of boss you want to work for. This is the kind of person you want to be - **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

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But what do we see all around us? What do we see in our world? What happens at work, at school or even at home? James addresses what happens when people don't humble themselves. Turn to chapter 4:1-6 (pg. 827 - NIV). - ***What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*** There's another sobering description of pride, selfishness, ego and arrogance. If you are continually fighting with someone, regardless of the other person's issues, pride, not humility is at work. It is the desire to stand tall rather than lower yourself. Few of us will kill to get what we want, but we do what Jesus said we do - we are tempted to hate others. And our prayers are blunted because they are motivated by selfishness. How God wants to answer our prayers that benefit others!

God, through James, gives us a picture of what happens in so many marriages - fights, quarrels, a battle of desires. You want a marriage of oneness, it can only be born out of humility. Fights, quarrels and a battle of desires at work? There is a lack of humility and a dominance of pride. Who will break the pride and introduce humility?

He continues in verse 4 - ***4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:***

"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

We have just read one of the most profound statements in the Bible - verse 6. Let's read it again - ***"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*** I don't want God to oppose me. I need his favor. When God is with me and for me I will have the best life possible. But that is only found in humility. In humility I'm willing to put God first and truly learn from him and follow his ways and then put others first. That is the whole summary of the Great Commandment - love God and love others. That only happens through humility and then God can shower his grace and good gifts on us. That's my point - **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

In verse 6 we are told that God gives lots of grace. When we lower ourselves, he lifts us up! He keeps giving grace or gifts we need to put God and others first. What is that grace? His grace is his complete love, forgiveness and care that he gives to those who are his children. He wants a relationship. He loves us like a godly husband loves his wife. God is actually jealous of us. It is a good jealousy. He wants to live inside us. He gives lots of grace. He wants a relationship. But we have strayed like an adulterous spouse. We have sought friendship with the world and stayed clear of God. So in

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humility we admit we are wrong. In humility we admit we need God. God will show favor when we humble ourselves, submit our selves, surrender. Without the humility to surrender to God, we'll miss all that God has to offer in this life and for eternity.

God hasn't given up on us. He keeps giving grace, mercy and forgiveness. After all the years of thinking we know best, it is time to humble ourselves before God. Until then, God can't really help you because you won't let him! We blame God, but we need to blame ourselves. So quit being stubborn, proud and self-sufficient. Quit defending the way you've been living. Humble yourself and allow God to have his way with you. When you do that, lower yourself, he will lift you up. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

Today is the day. Make the decision today to follow Jesus. Humble yourself! Lower yourself so God can be big or bigger in your life. If you've recently made that decision or are ready to make it right now, we invite you to seal the deal and make a promise to follow Jesus. In baptism we promise to follow Jesus.

Baptism in water is a picture of humility. When we go down, lower ourselves into the waters of baptism, we are putting our pride to death. When we come out of the water of baptism we are making a promise to joining with Jesus to start new. We promise to give him our everything and nothing less. We promise to follow the way of Jesus to the best of our ability all the days of our lives. He lifts us out of the water to a new life. So humble yourself, surrender to God and desire to be close to him. If and when you do that, he will not only come to you, but God himself will live in you.

In a moment we are going to stand and sing. While we sing, I'm inviting you to come down to the door here in the auditorium on your left if you are ready to humble yourself in baptism. There are folks there to answer any questions and help you. We have everything you need: private changing rooms, clothes to be baptized in, towels - everything. Just come. Don't worry about what others might think. Just humble yourself.