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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“HUMBLE BEFORE THE LORD”
First Peter 5:5b-11

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10).

I believe this, much of the time. When I do, I trust that God’s intent is to raise me up. Not only so, I even want to be humble.

(Full disclosure: sometimes, I don’t *really* believe it. In those moments I do not trust God and therefore I resist being humbled. But that is a topic for another day.)

When I believe that God desires what is best for me, I want to humble myself. How shall I do it?

{Ro 12:3} It is simple, in a way. As Paul says, **“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.”** The candid, no punches pulled self-evaluation of our strengths *and* weaknesses, virtues *and* vices, rights *and* wrongs is part and parcel of humility.

But there’s the rub: there is a fine line between healthy reflection and self-absorbed navel-gazing. It could go something like this:

‘How am I doing? Am I thinking **“of [myself] more highly than [I] ought”** or **“with sober judgment”**?’

‘I don’t *claim* to be perfect or have it all together. I have admitted my faults to Beth and the girls and the church. I wonder what they think about me?’

Do I look *real*? Or do I look like I’m *trying* to look real?

‘There are some sins I haven’t publicly confessed. People might appreciate it – or they might be disappointed. What would they think?’

‘Then again, I’m not the worst sinner. I’m not even the worst sinner I know. But am I really *that* good? No, I’m not.

‘Am I thinking **“of [myself] more highly than [I] ought”** or **“with sober judgment”**?’

Have you been there? That is a place of false humility – and false humility is nothing other than the whiney kid-sister of boastful pride. It does not get us any closer to authentic humility than overt arrogance.

? So, *how do we truly humble ourselves before the Lord?*

▣ Please turn to First Peter 5:5b-11. Theme of humility runs through these verses like a golden thread and binds them together.

■ Verse 5b: **“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,**

‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.’”

★ We **“humble [ourselves] before the Lord”** by exercising **“humility toward one another”** in the Church.

At several places along the way Peter sketches out what humility in action looks like:

- 2:1: “**rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.**”
- 2:17: “**show proper respect to everyone, love your fellow believers...**”
- 3:8: “**All of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing...**”
- 4:8: “**Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.**”

These behaviors presuppose humility. Trading malice for goodwill requires us to “**clothe [ourselves] with humility**” and so does *every other action* on this list.

? *If this is what putting on “**humility toward one another**” looks like, how do we do it?* How do we humble ourselves toward those who are younger or older, who prefer a style of worship music we dislike, whose personal quirks irritate us, or whose political convictions conflict with ours?

✎ {2 Co 5:16} For this to happen, we must “**regard no one**” – least of all our fellow Christ followers – “**from a worldly point of view.**” We must see each other from God’s point of view.

- According to 1:1-2 God sees my brothers and sisters as those whom he has chosen, whom his beloved Son has purchased with his precious blood, and who have been sanctified by the power of his Holy Spirit!

- According to 2:9 the Father sees you as members of “**a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, [his] special possession.**”

{1 P 4:14} The fact that “**the Spirit of glory and of God rests on**” me, too, is no grounds for pride on my part. The more clearly we see each other from God’s point of view, the more consistently and freely we will “**clothe [ourselves] with humility toward one another.**”

As we do this, we humble ourselves before the Lord. For it is only in him that we are who we are.

- Moving on to verses 6-7: “**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**”

- ★ We “**humble [ourselves] before the Lord**” by exercising humility in hardship.

Yes, we should “**humble [ourselves] ...under God’s mighty hand**” in failure *and* success, loss *and* gain, distress *and* ease, sorrow *and* joy. But right here Peter is calling us to be humble in situations that provoke anxiety.

Peter is speaking to his readers where they live.

- {1:1; 2:11} They are “**exiles**” and “**foreigners.**” Life as aliens and refugees is not easy, even in relatively good circumstances – and their circumstances are anything but good. All of them have endured social hostility, and some have suffered actual persecution. Hence, Peter writes:

- {2:12} “**Live...good lives...though [the pagans] accuse you of doing wrong**”;

- {2:20} **“If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God”;**
- {4:12} **“do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you”;**
- {4:13} **“rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ”;** and
- {4:16} **“if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”**

And there are several additional references.

? *If that is what it looks like to “humble [ourselves]... under God’s mighty hand,” how do we do it?* How do we suffer humbly, without giving in to fear, shame, despair, bitterness, or revenge?

✎ For this to happen, we must draw near to Messiah.

- **“To this you were called”** (2:21-23)

because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

**“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”**

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

{Mt 26:38-39} **“He entrusted himself to”** God. He cried **“if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”**

Drawing nearer to the Messiah does not eliminate all anxiety. Still the closer we get to Jesus, the easier it is

to entrust ourselves to **“God’s mighty hand”** and cast our anxiety on him.

■ Verses 8-9: **“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”**

★ We **“humble [ourselves] before the Lord”** by exercising humility in spiritual warfare.

Peter does *not* obsess over the devil, nor does he depict the devil as an undefeatable foe. Peter *does* portray the devil as a real threat, an **“enemy”** who **“prowls around like a roaring lion.”**

The enemy *might* try **“to devour”** us by engineering financial loss or illness or grief. But let’s not be too quick to give him the credit! It can be **“God’s will”** for us **“to suffer for doing good”** (3:17), and God does inflict hard-ship to test and judge us (4:12-17). Besides, adversity is often a consequence of our own bad choices (2:20, 4:15).

The enemy *will certainly* try **“to devour”** us by exploiting our suffering in order to destroy our faith.

He will try to turn our gaze from Christ in the storm to the storm itself, like Peter on the stormy sea.

He will try to puff up our personal confidence, like Peter when he claimed he would never fall away.

He will try to inspire such intense fear that we will deny Jesus to avoid suffering, like Peter did.

✎ We can stand **“firm in the faith”!** But for this to happen, we must be alert and sober-minded.

Jesus was “**alert.**” He recognized spiritual attack as it was happening.

When he was hungry the devil urged him to turn stones into bread. Good ends are easily confused with the wrong means, but Jesus saw through the attack.

When he was realizing how lonely it is to be the Messiah, the devil urged him to win fans by performing a great miracle. Divine approval is easily confused with public popularity, but Jesus perceived the attack.

When he was grappling with the cost of his mission the devil urged him to avoid the cross by taking control of the world. Obedience is easily confused with safety, but Jesus discerned the attack.

Jesus was also “**of sober-mind.**” He underestimated neither the potency of Satan’s assaults nor his own need for help. He relied on the Scriptures to guard his mind and direct his steps. He prayed often to maintain intimate fellowship and receive guidance and submit himself to his Father. In the garden he leaned on Peter, James and John for support.

If God the Son needed Scripture, prayer and fellowship to “[stand] **firm,**” how much greater is our need! To be sober-minded is to take full advantage of the resources the Lord has provided for us.

May we “**Humble yourselves before the Lord**” by “[clothing ourselves] **with humility toward one another,**” by “[casting] **all [our] anxiety on him,**” and by “[resisting] **the devil, standing firm in the faith.**”

■ “**And,**” verses 10-11, “**the God of all grace, who called [us] to his eternal glory in Christ, after [we] have suffered a little while, will himself restore [us] and make [us] strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.**”