



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

IT'S HARD TO BE HUMBLE • Neil Downey

I have an infatuation with country music. Not modern, Kenny Chesney-style country: that stuff is essentially pop music with cowboy hats. No, I'm referring to old-school twangy country: singers like Conway Twitty, George Jones, and Charlie Pride.

Don't get me wrong – I don't *prefer* this style of music. I just admire it for its creativity. If you were to read a list of popular country tunes from a couple of generations ago, you'd find some clever song titles, including *If the Devil Danced in Empty Pockets*, *He'd Have a Ball in Mine*; *She Got the Goldmine*, *I Got the Shaft*; and my personal favorite *I Gave Her the Ring, She Gave Me the Finger*.

One particular song from that same genre of music is a somewhat tongue-in-cheek description of a significant struggle in my life. Here's an excerpt:

*Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble
When you're perfect in every way
I can't wait to look in the mirror
'Cuz I get better lookin' each day
To know me is to love me
I must be a hell of a man
Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble
But I'm doin' the best that I can* ¹

As ridiculous as those lyrics sound, they paint a relatively accurate picture of my attitude for a long period of my life. It is extremely hard to be humble when you're full of pride.

When I was a little kid, I thought I was pretty hot stuff. In nearly every picture of me from grade school and Junior High, I have my chin in the air, with an "I'm all that and a bag of chips" pose. I used to blow-dry my hair, I'd unbutton my shirt to show off my chest, I would spend hours in front of the mirror amazed at how cool I was. Or at least that's what I wanted everybody else to think: that guy is cool! More than anything, I wanted to be popular. But not many people want to spend time around a self-absorbed kid with a giant ego.

It wasn't until college when I started to follow Jesus that my self-perception began to change. When I started reading scripture, praying, and hanging out with Godly people, I started to experience humility for the first time. Because humility isn't simply a low view of yourself (nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I might as well go eat worms); it's having a biblical view of yourself. Knowing that you are sinful beyond measure yet loved beyond imagination tends to make a person humble.

The longer I live, the more I see how subtle and sneaky pride can be. I am a world-class image manager. I will do things – good, Christian things – just to get noticed and acknowledged by people. I still want people to think that guy is cool! Humility is something I must continue to pray for and seek as I battle pride.



However, it's nice to know that I'm not alone in my struggle with pride. Even heroes of the faith had some humility issues. Read this from Numbers 12:3: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." At first glance, this might sound quite impressive. Until you consider who wrote the book of Numbers. Yep, Moses. But I digress.

Humility in Scripture

Humility is important for several reasons: the primary reason being that God commands it. In Micah 6:8, the prophet writes "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." That's pretty clear-cut.

But God not only requires us to be humble; He also explains the benefits of humility.

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. Ps 25:9

He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. Pr 3:34

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Lk 14:11

I don't know about you, but I'd rather humble myself and have God exalt me than exalt myself and have God humble me. The latter sounds much more painful in the long run.

Over my years of marriage, my wife and I have made a significant number of "some assembly required" purchases. And even though this probably goes against some sort of man-law, I heavily rely on the instruction manual to help me put an intricate item together. It's especially important that the manual has pictures of what the finished product should look like. It's much easier to put something together if I have a clear picture or model of the ideal.

And so it is with humility. Jesus is our ultimate example of what it looks like to be humble. In his letter to the church in Philippi, the apostle Paul gives this advice:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Phil 2:5-11

Jesus - God the Son - left the splendor and majesty of heaven and took on human flesh to be born in a feeding trough. He showed the ultimate obedience and humility by subjecting himself to a form of execution reserved for the vilest offenders. He, who was sinless and perfect, suffered and died for us. And what was the result? Humankind was redeemed, Jesus was exalted and the Father was glorified.

Enhancing God's Reputation

So how does this apply to us? How are we supposed to be like Jesus in the area of humility? Well, Paul spells it out pretty clearly; we should have the same attitude as Jesus. And what kind of attitude is that? One of service, obedience and sacrifice. One that seeks the good of others. One that is willing to lay down rights and privileges in order to glorify the Father. Because in the end, that's what it's all about.

Scripture clearly and repeatedly tells us that the purpose for which we were created, our reason for being alive, is to glorify God. I once heard someone explain what it means to glorify God this way: God doesn't change. But the way people view him and think of him – his reputation – does change. So everything we say, do, think and feel can be to enhance God's reputation; to give people a glimpse of how good and great God really is. And you can't glorify God and yourself at the same time.

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I love God. I want to obey him and serve him. I want other people to know him and worship him because I want him to be glorified. And I don't want anything about myself to keep that from happening. So I want my attitude to echo that of John the Baptist in John 3:30: "He must become greater; I must become less."

As I continue to walk with Jesus - becoming more aware of his holiness and my own sinfulness, yielding my will to his, and allowing the fruit of the Spirit to grow and ripen in my life – I continue to become more like him. And it's slowly becoming not as hard to be humble.

Endnote

¹ *It's Hard To Be Humble*, Mac Davis. 1980

End

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