

The Blessing of Humility by Jerry Bridges, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2016. (51 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols).

1. Humility Taught in New Testament.

The character trait of humility is the second-most frequently taught trait in the New Testament, second only to love. At one time I counted fifty instances of love taught, either by precept or example, in the New Testament; I counted forty instances of humility. I regard these two traits as the foundational stones of Christian character. All other character traits, in one way or another, are built on love and humility. [page xi]

2. Fruit of the Spirit.

... none of the traits demonstrated in the Beatitudes are about personality or temperament or spiritual gifts. They are what Paul, in Galatians 5:22-23, calls the fruit of the Spirit: the results of His work in our lives. [page xiii]

3. Ephesians 4:1-2.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:1-2) [page 1]

4. The Bible Applied Every Day.

“The Bible is meant to be applied in your every-day life.” [page 1]

5. Live in Humility.

As Paul expands on the meaning of a worthy walk, the first thing he mentions is humility. Think of what that means: As I drive down the street, as I interact with my spouse or my children, or with my coworkers at a job, or with a clerk at the grocery store, I am to do all of it with humility. [page 2]

6. Clothe Yourselves with Humility.

God’s promises to those who walk in humility. The apostle Peter joins precept and promise together in 1 Peter 5:5-6:

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. 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. [page 5]

7. Accepting God's Providence.

To humble oneself under the mighty hand of God is to submit to and accept even adverse providential circumstances from God. [page 6]

8. Isaiah 66:1-2.

Isaiah 66:1-2, *“Thus says the Lord:*

“Heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool;

what is the house that you would build for me,

and what is the place of my rest?

²All these things my hand has made,

and so all these things came to be,

declares the Lord.

But this is the one to whom I will look:

he who is humble and contrite in spirit

and trembles at my word.” [page 7]

9. Intimate Relationship with God.

God promises those who will walk humbly that He will enter into an intimate relationship with them, look with favor and affection toward them, and encourage them in their pursuit of humility. Instead of despising humility, as the Greco-Roman culture did and as our present culture still does, God exalts it and promises to bless those who pursue it. [page 8]

10. Matthew 5:3.

Matthew 5:3, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

[page 9]

11. Our Sinful Condition.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” As used here, *spirit* refers to one's inner being, our self-awareness. Specifically here it means how we evaluate ourselves with regard to our spiritual condition. This abject poverty of spirit comes from our awareness of our own dreadfully sinful condition. [page 10]

12. Ongoing Daily Attitudes.

In the Beatitudes Jesus is talking about the character traits of those already in the kingdom. And He says we should be poor in spirit. It should be the ongoing daily attitude of one who is growing spiritually. [page 12]

13. Realization We Daily Fall Short of God's Standard.

The person who is poor in spirit recognizes that his or her best deeds are always mingled with the corruption of one's sinful nature, with impure (that is mixed) motives, and with imperfect performance. This person recognizes that he or she never comes close to obeying the law of God as Jesus defined it in Matthew 23:37-39: to love God with all our being, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. [page 12]

14. We Are What We Are by God's Grace.

... when looking at themselves, those who are poor in spirit freely acknowledge that all they are, and anything they have accomplished, is because of the grace of God at work in them (1 Corinthians 15:10). [page 14]

15. God Uses Adversity in Our Lives.

Those who are poor in spirit do not murmur or complain about adverse circumstances God allows or brings into their lives. Instead they acknowledge that there is still much sin remaining in them, and that God often uses adversity to expose sin and to grow them more and more into conformity to Christ. [page 15]

16. Facing Sinful Actions and Thoughts.

...true humility begins with and grows out of being poor in spirit. It is when we face the sinful attitudes and practices that still entangle us, when we begin to realize how desperately far short we fall from being the people God intends us to be, that we can begin to express humility in action. [page 16]

17. Mourning Over Sin.

Each of the eight Beatitudes addresses a specific attitude of the heart. In this one Jesus is addressing our attitude toward our personal sin. James makes a similar point:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:8-10)

In this Beatitude, mourning is not just a touch of sadness but deep heartfelt grief, accompanied by tears, over one's sin. Probably very few Christians today ever experience this kind of mourning over sin, but Jesus said that those who do shall be blessed. [page 18]

18. Our Sin Is against God.

All sin is primarily against God and His law. We may wrong our neighbor, but it is God's law that we have broken. It is God's glory that we have sinned against. We will

never see the seriousness of our sin and mourn over it until we see that it is against God. [page 20]

19. Displaying Humility in Action.

So mourning over our sin is truly a display of humility in action. We cannot be proud and mourn over sin at the same time. We cannot be judgmental toward other believers, or even toward unbelievers, if we are truly contrite and brokenhearted over our own sin. [page 24]

20. Mourning Over Our Nation's Sin.

There is no question that our nation is sinking more deeply into gross sins of violence, immorality, murder (especially of the unborn), flagrant dishonesty, and other kinds of vile sins. What should be our attitude toward these sins? We have three options: condone it, condemn it, or mourn over it. We certainly don't condone it, but I think most of us merely condemn it. [page 25]

21. God Be Merciful to Us and Our Nation.

O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens (Ezra 9:6).

Notice how Ezra identifies himself with the sins of the people: *our* iniquities, *our guilt*. I believe this is the attitude we should pursue in our day. It is so easy for us to stand apart from the culture and do no more than express self-righteous judgmentalism toward it. But those of us who grieve deeply over our own sin will not do this. Instead we will mourn over the sins and wickedness of our nation and will pray most urgently that, just as we want God to be merciful to us, so we want Him to be merciful to our nation as a whole. This will be another expression of humility in action. [page 25]

22. Meekness Toward God and Others.

The Greek word *praus* is usually translated as either "meek" or "gentle," depending on the context. For purposes of this study I use meekness as our response to the often hurtful actions of other people or to the adversities God brings into our lives. There is then a twofold expression of meekness: first toward God and then toward other people. Meekness toward God involves

- responsiveness to His Word
- submission to His providence [page 28]

23. The Beatitudes Build on Each Other.

So we see that these character traits of the Beatitudes build on one another. Only the person who is “poor in spirit,” who recognizes his or her own remaining spiritual poverty, and who “mourns” over his or her sin will want to be responsive to God’s Word as a means of dealing with sin and growing in Christlike character. [page 29]

24. Submission to God’s Providence.

Submission to God’s providence requires first that we understand the meaning of the term. Briefly, for purposes of this study, *providence* refers to God’s sovereign rule over His entire creation, controlling, directing, and orchestrating all events and circumstances to accomplish His purposes. In support of that statement consider the following Scriptures:

For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27)

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ (Isaiah 46:9-10). [pages 29-30]

25. Repaying Evil with Good.

The Puritan Thomas Watson wrote that meekness toward other people consists of three things: the bearing of injuries, the forgiving of injuries, and the returning of good for evil. Let’s analyze what these three expressions of meekness look like in everyday life. [page 32]

26. Meekness Is Humility in ACTION.

You can see that meekness truly is humility in action. It takes humility to submit ourselves to and be convicted by God’s Word. It takes humility to not murmur or complain about the difficult and painful events in life, but instead to see them as God’s work of growing us more and more into the likeness of Christ. It takes humility to bear with and forgive those who hurt us in some way. And it certainly takes humility to repay evil with good. [page 37]

27. Strong Words Used.

In the first two Beatitudes Jesus uses the strongest words possible: The Greek word for *poor* refers to abject poverty; the word for *mourn* is what we do when a loved one dies. [page 39]

28. Desiring Righteousness.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness indicates a strong overwhelming desire for righteousness. [page 40]

29. Christians Are Counted as Righteous.

Jesus perfectly satisfied the righteous requirements of God's law, both in its precepts (what God requires of us) and in its penalty for our failure to perfectly obey. As it is often said, "He lived a life we could not live, and died a death we deserved to die." As a result, all who trust in Christ as Savior are justified—that is, counted and treated by God as perfectly righteous. [page 42]

30. Righteousness in Daily Life.

...whoever hungers and thirsts after the righteousness we have in Christ will also hunger and thirst to be righteous in his or her daily experience. [page 44]

31. Striving for Righteousness.

The words *holiness* and *righteousness* are closely related and sometimes used interchangeably. So we are to pursue righteousness, we are to live righteousness, we are to practice righteousness, and we are to strive for it. [page 45]

32. Spending Time in God's Word.

"As the Holy Spirit brings them to our attention" implies regular exposure to the Bible through our reading or studying it, as well as hearing it taught by our pastors or other spiritual leaders. There will be no growth in experiential righteousness apart from the regular intake of the Word of God. [page 46]

33. No Growth without God's Enablement.

We cannot make one inch of progress toward experiential righteousness without His divine enablement. [page 47]

34. Our Falling Short Brings Humility.

ComOnly those who are poor in spirit and who mourn over sin will hunger and thirst after the righteousness we have in Christ. And only those who are poor in spirit will recognize how far short they come in attaining experiential righteousness. The awareness of our absolute dependence on the righteousness of Christ and of our failure to attain more experiential righteousness will produce humility in us. [page 48]

35. Our Relationship to Others.

The first four character traits of the Beatitudes—poverty in spirit, mourning, meekness, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness—all address our internal character and

our relationship to God. Here in this Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful,” Jesus began to address our relationship with other people. [page 49]

36. Compassion and Mercy.

Note the subtle distinction between compassion and mercy. The Samaritan *had* compassion and then *showed* mercy. [page 50]

37. Showing Mercy.

...there is abundant evidence in both the Old and New Testaments that we are to be merciful and compassionate to those in need, whether at home or abroad. So when Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful,” surely He would have had in mind mercy to those who are physically poor and needy. [page 52]

38. The Needs of the Soul.

...what about the *spiritual* needs of the poor and needy? Suppose we are able, by the generous giving of all Christians, to raise multitudes of men, women, and children out of abject poverty into a liveable and decent standard of living. If we were able to do that to the neglect of their eternal destiny, we would have done them a fatal disservice. As Jesus said, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). [page 52]

39. Forgetting and Not Remembering.

This is what it means to forgive. We do not remember the sins against us. Someone has pointed out the difference between forgetting and not remembering. We unintentionally forget lots of things—where we put our car keys, and other things like that—but we choose not to remember. We can choose not to replay in our minds the sin of someone else against us. We can choose not to bring up that sin again—either to ourselves, to another person, or to the person who sinned against us. To bring it up again indicates that we have not truly forgiven, or else that we are still struggling to forgive and need to continue working on it, asking God to help us. [pages 55-56]

40. The Cost of Forgiveness.

Forgiving costs us. It means we let go of our hurt and resentment and never bring it up again, even to ourselves. And if the offending person is a believer, this means we pray for them, for Jesus said, “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). If the offender is an unbeliever, we should pray for his or her salvation. [page 56]

41. Eight Functions of the Heart.

John Blanchard lists eight functions of the heart identified in the Scriptures:

- It is the seat of the emotions.
- It is the seat of understanding.
- It is the seat of reason.
- It is associated with the conscience.
- It is the seat of motives.
- It is the root of our desires.
- It is involved in decision making.
- It is the seat of faith. [page 59]

From John Blanchard, *Right with God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971), 86.

Once we acknowledge God's ownership of us, our responsibility becomes clear: Whatever we do must serve God's purposes. And central among God's purposes, as demonstrated throughout the Scriptures, is God's glory. Paul concludes a brief message on sexual purity with the admonition, "So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). He does the same in 1 Corinthians 10:31 after a discussion of the issue of eating meat offered to idols. "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." That, positively, is purity of heart. [page 61]

43. Dealing with Sin First, then Becoming a Peacemaker.

We need to deal with the sinful passions of our own hearts before we can deal with conflict of any kind with others. So where do we start? One way would be to go back over each of the character traits of the previous Beatitudes and to prayerfully and carefully ask ourselves how we compare with each of the traits. Am I poor in spirit? Do I mourn over my sin? Am I truly meek before God and with respect to other people? Do I truly hunger and thirst for righteousness, not only in my conduct but also in my heart? Am I merciful toward others who sin against me because I am aware how merciful God has been to me? Do I seek a singleness of heart toward God based on the fact that I am no longer my own, but rather am Christ's possession? And if I am truly His possession, then does it really matter how I am treated? Because that is His business.

If we ask ourselves these questions with complete honesty, we should end up with a deep sense of humility. Only then are we in a position of becoming peacemakers. [page 69]

44. Culture Hostile to God.

There is no doubt that the culture is becoming more and more antagonistic toward biblical values. For some years I have thought of our American culture to be ungodly; that is to believe and act as if God is irrelevant. Now I believe we have become not just ungodly but actually anti-God. An increasing of those who most influence our culture—such as academia, the media, and the entertainment industry—are openly hostile to the whole idea of God or of biblical values. [page 77]

45. Paul’s Growth in Humility.

The apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians about AD 54. In it he referred to himself as the “least of the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:9). In AD 62, in his letter to the Ephesians, he considered himself as the “very least of the saints” (that is all believers—Ephesians 3:8). In about AD 63-64, in his first letter to Timothy, he referred to himself as the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

From the least of the apostles, to the very least of all the saints, to the foremost of sinners, all in the space of about ten years. On the surface it seemed as if Paul was regressing in his Christian life, but in actuality he was progressing. Paul was growing in humility, one of the two most basic character traits of a Christian (the other being love). [page 83]

46. All Our Sins Forgiven on Christ’s Cross.

In the gospel, the Good News, that our sins—however many there may be, and however ugly they are—have all been forgiven through Christ’s death on the cross. And furthermore, not only are we forgiven, but we also are actually credited with the righteousness of Christ Himself. [page 84]

47. Daily Assurance of the Gospel.

To put it in plain words, believers need to appropriate the gospel for themselves every day. Why? Because we are still practicing sinners every day, and without the daily assurance of the gospel, we can begin to think that, at least for that day, we have lost the favor of God. [page 84]

48. Christ Lived the Perfectly Righteous Life in My Place.

Jesus both perfectly obeyed God’s law and then paid the penalty for our failure to perfectly obey it. We return to the beautiful observation that “he lived a life we could live and died the death we deserved to die.”

This is the gospel, the message of “good news.” This is the door each of us must walk through by trusting in Christ as the One who bore *our* sins in His body on the cross. But as I said earlier, the gospel is also a path we must walk along until the day we die.

As I walk along, I learn that Jesus not only died in my place, but He also lived that perfectly righteous life in my place. That's when the good news of the gospel really becomes good news! [page 86]

49. United with Christ – In Him.

The latter part of 2 Corinthians 5:21—“so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”—also needs some explaining. We obviously do not become in ourselves as righteous as God Himself. The key to understanding Paul's words are two words: *in him*. This is Paul's shorthand expression for our representative union with Christ. God appointed Jesus to be the representative before Him of all who trust in Jesus for our salvation. So all that Christ did in His sinless life and sin-bearing death, He did in our place as our representative. So the expression “in him we might become the righteousness of God” means that we might be counted as righteous by God *because* He credits to us the perfect righteousness that Jesus lived out over thirty-three years. [page 90]

50. Depending on the Holy Spirit.

We also need to daily realize our dependence on the work and power of the Holy Spirit to pursue the various expressions of humility. There is a fundamental principle of spiritual growth that I call “the principle of dependent responsibility.” For example, God says through Paul, “Walk in ... humility.” We are responsible for doing that, but we must depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us. Furthermore, we are dependent on the Holy Spirit to work genuine change in our hearts. As Paul said, “[It is] only God who give the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7). [page 94]

51. Growing in Humility.

As we grow in the Christian life, then, we become increasingly aware of our dependence on the righteousness of Christ revealed to us through the gospel. And we also become increasingly aware of our dependence on the Holy Spirit. Both of these awarenesses are expressions of humility. In our dependence on the righteousness that is in Christ and on the power of the Holy Spirit, may we all seek to grow in humility as we see it in the eight character traits of the Beatitudes. [pages 94-95]