

“Models of Humility in the Old Testament”**

“Don’t just tell me. *Show* me.”

Have you ever said those words? I have. When teaching a particular technique in athletics, a good coach doesn’t just describe what to do. He demonstrates it. The same goes for a good music teacher or project leader at work.

We’ve been learning about the necessity of humility for several weeks now. Since God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble, it’s vital that we get serious about cultivating humility.

But practically speaking, what does that look like? All of us struggle with pride and consequently all of us need to change to become what we are not presently, but change *into what?*

In order to change from what we are and become what God wants us to be, we need models. God’s Word provides models, too, both negative and positive ones. In this message we’re going to learn by examining several models of humility (both negative and positive ones) found in the Old Testament. Next time, the Lord willing, we’ll look at several models found in the New Testament.

I. We can learn by examining models of individuals who lacked humility.

There is benefit to be gained by considering the negative and then avoiding it. *Not like this, but like this*, my eighth grade basketball coach use to say when teaching me how to shoot. If you want to know what humility looks like, it’s *not like this*. Here are four examples of proud people who lacked humility.

A. Korah (Numbers 16)

Remember Korah?

1. He was called to be a servant of God, but wasn’t satisfied (1-2).

Korah was a Levite, a Kohathite to be precise. As such he was given the honored privilege of serving in the tabernacle, but that wasn’t enough for Korah.

Numbers 16:1-2 “Korah ... became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council.”

2. He led a rebellion because he wanted personal honor (3, 8-11).

In his pride Korah wanted a higher position, namely the priesthood. So he resorted to smear tactics to try and get it.

Numbers 16:3 “They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, ‘You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD’s assembly?’”

In order to get what he wanted, Korah attacked Moses and Aaron since these men stood in the way of the position and power he so wanted. But his attack sounded so spiritual. “We’re all holy. We don’t need you to be our spiritual leaders.” Moses exposed his folly...

Numbers 16:11 “It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?”

What happened to Korah? It’s a lesson to all who would use religion to promote selfish agendas.

3. He and his partners were swallowed alive (31-33).

Numbers 16:31-33 “As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah’s men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community.”

One of the things that makes pride so dangerous is its complexity. Jonathan Edwards observed:

“It takes many forms and shapes and encompasses the heart like the layers of an onion—when you pull off one layer, there is another underneath.” Jonathan Edwards^[2]

Wayne Mack suggests, “Pride feeds off nearly anything: a fair measure of ability and wisdom, a single compliment, a season of remarkable prosperity, or a small accomplishment.”^[3] The Puritan Richard Mayo wrote, “It is hard starving this sin, as there is nothing almost but it can live upon.”^[4] Robert Murray M’Cheyne confessed, “I know I am proud; and yet I do not know the half of that pride.”^[5] Twenty years after his conversion Jonathan Edwards groaned about the “bottomless, infinite depths of pride” left in his heart.^[6]

B. Haman (Esther 3-7)

Haman was a politician in the Medo-Persian empire in the fifth century B.C. But he was no half-rate leader...

1. He was King Xerxes' right hand man (3:1-2).

Esther 3:1-2 "After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him..."

Haman was on the top of the pile. Everybody bowed before him, everything, that is, except for a Jew named Mordecai. Mordecai refused to kneel in Haman's presence, and this insubordination infuriated pompous Haman. He could have killed Mordecai but decided that wasn't a big enough penalty for the crime.

2. He wanted recognition so badly he was willing to kill a people-group to get it (3:5-6).

Esther 3:5-6 "When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes."

Now there's a proud man! He's so wrapped up in himself that he'd kill thousands just to get back at one man who slighted him.

3. He was a self-absorbed man (6:6-10).

It's almost comical to see how consumed Haman was with himself and what happened as a result. King Xerxes discovered that he had failed to reward a man who saved his life and asked Haman for his suggestion on how to reward this life-saver. Listen to the narrative...

Esther 6:6-9 "When Haman entered, the king asked him, 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?'" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'"

And then King Xerxes responded, "Okay, go do it. The man is Mordecai and I want you to honor him as you've suggested!"

The Proverb says, “Pride goes before the fall.” That’s a fitting epitaph for Haman.

4. *He was hung on the gallows he himself built (7:10).*

It’s been said, “Give a fool enough rope and he’ll hang himself.” Haman did just that.

You say, “I don’t struggle with pride like Haman.” Really? How do you respond when the person at work snubs you? “Well, I sure wouldn’t kill his family!” you say. That’s good. But do you snub him back? That’s evidence of pride. If you had the power would you fire him? That too is evidence of pride.

C. Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36, 39, 44).

Jehoiakim was a king when Judah was being invaded by the Babylonians. He was contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. His pride surfaced when...

1. He received a written message from God (36:1-3).

God told Jeremiah to take a scroll, write a prophetic message of judgment, and have it delivered to King Jehoiakim. The reason?

Jeremiah 36:3 “Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.”

Sadly, Jehoiakim thought he knew better than God. When the scroll arrived...

2. He rejected God’s message and threw it in a fire (36:22-23).

In fact, after hearing God’s Word, Jehoiakim actually took a knife, cut off pieces of the scroll, and threw them one by one into his fireplace. Verse 24 says,

Jeremiah 36:24 “The king and all his attendants who heard all these words **showed no fear**, nor did they tear their clothes.”

It’s a serious thing, beloved, how we treat God’s Word. It’s a serious thing to think you don’t need His Word. It’s a mark of pride.

As a pastor, I’ve noticed a yellow flag over the years, a warning sign that indicates a church member is starting to slide. It’s a simple thing, but ever so significant. The person gets busy with other things and loses interest in hearing God’s Word. They take the overtime on Sundays, and even when

they do come to church it's not because they want to hear God's Word. It's to *do something*. Dear friends, it's the evidence of pride when we think we don't need to sit regularly and consistently under the teaching of God's Word. Service is important but it's the result of the ministry of God's Word, not the replacement for it.

Jehoiakim paid a great price for his pride...

3. He lost his sons, his eyes, his freedom, and his nation (39:6-7).

The last thing he ever saw was the slaughter of his sons by the Babylonians, just before put out his eyes, and bound him with shackles. Sadly, his people learned from his negative example.

4. His people showed their lack of humility by how they treated God's Word (44:10).

We're told this in...

Jeremiah 44:10 "To this day they [a reference to the Jews who fled to Egypt] **have not humbled themselves** or shown reverence, nor have they followed my law and the decrees I set before you and your fathers."

C. S. Lewis said that pride is the greatest sin, commenting:

"Unchastity (unfaithfulness), anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that are mere flea bites in comparison. It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice. It is a completely anti-God state of mind."[\[7\]](#)

Well said. We're guilty of pride any time we exhibit an *anti-God state of mind*.

D. Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)

In an earlier study we learned from Charles Bridges that pride "contends for supremacy" with God. That sums up what Nebuchadnezzar did.

1. He contended for supremacy with God (28-30).

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful ruler, a world ruler in fact. But his power went to his head...

Daniel 4:28-30 "All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king

was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon , he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’”

Notice the first person pronouns: **I, my, my**. Here’s a man who’s taking credit for things that are gifts from God. The next time we start to do that (and we’re prone to do it all the time), remember what happened to Nebuchadnezzar...

2. God struck him with insanity (31-33).

Daniel 4:31-32 “The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

And that’s what happened. This powerful, proud man lost his mental faculties and lived like a cow for seven years. Because of God’s mercy the story has a pleasant ending.

3. After he humbled himself and gave God the glory, he was restored (34-37).

In fact, we can learn vicariously from what this once proud king said after his bout with insanity...

Daniel 4:37 “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And **those who walk in pride he is able to humble.**”

Who struggles with pride? If we left these examples assuming that just certain types of folks are vulnerable we would certainly be amiss. Spurgeon said:

“That demon of pride was born with us, and it will not die one hour before us. It is so woven into the very warp and woof of our nature, that till we are wrapped in our winding-sheets we shall never hear the last of it.”^[8]

II. We can learn by examining models of individuals who demonstrated humility.

Someone once asked Augustine, “What is the most important quality in the Christian life?” He responded, “Humility.” The person asked, “What is the second most important quality in the Christian life?” Again Augustine responded, “Humility.” The man asked a third time, “What is the third most important quality in the Christian life?”

Augustine repeated, “Humility.”[\[9\]](#)

I guess you could say that Augustine felt we need humility! Rightly so. It’s the key to receiving God’s grace. It’s also what we see exhibited, by the grace of God, in the following individuals.

Time doesn’t permit us to do a thorough biographical study of each person. My aim is merely to identify particular traits that accompany humility.

A. Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

One of my favorite biblical characters is Joseph. You have to admire him. Talk about overcoming challenges! He surely did. Here are five responses to difficult situations and in each, the common denominator is that Joseph humbled himself.

1. When betrayed by his brothers, he focused on the purpose of God (45:4-7).

At no fault of his own Joseph was born into a family where there was parental favoritism and intense sibling rivalry. His brothers hated him so much they sold him into slavery when he was a teenager. He lost the prime of his life, but he did not lose his sweet spirit. We find out why in a conversation years later when he met his brothers again:

Genesis 45:5-7 “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that **God sent me ahead of you**. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But **God sent me ahead of you** to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”

When we are proud we focus on our rights. When we humble ourselves we focus, as did Joseph, on the purpose of God, a purpose which often included unjust suffering.

2. When tempted to commit sexual sin, he resolved to please God (39:6-10).

An Egyptian official named Potiphar bought Joseph and because he was pleased with him, made him manager of his estate. Potiphar’s wife was also pleased with Joseph, but with sinful intent. “Come to bed with me!” she pleaded, not once but day after day.

Joseph could have rationalized the situation, but instead he resolved to please God. He told the seductress:

Genesis 39:9 “No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”

Note that humility doesn't mean we deny power and position if we have it. Joseph acknowledged he was the most powerful person in Potiphar's estate. Humility means that we don't misuse position and power for sinful, selfish ends. The humble person, when tempted, fixes his eyes on God.

3. When given the opportunity to boast, he put the focus on the Lord (41:14-16).

Joseph had the ability to interpret dreams. One day Pharaoh had a baffling dream and called for Joseph who at the time was in prison for a crime he didn't commit.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it (Gen. 41:15)."

This was Joseph's ticket out of prison. Everyone else has forgotten him. It's time to toot your own horn Joseph! After all, the Good Book says, God helps those who help themselves, right? A humble person knows it does *not* say that. Listen to Joseph:

Genesis 41:16 "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

When you're paid a compliment, how do you respond? "Well, yea, I am pretty good! Thanks for noticing!" Who gets the glory for your accomplishments?

4. When he became powerful, he used his power to serve (41:41-43, 46-48).

For interpreting Pharaoh's dream Joseph was promoted to being second in command in Egypt. A proud person would say, "After all I've been through now it's time to enjoy!" Not Joseph. He didn't use his position for personal gain. Greater position means greater potential and opportunity to serve others.

5. *When he had the chance to get even, he chose to forgive (50:15-21).*

I'm not sure you'll find any clearer illustration of unconditional love and forgiveness by a human being than the one in Genesis 50. Joseph's brothers come to him with a plea (and a lie). Before dad died he told us to tell you to forgive us (for they were afraid he would retaliate). "We are your slaves," they said (18). To which Joseph responded as he wept:

Genesis 50:19-21 "But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. **Am I in the place of God?** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And **he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.**"

That's humility, choosing to forgive rather than give the cold shoulder, or worse, retaliate. You say, "How could Joseph forgive like that?" Here's the answer. He could forgive because he knew he'd been forgiven. Joseph knew that God had forgiven him of far more than he was being asked to forgive. A humble person is willing to show grace because he knows how much he needs grace.

My friend, if you're struggling to forgive right now, look to the cross. Ponder what Jesus endured because of your sin. It's far more than what you or I will ever endure.

B. Moses (Exod. 7; Num. 12:3)

What do you think of when you hear the name 'Moses'? A great leader, a mighty man of God? That he was. But he didn't start leading until he was eighty. What happened prior to that? Simply put...

1. God broke him before He used him (Exod. 7:7).

Moses spent forty years on the back side of a desert taking care of sheep before he experienced the fulfillment that comes from knowing God is using you. He was a has-been, a former member of Pharaoh's household, a forgotten man past his prime. Then, as a broken man, God appeared to him and gave him the assignment of leading two million Hebrew slaves out of bondage.

2. God blessed him so he could bless others (Numbers 12:3).

We find an interesting comment about Moses in...

Numbers 12:3 "Now **Moses was a very humble man**, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."

That observation came right after Moses' brother and sister undermined his authority, asserting in Numbers 12:2, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this."

It's tough to play second fiddle. Apparently, Aaron and Miriam were struggling with jealousy or misunderstanding, and consequently accused Moses of being arrogant.

Not so, as verse 3 states. *Moses was a very humble man*, indeed, *more humble than anyone else on earth*. That's quite a statement! What qualified Moses to receive it? For certain, God's grace made it possible, but what stood out about Moses as a leader? This. He understood that God blessed him with authority and leadership ability for this reason, *so he could bless others*. He didn't see himself as the king on top of the hill but as the servant holding up the hill.

He foreshadows Jesus, who came not to *be served* but to *serve and to give his life a ransom for many* (Matt. 20:28).

Recently I listened to an interview of a sports figure who experienced success after some initial failure. When asked by the announcer how he felt the athlete responded, "I'm really proud of my accomplishment," and went on to describe what HE had done to overcome adversity.

You'll hear politicians say that the same. "I'm really proud of my record. Vote for me." Musicians join their company. "I'm proud of my creativity." Parents may not say it but often think it (and like to hear such compliments from others), "We're really proud of the job we did as parents which is, by the way, why our kids are so successful."

Those are words you never heard from the lips of the models we'll considering. Moses never said, "I'm really proud of the job I did leading the Israelites to the promised land."

We've grown so used to boastful leaders that we tend to think that to be successful, you have to exhibit some pride. That's not true. In the recent best seller, *From Good to Great*, Jim Collins led a five year study to determine the difference between *good* companies and *great* ones. His research identified two specific character qualities shared by the CEOs of these good-to-great companies.

We might expect the first trait. The leaders possessed incredible professional will. They were driven with a passion to succeed.

But the second trait surprised the researchers. The leaders were actually modest, even humble. They focused on the contribution of others and didn't particularly want the spotlight. Collins writes, "The good-to-great leaders never wanted to become larger-than-life heroes. They never aspired to be put on a pedestal or become unreachable icons. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results."[\[10\]](#)

Time won't allow us to do more than merely mention the highlights of the following models—and I would encourage you to follow up with your own study.

C. David (1 Sam. 24; Psalm 78; Psalm 51)

David is the prototype as Israel's greatest king. Even the Messiah is referred to as "the son of David." But his beginnings were surely unassuming, and even as a king he exhibited great humility.

1. When attacked by an ungodly father-in-law, he showed respect and submission (1 Sam. 24:8-10).

How would you respond if your father-in-law tried to nail you to the wall with a spear? David respected the man and refused to get revenge.

2. When he became king, he led as a shepherd (Psalm 78:70-72).

Psalm 78:70-72 says this, "He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them."

3. When confronted by his own sin, he repented publicly (Psalm 51).

This is perhaps the greatest display of humility David ever exhibited. It happened AFTER he committed adultery and murder. When faced with his sin, he repented, not just privately but publicly. Indeed, he wrote out his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 and, according to the heading over the psalm,

he *gave it to the choir director*. In other words, he wrote this psalm to be sung in public worship services! Wayne Mack's observation is helpful:

“The king, the ruler of the people, humbled himself to such an extent that he was able to write a song for the congregation that recounted his struggle to hide his sin, his repentance, and his restoration to the Lord. We might infer from this that David knew how much he needed to be reminded, over and over again, of how he had failed the Lord. The constant reminder of this public song probably helped him to continue to walk in humility before God.”[\[11\]](#)

Our tendency is to want to forget the past. David learned from his. By reviewing our past sin we keep fresh in mind two things: one, we are weak sinners; two, God's grace is sufficient to cleanse and restore us.

D. Abigail (1 Samuel 25)

This woman exhibited tremendous humility in the following ways:

- 1. Though married to a wicked man, she demonstrated selfless grace (23-24).*
- 2. She believed God's promises and acted in light of them (30-31).*

E. Daniel (The Book of Daniel)

Daniel went from refugee status to high ranking official in his lifetime. He outlived several kings and held powerful positions in a couple of empires. Daniel showed humility in these ways:

- 1. He did not use God-given abilities for selfish gain (5:16-17).*
- 2. He was willing to lose his position and life rather than compromise his allegiance to the Lord (1:8; 6:10).*

F. Josiah (2 Kings 22:19)

Josiah became king at age eight, assuming leadership at a time when his nation was spiraling downhill fast. But he made significant reforms.

- 1. His heart was tender and responsive to God's Word.*
- 2. He took action to get rid of sin.*

God said this to say about Josiah...

2 Kings 22:19 “Because your heart was responsive and **you humbled yourself** before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD.”

Hopefully, we’re beginning to have a clearer picture of what humility looks like in action. Now it’s time to get intentional. Yes, if we going to put off pride and put on humility, it won’t just happen. We must get *intentional about humility*.

“Pride is the shirt of the soul, put on first and put off last.” George Swinnock[\[12\]](#)

What do you do every morning? You get dressed, right? That’s what we need to do with humility each morning. C. J. Mahaney offers some helpful suggestions for how to begin your day in order to clothe yourself with humility.

Getting Intentional about Humility: A Practical Strategy for Beginning Your Day

1. Begin each day admitting your desperate need for the Lord.

Mahaney observes:

“Sin doesn’t wake up tired, because it hasn’t been sleeping. When you wake up in the morning, sin is right there, fully awake, ready to attack.”[\[13\]](#)

So rather than be attacked, go on the offensive. From the moment you wake up, declare your dependence upon God. “I need You today, Lord. I’m humbling myself before You again today.”

2. Begin each day pondering the cross.

There’s no better place to cultivate humility than at Gethsemane and Calvary . We need to confess with Joseph Hall:

Thy garden is the place,

Where pride cannot intrude;

**For should it dare to enter there,
T’would soon be drowned in blood.[\[14\]](#)**

Isaac Watts summed it up:

**When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.**

3. *Begin each day in the Word and prayer.*

When I open the Scriptures before rushing out the door, I am making a statement, “I need to hear from You, Lord. I can’t face this day without Your guidance.” If I don’t open His Word, I am making another statement, “I’m feeling pretty strong today, Lord. I don’t think I need time with You.”

4. *Use your commute time to memorize and meditate on Scripture.*

How much time do you spend in your car each day? Fifteen minutes? An hour? Whatever it is, think of how much Scripture memorization and meditation you could accomplish if you simply turned off the radio and used that time to prayerfully reflect on God’s Word. Use wisely your “down” time each day.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[\[2\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p.10.

[\[3\]](#) Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 10.

[\[4\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 10.

[\[5\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 10.

[\[6\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 10.

[\[7\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 62.

[\[8\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 13.

[\[9\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 21.

[\[10\]](#) Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, p. 27.

[\[11\]](#) Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 136.

[\[12\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 9.

[\[13\]](#) C. J. Mahaney, p. 69

[\[14\]](#) Taken from Wayne Mack, *Humility: The Forgotten Virtue*, p. 11.