

- PRAYER -

In the last month or so, Josh Tong has been teaching us at Prayer Meetings about “Gospel Culture”. Gospel Culture is a companion to Gospel truth.

“**Gospel Truth**” is what we believe and involves everything Jesus is in his person and what he has done for us at the cross—this is the very center of our faith.

If “**Gospel Truth**” is about what we believe as primary and essential, “Gospel Culture” is about what is primary and essential in **our behaviour**.

If **Gospel truth** is like the Bread we eat, Gospel culture is like the smell of the bread baking in the oven that wets our appetite for it.

Years ago, when we first started this church, we used to talk a lot about the pursuit of humility. Then for many years we forgot how important this virtue is—mostly because I forgot and didn’t prioritize it enough in my own life.

I am very grateful to Pastor Josh for reviving the emphasis on this virtue and other vital characteristics of “Gospel Culture”.

We are all proud people to varying degrees, so humility does not come easy to any of us. There are many subtle ways that pride works in our soul, and today I want to uncover a lesser known aspect of pride and how it provides and opportunity to grow in humility.

Please open your Bibles to **1 Peter 5:5-7**

The book of 1st Peter is written to Christians who are facing an uncertain future because of many trials and fierce persecution.

Sometimes life gets very hard and we can be tempted to be fearful and anxious and worry a lot. This was a temptation for the believers that Peter was writing to...just like it is for many of us here today.

There is an unusual convergence of seemingly unrelated issues that emerge in the 3 verses that we are going to look at together. Ordinarily, when people are fearful and anxious, the right thing to do is comfort them, pray with them, and share God's promises with them.

But Peter doesn't primarily comfort the anxious here. Instead he, surprisingly, links their anxiety to the sin of pride and tells them **the key to dealing with their anxiety is to humble themselves.**

By doing this, Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches us something very valuable about how to identify subtle expressions of pride in our own lives.

When we face situations that we don't like, and that are **out of our control**, our pride kicks in strongly and we try to manipulate and manoeuvre in any way we can to change the situation.

Whether its through sweet talking someone with flattery, or getting angry & sullen, or making threats, or becoming defensive and argumentative, or withholding affection...when people behave in ways that we don't control....as sinners our default response is try to control them anyway—even though we don't hold the strings—and they aren't puppets.

When that fails to change the situation (which it often does) we experience the emotion that everyone feels when they try to control what is outside their control—**anxiety & fear.**

I don't control the weather, but it affects my drive to work or the state of my crops so **I feel anxious**. I don't control my children's actions, yet they can make decisions with long ranging implications so **I feel anxious and agitated**.

The key then is to relinquish control—which Peter says is the essence of humility! We could say it this way:

The Humble Release and Entrust the Uncontrollable to God

Let's carefully follow Peter's line of argument here. We will do this by answering three questions—**What?**—**Why?**—and **How?**

- **What** explains the the behaviour Peter is teaching us about
- **Why** explains the motivation given to help us want to do it
- **How** answers the practical application of obedience to our lives

Notice how Peter speaks about Humility...

I. What?

In **verse 5** —the younger people in the church are commanded to clothe themselves with humility—which is explained as a way of **being subject** to the elders. It's the same word used in **Eph 5** to describe the way wives are to relate to their husbands—literally it means, "voluntary yielding in love".

Then in **verse 6** it tells us to "humble ourselves"

In other words, humility is not a feeling that comes upon us...but is rather something quite deliberate—a choice. A decision to act a certain way. Something voluntary. It's something we have to consent to—we can be humble by choosing to be humble—or we can remain proud by not choosing to be humble.

Jesus is our example in this. The Bible tells us that he died for us because **he chose to humble himself** first:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.
Phil 2:6-7 NLT

Jesus himself accentuated his choice to die for us, as told in the Gospel of John:

“I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily.” **John 10:17-18 NLT**

If we are going to be humble and live in humility we need to get this piece of the puzzle clearly. Humility is a choice. Don't wait to feel humble...that only happens when God humbles you. Don't wait for that. That's a hard way to get humble. Choose instead to humble yourself today.

Saying that, of course isn't enough to make one want to do it—after all humbling oneself is hard. We like to be right. We like to get our way. We think we know what's best for ourselves. So humility cuts against the grain and requires significant self denial.

Thankfully, Peter gives us **a lot of motivation** in this passage. He gives us **solid reasons** to do the hard thing and humble ourselves before God.

2. **Why?** (motivation)

Peter gives us 3 reasons why we should humble ourselves and make it a pattern in our lives.

First Reason

First, he tells us in **verse 5** that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

In other words, humility, or the lack of it, affects our relationship with God on the most fundamental level. **With it, God is for us. Without it, God opposes us.** The words “**give favor**” have the idea of acceptance from God.

“I will look favourably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at my word.” **Isa 66:2 CSB**

If we want God in our corner—we are going to have to take humility seriously.

SECOND REASON

The second motivation, moves from how God thinks about the humble, to what God does for the humble—we find this in **verse 6**—He exalts the humble.

Does that surprise you? It does me. Because it seems to be dangling a motivation that seems less than honorable. It seems to be saying—If you lower yourself enough you get to be exalted which is what you wanted in the first place—on the surface it seems like the health and wealth preachers who tell their congregations that God will prosper them if they give generously.

But that fails to distinguish between self-exaltation which is always evil in Scripture, and exaltation by God which is always good in Scripture.

It doesn't say God will make you great so everyone will treat you as special—rather it says that God will exalt you in a way that HE treats you as special. An example of this is found in Luke 18:

In Luke 18, the way God exalts the humble is by justifying them. To be in a right relationship with God **IS** to be exalted!

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified**, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself **will be exalted**. **Luke 18:13-14**

Again—this in the pattern we see in Jesus. He humbles himself and God exalts him:

“He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. **Therefore**, God elevated him to the place of highest honor.” **Phil 2:8-9 NLT**

Jesus is a paradigm of God’s desire to exalt his people, if we will humble ourselves before him.

THIRD REASON

The last reason he gives for humbling ourselves is found in **verse 7** —**He cares for us**. We give God our anxieties BECAUSE he cares for us.

When life seems out of control we can be tempted to doubt God’s care for us. When circumstances out of our control press down on us—it can feel like God is against us. When people in our lives are not responding the way we want them to—and when we feel helpless to change the situation—we are easy to feel like we have been abandoned by God. That’s what it **FEELS** like. But our feelings are a poor barometer of what is true and real.

One of the businessmen I am mentoring these days is a pilot who flies his own plane.

He was telling me about a time a while back where he was flying with his kids at night—but it was overcast and there were no stars visible in the sky, and he was flying over water which at night is pitch black. There was no horizon in sight and he completely lost his sense of where the air and ground were. He said its very frightening because you can't tell whether you are flying up, straight, or down toward the water (this is what happened to John F. Kennedy Junior when his plane crashed)

The only way to fly safely in those conditions is to look at the **instrument panel** and follow those objective dials very carefully. My landed safely because he trusted the instrument panel and not his gut feelings.

The Scripture is our instrument panel that tells us how God views us and thinks about us—not our feelings. When going through a dark time, our feelings will tell us things about God that can't be trusted.

My dad used to say, “Don't doubt in the darkness what you believed in the light”. Good advice. But even better advice is—**when navigating through the darkness of uncontrolled situations—trust the light of God's word to guide you.**

So we have looked at the **WHAT**...and the **WHY**..of humbling ourselves. Now we come to the practice itself— the **HOW**.

3. How?

Look again at **verses 6-7**.

There are two ways we do this. Both are necessary. One is in the way we **think**. The other is in the way we **pray**.

The first of these two isn't real obvious. Notice it says we humble ourselves under **the mighty hand of God**. I did a little research into the way the word "**hand**" is used in Scripture and discovered something I had never seen before. The word hand usually represents the acting agent—the source of the activity.

In other words, when you are facing a situation out of your control—either in your circumstances or in a relationship (or maybe both)—we often only see the human hand at work—the angry, unreasonable boss; the blocking of your plans; the unreasonable person in your family; society increasingly moving against Christian values—but fail to see **God's hand**—God's mighty sovereign hand which is behind it all.

Let me remind you of what we have often recited from the Heidelberg Catechism:

"ALL things, in fact, come to us not by chance, but from his fatherly **hand**...All creatures are so completely in his **hand** that without his will they can neither move nor be moved." **Heidelberg Catechism on Providence**

Before we will ever entrust our cares to God, we need to believe deeply in both his goodness (he cares for us) and his absolute sovereignty (his mighty hand).

Only after we see God the right way, will we stop trusting in our own solutions and entrust ourselves to God..as the Scriptures say:

"Those who know your name trust in you" (Ps 9:10)

We cast our anxieties on God—**by entrusting prayer**.

Again—Jesus is our example in this. When life was hard and “seemingly” out of his control as a man—**what did he do?** He didn’t get mad. He didn’t get even. He didn’t take matters into his own hands. INSTEAD...He cast his cares on the Lord....

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but **continued entrusting himself** to him who judges justly. **1Peter 2:23**

The book of **1 Peter** makes it clear we are to follow Jesus’ example in this:

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.... Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will **entrust their souls** to a faithful Creator while doing good.” **1Peter 2:21; 1Peter 4:19**

CJ wisely articulates it this way, “Each day we are either casting cares or accumulating cares”

What about you today?

Does your soul look **like a wool sweater after a walk in the woods....full of burrs sticking to it?

...or is your soul **like an clean inbox with all emails archived and sent or deleted?

