

How Does Humility Lead in Conflict

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of humility in leadership, particularly in shaping shepherds for God's flock. It delves into the serious joy found in the Bible, exemplified by the apostles' rejoicing in suffering for the name of Jesus. The speaker highlights five key traits of humility, focusing on subordination to God, not feeling entitled to better treatment than Jesus, speaking truth in love, dependence on grace, and being open to criticism while maintaining unshakable convictions.

Scripture: Matthew 10:24, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 Corinthians 13:6, Ephesians 2:8, James 4:15, Proverbs 12:15, 2 Corinthians 5:11, Galatians 5:23

Topics: "Humility in Leadership", "Joy in Suffering"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray. Father, we just pause for a moment, one more time, here to say we need you. If any value that is lasting is going to come through my mouth, it will be owing to you.

And so we pause to say we look away from ourselves. Don't rely on your own insight. Don't rely on your own preparations.

Rely upon the Lord, and he'll make your path straight. So God, come and help me, I pray, to be faithful to your word. Now I'm encouraging to these folks, and to Brian in particular, in Jesus' name.

Amen. So I want to say especially to Dr. Arnold, your new president, how thankful I am for this invitation to be part of the installation. I regard it as a great privilege because leadership in shaping shepherds of God's blood-bought flock will either experience, that leadership will either experience the joy of the crown of righteousness or a cry of anguish for failure.

Paul said to the shepherds of Ephesus, Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. So, if shepherding is that serious, and the shaping of shepherds is even more serious, then you should

ask, and I should ask, why would you be eager to be here to consign a man to such danger? Listen to Jeremiah. Now, woe to you shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord.

You have scattered my flock and have driven them away. Woe to the shepherds. So, woe to Brian Arnold if he shapes shepherds that mislead the flock.

That would be a tragic and terrible thing, right? It would be awful. Wail, you shepherds. Cry aloud.

Roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter have come. Well, if shepherding is that dangerous, and shaping shepherds is that dangerous, why would I consider it such a privilege to be here, to be a part of this process? Because not only are there dangers, and they are real, but because there are such enormous delights. Listen to this word from Hebrews 13.

Your leaders, your shepherds, are keeping watch over your souls. As those who will have to give an account, let them do this with joy, not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. A gloomy pastor is not an advantage to his flock.

An unhappy minister does not make a healthy church. Joy in the shepherd is essential for health in the flock, in the sheep. Therefore, the shaping of shepherds is a happy affair.

Or it fails. If we're not praying, and studying, and worshiping, and loving with joy, according to Psalm 1, serve the Lord with gladness, we're failing. We're unfitting shepherds to be of advantage to their people.

So, it's a happy affair. And if you ask, so, how does that fit together with, wail, you shepherds, for the days of your slaughter have come. That can't go together.

I mean, that's intolerable to put those two together. My answer is, think again. The only joy in the ministry worth having is serious joy.

A kind of joy that is so rooted in God that if you don't have it, you're an idolater. So, all of that, Dr. Arnold, just say thank you for having me. I love doing this.

I love what you're about to do, what you're about to give your life to. I love seminaries. I love shepherds.

I love the church. What a calling, what an opportunity, what a joy, what a danger. So, here's what I want to talk about.

The question arises out of the experience of serious joy that is crucial for our time and your calling. So, let me describe the experience I'm thinking about, the experience of serious joy in the Bible, and then the question that comes out of it for me that I'd like to try to answer. The experience is found in Acts chapter 4. It goes like this.

You remember the Sanhedrin was trying to silence the apostles. Don't teach anymore in this name. And here's what happened.

They beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. They left the presence of the council rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. I call that serious joy.

What would you call it? Rejoicing over being beaten and shamed. So, were they silenced? Verse 42. Next verse.

They did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. Now, if you shape shepherds like that, that are told by their culture, you shut up. Who are you to talk in the name of God? Who do you think you are to claim to speak for God? What kind of people are you preparing? What arrogance? The question will be, will you have trained shepherds who go silent under that withering criticism? Here's the question that arises for me.

Will that accusation of arrogance in presuming to speak for God week in and week out into all kinds of settings and situations from a book silence your shepherds? Now, God hates arrogance, right? God hates pride. And he loves humility. Shepherds who speak for God need great clarity about what is arrogant and what is humble.

That's the question for me. It's been a question for me a long time. A hundred years ago, G.K. Chesterton pointed out how what we think is recent, the culture has co-opted the word arrogant to refer to conviction.

And has co-opted the word humility to refer to uncertainty. And if you speak with conviction, you're arrogant. And if you speak with uncertainty, you're humble.

That's not new. Listen to Chesterton, 1908. What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place.

Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself and undoubting about the truth.

This has been exactly reversed. Nowadays, 1908, nowadays the part of a man that he does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert himself. And the part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt the divine reason.

We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. End of Chesterton. So, if humility is not abandonment of conviction, and if humility is not the embrace of uncertainty, what is it? What is humility? When you're called upon to have confidence that is so strong, beatings don't silence you, they make you glad.

They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. So that's my question. And Wayne had seven points.

I have five. That is five traits of humility. So what I'm after is to exhort Brian Arnold to be this and to shape shepherds who are this, a kind of humility that has conviction and certainty concerning the word of God and great deference about themselves and awareness of their own sinfulness.

Number one, trait number one, humility begins with a sense, and I'm using the word sense here as something more than knowledge, a deep sense, a sense of subordination to God in Christ. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. Matthew 10, humble yourselves under, under the mighty hand of God.

So we feel this, I'm under, I'm a man under, not over, I'm under. And I don't just know it, I feel it. I wake up in the morning, I go to bed at night, I have a practice myself of getting on my knees once a day and saying I am not God.

It's a good reminder. You are God, I am not. The distance between God and us is infinite.

Greatness, power, wisdom, justice, truth, holiness, mercy, grace, those are as high above the heavens and above ours as the galaxies are above earth. God is high, I am low. God is powerful, I am weak.

God is wise, I am foolish. God is rich, I am poor. God is self-sufficient, I'm totally dependent.

To know this and tremble at it, to fear God, that is, is the beginning of wisdom. Or as Proverbs 11 says, with the humble is wisdom. That's number one, a deep sense that I'm under.

I'm not God. Number two, humility does not feel a right to better treatment than Jesus got. And the word feel matters a lot here.

What you feel and not just what you know is what defines how you respond, right? In the moment, when you don't have a chance to think, you just respond. It's who you are deep down that shapes you. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household? So, humility is not based on a life of perceived rights or entitlement.

Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. While suffering, he uttered no threats, but handed over his cause to him who judges justly. That was an example for us.

Much of our anger and my, my, my. I have struggled with anger all my adult life. Like if our marriage is going to be destroyed, it won't be sex.

I am not drawn to any of you women. I am not. But I get angry.

And anger can kill every other emotion and ruin a marriage. So, much of our anger and resentment comes from the expectation that I have a right to be treated well. Decades ago, I was sitting in Seoul, Korea when I heard this.

George Otis said, Jesus never promised his disciples a fair fight. Ever. You walk into a fight expecting fair play, you're going to get angry.

Way quicker than if you don't expect it. Because Jesus didn't get it, why should you get it? Do not be surprised, Peter said. Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you as though something strange were happening to you.

The reason we get angry is because this is going to be happening to me. Jesus didn't respond that way. And you're, you're going to get it worse.

Why would you expect to be treated better than Jesus? We don't need to get the last word. We don't need to win the argument. We don't need to be vindicated in this world.

God will vindicate us in his time. And that frees us. My, my, my.

Oh, is that freeing? I don't need to win. I don't need to be you. I don't need to show that I'm right.

God will, if I'm right, in time. And at the second coming, when your life appears, you won't worry about what it was like here. Humility does not feel a right to better treatment than Jesus got.

It doesn't feel the right. That's a lifelong battle. Join me.

Number three. Humility asserts truth, not to bolster the ego with control. Or with triumphs in debate, but as an honor to Christ and a love to others.

Huge difference. Whether you're a truth guy for ego control and for triumphs in debate, going to get the last word on Twitter, or whether people can smell he cares about the truth because he loves Christ and loves people. First Corinthians 13.

Love rejoices in the truth. So if truth is an instrument of salvation, which it is, they perish because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. If truth is an instrument of salvation, then to speak it is part of Christ's exalting love.

It must be. If truth is an instrument of sanctification, which it is, sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth, then to speak it is part of Christ's exalting love. If truth is an instrument in liberation and joy, which it is, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Then to speak it is a part of Christ's exalting love. In other words, speaking the truth that others need to hear, but may not want to hear, is an honor to Christ and good for people. You must believe that or you will not survive the criticism you will get in this culture.

Number four. Humility knows and feels that it is dependent for everything on grace. Dependent for all knowing, believing, acting, breathing on grace.

Matthew 16, 17. Blessed are you, Simon Barjona. Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

He said that when Peter answered, who you are, you're the Christ. And Jesus said, that didn't come from you. Ephesians 2, 8. By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God. Faith is not finally our doing. It is the gift of God.

You talk about humbling. You don't even get credit for your faith. Philippians 2. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for God is the one who is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Every step you make in sanctification is from God. You're getting credit for your growth in grace. He's at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The simplest plans that you have for tomorrow, you must submit them to God. Not even an hour will you live. I won't finish this message apart from sustaining grace.

James 4 to me is just one of the most mind-boggling, glorious, wonderful statements of God's gracious sovereignty. Here's the key sentence. When you plan to go to Los Angeles, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

Are you kidding me? If the Lord wills, Piper lives to the end of this message. If he doesn't, I drop over. It's as simple as that.

It's in his hands. I mean, seriously, do you believe that? You will not live to the end of this message apart from God's will that you live or not. And then it adds this amazing statement.

And do this or that. I'll read it again so you make sure you see it. You ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

You don't do anything apart from God's will. Nothing. This or that.

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore I say, Humility knows and feels I am dependent on grace for all my knowing, all my believing, all my acting, all my breathing.

A lot of people ask me, Whoa, you've written a lot of books. How do you stay humble? I said, I can't breathe without him. I'm totally under him and totally dependent on him like a leaf blowing in the wind.

Along with four or five other good reasons that God will break me. Five. Finally, humility knows and feels that it is fallible.

And so considers criticism and learns from it. But also knows that God has made provision for unshakable human conviction. And that he calls us to persuade others.

First Corinthians 13. Now we see in a mirror dimly. Then face to face.

Now I know in part. But then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. Proverbs 12.

A wise man is he who listens to counsel. You get above counsel. You are out of line.

You've lost humility. You're above counsel. Presidents are not above counsel.

They're looked to. It's a lonely and heavy job. Surround yourself with wise counselors.

We're not God. We're sinners. We're finite.

We're culturally conditioned. And therefore we're fallible. We make many mistakes.

James says so. We make many mistakes with our mouths. Goodness gracious.

I have had to take back and apologize for, dare I say, thousands of words in 50 years of marriage. We make many mistakes of many kinds. James says the wisdom from above is open to reason.

James 3.17. What are some words for that? Teachable. Open to correction. Not defensive.

Not afraid of the ego cost of having to admit you were wrong. That's what the wisdom from above is like that. Nevertheless, nevertheless, humility knows that God has made provision for unshakable human conviction.

He calls us to persuade others with that conviction. Second Corinthians 5.11. Knowing the fear of the Lord, I persuade men. Titus 2.15. Speak and exhort and reprove with all authority.

Let no one disregard you, Titus. Wow. You cannot seek to persuade anyone humbly if you have no convictions.

You can't speak humbly with authority if you have no convictions. Just one little insight here about relativism. I was asked in the Q&A about postmodernism and whether it's still around.

Well, relativism is still around. It's always been around. It'll always be around because it's so useful.

Have you ever thought that the relativists who don't think there's any absolute truth, and therefore you're arrogant to claim to speak anything with conviction, those relativists have an up on you in this regard. Relativism often passes for humility. However, it is just as likely a cloak for pride as is conviction.

Conviction might be a cloak for pride, and relativism that says you can't have any convictions might be a cloak for pride. Because if there are no objective truths that you can know, then you're free to be God. Right? You can create your own truth.

You can be judge and jury in every controversy. Relativism is very attractive. It's very useful to the proud heart because it permits you to act like God.

It looks humble, and it's not. Humility submits to objective reality outside itself. It can't make it up.

Like, make it up. I'm going to make up reality to feel what I desire. Humility is not afraid to do that.

It knows there's objective reality out there. That's metal. Not passing through that tonight.

I'm submitted. I'm under that. I'm a servant of that.

I can't make a new reality out of this. That's a reality, and I cannot change it. Humility says, fine.

I'll live with that. I'm under that reality. Humility knows that its grasp of reality is fallible, but it also knows there is such a thing as objective reality and that by God's grace, there's the key, we are enabled to see it truly, if not perfectly, truly, and to submit to it and proclaim it.

Conclusion. At the bottom of these five traits of humility is this. Humility senses that humility is a gift beyond our reach.

I'll say it again. I didn't mess up there. Humility senses, feels that humility is a gift beyond our reach because if humility is a product of reaching, we instinctively boast and feel proud that we have reached it.

Humility is the self-forgetful gift that receives everything as a gift. You cannot make humility happen. It's a gift.

It's a reflex. It's an effect of God and your encounter with him and his word. Paul calls it, in Galatians 5, 23, a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

It is or it's not there. It's a work of the Holy Spirit or it's not there. That's how dependent we are.

It's a fruit of the gospel, knowing and feeling that we are desperate sinners and that Christ is a great and undeserved Savior. So, Dr. Arnold, Brian, submit to Christ as supreme. Don't expect better than he got.

Tell the truth in love for Christ's sake. Receive all of life as a grace. Be teachable, but not wishy-washy.

Be done with all boasting in men, for all things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. So, Father, as we move forward now hear from the voices and then from Brian, be on us to make us humble. We can't do this, Lord.

It's easy for me to boast about preaching on humility. It's just the way we're wired. So, God, we're so desperately needy that you would give the gift, this self-forgetful gift of humility with backbone, brokenhearted boldness, courageous contrition for your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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