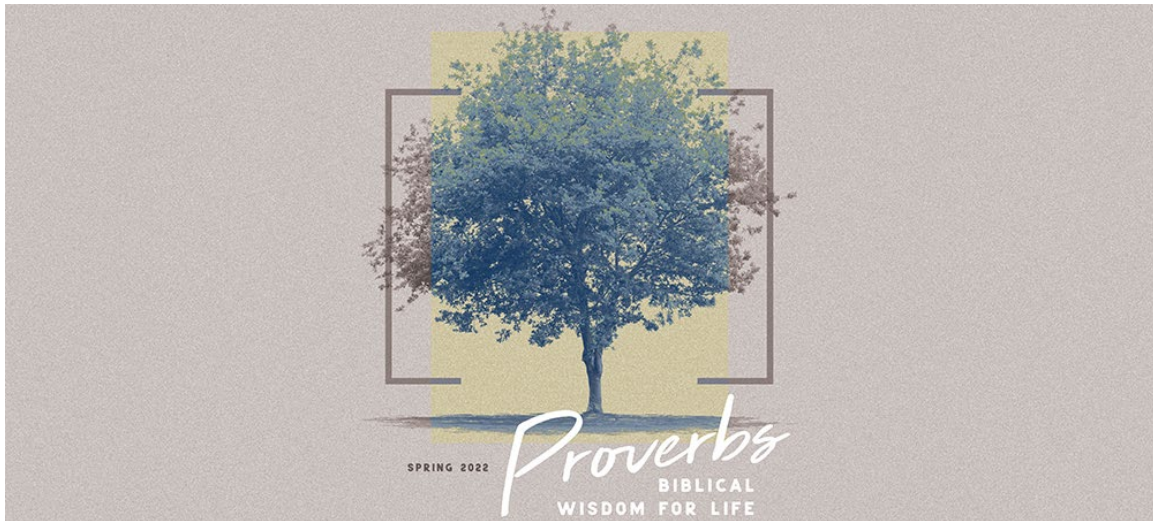


## **Week 11: Proverbs: Humility and Pride**

### **Hook**



**Main Point: Humility is about loving God and loving others first.**

Numbers 12:3 describes Moses as being “very humble, more than any person who was on the face of the earth.” Break your LifeGroup into small groups and ask them to identify the humblest person in each of these areas: professional sports, music, television/movie performers, and politics.

**Of the celebrities you identified, how has their humility impacted their career?**

**What value does our culture place on humility? Why do you think that it?**

**Transition:** Today’s lesson will explore the value of humility and the heart behind it.

## **Week 11: Proverbs: Humility and Pride**

### **Book**

**Main Point: Humility is about loving God and loving others first.**

**Proverbs 3:34; 6:16–17; 15:25; 16:5; and 21:4 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** The Lord loves humility and hates pride.

**Q: How does the Lord lift up the humble in Scripture? Give some examples.**

Our culture often fails to value humility. We're taught to "look out for number one" and to be aggressive as we climb the ladder of success, even if we have to step on a few people on the way. We're so anti-humility that we have created the "humble brag," feigning humility to covertly brag about ourselves.

In the Ancient Near East, Jewish culture was just as anti-humility. Everything was based on social status, not only whom you hung out with but whom you could marry or do business with, where you sat in synagogue or at a meal, or whether you were invited to that meal at all. People spent a lot of time and energy making strategic moves to further their standing in the community.

Jesus "called off the honor game," choosing a life of humility instead.<sup>1</sup> He chose despised sinners and ordinary fishermen as His disciples. He treated foreigners, the poor and outcasts with respect. He ate with sinners, let lepers touch Him, honored children, and let women sit at His feet as disciples. Even His becoming a man was an act of unprecedented humility. With the incarnation, Jesus emptied Himself of the honor He deserved in order to live an obscure, difficult life and die an incredibly shameful death, all for us (Philippians 2:3–11).

Proverbs shows us two conflicting value systems – the way of the world (pride) and the way of the Lord (humility). The world tells us to focus on people who can help us get ahead, but Jesus said to serve those who can't do anything for us in return (Luke 14:12–14). The world tells us to put ourselves first, but Jesus said the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16). The world tells us to climb the corporate ladder, but Jesus said to kneel down and wash feet (John 13:12–16).

Proverbs 3:34 and 6:17 are part of larger passages that list several character traits that God hates. Each of these qualities is contrasted by the picture Jesus created in the Beatitudes: blessed are the meek, the merciful, the poor, etc. (Matthew 5:1–12).<sup>2</sup>

Proverbs 16:5 has an even stronger tone – the arrogant are an abomination. Proverbs tells us that pride is sin (21:4). When James (the New Testament's "wisdom literature")

quoted Proverbs 3:34, he explained to us why: humility is submitting yourself to God, to His authority and wisdom (James 4:4–10). The proud think they know better than God, such as Adam and Eve. That very first sin was about a lack of trust in God’s Word, a lack of submission to His authority. A lack of *humility*. Adam and Eve chose to try to *take* wisdom (knowledge of good and evil) for themselves rather than submitting to God and trusting His wisdom (what He said was good and evil).

In a culture that glorifies self-promotion, “humility” may sound like having a negative view of yourself. But it’s not; a humble person has a realistic, biblical view of himself. Humility isn’t about putting ourselves down; it’s about not putting ourselves higher than we should be, putting ourselves in the proper place (Romans 12:3) both in our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. God’s people are to practice humility in their relationship with God and others.

1. Humility with God is about recognizing that God is God, and we are not; that the God who created the whole universe knows better than we do and has the right to tell us how to live and to discipline us when we don’t obey. Humility starts with drawing near to God. The closer we get to God, the more we see His glory and the more humble we become (Isaiah 6:5).
2. Humility with others is about putting others’ needs ahead of our own (Philippians 2:3–4). It’s serving others, even those the world may categorize as “less than” us. Rick Warren wrote, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”<sup>3</sup> Humility is loving God and loving others *first*, thinking of others’ needs *first*. It’s serving others, not demanding they serve us. It’s building up others, not tearing them down so we look better. It’s thinking about what we can give instead of what we can get, how we can help others before helping ourselves. If we *all* had this attitude, everyone’s needs would get met.

**Q: In what ways is your understanding of yourself improved when you grow in knowledge of the Lord?**

**Q: What damage does pride do to your relationship with God and others?**

**Q: Describe Christ’s humility. How might demonstrating this kind of humility affect your relationship with God and others?**

**Proverbs 3:7–8; 11:2; 13:10; 15:33; 16:18–19; 18:12; 21:24; 22:4; and 29:23 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Pride leads to destruction, but humility leads to wisdom.

**Q: Give some examples of how pride can lead to destruction in someone's life.**

**Q: Why might humility lead to wisdom? How is it connected to "fear of the Lord"?**

Not only does Proverbs tell us that God hates pride and loves humility, it also (as always) gives us some practical reasons that humility is better than pride. Pride leads to destruction, but humility leads to wisdom. It is pretty clear to see how humility and wisdom are connected from the discussion of humility above. Humility is submitting to God's authority, the "fear of the Lord" (15:33).

Humility toward God is trusting in His wisdom above your own, which will always lead to better results in life – maybe not always physical blessings such as riches and fame but spiritual blessing such as joy and peace and healing (Philippians 2:1–4; Psalm 131:1–2; 3:7–8). Pride often sets us up for failure. We've seen it happen so much that people quote Proverbs 16:18 all the time, often without realizing it's from the Bible.

Proverbs tells us that we can "be assured" the proud will not go unpunished (16:5). The Hebrew literally says, "hand to hand," signifying something that is *guaranteed*, as in a confirming handshake.<sup>4</sup> Yet we see every day that some arrogant people *do* go unpunished, and many humble people are *not* blessed. Scripture gives us two answers: 1) Their punishment may not come until the Day of Judgment, and 2) we need to make sure we have the right definition of "blessed."

Blessing in the kingdom of God isn't necessarily physical riches or health or honor, it's often *spiritual* riches (Ephesians 1:3; 3:16). It's a healthy exercise to read these Proverbs with the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes describe a kind of blessing that is upside-down in the eyes of the world but consistent with the kingdom of God.

The business world is even starting to come around to this idea that humility is more effective than pride. For a long time, it was believed that the best leaders were self-confident to the point of arrogance, but the most recent research has found that the most effective leaders practice humility and servant leadership.<sup>5</sup> They have a fierce determination to succeed, but it's for the good of the whole company, not just themselves personally. Or as the Bible would say it, humility instead of "selfish ambition" (Philippians 2:1–5).

Robert K. Greenleaf, who coined the term "servant leadership" in 1970, wrote that a servant leader is most concerned that other people's highest priority needs are being served. Servant leaders are not focused on accumulating power, wealth or status for themselves. They focus on the growth and well-being of the people and communities to

which they belong. Which ends up benefitting them because it makes the whole community stronger, from the bottom up. But the focus is not on themselves; it's on how they can serve and develop others.<sup>6</sup> Humility is about focusing on what we can give instead of what we can get – not just physically but spiritually, emotionally and relationally, too. Whether in our work, our church, our home, our friendships or our marriages, it's asking ourselves, "How can I serve this person today?"

**Q: How does pride lead to destruction?**

**Q: Describe the Lord's posture toward the proud (James 4:6; Proverbs 15:25). How then does pride make someone's life difficult?**

**Q: Describe some of the blessings you have enjoyed in the Lord. In what ways are these blessings greater than wealth or fame?**

**Q: Why is servant leadership so effective? How does a posture of humility and servanthood improve organizations like companies, churches and marriages?**

**Proverbs 25:6–7, 27 and 27:2 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** It's better to be praised by someone else.

**Q: Why is it better for someone else to praise you instead of yourself?**

This last point is a simple, but very true, practical statement about pride versus humility. It is *always* better to have someone else praise you than to brag about yourself. Allen Ross wrote, "Self-praise does not establish a reputation. The reputation comes from what others think of you."<sup>7</sup> Paul went a step further when he said it's not self-praise that makes you "approved," but rather being "the one whom *the Lord* commends" (2 Corinthians 10:18).

Proverbs uses the example of waiting to be invited to a place of honor versus putting yourself forward in the king's presence. When Jesus talked about humility, He used a similar example that was relevant to His time, the way people were seated by honor at meals. It's better to seat yourself in the lowest place and be asked by the host to move up than to sit at an honorable place and asked to move down. Therefore, Jesus said, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). James concluded in his wisdom passage on humility that when we humble ourselves in God's eyes, He will exalt us (James 4:10). The practical advice of

Proverbs always leads us to a spiritual truth as well – humility isn't just about doing what "works best"; it's about honoring the Lord.

**Q: Describe a time you waited to let someone else praise you. How did it turn out?**

**Q: What kind of people does God "commend"? What do their lives look like?**

## **Week 11: Proverbs: Humility and Pride**

### **Took**

**Main Point: Humility is about loving God and loving others first.**

Choose a person you love and engage in a conversation this week solely focused on them. Write down in advance how you feel about that person and how you plan to encourage them in the conversation. For example, Bill is a generous friend and coworker; I want him to know that his kindness has helped grow our team, and I value how he has invested in me. Avoid speaking about yourself as much as you can. Afterward, prayerfully evaluate the exchange. In the following weeks, note how that conversation impacted your relationship.

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** In what ways do you see pride in the world around you? What kind of effect does it have on your communities – where you work, live, and play? How have you seen pride cause destruction in your own life? In the lives of others? Why do you think people are prideful? In what ways do you personally struggle with pride? How can you fight pride in yourself and cultivate humility instead?

**PRAY:** Ask God to reveal to you anything prideful in the way you are living, either in not submitting to His wisdom or in not putting others' needs ahead of your own. Pray for His Spirit to grow deeper humility in you.

**ACT:** Praise someone else. Choose someone around you who is especially humble and find a way to praise that person this week. You can do it privately – tell him/her how great he/she is directly, one-on-one – but it may be even more effective if you do it in a more public way. Or even praise him/her to others without his/her knowing about it.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader* (South Orange, NJ: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).