



# Sermon Growth Guide

**November 13, 2022**

## Humble Pie - Humbly Serve

### 1 Peter 5:5-11

**Key Verse:** 1 Peter 5:6

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

**Big Idea:** Humility is cultivated as we put on the apron of service and humbly serve.

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## Foundations

This week we continue our sermon series called **Humble Pie**. In this series, we are uncovering the necessary ingredients to cook up some delicious humble pie. Last week, we looked at the first ingredient: curiosity. Today we are looking at what it looks like to humbly serve.

Service is a concept that has become more transactional in our day. For example, schools and honor societies will require a certain amount of community service a year in order to graduate. In Peter's letter to the churches around Asia Minor, we see that despite persecution, confusion and chaos, God is calling us to serve with a new perspective.

This week we learn that humility has an inverse effect on our lives; the lower we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, that same hand lifts us. Humility starts by allowing ourselves to be humbled by God's mighty hand.

Secondly, we are invited in this passage to clothe ourselves with humility, sort of like putting on an apron to bake a pie. The second image of humility is being like an apron. In this passage, Peter encourages us to do the work of serving. To roll up our sleeves and get serving! We serve not because we are needed, but because Christ is needed.

Blessings as you share your lives with one another this week.

## Understanding God's Word

Together, read 1 Peter 5:5-11.

What words or phrases stood out to you from this passage?

What questions do you have from this passage?

## Applying God's Word

What did you think about Jennifer's mention of Saint Benedict of Nursia's "Ladder of Humility"?

Pick one ladder on the "Ladder of Humility" to work on this week.

What would your apron of humility look like? Does it look patchy and have holes in it? Where are some areas of your life that could use a little humility?

## Witnessing God's Word

We have many places to serve right here at the church! Where is God calling you to use your gifts and talents in a unique way? What ministry is calling you to share the light of Christ?

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We are in Week 2 of our **Humble Pie** series today—we are cultivating humility together. Today we are in 1 Peter—and our title is **Humbly Serve**. So that gives you a clue about what your assignment will be at the end of this sermon. Let's open our Bibles, and read our text together from 1 Peter 5:5-11.

### **Introduction**

My mom makes great rhubarb pie. Rhubarb has grown in our yard for decades. Now, if you've never had rhubarb pie, when it's offered to you, it usually comes with a warning—this isn't like other pies. It probably needs to be served with a tub of vanilla ice cream nearby, or at least some whipped cream. Because rhubarb pie is exceptionally tart. Rhubarb, by the way, is a vegetable. And it is rich in antioxidants. It carries antibacterial, anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties that can protect from many health-related issues such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. So, eat up! But beware. It's a pie that is not what you expect when you bite into it.

Cultivating humility in our lives can be a bit like rhubarb pie. The first bite isn't going to be the best bite of pie you've ever had. It's going to be tart, a little sour. You are going to have to choose to take another bite. You are going to have to make yourself keep eating. But there are good things inside that bring health and protection, that fight disease. And the more you eat it, the more you might discover it's OK. You might actually acquire a taste for this out-of-the-ordinary pie.

We are in our three-week series right now called **Humble Pie**. How do we cultivate the godly virtue of humility in our lives? We are looking at the ingredients that go into making humble pie: curiosity, service and gratitude. Three ingredients. Three practices. Three ways to cultivate the Christian virtue of humility in our lives. Last week you were assigned the first ingredient of humble pie: curiosity. Were you curious this week? Did you ask questions and pursue some new learning?

Today we are looking at the second ingredient of humble pie—service. To cultivate humility, we need to serve.

### **Context**

Our passage today comes from the first letter of Peter to the scattered churches of Asia Minor. The call to serve comes a few times throughout the letter, and serving others is an indicator that love and compassion, humility and sympathy, are indeed growing in the lives of the believers. It's important to note the context into which Peter is writing this letter. Peter talks about the suffering, the trials and

the difficulties that Christians are facing in this time. He doesn't get specific, but historically there is widespread persecution of followers of Christ in this timeframe. From slander to violence to death, Christians were hated because of their allegiance to Christ. It's into this moment in history that Peter writes this letter of encouragement: **keep your eyes on Jesus, he urges. Follow Him. You belong to Him.** If you were to read the entire letter, you would discover two strong themes: 1) to practice submission to those in authority over you, and 2) to serve one another.

We just had an election this week, so the odds are that perhaps half of you are doing OK and half of you are not. Maybe you are mixed. We have a political landscape that includes a lot of serious issues, but Scripture exhorts us to keep perspective. The mighty hand of God is on the throne. So, take heart.

Peter is fairly straightforward here. We are to submit to those in authority over us. That's in chapter 2. I'll let you unpack that chapter in your Life Groups this week, because that is not my assignment today. This is not a sermon on submission, although submission and service are closely related. This is a message on serving. But I will say this: If you want to fast-track humility being grown in your life, practice true submission to those in positions of authority over you.

And one more note on this. Peter does not say to submit to those in authority over you if they seem to have your best interest in mind. Or if they are kind to you. Some will be (like the elders who are shepherding you) and some won't. Peter seems wildly unconcerned with who is in political power when he writes this letter. And believe me, Nero unleashes some of the most horrible persecution of Christians in history. But what Peter is concerned with is God's mighty hand at work in your life (especially in times of suffering), and in serving one another in love.

And let's take a moment to remember who is writing this letter. The author is Peter, the disciple. From the Gospel stories, when we think of Peter, we don't immediately think of him as a superior spokesperson for humility. When we first meet Peter in the Gospel narratives, he is brash, he's boastful, he's kind of like a bull in a china shop. He speaks before he thinks, and he's an all-or-nothing guy. In fact, he alludes to a story in our passage today that wouldn't exactly win him the "most likely to become humble" award. But Peter gives us two invitations that I want to talk about today from this passage:

- 1) The invitation to clothe yourselves with humility (vs 5)

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2) The invitation to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God (vs. 6). Let me say a word about this one first.

### God's Mighty Hand

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). God's mighty hand is celebrated throughout Scripture—mostly in reference to the Exodus event—God freeing his children from slavery in Egypt.

**Exodus 13:3:** Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand."

**Psalm 118:16:** The LORD's right hand is lifted high;

the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"

**Psalm 136:12:** with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; *His love endures forever.*

The same mighty hand who brought Israel out of Egypt and into freedom is the same hand at work in our lives. The emphasis here is on a mighty and skilled hand...like that of a surgeon, almost. One theologian writes—it's like the "way in which a person in need of physical treatment and relief chooses and consents to become a patient of a particular surgeon, and thus submits himself under his 'operating hand,' in the hope of enjoying the promised benefit in due time" (Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*). We are humbled by God's mighty hand operating in our lives: restoring, rescuing, healing, shaping, forgiving, lifting us up in His proper timing.

Saint Benedict of Nursia lived at the end of the 5th century. A young Italian, who after going off to university in Rome realized the church was in total chaos and completely underequipped to navigate a way forward in an everchanging world. Benedict removed himself from the world. He fashioned a prayer cell in a cave and began to pray his way forward. As a student in the desert tradition, he quickly learned what all the desert mothers and fathers learned: "an authentic search for God leads to life with other people" (Wilson-Hargrove, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Contemporary Paraphrase*).

Benedict began to build a community and fashion a "rule of life," a way for Christians to live together under the gospel, and find a way forward. A "rule of life" is a simple curriculum for finding a common future together under the Lordship of Christ. Chapter 7 of Benedict's work is called "Humility," and in this chapter he fashions what he calls a "ladder of humility." The ladder is a bit counterintuitive. We climb the ladder by going down and by not exalting

ourselves. However, in going down, God lifts us up. Benedict writes that the very first step of humility requires a person to keep the fear of God always before his or her eyes. In Scripture and prayer and in relationship with God, we learn that God is a loving father who sees us and calls us to Himself, to obedience and to the Word. Step one is following the way of Christ and not our own way. Allowing ourselves to be humbled under the mighty hand of God is where humility starts.

Step two of the humility ladder "calls the climber to stop loving her own desires and no longer find satisfaction in what she wants" (*Ibid.*). And right there, most of us are done climbing. And we go back to step one. The ladder goes up to 12 steps. And each step requires action, not just thoughtful contemplation. I would commend this little tool to you and a friend to discuss as part of your spiritual journey. Step three is submission. Serving comes at steps six and seven. Interesting. Serving comes at a higher step than submission. St Benedict uses the image of climbing a ladder to help us cultivate humility. Peter, on the other hand, writes that cultivating humility is like putting on clothes.

### The Apron of Humility

Our clothing is changing right now. T-shirts and shorts have been put away and replaced with sweaters, flannels and warm pants. This is the time of year when we pull out our jackets and gloves. It's crisp and chilly and snow is here! "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

"God opposes the proud  
but shows favor to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Peter writes that we all should "clothe" ourselves with humility. Put on humility, he writes, like you put on your clothes. The command is for everyone. Not just those who are good at being humble. Peter indicates that humility is something we put on. The image here is an outer garment that goes over the clothing and then a knot is tied to keep it secure (Stibbs, *ibid*). Like an apron. An apron is a symbol of service. It's this image of putting on an apron that connects this passage to the story of Jesus in the Upper Room, removing His outer garment, and knotting a towel around His waist. Jesus puts on the garment of a servant. "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. (John 13:3-4). Humility is cultivated as we put on the apron of service and humbly serve. My first year out of college, I put on an apron and

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worked at the Black Sheep Café in my college town. I arrived early in the morning, I put on that apron, and I started brewing coffee. Now, nobody puts on an apron to enjoy wearing an apron. When the apron goes on, serving begins. To clothe yourself with humility is not to think about being humble or to pray to become humble. To put on the apron is to get busy serving.

If you recall that scene in the Upper Room with Jesus and the disciples, Peter has a prominent role in that dinner party—mostly because he makes this moment about himself. Again, we can't help but love Peter—he's brash, rude, outspoken and he speaks his mind. Jesus takes the basin and the towel and begins to wash the disciples' feet. It's an awkward moment. Jesus should not be washing feet. He's their leader, their teacher. He ranks higher than them. When He comes to Peter, Peter says, "No! You'll never wash my feet, Lord. You will never serve me." And Jesus' response to Peter is this: "Well, then Peter, you'll have no part of what I'm doing." And Peter backs off his response and invites Jesus to wash his entire body! All-or-nothing Peter, constantly missing the point! But certainly, Peter remembers that night as he writes this letter. And he remembers the startling act of Jesus wrapping a towel around his waist and washing his feet. The act of a servant. And not a pretty one. Washing dirty feet is not something any of us really want to do. It's kind of like eating rhubarb pie, only much worse. And yet, that's exactly what Peter is calling us to do. Washing dirty feet cultivates humility.

But the act itself comes from an even more startling act—the Lord of the universe washing your feet and mine. We serve because we ourselves are served by Christ. It's an important detail not to miss. We don't serve because the world needs us to serve it. The world doesn't need you or me to serve the world. The world needs Christ. Peter recalls the moment his feet were first washed by Christ, and he was never the same. In being served and washed and loved by Christ, we find ourselves lifted up by the mighty hand of God. We are strengthened, cared for and sent in Jesus' name to demonstrate God's love in tangible and concrete acts of service. You see, friends, we serve not because we are heroes. We serve because we are loved. Before I give you your assignment for today, I just need to ask the question: Do you know how much God loves you?

This weekend about 120 of us met together for this year's Christian Life Conference, titled "The Surprise of Spiritual Health." And one of the surprises we discovered is that we

don't own our own spiritual health. Rather, in attaching ourselves to Jesus, His health becomes our health, and in Him we become the people we are created to be: loved by God and sent to serve Christ in this beautiful world. Ruth Haley Barton writes: "We don't transform ourselves, but we arrange our lives for spiritual transformation" (Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*). We arrange our lives to love and serve God and to love and serve our neighbor. To go lower is to go higher. To serve is to become great in humility.

### Your Assignment

So, your assignment this week is quite simple: serve someone. I was talking with my daughter earlier this week, and asked her about this assignment. What should people do with this ingredient? She said, "Keep it simple, mom." People should do small things, little acts of service.

- Holding the door open for someone
- Helping someone who is lost find their way
- Sharing your lunch
- Inviting someone to play volleyball with you at recess
- Offering to help someone with their homework, or if they don't understand something

Oh, OK. I was thinking big, she was thinking small, everyday opportunities we have to serve others. Just serve. And here's the further challenge: do it quietly, don't post it, don't tell anyone. Just serve in the name of Jesus.

I close with this. When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he wrote a hymn about Jesus taking the form of a servant. And in taking the form of a servant, Paul writes, Jesus found Himself in human likeness. Here is how I read that: to be fully human is to be a servant. You see, Jesus came not to be served but to serve. So...

- When you hold the door for another, you are living as you are meant to live
- When you get your child a glass of water for the 14th time tonight, you are living as you are meant to live
- When you shovel snow from your neighbor's sidewalk, you are living as you are meant to live
- When you give a ride to someone who needs it, when you take someone's shift at work, when you provide for a need, when you are other-centered, you are living as you are meant to live
- Anytime you put on the apron of service, you are living as you are meant to live

Enjoy your assignment this week!  
Amen.

