

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS*

*the*  
**BLESSING**  
*of*  
**HUMILITY**

**JERRY BRIDGES**

When I read my first Jerry Bridges book twenty years ago, I had the sense that every paragraph had been pondered, prayed over, and carefully prepared. Each ensuing book has led me to the same conclusion. The writings of Jerry Bridges are a gift to the church. In this new book, he addresses a relevant topic with the wisdom of a scholar and the heart of a servant.

MAX LUCADO

Pastor and bestselling author

Jerry Bridges helps us remember that the starting point of true humility is a deep understanding of who God is. The more we know Him, the more we can know our true selves. This exploration of humility is humbling—because it will help you see God more clearly.

KYLE IDLEMAN

Bestselling author and pastor, Southeast Christian Church

*The Blessing of Humility* gives us Jerry Bridges at his best: a lifetime of prayer and meditation on Jesus' first and definitive sermon that frames a life lived in the Kingdom of God under conditions exclusively characterized (eight times!) by blessings.

EUGENE PETERSON

Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.

For many, the Beatitudes are beautiful but remote. They hold poetic images but don't really seem relevant for life. Throughout this wonderful book, Jerry Bridges shows us the grace that's found when we walk humbly with Christ and the joy that comes from resting in His finished work on the cross. Finally, someone humble wrote a book on humility.

C.J. MAHANEY

Author of *Humility* and *True Greatness*

Jerry Bridges masterfully helps us not just understand but also enter into living out the countercultural Beatitudes of Jesus.

Jerry does this by removing the idea that it cannot be done, by dispelling the myths associated with how it might be done, and most of all by reminding us that when it is done, it's done through the work of God's Spirit in our lives. It's not just a message on humility; it speaks of a person who is humbly living out the message that he has put to paper.

**TOM HUGHES**

Lead pastor of Christian Assembly, Los Angeles, and author of *Curious*

I love Bridges's concept of "dependent responsibility." Throughout the book, he shows that there are things we must do. It is our responsibility, for example, to walk in humility. But we must depend on the work and power of the Holy Spirit. As we grow, we become more aware that it is always Him.

**RICHARD DOSTER**

Editor, *byFaith* magazine

Pride is not only a problem for the chest-pounding athlete but for the "gentle" Christian who views the people of the world as his enemies. For most of us, the cancer of pride remains hidden and undetected. Like a skilled physician, Jerry Bridges uses God's Word to expose it. Yet, also like a skilled physician, Jerry not only exposes the disease but also applies the balm of the gospel to promote healing and genuine spiritual growth. This book is for everyone who doesn't think he needs it.

**MARK BATES**

Senior pastor, Village Seven Presbyterian Church, Colorado Springs

This is a Bible-saturated, theologically precise, and gospel-framed devotional book for those seeking more of Jesus and less of self in their lives.

**FELIPE ASSIS**

Senior pastor, Crossbridge Miami

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JERRY BRIDGES

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*The Blessing of Humility: Walk within Your Calling*

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## A NOTE TO THE READER

This book can be read completely in about two hours or less. You may want to do that to get an overview of the book

However, the real value of this book will come as you then read each chapter reflectively and prayerfully. Ask God to help you see yourself as you really are in the light of each of the character traits covered in the eight Beatitudes. And then ask God to help you grow in the areas where you see yourself to be most needy.



# INTRODUCTION

The character trait of humility is the second-most frequently taught trait in the New Testament, second only to love. At one time I counted fifty instances of love taught, either by precept or example, in the New Testament; I counted forty instances of humility. I regard these two traits as the foundational stones of Christian character. All other character traits, in one way or another, are built upon love and humility.

Yet we so seldom hear any message or read any books on these two subjects. I think this is because they are so intimidating to us. Any honest Bible teacher, whether in speaking or in writing, realizes how far short he or she comes to exemplifying either of these character traits, so there is a reluctance to teach on a subject where one has made so little progress. For years I was hesitant to teach on 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter, and I felt an even greater hesitancy to write on humility, lest I appear to be saying, “I am a humble person.”

I eventually learned that the job of Bible teachers is to point to Scripture, not to ourselves. We can do this with love because we can point to 1 Corinthians 13 and say, “This is what love

looks like in everyday life.” But until recently I could never point to a single passage of Scripture and say, “This is what humility looks like.”

Then a request to write a short article on the Beatitudes caused me to study them really for the first time. As I did so, I thought, *These expressions of Christian character are a description of humility in action.* At last, I thought, here is an objective description outside of myself that I can point to and say, “That’s what humility looks like. That is humility in action in everyday life.”

Of course 1 Corinthians 13 is not an exhaustive treatment of love. And the Beatitudes are not an exhaustive treatment of humility. But both give us a good place to start. And the truth is, none of us will ever attain perfection in the traits that are mentioned. So keep in mind that I am not saying, “This is who I am” but rather “This is who I would like to be, and I am praying that I will grow in these traits, even as I pray you will also.” So let’s work on them together.

As we study these traits in the Beatitudes, we need to keep in mind several truths:

First, all Christians are meant to display these characteristics. They reflect qualities of a normal Christian life. They are for the plumber as well as the preacher, for the manager in business as well as the missionary on the mission field. No one is so high in social or economic status in this world, or so gifted in ministry, that these Beatitudes do not apply to him or her. Rather they are meant to be seen in the life of every Christian, without exception.

Furthermore, these characteristics are not meant to be reflective of our personalities, or temperaments, or even spiritual

## INTRODUCTION

giftedness. Some people are naturally more self-effacing than others; some Christians have the gift of mercy and others do not. But none of the traits demonstrated in the Beatitudes are about personality or temperament or spiritual gifts. They are what Paul, in Galatians 5:22-23, calls the fruit of the Spirit: the results of His work in our lives.

Third, our progress in growth in these traits does not determine our acceptance with God, either in our eternal salvation or in our day-to-day standing with Him. It is Christ's righteousness, not our own, that makes us acceptable to God day after day (more about this in chapter 10). I can guarantee you that if you are honest with yourself and you let the Beatitudes search you, you will see yourself to be a greater sinner than you thought yourself to be. And when that happens you must flee to the righteousness of Christ to keep from becoming discouraged.

The fourth truth is that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit for any progress we make. We are dependent on Him to work in us, and we are dependent on Him to enable us to work because His work makes possible our work (more on this in chapter 10).

So in dependence on the righteousness of Christ and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, let's be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

1. Let's hide or "store up" these words in our hearts (see Psalm 119:11).
2. Let's pray over these traits, asking God to show us our deficiencies and to cause us to grow in them (see Psalm 119:33-37).



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CHAPTER ONE

## PRECEPTS AND PROMISES

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge  
you to walk in a manner worthy of the  
calling to which you have been called, with  
all humility and gentleness, with patience,  
bearing with one another in love.*

EPHESIANS 4:1-2

I still vividly remember a statement I heard at a Bible study in January 1952. It literally changed my life. The essence of the statement was, “The Bible is meant to be applied in your everyday life.” As obvious as that is to me today, it was a brand-new thought that night. I had grown up in church and had never strayed beyond its moral boundaries, but as far as I can remember, the application of Scripture to one’s daily life had never been taught in our church.

But that night, upon hearing that statement, it was as if someone had turned on a light in my mind. I was a young officer in the navy at that time, so on my way back to my ship, I prayed, “God, starting tonight, would you help me to apply the Bible to my everyday life?”

“Everyday life” is the crucial part of that life-changing statement. In Ephesians 4:1, Paul urges us to “walk in a manner

worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” In that context *walk* means to live out one’s ordinary daily life, whether it’s working at your job, doing the laundry, grocery shopping, or a myriad of other things we do in the course of an ordinary day.

As Paul expands on the meaning of a worthy walk, the first thing he mentions is humility. Think of what that means: As I drive down the street, as I interact with my spouse or my children, or with my coworkers at a job, or with the clerk at the grocery store, I am to do all of it with humility.

In the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day, humility was a despised trait. They viewed it as a sign of weakness. And our culture today is no different from that world of two thousand years ago. Maybe it’s a little different in our Christian circles. We may even admire humility in someone else, but we have little desire to practice it ourselves.

But when Paul wrote, “walk . . . with all humility,” he was not just speaking for himself; rather he was speaking as God’s spokesman. The Bible is not an ordinary book reflecting the thoughts of the various writers. Rather, as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” Peter helps us understand what that means when he wrote in 2 Peter 1:21, “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” To be “carried along” means that the writers of Scripture were so guided by the Holy Spirit that they wrote exactly what He wanted them to write. That is why we frequently read in the Bible an expression such as “the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David” (Acts 1:16). God “breathed out” His words through David (or other writers). So we can confidently say, “What the Bible says, God says,” even though He says it through the mouth or pen of human beings.

The issue here is one of authority, and one meaning of authority is the right to command. Paul does not have the right to command us to walk in humility, but God does. And though, speaking to his friends (and to us today), Paul uses a softer word (*urge*), he is still conveying the idea that a life of humility is not an option for a believer to choose or reject. It is a command of God.

This is a crucial point, because in our frenetic world of today, such softer character traits as humility, gentleness, and patience often get ignored or even regarded as unreal expectations in the hustle and bustle of life. But if we want to apply the Bible's teaching to our daily lives, we cannot ignore the call to live our ordinary lives in a spirit of humility.

Ephesians 4:1-2 is not the only Scripture in which Paul urges us to practice humility. In Philippians 2:3 he writes, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." And again in Colossians 3:12, he tells us to "put on . . . humility." Peter adds his voice in 1 Peter 5:5: "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another." These are not offhand statements made in passing. They are all the very words of God and carry with them the implied authority of God to command us to pursue humility in our everyday lives.

In addition to Paul and Peter, Jesus frequently addressed the subject of humility. Though He seldom used the word, the concept is scattered throughout His teaching. In fact the character traits in the Beatitudes, which constitute the major portion of this book, are all expressions of what I call "humility in action."

One of my favorite teachings of Jesus on humility is Luke 14:7-11, which I learned many years ago. I *try* (note the

emphasis) to practice the principle He taught on appropriate occasions.

*Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

LUKE 14:7-11

To apply Jesus' teaching to our present-day culture, we need to think in terms not of a seat of honor but of positions, of prestige, recognition, or authority, which most of us are tempted to seek after. Instead, a good rule to follow is found in the words of Proverbs 27:2: "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips."

Jesus not only taught humility; He practiced it Himself. We see this in His washing of the disciples' feet at the Last Supper (see John 13:1-11). What makes His act even more striking is that He did this in full awareness that He was the eternal Son of God (verse 3). And we see His ultimate humility, as He humbled Himself even to death on the cross for our sake (Philippians 2:8).

I've titled this chapter "Precepts and Promises," but so far I've used neither word in the text of the chapter. A precept, however, is a synonym for a command. In fact, my dictionary defines *precept* as "an order [or command] issued by a legally constituted authority." And of course there's no greater authority than God. A *promise*, meanwhile, is a declaration that gives a person the right to expect the performance of that which is promised. Only God has the infinite power and absolute integrity to fulfill that which He has promised.

So now let's move to God's promises to those who walk in humility. The apostle Peter joins precept and promise together in 1 Peter 5:5-6:

*Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.*

In verse 5 the precept is "clothe yourselves . . . with humility." That is, humility should be as much a part of us as the clothes we wear. We wouldn't think of appearing before other people without our clothes. And we shouldn't think of appearing before other people without deliberately clothing ourselves with an attitude of humility.

The promise is that God gives grace to the humble. *Grace* is often used as a synonym for God's power (see, for example, 2 Timothy 2:1; 2 Corinthians 12:9), and that is its meaning here. An attitude of humility is completely contrary to the world's values, but also contrary to our own sinful nature. So we need God's grace—that is, His Spirit-supplied enablement—to clothe ourselves with an attitude of humility as we encounter

different people and different situations throughout the day. And God promises us He will supply that grace, as we seek to walk in humility.

While verse 5 speaks of humility with regard to other people, verse 6 speaks of humility toward God: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.” To humble oneself under the mighty hand of God is to submit to and accept even adverse providential circumstances from God (more about this in chapter 4).

The promise of verse 6 is that at the proper time God will exalt you. What that exaltation will look like, and the proper time of it, is left undetermined because it can come in many ways and at various times. Only God knows the proper time and expression of His exaltation. And it may not come in this life, but it will come because God, who cannot lie, has promised it.

Now let’s look at two Old Testament promises to those who seek to walk in humility. The first is Isaiah 57:15:

*For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
“I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.”*

As we consider this Scripture, first notice God’s description of Himself. He is high and lifted up, and His name is holy. This passage is a reflection of Isaiah 6:1-7, in which Isaiah in a vision sees God as high and lifted up (that is, as exalted) and hears the seraphim cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.” As a result of seeing God in His magnificent glory, Isaiah was totally

devastated. But in Isaiah 57:15 this same infinitely holy and exalted One promises to dwell with those who are of a contrite and lowly (that is, humble) spirit, and to revive their hearts.

In this context, to dwell with someone is to enter into an intimate relationship with that person. And to *revive* here means to encourage the person. This is a fantastic promise to go along with the precept to live a life of humility. Walking in humility will sometimes involve a sense of shame or even humiliation. As we humbly accept those situations, God promises to dwell with us and encourage us.

The second promise is Isaiah 66:1-2:

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth is my footstool;  
what is the house that you would build for me,  
and what is the place of my rest?  
All these things my hand has made,  
and so all these things came to be,  
declares the LORD.*

*But this is the one to whom I will look:  
he who is humble and contrite in spirit  
and trembles at my word.”*

Once again, in verse 1 and at the beginning of verse 2, we see the infinite majesty of God. Heaven is His throne, and the earth is only His footstool. In fact, He made it all. Yet even though God is infinite in His power and glory, there are those to whom He will look with affection and favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and those who tremble (in profound respect) at His word. What a promise!

Combining these two passages of Scripture together: God promises those who will walk humbly that He will enter into an intimate relationship with them, look with favor and affection toward them, and encourage them in their pursuit of humility. Instead of despising humility, as the Greco-Roman culture did and as our present culture still does, God exalts it and promises to bless those who pursue it.

Does this not cause us to realize that the pursuit of humility is not an incidental thing—something we seldom think about—but rather a character trait that we should give diligent attention to? The very fact that we are so casual about humility should in itself cause us to humble ourselves in the dust before such a glorious and gracious God.

To recap what we have seen in this chapter, the pursuit of humility in our daily walk comes under the precepts—that is, the authoritative commands—of God. And Psalm 119:4 says, “You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.” Humility is not an optional add-on for the super-spiritual; it is for all believers to practice in our daily lives. Furthermore, God has promised to give grace to us as we seek humility.

But what does humility look like as we pursue it every day? In the following eight chapters we will see how humility expresses itself in the different circumstances and people we encounter as we live out our daily lives in a broken and sin-cursed world. Our guide will be Jesus Himself, who began His longest recorded sermon with a litany of countercultural blessings known to us as the Beatitudes. Taken together, they offer a portrait of humility in action, something which God commands and which God promises to bless.