

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for November 4: Living in humility

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For anyone looking for the key or secret to fulfillment and success in life, there certainly is no shortage of advice. A quick search for the term “success” on Amazon leads to over 240,000 titles offering paths to success in various areas of life.

Each of the “experts” seems to have his or her own system that involve seven habits, or 10 steps, or 12 choices or 17 keys that lead to what the individual author defines as success. Perhaps not surprisingly, most of these include things such as building a positive mental attitude and an attractive personality, develop personal assertive initiative, set goals and refuse to be sidetracked into unprofitable activities or mindsets. Each of these self-empowering self-help programs have promised to lead anyone who sticks to the plan to fulfillment in life by grabbing all life can offer.

Yet over the past several decades, the proliferation of these programs has been accompanied by the rise in stress- and anxiety-related mental and physical health problems. In the closing verses of his first letter, Peter gives his readers a better way to find fulfillment in life. It is found not in self-promotion but through living in humility in all our relationships.

Humility in leadership (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Peter begins this section by addressing those within the church whom the world would see as having succeeded by reaching the top positions of leadership. While he specifically refers to “elders,” his words are applicable

to anyone within the church in any leadership position including teachers and deacons.

Verse 2 encourages these leaders to be the shepherds among those whom they lead. This image is used frequently throughout the Bible to describe all leaders God calls. Its significance lies in the picture of the way in which these leaders are called to lead.

This can be demonstrated by the difference in a shepherd and a cowboy. A shepherd gently leads the flock while a cowboy drives the herd. Leaders within the church are called to lead not by barking orders and dominating the followers, but by quietly and gently leading by example.

Jesus told us this when he said that the greatest leaders in the kingdom are those who are servants to all (Mark 9:35). In order to do this, one must take on humility. Leadership comes with great temptations to control others and seek personal gain.

Peter clearly warns leaders to avoid these temptations by refusing to lord over their followers or to become greedy for money (and one might add greedy for power or other perks of leadership). If one is in a position of leadership in the church, it is because God has called them to the role, and they thus should not view it as a job but should be willing to humble themselves as they seek to shepherd the flock in a way that pleases the Chief Shepherd.

Humility in relationships (1 Peter 5:5)

In verse 5, Peter shifts attention from the shepherd to the sheep. He specifically addresses “young men,” which may refer to either chronological age or level of spiritual maturity. By instructing these people to submit to the authority of those who are older, Peter is not saying the older generation should run over and dominate the younger ones without regard to their ideas or thoughts. This is why he began with a warning to

the older leaders.

Indeed it often has been suggested that one of the reasons for the shortage of younger people in the church today is they often feel they do not have a voice that is heard. Peter is, however, calling for those who are younger in the faith to respect the wisdom of their older leaders.

This does not mean anyone should see themselves as unimportant. Indeed, you actually need an honest healthy self-image in order to truly humble yourself in service to others. All within the church should have this attitude toward each other. We should all be “clothed in humility” as we interact in carrying out God’s mission.

Humility in submitting to God (1 Peter 5:6-7)

We cannot follow Peter’s instructions to submit to one another, however, until we have submitted ourselves to God. One of the reasons we find it so difficult to submit or humble ourselves is we have bought the world’s lie that we are the one who has to meet our needs and get to where we need to be in life.

1 Peter 5:6-7 gives us two of God’s greatest promises which can take away all of the stress and anxiety this lie brings. First, God promises that if we humble ourselves before God, he will raise us up. If we turn our plans over to him, he will move us into the places we need to be. But God cannot raise us if we are already standing on our own.

Second, if we humble ourselves and cast our concerns over our needs before him, God will meet them because he cares deeply for each of us. This means giving God all our cares. We often give God the big things, thinking we can handle the small ones. But soon the small ones become big ones unless we simply turn them all over to God, trusting in these two great promises.

Humility in resisting Satan (1 Peter 5:8-9)

As we humbly submit to God, we need to be especially alert for attack by Satan. Any time we seek to submit to God, we move up the enemy's most wanted list, and he turns up the heat. While we do not need to fear him, we must respect the fact that Satan is more powerful than we are alone. We always should be sensitive to his cunning and often subtle attacks. He often will offer us what is good to prevent us from having God's best. He often will not come with a frontal assault, but will seek a foothold by coming in through an unwatched side door.

Any time we find ourselves rationalizing our actions, we should quickly resist Satan's attempts to sidetrack us. Because while Satan is stronger and wiser than we are, he is no match and flees from the one fully submitted and humble before God.