



# humility

Selections from Richard J. Foster  
and Andrew Murray

A Renovaré Resource for Spiritual Renewal



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and Andrew Murray

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# Foreword

Today, like most days, I must sift through an email inbox stuffed with offers: a seminar here, a masterclass there, all promising to aid me in tapping into greatness or my money back.

When I check social media, I'm amazed at the vitriol on display. Are the folks represented actually screaming, or is that just the way their posts sound?

When I turn on the nightly news, wars and rumors of war dominate the headlines, punctuated by political ads that feature vicious attacks among contenders.

So much noise. So much strife.

In these noisy days, I am grateful for those who encourage me to attune my ears to the voice of the Good Shepherd. At Renovaré, we seek to learn from Jesus a different way: a way of loving God and loving our neighbors. A way of purity of heart unencumbered by pride. A way of graciously deferring to one another and learning from each other.

This booklet includes words of wisdom from Richard J. Foster and Andrew Murray, both of whom have taught me much about following the way of humility and sacrificial love modeled by Jesus. I think you'll find within these pages some sustenance for your soul, some encouragement for your life with God.

Together let's turn down the volume on the noise of the world and listen for the voice of Jesus, our ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend.

Richella J. Parham

*Chair, Renovaré Board of Trustees*

# Introduction

Humility... the once-acknowledged virtue of past eras has quietly receded into the background. Human nature has always bent toward pride. But today, as life moves quickly, we may not even take notice of this character quality replete in Scripture but lacking in our conscious formation.

We soak daily in a culture of celebrity names, lives paraded on screens, image promotion at every turn, and increasingly unabashed self-aggrandizing in so many sectors of society. Even God's people can easily lose sight of the way of Jesus, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:6-8).

Reflections like these prompted Richard Foster to begin journaling his own notes on this lost virtue of humility. As he looked back at Scripture and what the devotional masters had to say, as well as Lakota oral traditions and writings, he found himself penning a search for the meaning and growth of humility within himself. Remember humility. Seek humility daily. Work at being formed in humility, through the living presence of Jesus.

It's a search that Andrew Murray penned as well in a small volume titled simply, *Humility* and published in 1884. Foster quotes Murray, and the two books complement each other beautifully in drawing us again to the vital presence of humility in the life of a follower of Jesus.

Foster journals early in his search, "By meditating on Jesus' life we see humility take on flesh and blood. ... It begins to dawn on me that Jesus is indeed the divine paradigm for conjugating all the verbs of humility."

And Murray reveals, “My one need is humility. And let us believe that what Jesus shows, he also gives. What he is, he can impart. As the meek and lowly One, he will come in and live in the longing heart.”

Here, we have included a selection from Richard Foster’s book, *Learning Humility: A Year of Searching for a Vanishing Virtue*, releasing in early December of 2022, and an excerpt from Andrew Murray’s *Humility*, in Contemporary English. We hope you will enter with these authors and with the Renovaré community into the rich remembrance and growth of a virtue that, perhaps more than any other, draws us to union with Jesus.

Brenda Quinn

*Author, Editor, and Pastor of Spiritual Formation*

# Excerpt from *Learning Humility*

by Richard J. Foster

## The Moon When the Wind Shakes off the Leaves<sup>1</sup>

*For thus says the high and lofty One  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the humble,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

Yahweh (Isaiah 57:15)

*Humility and fear of God surpass all other virtues.*

Abba John the Dwarf

## **This Persistent Integrity**

The tenth Lakota virtue is *Cantewasake*, “fortitude.”<sup>2</sup> It is said of this virtue, “After learning patience and inner endurance one gains the strength necessary to have fortitude. Emotional stability, being alert, and having determination can help in having this persistent integrity.

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1     October 8 – November 4. Out of respect for Native Americans’ nature-informed way of marking time, Richard organizes his year of journal entries in *Learning Humility* according to the thirteen months and moons of the Lakota people of the northern plains.

2     While researching the Lakota calendar, Richard discovered that there are twelve traditional Lakota virtues—the first of which is humility. *Learning Humility* includes his reflections on Lakota values as “quite consistent with a Christian understanding of the moral life” and helpful in enriching our understanding and practice of humility.

This brings to my mind the words of James about trials producing endurance: “My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:2-4). Endurance ... fortitude ... leading to humility of heart.

I would like to think about the ways humility and fortitude complement each other. I will live with this for the next few days and see if anything emerges.

## **The Birth of Obedience in the Heart**

This morning I wake up to the first snow of the season. Only three or four inches but it's enough to flock the woods out my study window. Wonder-filled! It will melt soon with our warm weather, but still ... lovely, lovely, lovely.

No fire today since over the summer I have accumulated a generous stack of books and papers in front of the fireplace. Still, I sit in my rocking chair for some moments watching the snow come down gently. I punch up a Christmas CD and begin cleaning the books and papers away from the fireplace so that next time I will be ready for a roaring blaze.

As I work away I come across these words from Thomas Kelly of *Testament of Devotion* fame, “humility and holiness are twins in the astonishing birth of obedience in the heart.” Is he saying that humility of heart and purity of life work together to produce obedience toward God? I think so. I will see what I can do to put this into practice and see what I learn.

## Texture and Feeling Tones

A morning hike in a nearby canyon is utterly refreshing. The landscape has turned rust-colored brown almost overnight. All the plant life is preparing for the winter season that is soon to come. But today the sun warms me. Along the trail I can see little patches of snow that have effectively hidden from the sun.

Human hikers (except for me) are nonexistent, due I imagine to the snow of the other day. Hence, I am able to hike in complete silence. I hear only the twitter of the rosy finches in the trees and the gurgle of the creek below. The silence does me good. The “brown” of plant and rock draws me down toward the earth. There is a kind of humility in my getting down close to the earth. Humility ... *humus*. Hiking quietly, without a word. No one knows of my presence, except the mule deer and black squirrels ... and they could not seem to care less.

These times provide texture and feeling tones to the word *humility*.

## The Small Corners of Life

Early this morning I sense a divine nudge to learn about humility in the “small corners” of life. Lord, show me ways to express a humble spirit in these small corners.

The first order of the day is to take Carolynn to a medical appointment. Once there I wait ... and I wait ... and I wait. It is not unusual, this waiting, but I am wondering if this is one way I am to learn humility today. Just wondering.

Then we decide we have time for me to get my flu shot for the season. So, off we go to my pharmacy. The lady who attends to us has difficulty with the computer system. Again, waiting. I sense her frustration and pray for her to find a way through the computer maze. Today, it is not to be. She finally gives up and asks me to come back another day. Okay.

Off we go to Carolynn’s pharmacy to see if we might have better success. Indeed, we do. She has no problem with the computer ... but the

interruptions in her labors are maddening. I wait ... and wait ... and wait again. I muse that by learning a “patient waiting” I bring a humble spirit into my soul. On the other hand, a waiting that is filled with anxiety or anger thwarts humility of soul. So, I seek to orient myself to a “patient waiting.” The pharmacist says it will be twenty minutes. Well, twenty minutes turns into thirty and thirty turns into forty. Perhaps more. I try not to check my watch.

At last we are rewarded and I receive my shot, thankful for the good care of the pharmacist. And everything is done in time to get Carolynn home so she can get to an afternoon appointment in time. So far so good.

I’m free now and I decide to go to the rec center for my exercise for the day. I make appropriate preparations and I am off. However, I forgot that this is late Friday afternoon and the freeway ten miles away has major construction delays and so traffic is diverted to our country roadway. I am five miles away from the roadway, and when I get to it I find traffic backed up for several miles behind the single light at our little intersection. I take one look at the long line of cars and decide I have learned enough about “humility-that-comes-through-waiting” for one day. I turn around and drive home. I get my exercise by using the treadmill downstairs. I’m glad for what I have learned and humbled by the experience.

## **Tending the Fire of My Soul**

A wonderful snow of perhaps twelve inches over two days has turned our home into a winter wonderland. I need to clear off the driveway three different times, but once that is accomplished I can enjoy our quiet woods ... the woods are always especially quiet after a good snow.

Most of all I am ready for a good, steady fire down in my study. The wood and the flames are good companions. In the late afternoon I think back to when I was a child of eight. We had wintered at an uncle’s cabin deep in the Rocky Mountains. I slept in front of the generous fireplace.

As this was our only heat source through the night, we needed to keep it burning. In time I became the person who tended the fire through the night. Tonight I am reminded that I need to be constantly tending the fire of my soul.

## **The Voice of the True Shepherd**

Today I go back to an old friend, John Woolman, and his famous journal. I am considering a passage where he is dealing with materialism and his relationship to this thorny subject. He brings up humility amid a discussion of simplicity of life: “I saw that an humble man, with the blessing of the Lord, might live on a little, and that where the heart was set on greatness, success in business did not satisfy the craving; but that commonly with an increase of wealth the desire of wealth increased. There was a care on my mind so to pass my time that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the true Shepherd.”

For Woolman the most important thing is a “steady attention to the voice of the true Shepherd.” May this become true for me more and more ... as I am ready and able to receive it.

## **The Wise Apostle Paul**

I am seeking to settle into the writings of the wise apostle Paul and especially his words on humility. They read like a rat-a-tat-tat of concern for the spirit of humility.

- Romans 12:10—“Outdo one another in showing honor.”
- Romans 12:16—“Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.”
- Galatians 5:13—“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.”

- Ephesians 4:1-2—“Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”
- Ephesians 5:21—“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
- Philippians 2:3—“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.”
- Philippians 2:5-8—“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ... He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”
- Colossians 3:12—“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”

And to top it all off we have Paul’s magnificent essay on *agape* love in 1 Corinthians 13. Here we find humility hidden inside *agape* as an essential ingredient: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

How is it that Paul learned the spirit of humility so deeply in his soul? Did he learn lessons in humility as he stood watching Stephen’s death? The many disciples of Jesus that Paul persecuted surely taught him about a life of humble service. I rather imagine that his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ (strong enough to knock him off his donkey and blind him for a time) and his conversion experience with Ananias who addressed him as “brother Saul” taught him the ABCs of humility. Even more important were his three years in the deserts of Arabia, where I rather imagine he was constantly learning directly from his divine Teacher Jesus. Most certainly Paul learned well what a life of humility in the interior chambers of the heart looks like. Oh, may I too learn the supreme value of humility of heart.

## The Most Gracious Ecumenical Spirit

Andrew Murray was a Scottish preacher and pastor of the nineteenth century. Virtually all of his ministry years were spent in South Africa. We know him today because of his many books of Christian devotion, perhaps the most well-known being *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. My early training in the life of devotion came to a large extent from Andrew Murray's writings.

I single him out here because of a slender volume (just over a hundred pages) he wrote with the simple title *Humility*. Indeed, the title is so unassuming that more recent editions of the book have sought to embellish it a bit with subtitles like *True Greatness* or *The Beauty of Holiness* or *The Journey Toward Holiness*. These are justified only because Murray devotes chapter seven to humility in relationship to holiness, especially the Keswick holiness movement in his day, sometimes called the Higher Life movement. But the central focus of Murray's book is the Christian virtue of humility.

I appreciate many things about this small book. One emphasis of Murray's we can easily miss is the ease with which he uses epigraphs from Roman Catholic writers of devotion to begin many chapters. Remember, in the nineteenth century the Dutch Reformed Church in which Murray was ordained was not especially warm toward the Church of Rome ... to put it mildly. Add to this that Murray's mother was a descendent of the French Huguenots who had been so severely persecuted by Rome, almost to extinction. Yet, in this small book I find Andrew Murray showing the most gracious ecumenical spirit, drawing from a breadth of sources:

- Thomas Aquinas—"If you are looking for an example of humility, look at the cross."
- Thomas à Kempis—"The more humble a man is in himself, the more obedient toward God, the wiser will he be in all things, and the more shall his soul be at peace."

- Bernard of Clairvaux—“It is no great thing to be humble when you are brought low; but to be humble when you are praised is a great and rare achievement.”
- Augustine of Hippo—“Should you ask me: What is the first thing in religion? I should reply: the first, second, and third thing herein is humility.”

Lovely. I like the quotations and, even more, I like that Murray used them.

## **The Root of All**

Andrew Murray himself says: “Humility is the only soil in which virtue takes root; a lack of humility is the explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a virtue along with the others, but is the root of all.”

Again, “The call to humility has been too little regarded in the church because its true nature and importance have been too little apprehended.”

Then Murray shares with us his own lack and learning about humility: “I had long known the Lord without realizing that meekness and lowliness of heart are to be the distinguishing feature of the disciple, just as they were of the Master.”

Finally, Murray deals with pride, which he considers the crux of our problem:

Let us at the very outset ... admit that there is nothing so natural to man, nothing so insidious and hidden from our sight, nothing so difficult and dangerous as pride. And acknowledge that nothing but a very determined and persevering waiting on God will reveal how lacking we are in the grace of humility and how powerless we are to obtain what we seek. We must study the character of Christ until our souls are filled with the love and admiration of his lowliness.

## **Satan at the Headwaters of Pride**

Murray sees pride as the great enemy of humility. And he stresses repeatedly that Satan is at the headwaters of pride. In one significant passage Murray speaks of “the pride Satan breathed into humankind.”

The epigraph to lead off chapter eight (“Humility and Sin”) contains a quote from Jonathan Edwards that I had never read before: “Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil’s reach as humility.”

The theme of pride originating in Satan is sprinkled throughout *Humility*. It is probably not the way we would write about the issue today, but for this very reason it has unusual punch. It underscores for me the need to be aware that the Enemy of our souls uses pride as his chief weapon. So, all the more need for me to cultivate humility of heart.

## **The Best of All the Graces**

On this subject Murray was keenly aware of the failure of the church in his day: “It seems that the church has failed to teach its people the importance of humility—that it is the first of the virtues, the best of all the graces and powers of the Spirit.”

If Murray’s words are an accurate description of the church in the nineteenth century ... how much truer of us today. Precious little in today’s culture encourages humility of heart. Pastors find it exceedingly difficult to address the subject in their preaching. And the average Christian has so few living examples of how to live quietly and humbly.

O Lord, forgive us for our lack. Teach us a good way forward.

## **Every Kind and Form and Degree of Pride**

Murray concludes his slender book with an experimental prayer for humility.

I will here give you an infallible touchstone that will test all to the truth: retire from the world and all conversation for one month. Neither write, nor read, nor debate anything with yourself; stop all the former workings of your heart and mind, and with all the strength of your heart stand as continually as you can in the following form of prayer to God. Offer it frequently on your knees; but whether sitting, walking, or standing, be always inwardly longing and earnestly praying this one prayer to God: that of his great goodness he would make known to you, and take from your heart every kind and form and degree of pride, ... and that he would awaken in you the deepest depth and truth of that humility which can make you capable of his light and Holy Spirit.

I am not sure I could manage Murray's one-month time frame ... but his prayer for humility most certainly speaks to my condition. O Lord, God of all mercy, take from my heart every kind and form and degree of pride. Awaken in me the deepest depth and truth of that humility which can make me capable of your light and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## A Simple Prayer

A simple prayer has been drifting in and out of my consciousness in recent days. I haven't gotten the wording quite right and so decided that writing it out might help me articulate the inner yearnings.

Loving Lord Jesus, I humbly ask that you would ...  
Purify my heart,  
Renew my mind,  
Sanctify my imagination, and  
Enlarge my soul.  
Amen.

I think it would be good to stay with this prayer for a while.

## The Human Side and the Divine Side

Took a hike today with my little prayer as my companion and sensed that there are two sides to its answer: the human side and the divine side.

On the human side

- With regard to *heart purity*, I am *to consider* tenderly the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am *to see* his heart as an open wound of love toward all humanity. And I am *to feel* the divine love pouring out of his wounded heart for me.
- With regard to a *renewed mind*, I am *to think* on whatever is true and honorable and just and pure and pleasing and commendable (Phil 4:8). Not all the time, but whenever I am able.
- With regard to a *sanctified imagination*, I am *to picture* the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, the river of the water of life bright as crystal, and the tree of life on either side of the river whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev 21–22). Imagine that! Picture this, not constantly, only as I can.

- With regard to an *enlarged soul*, I am *to find* people I can serve. In small ways, and even large ways. Whenever possible.

On the divine side

- With regard to *heart purity*, God alone purifies the heart. God alone will straighten out the twistedness of all desires. God alone will radiate light into every dark corner.
- With regard to a *renewed mind*, God alone will train the mind into deep habit patterns of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).
- With regard to a *sanctified imagination*, God alone slowly, slowly, slowly channels all the imaginings into that pure stream which is comprised of the good and the true and the beautiful.
- With regard to an *enlarged soul*, God alone will place deep within the subterranean chambers of the heart and the mind and the imagination an understanding of the overwhelming preciousness of every single person.

Then came this authoritative word: remember that God is ...

- quick to forgive
- eager to heal
- glad to restore



# Excerpt from *Humility* by Andrew Murray

## Humility in the Life of Jesus

John's gospel opens a window to the inner life of Jesus. Often Jesus spoke of his relationship with his Father. He revealed the motives that guided him. He shared the heart behind what he did. Although the word "humble" doesn't appear in John, Jesus' humility is revealed there like nowhere else in Scripture. Humility is a person's simple consent to let God be everything—a surrender to his purposes. In Jesus we will see the perfect example of humility.

Listen to these words from John's gospel where Jesus speaks of his relationship with his Father. Notice how often he uses the words "not" and "nothing" of himself.

- "The Son can do **nothing** by himself." (John 5:19)
- "I do **nothing** without consulting the Father. I judge as I am told. And my judgment is absolutely just, because it is according to the will of God who sent me; it is not merely my own." (John 5:30)
- "For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, **not** to do what I want." (John 6:38)
- "I'm **not** teaching my own ideas, but those of God who sent me." (John 7:16)
- "I do **nothing** on my own, but I speak what the Father has taught me." (John 8:28)
- "I am **not** here on my own, but he sent me." (John 8:42)
- "I have **no** wish to glorify myself." (John 8:50)

- “The words I say are **not** my own, but the Father who lives in me does his work through me.” (John 14:10)
- “And remember, my words are **not** my own. This message is from the Father who sent me.” (John 14:24)

These words expose the deepest roots of Christ’s life and work. They show why Almighty God could perform his mighty work of redemption through him. And they teach us the essential nature of the life Jesus lived and now makes available to us.

Christ found this life of complete self-surrender, of absolute submission and dependence on God’s will, to be perfect peace and joy. He lost nothing by giving everything to God. The Father honored Jesus’ trust and did everything for him, then raised him up to his own right hand in glory.

Jesus’ humility was simply surrender of himself to God. He let the Father do in him whatever he wanted. It didn’t matter what people around him said of him or did to him. It is so that we will have this same spirit that we have been allowed to share in Christ. When Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and follow him, this is what he means ... We are to be and do nothing by ourselves so that God may be all. In Jesus we discover what humility means. It is because we don’t understand or seek after it that our own humility is so shallow and feeble.

Are you feeling that this life is too far beyond you, that you could never reach it? Then let that realization drive you to seek the answer in him. Only Jesus, living inside of us, can live this life of humility in us. If we long for it, let us ask Jesus for his secret. That secret—which is meant for every child of God to know—is that Jesus lived his life as a vessel, a channel through whom the Living God could show the riches of his wisdom, power, and goodness. The root of all spiritual growth and all faith and all genuine worship is a conviction that all that we have comes from God. Then we will bow in deepest humility to wait on him for it.

Jesus never thought for a moment of seeking his own honor or asserting his own power to prove anything about himself. His whole Spirit was that of a life yielded to God so that God could work through it. Whatever we may be satisfied with about our “Christian life” must be set aside as nothing until we find Jesus’ humility.

Brother or sister, are you clothed with humility? Ask your daily life. Ask Jesus. Ask your friends. Ask the world. And begin to praise God that in Jesus you have a Way to a heavenly humility that you have barely understood and a blessing that you’ve never really tasted before.

## **Humility in the Teaching of Jesus**

Jesus opened his heart to us, and when we looked inside, we found a wonderful humility there. Now let’s listen to his teaching. Let’s learn what he has to say about humility and what his expectations are of his disciples. I am going to do little more than quote some of his teachings, but I trust you to discover what they should mean to you and to press the seeds down deeply in your own heart.

1. Look at how Jesus started his season of public teaching. When he called his disciples to him on the mountainside, he began: “God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them... God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them” (Matt. 5:3,5). The very first words of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth were meant to reveal the open gate where we can enter in. The poor in spirit, who have nothing in themselves, can receive the Kingdom. The meek, who seek nothing for themselves, can inherit the whole planet. The blessings of heaven and earth are for the lowly. For a life of blessing in both the seen and unseen realms, humility is the secret.

2. “Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). Jesus offers himself as our

Teacher. Meekness and lowliness are what he offers; in them, we will find perfect rest for our souls. Humility is to be our deliverance.

3. The disciples had been arguing about who would be greatest in the Kingdom. To settle the matter once and for all, they agreed to go to the Master (Luke 9:46; Matt. 18:3). How startled they must have felt when he set a child in their midst and said, “Anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” What will be the most valued personal characteristic in God’s holy nation on earth? No one but Jesus would have guessed the answer. The highest glory of heaven, the genuine mark of having heaven in your heart, is humility. God esteems it above all else. “Whoever is least among you is the greatest.” (Luke 9:48).

4. The sons of Zebedee had asked Jesus for the most important places in the Kingdom, at his right and his left. Jesus said that they were not his to give, but the Father’s, who would give them to those for whom he had prepared them. They must not look or ask for those places. Instead, they should think about the cup and baptism of humiliation. Then he added, “Whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.” The place nearest to God is also the lowliest.

5. Once, Jesus spoke to the crowds and to the disciples about the Pharisees and their love of positions of honor. He said again, “The greatest among you must be a servant” (Matt. 23:11). Genuine humble service, without thought of reward, is the only “ladder to success” in God’s Kingdom.

6. At a Pharisee’s house, Jesus told the parable of the guest who would be invited to take a better place at the banquet and added, “For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored” (Luke 14:11). His demand is unchangeable; there is no other way. Only people who choose to humble themselves will be honored.

7. After telling the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus said again, “For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be

honored” (Luke 18:14). In the temple, in worship of God, everything is worthless that isn’t full of a deep, true humility toward God and men.

8. When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, he said, “And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet” (John 13:14). The authority of Jesus’ command, example, and thought makes humility the first and most essential condition of true discipleship.

9. At their last Passover meal with their Master, the disciples were still arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus cut the debate short: “In this world kings and great men order their people around, and yet they are called ‘friends of the people.’ But among you, those who are the greatest should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant... For I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:25-27). The path where Jesus walked—and opened a way for us to walk—is the way of service to all. This was the spirit in which he brought salvation, and he saves us for the same humility.

How little this humility is taught. How little it is lived! How little the lack of it is felt or confessed. I’m not saying that no one ever makes any progress towards Christlikeness in this area. But I am saying that too few people think to make humility a goal that they desire and pray for. How little the world has seen it! How little it has been seen even in the “inner circles” of Christianity.

For many of us, it has been a new joy in our walk with Jesus to know that we can yield ourselves as servants, as slaves to God. We have discovered that service to him is true freedom—the freedom from sin and self. We need now to learn another lesson. Jesus also calls us to be servants of one another. If we accept this command willingly it, too, will be a delight to obey. It will mean a new and fuller freedom from sin and self. At first this service may seem hard, but that’s only because of lingering pride that still considers itself to *be* something.

We can learn that being nothing before God is our glory, Jesus’ Spirit, and Heaven’s joy. Then we will welcome with our whole hearts the

discipline that comes our way when serving the unlovable. When our own hearts are set on this kind of service, every word Jesus spoke about humility will take on new life for us. No position will seem too low. No stooping will be too deep and no service too humble or too hard to endure, if only we can know the fellowship of the One who said, “For I am your servant.”

Brothers and sisters, the path to the “higher life” is down, lower down! Your responsibility is humble service. Let that also be your one goal and prayer. God is faithful. Just as water always runs to the lowest place, so the moment God finds people humble and empty, his glory and power will flow into them to lift them up and bless them. Humble yourself. That’s your part. Honoring us—that’s God’s part. By his mighty power and great love he will do it.

People sometimes talk as if humility and meekness will rob us of everything bold and admirable and worthwhile. Oh, that all would believe that humility is what God admires! If only we would understand that humility is the royal attitude of the King of Heaven, that it is Godlike to humble yourself and become the servant of all! That path is the only one leading to the joy and glory of Christ’s presence inside us and his power resting on us.

Jesus, the meek and lowly One, calls us to learn from him the path to God. Let us absorb the words we have been reading until our hearts are filled with the thought: My one need is humility. And let us believe that what Jesus shows, he also gives. What he is, he can impart. As the meek and lowly One, he will come in and live in the longing heart.

## **Humility in the Disciples of Jesus**

We have looked at humility in the person and teaching of Jesus. Let’s now see if we can find evidence for it in the circle of his hand-picked companions—the twelve. If we instead discover a lack of humility in them, then the contrast between Christ and men will be that much clearer. We’ll

appreciate even more the dramatic change that Pentecost produced in them. It will prove how real our participation can be in the perfect victory of Jesus' humility over the pride that the devil injected into man.

From the words of Jesus, we have already seen that the disciples demonstrated how spiritually bankrupt they were when it came to humility. Early on, it seems, they began a long-running argument about which of them was the greatest. This dispute seems to have reached a new low when James and John put their mother up to requesting the places of honor—at the left and right hands of the throne—for her sons. Finally, during their last meal with Jesus before the cross, the squabble about which of them was “number one” erupted again.

Of course the disciples had their moments when one of them would genuinely humble himself before his Master. When he first met Jesus, Peter had enough sense to cry out, “Oh, Lord, please leave me—I’m too much of a sinner to be around You.” All of the disciples had fallen to their knees and worshiped Jesus when he calmed the storm. But those sporadic moments of humility only serve to make their habitual pride that much more obvious. Their true colors were shown in the natural and spontaneous outbreaks of self-life in them. If we consider these men, they can teach us several critically important lessons.

*First, we can see how much there can be of a very zealous and active Christianity while humility is still sadly lacking.* See it in the twelve. They had a sincere, passionate attachment to Jesus. They had forsaken everything for him. The Father had revealed to them that Jesus was the Christ of God. They believed in him, loved him, and obeyed him. When others turned away, they clung to him. They were ready to die with him. But deeper down than all their sincerity and good intentions lay a dark power. They were hardly aware of how hideous it was or that it even existed. But this power had to be killed and thrown out before they could serve as witnesses that Jesus is able to save sinners.

This is still the case. We find many professing Christians—including those who would consider themselves “ministers,” “evangelists,” “mis-

sionaries,” “teachers,” or “full-time workers”—who seem to possess many spiritual gifts, yet lack humility. There are people who seemingly are channels of blessing to millions, but who demonstrate, when the time of testing comes or when light shines on their lives, that humility is hardly to be found in their characters. These sad examples confirm the fact that humility is the greatest and highest characteristic a person can have. It is a grace that only comes with power, when Christ is formed in us.

*Secondly, we can see how weak all external teaching and personal striving is to overcome pride and produce a meek, lowly heart.* For three years the disciples had been under apprenticeship to Jesus Christ. He let them know his main curriculum: “Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle” (Matthew 11:29). Time after time he had spoken to them, to the Pharisees, and to the crowds that humility was the only path to the glory of God. He had not only lived his life before them as the Lamb of God in divine humility, he had openly shared the inmost secret of his life. “For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). “For I am your servant” (Luke 22:27).

Jesus had washed their feet and told them they were to follow his example. And yet, every last one of them had learned so little. At their last meal with him, that argument was still brewing. No doubt they had tried to learn his lessons and had made up their minds that they wouldn’t disappoint him again. But it was no use! Outward teaching, even from Jesus himself, cannot cast out the devil of pride.

No arguments can convince pride away. No appreciation of humility can create it where it doesn’t exist. No resolve is sincere enough to change a person’s heart. When Satan casts out Satan, it is only to enter again in a stronger but more hidden power! Nothing can make a lasting difference, unless a new heart with Christlike humility takes the place of the old.

*Thirdly, it is only by the indwelling of Christ in his humility that we can become humble.* We didn’t create pride. We can’t create humility, either. Pride belongs to us, and we belong to it, because it is who we

are—our very nature. Humility must be ours in the same way. It must be our very self, our very nature. The promise is, “as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful kindness became more abundant” (Romans 5:20). All Jesus’ teaching of the twelve, and all their vain effort, was necessary preparation for his entering into them with divine power to *give* to them and *be* for them what he had taught them to desire.

In his death, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil. He put away sin and accomplished an eternal redemption. In his resurrection, he received from the Father a completely new life. It was the life of a man in the power of God, able to touch men’s hearts, to enter and renew and fill their lives with power. In his ascension, Jesus received the Spirit of the Father, through whom he could accomplish what he could not have done had he stayed physically present on earth. He was able to make himself one with those he loved, and actually live their lives for them. Then they could live before the Father in humility like his, because it was he himself who lived and breathed in them. And on Pentecost, he came and took possession of them. The work of getting them ready, of awakening a desire and hope in them through his teaching, was completed with a powerful transformation through the Spirit. The lives and letters of James and Peter and John testify that everything had changed for them. The Spirit of the meek and humble Jesus truly had possession of them.

I am sure that those who hear these words find themselves in many different places spiritually. Some may not have given their pride much thought. Others may be living in condemnation. They have tried to change their pride with sincere striving, but have suffered one discouraging failure after another. Still others may testify joyfully of the spiritual blessing and power they have received in many areas, but the people close to them can testify (with a good deal less joy) that the power to be humble isn’t one of those areas. And others may be able to say that the Lord has given them deliverance and victory here, too. He has taught them how much they still need and may expect out of the fullness of Christ.

Wherever you are personally, I urge you to seek a deeper conviction of the unique place humility holds in becoming like Jesus. We have to understand the utter impossibility of the church or of the individual believer to become what Jesus wants them to be, as long as his humility is not recognized as his greatest glory, his unchanging command, and our deepest blessing.

Let's deeply consider how "mature" the disciples seemed to be when humility was lacking from their characters. Let's pray to God that other gifts won't satisfy us. May we never forget that the absence of humility is the secret reason why the power of God cannot work in us. It is only when we, like the Son, truly know and show that we can do nothing of ourselves, that God will do all. It is when the truth of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" becomes true in the experience of believers that the Church will put on her beautiful garments and humility will be seen in her members as the beauty of holiness.

## **Humility in Daily Life**

*If someone says, 'I love God,' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? (1 John 4:20)*

Here's a sobering thought: God measures our love for him by the love we show our brothers and sisters in everyday fellowship with them. It is a serious thing to realize that our love for God isn't genuine if it fails the test of daily life with our fellow human beings.

The same thing is true with humility. It is easy to think we humble ourselves before God. But humility before people is the only real proof that our humility before God is more than just a figment of our imagination. It is the only true evidence that humility has made a home in our hearts and become our nature. How can we know that we, like Christ, have made ourselves of no reputation? By the reality check of daily life. When lowliness of heart has become more than a posture in prayer, but

instead the very spirit of our lives, it will show itself in the way we treat our brothers and sisters.

This lesson is crucial. The only humility that really belongs to us is not what we try to show before God in prayer, but what we carry with us and live out when we get up off our knees. The insignificance of daily life is the test of eternity. It proves what Spirit really possesses us. It is in our unguarded moments when we show who we really are. To know the humble man, you have to follow him around and watch his daily life. Isn't that lesson exactly what Jesus taught? Humility before God is nothing if it isn't proved by humility before men.

The humble person tries at all times to follow the rule, "Take delight in honoring each other, serve one another in love, think of others as better than yourself, and submit to one another." The humble person looks at every child of God—even the weakest and unworthiest—and honors him as the King's son. The Spirit of the One who washes feet will make it a joy for us to be the least, to serve others in love.

The humble man or woman feels no jealousy or envy. Humble people can praise God when others are blessed instead of them. They are unshaken when others are praised and they themselves are forgotten. In God's presence they have learned, like Paul, to say, "I am nothing at all" (2 Corinthians 12:11). They have received the Spirit of Jesus, who refused to chase after recognition or honor.

Life on earth means that we will experience temptations to be impatient or irritable, to think resentfully or speak harshly. People around us will make mistakes. They will even sin against us. When humble people face that kind of test, they will bring up from their hearts a law that is written there: "You must bear with each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (Colossians 3:13). They have learned that in putting on the Lord Jesus they have "clothed themselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12). Jesus has taken the place that self used to have in their lives, so they don't find

it impossible to forgive as Jesus forgave. His humility isn't a matter of constantly putting himself down in his words or thoughts. He is tenderhearted. His heart is full of compassion and kindness, meekness and patience—the sweet spirit recognized as the heart of the Lamb of God.

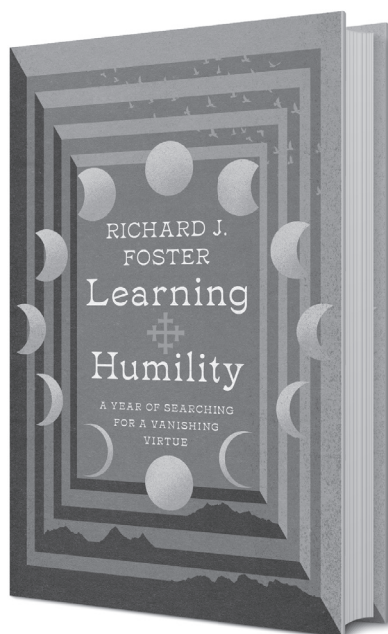
Disciples want to grow, and they should. But their aim shouldn't be just for more boldness, joy, contempt for the world, zeal, or self-sacrifice. Even pagan philosophers and those who preach self-improvement would embrace those goals! What set Jesus apart from all the good intentions on earth was the way he took up his cross daily. Death to self—becoming poor in spirit, meek, humble and lowly—was Jesus' aim. That heart is what he brought to earth from Heaven. And that heart is how we show our Christlikeness. We must die to self in our dealings with the lost, certainly. But most of all we must pick up our cross in our dealings with God's people—denying ourselves for them, as Jesus did for us.

When people try to serve Jesus in community, all too often they find it impossible to be patient with one another, to love one another, to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. People who should have experienced the deep joy of working as partners instead are a hindrance and burden to each other. All for one reason—the lack of the humility that considers self as nothing and rejoices in being the least and only wants, like Jesus, to be the servant and helper of others, even of the least deserving.

Why do people who joyfully commit themselves to the cause of Christ find it so hard to commit themselves to their brothers and sisters? Isn't it because we have so little taught that the humility of Christ is the most important virtue and highest goal we can aim for by God's Spirit? But let's not be discouraged. Let the discovery that we lack humility motivate us to expect more from God than we've experienced. Let us look at every difficult, testing situation as an opportunity to grow. Let us look at difficult people as God's instrument for our purification. The Life of Jesus is breathing inside our hearts! And let's truly believe that God is

everything and we are nothing, so that we may—by God’s power—seek only to serve one another in love.

Fellow Christian, please take a good, hard look at what the Bible says a humble person is like. And please ask those walking with you whether they recognize in you a reproduction of the original. Let’s not settle for anything less than believing that each of the scriptures we have looked at is a promise of what God can and will do in our lives. Let’s take those scriptures as a description in words of what the Spirit of Jesus will birth inside of us. Let’s allow our failures and shortcomings to drive us to the arms of the humble Lamb of God. Believe completely that where he is enthroned in the heart, his humility and gentleness will be one of the streams of living water that flow from within us.



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***“It seems that the church has failed to teach its people the importance of humility—that it is the first of the virtues, the best of all the graces and powers of the Spirit.” — Andrew Murray***

This booklet includes a selection from Richard Foster’s book, *Learning Humility: A Year of Searching for a Vanishing Virtue* and an excerpt from Andrew Murray’s *Humility*. We hope you will enter with these authors and with the Renovaré community into the rich remembrance and growth of a virtue that, perhaps more than any other, draws us to union with Jesus.

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**Andrew Murray** (1828-1917) was a South African pastor who became a renowned missionary leader (Dutch Reformed). Educated in Scotland and the Netherlands and ordained in 1848, Murray pastored several South African churches, then helped to found two institutions of higher learning. Murray vigorously promoted the call to missions, especially in the Transvaal province of South Africa and in Malawi. He is best remembered for his extensive devotional writings (240 volumes in all), which continue to be widely read today.

**Richard J. Foster** is founder of Renovaré. Having studied at George Fox and Fuller Theological Seminary, Foster has served as a pastor and taught worldwide on spiritual formation. He is the author of several books, including *Streams of Living Water, Prayer; Finding the Heart’s True Home, Life with God*, and *Celebration of Discipline*, which has sold over two million copies worldwide. He and his wife, Carolyn, have two grown children, Joel and Nathan, nine grandchildren, and live near Denver, Colorado.

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