

# Russell Kelfer

# The High Cost of Humility

# 904-A

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

# The High Cost of Humility

We have been precariously perched on the precipice peering painfully and personally into the perennial problem of pride. The sad thing most of us can conclude from these five lessons is that: a) God hates pride, and b) we have it. (Most of us suffer from both “natural” pride and “spiritual” pride.)

So we have a problem, but knowing the problem is not our objective. Knowing the problem is only a means to an end. Our objective is to be changed and to become wise in the area of humility. Our earnest desire is not to know how proud we are and become preoccupied with that. Our desire is to humble ourselves and become preoccupied with Jesus Christ.

To that end, our lesson today is entitled, “The High Cost of Humility.” We have a good news sandwich. The good news is that we can become humble. The bad news is *it costs something*, but the other good news is *it’s worth it!*

I believe with all my heart that you and I can only mature into the likeness of Christ in proportion to our willingness to humble ourselves. Have you ever thought of God’s stair step checklist for spiritual renewal in II Chronicles 7? What is step one? It says, “If my people, who are called by my name (that’s us) shall (what?) humble themselves...” (see II Chronicles 7:14) Then He goes on to say, once we have learned to humble ourselves, we must pray, seek His face, and turn from all our rebellion. The first step is that we humble ourselves, and the indicators are that this is something in God’s power that we must *choose* to do.

So we will begin today’s lesson by looking at our part, what WE can do to humble ourselves. And while there are some costs involved, they are nothing compared to the costs involved as God does HIS part.

Peter said, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God.” Our goal is to examine seven ways to do that. In the process of looking at God’s prerequisites for humility, we will attempt to look through the lens of six lives which either

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exemplified humility or dramatized the process. We will look at Job, Joseph, Moses, Paul, Peter, and, of course, Jesus. We will see what they did to humble themselves and what God did to humble them.

### SEVEN STEPS TO HUMILITY:

Step #1- It may sound simple, but it isn't superficial. It is simply this: Ask God to humble you. (Have you ever done that?) Now remember, what we want is the mind of Christ in control of our pride. We want the wisdom of God to be humble. So the first step is found in James 1. If you are seeking the mind of Christ in a given area, here's what you do.

If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, (He's not stingy with His resources.) and upbraideth not; (He'll never scold you for asking. But there is one condition. That man must be willing to let God do it His way. And never waver in his confidence that God's way is best.) and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth (in this confidence) is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (James 1:5,6)

That mind won't receive wisdom because a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. So the Holy Spirit says, "Would you like to learn how to appropriate God's wisdom, say in the area of humility?" (It will be the same no matter the area of life we're dealing with.) You have to do two things:

a- Specifically ask God. He loves to give it, and never shames us for asking. But He waits for us to ask.

b- Be prepared not to waver as God gives it to you. It may not be as easy as you'd like, and chances are God's methods won't be what you expected. The question is: Do you want to be humbled badly enough to ask for it and then hang in there no matter the cost?

Or will you be like the man who went into the city's most exclusive restaurant and asked for the best thing on the menu, only to waver when he got the check. He should've counted the cost first. God's given us His menu of holiness, and humility seems to be the best thing on the menu. But there **is** a cost. Our goal is to reach the place where we can honestly **ask** God to humble us, but I don't recommend doing that until we have first looked at the price tag. Once we know the price, we need never

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waver when the check comes. So what I'm suggesting is that we count the cost, the **high** cost of humility, and be prepared to ask ourselves if, in fact, we are ready to ask God to humble us. Well, what is the cost? That brings us to steps 2-7. You want to humble yourself?

Step 2- Make a covenant to spend an increasing number of hours in the presence of God. You say, "Well, I've tried that. That's not easy." I agree with you. It's much easier for me to tell you to do it than it is for me to do it myself. But if we're counting the cost, that's part of it. Jesus was the humblest man who ever lived.

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made Himself of no reputation, (nothing) and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

Jesus knew of His equality with the Father, yet He spent hours at the feet of the Father. And while He walked this earth, clothed with our humanity, never once do we see Him preoccupied with Himself. Always and only He came to do the will of Him who sent Him. Yet a great while before day, He would go up to a mountain alone, just to spend time alone with the Father. Job's humility did not come automatically when trials came, nor did it come from his counselors. They only surfaced the spiritual pride that lay buried beneath his religious exterior. Job's humility came when he and God had a long, heart-to-heart encounter. Only then did Job see himself from God's perspective. And only then did he humble himself.

Was not the same thing true of Moses? "The meekest man in all the earth." (Numbers 12:3 paraphrased) That's what God said of him. Was he not the one man in all the earth, as well, whose whole life was virtually spent alone with God in preparation, then alone with God in the presentation of God's revelation to His people. Moses spent years of his life alone with the Father. Thus he knew that who he was, was not the issue. The issue was who God was, and that's the issue for us, as well.

Do you really want to be humble? Then purpose to spend

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more and more time alone in the presence of the King. You just can't spend hours worshipping Him and come away with inflated ideas of your own importance. When you leave His presence, you just want to shout:

His is the Kingdom!

His is the Power!

His is the Glory forever!

Humility, you see, is the direct result of worship. So we can choose to humble ourselves by choosing to be alone (increasingly alone) with Him.

Step 3- I believe a third prerequisite to humility is to make it a lifetime goal to study the character of God. Study His worth, His works, and His ways over and over. Begin by spending six months to a year meditating on the supremacy of God.

In one of his letters to Erasmus, Luther wrote these words,  
"Your thoughts of God are too human."

It was God Himself who complained to his people in this verse,

...thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself:...  
(Psalm 50:21b)

(In other words, you treated me like one of the guys.) Because we do not fully grasp the majesty and supremacy of our God, we tend to fashion Him after the likes of men. And then when we say God is power, we tend to think of the most powerful thing we know of on earth and view God as a little more powerful than that. God's power cannot be measured by man's. God's power is a unique expression of His character that so transcends our most vivid imagination, that we cannot even begin to comprehend it unless His Word reveals it, and His Spirit interprets it.

Likewise, when we think of God's love, we tend to begin by looking at what the world calls love and upgrading it a little, don't we? The love of God has no human counterpart. The love of God is a cross on a hillside with the God of eternity on that cross dying for you; dying for me. While we were yet in rebellion against Him, He died for us. "Forgive them, Father," for His accusers He cried. We must begin to define our love from His life, not His love from ours.

This, you see, was the Sunday School lesson that God taught Job when Job at last came to the end of his preoccupation with

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himself. In chapter 38 of Job, Job had become so pridefully out of touch with what God was doing, that God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind and said,

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? (Who is this teacher named Job?)

Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. (We're going to have a little quiz, Job.)

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast (so much) understanding.

(Job 38:2-4)

Then for 109 verses of Scripture, Jehovah gives Job a detailed account of the supremacy of God. He asked Job question after question to deal with his pride. He said Job, have you entered into the springs of the sea? Have the gates of death been opened to you? (No, they are open only to God.) Do you know where the light or the darkness comes from Job? Can you tell it where to start or stop? No, only God can. Job, have you entered into the treasures of the snow? God has. Can you lift up your voice to the heavens, Job, and make it rain? No, but God can.

Then, at last, humility began to surface in Job,

Behold I am vile, what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. (Job 40:4)

But God went on with His lesson, and finally Job was broken before God.

Then Job answered the Lord, and said,

I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. (Job 42:1-3)

Once Job saw who God was he ceased being preoccupied with himself and simply humbled himself at the feet of His God. May I suggest that some of us take chapters 38-42 of Job and meditate on them for the next month over and over and over, memorizing the key passages together. It may well begin to awaken a whole new sense of awareness of God's majesty, and it may well humble us in the process.

Step 4- Revisit the cross regularly. When was the last time you got alone with God and simply meditated on Matthew 26, 27,

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and 28; or Luke 22, 23, and 24, and personally placed yourself in your imagination at the foot of that cross. (We *were* there, you know.) But we lose our perspective of the Cross; and when we lose our perspective of the Cross, spiritual pride has a heyday. Spend time at the Cross, and God will humble you in the process.

Step 5- Have a funeral service for self. Lord willing, we'll do that in our next study. It's one thing to say, "self is dead." It's another to bury him; claim a verse for the tombstone and always be able to point back to his death certificate.

Step 6- Study the rights of a dead man. We'll do that in the next study, as well. If self is dead, then we must deal with his demands accordingly. We'll read him his rites in our next study.

Step 7- Practice being a servant. We have been commanded to:

...but by love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13b)

...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. (Philippians 2:3b)

Jesus was our perfect example. He concentrated on serving those the world brushed aside—the lame, the blind, the prisoner, the leper. He gave Himself to those who knew they had needs, not to those who had something to give in return. He gave them Living Water, but He also healed them, fed them, and told them He cared. So long as the church of Jesus Christ is polarized, some meeting physical needs and letting men and women die in their sins; others saying repent, go be warmed and filled, but offering them nothing to warm them or fill them; so long as the church is polarized at those two extremes, Satan has destroyed the power that only the balanced church can have. Our job is to humble ourselves, get our hands dirty, and meet needs, meet people where they are: in hospitals, in jails, in nursing homes, in orphanages.

In the Body of Christ itself, we must meet each other's needs, or we are not a New Testament church. It may mean cleaning someone's house, moving someone's furniture, washing someone's dirty clothes. It may mean hugging and loving that dirty child up the street, or even stopping to befriend that dirty, destitute man who is wandering aimlessly along. We are the salt of the earth; and if the salt loses its flavor, it's worthless. Keep it in the shaker, and it won't season a thing!



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In John, chapter 13, verses 3-17, Jesus gave the second most impressive demonstration of humility ever given. I say the second, because he gave the first most impressive one at Calvary. But Jesus did something we can do and He told us to do it.

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

(John 13:3-17)

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the Creator God, the very

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One who even this moment is seated at the right hand of the Father living to make intercession for us, the King of eternity who will one day soon ride triumphantly into time to usher in eternity—our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, got up from dinner, took off His outer robes, symbolically took a towel, poured water into a basin, and one by one, He washed the feet of His stunned followers. Only Simon Peter argued with Him. “You don’t understand it now,” Jesus answered. (And he didn’t.) “But later on the significance will hit you like a ton of bricks.” (And it did.) But I’m not sure it has for some of us. He said, “Pay close attention. You never get too important to serve. You never get too great to get your hands dirty. I am the Lord.” He said, “And I’ve done for you the most menial thing I could as an example. Is the servant greater than his master? You say no? Then meet each other’s needs. Humble yourselves and become servants to one another.”

He ended with this amazing thought. He said, “It’s one thing to understand this. It’s another to **do** it. You’ll be blessed,” He concluded, “not by what you know, but by what you do.” It doesn’t just happen. You have to ask God to open your eyes to real needs. Then, in His energy, get your hands dirty meeting them. It’s called humbling yourself; forgetting your “station” in life, and, like Jesus, taking on yourself the form of a servant. There are within a block of where you live dozens of needs waiting to be met; widows who need their lawns mowed, their houses painted, children who are fatherless who need to know a man who cares. There are those in the hospitals and nursing homes who never even get a card or a call, those who are lonely and need a friend, those who are hungry and need a meal, those who are hurting and need to talk to someone who has been in the valley and emerged with a fresh vision of God. Do you want humility? Then humble yourself and serve. And one last thing: remember Matthew 6. When you serve or when you give, *you don’t need to tell anyone but Him*. Well, those are seven things we can do.

The eighth thing is to purpose before God to cooperate with Him as He does the rest. The rest of this lesson has to do with what He has to do in answer to our prayer for humility. You see, you and I by humbling ourselves, make it possible for God’s Spirit to flow into those secret recesses of our lives that have been sealed off by pride, and make it possible for the mind of

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Christ to control our thoughts. The process of becoming humble also involves an even deeper work, a work that only God can do.

And I believe how much God has to do depends on two things:

- a) How much we humble ourselves.
- b) How great is the task He has for our lives.

If we do not humble ourselves, as we learned several lessons ago, we leave God no choice but to humble us circumstantially. That's true. I believe those for whom God plans greater levels of exaltation must undergo an even deeper level of spiritual surgery to prepare them for what He plans to do.

At any rate, as we observe the lives God seems to have used: the lives of Jesus, Joseph, Job, Peter, Paul, and Moses, we find four common denominators in their experiences. Four ways God brought them low in preparation for the day when He would lift them up. There are four tools God uses to humble His saints. Let's look at them. They are part of the high cost of humility:

*Tool #1 - He may remove the sources of your pride, at least for a season.*

He took away Job's reputation, his wealth, and his family.

He took away Joseph's coat, his family, and his reputation.

He took Moses from his people and his family. He took from Moses all of his claims to greatness.

Job ended up on an ash heap scraping boils.

Joseph ended up in a prison.

Moses ended up on a deserted hillside until he came to the end of himself.

Then God gave Job back everything two-fold. Joseph ruled a nation. Moses ruled God's people. But first, He took it all away and humbled them, because what He had for them to do could not be done with self still alive.

I cannot promise you that if you ask God to humble you and use you that He won't take from you (at least for a season) some of the sources of your pride. Your talent may seem to diminish. Your prestige may seem to crumble. Your security may seem to vanish. As I said, the cost is high.

You can't be a Joseph without a dungeon. You can't be a

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Moses without 40 years of sheep. You can't have Job's heart without some of Job's hurt. You have to count the cost before you ask.

### *Tool #2 - God uses failure.*

If you are to be an example of humility, you have to be willing to fail. Peter vowed to Jesus, "These guys may let you down, Lord. They probably will, but not me." "Peter," the Lord answered, "before the cock crows this day, you will have failed me three times." "Not me, Lord," Peter cried. "I'll die for you." (see Luke 22:33,34) But out of the ashes of failure came humility.

And Peter went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:62)

NOW Peter could write,

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of  
God, that He may exalt you in due time. (I Peter 5:6)

NOW he could feed God's sheep. NOW he could feed God's lambs, because NOW he knew he couldn't do it. Peter died that night (spiritually) so now Jesus was free to live. Moses tried to save his people and failed. Out of those ashes of that failure came those years in the desert alone with God until there was no Moses left in Moses. When God called him to be His spokesman, the stuttering old saint felt too unworthy even to respond. He was dead. Now God could come alive in Moses.

We are programmed not to fail; but there are some of you today who have found Christ because you failed on the job, failed with your children, or failed in your marriage. Out of the dust of desperation, you humbled yourself before God and asked Him if it were possible for the God of eternity to use a failure. You gave up on yourself, and God came alive in your life. Do you want a spirit of humility? Ask God for it. But remember, *He may have to let you fail, lest you fail to see it's His life, not yours you're living.*

### *Tool #3- is rejection.*

I realize that rejection is the dominant theme in Christian counseling today, and the underlying problem in many lives who are frustrated through not feeling accepted or worthwhile. I realize that it must be dealt with or the one who has been rejected is not free to live the exchanged life. We must come to grips and come to Christ with our rejection.

I also realize that once that person has let the life of Christ take control and has dealt with his or her bitterness at the Cross,

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God takes and turns the curse into a blessing. What Satan meant for evil, God uses for good, and those very scars become the tools God had been using all along to shape a usable life.

Joseph was rejected by his family.

Moses was rejected by his kinsmen.

Job was rejected by his friends.

Jesus was rejected by his own.

God brought them low to bring them up.

And it's not enough to deal with your bitter spirit and say, "Now I can forgive those who rejected me." You're not healed until you can see that rejection as a tool in the hands of a sovereign God, building into your life the very qualities and experiences that II Corinthians 1:3 and 4 says will give you a ministry. You pray for humility, and God may allow you to taste rejection to humble you. It's worth it, but it's part of the high cost of humility.

*Tool #4 is the "thorn".*

There are some traumas in life that come into our lives and then leave. They work character into us and teach us to trust, and then go as they came. But the "thorns" of life are *the steady, unrelenting difficulties that go on and on and on*. When allowed to perform their purpose, they produce humility.

Sometimes the thorn is a disease, a crippling or an embarrassing physical affliction, an emotional weakness, a rebellious child, a tough marriage, some form of unending pain or frustration; something that makes you either dependent on others or humiliated before others. You say, I know people with "thorns" that aren't very humble. (Well, you don't know what they'd be like without it!)

Job had a thorn, a humiliating, debilitating, embarrassing sickness. His friends blamed it on sin, but it wasn't sin. It was a tool Satan sent to destroy him that God used to humble him.

Paul had a thorn. He tells us in II Corinthians 12 that God had so blessed him spiritually that the only way God could keep his pride from consuming him was to give him a "thorn." It'll make you weak, dependent, and humble, God must have said. So Paul got excited about his "thorn." He saw it as a gift from God to humble him.

Has God given you a thorn? If so, have you passed from the

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stage of resentment to the stage of resignation? God wants you to go one step further. He wants you to pass from the stage of resignation to the stage of rejoicing. That thorn is a precious present to humble you.

And if you ask God to humble you, in love, He may give you a “thorn”. Thorns aren’t pleasant. Neither were the ones that pressed upon the Master’s brow. From the pain, there came the gain of life eternal. It’s worth it, Beloved. It’s part of the high cost of humility.

So if you ask God to humble you, there are at least four things you may have to face.

You may face the loss of your strengths or talents,

You may face failure,

You may face rejection,

You may face a “thorn”, in order to face the issue of humility at the level of reality God has in store for you.

You ask, “Is it worth it?” You’re asking is it worth it to experience a little pain or grief or embarrassment in exchange to have the mind of Christ? To the natural man the cost is high, too high. But Christ in us says, “What a bargain!” At least now we are without excuse. We know there are some things we must do to humble ourselves. We know there are some things only He can do to humble us. So the question is “How will you pray?”

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Now, knowing the facts  
Just how will you pray?  
“Dear Lord, humble me...  
And do it YOUR way?”

Or, “Lord, I believe  
You would honor that cry  
But Lord, I refuse...  
The price is too high!”

“I want to be humble  
But I won’t pray that prayer  
The price tag it carries  
I simply can’t bear.”

You can’t pay the price?  
Is that what you said?  
It’s self that’s refusing  
I thought self was dead!!!

Let’s pray this prayer together  
Our hearts in one accord  
Let’s pray, no matter what the cost,  
That He might reign as Lord.

Oh, God if it takes failure,  
Oh, God, if it takes strife;  
Oh, God, if it means heartache,  
To gain the Christ-filled life;

Lord, anything at all it takes,  
Grant me humility;  
That Jesus Christ the humble one,  
Might live His life through me.

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01.11.12