



*In the Lord's eyes, true greatness
does not come through worldly
strength, power, or position.*

It comes through humility.

WHAT IS HUMILITY, AND HOW DO WE DEVELOP IT?

By Barbara A. Lewis

Hyrum Lefler served a mission to Poland in 2002. He had been in the country only a short time and was struggling to learn the difficult Polish language when he learned that his father had died in a construction accident. Elder Lefler wondered why the Lord would take his father while Elder Lefler was serving a mission. Why was his father not protected?

As grief swept over him, he fell to his knees and humbly begged the Lord for understanding. Then it hit him. With his earthly father gone, he needed to rely more on his Father in Heaven. He had another Father who loved him.

Elder Lefler decided he would not question the Lord. He dedicated himself to submit humbly to the Lord's will in all things and put all his energy into his mission. Peace flowed into his heart and strength filled his soul. Because of his choice to be humble, Elder Lefler could feel the support of both his earthly father and his Heavenly Father. He continued to study diligently, and within a week of his father's death, he could understand the Polish language as people spoke. He knew that his Heavenly Father was helping him as a confirming gift of love.

Qualities of Humility

Having humility means that we present to our Heavenly Father and the Savior "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20), as Elder Lefler did. We become meek and teachable like a child (see Matthew 18:4; Mosiah 3:19). We overcome pride and "recognize gratefully our dependence on the Lord."¹ We repent when

we need to repent. We understand that we need Heavenly Father's support and that our talents and our gifts come from Him.

The defining characteristic of humility is the submission of our will to God's will. "The submission of one's will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God's altar," said Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. "The many other things we 'give' . . . are actually the things He has already given or loaned to us. However, when you and I finally submit ourselves, by letting our individual wills be swallowed up in God's will, then we are really giving something to Him! It is the only possession which is truly ours to give!"²

Humility is not a sign of weakness; it is just the opposite. It shows that we know our strength comes from God.³ When Christ's disciples asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" our Savior taught, "Whosoever . . . shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1, 4). Contrary to what we might often think, greatness does not come only because of strength and power; true greatness requires humility.

Pride Is the Opposite of Humility

Unless we are careful to cultivate the characteristics of humility described above, it is easy to be distracted by humility's opposite: pride. As author C. S. Lewis wrote, "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man."⁴ President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught, "The proud make every man their adversary by pitting their intellects, opinions, works, wealth, talents, or any other worldly measuring device against others."⁵ That is when we run into trouble. Delighting in being richer than our neighbors, more athletic than our friends, or better looking than others is being prideful. For example, when Saul heard Israelite women chant, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7), Saul compared himself to David, and his feelings of inferiority led him on to works of wickedness.⁶

President Benson also declared, "The proud wish God would agree with them. They aren't interested in changing their opinions to agree with God's."⁷ They believe they

know better than God what is best for them, and they care more about what people think of them than about God's judgment. The Book of Mormon describes the Nephites' tragic fall from greatness (see Moroni 8:27), and modern revelation confirms that pride helped bring about their fall (see D&C 38:39). God does not look for the richest, the most beautiful, or the cleverest person. He blesses the humble and meek who are willing to submit to His will.

Humility Enables Repentance

Martin Harris was an example of one who humbled himself through repentance. He was a wealthy and



LOOKING INSIDE: HOW CAN WE DEVELOP HUMILITY?

- Submit our will to the Lord's will (see 3 Nephi 11:11; Moroni 10:32).
- Recognize the Lord's hand in all things (see D&C 59:21).
- Pray to our Father to help us grow in humility (see Helaman 3:33–35; Ether 12:27).
- Choose not to be offended (see D&C 42:88).
- Recognize, confess, and forsake our sins (see Mosiah 26:29–30; D&C 58:43).
- Fast and pray for the needs of others (see Isaiah 58:6–7; Alma 6:6).
- Think of the Savior and renew our covenants during the sacrament (see Mosiah 18:8–10; D&C 20:77, 79).

respected landowner in Palmyra, New York, USA, in 1827. He risked his reputation by supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith and became a scribe during part of the Book of Mormon translation. After losing 116 pages of the manuscript, he was described in a revelation as a “wicked man” who had “boasted in his own wisdom” (D&C 3:12–13). However, he humbled himself and repented. He pledged his farm to cover the publication costs of the Book of Mormon and was allowed to be one of the Three Witnesses to see the golden plates.

Nevertheless, he later gave in to pride and was excommunicated. Five years later he once again humbled himself



LOOKING OUTSIDE: HOW CAN WE HUMBLY SERVE OTHERS?

- Donate our time and resources to help others (see Deuteronomy 15:11; Malachi 3:8–10; Mosiah 4:26).
- Accept Church callings willingly (see Mosiah 2:16–17).
- Refrain from boasting (see Matthew 23:12; Alma 38:11).
- Share our testimonies (see Mosiah 28:1–3).
- Serve a mission, if we can (see Alma 4:19; 31:5; D&C 112:28).
- Obtain or keep a current temple recommend, and attend the temple often (see Isaiah 2:2–3; D&C 124:39).

and was rebaptized. Eventually he traveled to Utah to join the Saints there. He never denied his testimony of the Book of Mormon, and he spent the rest of his life sharing it.⁸

The Greatest Example of Humility

Ultimately, our perfect example of humility is Jesus Christ. He was born in a shelter for animals, where his bed was a manger. The first people to visit Him were poor shepherds. (See Luke 2:7–20.) After Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000, the people wanted Him to become their king. Concerning this episode, Elder Athos M. Amorim of the Seventy taught: “Such popularity and power would have severely tempted or corrupted most people. But Jesus ignored the intoxicating influence of the praise of the world, departing into a mountain to be alone (see John 6:15).”⁹

On another occasion, the Savior knelt humbly before His disciples and washed their feet (see John 13:2–5). He also rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey, a symbol of both royalty and humility known to the people (see John 12:12–18; Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus spent His life in the service of others, without regard for personal fame or fortune. He taught the people this great truth: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:27).

Under the heavy weight of the sin and pain of the world in Gethsemane, our Savior submitted Himself to His Father’s will: “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). His final mortal act was the greatest example of humility ever witnessed, as He allowed Himself to be hung upon the cross. His example sets the standard of humility for all of us to follow. Through Him we can overcome pride, repent, and learn to submit our will to the Father’s. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. “Humility,” Gospel Topics, [topics.lds.org](https://www.lds.org/topics).
2. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 24.
3. See “Humility,” Gospel Topics, [topics.lds.org](https://www.lds.org/topics).
4. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1960), 109.
5. Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 4.
6. See Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” 5.
7. Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” 4.
8. See Larry E. Morris, “The Life of Martin Harris: Patterns of Humility and Repentance,” *Ensign*, July 2012, 56–61.
9. Athos M. Amorim, “Words of Jesus: Humility,” *Ensign*, March 2003, 50.