

## THE BEST WAY UP IS DOWN

### JAMES 4 v 6b & 10

**As the scripture says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

Some time ago I came across some cartoons depicting humility. One shows a man in his pyjamas kneeling by his bedside praying; “Lord, help me to be humble, and I want that by 10.00am on Monday”. Another cartoon shows a man sitting at his desk busy at work. He says to a colleague; “I’ve always managed to retain my humility, I’m proud to say”. I once heard of a man who wrote a book entitled ‘Humility, And How I Attained It’. If a person claims to be humble the implication is that he or she is anything but humble. Many people have a false or distorted idea of what humility is. Some people think that humility consists of merely belittling themselves. If they are praised for something they have done, they downplay their action no matter how great or heroic the action was. Humility is the quality of being modest and respectful. It is widely seen as a virtue in many religious traditions.

James takes up the theme of humility; 4 v 6b & 10. God is against proud people, but he comes to those who are humble and contrite. St Augustine, one of the great leaders & theologians of the early Christian Church, had a famous saying; **“For those who would learn God’s ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second, and humility is the third”.**

**Firstly, note the principle that is stressed;** v 10a. With an economy of words James gets straight to the point. He says; “Humble yourselves”. John Blanchard comments; **“I wonder whether there are two words in all the New Testament epistles we need more than these. Certainly if they were obeyed they would revolutionize our homes, our churches, our Christian service, indeed the whole of our lives”**. Many years ago, there was a famous correspondence in the London Times newspaper under the subject ‘What is wrong with the world today?’ The best letter of all was the shortest and read; ‘Dear Sir, I am, Yours faithfully, G K Chesterton’. This simple declaration takes us to the heart of a man’s problem and a woman’s problem. It is himself or herself. What is the cause of so many problems within families, churches, committees, boards, church leadership groups and organisations? If individuals were honest, they would answer the question with two words; ‘I am’. Isn’t it true that many of us want the best positions, to monopolise conversations, to always be top dog, to be recognized and praised by others. Christian leaders are not exempt from this. I have heard preachers give sermon illustrations in which they draw attention to themselves. They always come out best and are always right.

The Greek word James uses is ‘tapeinothete’ translated ‘Humble yourselves’ is in the passive voice which means that its literal translation is, ‘Be humbled’. Grammatically the point is that the power to bring about this humbling comes from outside of ourselves. It comes from God. We cannot boast about our humility because it is a gift from God. The apostle John wrote about Diotrophes in 3 John v 9 ‘who

loves to be first'. His main concern was to be in the forefront, to be noticed. He had an insatiable desire for appreciation. Does this describe any of us?

**Secondly, note the promise that is stated;** v 10b. Martin Luther said; "**It is God's nature to make something out of nothing, that is why he cannot make anything out of him who is not yet nothing**". The reason why some of us are ineffective in our Christian service is because we are trying to offer it in our own strength and for the purpose of our own glory. We feel we have to justify ourselves or prove that we are superior to others in the things we do, and that may include what we do in the life of the church. We try to lift ourselves up. To engage in this kind of behaviour is foolish because only God can lift us up. Jesus ended the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector by saying; Luke 18 v 14b "*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*". The Greek word 'hupsei' translated 'lift you up' means to raise to a position of dignity. The old bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote; "**The highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth**". Paul writes in Philippians 2 v 3 "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves*". We can't manufacture humility. I can't attend a course on humility and at the end of it receive a certificate which states; 'This is to certify that David Campbell is a humble man'. What I must do is submit to God and ask for the grace of humility. Sometimes God has to bring us very low in order to lift us up. Someone said; "**The best way up is down**". It may seem a contradiction, but it's true.