

“The Secret Power of Humility”

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My dear brothers and sisters of BYU-Pathway Worldwide, I am thrilled with the opportunity to speak with you about the secret power of humility.

You may not have ever thought about it, but humility is the great alpha and omega virtue. President David O. McKay shared this teaching from Confucius: “Humility is the solid foundation of all virtues.”¹ We also learn from Elder Bruce R. McConkie that “all progress in spiritual things is conditioned upon the prior attainment of *humility*.”² It is interesting that what the world often considers to be of little value, God considers to be essential. We can always learn something from others; everyone has something to contribute. The quality of humility allows us to learn, which leads to improvement.

So, what is humility? It is a willingness to be taught. When we are humble, it is a recognition that we don’t know it all, as obvious as that perspective should be. It includes a righteous confidence, knowing that you can succeed with the Lord’s help. I have observed the example of many Church leaders who never accept personal praise for their work; rather, they always acknowledge that they are blessed of the Lord as they strive to serve. President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Humility is not pretentious, presumptuous, nor proud. It is not weak, vacillating, nor servile. ... Humility is repentant and seeks not to justify its follies. It is forgiving others in the realization that there may be errors of the same kind or worse chalked up against itself.”³

Pride is the opposite of humility. A humble person does not think he or she is the smartest person in the room — unless they are alone — or that you are more important than other people. Humility is understanding that your righteousness has not earned you some great reward.

President George Q. Cannon, who was first counselor to four presidents of the Church starting with President Brigham Young, taught this great truth: “The greater the blessings that we receive, the greater is our danger and the greater should be our humility. The more favor we receive from heaven, the more we should be humble before the Lord and before our brethren; not be lifted up, not be filled with pride, not imagining that because the Lord has blessed us in some peculiar way, we are especial favorites of heaven.”⁴

President Ezra Taft Benson described pride as “the universal sin, the great vice.”⁵ The theologian C. S. Lewis explained that “pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next [person]. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone.”⁶

¹ David O. McKay, *Ancient Apostles* (1918), 118

² Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (1966), 370

³ Spencer W. Kimball, “[Humility](#)” (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 16, 1963), [speeches.byu.edu](#)

⁴ Arthur Winter, “[Discourses](#),” *Deseret Weekly*, Mar. 23, 1889, Vol. 38, No. 13, 385; as quoted in *Put On Thy Strength, O Zion* (1982/1986), 185

⁵ Ezra Taft Benson, “[Beware of Pride](#),” *Ensign*, May 1989, 6

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1960), 95

Now, let's explore the characteristics of humility. One who is humble is patient, kind, and considerate. When we are humble, we do not consider that we are possessors or overseers in control of anything or anyone; rather, we are stewards with the responsibility to care for, improve, and nurture that which falls within our sphere of influence. Because you understand that you don't know all the facts, circumstances, and influences surrounding another person or situation, you aren't judgmental or critical. Unless you are serving as a bishop or stake president, or their counselor, you have not been called to be a judge.⁷ Therefore, you can relax, because being a judge is not your job. When we are humble, we can disagree without being disagreeable, and we can still adhere to our principles in spite of how others act.

Those who are humble can admit they are wrong. Elder Marlin K. Jensen shared this experience: "Once my father, in the heat and frustration of a humid July afternoon, overreacted to my youthful farming blunders and administered punishment which I felt was in excess of the crime. Later he approached me with an apology and a much-appreciated expression of confidence in my abilities. That humble expression has remained in my memory for more than 40 years."⁸

Humility is powerful and strong rather than weak and fearful. Think of the Savior as He cleansed the temple of money changers or withstood the attacks of His accusers, yet He was gentle with children and those who were repentant. Jesus Christ invites us to become as He is when He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."⁹

Humility encourages peace and reduces contention. Do you remember the story President Russell M. Nelson shared about the two little sisters with unresolvable heart problems who died after he performed their surgeries? Their parents were so distraught that they harbored resentment toward the Church as well as him. Despite President Nelson's attempts to reconcile, they refused to be comforted. One night, years later, President Nelson felt the spiritual presence of those little girls. They came with an urgent appeal to help them be sealed to their parents. By now the mother had passed away. President Nelson made another attempt to meet with the father and a brother. This time, they agreed, and as they met, President Nelson, in all humility, knelt before them and asked for their forgiveness — promising that if they prepared themselves, they could be sealed to their departed and dearly loved family members and be together forever. The father and brother humbly accepted President Nelson's offer and were later sealed in the temple to their loved ones, bringing peace and joy in their newfound promise of eternal togetherness.¹⁰

Less than a year ago, President Nelson reiterated his call for each of us to exercise humility in order to find peace. He said, "We are followers of the Prince of Peace. Now more than ever, we need the peace only He can bring. How can we expect peace to exist in the world when we are not *individually* seeking peace and harmony? ... I plead with you to do all you can to end *personal* conflicts that are currently raging in your hearts and in your lives. ... Exercise the humility, courage, and strength required both to forgive and to seek forgiveness. The Savior has promised that 'if [we] forgive men their trespasses, [our] heavenly Father will also forgive [us].'"¹¹

The Lord will have a humble people. You can be humble on your own or you can be humbled by your circumstances. From the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma's teachings to the poor class of Zoramites was instructive: "And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word? Yea, he that truly

⁷ See also [Doctrine and Covenants 107:72](#)

⁸ Marlin K. Jensen, "[To Walk Humbly with Thy God](#)," *Ensign*, May 2001, 11

⁹ [Matthew 11:29](#)

¹⁰ Russell M. Nelson, "[The Price of Priesthood Power](#)," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 66–67

¹¹ Russell M. Nelson, "[The Power of Spiritual Momentum](#)," *Liahona*, May 2022, 97, 100

humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.”¹²

I will confess to having my own experience of being humbled by external circumstances. Not long after I completed graduate school and obtained my first job, we needed another car so I could get to work. My father had an old car that he was gracious enough to give us. Soon after we started driving it, we began to call it the “Humility-mobile.” Let me describe this car to you. The rear springs had collapsed so that the front end was about six inches higher than the back. It was mostly covered in rust, which caused several problems that made driving difficult, if not dangerous. The driver’s door had literally rusted off its hinges. If I opened that door, it simply fell on the ground. So in order to get into the driver’s seat, I had to open the passenger door and slide across the seat in order to get behind the wheel. The wheel wells were also rusted out, and you could see the road through the holes in the body of the car. On rainy days, water splashed in from puddles on the street, and on dry days on gravel roads, dust coming through the holes made it hard to breathe inside the car. Luckily, taping some pieces of cardboard over the holes fixed this additional “air conditioning.”

Also, the crank for the window in the driver’s door was broken. The only way to get that window up and down was to lift it by hand, which was a difficult and awkward as a maneuver when you wanted to talk with someone outside the car. Last of all (well, kind of last of all), the heater did not work. During the very cold winters of Wisconsin in the United States, I dressed up like an Eskimo and kept a small scraper handy to remove condensation from the inside of the windshield that built up from my breathing.

By now you get the picture that this was not a cool car. In fact, it was not even an okay car. Every time I drove this vehicle, I was reminded that I was too poor to afford a better vehicle. Many times, I was embarrassed to have others see me in the Humility-mobile. Eventually, I learned to laugh about these matters as I experienced these daily opportunities to develop humility. I was truly grateful that the car made it possible for me to go to work and fulfill my church callings. In a few years, we were able to afford a better used car, which had parts that all worked. However, I was grateful then and I am grateful today for my experience with the Humility-mobile.

How do we become humble? President Henry B. Eyring once gave counsel to two sister missionaries in Brazil who had asked him how they could become more humble. Upon reflection, he later said, “I would have given them just this one bit of counsel ... about what to do. I would have said just this, ‘Always remember Him.’”¹³ As we remember the Savior and all that He has done for us, we become more grateful and humble.

Second, we must trust God to guide us. He can surely make more out of us than we can of ourselves. The prophet Ether taught, “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.”¹⁴ When we exercise faith during a trial, we are learning to be humble. As we are patient with the Lord and His timetable, we demonstrate our trust in God. During a time of trial, we can ask ourselves, “What can I learn from this experience?”

Another way to increase humility is by serving others. Some years ago, our elders quorum was asked to help move a family from one apartment to another in a student housing complex. When we arrived at the apartment, little to nothing was prepared. We filled and carried as many boxes as we could find, and the rest of the household goods were put loosely in laundry baskets or carried in our arms. To get to the new apartment, we had to go down three flights of stairs, walk across the complex, and then up three more flights of stairs. After a couple of hours, most of

¹² [Alma 32:14–15](#)

¹³ Henry B. Eyring, “[Always Remember Him](#),” *Ensign*, May 1995, 25

¹⁴ [Ether 12:27](#)

us got so tired and even a little irritated that we finally gave up. Only one brother continued for another hour and a half until the job was complete. Up and down, up and down, again and again and again, he displayed true humility through his quiet, enduring service. Years later, this good brother was called as a stake president.

Today I have quoted several prophets, both ancient and those of the Restoration, on the topic of humility. Their words have increased my understanding and strengthened my resolve to choose to be humble. Our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, provided encouragement to hearken to the words of the prophets as he addressed young adults in a worldwide broadcast: “You may not always understand every declaration of a living prophet. But when you know a prophet is a prophet, you can approach the Lord in humility and faith and ask for your own witness about whatever His prophet has proclaimed.”¹⁵ I bear witness of this truth and that our prophet has been chosen by God to be His spokesman on the earth at this time.

Being humble is one of the greatest strengths a person can possess. Humility helps us endure both hardship and success. It helps build righteous confidence in all aspects of our lives. It encourages us to keep the commandments. This not-so-secret power of humility has blessed my life as I have learned to trust God’s guidance and accept the experiences that bring humility. As you struggle with your challenges, true humility will lead you to conclude, “Thy will be done.”¹⁶ As you choose to be humble, I promise you will be blessed with more peace and progress than you experience now and on into the eternities. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “[Becoming True Millennials](#)” (worldwide devotional for young adults, Jan. 10, 2016), broadcasts.churchofjesuschrist.org

¹⁶ [Matthew 6:10](#)