

WALKING WITH INTEGRITY IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY
STUDY NINE

The Integrity of True Humility

John 1:6–8, 19–27; 3:25–30

Nothing is more Christian than walking humbly with our God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS hung a garland around the neck of John the Baptizer that He gave no one else:

“I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist.”

(Matthew 11:11)

That’s quite a character reference coming from Jesus! What made John the greatest human? Certainly, his simple devotion, deep conviction, godly vision, steel-hearted courage, and intense self-discipline. But at John’s core was a quality that outshone them all . . . humility.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll pinpoint four characteristics of humility that John modeled as we learn from the greatest how to walk humbly with our God.

**PREPARE YOUR HEART**

What does it mean to be a humble husband or wife? A humble student or teacher, employee or CEO, nurse or doctor, parishioner or pastor? Ask the Lord to help you learn true humility in *your* God-given roles as you open His Word and study John’s example.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Our first passage about John the Baptizer comes on the heels of a brief but profound prologue about Jesus. While the deity of Jesus commands center stage in the opening of the gospel of John, in John 1:6, the spotlight suddenly swings to the man, John the Baptizer. In so doing, the gospel writer draws a dramatic distinction between Jesus who “was God” (John 1:1) and John, “a man” sent by God (1:6).

Let’s take a closer look at this remarkable man sent by God—his mission, his role, his acclaim, and his secret for staying humble.



Observation: John’s Mission, Role, Acclaim, and Credo

Observation is the first of four steps in *Searching the Scriptures*. For an overview of these steps, download this printable [chart](#) that you can use as a guide in your Bible study.

Observe *John 1:6–8*, noting the contrasts between John the Baptizer and Jesus. How did the gospel writer describe who John was and who he was not?

What was John’s central mission?



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John had a calling. He didn't just do what he felt like doing; he was sent by God. He had one purpose—to be the witness, to proclaim the truth regarding the one who was to come right after him. He was the forerunner. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

According to *John 1:19–23*, what specific roles did John *not* fill? What role did he fill?

As spokesperson for Christ, John did more than speak. He baptized people in the Jordan River as a sign of their repentance. “What right do you have to baptize?” questioned the Pharisees (*John 1:25*). What characteristics of John’s humility do you see in his response to them in *1:26–29*?

As an admired leader and authority figure, what temptations do you think John may have battled?



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John's ministry grew and so did his fame. Soon, the itinerant wilderness preacher had his own congregation. John's disciples worried that Jesus' growing ministry would overshadow John's. When they asked him about it, how did John respond, according to [John 3:25–29](#), and what does his response reveal about his character?

It takes humility to avoid the pitfalls of competition and comparison which lead to the sins of envy and jealousy. Without humility, we view others as rivals, not brothers and sisters on the same level at the foot of the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The downpour of public adulation could have waterlogged John's humble spirit with pride. What perspective about himself and Jesus kept his pride in check, according to [John 3:30](#)? How do you see this statement forming a basic rule of life for John?

*Our greatest delight is to enthrone Christ while dethroning ourselves.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Interpretation: Principles of Humility from John's Example

In the interpretation phase, we explore the meaning of John's example and formulate principles based on the truths we discover. Review the key verse from each section above and write a principle that begins with the phrase, "A truly humble person should . . ."



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The Man and His Mission—John 1:6–8

Key verses: “God sent a man, John the Baptist. . . . John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light” (John 1:6, 8).

Principle: *A truly humble person should . . .*

The Role and Its Temptations—John 1:19–27

Key verses: “I am not the Messiah. . . . I am a voice shouting in the wilderness. . . . I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal” (John 1:20, 23, 27).

Principle: *A truly humble person should . . .*



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The Public and Its Applause—John 3:25–29

Key verse: “I am filled with joy at [Jesus’] success” (John 3:29).

Principle: *A truly humble person should . . .*

The Basis of John’s Humility—John 3:30

Key verse: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30 NASB).

Principle: *A truly humble person should . . .*

We look for ways to give him center stage, and then slip off behind the curtain and applaud with everyone else, as Jesus gets all the credit. We consistently reject praise for ourselves as we deliberately redirect it to our Lord and Savior. That’s the way we live our lives.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Fruit of Our Devotion to Christ

Since the church’s inception, the sinful weeds of envy and jealousy have invaded relationships between believers. Paul noticed some fellow church leaders “preaching out of jealousy and rivalry” (Philippians 1:15) and motivated by “selfish ambition” (1:17).



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How did Paul avoid the competition-and-comparison trap? He focused on the big picture, *proclaiming Christ*, not petty rivalry. “The message about Christ is being preached . . . so I rejoice,” Paul declared (Philippians 1:18), echoing John’s sentiment, “I am filled with joy at [Jesus’] success” (John 3:29).

Paul’s humble response had root in a rule of life that centered around devotion to Christ. What was Paul’s credo, according to *Philippians 1:21*?

How did Paul’s devotion help him stay humble?

True humility flourishes in our *devotion to Christ* and crowds out the weeds of envy and jealousy. Both Paul and John’s devotion to Christ poured out of their hearts as everyday humble actions—just as our devotion to Christ can do the same for us.

“He must increase, I must decrease.” That’s not a motto we hang on the wall; we live it.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Humbly Living Out Our Devotion to Christ

Let’s tie up our study with four characteristics of John’s true humility that we can emulate.



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Accept your God-given role, including your limitations. You should be clear-minded about God’s purpose. Knowing what you’re to do and not do in life helps you be realistic and humble about your limitations.

Resist subtle temptations to be someone you’re not. John rested in his God-given role on this earth—the sidekick, the supporting actor, the assistant, the follower. Likewise, God made you to be you and not another. Rest in Him. You have a unique role to fulfill on this earth. Trying to fulfill another’s role simply won’t work . . . for you or anyone else.

See God’s hand in another person’s success and rejoice over it. Like the maid of honor or best man at a wedding, rejoice over the ones at the center. You avoid envy and jealousy when you humbly delight in the well-being of others.

Fully commit to exalting Christ and wholly submit yourself to Him. The motto, “Jesus must increase, I must decrease” is the cardinal secret, the only foundation on which you can build a humble life.

Which of these characteristics resonate with you today? How? Which one do you truly need to embrace the most?

Commentator Arthur W. Pink said, “The more I am occupied with Christ, the less shall I be occupied with myself. Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a *by-product*.”¹ How can you occupy yourself with Christ today? What thanks can you give Christ for an undeserved blessing? What praise can you offer for one of His amazing attributes?



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Rather than talking about yourself, your problems, or your circumstances, begin your trek toward humility by sharing these praises with someone. Others will notice Christ increasing and not even realize that you are decreasing at the same time.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, broaden my vision of the greatness of Christ. Draw me nearer to Him so that He alone fills my view and I can see nothing else but His glory, His beauty, His grace. Then, help me to consider every event in my life as tribute to Him and an opportunity for me to give Him praise. In His name I pray, amen.

Endnote

1. Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 149, as quoted in Insight for Living, *John the Baptizer* (Anaheim, CA: Insight for Living, 1991), 27.

