

# **FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH**

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*Series God Gives Grace to the Humble*

*SERMON: The GOAT of Humbleness?*

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## **Introduction**

Somebody once said, **“Most people can bear adversity, but if you wish to know what a person really is, give them power.”**

In other words, who are you when you have power and can exert control over others? We’ve witnessed people being humbled when they have gone through tough circumstances. But what about when we are in control and in power? Who are they then? I think this statement has a lot of bearing on what we are talking about today.

Today we get into the first of our Bible Character Studies in which we want to explore humility in their lives. Our theme for the year is, **Humility** taken from the verse: **God Opposes the Proud, but Gives Grace to the Humble.** (1 Peter 5:5 and several other references) We want to be a humble people and a humble church. Our first Character study is on Moses. We will consider: Who is Moses? How does he exhibit humility as a powerful leader? And what does he teach us about humility in our lives? So, 1<sup>st</sup>:

## **I. Who is Moses?**

When I say the name “Moses,” what or who, besides Charleton Heston comes to your mind? We might ask, “Is he the GOAT – greatest of all time?” Can you have a ‘greatest of all time’ in humility?

Moses may be one of the most famous names for many people familiar with the bible. But it is worth a quick review of some of his story.

His story begins in **Exodus 2**. These events take place about 1450 years before the time of Jesus. His story begins with his people, the Israelites, in slavery. Pharaoh, King of Egypt (**Map of Egypt** with Nile River labeled) has ordered all the Israelite baby boys to be thrown into the Nile River

at birth, because the Israelite population was becoming too numerous and these foreigners were seen as a threat to national security.

One mother saw that her baby boy was special and so she made a waterproof basket, placed the baby in the basket and floated the basket on the Nile. As it turned out, Pharaoh's daughter saw the basket and rescued the baby from the river. She proceeded to raise the boy as her own, as an Egyptian, in Pharaoh's household. Somewhere along the way, the boy, now named Moses, by his adopted mother, learned that he was an Israelite.

One day Moses went out to visit his people. He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite, so he took matters into his own hands and killed the Egyptian. Pharaoh found out about the incident and sought to kill Moses. So, he escaped to the wilderness, where he found a wife, got married and made a living herding sheep.

Years later, as he was out herding sheep, God met him in a burning bush and commissioned him to go and lead the Israelites out of slavery, to freedom.

Moses came up with one excuse after another about why his leading the people was not a good idea. In the first place, he felt woefully inadequate for the task. But God would have none of it, reminding Moses that it was God, after all, who gave people their various gifts and abilities.

So, Moses set out to lead the people to freedom.

He first had to convince the leaders of Israel that God had sent him for this task.

Then he had to confront and convince Pharaoh to let the people go. That was no easy task.

Long story short, Moses led the people to glorious freedom, under the cover of darkness, and he helped them cross a body of water called the Red Sea.

(As a boy, one of my favorite songs was, "How did Moses Cross the Red Sea?" "Did he fly, did he drive, did he jump, no, no, no.")

God blew with his wind puff, puff, puff, and God made a way and Moses walked across."

Moses led the people to the foot of Mount Sinai in the desert. While the people waited at the

bottom, Moses, went up the mountain to meet with God and receive the 10 Commandments and the other laws for life that God would have the people learn and practice.

(I believe it is no coincidence that Jesus ‘went up on a mountain’ to give his Sermon on the Mount, in which he revealed the deeper meaning of Moses’ laws, and the teachings we hold so dear today as we learn to follow Jesus.)

Back to Moses’ Story. God had already told Moses, that Moses would be God’s mouthpiece. Whenever Moses spoke, it was as if God was speaking directly to the people – talk about a man with power and influence.

The trip across the desert was no cakewalk. A journey that should have taken a few weeks lasted 40 years. And at the end of it, Moses was now 120 years old and yet was just as strong as when he started out. Talk about longevity in a career.

The journey had a few glorious moments, like when God’s presence filled the tabernacle, but as you read the story, it seems it was mostly filled with griping, grumbling, complaining, threats of mutiny against Moses, disobedience, quarrelling, infighting. You name it. And yet Moses endured it all.

Moses was an amazing leader and a patient teacher. But on several occasions, he also blasted the people for their rebellion, and then he would intercede for them when God wanted to wipe them off the face of the earth and start over.

So, where does Moses stand in the GOAT – ‘Greatest prophet of all time’, debate? He was a prophet, a teacher, a leader. He was a world religion organizer. He authored some of the most important books in the Old Testament. He is usually considered the greatest prophet of Judaism. At his death he was pronounced ‘the greatest prophet ever.’

Not only that, later on, he along with Elijah, met with Jesus on top of another mountain – as recorded by the Gospel writers. And Jesus often made references to Moses and his teachings.

Is Moses the greatest of all time? He has to be in that discussion. Particularly the way our world typically defines greatness. So why would we bring up the name of Moses to begin a series on

humility and being humble?

We bring it up precisely because **greatness** and **humility** in the kingdom of Jesus are **necessarily inseparable**. They are always linked together. You cannot have one without the other.

But, there is an even shorter and more plainly expressed answer, given to us in the Book of Numbers in the bible. 4<sup>th</sup> book of the bible. The book mostly consists of numbers. With a few stories thrown in to keep our attention when we are trying to read the whole way through our bibles. About 1/3 of the way through this book, chapter 12, we stumble across a verse that seems out of place. So out of place, that many English versions put it in parentheses. It is our text for this morning. But before I get there, let me set some context as we consider:

## **I. The Humility of Moses**

The context offers some insight that helps us understand why Moses would be considered a humble man. The context of our verse is one of the most revealing moments in Moses' life. To understand the verse, we must consider the context. Let me set the context.

In Numbers chapter 11, and you can turn there, Moses has just been challenged, by the Israelites, to provide them with meat. Up to this point on their journey, all they have had to eat is mana. And they are sick of it. Why? Well, think of a food you really like. Then try to imagine, having to eat it every day, and there are no other options. Even your favorite food could become disgusting.

I remember one time as a boy, at boarding school, they made chocolate no-bake cookies – my favorite. I snuck into the kitchen and grabbed two fists full. I got about a dozen cookies and took them outside and started eating them. That first fistful was really good. By the time I finished the last one, I wasn't feeling so good. In fact, I threw up. Lost my desire for no-bake cookies for a while. (Now I love them again.) but if you can imagine how I was feeling that day at boarding school, I think that is how the Israelites were feeling about mana. So, beginning in Numbers Chapter 11:

**11:1 The people began to complain about their hardship, and the Lord heard everything they said. Then the Lord's anger blazed against them, and he sent a fire to rage among them, and he destroyed some of the people in the outskirts of the camp. <sup>2</sup> Then the people screamed**

to Moses for help, and when he prayed to the Lord, the fire stopped. <sup>4</sup> Then the foreign rabble who were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt. And the people of Israel also began to complain. “Oh, for some meat!” they exclaimed. <sup>5</sup> “We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted. <sup>6</sup> But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!”

Moses is totally frustrated with the people. But it is not their desire for meat that distresses Moses, so much as their **false nostalgia**. They remembered the different food they had to eat in Egypt, but they did not recall how they had been mistreated as slaves. That’s what we mean by false nostalgia.

It’s a common problem people have when things aren’t going well, in the present moment. We may call it longing for, “the good ole days,” – which often don’t really exist.

Moses was also annoyed with their **ingratitude**, and their continued failure to recognize God’s goodness to them. That’s really what bothered Moses. It bothered him so much He prays to die:

#### **Num. 11:10-15**

<sup>10</sup> Moses heard all the families standing in the doorways of their tents whining, and the Lord became extremely angry. Moses was also very aggravated. <sup>11</sup> And Moses said to the Lord, “Why are you treating me, your servant, so harshly? Have mercy on me! What did I do to deserve the burden of all these people? <sup>12</sup> Did I give birth to them? Did I bring them into the world? Why did you tell me to carry them in my arms like a mother carries a nursing baby? How can I carry them to the land you swore to give their ancestors? <sup>13</sup> Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people? They keep whining to me, saying, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ <sup>14</sup> I can’t carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy! <sup>15</sup> If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!”

Isn’t it surprising how Moses talks to God. Is it safe to talk to God that way? It almost sounds disrespectful doesn’t it. Even if a leader is having a bad day, is it okay to talk like this? Is this a sign of humility? But wait. We must look at the bigger story the author is setting up.

Well, chapter 11 continues with God providing help for Moses because God sees a man

overwhelmed by his leadership responsibilities. God has Moses select 70 people to help carry the load of leading the people. And God gives these people a special gift of God's Spirit, so they begin to prophesy.

And God also provides meat for the people, just as they had requested. He does it by having quail, fly into the camp and fly just 3 ft off the ground so people can catch them. So, the double crisis in Chapter 11 – Moses overwhelmed by his responsibilities, and the people demanding something else to eat – those two crises pass. Now Moses can relax and enjoy the journey for a bit. Not so fast.

The Author is setting up the story for us. A new challenge arises and here is where it gets really interesting.

**12:2 Miriam and Aaron** (Moses' siblings) **criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman.** <sup>2</sup> **They said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he spoken through us, too?"** .... (exaggerate the pause) **But the Lord heard them.**

We don't have time, or need, to discuss their complaint right now. But what makes this account so interesting is **not** what **is** said but **who** said it. This time the complaint against Moses is not by "the people," or the "the foreign rabble." This is Moses' own brother and sister, the sister who watched over him as a baby as he floated down the Nile in a reed basket, the brother who was his faithful companion in some of his most risky encounters with Pharaoh. To be criticized by the crowd, or by opponents, is one thing. To be turned on by those closest to you, your own family, is altogether different and unnerving.

So, what is Moses' response? What did Moses say? How did he defend himself and put Miriam and Aaron in their place? What did he say? Look (**highlight the dots**). Moses said nothing. The text is explicit (that Moses did not say anything) at this point. And it is for a reason.

Sometimes people don't respond in a situation because they simply don't know how to respond. Other times leaders may not respond because they don't care. But here the text wishes us to know that neither of these is the reason this time. Instead, Moses' calmness, or even temperedness, his self-control comes from deep within his character: Why didn't Moses respond?

### Vs 3

**Moses was very humble – more humble than any other person on earth.**

There you have it. Mic drop moment. When it comes to humility and being humble, Moses is the greatest of all time.

But this sentence is strange, both in what it expresses, and its place in the narrative. Moses humble? The man who spoke words of fire, who was undaunted in the presence of Pharaoh, who led an entire nation out of slavery, who was unafraid to argue with God himself, the man who smashed the stone tablets after seeing the golden calf. Was this a humble man?

And why is the sentence placed here, in the story of Miriam and Aaron? It seems to interrupt the flow. (That's why some translators put it in parentheses. As if it is an aside comment) "Oh, by the way. Moses was also humble." It is not an aside comment. The author has done this on purpose.

You see, verse 2 has told us that God heard their remarks. And do you remember what God did previously when he heard people complaining? It was in Chapter 11. Remember? God sent a blazing fire and began to destroy the people, until Moses interceded on their behalf and turned God's anger away.

Here, we are supposed to notice, that Moses does not react. What it is about Moses that would prompt the author to tell the story this way?

**[Because], the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth.**

1<sup>st</sup> we really must consider the question, if Moses is the author of Numbers, and tradition says he was, how can Moses say about himself, that he was the most humble person on earth. Isn't it bragging to say that? That is a legitimate question. So again, many English translations put the phrase in parentheses and scholars suggest this sentence is an addition by a later editor. Perhaps.

But what we are really supposed to notice is: In the face of a personal attack, by those closest to him, Moses did not reply. – Because he was the most humble man on the face of the earth.

**But** God had heard their complaint, and it is presumed Moses knew, that God will handle the situation and verse 4 tells us that God replied.

**So immediately the Lord called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam and said, “Go out to the Tabernacle, all three of you!” So the three of them went to the Tabernacle. “Aaron and Miriam!” [God] called, and they stepped forward. 6 And the Lord said to them, “Now listen to what I say:**

**“If there were prophets among you,  
I, the Lord, would reveal myself in visions.**

**I would speak to them in dreams.**

**<sup>7</sup> But not with my servant Moses.**

**Of all my house, he is the one I trust.**

**<sup>8</sup> I speak to him face to face, (Exodus: as a friend speaks with a friend.)  
clearly, and not in riddles!**

**He sees the Lord as he is. (Moses has connections, he’s powerful. He can do stuff.)**

**So why were you not afraid  
to criticize my servant Moses?”**

**<sup>9</sup> The Lord was very angry with them, and he departed. <sup>10</sup> As the cloud moved from above the Tabernacle, there stood Miriam, her skin as white as snow from leprosy. When Aaron saw what had happened to her, <sup>11</sup> he cried out to Moses, “Oh, my master! Please don’t punish us for this sin we have so foolishly committed. <sup>12</sup> Don’t let her be like a stillborn baby, already decayed at birth.”**

**<sup>13</sup> So Moses (with all the power in the world to retaliate against his opponents) cried out to the Lord, “O God, I beg you, please heal her!”**

Again, when God was angry, Moses interceded on Miriam’s behalf. Who is Moses, when he has all the power? He is one who interceded rather than retaliates.

Why is Moses so calm in the face of this seeming betrayal by those closest to him, when in the



previous chapter he had been so agitated by the people's request for meat? Why was he able to face this challenge with such calmness?

These questions answer one another. See, the people's challenge was directed against God – or circumstances – not against Moses. That is why he cared. Miriam and Aaron's challenge was directed against him. It was personal.

That is why he was serene. Moses did not care about himself. He cared about God and God's cause, the mission of leading this ragtag, complaining, rebellious group of people to freedom. But he did not care about his own status or well-being. Because he was humble – even though he was powerful.

What a beautiful story about Moses that teaches us what humility really is.

We have said it before, Humility is not – having a low estimate of oneself. That is false or counterfeit humility. True humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less – and thinking of others more.

The Hebrew word used to describe Moses in the passage is, **anav** – meaning **one who never thinks about himself or herself because he/she has more important things to think about.**

One person put it this way, about another leader: “He took God so seriously that he didn't need to take himself seriously at all.” That is biblical humility in the pattern of Moses.

So to summarize Moses expressions of humility:

**Moses cared about God, and God's reputation in the minds of others**, particularly those who may not know God.

**And Moses cared about others more than he cared about himself and his reputation.**

**Moses interceded for others with God** – when he could have retaliated he stepped in to rescue instead, even those who opposed him.

**Moses did not jealously guard his authority.**

We did not read the section in Numbers 11 but I mentioned it. When God told Moses to appoint other leaders to help, and then God gave them the ability to prophesy, and they did.

Joshua, Moses' assistant, wanted Moses to stop them, appearing to think their gift would undermine Moses' gift and authority as prophet, his prestige.

### **Numbers 11:28-29**

**Joshua, who had been Moses' assistant since his youth, protested, "Moses, make them stop!" [prophesying]**

**<sup>29</sup> But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them all!"**

Moses rejoices in their gifting. He is not threatened by it, because he did not consider his gift to be about him, but about God and God's mission in the world. He saw himself simply as one of God's servants along with others.

(This is similar to how the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1 rejoices when others preach the gospel even though they do it for wrong motives and to hurt Paul. Paul isn't jealous of them or try to stop them. Paul cares more about the cause of the Gospel than he does about himself.) This is the humility of Moses.

How can we apply these lessons in our own lives?

### **III. Humility in Leadership**

Perhaps the most important lessons we learn from Moses and how his humility dictated his life, are in the area of **leadership**. Some of us are in recognized positions of leadership. You may be a boss, a supervisor. A business owner. A board member of some organization.

Others of us are leaders in a less formal capacity. You may be the leader in your home, or in a club of volunteers, or your group of friends. Or maybe you are the leader on a team that you play on. I believe the characteristic of **humility in leadership** that we learn from Moses should be evident in every situation.

If you recall from our sermon on the first Sunday of the year, when we introduced the theme of humility – “God Gives Grace to the Humble,” we said how this theme will often find us going against the current of our culture. This will never be more true than when we apply it to leadership. Including leading in a church setting.

Our culture tells us that humility, letting others go first and have their way will never work in leadership. Our culture seems to think that to be a leader means I must take charge and make others follow me or get out of my way. Moses shows us a different way of leading. He shows us a humble way of leading. So let’s consider a few points of application.

Humility in leadership begins with:

1<sup>st</sup>

**1. A genuine sense of personal inadequacy for the task.** We see this in Moses and some other great prophets – like Isaiah and Jeremiah. We see it in Paul. As you read their stories, they all sense that they are not up to the task God has given them.

I recall the story of a young, recently educated pastor. He was assigned to preach. On one occasion he felt like he had prepared a really catchy, entertaining, life transforming, powerful sermon. He was on fire. He practically jumped up into the pulpit, head held high, just waiting to give the congregation a piece of wisdom. His confidence showed in his demeanor as he got up to preach.

Well, the sermon was a flop. Nothing about it went well. And he concluded, head drooped, embarrassed, sat down, obviously humbled, and with his tail between his legs, so to speak.

After the service, a wise, elderly person gently counseled the young preacher: “If you had gone up to preach, the way you came down, you would have come down, the way you went up.”

**“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**

No one else can see what is in your heart, but you know if your leadership attitude is more one of, “They are lucky to have me on their team,” or “Lord, I’m not able to do this. Please give me wisdom.”

2<sup>nd</sup>

**2. Humility in leadership means not taking yourself or your plans and ideas too**

**seriously.**

What do I mean by that? When we take our agenda, our plans, our preferences too seriously, we are sure they are more important, better than others and must be carried out at all costs. When we approach a meeting or a conversation, with this attitude, we will have a hard time listening for the good and the advantages of someone else's ideas. We will have trouble accepting their wisdom. We are more likely to listen with an intent of refuting another's ideas.

So, this week, ask yourself, "How do I listen to alternative ideas and suggestions when I am in a meeting, or sitting around the family dinner table?" Do I demand my agenda, or try to implement the ideas of others instead – humility.

3<sup>rd</sup>

**3. A humble leader endures personal attacks and ridicule without a need to defend them self or retaliate.**

One author, commenting on the Moses story, said it this way, "*When the Israelites demonstrated a lack of gratitude for what Moses had done on their behalf, he said nothing. When the people complained about his leadership, he did not retaliate. When his own siblings jealously questioned his authority and God stepped in to punish, Moses interceded for them.*

*But when they spoke against God, Moses was zealous for defending God. Moses seemed to be without personal ego. People could run roughshod over him, but his demeanor changed when people began to criticize God."*

This reminds me of the accounts of Jesus. One time he was zealous for the integrity of his Father's house – the Temple - and "made a whip to drive out the money changers." This was not because of a lack of humility. It was precisely because of the humble position he had taken as a man before God. And because of his zeal and reverence for his Heavenly Father.

But on his way to the cross. "When the insults were hurled at him, and his executioners tried their best to humiliate him, he did not find it necessary to respond." Instead he left the situation in God's hands.

So:

What triggers an outspoken defensive response in you? A personal attack, or only when the attack is against God's character and God's mission?

4<sup>th</sup>

**4. Humility in leadership means having complete devotion to and reverence for God and God's mission, not mine.** (similar to 2<sup>nd</sup> point but stated a different way)

The result of such devotion is an uncompromising conviction, and constant concern for the good of others – even if it means pain, suffering and sacrificing for myself. After all, isn't this the very way of Jesus who, **“Though he was God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, took the form of a servant, even to the point of death on a cross.”**

Jesus was willing to endure the cross for our good. For our sakes. He knew God's mission on earth and he unswervingly followed God's plan.

In any area of leading, we have to make sure that what we are devoted to is what God wants, and is done in God's way. Not our own.

Humility isn't about pretending to be lower than we are. It's about realizing we are not as mighty as we think. When we understand who we are—gifted, loved, and made in the image of God, but also flawed, weak, and wholly dependent upon God—we will naturally show respect to, listen to others, and be eager to see those around us flourish.

If you want to be “great in humility” in the kingdom of Jesus, it will require you to always stoop and place yourself, your ambitions, your plans, underneath everyone else. And Trust God to use your good ideas and plans as he wants them used. – So counterintuitive in our culture, but it is the way of Jesus and his Kingdom.

**PRAY**