

Grace for the Humble

Pastor Mark Johnson on Subtle Pride, Dependence on God, the Audience of One, and Learning Humility

Pastor Mark Johnson
Friday, October 2, 2026

Program Summary

In this Friday edition of Mark & Friends, Pastor Mark Johnson continues to hover over James 4:6: 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Rather than looking only for obvious arrogance in other people, the room of friends turns the verse inward and asks where pride hides subtly in ordinary Christian life. Pride can appear in accomplishments, defensiveness, impatience, comparison, the need for recognition, self-sufficiency, and the temptation to take credit for gifts and success that ultimately come from God. Pastor Mark defines biblical humility not as self-loathing, quiet speech, or merely deferring to others, but as recognizing dependence on God, submitting to Him, and giving Him the honor He is due. Deuteronomy 8 becomes a major illustration: God led Israel through hunger, thirst, desert, and dependence so they would remember that provision came from Him and would not later say, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth.' The discussion closes by applying humility to difficult relationships: even when another person is rude or unkind, believers can set firm boundaries without surrendering the nature of Jesus.

Key Takeaways

- James 4:6 asks me to examine whether I am living from pride or humility, not merely to identify pride in someone else.
- Pride refuses dependence on God, resists submission to Him, and takes for self the honor that belongs to God.
- Accomplishment becomes pride when a God-given ability becomes evidence that I am better than someone else.
- Defensiveness can keep me from hearing a needed message simply because I dislike the tone or harshness in which it was delivered.
- Humility asks what I can learn and what I can control - my own response - even when another person could have spoken more wisely.
- Impatience can expose self-importance when I treat my schedule, plans, or priorities as more valuable than another person's time.
- Belittling someone because of age, race, knowledge, ability, or talent ignores the image of God and the gifts He has placed in that person.
- Even serving can become prideful when I begin craving recognition for how humble, sacrificial, or useful I have been.
- Living before an 'audience of One' frees me from needing applause if I know I have faithfully served God.
- Biblical humility is not self-loathing or a personality style; it is dependence on God, submission to God, and giving honor to God.
- Deuteronomy 8 shows that seasons of need can teach dependence and protect people from the pride that often accompanies success and ease.
- Success is dangerous when I forget that God gave the abilities, opportunities, strength, and provision behind what I accomplished.
- Humility allows me to remain Christlike in difficult relationships: I can be firm and set boundaries without becoming rude or retaliatory.

Scripture References

- James 4:6
- Matthew 5:3
- Jonah 3-4
- Deuteronomy 8:1-5
- Deuteronomy 8:15-18
- Matthew 7:3-5
- Philippians 2:3-8
- 1 Peter 5:5-6

- Proverbs 3:5-6
- James 4:10

Quote of the Day

“Biblical humility recognizes dependence on God, is subject to God, and attributes all honor to God.”

Broadcast Notes

Tim opens by reading James 4:6, and Mark notes that the Friday room-of-friends study will remain on this verse for this week and next. Pastor Mark connects James with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where the kingdom message begins not with a checklist but with the heart - people who recognize their spiritual poverty and need for God. He repeats a Bible-dictionary definition of pride: refusing dependence on God and subjection to Him while attributing to self the honor due to God. The group then deliberately turns from obvious pride in others to subtle pride in themselves. Jonah becomes an early example: he obeyed outwardly while still wanting God to act according to Jonah's own judgment. Participants identify pride in academic ability, money, physical appearance, music, defensiveness, impatience, and comparison. Pastor Mark gives a particularly practical example of hearing an angry or harsh message from a spouse: humility may require separating the poor delivery from a truth I still need to hear. Mark Burns returns to impatience as a recurring personal example - the assumption that his schedule or priority is more important than the person slowing him down. The conversation also exposes 'humble pride': serving sacrificially but becoming resentful when nobody recognizes it. Pastor Mark answers with the image of an 'audience of One' - faithful service ultimately seeks God's approval rather than applause. He then carefully distinguishes humility from body posture, quietness, self-loathing, or mere deference. Biblical humility recognizes dependence on God, submits to God, and returns honor to Him. Deuteronomy 8 provides the major biblical illustration. Israel's desert hunger, thirst, manna, and dependence were meant to teach that God was the provider before the people entered a land of abundance and were tempted to say their own power had produced their wealth. The source transcript contained a lengthy accidental repetition of the final clause of Deuteronomy 8:18; the proofread transcript removes that transcription loop and preserves the verse once. The program closes by applying humility to difficult people. A believer can set boundaries and speak firmly without adopting the other person's rude or hostile nature; keeping the nature of Jesus means refusing to become part of the problem.

♥ Practical Applications

- Before criticizing pride in someone else, ask God to show me one subtle place where pride may be operating in me.
- When I receive criticism, separate the tone from the message long enough to ask whether there is something true I need to hear.
- Notice one moment of impatience and ask whether I am treating my schedule as more important than another person.
- Thank God specifically for an ability, education, opportunity, resource, or talent that I am tempted to treat as self-produced.
- When I catch myself mentally belittling someone, deliberately look for the image of God and a gift or value He has placed in that person.
- Serve one person this week without telling anyone and without looking for recognition.
- When praise comes, receive it graciously and then consciously return the honor to God who supplied the ability.
- Use the phrase 'audience of One' when I am disappointed that people did not notice or appreciate what I did.
- Review a season of difficulty and ask what dependence on God it taught me that success might have hidden.
- Read Deuteronomy 8:17-18 and identify one success where I am tempted to say, 'My power did this.'
- In a difficult relationship, set needed boundaries firmly but refuse to mirror the other person's rudeness or hostility.
- End the day by asking: Where did I depend on God today, and where did I quietly act self-sufficient?

Today's Challenge

For seven days, practice an 'Audience of One' humility check. Each evening identify one moment involving accomplishment, criticism, impatience, comparison, recognition, success, or conflict. Ask: Did I depend on God, submit to God, and give honor to God? If not, name the pride honestly and choose one humble response for tomorrow. Once during the week, do one meaningful act of service that no one else needs to know about.

Closing Prayer

Father, You oppose the proud but give grace to the humble. Search me and show me the subtle places where pride hides in my life. Keep me from seeing pride only in other people while missing defensiveness, impatience, comparison, self-importance, self-sufficiency, or the desire for recognition in me. When someone speaks to me poorly, give me enough humility to hear any truth I need without excusing their wrong behavior. Teach me to control my response and to remain like Jesus. Thank You for every ability, opportunity, resource, relationship, and success You have given me. Keep me from taking the honor that belongs to You. Teach me to live before an audience of One, content to serve faithfully whether people applaud or overlook me. In seasons of need, remind me that dependence is not failure; it can be Your gracious way of teaching me where provision truly comes from. When life goes well, keep me from saying in my heart that my own power produced it. Help me recognize my dependence on You, submit to You, and return all honor to You. In difficult relationships, help me set wise boundaries without surrendering the nature of Jesus. Make me firm without being rude, truthful without being proud, and humble without becoming passive. Give me the undeserved grace You promise to the humble, and let that grace shape my thoughts, words, actions, and relationships today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Mark Johnson

Pastor of Calvary Church, Springfield

Pastor Mark Johnson serves at Calvary Church in Springfield and regularly facilitates the Friday Mark & Friends verse-by-verse study through James. A seasoned pastor, teacher, counselor, and storyteller, he brings practical biblical insight to everyday issues of relationships, character, wisdom, conflict, pride, and Christian maturity. In this continued study of James 4:6, Pastor Mark helps listeners recognize subtle forms of pride and defines biblical humility as dependence on God, submission to God, and giving God the honor He is due.

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About Today's Host

Mark Burns

Host of Mark & Friends

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLUJ Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. For decades, Mark has been involved in Christian radio and ministry, with a heart for helping listeners know Jesus and grow deeper in God's Word. Through Mark & Friends, he brings pastors, ministry leaders, teachers, missionaries, authors, and everyday believers around the microphone for biblical teaching, testimony, conversation, and encouragement. His desire is that each program help listeners learn, grow, and faithfully live out their relationship with Jesus.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Greetings from James chapter 4 verse 6. In fact, God treats us with even greater kindness, just as the scriptures say. God opposes everyone who is proud, but he blesses all who are humble with undeserved grace. That was James chapter 4 verse 6. And that was Tim, and you're a pro at reading Tim and being a part of the Friday edition of Mark & Friends.

Oh magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together. It's Friday, October 2nd, 2026, finally Friday, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention it's my wife Holly's birthday today. Happy birthday, honey.

Happy birthday. Thank you, Holly. She's a total behind-the-scenes person that doesn't want to be recognized or acknowledged, but you have to do that.

So naturally you did it. Husbandry 101, you have to do that. So welcome to the Friday edition of Mark & Friends, and we're going to continue our journey through the book of James.

We began chapter 4 last week, and we'll continue focusing on verse 6, but he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble, helping facilitate our discussion as Pastor Mark Johnson of Calvary Church here in Springfield. Mark it's great to be here today.

I want to take us on this verse and kind of hover over it for this week and next week and think about what we can learn out of this verse. When Jesus lays out his message on the kingdom of God, his kingdom, we read that in Matthew

chapter 5, 6, and 7 in the Sermon on the Mount. He doesn't start his message with a list of do's and don'ts.

He doesn't say, start off with don't lie or don't steal or be kind to people. He starts off dealing with the heart of man and how we come to God. He starts off by telling us that blessed are those who are poor of heart, destitute of heart, who realize they are empty and they need God and they come to him not trying to tell God how to do things, but receiving from God how they should do things.

It's a lesson in setting aside our tradition. It's a lesson in giving clear eyed analysis of how we were raised and how we see things. So I believe that the main point of James comes back to that very thing.

Are you living a prideful life or a humble life? So last week's message we dealt a bit with pride. We talked about that in the last few weeks. The Bible dictionary definition of pride is this.

Pride refuses to depend on God and be subject to him. But attributes to self the honor due to him and it figures as the very root and essence of sin. Now probably sitting in this room with us today, all of us have probably experienced dealing with somebody who is not depending on God, who is not subject to God, but they felt all honor was due to themselves and the way they acted was full of pride.

We probably all dealt with that and I think I said what I meant. We dealt with those people. We dealt with people who function in pride.

But here about ourselves, let's think about ourselves. Where can pride subtly be involved in our lives and we don't pick up on it, we don't see it in us? Where are subtle places pride can arise in us? I think one story that doesn't really get this angle, the story of Jonah, a lot of attention goes to him being the whale being raised for that, but when he goes to Nineveh he preaches, he does what he's told to do, but to him he's only doing what he's supposed to do in order to free up God to strike them all down. His motive is, I know what needs to happen to these people and so I'm just going to check this off the checklist and then I'm going to sit back and I'm going to watch as God destroys them all because that's what I know needs to be done.

That's good. I probably don't have too many Jonah experiences. Where do we have experiences? Where do we struggle with pride? Well I think we struggle a lot with pride in our accomplishments, like our academic accomplishments, if we're very good at something, musical, we give pride to how much money we make, what's in our bank account, or sometimes how beautiful we are physically, there's so many ways that we do it.

So Jude, think about this, this definition we read says, attributes to self the honor due to him. So you take the person who is gifted at getting an education, they read it and they learn it instantly, they can apply it quickly, and they begin to think, I'm something, look how gifted I am, look how smart I am, all the rest of you are beneath me, I'm the top of the class, instead of saying, God thank you for giving me this gift, let me use it well to serve others. I think a more subtle one is, sometimes we feel the need to defend ourselves when we're right, but if we check ourselves before we wreck ourselves, we can actually bring more flies into the web, the web being the gospel and the fellowship of Christ.

Bernie, you started off with a point there of defending ourselves, and defending ourselves comes from this tendency of, we've been attacked in some way, and this idea of how do I respond to that attack in a humble way, in a way where I am not being defensive of me. Now I'll tell you one of the tough things, one of the tough things that we deal with is when somebody speaks to us in anger, they're frustrated with us, and the words come out in anger, can I separate the anger from the words, the words may even be harsh, can I separate the harshness of the words from the message. Maybe I needed to hear, maybe I needed to hear why my wife is so frustrated.

Maybe I needed to hear that, but I'm so caught up in her, maybe in her being angry, or maybe in her being really expressive, that I don't hear the point and I become defensive. That's an act of pride, instead of sitting back and saying, okay God, I know my wife loves me, I know she honors me, I know she treats me right, what have I done here that has stirred this up, what do I need to learn, but we're like warped up because of the tone of voice, or because of the words that were used. That happens in workplaces, that happens in relationships, and that lack of humility to listen, to receive, and to set all the junk aside.

Now, should they have been wiser, well yeah, but I can't control that, I control my response. One aspect where it's very subtle, and I think I've harped on this for about a month or two, is being impatient, and it's because my schedule, my plan, my priority, because I'm prideful, I think it's more valuable than somebody else's time, or how they're holding me back from doing that, so maybe the thinking of self-importance more than I should. Any place, Mark, where I look at somebody else, and I belittle them in my mind, that can be racially, it can be age, it can be how well versed they are in the things we're talking about, and so I can dismiss them, and put them, maybe they're not as musically talented as I am, and so I've got this great music talent, and they don't, and they're kind of slow in keeping up with me musically.

Any place like that becomes an issue of pride, instead of giving God due honor, thankfulness for what he's made me, and then looking to see, what is the gift in the other person that God has given them? Can I see the image of God in the other person? Now, we live in a sin-filled world, and a lot of times what we see is sin, and that's a problem, but can we see the value of God in them, so that we can be patient in our dealing with folks? So, yeah, it's not just the big pride that's a problem, it's the subtle areas in our life where we're not giving due honor to God that he is due, when we're thinking we're better, and especially when it moves into this, I'm better than somebody else. Here's one that I see from time to time, and I'm probably guilty of it myself sometimes. If you are thinking that you're a servant, and you've gone out, and you've done things, and you've sacrificed, and you've, you know, I've done the Lord's work, but then I don't get enough recognition for it.

Where's my parade? Where's my trophy? Whatever. But I'm going, I'm so humble, and nobody's recognizing my humility. There was a song that was written a number of years ago, and it talked about the audience of one.

And the audience of one is when we realize, I do all of this before God. Whether everybody applauds me, or they don't applaud me, I'm not going to lose out on the recognition I need. If God says, well done, on the other side, the temptation to fall into the accolades of people to us, and not let that thankfulness go to God who gave us the ability, is where we fall into places of pride.

We've got to learn to live. One of the places I think Jesus would, he showed us so clearly, is how to live our life when the world doesn't accept what we do, but we know we're playing before that audience of one, and doing the right thing. So let's get this.

Humility is not the way one carries their body. Humility is not simply an act of deferring to others. Simply is not a sense of self-loathing.

That's not humility. Humility has nothing to do with the volume of my voice. Those are actions, and they can all be done with a humble spirit still.

Biblical humility recognizes dependence on God, is subject to God, and attributes all honor to God. So what do I do with the honor I get? So when you are thanked, when you are praised for your servant spirit, what do you do with that? Do I keep, oh look at the, everybody's saying what a great servant I am. Am I hoarding that in my, or am I saying, God, thank you for the ability to be used of you to serve others.

That's the way it should be. That's the transformational way the kingdom of God works from the kingdom of this world. It's transformational.

So I'd like for someone to read Deuteronomy 8, 1 through 5, who's got that force. Be careful not to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

That's Deuteronomy 8, verses 1 through 5. Let's skip down to verse 15 and 16. Let's read that one as well. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions.

He brought you water out of a hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you, so that in the end it might go well with you. Get that last line.

So that in the end it might go well with you. What did he do to them? He led them into a desert? That wasn't a pleasant place to be. He caused them to hunger? None of us like to hunger.

He caused them to thirst? And he surrounded them with scorpions and snakes. Now what did he promise them? That they'd be okay anyway. He promised them when they came out of Egypt.

It might go well with you. The land of milk and honey was coming. Then what did they get? They get desert and hunger and thirst and snakes and scorpions.

So basically he led them to a place where they had no other recourse but to depend on him. And would they do it graciously or not? Yeah, Mark, I wrote down self-sufficiency, and that's a form of pride too, and whenever we become self-sufficient and forget about God, he'll address that in his way. He knew, God knows that the temptation of milk and

honey, the temptation of success and ease, is for us to be prideful and think that what God has provided, that we have provided for ourselves.

So he takes them to a place where they cannot provide for themselves, and he provides for them, hopefully that they will learn the lesson that the richness of God can be provided to them, and they can remember that he's the one providing. So in verse 17, it says this. You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced the wealth for me.

That's pride. You're going to be tempted in this land of milk and honey. When things are going good, you're tempted to think, I did this.

Pastors are tempted that way. Look at this great church I built. Look at these kids.

My kids are obeying me. We are tempted to look at when things are going well and say, look at the business I built this business. Businessmen are tempted with this.

Doctors are tempted with this. I'm the smart guy here. He says, you're tempted by your success to think, I did this.

But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers.

If I keep the nature of Christ, I can be firm without being rude. I can say firmly, listen, you can't talk to me that way, it's not right for you to talk in this room that way, and be firm without being part of the problem. Oh listening friends, James chapter 4 verse 6, with these powerful words, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

May we humbly take this message today, think about it, pray over it, let it influence our actions, our thought life, the ways we treat others today, and we look to God as the one that provides all good things, and so may you draw near to God as he draws near to you. If you missed a portion of today's broadcast, want to hear it again or share it with a friend, stop by our resource page at GreatNewsRadio.org and WLUJ.org under the Mark & Friends tab, and there's a transcript of today's broadcast, the verses that have been mentioned, talking points, next steps, and even a prayer for you, so stop by GreatNewsRadio.org or WLUJ.org and click on the Mark & Friends tab. Well thanks for listening, thanks for being a part of our radio listening family, this is Mark Burns and Pastor Mark Johnson in a room of friends with the ministry of Great News Media, God bless you and have a great day and night.