



Biblical Perspectives in Everyday Life

HUMILITY—GOD’S PATH TO EDIFICATION & EXALTATION

Humility ... I have worked hard to cultivate it, sustain it, and perfect it. After all, it’s an essential quality of both Christ’s and Moses’ character (Matthew 11:29; Numbers 12:3). Without humility, one can neither receive God’s grace (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5) nor be saved (Job 22:29; Psalms 76:9; James 1:21). As a result, prior to truly knowing Christ, I diligently tried to “humble ... [myself] under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt ... [me] at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:6).

Nevertheless, to my dismay, that “proper time” never occurred, and instead I found myself stumbling through life in a consistently ignominious fashion. Fortunately a close Christian friend told me that I was unbiblically making humility an object of personal pride. He said I was building and rebuilding my spiritual house on sand, not on rock (Matthew 7:26-27). I had made a career of “falling down”, because, in my arrogant attitude and behavior, I was actually displeasing to God. I was unaware that I failed to heed Paul’s warning to the church at Corinth when he wrote, “let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). My question to this friend was, “How then does one achieve a level of humility that is pleasing to God?”

His reply: the same way King Nebuchadnezzar obtained humility . . . not by actively pursuing it, but by passively receiving it. Proudful people never obtain true humility by their own efforts. They may cultivate or carefully craft an image of humility, but they can only become truly humble by being humbled.

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and *He is able to humble those who walk in pride*” (Daniel 4:37, *emphasis added*).

When I checked my Concordance for the one, two or perhaps three words that are translated into English as some variant of humility, I learned there were over a dozen such words. Most of them are translated “afflicted,” “oppressed,” “weakened” or other similar words describing how someone is truly “humbled.”

For example, when Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth from Moab after her two sons had died, she told those who knew her that “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me ... the Almighty has afflicted me” (Ruth 1:20-21). Naomi had been humbled. While she could not see God’s overall plan in her affliction, she clearly acknowledged His sovereign hand in “bringing calamity” upon her.

Naomi’s affliction from the Lord was not unique only to her. As the LORD told Isaiah, “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these” (Isaiah 45:7).

Job learned that God-ordained calamity falls on both the righteous and unrighteous (Job 31:3, 23). The difference is how each responds to calamity. We can either become hardened or humbled. Only the latter receive God’s grace (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in *time of calamity*” (Proverbs 24:16).

God’s affliction through some form of calamity can represent His judgment and may also be meant to make us listen, repent, and become teachable. The LORD told Jeremiah regarding the suffering prophesied for the house of Judah, “Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way” (Jeremiah 26:3a).

He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way (Psalms 25:9).

God’s purpose for calamity is always for good, because He is forever holy, just, and righteous.

The LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice” (Daniel 9:14).

My avid pursuit of humility to please God and impress others was essentially a works-based salvation process. After falling numerous times until I hit what seemed like “rock bottom,” God sent a friend to show me the biblical path to true humility and subsequent salvation. This path was not of my own doing but was completely the result of the person and work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Until then, my feigned humility was based on a false gospel that, in reality, made me

into a false believer.

At some point in the process of being truly humbled through His affliction on me, His Spirit regenerated me, made me a new creation in Christ, and opened my ears and eyes to His truth. I began to read Bible passages I had read for years as if I were reading them for the very first time. They were finally understandable and were directed with laser-like focus on my deservedly pitiful thinking and pride-induced circumstances.

By being brought low through divine providence, I realized my exalted position in Christ. With other brothers and sisters of humble circumstances, I began to glory in the high position I now had in my wonderful Savior (James 1:9). And, like Asaph, I can genuinely cry out, “Let the afflicted [the humbled] and needy praise Your name” (Psalm 74:21).

Since then, my periodic consumption of humble pie has often turned me away from evil that physically and mentally was causing both harm and grief and, instead, turned me toward a trusting dependence upon my Savior. In some instances, He has delivered me from the affliction; in others, He has sustained me through some difficult and trying circumstances. In all cases, He has used these occasions to open my ears to His voice.

He delivers the afflicted in their affliction, and opens their ear in *time of oppression* (Job 36:15).

For You save an afflicted people, but haughty eyes you abase (Psalms 18:27).

Like Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 12, I have grown spiritually in these situations.

“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

I have learned that God’s peace and joy are available in trying times, many of which humble me.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

God has ordained a path for believers to be edified here and now with a promise for eternal exaltation later. Humility is the gateway to that path, and on-going steps of humility are necessary to continue the journey. Every step of the way, those on the path know that humility, brought about by being humbled, is truly a gift from God.

PASSAGES REFERENCED ABOVE, BUT NOT FULLY QUOTED:

Matthew 11:29, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and *you will find rest for your souls.*”

Numbers 12:3, Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.

Job 31:3, 23, Is it not calamity to the unjust and disaster to those who work iniquity? . . . For calamity from God is a terror to me, And because of His majesty I can do nothing.

James 4:6, But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

1 Peter 5:5, You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Job 22:29, When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence, And the humble person He will save.

Psalms 76:9, When God arose to judgment, To save all the humble of the earth. Selah.

James 1:21, Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

Matthew 7:26-27, Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.

James 1:9, But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position...

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