

WISDOM FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - Practical Studies From Proverbs - Part nine

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GROWING IN THE WISE GRACE OF HUMILITY

The subject of humility is hard to isolate in the book of Proverbs because it is a virtue that is rarely dealt with as a stand alone subject. In the same way that **pride** is considered the root of so many other sins in the Scriptural diagnosis, **humility** is viewed as the source of many other virtues.

This is perhaps the hardest thing for us to grasp about humility. We see it more as a path of **emptiness** than **fullness**. We have a hard time imagining humility as a way **up** rather than **down**, as a means of **strength** rather than **weakness**. That's because it's easy just to see the **self-emptying** of humility rather than the Holy Spirit's gracious **fruit-cultivating** participation in it.

1) AN OPENING PARABLE ABOUT HUMILITY

Proverbs 25:6-7 - "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, [7] for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble...."

Even a quick reading of this account will show how it mirrors Jesus' remarks in one of His most famous parables:

Luke 14:7-11 - "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they **chose the places of honor**, saying to them, [8] "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, **do not sit down in a place of honor**, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. [10] But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. [11] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

I wonder if Jesus had those opening words from Proverbs in His mind when He told this parable. The point of each is exactly the same: **We don't have a good understanding of how our own personal advancement is to be achieved in God's kingdom**. We think the road to advancement is **self-advancement**. But if I take the best seat in the house for myself, I will never hold on to it for long. Grasping for recognition and prominence is ultimately self-destructive and embarrassing in the long run.

The lesson is summed up so clearly in Jesus' story in **verse 11** - "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Clearly, it is better to humble **myself** than to be humbled by **someone else**. It is only because we doubt the reality and inevitability of this law of God that we will **gamble** on our own self-advancement, thinking we will never have to pay the price for our unchecked pride. As we'll see in a minute, this is because this process may not fulfill itself in a single moment.

2) HUMILITY WILL LEAD TO EXPANSION OF SOUL AND EXALTATION. PRIDE IS THE ROAD TO RUIN AND DIMINISHING STATUS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

This whole subject is restated as a divine law in several different forms in the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 15:33 - "The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes **before** honor."

Proverbs 16:18 - "Pride goes **before** destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Proverbs 29:23 - "One's pride **will bring** him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor."

Before **honor** is **humility**. After **humility** comes **honor**. You must get to honor **through** humility. Humility is the only God-honored **gateway** to honor - "**Before honor comes humility**" - "**A humble spirit will obtain honor.**"

In our opening parable from Proverbs 25 and its restatement from Jesus we see this unwritten law being fleshed out.

The person humbly taking the lower seat, even though he may be deserving of a higher place, will, in fact, find the host requesting his presence at a better seat in due time - ***“He who humbles himself will be exalted.”***

Of course, the opposite principle is also well verified: ***“Pride goes before destruction.”*** We can all think of the most universal application of this law ever witnessed since the dawn of creation:

Genesis 3:1-5 - ***“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” [2] And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” [4] But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”***

This is the downward spiral followed by all who would elevate themselves on their own terms rather than exercising humble obedience and trust in God. When pride takes the controls of your life, there is no good destination to be reached. The only direction is down. Pride comes before a ***fall - never before anything else in any final sense.***

3) **THE TRUE EXERCISE OF HUMILITY ALWAYS REQUIRES FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD**

Here’s why: The divine laws we just studied don’t manifest themselves ***immediately***. This applies both to their being ***kept*** and to their being ***ignored***.

In other words, people who press to the front of the line of life ***do*** frequently seem to get the best seats. And people who quietly and faithfully demonstrate a steady meek spirit ***do*** appear to be losers in the eyes of the world. That is why the humble life requires too much strength for the arrogant man. He doesn’t possess that kind of trust in God’s ways. He’s too weak to advance very far in humility. And he’s ***impatient***. Because he can’t wait for the approval of his heavenly Father, he has to be constantly applauding his own life. But this is only because of the proud man’s ***unbelief***. He can’t live life in the light of another kingdom.

Humility ***makes room for another realm to work***. Humility prepares the human heart in a way that is irresistible to the Holy Spirit. That’s why the Bible says God ***“draws near to the humble in spirit.”*** This is the way God loves to manifest His presence. The ***reason*** God loves to work on behalf of the humble is He gets all the glory. In exalting himself, the proud man leaves no room for God to be glorified in anything he does. This is why the Bible says God ***“resists the proud.”***

4) **HOW GOD EXALTS THE HUMBLE**

If you and I will learn to ***“walk humbly before our God”*** He will manifest these blessings in our lives:

- a) ***Humility will bring a prosperous, happy and enriched life - Proverbs 22:4 - “The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.”***

Because the truly humble person will ***“fear the LORD”*** he will honor God with all his goals and aspirations. As he seeks God’s kingdom first, as promised, God will add all these other things unto his life:

Matthew 6:33 - ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”***

- b) ***Humility will bring growth in the walk of wisdom - Proverbs 11:2 - “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.”***

The proud person will never be a wise person because he is not humble enough to ***listen*** to wisdom. Wisdom can never be integrated into a proud heart because the proud person, like the fool, can’t imagine himself wrong or in need of help.

This is the chief reason the Bible says God looks for people with ***“broken and contrite hearts.”*** He knows His will and way will be most readily embraced by people who don’t treasure their own ways above God’s. This may be the very first mark of a humble person: ***He is teachable. He will listen.***

- c) ***The humble person will experience God’s guidance in all his ways - Proverbs 3:5-8 - “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways***

acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. [7] Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. [8] It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.”

Most of us can quickly quote **Proverbs 3:5-6**. But the really important verses are **7 and 8**. Those last two verses describe **how** we learn to trust in the Lord and experience Him directing our paths.

Though expressed in different words, the first step is **humility** - **“Do not be wise in your own eyes”(7)**. This is what makes the rest of the process work. A proud person will never be able to accomplish this. Only the humble will experience this kind of divine exaltation in the other areas of life.

- d) ***The humble person will live a properly ordered and protected life - Proverbs 25:27-28 - “It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one’s own glory. [28] A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”***

The illustration of too much honey is a great one. Picture the sweetest things you experience and long for. For the proud man the sweetest thing is **the unfettered ability to get his way**.

But something begins to happen over time. Just as too much sweetness can actually begin to turn your stomach, the thrill of the proud begins to spin out of control. What seemed like **freedom** begins to feel like **prison**. The self becomes dominated by habits that rule and bind.

There is no more hopeless feeling in the whole world than to have your own way until you are finally sick of yourself. Seeking your own glory only feels sweet for so long. The humble man is truly spared this greatest tragedy of all.

5) **THE EXAMPLE AND MEANS TOWARD HUMILITY**

We are constantly called to remember we follow a **humble Savior**:

Philippians 2:3-11 - **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

It's as though our loving Father knows our weakness. We don't easily appreciate the value of humility. O, how we need the Biblical reminder that the greatest all of the entire creation came about through **pride**. And the final undoing of all that is wrong with mankind and his world came about through the **humility** of our Savior.

If we have been redeemed, and all creation (one day) will be completely restored and set free by the power of a humble Savior, then I can trust God to continue to accomplish His redemptive purposes in all of the aspects of my life as I walk in humility before Him. The meek really **do** inherit the earth. There is nothing He can't be trusted to do for the humble. So let the Spirit's humble mind rule and dwell in all you do.