

Humble Yourself

By Wendy Wood



*“Therefore, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God”
1 Peter 5:6*

Over the last couple of weeks, I have spent time re-reading Wayne Mack’s book “Humility: The Forgotten Virtue” and David Mathis’ book “Humbled”. The combination of the two has been helping in thinking rightly about humility and what it means to “humble yourself”. Throughout scripture we are told to “humble yourself” and “put on humility”(1 Peter 5:6, Colossians 3:12). We are told “be completely humble” and to “clothe ourselves with humility” (Ephesians 4:2 and 1 Peter 5:5). We are told in scripture that blessings come when we humble ourselves such as 2 Chronicles 2:14 which tells us God will hear us from heaven and forgive us and heal our land. Luke 14:11 promises that those who humble themselves will be exalted by God. Proverbs tells us that God shows favor to the humble and that the humble receive wisdom (3:34, 11:2).

I have always found “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” one of the most sobering phrases in scripture (1 Peter 5:5). I often have a counselee stop and put words or imagery to what it means to have God oppose the proud. If you are proud,

God is your enemy. If you are proud, God is actively working against you. If you are proud, God is your opponent, not your friend or helper. It's easy to blow past this short phrase and excuse our pride, but when we stop and think soberly about pride, we should be horrified at our indwelling pride and be grieved by what it says about our thoughts of God. C.S. Lewis famously said, "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind." Pride is "anti-God" because pride puts Self on the throne of the universe. Pride removes God from His rightful place and ascends the throne of life. Pride says, "I don't need God" and "I know just as much as God and can rule in His place". Pride doesn't want to surrender and submit to God because the prideful heart believes self is most important.

In the book "Future Grace" John Piper argues that pride is a two-sided coin. On one side is the boasting arrogance of thinking highly of self. On the other side of the coin is the person who focuses on self in a self-pitying or lowly way. Both ways of looking at self are sinful because pride is simply thinking about yourself instead of Christ. "Boasting is the response of pride to success. Self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says, "I deserve admiration because I have achieved so much. Self-pity says, "I deserve admiration because I have sacrificed so much." Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak. The reason self-pity does not look like pride is that it appears to be needy. But the need arises from a wounded ego and the desire of self-pity is not really for others to see them as helpless but as heroes. The need self-pity feels does not come from a sense of unworthiness, but from a sense of unrecognized worthiness. It is the response of unapplauded pride. (John Piper, Future Grace). Pride makes Self a hero. The attention on Self as the hero tries to steal God's glory and ascend the throne of life.

Once we are fully convinced pride is a horrific, anti-God sin, we must repent of it. Realize and be grieved by the heart that is essentially telling God "I can do this on my own. I don't need you. I am wise enough and capable enough to do life on my own." We can confess this openly to God knowing that "He gives more grace to the humble" and promises to forgive us (James 4:6 and 1 John 1:9). Confession is important but repenting and turning from the sin is vital. How do we "put on humility?"

What does scripture mean when it says "humble yourself"? This is where David Mathis' new book "Humbled: Welcoming the Uncomfortable Work of God" is helpful. Just as in every single area of life, God is the initiator. God is sovereign and it is His plan and purpose that are working at all times in every circumstance. Therefore, God is the initiator of people being able to "humble themselves". David Mathis says, "Self-humbling is, in essence, gladly receiving God's person, words, and acts when doing so is not easy or comfortable" (Humbled page 17). God puts us in a situation

where “humbling” comes from without (from God) when we are in a circumstance where control and comfort seem to be fleeting away. In that humbling situation we have a choice. “Will [we] bow up, reacting defensively with pride and self-exaltation, or will [we] bow down, humbling [our]selves before the gracious hand, rebuke, and perfect timing of the Lord” (page 15-16).

Humbling ourselves is responsive to God’s initiating circumstances that take away our comfort and control. We have a choice at that time. We can act in opposition to God and fight to get the feeling of control back (though that is futile) or we can submit to God’s purpose in our life and choose to trust Him.

David Matthis uses the pandemic as a recent worldwide event that is God’s initiation for us to respond to. Just as God repeatedly put Israel into circumstances where enemies were invading them or they had evil kings leading them, God has put our nation in a position where our way of life seems threatened. How have you responded in your heart? (I am not advocating for or against any of these mandates, just encouraging you to examine your heart and the prideful or humbling response you have had.) As the government locked us down in our homes, put mask mandates in stores, restaurants, outdoor concerts and sporting events, and now has made vaccines required for many, how have you responded?

We have had the opportunity to “bow up” and respond with arrogance and “I know better than they do” attitude, or to get angry and slander leaders in response. Or, we could respond by “bowing down” in humility and submitting to the circumstances God has placed over us. Humbling ourselves may be praying to God and seeking His wisdom in what decisions to make regarding vaccines and whether or not to stay home or be around people. A “bowed down” response will involve searching God’s word and seeking to continue to live out the calling we have received in Christ by the way we interact with family, friends, and strangers. As we look to scripture and pray seeking wisdom, our consciences will play a role in our decisions, too. However, it is the heart where pride first takes root. The words and phrases that run silently through your mind are the biggest indication of either bowing up or bowing down.

What other circumstances has God initiated in your life that are “humbling”. Maybe you have a child making decisions that go against everything you raised them to believe. Maybe you have a boss who belittles you and takes credit for your work. Maybe you have an illness that will be life-long and difficult to endure. Maybe your church is making decisions you disagree with. Whatever situation God has placed you in, you choose how you will respond. Will you bow down and trust God and pray and seek His word for trusting and submitting to Him? Or will you fight and kick and pridefully try to regain

control of your own life? The warnings in scripture that pride comes before a fall, that destruction befalls those who are prideful, and God opposes the proud should lead us to fall down in humility before an awesome God.