

God Resists the Proud

By David de Bruyn

If the Christian life is all of grace, then the most important thing for a Christian is to continually be in the state to receive grace. If God is the source of the Christian life and the point of the Christian life, then the most important thing that you as a believer can do is to adopt a posture to receive His strength to live for His glory.

This state, this posture, this heart-attitude before God is what the Bible calls humility. *"God gives grace to the humble"* (**James 4:6**). Humility, therefore, should be the priority.

Humility is a hard thing to describe. One of the reasons we struggle to understand it is because our biggest problem is pride. We carry the sin nature which believes, 'I Am.' All of life, we battle and chide against the pride of others, who also want to please themselves most, who also honour themselves as god, and will not bow to worship us and please us first.

Our pride has so corrupted our will, our emotions, our desires, our conscience and our mind, that we don't fully know what it means to humble ourselves. **Jeremiah 17:9** says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* If we try and be humble in our own strength – we mess it up. Our pride gets in the way, and starts boasting in our humility.

The moment that we think we are humble is actually the moment we are not. In fact, you can never be humble by aiming for humility as an end in itself, just like you cannot truly worship a king if you are more focused on bowing than you are on the king.

As A.W. Tozer put it, we cannot be humble by tinkering with our soul. God certainly calls on us to do self-examination, but apart from His grace, merely looking within will be as fruitful as sending a conceited man to look into the mirror.

So, there is a real dilemma. For us to relate to God correctly so as to give Him the glory, we have to be humble. To begin to receive grace, we need to be humble. Humility is the starting point of relating correctly to God. But we lack the ability to truly know what humility is, and how to do it. It seems like we are at a dead-end.

Humility is the master key that unlocks all of God's grace, so that we can glorify God by loving Him with all of our heart. But that master key is outside of our grasp. We cannot even get into the starting blocks.

But God knows that. He knows that for the soil of our heart to be in that prime state to sow His grace, He needs to work in it first. He needs to fallow up the hard heart of pride. God not only gives grace in response to our humility, He gives grace to teach us humility. You could say, God gives grace so that we can experience more grace.

In fact, so much of life is God's School of Humility. God longs to have each of His children in their place, adopting a posture toward Him that will glorify Him and satisfy them. He knows that humility is actually the state of greatest joy. Indeed, God wants the unsaved man to come to a place of humility where He repents and confesses Jesus Christ as Lord. And so God has many different ways of teaching us humility.

Since we want to look at what God does to teach us humility, it will help us if we at least attempt a definition of humility. I will give you a definition of humility which may surprise you. Humility is desiring God above all else.

Now that is not how you usually hear humility defined. It is usually defined as submission, or as surrender, or being low before God, having a quiet spirit before Him, or depending upon Him. Humility will certainly include these things, but I suggest that if these things do not have a desire for God – they are not humility.

If I submit to God, but with no heart to know Him better, only begrudgingly – is that humility or pride? That is merely deferring – it is submitting to please myself – like the child who does their chores with a bad attitude. If I surrender only from a reluctant heart, with no desire to see God work through me, is that really surrender?

If I am low and small before God, only out of duty, with no desire for God, is this humility that glorifies Him? If I depend on God simply so He will give me the things I want or make my life smoother, is this humility? No, this is in fact evidence of pride – seeking to serve self.

See, true humility is a desire for God. It admits that the meaning of life, the most valuable things in life, are not contained inside Self – which is what pride believes. It believes that the answers are found outside of Self – in God. Humility is a hunger for God. You could say that humility is the desire to fulfil the great commandment – to love God with all your heart, soul and mind.

So yes, it is a desire to submit to God, and to surrender to Him, and to be still before Him, and be small before Him, and depend on Him – but all with this goal: to see God, to know Him, to experience Him and love Him.

How does God teach us humility? God has many tools to accomplish this, more than we can mention. The clearest answer is found in **1 Peter 5:5**: *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* The word 'resists' has a military connotation. It really means 'to lay siege to.' Now think about that.

There is the proud human heart, pictured as an ancient walled city desiring not God, but self, seeking satisfaction and meaning not from God, but from what is inside the city, from God's gifts. This citadel of human pride is a great affront to the true King. It robs Him of glory, and exists in rebellion. God, for His name's sake, lays siege to the human heart, to conquer it for His glory. Human pride fights God off. We resist God as if He is the enemy seeking to rob our city.

It is only when through God's siege warfare tactics we eventually realise that God is not the enemy, He is in fact the desire of our hearts, that humility replaces pride. In that sweet state, we realise that joy and meaning are not inside us, they are outside us – in God. In a siege, a city would fortify itself, and depend upon its internal resources to survive the attack. If the city could outlast the attackers outside its walls, it would win.

Pride seeks to depend on self and enjoy self and resist God, who is seeking to conquer us. However, in our case, our internal resources of our own wisdom, intelligence and strength are severely outclassed by the omnipotent God who sets Himself in array at the wall of our heart. There is no way God will run out of resources or tire of assaulting the walls of human pride.

Eventually, only two things can happen. The walls of pride will come crashing down as we bow in humility to God, or we will self-destruct from our own pride and sin before that happens. God must do three things for this humility – this desire for God to take place:

1. He must show us the vanity of pride.

Like an attacking army, he must cut off supplies to that city, so it is forced to exist on only what is inside it. He must starve us out, so to speak. He must exhaust our trust in self. He must firstly assault our human pride to show us that the answer is not inside us. He must strip us of self-confidence, self-reliance, self-satisfaction, self-righteousness. He must show us that what we have inside our city is weak, pathetic, ineffective, and not something worth banking on. He must show us that what we are depending on will lead to destruction.

2. He must then show us the value of God.

He must secondly show us something of His perfect nature, will or purposes. He shows us that what He offers outside the walls of our human pride is something far better, far more beneficial than what we have stored up in our own hearts. God could, if He wanted to, simply flatten the walls of our heart. But it gives Him far more glory to show us the beauty, the desirability, the reward of His grace, so that we desire Him willingly. He must let us see that the fight against God is futile and foolish – since He seeks our good.

3. Thirdly, He must show us our weakness.

God must show us our total inability and helplessness to reach or obtain Him. He shows us He is what we need, but also shows us that we have no way of reaching Him. He must make us see that He is not just another option for joy – He is the ultimate joy, and we cannot reach Him on our own terms.

Now these three things together produce humility – I see the vanity of seeking joy in myself, I see the desirability of God, I see my inability to reach, see, know and experience God. The resulting reaction is humility. I have a desire for God, abandoning self and coming to Him with

empty hands and a hungry heart. This is the state God wants us in – desiring Him, but seeing our total inability of reaching Him.

We then come to God by Jesus Christ, for His grace. We cry out to him, and He gives us grace in the Holy Spirit. He then satisfies our souls, which then glorifies Him. We desire to love Him, and He then gives us grace to do so. God gets the glory both as the Source of our desire, and as the Satisfaction of our desire. *“For He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness” (Psalm 107:9).*

So let us see some biblical examples of how God uses these three strategies in bringing down the walls of human pride. The reason for seeing these is what **Romans 15:4** says: *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

God included these examples for our learning, to teach us so that we might have hope. That’s a confident assurance. As we see these examples, we can understand that God is working these things together for good. God is not sadistic or cruel. The real enemy is our pride and sin, and God cuts deep to remove it.

As we see this, and identify it in our own lives, it gives us hope – God will finish the work He has begun in us. He will teach us humility so that we can receive grace and love God. These examples also help us to keep this mindset before us: humble yourself before God and desire Him above all else. So, let us see how God achieves His first strategy – by stripping us of our satisfaction and confidence in Self.

Stage 1 – Showing us the vanity of pride

One strategy is when God creates a situation we cannot control or handle to show us **the vanity of self-confidence**.

Nebuchadnezzar, for example, was the great king of Babylon. Warned about his pride, he continued to delight in himself, and God judged him by afflicting him so that he acted like an animal for some time. He ate grass like an ox, crawled around on all fours, and lived outdoors until God saw fit to return his understanding back to him.

There was nothing Nebuchadnezzar could do about the situation. He was completely powerless to change anything. God reminded Nebuchadnezzar who was really running the world, Babylon, and indeed his own life. Nebuchadnezzar came to see this and declared in **Daniel 4:37**: *“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”*

God can send any number of situations our way. It can be financial ruin. It can be a debilitating disease or sickness or accident. It can be ruined relationships. It can be death itself – that of others or the possibility of our own – anything that gets us to see we do not have nearly the resources we think we do to cope with life. We are weak next to Him, powerless to shape or

control our lives. God is the Lord, and he seeks to show us that by trying to control everything in life, we are in proud rebellion to Him.

Another way God shows us the vanity of pride is that

Secondly, God brings things into our lives which we do not want, to show us **the vanity of self-sufficiency**.

Paul certainly experienced things that we would regard as negative. He was persecuted, attacked, maligned, hurt, slandered. He endured physical deprivation and many other things. He too, had something in his life he did not want:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

2 Corinthians 12:7-8

Paul was given something he didn't like to keep his focus right. God did not want Paul to become self-satisfied, comfortable and worldly. Paul realised that God's purpose in giving him something he did not want was to strip him of being in love with the here and now, with his own ability and comfort, and so he could receive the grace that God provides to go through such things.

God showed Paul that he was desiring the wrong things. God did not remove the thing Paul disliked; He taught Paul that His grace was a superior pleasure. God showed him that inside the walls of human pride is ultimately vanity. He showed Paul that the best things are not on this side of heaven. In contrast, God's sustaining grace seemed a pleasure, and he turned to God with a humble heart:

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

How can God cause us to desire Him above all things when we are solidly in love with the things in front of us? God sometimes has to put a sour taste in our mouths when it comes to this life so that we turn our attention outside of the walls of self, and look upward.

A third way God shows us the vanity of pride is that He gives us a command we do not want to obey, to show us **the vanity of self-righteousness**.

One of our problems when it comes to following God is our self-righteousness. We become so convinced that we are such great servants of the Lord, that one of the tools God uses to create humility in us is to show us that we really are rebels, so as to desire real righteousness, not our own. God did this with Jonah.

Jonah had a pretty good ministry in the northern kingdom, prophesying judgement to Israel's enemies. But when God told him to preach repentance to the Ninevites, the command confronted him with the evil and rebellion in his own heart. He ran from God, and only reluctantly preached in the end. God used a plant to teach him how selfish his heart really was.

Jonah cared more about his own physical comfort, his own shade from the sun, than for the souls of thousands of people. If Jonah wrote the book of Jonah, then we assume he had learned the lesson. God had humbled him by showing him he was not nearly as obedient and righteous as he thought he was. It brought him to a place where he desired God's grace and to be more like God, having seen how unlike God he was.

God may give you a command you really do not like, or trust, or see the sense in. It may be to submit to a human authority. It may be to give to Him. It may be to be faithful to a local church. But our unwillingness reveals our pride, and our pride makes life miserable for us. God must often show us the filthy rags of our own righteousness so that we will desire the spotless white robe of His righteousness.

Indeed, seeing our guilt before God, our worthy condemnation, and the fact that we cannot change, humbles us. It shows us there is not much inside us to really admire or impress God with. In fact, the people of Nineveh express this truth well after they heard the preaching of Jonah regarding their sin and God's judgement. The king of Nineveh declared:

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?

Jonah 3:8-9

Sometimes, God allows our sin to find us out. We tend to think no one knows about our sin, that we have perfectly hidden it. King David found out through Nathan the prophet that his scheme to get rid of Uriah to cover up his sin with Bathsheba would backfire. God would shame him openly, he would lose the child conceived with Bathsheba, and the sword would never depart from his house.

Psalm 51 describes the repentant humility that this brought upon David. God will often use the Word of God, another person, or the consequences of our sin to reveal how guilty we are before Him, and how we need cleansing from Him.

Having used these strategies, we hopefully see how weak and powerless we are. We see how sinful and guilty we are. We see how self-centred, self-righteous and self-confident we are. God has shown us there is not much inside the city of Self, and even if there were, it will not last long or survive what God can throw at it. God then applies His second strategy, that of showing us He is more desirable.

Stage 2 – Showing us the value of God

He lavishes mercy and kindness on us when we don't deserve it, to show us His grace. When King Saul died, and later when David was coronated, someone like Mephibosheth went into hiding. It was customary for kings who took over the throne to kill off the remaining relatives of the previous king. Mephibosheth, being a grandson of King Saul, fell into that category.

Instead of seeking his head, King David sought to be kind to him because of his friendship with Jonathan. He brought Mephibosheth, who was lame, to his court, and promised to feed him at his royal table for the rest of his life. Mephibosheth was expecting death and retribution, and rightly so, according to the custom of the day.

Instead, to his total disbelief, he receives the treatment of a prince, like one of David's sons. **2 Samuel 9:8** records Mephibosheth's response to this: *"And he bowed himself, and said, 'What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?'"* He was humbled. And when we understand the just reasons for God to be attacking us, and instead see that He is actually trying to rescue us, it breaks us and humbles us.

It then that we see how selfish, self-protective, and unworthy we are, and we see how good, gracious and loving He is. Mephibosheth was a lame, undesirable, weak man who could easily have been destroyed by powerful King David. Likewise, we are weak and undesirable before God – who could simply condemn us for our treasonous rebellion. Instead, He showers us with mercy and kindness.

There is nothing like being repaid good, for having given evil, to slay you. It all at once shames you, humbles you, and causes you to deeply admire, love and trust the one who does you such good. **Romans 2:4** tells us it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance.

See, messages of judgement and condemnation will not cause us to desire God if there is no hope. So God showers us with common grace as humans, and with special grace in the Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross, with His enabling grace in the Holy Spirit when we are saved. At this point, God has the human heart desiring Him. He has removed the appetite we had for self, and created a thirst for Himself.

Philippians 2:13 tells us He works in us both to will and to do. He creates the desire for Himself. He circumcises our hearts so that we want to love God and please Him. So now He has shown us how shallow the pool of self is and how cool and refreshing and glorious the rushing river of God is. You might think He is done. After all, now that we desire God, isn't that mission accomplished?

No, not quite. Because man's pride is so insidious, it will seek to take over even this good desire. It will seek to manipulate this desire for God to its own ends. It will seek to reach God on its own terms. So God's final battering ram to the walls of our hearts is that He will now show us that our desire for God cannot be quenched in our own strength.

Stage 3 – Showing us the vast gap

God gives us a standard we can never reach to show us our helplessness. Once we recognise that the answer lies in God, His final weapon is to disarm the seeker from thinking they can bargain with God, or purchase God, or offer something to God, or come on their own terms or in their own strength. Our Lord often did this with seekers.

For example, when a man asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him to perfectly obey the Law: love the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind, and love his neighbour as himself. Jesus' intention was for the man to fall on his knees and say, 'I want eternal life, but I can never keep that standard!'

Likewise, the rich young ruler came to Jesus stating his desire to follow Jesus and obtain salvation. Jesus told him he ought to sell all his goods to follow Him. Jesus was intentionally lifting the bar to where it hurt. The man thought he had perfectly kept all the commandments and was therefore worthy of eternal life. Jesus was trying to show him that the standard to obtain eternal life is infinitely high – it is the very righteousness of God. Unfortunately, the man did not repent in humility, but clung to his self-centred form of self-righteousness.

Israel was given the Law with its 600 or so commandments, to teach them how high and unyielding the standard of God's righteousness is. The idea was for them to humble themselves, seeing the beauty of the Law, but recognising their inability to keep it. Paul wrote, *"Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (**Galations 3:24**).

Peter certainly thought that he had it in himself to be loyal to Jesus. But when push came to shove, he found that he could not do it. He loved himself too much. He wept bitterly over it, but he had to be shown that even his good desire to serve Jesus was not enough. He had to have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit before he was able to stand for Christ.

God will often allow us to attempt His perfect standards in our own strength. He will allow us to take upon ourselves a task far too great for us. He will allow us to begin the pursuit of God in our own strength. Inevitably, we come to a place of brokenness. We see that we do not have it in us. We want to desire God, but we do not have the strength to carry it out:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

Romans 7:18

The answer to this problem is found in **Romans 7:24-25**. Having shown a person the futility of seeking real life within themselves, having shown them the glory of God, and having shown them they cannot reach God without God's grace, the walls of pride come down, and we are finally in a state to receive grace.

The end result of most of the examples we have looked at was the blessed state called humility. God shows us what we have inside is really not much to boast in at all. He then shows us what He offers is far, far greater. He then slays us by showing us that we cannot reach Him on our own terms.

The desire we have for God can only be met by God – and on God's terms. When God lays siege to a proud heart, He is not interested in a truce, He is interested in total surrender.

God's work in and through us amounts to this: He wants us to come to a place of absolute soul-hunger for God, where we do not seek things in the place of, or higher than, God, and where we do not try and bring things to the table to bargain with God. That's when God gets all the glory – when everything is of grace.

This is humility – longing for God. Longing for the pleasure of pleasing Him – for the happiness of holiness. Desiring the victory of God in our surrender. Desiring to see and savour God in our silence. Desiring to exult in His exaltation. When we are humble, God still gets the glory, as it is His work, not ours. And to this humble heart, God gives more grace. He enables us to obey the greatest commandment – to love God with all our heart, soul and mind.

How can we apply all this to our lives?

Question yourself: What is God doing in your life? Showing you the vanity of self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness? Sometimes our trials last longer because we resist God, instead of submitting to Him and what He is doing. Perhaps He is in the process of revealing how sweet He is to your soul. Don't crowd out the possibility of enjoying God by pursuing lesser, vain things.

As **Jeremiah 2:5** says: *"Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?"* and later we read *"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"* (**Jeremiah 2:13**).

Perhaps God is purifying even your desire for Him by showing you that even desiring God must be by His grace. But here's the key- don't aim for humility as an end in itself. We'll get it wrong when we try to 'do humility' for its own sake. That will make you like a runner who is focused on his leg motion during a race, rather than on the finish line.

Instead, aim for what humility seeks to achieve: a desire for God. Ask yourself at all times, is my chief desire now a desire to know and love God? Am I doing this to see and enjoy His glory? When we answer that question frequently and honestly, the result will be that we will truly notice our pride, and can turn from it.

When we see that pride is desiring self and things above God, it becomes a lot simpler to identify it, turn from it, and turn to God for the grace to love Him as we should. Christ was humble – because Christ's greatest desire was for His Father to be exalted. It was this goal – the joy that was set before Him – that enabled Him to continually lay aside things to go after that pursuit of the joy of loving His Father.