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A proud person blames everyone while excusing himself.

A person is the most susceptible to falling when he is doing well. When he reaches a level of success, it is easy to forget the grace which transported him there. Because this is true, we are to *“be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”*. (1 Peter 5:5)

Uzziah, a descendent of King David, was crowned king at the age of sixteen. At first he sought God diligently - you would too if you were made ruler of a nation at that age! More than likely he was overwhelmed and humbled by the magnitude of the undertaking. Yet, *“as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper”*. (2 Chronicles 26:5)

Because he utterly relied on God, he was greatly blessed. He made war against the Philistines, defeating them in numerous cities, as well as the Arabians, Meunites, and Ammonites. Under his lead the nation became strong both economically and militarily. There was an abundance of prosperity under his leadership. All this success was the result of the grace of God on his life. But over time something changed: His humility was replaced by his own confidence. *“But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense at the altar of incense”*. (2 Chronicles 26:16)

It was not in a weak moment, but when Uzziah was strong that his heart was filled with pride. As he surveyed the prosperity and success that encompassed all of his domain his heart ceased to seek the Lord. As his achievements mounted he assumed God would continue to bless him just as God had done when he humbly sought him.

His rise to pride didn't happen overnight. But it can easily happen to anyone. People in the kingdom who have fallen have not done so in the dry times, but in the times of abundance.

This is the pattern many Christians fall into. When they first get saved, they hunger to know the Lord and His ways. Their humility is evident because they seek Him and trust Him for everything. They arrive at church with a hunger in their hearts, “Lord, I want to know you!” They submit to God's direct and delegated authority. But after they have amassed knowledge and waxed strong through experience, their attitudes change. Now, instead of reading their Bible with the intent of “Lord, reveal Yourself and Your ways to me,” they use it to support their established doctrine reading what they believe instead of believing what they read. No longer do they listen for God's heavenly voice in the voice of the speaker. Instead they fold their arms and lean back with the attitude, “I'll see what he (or God forbid it be a she) knows.” They are the experts in Scriptures but have forfeited their tenderness and humility of heart. The grace to serve God now wanes.

1st Corinthians 8:1 says, *“... We know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”*. Love does not seek its own but lays its life down for the Master and those it is called to serve. God explained that knowledge gained without love results in pride.

When pride entered the heart of Uzziah did he become more or less religious? The amazing answer? He became more religious! His heart was lifted up and he entered the temple to perform his so-called worship. Pride and a religious spirit go hand-in-hand. A religious spirit causes a person to think he is humble because of his appearance of spirituality. The truth is he is proud. A proud person stays in bondage to a religious spirit because he is too proud to admit he has such a spirit. This is one reason that pride is so camouflaged in the church. It hides behind a religious (put your denomination here) mask.

Azariah and the other eighty priests of the temple went into the sanctuary where Uzziah was burning incense and confronted him saying, *“It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord...Get out of the sanctuary for you have trespassed. You shall have no honor from the Lord God”*. (2 Chronicles 26:18) [Maybe it's just me, but do you know how many times I've wanted to say those exact words to some people posing as ministers?] Watch Uzziah's response when confronted by the priests. *“Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censor in his hand to burn*

incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord, by the altar of incense”.

Uzziah became angry. Pride will always justify itself. This self-defense will be coupled with anger. A proud person blames everyone else while excusing himself. Uzziah directed his anger at the priests, but the problem lay deep within his own bosom. Pride had blinded his eyes! Instead of humbling himself, he allowed anger to fuel his pride. Leprosy broke out on his forehead where all could see it. In this case leprosy was an outward manifestation of an inward condition.

Leprosy in the Old Testament is a type of sin in the New Testament. It is a sad but true commentary that many mighty people have fallen into sin in the church. With many of those that fall into sin, the root is not the sin itself, but the root is pride.

Pride is a subtle and deadly foe yet so easily camouflaged. Those in pride are ignorant of their true condition. Only humility can expose it. Pride is the very root of rebellion and we see its influence right from the start - when Lucifer rebelled against God. God described Lucifer's heart condition.

“You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;....Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor”. (Ezekiel 28:14-17)

All that he was and all that he possessed was a gift from God. Yet at some point he forgot this and longed for more. His heart became lifted up, and he wished to enforce his will. Issuing forth from the pride in his heart he made several proclamations, all which began with the words *“I will” (Isaiah 14:12-15)*. There was no humility within him. He was cast out of God's presence.

Hear this, servant of the Lord. God gives grace to the humble while resisting the proud. You never find the grace of God in an individual who has forgotten where he came from and the one who brought him out. James said, *“But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you”.*

We resist the devil by our submission to God. Our humility and obedience usher in God's grace, which is a mighty weapon against the evil one.

We are told of Jesus: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”. (Hebrews 4:15-16)*

He gives us grace and mercy in our time of need to help us. He is merciful towards our ignorance and weakness (1 Timothy 1:13 and Hebrews 5:2) but not toward willful disobedience (Hebrews 10:26-31). He supplies the grace necessary to overcome our weaknesses. (Look up these Scriptures!)

In this light, we have a new understanding of the truth, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness”. (2 Corinthians 12:9)* Our weakness is our inability to obey God in our own strength. It is not possible to live the life God expects of us on our own. But He adds His strength to our weakness. This aid is called grace. So we can say grace gives us the ability to fulfill what truth demands. This is confirmed by Hebrews 12:28, *“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.....”.*

Receiving God's grace is not a one-time experience. James told believers, *“But He gives us more and more grace (James 4:6 AMP)*. We need it every moment of every day. In each epistle Paul begins with greetings of *“Grace to you from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*. These letters were for believers, illustrating our continual need for God's grace.

We are also encouraged to grow in the grace of God (2 Peter 3:17-18). As we do our hearts are strengthened to fulfill God's will and shun the will of man. We see this exemplified in the life of Jesus: *“And the child grew, and became strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him”. (Luke 2:40)* The grace of God on His life empowered Him to develop a strong spirit and fulfill the will of His father.

There are various degrees of grace. This is revealed in Acts 4:33. *“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all.”* We should hunger for greater degrees of God’s grace. The greater the grace, the greater our capacity to serve and glorify the Lord. And remember, God’s word says the pathway to grace is humility.

We are to walk continually in humility, for God gives His grace to those who are of a contrite spirit (James 4:6-7). Those who are utterly dependent on him. We see this humility or complete dependence upon God’s grace in Paul. *“Now I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities..... for when I am weak, then I am strong - the less I have, the more I depend on Him (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10 TLB)*

Hear his words, *“The less I have, the more I depend on Him”*. This was the progression of Paul’s life. As you study it, you will find that the longer he lived, the more dependent on God’s grace he became and the less he relied on his own strength. This attitude breeds humility. The longer Paul lived, the more he emptied himself for the cause of Christ.

When he was first saved, Paul humbled himself by forsaking all he had achieved in the flesh, laying aside all his accomplishments as nothing but vanity. *“But all these things that I once thought very worthwhile - now I’ve thrown them all away so that I can put my trust and hope in Christ alone”*. (Philippians 3:7TLB)

All who come to Jesus and are genuinely born-again, reach this place. However, humility does not stop there; it is progressive.

Proceeding with Paul as an example, he was a leader with an abundance of spiritual revelation and wisdom. This afforded him the opportunity to achieve much in his service to the Lord. But his knowledge could have easily become a stumbling block. He willingly released all he had achieved before his conversion, but what about after he became a Christian leader? Would he allow wisdom and accomplishment to lift his heart, or would he continue to depend on God’s grace? We find the answer in Paul’s own written words after years of successful ministry. *“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”*. (1 Corinthians 15:9)

Do you hear the humility in these words? He did not even consider himself worthy to be called an apostle because of the terrible things he did prior to his conversion. Yet this man received possibly the greatest revelation truth of God’s forgiveness - that a man in Christ Jesus is a new creation. Previous moral and spiritual conditions have passed away and all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17) Even with this revelation and the accompanying ministry exploits, he still remembered the magnitude and greatness of God’s mercy toward him. *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than all of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”* (1 Corinthians 15:10)

“I labored more abundantly than all the other apostles!” Is Paul talking out both sides of his mouth? This comment sounds arrogant, yet it is not. It precedes another declaration of Paul’s dependence on God. He followed his assessment of himself as the least of the apostles with an acknowledgment that all he had done had only been by God’s ability. He was fully aware that all he had achieve spiritually flowed from the unmerited favor and grace of God.

Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians in the year A.D. 55. His self-description as *“the least of the apostles”* is hard to swallow. Both in his day and throughout the history of the church, Paul has been esteemed as one of the greatest apostles. Now consider what he said to the Ephesians seven years later in A.D. 62 after further ministry accomplishments. *“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace which was given me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.....(Ephesians 3:7,8)*

Seven years earlier he called himself the least apostle, and now he describes himself as lower than the least of all the saints! What? If anyone could boast in their Christianity, it surely was Paul. Yet the longer he served the Lord, the smaller he saw himself. His humility was progressive. Could this be why the grace of God on his life increased proportionately the older he became?

At the close of his life Paul sent two letters to Timothy. Hear again how Paul described himself: *“this is a faithful saying, one worthy of all acception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am CHIEF!”* This is this Ministries’ theme verse!

Now Paul is the “chief” of sinners! He did not say “I was chief”. He said, “I am chief”! After years of great accomplishment, his confession was not, “I have done it all; my great ministry should be esteemed”. Nor did he say, “I have done a great work and deserve the respect of a true apostle”. It was not, “I am the least of the apostles” as he had written several years earlier; nor was it, “I am the least of the Saints”. It was, “*of all sinners, I am chief*”. Though he knew that in Christ, he was the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21) he never lost sight of God’s grace and mercy. In fact, the longer he lived the more dependent he became on God’s grace.

This explains another statement Paul made toward the end of his life. “*Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it on my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*”. (Philippians 3:13,14)

Can you hear the humility in his words: “*I haven’t arrived, and what I have achieved, I leave behind in thought. It is nothing compared to the quest to fully know Christ Jesus my Lord*”.

Notice he said, “*I press toward the goal*”. To press means there is resistance and opposition. One of the greatest opportunities to the upward call is pride. That’s the reason the upward call is so easy to miss.

We believers need to battle against the foe of pride rather than the battle for our rights and privileges. We waste so much time defending ourselves. This leads to factions and contention. I know in prison this can be the last place we want to feel taken advantage of or our “rights” have been violated. I remember having a heated discussion with one of my superiors and in the middle of it, I heard “your pride is being exposed”. I was convicted and the following Scripture came to mind: “*By pride comes nothing but strife but with the well advised is wisdom*”. (Proverbs 13:10) I find that if we find ourselves arguing with anyone, it’s due to pride lurking somewhere and we must deal with it. “What if I know I’m right?” “*Agree with your adversary quickly*”. (Matthew 5:25) By refusing to defend yourself, one if not both of the following will happen. First, you lay down pride, which will open your eyes to recognize flaws in your own character that went previously undetected. Second, if you are right, you are still following the example of Christ by allowing God His rightful place as judge of the situation. “*For this is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly*”. (1 Peter 2:19,21-23)

This is our calling to follow Christ’s example, who suffered when he was not at fault. This precept wars against the natural mind since his logic appears absurd. However, the wisdom of God proves that humility and obedience make room for God’s righteous judgment. Defense, correction, vindication or whatever other response is appropriate should proceed from the hand of God, not from man. An individual who vindicates himself does not walk in humility of Christ. No one on earth possesses more authority than Jesus, yet He never defended Himself. “*But when He was accused by the chief priests and elders, He gave no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, ‘do you not hear how many things they testify against you?’ But He gave no answer, not even a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed*” (Matthew 27:12-14)

Jesus was accused of a complete lie! There was not a morsel of truth in what they accused Him of. Yet He did not correct His accusers or defend Himself. His behavior caused the governor to marvel at His composure. He had never seen such behavior from a man.

Why didn’t Jesus defend Himself? It was so that He could remain under His Father’s judgment and thus His protection. Remember Peter said “*when He was reviled, He did not revile in return... But committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*”. (1 Peter 2:23) When we refuse to defend ourselves we are hidden under the hand of God’s grace and judgment. There is no safer place. “*Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies* (Romans 8:23)

In contrast, those who defend themselves come under the judgment of their accusers. The moment you justify or defend yourself before another you yield to them as your judge. You have forfeited your authority or position in Christ, for your accusers rise above you when you answer his criticism. Yes, his authority is elevated above you because of your self-defense. Attempting to prove your innocence, you succumb to the mercy of your accuser. “*Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going to him in court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*” (Matthew 5:25,26)

According to this parable you will be made to pay whatever your accuser demands as restitution. You are left helpless and at his mercy. The greater offense he bears toward you, the less mercy he will extend to you. He will exact every penny of your debt.

Pride would say, "Defend yourself". Jesus said, "*Agree with your adversary*". In so doing you lay down pride and make God the judge of the situation. And any of you who have been falsely accused, myself included, look around you..... I think we can learn a valuable lesson here.

"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 18:4)

When we humble ourselves by obeying God's word then His favor, grace and righteous judgment rest upon us. This attitude is hard to develop - maybe even more so in prison- in our quick, convenient and easy society. We are trained to lack the stamina required to endure patiently. God's deliverance always comes but often differently than how or when we expect. But with His deliverance comes great glory! Humility is the road to true and enduring success.

Let's all humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord

Your servant.....

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Christ's

Heart

In

Every

Felon