

Humbling Ourselves to Come to God



Pride vs Humility (Part 8)
by Derek Prince

In my talk yesterday I pointed to the perfect pattern of self-humbling provided by Jesus Himself. From heaven's glory and the place of equality with God, He took the seven great steps down that culminated with death on the cross. For this reason God, in turn, exalted Him to the highest place in the universe, gave Him the name that is above every name, and ordained that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue should confess Him as Lord.

Although this law of self-humbling was thus perfectly demonstrated in Jesus, it's most important for us to see that exactly the same law operates just as accurately and just as universally in the life of each one of us. And in our own lives there are two main successive phases in which we need to apply this principle of self-humbling. The first phase is in order to come to God initially. The second phase is after we have to come to God, in order to progress in the spiritual life.

Let me just state those two phases again. The first phase of self-humbling, in order to come to God initially. The second phase of self-humbling, in order to progress in the spiritual life.

Today I'm going to speak about the principle of self-humbling as it applies in coming to God initially. In Matthew 18:1–4, Jesus used the pattern of a child as an example of how to come to God.

> "At that time disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" (NIV)

Some of those people were assuming that they were already in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus said you haven't even entered. And the reason you haven't entered is because you haven't met the condition. What is the condition? He uses the very phrase "humbling himself." "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Certainly the people of Jesus' day didn't expect that kind of

an answer. They would have expected Him to point to some ruler, or some learned rabbi, or to some wealthy man. But He took the most conspicuous example of weakness and humility, a little child, and He said, "If you ever want to get into the kingdom of heaven, you've got to change and become like this little child."

Now, little children are not perfect. Those of you who are parents with children will know that! They sometimes lose their temper. They're sometimes difficult to deal with. But there is one feature of a little child that is almost universally true: a child is teachable. A child doesn't have prejudices and preconceptions which close it out from the truth. It receives the truth without having to prove itself right or demonstrate its cleverness. And so, Jesus chooses the child as an example of how to get into the kingdom of heaven. We have to humble ourselves just like a little child.

And then look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29, about the people whom God chooses. Frankly, it's an unlikely lot of people. This is what Paul says:

> "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; [Notice the three 'not many's' not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble.] but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God." (NASB)

You see, there are three categories of people who find it particularly hard to get into God's kingdom: the wise, the powerful and the noble. Is there anything wrong with wisdom or power or ability? Does God have anything against those things? Not at all. The problem is that those are the three main sources of pride in human nature. People are proud because of their wisdom, their education, their cleverness, because of their power, their influence, or because of their noble birth and their social position. And so the proportion of such people who get into the kingdom of heaven is small, not because there is anything wrong with those things in themselves, but because they are commonly the source of pride in human nature and the proud cannot get into the kingdom of God.

Then listen to what Jesus says in a remarkable interview with a certain rich ruler. Jesus uses a very remarkable phrase that I want to explain. He speaks about a camel going through the eye of a needle. Let's read this account of this interview between Jesus and the ruler in Luke 18:18–25:

> "A certain ruler asked Him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good, except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother." 'All these I've kept since I was a boy,' the ruler said. [And I believe he was speaking the truth] When Jesus heard this, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!' [Why? Because people will so often trust in their riches. Riches are so often a source of pride. But then this the comment of Jesus:] Indeed, it easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (NIV)

Have you found that somewhat difficult to understand? Let me offer you an explanation. I have lived in the land of Israel for several years at different times and I have heard from firsthand sources the situation that existed in the wall of the old city at the Jaffa Gate even at the beginning of this century. In those days, there was a great big iron gate which was closed every night at sunset and never opened again until sunrise next day. On no account would they ever open that big iron gate during the hours of darkness. But it would sometimes happen that a traveler on a camel would arrive late at the gate and would knock on the door and ask to be admitted. And when they did that they opened just a small gate inside the main iron gate and then the rich man would dismount from his camel, he would strip the camel of everything on its back—all the baggage he was carrying—force the camel to its knees and then, with great difficulty, the camel on its knees without any of its baggage could just squeeze through that small gate in the Jaffa Gate which was known as the Eye of the Needle.

And that's how it is when a rich man comes to the kingdom of God. He has to lay aside all of his baggage, all his pretension all his pride, all his arrogance, all his independence, and he has to get right down on his knees and he can just squeeze through. But you see, a poor man who carries nothing and has nothing in his hand but a staff, he can get through much more easily. All he has to do is stoop, pass through and he is

on the inside. The same gate is for all, rich and poor, but so often it's harder for the rich to get through than the poor.

For my closing example today I want to turn to the pattern of a man in the Old Testament who tried to come to God in a big way and found that it didn't work. The name of the man was Naaman. His story is related in 2 Kings 5. He had a very distinguished background. He was a great man. He was highly regarded, he was a valiant soldier, he was a commander of an army, but he had one problem—he was a leper. How many people are like that? They've got everything, but a problem. So he was told by one of his maid servants, who was a little Israelite girl, who had been taken captive, that if he could make his way to the prophet in Samaria—that was Elisha—he could be healed of his leprosy. So he went to the king of Syria and asked for permission and the king of Syria said, "Go on! That's a good idea." And Scripture says he took with him ten talents of silver (that's seven hundred and fifty pounds of silver), six thousand shekels of gold (that's a hundred and fifty pounds of gold) and ten sets of clothing. See, he was going to come to God in a big way. When he got to the king, the king didn't know what to do with him. He was desperate, but the prophet Elisha sent a message to the king and said, "Send him to me and he will be healed." And this is the end of the story:

> "So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, 'Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will restored and you will be cleansed.' [What an insult. Elisha didn't even come to the door. He just sent a message.] But Naaman went away angry and said, 'I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. [Naaman expected personal ministry from the great prophet. Something dramatic. And then he commented:] Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?' So he turned and went off in a rage. [Have you ever seen the Jordan river? It certainly is a muddy river. I can understand Naaman's reaction when he compared it to the snow fed streams of his own country.] But Naaman's servants went to him and said, 'My father, if the prophet had told you to some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy." (NIV)

You see the lesson? He had to lay aside everything. Just like the camel that was going to get through that tiny gate, he had to lay aside his rank, his uniform, his wealth, his position, his prestige. He had to take off his clothes and expose that leprous skin of his. But when he did that, when he humbled himself, when he fully obeyed and went down into that river and dipped seven times, then he received his reward. What a beautiful picture of a man who tried to come to God in a big way, but learned to humble himself and receive what God had promised him.

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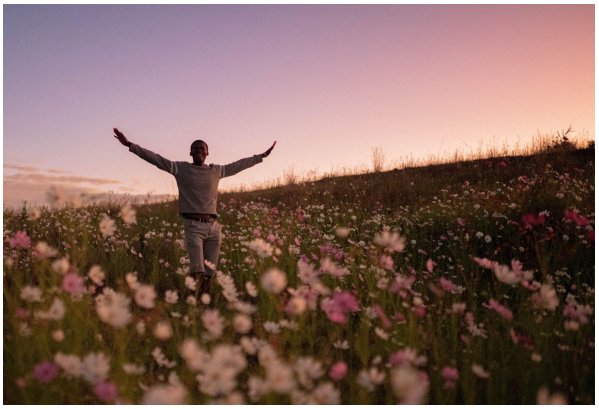

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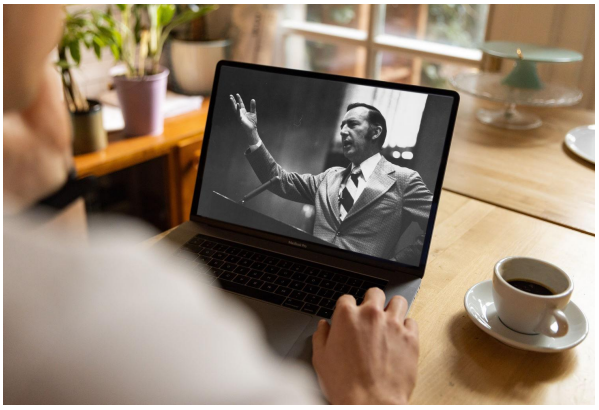

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