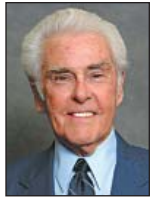


## Live humbly

Can a reigning monarch live humbly? In Old Testament history, at least one monarch is described as humbling himself before God.



**John Howell**

Josiah became king of Judah after Israel had committed many sins, which provoked God to anger. Josiah sought to bring the people back to the Lord so God said to him, “Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you,” declared the Lord” (2 Chronicles 34:27).

The king under whom Daniel served was not at all like Josiah. Instead of humbling himself, he reveled in his pride for what he had accomplished in Babylon.

**Biblically, pride is the basic sin that leads to other sins (Daniel 4:28-30).** In *A Theological Word Book Bible*, scholar Alan Richardson points out that a “distinctive feature of biblical religion is its teaching about pride and its converse, humility; this is unparalleled in other religions and ethical systems. According to the Bible (and to the classical Christian moral teaching), pride is the very root and essence of sin” (p. 176). From the sin of Adam’s rebellion in Genesis against God’s instructions and on through the Old Testament, God condemns the proud and commends the humble (especially in the Psalms and Wisdom literature).

Pride attributes to self the honor and glory that are due to God. What God desires most from his followers is not outward sacrifice but a humble spirit. A familiar affirmation of God’s desire is in Psalm 51:17: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

King Nebuchadnezzar was quite content with his place in life as he described it. He “was at home in his palace, contended and

prosperous” (4:4). However, his contentment was disturbed by a dream that only Daniel could interpret for him. He was to be driven away from people and live among the animals. David encouraged him to “renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed” which would be a sign of humbling himself.

Verse 28 declares that “all this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar but verses 4:31-33 describe the judgment of God coming later. Thus verse 28 appears to be predictive, introducing what will happen later as punishment for his sins against God.

**Humble yourself or God will humble you (Dan. 4:31-33).** “Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’”

In some ways, the king’s admiration for what he did in Babylon is justified by his building program. “Apart from his military conquests, Nebuchadnezzar is noteworthy for a massive rebuilding program for Babylon itself” (Holman Bible Dictionary, p. 142). The judgment of God came upon him because he allowed his pride to overcome any dependence on God for what he accomplished. “Boasting, and the pride which trusts in oneself or in any human prince or army, are contrasted with the true humility which trusts in God also...the proper attitude for man in the presence of the Lord is self-abasement and trustfulness” (Richardson, p. 176). And “those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

**God restores us as we humble ourselves before him (Daniel 4:34-35).** At the end of the king’s time of punishment for excessive pride he declared, I “raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.” Whereas prior to this experience he portrayed God as being

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the God of the four youths from Judah, in this passage he personally praised God.

We turn from Nebuchadnezzar’s experience in the Book of Daniel and allow the Christian message to call us to humility as we seek to follow the example and teaching of Jesus. The Greek term for being humble is “to bring down one’s pride, to have a modest opinion of one’s self, to behave in an unassuming manner devoid of all haughtiness” (Matthew 18:4, 23:12; Luke 14:11, 18:24). (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 614)

Jesus’ response to his disciples’ questioning who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven challenged their pride. In this short text (Matthew 14:1-5), Jesus alludes to a character deficiency among his own disciples. The disciples wanted positions of power and influence and had lost sight of God’s divine purpose for their lives. So Jesus used “children” as an example of what the “greatest” in the Kingdom of God must embrace if they are to be spiritually humble.

Humility is placing Christ at the center of one’s attitudes and desires. T.W. Hunt, in his book, *The Mind of Christ*, explains, “The humble hear the Lord. That is part of being humble. The humble look up. They cannot look down on others; for they consider themselves to be at the bottom. The proud disregard the Lord, for look is always downward” (p. 93).

Judson W. VanDeventer captures Christian surrender to humility through Christ in his hymn, “All to Jesus I surrender, Lord, I give myself to Thee; Fill me with Thy love and power, let Thy blessing fall on me. I surrender all...”

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