



Light from the Word

Broken-Heartedness: The Foundation of Humility

God has used many people throughout history. Is there a common thread of character which unites them? We certainly see a great diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and personalities. What do Joseph, Moses, David, Isaiah, Peter and the others have in common? What attribute did they possess that made them useful to God?

It was not their education, wealth, position, or specific gifts and talents, though God used those things. Indeed it was not that they had reached a state of perfection. We know that David sinned terribly with Bathsheba and in the murder of Uriah. Moses killed a man and later became so angry he struck the rock and was forbidden to enter the Promised Land.

Indeed we find in these examples, and Scripture teaches in principle, that it is not some inherent ability, skill, or talent which makes one useful to God. Rather, it is an attitude of heart, a posture toward God and others, which defines God's servants. God, the Maker of all things, is clear that He needs nothing from us except for humility of heart.

"Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

God referred to David as *"after mine own heart"* (1 Sam. 13:14). Surely to possess the heart of God would be to walk in humility before Him and to obey Him as in Isaiah's entreaty to be contrite and to have respect unto the Word. When faced with great trials, such as before Goliath, David went *"in the*

name of the Lord" (1 Samuel 17:45). These life lessons taught him faith and obedience which led him to later say, *"I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only"* (Psalm 71:16).

To be broken-hearted is to be humble, contrite, meek, and repentant. It stands in stark contrast to man's nature which is proud, self-assured, arrogant, and self-righteous. Humility is a prerequisite for grace (James 4:6) and begins with a right understanding of God and our relationship to Him.

God has revealed Himself in His Creation and through His Word. In faith, we learn that we are the creature and He is the Creator. He is all holiness and purity. In our free will, we have sinned and come short of His glory (Romans 3:23) and deserve death (Romans 6:23). We are wholly lost and undone and in need of mercy. God, in His great love and mercy, has made a way of escape for us who deserve judgment. He sent Jesus to pay our debt on the Cross, offering full pardon and redemption to all who believe upon Him. (John 3:16, Psalm 103:3, 2 Cor. 5:21, Romans 5:1).

What is the response of God's servants when they begin to comprehend the nature and work of God?

Joseph learned much through the trials he experienced; being sold by his brothers, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, forgotten by the butler to whom he prophesied in prison. The Psalmist describes this as being tried by God's word before Joseph's time came, *"Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him"* (Psalm 105:19). Then, when he was to be used by God, he could humbly say, *"It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace"* (Gen. 4:16).

Moses stood before the burning bush and *"hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God"* (Exodus 3:6), asking, *"Who am I"* to do the work which God

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asked of him (Exodus 3:11). This man, of whom it was said, “*Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*” (Num. 12:3), led his people out of bondage, called manna from heaven, water from a rock, and much more. Only in his brokenness could he demonstrate God’s power.

David, the shepherd boy who became king, was entrusted with much power and influence after he learned to trust God. Yet perhaps his greatest test came when confronted by his own sin. Nathan weaved a story that broke through the pride which had crept into David’s heart and elicited the righteously angry cry, “*As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die*” (2 Sam. 12:5). When the prophet’s condemning words, “*Thou art the man*” pierced his heart, he replied, “*I have sinned against the Lord,*” and later anguished, “*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me*” (Psalm 51:1-3).

In contrast, Saul had justified

and tried to cover disobedience with a self-righteous appeal to having sacrificed to the Lord. Samuel called him out saying, “*Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*” (1 Sam. 15:22). Ultimately chastising him with the words, “*When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?*” (1 Sam. 15:17). Although God revealed lifetime lessons through Saul’s humility and pride, it was only in Saul’s humility that God’s grace had free course.

Isaiah, who stood before kings and whose prophecies guided the children of Israel for generations, could only say, “*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*” (Isaiah 6:5) when the glory and holiness of the Lord was revealed to him. He could then teach us that, “*thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones*” (Isaiah 57:15).

Peter, that bold disciple who denied His Lord in the hour of greatest need, was assured by Jesus, “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*” (Luke 22:32), but only after being warned that, “*Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat*” (Luke 22:31). That “sifting” brought him to a place where he could make a humble and sincere expression of love toward Jesus (John 21:15-17). Only then could he be used by Jesus to “*Feed my sheep.*” And his boldness could be turned to a confidence in God which enabled him to say, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29), when confronted by the same religious authorities before whom he had fled when relying upon his own strength.

May God grant that we can daily seek an attitude of brokenness as these servants of God. It will serve as the foundation of humility and the key to His grace.