

The Remedy to Sinful Behavior

James 4:6
2/27/2000

The book of James, the fourth chapter. We will read together verses 1 through 12. James, chapter 4, verses 1 through 12.

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”

Now in James, chapter 4, James has been reproofing and rebuking his readers for the sinful behavior in their lives. And as we observed in our study together last time, there were four sins that he specifically addressed.

The first sin that he addressed was that of wars and fightings and killings, in verses 1 and 2. These are social wars, in which we have declared war in our hearts against another person so that there is an ongoing attitude of hostility and malice towards that person. This attitude of war, of course, produces fightings, in which we attempt to attack and hurt another person usually by way of *verbal assault*. And the ultimate outcome of such wars and fightings is that they result in social *killings*, in which the parties separate from each other on a permanent basis. So this was the first sin that he identified in the lives of his hearers—that of wars and fightings and killings.

The second sin that he identified was the use of wrong methods for the fulfillment of their desires. He spoke of this in verse 2. He says, You have not because you ask not. Instead of asking, you are going around trying to fight and to war and to kill to get what you want. So these people were using the carnal methods of wars, fightings, and killings, to get what they wanted, rather than *spiritual* methods, such as *prayer*. And so their legitimate desires were unfulfilled because they were using *carnal* methods to try to *achieve* them, rather than spiritual methods.

And then the third sin that he identified in them was that of ungodly and unsanctified desires, in verse 3, when he said that these people *did* use spiritual methods, such as prayer, and yet they *still* did not obtain the fulfillment of their desires, because their desires themselves were motivated by sinful selfishness and they were asking for things that were contrary to God's word and to God's will. Their ungodly and unsanctified desires needed to be *repented of*, not fulfilled.

And then the fourth sin that he identified in the lives of these people was that of friendship with the world, in verse 4. These people were giving approval, endorsement, and affirmation to the attitudes, motives, speech, and conduct of those who were living in rebellion against God. They were *identifying* more with the unsaved than they were with God and with his *people*. And thus, they were acting as enemies of God by aligning themselves with those who were in rebellion against God.

Now all of these sins, we saw last time, were the result of following the wisdom that was from *beneath*—the wisdom, as it says in chapter 3, and verse 15, that is earthly, sensual, and devilish. And so the world and the flesh and the devil are all powerful opponents, that when combined together can easily overwhelm the believer and provoke very sinful behavior on his part. Without proper precautions and the obtaining of divine help, the believer is potentially capable of the *worst* kind of behavior.

Well what, then, is the remedy for preventing and curing this sinful pattern of behavior that James describes these professing believers as falling into in these first five verses? Well the remedy, as we said last time, is described in verses 6 through 12. And to summarize what he says, he says in short that it is the *grace* of God, received through the *means* of grace that is the remedy to this pattern of sinful behavior.

In verse 6 he says, But He gives more grace. And so he goes on in the remaining verses to talk about the *means* whereby we can *obtain* this grace that will enable us to overcome these wars and fightings and killings, the use of unbiblical methods to obtain our desires, the possession of unsanctified and ungodly desires, and this friendship with the world.

Romans 5, and verse 20, says, Where sin does *abound*, grace does *much more abound*. And this is exactly what James says in verse 6 when he says, But *He*, that is, God, gives *more grace*. Well, more than what? More than the sin that does so easily *beset* us; more than the *power* of the world and the flesh and the Devil; *more* than the habit of ingrained practices. He gives *more* grace than *any* of those things so that grace enables us to triumph over this ungodly wisdom that leads to such ungodly behavior.

So having spent our time last Lord's Day evening identifying these four sins that he was rebuking in the lives of these professing believers, this evening we want to begin to consider together the *remedy for* those sins. And the remedy for those sins, of course, is listed in verse 6, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

In the first place then this evening, let us consider together that *God gives grace*. This is the first step in considering together the remedy for these sins that he identified in the first five verses, is that God gives grace.

Now in verse 6, he says, “But *he*,” speaking of God, “*giveth more grace*.” Now notice if you will the *contrast* between God’s generosity and the *selfishness* of the people that he has just been *describing*. When you look at what is described in verses 1 through 5, you see people who are envying, who are desiring to have, and who seek to *consume upon themselves* whatever they can obtain. They’re very selfish *people*, and they’re willing to go to any lengths to *get* their selfish desires fulfilled.

In *contrast* to this, God *gives*. He doesn’t take. He doesn’t desire to consume upon Himself. He openhandedly *gives*. He is generous in contrast to our grasping and our selfishness. And it is precisely His generosity and His openhandedness that should *shame* us into letting go of the envious, selfish desires that leads us to fight and to war with other people, and to pray in a *selfish* way, rather than to give and to serve. If God gives so *generously* to us, then we ought to be ashamed of our own *selfishness* that he mentions here in verses 1 through 4.

But the main thrust of this statement is one of encouragement. He gives more grace. And what James is reminding us of here is that there is *more* than enough grace in God to check the *strongest* sins and the most *powerful* evil desires that we possess. No matter how strong our temptations are, God by His grace is able to overcome them. As Matthew 19, and verse 26 says, “With God all things are possible.”

You see, the thing about sin is that sin is *finite*, but God’s grace is *infinite*. And *sin* is no match for it. And when *sin* has done its best and *sin* has done its worst, and sin lies exhausted, God has but begun to pour out His grace and His mercy. The world and the flesh and the Devil *all* have their limits, but God has none. And so He gives *more* grace—grace that is *greater*, the hymn writer says, than *all* of our sins.

Now to be sure, *we*, by ourselves, cannot cure our envy, control our tongue, or tame our sinful desires. But God certainly *can*. And our discouragements, and our battle with sin, are only designed to turn our eyes and confidence *off* of ourselves and onto an allsufficient God whose resources and whose grace are *utterly* without limit.

It is, then, to God and His grace that we must *look* for victory over sin and not to ourselves or anything else. When James lists these awful sins and these awful behaviors, the first thing he says is not, You guys need to *stop* it now. Now certainly, he will address that as he goes on, but the first thing he brings out is God’s *grace*. *That’s* the remedy. The remedy does not lie in us *doing* better, trying *harder*. The remedy lies in the supply of God’s grace.

Now we must remember that this grace is *given*. It says, “He *giveth* more grace.” It is not something we *earn*, nor is it something we deserve; it is not something God is obligated, somehow, to pour out upon us. But even though it *is* given, and it is given *freely*, it is not given

except through the means that God has provided for its reception. Grace does not just somehow automatically appear, irrespective of our conduct or of our condition. There are things we must avoid if we are to receive this gift, namely pride. And there are things we must *do* if we are to receive this gift, namely humble ourselves. He says, God resists the *proud*, but He gives *grace* to the *humble*. And so this giving of grace does not occur *irrespective* of what we do or what our condition is. But it is given by way of a particular *means* or pattern.

And so God did not only offer us grace, but tells us how we may partake of it. He says God “giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” So those who would have God’s grace, which He freely gives, must pursue the right way to obtain it. God who has decreed to *give* this marvelous gift of grace that will enable us to *overcome* this wretched behavior that so easily besets us, has also decreed that means whereby we *obtain* it. And those who would *have* God’s gifts but who neglect the *means* He has prescribed for their reception have only themselves to blame for their lack. Because the *means* He gives for their reception are not beyond our *abilities*. Those means may challenge our *laziness* or they may reveal our *insincerity*, but they are not beyond our ability.

It’s kind of like a hungry man who would like to have the free soup that is offered down the street at the soup kitchen. But he dies of hunger because he is too lazy to walk the two blocks to where it is being handed out, and because he is too indifferent to his condition to do anything about it. It was his for the taking, had he employed the means to *obtain* it. The means were not beyond his ability, but his *laziness* and his insincerity kept him from the means of his *deliverance*.

And so it is with us. The grace is there to be had for the taking. And we *lack* grace only because we are not willing to put forth the effort to obtain it, which is clearly within our ability, or because we are too indifferent and unconcerned about our condition to really do anything about it.

And so God gives grace. He *gives*, in contrast to our grasping and our taking. He *gives* to encourage us that the His grace is greater than all of our sins. But He gives that grace through particular means, and we *must* avail ourselves of those *means*. Those means are within our grasp if we are not too lazy or indifferent to employ them.

And that brings us then to our second point. Having seen that God *gives* grace, in the second place let us consider together that *pride hinders grace*. Pride hinders grace. Now he says here, “But He,” God, “giveth more grace”—more than our sin. “Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Now if we are to have grace, we must first of all renounce *pride*. What James is doing here is he is quoting Proverbs 3, and verse 34, which says God scorns the scorners, but He gives grace to the lowly. In the Septuagint, it says, God resists the proud but gives grace to the lowly. And so, it has ever been the case from the beginning to the present that God resists the proud, and He will bestow *none* of His gifts of grace upon them. The word here “resists” means to set oneself against; it means to oppose. You see, there is a mutual opposition between God and the proud. The proud defy God, and God *resists* the proud.

Now this sin of pride is particularly odious to God, above all other sins. We tend to think of murder as being really bad, or adultery as being really bad. And they *are* really bad. But they're not *nearly* as bad as the sin of pride. And yet we hardly give the sin of pride a second thought. It's one of those "respectable" sins. But this sin is *first* in the list of those God hates, in Proverbs 6, and verse 16. And the reason why is because other sins are against God's *people*, or they're against God's *law*. But *this* sin is against God *Himself*. The proud man doesn't just strike out against other people, or just strike out against God's *law*. He strikes out against God Himself, and seeks to dethrone Him, and would strive to lift himself up against God *Himself*, and would exalt himself *above* God.

Turn in your Bible, if you would please, to Ezekiel 28. We'll read together verses 1 through 10. Ezekiel, chapter 28, verses 1 through 10. Here we have a clear description of a proud man and how pride works in relationship to God. Notice if you will, Ezekiel 28, verses 1 through 10.

"The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up"—there's the essence of pride, the lifting up of the heart. Now here's the result: "and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God." Do you see how this proud man is actually not just attacking other people or God's law, he's in competition with God *himself*. He's setting his heart as God, and saying that he *is* God, and he sits in the seat of God's sovereignty.

Notice verse 3. "[B]ehold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: with thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: by thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted *up* because of thy riches." So here is a person who is *very* wise, *very* capable, advances *very* far in the things of the world, and he starts *thinking* of himself as being *God*.

Notice if you will, verse 6. "[T]herefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas. Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? but thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God."

And so here is a man who in his pride, progress, advancement, wisdom, and wealth has *set* himself against God. And God sets Himself against this man, and not only does not give him grace, but brings to pass his destruction. And so the reason why pride is such an odious sin to God, and the reason why He resists it so much is because *pride* is an attack upon God's *person*.

Pride is also an attack upon God's *sovereignty*, especially in the operation of its *providences*. The proud man meets difficulties that come into his life—the crosses that Marvin was speaking about earlier. He meets them with anger, as though he somehow deserved better than that. And

he meets them with a condemnation of God, as though it was all God's fault. And he begins to accuse and blaspheme God for bringing these things into his life, while the blessings that have come into his life are received as produced by self and result in selfcongratulation and selfpraise. And so the proud man says, All problems—those are God's fault. But all good things are my accomplishments.

What is pride? Pride is simply an inordinate selfesteem in which one thinks more highly of himself that he ought to think, with the result that he views God and his fellow man with contempt and indifference. A proud man is one who has lifted himself up. He has lifted himself up to the point that he thinks more highly of himself than he *ought*. This man we just saw in Ezekiel 28 thought he was as high as *God*. And as a result, he had contempt for God and a contempt for his fellow man, and God would not let that stand.

No one who views God with contempt and indifference, or puts himself in any kind of competition with God, can expect to receive anything *from* God. In Psalm, chapter 12, verses 3 through 4, it says “The Lord shall *cut off* all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?” And so this passage promises that God will cut off such people, and certainly one of the things He will cut them off from is His *grace*. In Proverbs 29, and verse 23, it says, “A man's pride shall bring him low.”

And so it is obvious that proud people are resisted by God. Wealth, ability, position, progress—all of these things can provoke pride in us. And the *further* we advance, the more in danger we are of it. We see men like Pharaoh—Who is the Lord that I should obey *His* voice? We see men like Herod, who accepted the worship of the people who said, The voice of a God, and not of a man! We see someone like Haman, who set himself against the people of God and determined to destroy them all. We see men like Nebuchadnezzar, who says, Is this not great Babylon, which *I* have built for the honor of *my* glory? We see a man like Goliath, who stands and blasphemes God. Every one of these men were resisted by God for their pride.

And even good men, men like David, who when he numbered Israel out of pride; and Hezekiah, when he showed all of his treasures to the emissaries of the king of Babylon, out of pride, were resisted by God and brought low by God because of that pride. As Psalm 2 says, The man who sets himself up to oppose God, the Lord will have him in derision. And it says that the Lord will break him in pieces, like a potter's vessel, with a rod of iron.

So the point is, is that pride hinders grace. And when we start thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think; when we begin to have an inordinate selfesteem and think that we're pretty good stuff, and that we *deserve* all these things we want and God *owes* them to us, and if He doesn't deliver them, we're going to be angry with Him; and we start to accuse and *blame* God for our sins and for our difficulties and our circumstances; and we begin to view God with contempt and our fellow man; we're never going to have the “more grace” that we need to overcome our circumstance and situation of sin. But I'm thankful that he goes on to say, He *does* give grace to the humble.

And so this brings us to our third point this evening. Having seen that God gives grace; having seen that pride *hinders* grace; in the third place notice with me, humility obtains grace. Humility *obtains* grace. Now James specifically says that this “more grace” that God gives is given through a specific means, and that means is humility.

You know, you remember the illustration of the guy at the soup kitchen, right? If the soup kitchen is to the west, pride would be like going to the east. But humility would be like going *towards* the source of the supply. And so it is those who humble themselves that receive God’s grace. And this, too, is abundantly illustrated in the Scriptures. Time and again, we see men of God receiving grace from God in response to an expressed attitude of *humility* on their part.

For example, in Genesis 32 and verse 10, Jacob has this to say. He says, as he’s going back to face Esau, he says, “I am not *worthy* of the *least* of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou have showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.” And so Jacob expressed this great humility before God, and he says, Lord, I’m not worthy of *anything*. He says, You know, I started out with nothing, and now I’ve got *all* of this stuff. I don’t deserve any of it. But, Lord, I still have something I need to ask. Lord, my brother Esau is coming to meet me and I’m *afraid* of him. And Lord, would you preserve me? And of course, the Lord *did*. The Lord gave him *grace*. And the Lord put it in Esau’s heart to receive him and not destroy him; and in fact, their relationship was restored and they were able to live together in peace and unity and harmony. And the reason why the grace was given to overcome the sins of the past and bring about a reconciliation is because a man was willing to *humble* himself and express, not his *right* or his *demands*, but his unworthiness.

And then this occurred in the life of Solomon. In First Kings 3, and in verse 7, he said this: “And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.” And so here’s the man who’s king of Israel, sitting on the throne, and this was no MickeyMouse *kingdom*. David had made a *huge* kingdom that was very wealthy, very famous, very powerful. And here’s the man sitting on the throne of that kingdom. And he says, Lord, he says, I’m just a little child. He said, I don’t know anything. I need your help. Lord, would you give me wisdom that I might know how to rule this people? And God did. God gave him the grace and the ability and the wisdom that he needed to be able to rule Israel magnificently.

And then there was the centurion in Matthew chapter 8, and verse 8. He had a servant that he loved very much who was sick. And the centurion came to Jesus and said, “Lord, I am not *worthy* that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant shall be healed.” You see, he recognized that he was not a fit person for Christ to even come into his house. That was the degree to which he was low in his own eyes. Now centurions were not nobodies in the Roman Empire. They had rule over a hundred soldiers. That was quite a responsibility, and was quite an elevated position. And yet when he came to God, he says, I am not worthy that you should come into my house. And what happened? The Lord commended him for his humility and his faith. He gave him grace and his servant was healed.

And then of course there was the Syro-Phoenician woman—the epitome of humility. When Jesus said to her, in Matthew, chapter 15, It is not fit to take the children’s bread and to cast it to dogs. She said, Lord, I am a dog. But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ tables. And Jesus was so impressed with this woman’s humility that He gave her grace. He gave her what she desired. He gave her the healing of her daughter.

Now we could go on and multiply examples. But what we see here is that when people are *proud*, people like Pharaoh and Herod and Haman and Nebuchadnezzar and Goliath, they are *resisted* by God and destroyed by God. But when people are humble, like Jacob and Solomon and the Centurion and the SyroPhoenician woman, God just *floods* them with grace and with gifts.

What God looks for from us is a sense of *emptiness* in us—that we *have* nothing, and that we *are* nothing, and without His gifts and His grace we can *do* nothing, and that we are utterly dependant upon Him. Isaiah 57, and verse 15, says, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place.” And if we stopped right there, we’d say, How could I ever attain to that? How could I ever come to God and have dealings with this high, lofty, holy God? And God goes on to say, “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.”

And so what God looks for from His high and lofty position is for those who are contrite; those who are humble; those who are little in their own sight; those who are unable in their own sight; those who are dependant and needy and *know* it, and *spread* that neediness and dependence out before God, cast themselves upon Him for His mercy, with no hope of any other form of deliverance. And for those people, God gives more grace—more than they would ever know what to do with.

In Psalm 138, and in verse 6, it says, “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.” In Proverbs 11, and verse 2, it says, “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.” Proverbs 29:23, “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.” Proverbs 22, and verse 4, “By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life.”

Now notice the promises that are made to the humble. He has *respect* to the humble. He gives the humble *wisdom*. He gives them *honor*. And He gives them *riches* and *life*. I would say that’s quite an outpouring of grace. And He dwells with those who are of a humble and of a contrite spirit.

What is humility? Humility is simply the lowering of ourselves in our own selfesteem so that we see ourselves as dependant, as sinful, and as needy people, with the result that we esteem God and others *better* than ourselves, and are filled with thankfulness to them for their ministries in our lives. You see, the definition of pride is simply the opposite of that.

What is pride? Pride is an *inordinate* selfesteem, in which we think more highly of ourselves than we *ought* to think, with the result that we view God and our fellow man with *contempt* and

indifference. Humility is the *lowering* of ourselves in our selfesteem, so that we see ourselves as *dependent* and *sinful* and *needy* people, with the result that we esteem God and others *better* than ourselves, and are filled *thankfulness* to them for their ministries in our lives. You see, the humble man sees himself as *dependant*; the proud man sees himself as *independent*. The humble man sees himself as *sinful*. The proud man sees himself as selfrighteous. The humble man sees himself as needy. The proud man sees himself as selfsufficient.

It is only those who have a right view of God that are humble. You remember Nebuchadnezzar after he was humbled. He had this to say in Daniel 4:37: “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven.” Who did he used to praise and extol and honor? Himself, right? Is this not great Babylon, which *I* have built for the glory of *my* majesty? And now he’s singing a different tune. Now he prays and extols and honors the King of heaven. “[A]ll whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.” He got it figured out. And because he was humbled before God, he received God’s grace. I believe that we’ll see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven. I believe he was one of the Gentiles that was the firstfruits of those that would be gathered after the coming of Jesus Christ.

One who is humble is one who has a right view of God. He sees God as exalted and himself as not worthy of the least of His mercies. One who is humble has a right view of other *people*. Philippians 2, and verse 3, says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.” When he looks at other people, he thinks of other people as better than himself. The proud man thinks of other people with *contempt*. The humble man thinks of others with admiration—views them with superiority.

A humble man is one who has a right view, not only of God and of others, but also of himself. You look at Paul, the great apostle, and what does he say of himself? First Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom *I am chief*.” What is the mark of a humble person? He sees himself as dependent; he sees himself as sinful; and he sees himself as needy—with the result that he esteems God and others better than himself, and is filled with thankfulness to them for their ministries to him.

Now you might be sitting there asking the question, Why does God give grace to humble people? Why does he specify that particular characteristic as being those upon whom He pours out His grace? The reason why God gives grace to humble people, as opposed to any other kind of people, is because they alone are in the proper frame of mind and have the proper perspective to *use* that grace *rightly*. It’s kind of like the difference between giving a knife to a maniac and giving a knife to a surgeon. The maniac is going to use the knife to destroy himself and others. The surgeon will use the knife to bless himself and others.

In the same way, the proud person will use grace to selfglory, selfsufficiency, and ultimately selfdestruction, while a humble person will use grace for godliness, for growth, and for ministry to other people. Perhaps the classic example of this is Luke, chapter 18, verses 9 through 14, where you have the Pharisee and the publican. It says, “And [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which *trusted in themselves* that they were righteous, and *despised others*.” Remember

our definition of pride—the result of this inordinate self-esteem, in which they think more highly of themselves than they do of others, with the result that they view God and others with contempt? Here it is. Here is a man who despised others.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Now Jesus never disputes this man’s claims. This man had great opportunities and he had some great abilities. He apparently *avoided* some of the grosser sins, and he engaged in some of the *better* patterns of behavior.

But what was the result of all of that ability to do that in his life? It caused him to pursue a self-destructive path of pride. Would have been better that he had been a *drunk* in the gutter than that he be a man who was no extortioner—that he’d be a man who was not unjust, or an adulterer, or a thief, like the publican. Because of this man’s abilities, he was filled with pride and that pride brought about destruction.

The publican, on the other hand, standing afar off, would not so much as *lift his eyes* to heaven. In other words, he was so low in his own self-esteem and self-estimation, and in the sense of his *sinfulness*, he wouldn’t even look *up*. Didn’t feel like he had the *right* to look up towards God. That’s how humble he was. And he said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” He knew exactly what he was. He confessed what he was, he cast himself upon the mercy of God as his *only* source of hope, and he didn’t make excuses for himself, nor did he attempt to commend himself to God or puff himself up.

You know, the trouble when we pray for grace is oftentimes we come to God and we spread out before Him all of our virtues as being reasons as to why He ought to help us. Lord, I’m trying to serve you. You know, I’ve got this family, and I’m sacrificing for them. And Lord, don’t do that. Spread out before the Lord your sinfulnesses, your weaknesses, your failures, your inabilityes, your wretchednesses, your evil thoughts—and then cast yourself on His mercy. Then you’ll have grace. Jesus said, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Only a humble person is a fit steward of grace. You see, the publican was ready to be a responsible steward of justification, but the Pharisee wasn’t.

God’s great servants were different in many ways, but they all had one thing in common, and that was humility. Abraham said in Genesis 18, and verse 27, “Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.” Have you ever commended yourself to God on the basis of the fact that you’re just dust and ashes? That’s pretty humbling. When was the last time you emptied the fireplace and thought much of what was in it? Next time you do that, pour that stuff in the bucket, say to yourself, That’s me. That’s what I am. That’s all I am. Fit to be taken out and thrown on the trash heap. Now self-esteem folks wouldn’t like me to say that, but the self-esteem folks are friends of the Pharisees, not of the publican. And I’d rather be a friend of the publican any day than the friend of the Pharisee.

Moses, in Exodus 4, and verse 10, said, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” God’s calling him to go deliver His people from Egypt, and he says, Lord, I’m not *fit*. And then David, when God comes to him and makes these marvelous promises to him of the fact that his descendant will sit on the throne in Israel *forever*, it says: “Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” [2 Samuel 7:18]

You look at Josiah in Second Chronicles 34:27. God says to Josiah, “Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord.” And the Lord brought a great deliverance for His people.

And then there was Isaiah, chapter 6, and verse 5. “Then said I, 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.” And then Jeremiah, when God called him to preach, he says, “Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.” [Jeremiah 1:6] And then there was Daniel, in Daniel 2, and verse 30. After God had given Daniel this dream, to interpret the meaning of the king’s dream, Daniel says, “But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king.”

John the Baptist in Mark, chapter 1, and verse 7, said, “There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.” Have you ever thought of yourself as being unworthy to stoop down and untie someone’s shoes? That’s how John the Baptist viewed himself in relationship to God. And then there was Peter, Luke 5, and verse 8. After Peter saw it, “he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Now when you think about each one of these guys, what were they doing? Answer: They were running themselves down in the eyes of God. That’s what they were doing. Now the self-esteem people would have us build ourselves *up*. “God don’t make no junk.” Right? Well, He didn’t originally, but we turned it into junk by our sinfulness.

And so the next time you go to pray, pray in this fashion. O Lord, I have no business speaking to you because I am dust and ashes. I cannot serve you. I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. And Lord, who am I, and what is my house that you would even pay attention to *me*? And Lord, I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips. And I cannot speak. And as for me, I have no more wisdom than anyone else living. And Lord, I am not even fit to stoop down and untie the shoes of your own dear Son. I am a sinful man. Lord, depart from me. Ever pray like that? That’s how you get *grace*—by *commending* your wretchedness and your sinfulnesses to God; not by commending your righteousnesses and your *goodnesses* to God. And I am not talking about

some maudlin, selfdeprecation. I'm talking about a genuine owning of just how low and vile we really, really are. And if we could get a vision of that, we would start to begin to know what humility is all about. Great men of God had great grace from God because they had great humility before God. It's not rocket science. But it is humiliating. It is humbling.

And so what does God counsel us to do? Micah, chapter 6, and verse 8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" That's what the Lord requires of you—just to walk humbly with Him.

And so if you're going to glory in something, glory in the cross, not in yourself. Paul says in Galatians 6, and verse 14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Do you want to brag on something? Brag on Jesus. You can never do it enough. Brag on yourself once, and you've filled up your measure for eternity and beyond. God would have us to recognize that we are not worthy of the *least* of His mercies, and it is precisely when we are at that point that He pours them out in abundance.

And so it is when we are weak in our own eyes, *little* in our own eyes—it is then that we are strong, because it is then that His grace is made sufficient for us. So the Lord gives more grace. More grace is to be had, more grace is to be had as we *repudiate* pride and as we *assimilate* humility. May the Lord help us to pursue those *two simple means* to obtain that "more grace" to help us overcome our sins. Shall we pray together?

Father, you must increase and we must decrease. And Lord, we've got a lot of decreasing to do. We're not decreased nearly enough. And Lord, we recognize that you often leave us to struggle with grievous sins to bring us to a lower level of esteem of ourselves and to open our eyes to just how bad off and how wretched we really are. And Job's assessment, that I am a worm and no man, is not any too extreme; nor when he said, Behold, I am vile. Father, we are but dust and ashes. We are people who are sinful, grievously sinful, utterly neglectful of you and of your glory and of our responsibilities to you. Father, we have not served thee as we ought.

Father, how we need your grace. Be merciful to us who are sinners and pour out your grace upon us. Lord, we are sinful people. We do not know why you have not cast us into hell heretofore. For Father, that is what we deserve. But Lord, we cast ourselves on your promises, and we ask you that you would be merciful to us. Deliver us from our sins and unrighteousnesses, and may the Lord alone be exalted in our lives and in that Day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Page 6, last paragraph: But, Lord, I still have something I _____. Lord, my brother Esau is coming to meet me, and I'm *afraid* of him. And Lord, would you preserve me? And of course, the Lord *did*." Inserted, "need to ask."

Page 9, paragraph reads: “But what was the result of all of that ability to do that in his life? It caused him to pursue a selfdestructive path of pride. Would have been better that he had been a drunk in the gutter than that he be a man who was no extortioner—that he’d be a man who was not unjust, or an adulterer, or a thief, like the publican. Because of this man’s abilities, he was filled with pride and that pride brought about destruction.” Does that read right?