

Why Humility Before Prayer

by Lou Sutura

God wants us to humble ourselves before prayer because pride is a universal area of defeat and it is natural for all of us to have.

Topics: "Humility And Prayer", "Repentance From Pride"

Description

Lou Sutura preaches about the importance of humbling ourselves before God, addressing the root issue of pride as the essence of sin and the hindrance to prayer. He emphasizes the need for God's people to turn from their wicked ways, starting with dealing with the spirit of pride, which leads to devastation and separation from God. Through humility and prayer, God can reveal and cleanse us from our sins, allowing His presence to dwell among His people perpetually.

Transcript

Where does God begin in reviving His people? What precedes praying for revival? In II Chronicles Chapter 7 Solomon is just getting the temple built, and then God is speaking to His people. Verse 12 says: "The Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him: I have heard thy prayer; I have chosen this place to myself for a house of sacrifice." This is after Solomon has built the temple for God. Verse 13 is an amazing verse - God says, "I'm speaking to you Solomon, and I want to tell you something." He said: "If I shut up the heavens that there be no rain and if I command the locusts to devour the land" (God, I thought you were a good God, what are You doing now?) "and if I send pestilence among my people..." Can you get what God is saying? God is saying that there might come a time when He will close up the heavens so that there is no rain. He might even command locusts to devour the land or He might send pestilence among His people.

You might say, "I can see you doing it to the wicked and the unconverted, but now You are going to do it Your people?" You and I know He is a good and loving God and if God was to use measures like that, He's doing it out of His goodness and out of His love for us. Sometimes God, in the history of mankind, has had to resort to stringent and harsh measures to get our attention and could that be what He had to do with His people here? He said He might have to do this to get the attention of His people. I believe He's still doing it.

God says that He might have to do that. But He says if I start to do it, there's an answer -- things can be changed. He says in verse 14, "...Then if my people which are called by My name" -- who are they? I know who that means! That is those rotten, wicked people in Ottawa who don't know how to run the

government, right? No. That means the people who live on skid row in such immorality and wickedness? No. God said, "If my people..." That means God's people -- the church. Those who name His name.

God's people have the power and ability to change the situation. God's people are not in the majority, they are in the minority, but they are a powerful minority. It's just like the salt you use when you're cooking. Salt is not in the majority of what you're cooking with. It's in the minority of what you put in the pot. But what a little bit of salt can do! The Bible says if salt loses its flavor it's good for nothing but to be trodden under the foot of men -- it's no good. God is not looking for a majority, He's looking for a minority. It's a dedicated minority that will be able to change the situation even of the majority. The church isn't the majority, but it's a powerful minority with something in its hand: the ability to change society.

"If my people which are called by my name..." will do something. "If my people which are called by my name will call for a prayer meeting and pray..." Is that what it says? No! It says, "If My people which are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." God says He may have to do these things because you are a proud bunch! God is just waiting to hear from you from heaven

What a promise! Is that in your Bible? Let's live and act like it is. Let's believe like it is! Let's not play around with it. It's either true or it's not. It's either God speaking to us here in the church and speaking to Canada and speaking to the United States through His servant Solomon or He's not. You may not even be sure that you are a true Christian, but you have enough sense to know that the Bible is the Word of God and God speaks and what He speaks He means what He says and He says what He means! You have enough sense to say, "If that what God says, I'll go along with it."

You know, there is no hope for Canada apart from God coming on the scene and saving us. Unless we know God for who He is, there's no hope for us as a people. A lot of people laugh at the church and have no time for the church, but God says that institution called the church that is kicked around and laughed about has a power in its hand to save society and that's why Ralph and I go to towns for two to three weeks and spend a concentrated effort in a community to ask God to make us instruments to bring the church back to life and vigor and vitality and vision! The vision of the place God has given the church, lest we go in the same despair and depression and defeat that society all around us has looking for the answer to the moral ills of our day. The church has the answer: "If My people which are called by My name shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Verse 15 says, "Now mine eyes shall be opened." Now we're getting God's attention! "Now mine ears shall be a tent unto the prayer that is made in this place." God will open His eyes and look down, and open His ears and hear the cry, and He will be serious about what He can do when there is no human answer or hope.

What is this verse all about? It's a tremendous promise to you and me. I believe the principal of this verse is true for you and for me. It's laid out and verified in many other scriptures throughout the Bible. The principals here that you and I can claim are where God begins. God says, "If my people which are called by My name shall humble themselves and pray..." Why did God say that there's something we must do even before we pray before God will turn His ear and do His healing in our situation? Why did He tell us to humble ourselves even before He said to pray?

You know, sometimes I'm a little slow and it takes a long time for God to get through to me. I've read the Bible a number of times, backwards and forwards, and then all at once you see something in the Bible and you say, "Where have I been? It was there all the time! Lord, I think you just wrote it yesterday, I never saw that before!" I'm sure you've read that verse many times and I wonder if you've ever stopped long enough to say, "Why did God say his people must first humble themselves even before He asked them to pray?"

A proud heart needs to be broken, and it needs to be humbled. He is saying, "I might have to make it so that it doesn't rain. I might have to send pestilence among My people." He says, "The problem is, I find, that amongst My people there is too much of the spirit of pride and I want you to humble yourself!" So He says He wants us to humble ourselves, so we'd better understand what humility is.

I can tell you what it is NOT. A lot of people are funny. I tease them about humility. A lot of people think it is the end of all enjoyment. They think you can't smile anymore if you are humble. You have to have a long face and a sad heart. "I'd better think bad or sad thoughts about myself, and then I'm humble."

Dr. James Kennedy, the Presbyterian from Coral Ridge in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida has a wonderful definition of humility. Humility is "right thinking about God." Then it becomes right thinking about ourselves. It's rightly evaluating ourselves in the light of who God is. It's not thinking less of ourselves that what we ought to think, but it's a proper evaluation of ourselves in the light of who God is! That's a beautiful thing! The Bible says in Psalm 73:6 "Therefore, pride encompasseth them about as a chain." Who is the man who has to humble himself? God says, "...Then if my people which are called by My name shall humble themselves." So who is the man who has to humble himself? He must be a proud man, right? God is saying that you must deal with the problem of pride. That is the man that has to humble himself. It makes sense, doesn't it? What is the problem with pride? God says, "...pride encompasseth a man about as a chain." The problem of pride is that it is something so terrible and so powerful that it ensnares a man just like a chain and it has him in bondage and he is helplessly, hopelessly wrapped up and engulfed in chains and he needs a way out!

God is saying to His church that they need to humble themselves and deal with the problem of pride because pride has us in bondage. We are going to see that in marvellous ways in these days, and when we see pride for what it is we are going to see the tremendous release that comes to light when we are released from its bondage! What does Webster's dictionary say about pride? Webster says pride is "inordinate self-esteem." It's self-esteem that's pushed beyond what it ought to be. It is also "conceit, or ostentatious display." That is, display of yourself that becomes the very epitome of your very life itself -- to puff up yourself and show yourself off.

In theological terms, over 100 years ago Charles G. Finney said it best when he said, "Pride is a disposition to exalt myself, to get above others, to hide my defects and to pass for more than what I am." I'm glad I didn't live in Charles G. Finney's day! He hits you right between the eyes, doesn't he? Pride is a spirit disposition to exalt myself, to get above others, to hide my defects, and to pass for more than one I am.

Bill Gauthard said, "Pride is believing that we accomplished what in reality God and others have accomplished for us and in us and through us." Pride. Do we have that problem? Deal with this problem of pride.

When God comes to His people where does God begin in reviving His people? When we've seen God for who He is how can we think much of ourselves at that point? Right thinking about God has a way of bringing us down. We're so busy comparing ourselves with ourselves and with one another, and the Bible says that's a very dangerous thing to do. Ralph said earlier that God has raised a whole new standard. HE becomes the standard. Right thinking about God -- humility. Charles G. Finney said, "What low thoughts you have had of God and therefore what high thoughts you had of yourself." We bring God down and we lift man up.

Humility is wrapped up in a spirit of gratitude. Humility is recognized and characterized by a spirit of gratitude. We shouldn't be proud of the gifts that God has given us. Why should we be proud about that? We should be thankful, not proud. Pride is self-centered. Pride takes the credit. "Look what I can do. Look at my abilities." Gratitude is somebody-else-centered. Gratitude is giving somebody else the credit. Gratitude is saying "thank you." That's God-centered. Pride and humility. Pride is self-centered and humility is God-centered in the spirit of gratitude.

Here are eight reasons why I believe God says to humble yourself even before you pray. The first reason why God says to humble yourself before you pray is because the Bible teaches that pride is so utterly despicable in God's eyes and attitude. God names it number one -- before He talks about anything else -- He hates pride so badly, He wants to talk about it before He talks about anything else. Why does God say I am to humble myself before I should pray? Because pride is so utterly despicable. Utterly despicable. Pride is so utterly despicable in the mind and heart of God.

Having said that, I want to give you a one hour sermon in five minutes, just the kind you like. I preached on God's attitude toward pride. What is God's attitude toward pride? When I give it to you, I want to ask you a simple question. Do you know of any subject in the Bible that is talked about by God as being more despised than the spirit of pride? God says that the spirit of pride is an abomination to Him. He will not suffer the proud. They shall be abased. The proud are in bondage. There is no grace for the proud. They are under the wrath of God. God sets Himself in battle against the proud. Pride brings shame. It leads to destruction. It brings the swift judgment of God upon its victims. Pride is like witchcraft. It causes loss of respect. It defiles a man. Pride leads to contention and strife. It leads to a persecuting spirit. It is manifest in boastful words. It leads to self-deception. There is no man more deceived than the man who is self-deceived. God knows my pride. He cannot dwell in the proud heart. He will reward the proud-doer the Bible says. The proud will be burned like stubble. God will destroy the house of the proud. God will break the proud. Psalm 119:21 says, "The proud are cursed and they do err from the commandments of God." Here's a verse that puts them all in a nutshell -- here's the heart of it: "The proud are cursed and they err from the commandments of God." You have just heard 24 things that describe God's attitude toward the spirit of pride in the Word of God. No wonder He tells us to humble ourselves even before He asks us to pray because look how despicable it is to God. Pride is at the very base of which mankind fell and lost his holy estate with God, and maybe that is why it is so despicable to God.

I was preaching about pride in Tuscon, Arizona last fall when there were floods the night before we started two months of meetings. I stayed in the home of a policeman who had to go out all night sometimes, and he saw houses, cars and possessions tumbling into the river as the owners watched. People's hearts were so receptive. One night when I was preaching on pride a layman came up to me and said, "You know, pride is another word for ego. You know what ego spells? Easing God Out." Maybe that's why God puts pride first -- He knows that if we follow the pathway of pride He will be edged out of our lives.

The second reason God wants you to humble yourself before He asks us to pray is because pride seems to be so natural for all of us to have as the universal area of defeat. Wasn't it through the form of pride that sin first came in on the human race through Satan? It bore its fruit through Adam and Eve and we suffer for it today. Through that temptation of pride Satan first seduced Eve and breathed that awful ?? on the human race. So, brothers and sisters, through pride Satan seduced Adam and Eve and Adam was the father of the human race. It seems like we all come by that issue legitimately, don't we? Hebrews 12:1 says, "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Could that be God talking about pride, because it so easily besets us and takes us all under so easily?

The Bible says, "upon earth there is none like Satan, who is without fear, he beholds high things. He is a king over all the children of pride." Who are the children of pride? The Bible says that before you and I are Christians we are of our father, the devil. Do you know what your last name was before you were a Christian? It was John Pride. It was Lou Pride. He was our father, and he had the last name of Pride. I'm suggesting to you that it is no wonder pride is so natural for all of us! Some of us blow up, but most of us puff up!

A newspaper article said, "A college education now costs \$25,000, but do you know what it produces? It produces three very proud people: the student, his mamma and his pauper." His dad is broke. Somebody said, "A proud man is like an egg. He's so full of himself there's no room for anything else." Of all the enemies it's pride that dies the slowest and the hardest.

A television singer was interviewed who said, "Have you ever tried it for yourself? Do you ever let go of your pride long enough to listen to the voice inside? It's because of the pride in our life that we really can't hear the voice inside that we need to be listening to about the real problems in our life."

I hear people talking a lot about vitamins these days. My wife does, and your wife does, and she pours them into you -- Vitamin B and C and D. There's one vitamin you can't get in any health food store. It's Vitamin I. That is one we don't need to supplement, right? Vitamin I -- we all have plenty of it!

A woman of the world who was dying on her deathbed, a woman way up in society, do you know what she said on her deathbed? She said, "Do you know what is the last to die in man? It is the love of self." She was dying. Pride is the first thing that man has to overcome and is the last thing that man must overcome. So natural for all of us to have. The spirit of pride has such a way with us.

A lady got up at a meeting and gave her testimony at the microphone. She said, "The spirit of pride has such a way with me, I don't know what I'm going to do living without it anymore! I inherited it from my mother and father, and it has been so ingrained in me and is such a part of my culture. My mother and father have been such proud people for so long, I don't know what I'm going to do without it anymore!"

I remember a man who gave a testimony at one of our meetings and he was one of these tall fellows. He said, "I stand six feet four inches tall, but my pride stood ten feet!" Isn't it amazing? His pride was three and a half feet taller than he was! Are we getting the point?

I remember another meeting where a man got up and gave a testimony. This would catch your attention if a man came to the microphone and said words like this. He said, "I have both good and bad news for you folks here tonight. First of all, let me start out with the good news. The good news is, you folks don't have as much pride as I have." That was good news, wasn't it? "But the bad news is you still have plenty yourself!"

Another man in a meeting in Michigan got up on the last night of the meeting just as we were ready to close the whole crusade down. Ralph was about to pray the prayer of dismissal, and a man in the back raised his hand like he thought he was in school or something, and said, "Can I say something?" He came to the microphone and he said, "No one else has any pride in this church. I have it all, so there's none left for the rest of you. I have enough for everybody else in this church." You know what was happening. God was really dealing with him. Isn't it amazing that one man in a church had it all? Even though he had it all, there always seems to be enough to go around for the rest of us, doesn't there? It's natural.

Another man who was about six feet five inches tall and owned a Volkswagon said, "I bumped my head again this morning while getting into my car. Come to think about it, most of the bumps in my life come when I forget to lower my head!"

Another woman said, "It took me a long time to see that God's kingdom revolves around Him and not me." It takes us a long time to see that.

The third reason God tells us to deal with our pride even before He asks us to pray is because God fears that we might even think we don't have any pride. Why? Because of its deceptive nature. We might think we don't even have any pride. Some of you are thinking, "Lou, you would have to get to that point, wouldn't you? I was just sitting here thinking, well, this is one night I can relax, this message is not for me, but I know a lot of people sitting around me that really need it! The last thing in the world I am is proud, so this is not for me tonight." And then came reason number three!

Do you know how deceptive pride is? Jeremiah 49:16 it says, "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee and the pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." So the pride in your heart deceives you. God says if you didn't hear Me in Jeremiah, I'll repeat it again in Obadiah, so in chapter 1 verse 3 He says, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." Well, you say, that's in the Old Testament, do you have it in the New Testament? In the New Testament, Galatians 6:3 it says, "But if a man think himself to be something" (now he has a thought pattern -- "I'm something") "when he is nothing" (between his thoughts and what he really is are two different things) "he deceiveth himself." Do you know what nothing is? It's a circle with the ring rubbed out. Nothing.

There is no man more deceived than a man with self-deceit. That's the worst deception in the world. If someone else deceives you, and you find out about it, you'll stay up all night long and refuse to allow it to happen a second time. What is amazing about a man's self-deception is that he becomes like the fifth columnist on the inside in Franco's army. We just sort of agree with him that he is doing his work. There is no man more deceived than the man who is self-deceived. The Bible says that if a man thinks himself to be something when he really is nothing, he deceives himself.

When God was working the revival in western Canada, the Dutch government in Holland had one television station and the Christians had a telecast 30 minutes a week on this one national telecast. They heard about the revival in western Canada in 1971, so the Christian group that had that program came over to join us in Vancouver, British Columbia, way out by Seattle, Washington over on the west coast of Canada. They came to join us because they had heard that some Dutchmen were really getting right with God, so that really made them want to come and see. They spent a week and filmed the revival and took it back and showed it in two telecasts, thirty minutes each, for the whole country of Holland. The people in Holland were so excited, within 30 minutes the phone started to ring and the letters started to come into headquarters. They had 90,000 responses. The response was so wonderful they called for us to send a

team, so we ended up sending a team to Holland for a solid month as a result of those telecasts. The last night before that team that came and joined us out in Vancouver, before they went back to Holland, I asked the head man, Dr. Hagar, if he would like to say something to the Canadian people before going back to Holland. I asked him to tell what he was feeling and sensing and what he felt God was doing. He said a few words and then said, "I'd like to tell the Canadian folks something. I have a periodical in my country. I am an editor of a Christian periodical and I have 20,000 subscribers. A few months ago I wrote an article on the problem of pride, and at the end of the article I asked if anyone else had the problem of pride, and if they did, would they write and tell me. Maybe it is different here in Canada, but out of 20,000 subscribers, only 10 people wrote back and said they had a problem with pride." Self-deception. We don't even think we have any pride.

One Canadian man told us he didn't even think he had any problem with pride, but everybody else had it. Another man said, "It slowly dawned on me, I have incredible pride." It's a slow dawning, folks, how much pride we have in us. The devil sees to it that it's a slow dawning.

I don't know if you read it in the Daily Bread a number of years ago, but I don't think I could ever say it any better than what I read in that little illustration one morning at the breakfast. It talked about the man who boasted to his son how he could hunt. He could shoot the four-legged ones on ground level and shoot the ones that fly overhead. He could put up his gun and pull them out of the sky. He was boasting to his little son, and the son worshipped the ground his dad walked on. One Saturday there was no school and it was hunting season, so he took his son hunting to "show him how it was done." So what happens? Here they come, flying up overhead. Up goes the gun, he shoots, and they fly right on. The son looked up in the face of his dad, expecting to see the most embarrassed look on his father's face, after he had talked how he could pull those birds out of the sky. Do you know what happened? Instead of an embarrassed look on his face, the father had an astonished look on his face! The father said, "Son, you and I have just now witnessed a most marvelous miracle! There flies a dead duck!"

One lady wrote us a note and I still have the piece of paper. "Dear Lou and Ralph. This is to let you know that I am indeed full of pride. It is so strong in me I am not yet ready to yield it to Jesus, although I'm wanting to very much. Please keep preaching about it -- I need it to be weakened so that the Holy Spirit can gain control."

Pride is so woven into our hearts that only the spirit of God can show and reveal it to us. It's the most difficult to diagnose, and the most difficult to deal with. The gravest enemy to revival is the spirit of pride. That's why God says "deal with it!" before He even asks us to pray.

The fourth reason God tells us to deal with our pride even before He asks us to pray is because God fears that we might not recognize pride for what it truly is, because of its deceptive nature. It would be a shocking revelation tonight if I were to ask you what you think of pride. Many would say that it is a personality trait. "Well, what do you expect? My father was this way, and his father was this way, and I come by it legitimately -- I'm a chip off the old block!" "My last name is Sutera, and my father was that way, and my grandfather Sutera was that way, so what do you expect of me? I come by it legitimately, it's part of my personality." We think it's part of our personality. It's not part of your personality, it's part of that which is contaminating your personality. We can't see a lot of people's personalities, because of what is contaminating them -- the spirit of pride. You may say, "I'm just like my father." Just because he went to his grave with it, does that mean you have to too? Just because he didn't understand God's truth about it, are you going to? Are you going to pass it on to another generation, or are you going to start dealing with it

God's way? It's amazing to see how many of God's people don't see pride for what it is.

God has a different measuring stick sometimes. I find in the Bible, with all of my studying of the Word of God, only seven things in the whole Bible that God names as sin. Only seven things that God names as sin! God tells us about a lot of things that are sinful things in the Bible, but I find only seven that He actually names as sin. If you find more, let me know, I don't claim to have it all put together, but I find only seven. So what am I saying? Out of all the things the Bible talks about that are sinful things, how come God had to reach in and pick out seven words and say, "This is sin." Seven times. My mind says that God is afraid we might call it less than what it is. It's a deduction isn't it? God fears we might not give it the right name. God says, "You can see the others, I don't need to name them because you understand them, but I'm afraid you might miss this and give it a different name -- a lesser name than what it is." Seven. In Proverbs 21:4 three are mentioned: a high look, a proud heart and the plowing of the wicked -- all are sin. God fears we might miss it!

"Harken unto me you stout-hearted that are far from righteousness." Stout-hearted is a proud heart. It is far from righteousness -- that's sin. Habakkuk 2:4 says, "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him. The soul that is lifted up (the proud heart) is not upright (that's a sinful heart)."

A man said, "The Lord forgave my pride." What does God forgive? He doesn't forgive inconsistencies, he doesn't forgive mistakes, he forgives sins, and that man knew what it was! "The Lord forgave my pride." He's saying the Lord forgave my sin. That's the way we need to name it. The joy of the Lord is now a reality.

One young man got up at one of our meetings to give a testimony and said, "I'm a proudful person, so I guess I'm a sinful person." You see, we're not too sure that we're sinful people, but we're proudful people, as the young man put it. Some of us have not admitted to the fact that pride is sin, and there's only one thing to do with sin: get it under the blood of Jesus Christ who cleanseth from all sin.

One man wrote on the expectation card when we asked him what he wanted God to do for him in the revival this: "I want desperately to be used of God and I want to love His Word, but something is blocking it. I am working on my pride, but this is not what the main problem is. I don't know what it is. I am praying for God to break me and point out my areas of sin." Amazing. He's working on his pride, but this is not what the problem is! But he's asking God to break him. Oh, the deception!

Do you know that you can't spell "pride" without the letter "I" being in the middle of it? Do you know that you can't spell the word "sin" without the "I" being in the middle of it? Do you know you can't spell the word "revival" without God doing something with the "I" right in the middle of it? Do you know you can't spell the word "popular" without "U" being in the middle of it? That's the big #1, the big "I" that Ralph talked about. We might not recognize it as sin.

The fifth reason God tells us to deal with our pride even before He asks us to pray is because pride is not only a sin, it is the very essence of sin, the very heart of sin. Do you see why God says to humble yourself before you can pray? Because God is telling us that pride is not only a sin, it is the heart of sin, the essence of it. You may ask, "Where do you get that in the Bible?" Turn to Psalm 9:17 and see for yourself. "The wicked shall be turned into hell" (who else is going to be turned into hell?) "and all the nations that forget God." Let's see what the nations' problem is -- they are forgetting God. What is the essence of nations forgetting God? Look at verse 20, "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." What's the problem with the nations? They have no fear. What's their

problem? They need to understand that they are not God-sized, they are man-sized. They are not bigger than life-size. Let them know, put them in fear, let them fear God, and let them know themselves to be but men. Let them get their feet back on this earth -- they are not God! The spirit of pride! That was Satan's problem! What is a nation that forgets God? A nation that lifts itself up to take the place of God and dethrones God and humanizes God -- they are going to be cast into hell. The "I" number one. The "I" supreme. The God complex of a nation's society.

Psalms 10:2 says, "But the wicked in his pride persecutes the poor." What's his problem? Pride. "Let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasts his heart's desire, and he blesses the covetous whom the Lord abhors. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek God; God is not in all his thoughts." What was the problem with the nations? They thought they were bigger than man. They didn't need God. What is the problem with the wicked man? They will not seek God, they have no need of Him -- he is his own god. Why? Through the pride of their countenance they got that way. What is the essence of sin? Pride that says, "I DON'T NEED GOD." See why God says to deal with your pride before you can pray.

I thought wickedness is a man who drinks and he smokes and chews and he runs with those who do. Right? The kind of man who commits adultery and murder and all that is wickedness. When my Bible describes the wicked God puts it down that the essence of wickedness is that the wicked man, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in his thoughts. Pride is not just a casual sin, it is the heart and essence of sin, and that is why God says humble yourself even before He asks you to pray.

The beginning part was cut off, as it was the end of the tape:

?? I have a real problem with pride; I know this is wrong, but I can't seem to fight it. Dr. Graham said, "Pride is a serious sin; in fact, it is the root of almost every sin." I didn't tell him to write it, but that's what he wrote.

The sixth reason God tells us to deal with our pride even before He asks us to pray is because of pride's relationship to prayer. I suggest to you that not only is pride sin, but maybe God puts it first before He asks us to pray because maybe it's the biggest hindrance to prayer, and that's why He names it first. Do you see why it has to precede praying? If pride is at the heart of sin, what does it do to our praying? Jesus said in John 9:13, "And we know that God heareth not sinners." The Bible says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." So, why pray if you are proud, if pride is sin? "If I regard sin in my heart, God will not hear me." "If I regard" means if I give place, or if I have compassion on the iniquity in my heart, if I respect it, and pat it on the back and say "it's not really as bad as God says." If I regard it in my heart, and I hold it to me and I don't want to deal with it, God says the Lord will not hear me. No wonder He tells us to humble ourselves before He asks us to pray! It's not just a sin, it's at the heart of sin, and therefore it is the biggest roadblock to prayer!

"Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, behold, the Lord's ear is not heavy that the Lord cannot hear," says Isaiah the prophet. "But your iniquities separate between you and your God, and your sins hide God's face from you so that He cannot hear." So why pray? If pride is sin, then you can't pray. I believe many people are waiting for God to answer prayer, and the whole time God is waiting for us to act about the sin in our life. He says deal with the sin, and then I'll hear your prayer. "To this man will I look" says God. God says He will listen, "Even to him that is ??? of a contrite heart and trembles at My

word." A contrite heart is a humble heart. It isn't enough that prayers could even be offered for good things, like the converting of a community and the changing of a community and seeing a community change from its wickedness and sinfulness. It's not enough! Those prayers must come from a broken, humbled, contrite heart.

Habakkuk 2:4 says, "But the just shall live by faith." Why do we only have the second half of this verse memorized? I wonder if the devil doesn't want us to learn the first half of this verse. It says, "Behold, his soul, which is lifted up in him..." (What is that? A proud heart.) "...is not upright in him." It means, it's down wrong in him, if it's not upright, it's down wrong, right folks? "His soul, which is lifted up in him is not upright in him." That's a wicked heart, folks. But then it says, "But the just shall live by faith." Who is the just man in that verse? He is the opposite of the first man in the verse, it is a contrast. You're in either the first half of the verse, or the second half. Are you in the first part of the verse about the man whose soul is lifted up in him and his heart is not upright in him or in the second part of the verse about the man who has a humble and just heart who lives by faith? Get rid of the sinful heart and you'll be able to live by faith! Get rid of the pride and then you'll be able to pray in faith! Pride is opposition to faith. Pride becomes the obstacle to believing prayer. How can you pray if you don't believe? God asks us to humble ourselves before we pray because it's an obstacle to believing prayer.

I wonder if this might be why we have such poor prayer meetings. I saw an obituary in one of the Christian periodicals and it was an obituary for the prayer meeting. It was entitled "Sister Old Time Prayer Meeting Died Recently on Neglected Avenue and Worldly Street." What's happened to our prayer meetings? I go into so many homes and I see on the wall "Prayer Changes Things." I don't think there's anything that's seen more often than that in Christian circles. And yet, I see a lot of Christian people who, when looking for church, ask if the church has prayer meetings -- they wouldn't attend a church that didn't believe in prayer, and yet when they get there, they never go! It's amazing! Let me tell you why I believe a lot of people don't come to prayer meetings, because they used to go years ago, week after week. It seemed that nothing was happening, God wasn't answering prayer, and they decided it was a poor investment of an evening -- to be frugal with their time, after all, there's snow to plow and grass to cut, so much to do, so why go down to the prayer meeting where nothing is happening anyway? You decided it just wasn't a good investment of an evening. I wonder if psychologically and unconsciously that has happened to many, many Christians. They didn't mean to turn the prayer meeting off, but the prayer meeting turned them off! Society tells you to build yourself up and build your reputation up and that spirit has moved right into the church. We wonder why our prayers get nowhere. God is not answering because God hears not sinners and that is the essence of sin.

I wonder if the reason is that we have had the biggest hindrance to believing praying and God to answer because of the spirit of pride that has been controlling our lives and we were not even aware of the hindering force to God's ability to answer our prayers. In eastern Canada God did such a powerful work in Woodstock, New Brunswick in a Baptist church there that after the revival took place do you know what happened to the prayer meeting there? They had prayer meeting Wednesday and had so many come out that they didn't have enough seats for the people who came. The pastor had a heart attack on that one, and I'll tell you when he died. Some of the men came to him and said, "Pastor, this prayer meeting is too short. We need at least 30 minutes more to pray!" And then he dropped dead.

In western United States near Seattle, Washington a few years ago, we had a crusade out there and a year after the revival God brought the spirit of prayer onto that church and believing prayer, and God was answering that prayer, and a year after that revival I went back for an anniversary of the revival, one year

later. I sat on the platform and was going to give a message and the pastor got up and said, "I want to tell Brother Lou that we have seen a 26 percent increase in this church since the revival a year ago. But I want to tell him something more. We have seen God do something so wonderful that now our prayer meeting night is as large as our Sunday evening attendance and I am praying for the day when our prayer meeting shall be as large as our Sunday morning attendance." You should have heard all the "amens" throughout that congregation. I thought to myself, "who is going to make it happen -- here they are!" What happened? All at once, the heavens are open. God has come alive and is answering prayer because God broke the hearts of the people and dealt with the spirit of pride and now the heavens could be opened and God is active amongst His people in a wonderful way.

The seventh reason God tells us to deal with our pride even He asks us to pray is because of the utter devastation that comes through pride. Do you know of anything that brings more devastation than the spirit of pride? It has ruined more lives than anything else in the world. It's the sin that invites Satan to rule a person's life. It's the sin that cost King Saul his character, his crown, and ultimately, his life. Humility is the grace that made David king over King Saul. It is so serious that God says in Psalm 31:20, "Thou shalt hide them from the pride of man;" (it's so bad you've got to be hidden from the pride of man) "Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." In Proverbs 28:25 it says, "He that has a proud heart stireth up strife." Where does strife come from? From a proud heart. Philippians 2:3 says, "Let nothing be done through strife and vain glory." They are kissing cousins. Whenever you have strife you know that vain glory is right around the corner. What is the opposite? "Let each esteem the other better than himself." C.S. Lewis said, "Strife has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may even bring people together. You can find fellowship, you can find jokes, even among drunken or unchaste people, but the minute you touch their pride...enmity -- the war is on."

Why? We're all in competition. My pride is in competition with yours. "Compared to the rest, I'm the best." That's the spirit that gets a hold of us. When everybody is somebody, do you know what happens then? Then nobody is anybody. How devastating pride is! Everybody is somebody ends up nobody is anybody. Pride ruins personalities, families, relationships. Somebody said, "Pride is my attempt to bring others and perhaps even God to my terms rather than accept theirs or His." If that doesn't mean war, I don't know what does.

One lady in Tuscon, Arizona stood up to give her testimony and said, "I wouldn't be a divorcee today if this revival had come two weeks ago. Just divorced, because of her spirit of pride, she saw her part in that divorce. God revealed to me the presence of my pride and my part in the contention in my family's quarrels."

The Bible tells us a lot about the devil. It says he goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Where do you think the description of the devil as a roaring lion would be found in the Bible? The Bible talks him being an angel of light, a serpent and so many other things, but when it talks about him as being a roaring lion, the king of all the animals, it is found in 1 Peter, chapter 5. That's the "pride chapter." That's where it says "God resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble." And He says, "Beware and watch out because your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." When you're in the jungle and the lion roars, do you know what that means? It's not the roar that's going to trouble you (other than scaring you to death!), but it's who the roar calls that's going to give you trouble. The lioness' are the ones that get you -- the pride of lions comes to devour the proud.

There's destruction and devastation through the spirit of pride. The devil cannot get us into hell because we've accepted Jesus Christ and we know the theology about what it means to be a Christian and go to heaven, but he will try to bring as much discord into the fellowship of believers through even the subtlety of spiritual pride. We can destroy one another even in that situation.

One pastor said, "I'm often called upon to mediate. These squabbles are sometimes all-out wars and have not always been reconciled. The bottom line is always the same. In fact, every argument, fist fight, strife, international conflict, divorce, church split, labor dispute can be traced to the same source -- pride. Pride disguises itself very neatly as convictions, self-esteem and self-respect when in reality it is nothing more than stiff-necked egotism. Whenever you find strife, you'll find pride at the bottom of it somewhere. Either a husband is stubborn and must have his way, or a wife is lamenting, "I deserve better than this!" Sometimes it is the child who says, "No one is going to tell me what to do" or parents who won't admit that they might be wrong. In every home breakup, someone is saying, "I have my rights!" Pride rears its ugly head everywhere in the church -- the church is not exempt. Pride has destroyed so many local churches with strife. Conflict comes from pride, whether in the guise of lust, envy, covetousness, or selfishness. Get rid of that arrogant attitude and watch the battlefield become a lovenest."

We've had crusades where people have had to go back to other churches. They came to the church they were at because they left the other church in a huff. God convicted them so, that they had to go back on Sunday morning and ask permission to stand up and ask the whole congregation for forgiveness, because they left in a spirit of pride in a huff with a spirit of contention. God might be telling you to ask forgiveness.

I remember being in a church in Penticton, British Columbia where many churches were involved in the crusade in a joint effort. I was on the platform after eight days of revival and watched two couples be reconciled because they had left the church in a huff.

The Bible says, "only by pride cometh contention." A very exclusive society, isn't it folks? Only by pride comes contention. "Oh no, not in our church, only by pride and Mrs. So and So comes contention." Why, everyone knew the color of the drapes in the nursery should be green -- we shouldn't ever have had red ones in a church. And then you have a church split, over the color of the nursery drapes! Don't you give me 500 reasons why you had a split in your church. My Bible gives me only one. Only by pride comes contention. Have you been part of the contention? Deal with it in God's way.

A lady said, "God revealed my pride in the contention in my families quarrels. I don't feel proud, but we have contentions, so I must be proud. Therefore, I need to confess my pride whether I feel it or not." That's recognition -- part of contention.

No wonder pride brings condemnation of Satan. No wonder the Bible warns not to lift up a novice. We have a lot of Christians in churches where a man gets saved and he comes out of the world, and sinfulness -- drugs, immorality, or rock music -- one day he is saved and the next day we put him on the stage of the evangelical church, and we let him sing and write some Christian songs for us and he starts to dictate his philosophy of Christianity and he's only been saved one or two months! He puts in words, coming out of today's worldly culture -- he's a little babe in Christ -- and what happens? Three months later we find that pride has rushed to the top of his head, and four months later he's back in the old life. The Bible says, "Don't lift up a novice lest being lifted up with pride, he falls into the condemnation of the devil." We've done it in evangelical circles all over the world. Shame on us!

The eighth reason God tells us to deal with our pride even before He asks us to pray is because of pride's correlation to wicked ways in the verse found in II Chronicles 7:14. "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways." What have we learned? We've learned that pride is the heart and essence of wickedness. Now God is saying, turn from your wicked ways, four steps down the road in the verse. He starts out telling us to deal with our pride, but then four steps later tells us to turn from our wicked ways. How come? Why didn't God write that verse like this: "If My people, which are called by My name, would turn from their wicked ways and pray, and seek My face, then I will hear them from heaven." Why didn't God say, if we've learned that pride is the essence of wickedness, why didn't God say, "If My people, which are called by My name, would turn from their wicked ways and pray..."? Why not? Interesting, isn't it? Could I suggest to you, that I believe God reached into a bag, into the bag called "wicked ways" and got one of them, pulled it out, and put it at the front, and got the one that's the heart and essence of wickedness and pulled it out. And then He said, "Now later on, turn from your wicked ways." Do you know what I believe? I believe that God says, "first of all, deal with the root issue right up front, and then it will be no problem for me to talk to you about the little specific wicked ways for you to turn from then. I'll get no buck from you, you'll do it in 1-2-3." Pride is the essence of sin, and if we would deal with the essence of sin, that might be the key to turning from our wicked ways.

The Bible gives us a beautiful illustration of what I'm trying to say with two men who have leprosy. What is leprosy the type of in the Bible. Sin. What is it? It goes all over the body, doesn't it? I give you the illustration of Uzziah. He became a leper because he was put in a place of position and he got proud. He had authority, position, wealth, armies, security, and as he became a leader he was filled with pride. God smote him with leprosy. Leprosy is a disease that goes over the whole body, from the head to the toes. What caused him to get a disease that would cover his whole body? One sin. Pride.

That is the picture of the wicked ways. The sin -- pride. If you succumb to that you'll be infected with wicked ways. There are people whose lives are infected with many, many wicked ways. If I were to ask you what are your problems and what are your areas of defeat, what are the shackles of your life, and what are the wicked ways of your life, you'd say to me, "Lou, I have a list of them!" I want to suggest to you that because you've allowed the pride of your heart to grow that has brought with it the leprosy that has spread out into so many other areas of your life, you're carrying dozens of wicked ways. Leprosy from head to toe, and because of the sinfulness of pride, they've come upon you and you can't find victory in all of those areas of wicked ways because of the sinfulness of pride.

Another man in the Bible had leprosy and wanted to get rid of it. Seven ducks in a muddy river. Naaman was a captain in the Syrian army in Damascus and very proud. He had leprosy all over his body. He heard that there was a prophet of God who could pray for people and he could be healed. He went to the prophet of God and the prophet said to go into the Jordan River seven times and upon coming up the seventh time he would be healed. For him to duck into the muddy Jordan River -- never would he do such a thing -- he was so proud. Naaman was furious and said, "...Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" It wasn't until Naaman was willing to humble himself and duck seven times in the river that he would be healed from his leprosy, the disease that had spread all over his body. You and I have so many areas in our life just like leprosy, and until we recognize that there is a key to being delivered from all of those areas of defeat and it is dealing with pride, we will not have the key to defeating the wickedness that infects us.

Ralph and I, after the revival that took place in western Canada, were called by a church in Winston Salem, North Carolina to come and hold a revival. It was one of the first meetings in the United States after we had had the revival in western Canada. We had seen God cleanse and purify His church and set people free from every kind of shackle and bondage that you could imagine, God was setting people free. That's where we had come from. We flew to Winston Salem, and Len Greensborough, the preacher, picks us up at the airport, and says, "Brother Ralph and Brother Lou, I think I need to tell you something before you preach here tomorrow morning. You know where you are now, don't you? You're in Winston Salem, North Carolina, and this is the heart of the tobacco belt. Before I ever took this church as pastor, they asked me if I would preach about tobacco and if I said yes, they said they wouldn't have me as a pastor. So, I'd better warn you before you start, there are some things you'd better not talk about."

I thought to myself, "We've just come from Canada where God was setting people free and cleansing and purifying them from every kind of filthy habit going, and the preacher says I can't talk about this?" I thought to myself, "Pastor, are you sure you've got the right fellas for this revival, maybe you'd better send us back on the plane to go home!" But they'd spent the money on the tickets, so I said to myself, "Well, we're here now. Okay God, we're in for adventure, whatever it is, let's go."

The pastor said, "This week my people just got this bulletin, here it is. I sent this bulletin out, and it says, "Pastor Rich Wrights", and at the top it says, "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways" and the verse that I'm preaching on tonight, II Chronicles 7:14, right up front -- "The Hour of Revival." That's what my people got just on Wednesday of this week to read." I thought, "That's wonderful, people reading that verse to start it off."

Sunday morning came, and I'm sitting on the platform, the pastor hands me the Sunday morning bulletin and right on the top was the verse II Chronicles 7:14 all printed out again! I thought, "This is wonderful, we are off to a good start. I haven't even said a word yet, and look at what the preacher has written for the people." The pastor then stood up and said, "I want everyone to stand up and take your bulletins and read the verse out loud." I'm ready to start shouting up on the platform, thinking, "Praise the Lord, these people are baiting their own hook!" I started to preach, "You heathen! You people! The pastor told me about how many of you mess around with tobacco! You even smoke in the men's room! Terrible! I could hardly breathe in the rest room in between Sunday School and church! You even raise tobacco to make a living -- your livelihood depends on it! Why don't you straighten up!" Well, I didn't do that, folks, because my brother was around. No, I didn't do that because I read Andrew Carnegie's book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People" and he doesn't say to do it like that. No. Do you know what I started preaching on? "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways."

We stayed on the theme of pride for three or four nights. God Almighty started to put His hand on that congregation, the men and women of that congregation, and they started to break before God and to go down before God, and they were humble before God.

When you deal with the spirit of pride, you are saying, "Yes, Lord! Put Your hand on me!" And then you say, "Yes, Lord, what's the question?" And that's when God can lift a finger, once He gets His hand on you, he can lift a finger and say, "Do you know that I want to deal with you about this wicked way, and I want you to turn from this wicked way, and I want you to turn from this wicked way, and this wicked way." He can't do that and show you that until you let Him put His hand on you. That's dealing with the spirit of pride. You say, "Yes, Lord" and then you ask, "What's the question?" Then there's no more of saying "I

want to know what the Word of the Lord is. Tell me what the Bible says, so I can go off into the corner and decide whether I'll obey." Oh no! When you say "Yes, Lord" you've given Him the answer. Then He is able to say, "Turn from this wicked way." "Yes, Lord." Then the Holy Spirit says to me, "Okay, Lou, your day of grace is over. Go to it. Name the specifics. Name the specific wicked ways now." And I say, "Really, Lord? Really? You know where I am. Are there some bodyguards around here?"

When I started talking about wicked ways and that filthy habit of tobacco, that night when I spoke on that, on the wicked ways that God could set us free from, that night instead of men picking me up and throwing me out bodily, six men were at the altar, and God set six men free from tobacco that night. In Winston Salem, North Carolina. And the thing got so great in that area, that the public radio station, not even a Christian station, called us up and said, "We hear what's going on out there in the country. We'd like to open up those telephone lines for one solid hour, and if you have any people who God has set free from tobacco, we want them to call in on the telephone so that it can go out over the radio so that all of Winston Salem can hear that God is setting people free from tobacco out there in the church." We thought, "Why these guys are going to put J.R. Reynolds Tobacco out of business!" In the heart of the smoking country, God released people. The same place where the preacher said, "I can't even talk about it, they'll throw me out of this church!"

Brother and sisters, I couldn't talk about it either, until the Holy Spirit of God started working on the spirit of pride that is in rebellion to God's authority. To say, "Yes, Lord! Put Your hand on me, and then pick up Your finger and point out the wicked ways, and I'll turn, because I told you 'yes Lord'."

We could be so loaded and polluted with so many wicked ways in our heart, and we don't even know it! God Almighty can't even show them to us because we will never allow God to deal with the spirit of pride to give Him opportunity to put His hand on us to get in there! Once we deal with the real issue of the heart, then God will have an opportunity for his Holy Spirit to show us things about our life that we have never seen before and we thought we would never let God have the chance to show us! You don't have to carry your wicked ways to the grave! You can be free!

One preacher in the State of Michigan close to where these folks live in Michigan, a preacher said, "Two weeks before the revival I went out into the woods all by myself. I told my wife, I'm going to go out and get right with God. I'm going to ask the Lord if there is anything wrong in my life before the twins even come. I want to deal with whatever You show me about my life so that I can go home and be right with God and ready for the twins to come and preach to the people." That night he came back in and his wife said, "How did it go?" "Oh, I had a wonderful day. I prayed and asked the Lord to show me if there was anything wrong in my life, and guess what? The Lord didn't show me one single thing, isn't that wonderful?"

When we got to that church we started to speak on the spirit of pride on a Sunday and by Wednesday night I remember God zapped that preacher and got a hold of him and asked him, "Why did you go out two weeks before the revival in the woods to get right with Me before the twins came? Wasn't it that you were afraid you might have to humble yourself in front of your people?" You may say, "Can't somebody get right with God two weeks before the twins come?" The answer is "yes!", but not with that spirit! God showed him that it had been his pride that took him out there two weeks before. God started to deal with him on Wednesday night when he broke before God, and by Saturday night he came to me and said, "Lou, do you know what's happened to me? Since Wednesday night God has shown me now so many things in my life, and I asked Him when He would stop!" He got up on Sunday and told his church what had happened in his life. Isn't it amazing that two weeks before he had nothing wrong with him, but by

Saturday night he didn't know how there could be so many things brought to his attention?

You and I can have so many areas that are plaguing us, and driving us down, and we wonder why we can't have victory, and we don't even know where to turn, we don't even know what the problem is! We need to deal with the root first! When we deal with the root, it gives God an opportunity to point the fruit that comes out of the root and see us released and delivered. Charles Finney said, "Nothing as humility so prepares the mind for true divine light without darkness and so clears the eye to look on things in my heart as they really are." We will see them for what they are, but not until that happens in your life and mine.

God says to deal with humility and humble yourself before you pray because then it is no problem to turn from wicked ways. God is so good, He doesn't throw everything at you all at once! He lifts a finger and says "this thing." "Yes, Lord, I already gave You the answer." "And this thing." "Yes, Lord, I already gave You the answer." No more struggle. He's taken the kick out of your spirit, once you come to the place where you can say, "Yes, Lord." Humble yourself, turn from your wicked ways and God will purify His church, your heart and your home and relationships, because you let Him break you right at the heart of the issue to start with.

One preacher in western Canada said, "I never thought I'd live to see the day where the people of God were anxious for the Holy Spirit of God to reveal sin in their lives because they had such a desire to be totally clean with God. They wanted to be shown!"

What is your reaction to this message? One lady reacted like this, "Today, I readjusted my halo. It's not strangling me anymore." Is that it? Just readjust your halo a little bit? Or like the man in Michigan said, "I learned something tonight. I learned that God is not out to hurt my pride, He's out to kill it!" What is your reaction to the issue?

The Toronto Star (the New York Times for Canada) printed a headline (here's the world writing articles on the seven deadly sins) "Pride -- Queen of all Sins is Making a Comeback." The only mistake with that is that pride is not making a comeback, she's been here all along. Look at the big article the world writes about. Pride, the queen of all sins.

One man said, "God showed me that I had to be broken. He showed me that pride was like witchcraft. He broke me in order for the light to shine through. I had to be broken."

Another man said, "I was saying good-bye to a Christian brother who had been used mightily of God, and I told him that I would pray that he would be used of God wherever you go and that you should be blessed of God. That brother looked me in the eye and said, 'Don't pray like that for me. Pray only one thing for me. Pray that I may continually be broken.'" He knew only too well the deception of our own heart -- that wants to be lifted up in pride.

One lady said, "It's like I've gone to the doctor for years and I tell him the symptoms and I've finally come to grips with the disease -- it was pride!"

Nobody has ever choked to death by swallowing his pride. Once he swallows his pride his appetite has improved -- his appetite for God and for the things that really matter -- his family and everything around him -- once he swallows his pride.

We started with Dr. James Kennedy and we'll end with him. Dr. Kennedy said, "The spirit-filled life is the answer to the spirit of pride." For God to fill us with His Holy Spirit we must confess our sins. If you confess

your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from it. Then you can say, "Yes, Lord, you have access to me whenever You want to show me is what I want to know." Watch God do a marvelous work, watch your appetite improve, watch the house of God become so wonderful, the people of God become so wonderful, the fellowship of the saints, the desires of God become yours -- it's a new life! You move from second rate citizenship in the kingdom of God to first rate when you come and deal God's way.

"For now have I chosen and sanctified this house that My name may be there forever and Mine eyes and My heart shall be there perpetuate."

Do you know what this is a story of? It is simply God coming back to His people and God feeling at home once again amongst His people and God walking with His people, with His people comfortable in His presence. God wants to do that. He said, "My heart and my eyes want to be there perpetually." I've been in a lot of churches and I wonder where God was. Go

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