

(A Spiritual Leader) 13. Humbling Oneself

by Zac Poonen

To be a true spiritual leader, one must humble oneself under God's mighty hand and trust in His sovereignty, even in the face of false accusations and persecution.

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:5

Topics: "Humility", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the necessity of humility for spiritual leaders, explaining that true exaltation comes from God and is rooted in our willingness to humble ourselves. He warns against the allure of worldly recognition and status, urging leaders to model a life of servanthood and dependence on God rather than seeking fame or wealth. Poonen highlights the importance of accepting God's circumstances with joy, acknowledging mistakes, and apologizing to others as a demonstration of humility. He encourages believers to connect directly with God, rather than relying on human leaders, and to endure misunderstandings and accusations with grace. Ultimately, he calls for a shift in focus from seeking the approval of men to seeking God's will and purpose in our lives.

Transcript

A spiritual leader will always be ready to humble himself.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt us at the proper time (1Pet.5:5,6).

To be exalted does not mean that we become great men in this world or in Christendom and get the honour of men. It refers to spiritual exaltation, where we are given spiritual authority to fulfil all the will of God in our life and ministry. But such exaltation depends on our humbling ourselves.

We all know that the world is full of people who want to become bigger and bigger in the eyes of others. Every politician and every businessman wants to become bigger. Unfortunately those who call themselves servants of Christ also want to become bigger and bigger. They aspire to have grand titles like "Reverend Doctor" and to hold positions like "Chairman" of their organisations. Sadly, today's Christendom is no different from any corporation in the world!

Young believers today see their leaders standing in the spotlight like film stars, on large platforms in public meetings, living in expensive hotels and houses, and driving expensive cars. Not knowing much about

God's ways they admire such leaders and look forward to the day when they too will reach those heights! They feel that such preachers must have been faithful for many years for God to reward them in this way! And they imagine that by being faithful, they too will one day stand on such platforms with the spotlight on them!

When young men see preachers making lots of money with the gifts they receive from America and the Gulf countries, they look forward to the day when they too can be rich like them. The role model for these young men is not Jesus Christ but these wealthy, film-star-type preachers. This is the tragedy in Christendom today.

We need to demonstrate to our young people by our lives and teach them by our words that if we follow the Lord, we will not become wealthy or famous, but godly. At the same time, we'll be misunderstood, rejected and persecuted! But we'll be able to love those who hate us, and bless those who curse us. This is what we need to demonstrate to the next generation. If we don't do that, they will follow "another Jesus" - the one they see in today's carnal preachers.

To humble ourselves under God's mighty hand means to accept joyfully all the circumstances that God sends into our lives. We allow those circumstances to humble us, so that we become smaller and God becomes greater. When we become smaller in people's eyes, then they won't live in dependence on us, but on the Lord.

As a servant of the Lord, I'm more afraid of those who respect me highly than of those who criticise me. I find that some people respect me so much that they expect me to find God's will for them. I always answer, "No". I tell them, that it was only under the old covenant that people went to the prophets to find the will of God for them. Under the new covenant, every child of God (including the youngest) can go to God directly and know His will personally. In Hebrews 8:11, this is specifically mentioned as one of the privileges that we have under the new covenant. Now we can all receive the Holy Spirit and He is our Guide. So I tell my brothers that I can advise them, but I will never find the will of God for them. I've emphasized this from the very beginning of my ministry. The result is that today people in our churches know the Lord themselves, and do not lean on me. They are connected directly to Christ their Head. Thus the Body of Christ has been built in our midst through many years.

This is the first principle of building Christ's Body: We must connect people to the Head and make them independent of us, as soon as possible.

We need to humble ourselves and repent deeply of our failure in this area, in the past. We must long that Christ will increase in us and that we will decrease. God leads us through many circumstances in our life to reduce us, so that Christ might increase in us. If we humble ourselves under those circumstances, then God's purpose will be fulfilled in us.

Humbling ourselves involves apologizing to all whom we've wronged. As servants of the Lord, we are to be servants of all people and must be willing to go under all of them to bless them. When we make mistakes, we must be quick to acknowledge them and to apologize where necessary. The only one who never makes a mistake is God.

I have told the Lord that I am willing to apologize to anyone under the sun - children, servants, beggars or anyone - and that I would never stand on my dignity or prestige in this matter. And I've done that - and God has blessed me.

Don't ever stand on a false sense of prestige and dignity before your flock. If you've done something wrong, apologize to them and say that you were wrong and that you're sorry for what you did. Their esteem and respect for you will only grow thereby and not become any less. Why should you pretend that you never make any mistakes?

I heard of a college student once who asked his professor a very difficult question. The professor said he could answer that in three words: "I don't know"! The student's esteem for the professor shot up that day, not only because he saw the professor's humility, but also because he saw his integrity, in not teaching anything that he did not know.

I've said it publicly to the people in my church that I'll be making mistakes until the end of my life because of one simple reason: I'm not God. As long as I live on this earth, I'm going to make mistakes. Hopefully, those mistakes won't be as foolish as the ones I made ten or twenty years ago, because I've learnt some lessons from those earlier mistakes. I've acquired some wisdom from my blunders. But I'm still not perfect.

Many of you here are married. You know how easy it is for you to hurt your wives accidentally, even when you don't intend to. You may say something with a good intention. But your wife may misunderstand what you meant. It could be the other way around too - where you misunderstand something your wife said. What must you do in such cases? Let me just say this: Peace can be restored much quicker in your home through an apology than through a laboured explanation of your motives, or through an analysis of whose fault it was!

Suppose you find yourself in a situation where your colleagues misunderstand you. It may be no use explaining matters to them, because they may not be willing to listen. What should you do in such a case, especially when you're perfectly innocent? Should you feel sorry for yourself? Not at all. Just make sure your conscience is clear before God and men and leave the matter with Him. That's all you've got to do. That is the policy I've followed for many years now and I've been really blessed. I would recommend it to you too.

Anyone who serves the Lord is going to be the target of Satan's attacks. The more useful we are to God, the more we will be attacked by the enemy. We won't be able to avoid that. Satan will attack us through slander, false accusations and fabricated stories. And he will attack our wives and our children too.

Just think of the evil things that people said about Jesus in His lifetime, and that they say about Him even today. They called Him a glutton and a drunkard (Lk.7:34), a madman (Mark 3:21), demon-possessed (John 8:48) and the ruler of demons (Matt.12:24) and many such wicked names. They said he was a heretic preaching doctrines contrary to what the Bible and Moses taught (John 9:29). That's how they drove people away from listening to the Lord. But He never bothered to reply to such people. He never answered a single personal accusation. We shouldn't either. Jesus answered only doctrinal questions. Today, people say even immoral things about our Lord. But God does not come down in judgment on them.

They called Paul a deceiver and a false prophet who belonged to a sect that was evil spoken of, everywhere (Acts 24:14; 28:22). Thus they kept people away from listening to Paul too.

It has been the same story throughout church history with every great man of God - with John Wesley, Charles Finney, William Booth, Watchman Nee and with every other true prophet of God.

Henry Suso was a man of God who lived in Germany, a few hundred years ago. He was a saintly man and a bachelor. He prayed often that the Lord would make him broken and humble like Jesus Himself was. This was how God answered his prayer. One day Suso heard a knock at his door. When he opened the door, he saw a strange woman standing there with a baby in her arms. He had never seen her before. She was an evil woman who was wanting to get rid of her newborn baby and decided that the best man to dump it on was Henry Suso. So she told him, in a voice loud enough for everyone in the street to hear, "Here is the fruit of your sin", and left the baby in Suso's arms and walked off. Suso was stunned. His reputation in the town had been shattered in a moment. He took the baby inside, knelt down and told the Lord, "Lord, you know I'm innocent. What must I do now?" The Lord replied, "Do what I did. Suffer for the sins of others". Suso accepted the word of the Lord and never justified himself before anyone. He brought up that child as his own. He was content that God knew the truth and he was willing for everyone else to misunderstand him. Many years later, the woman was convicted of her sin and came back to Suso's house and proclaimed to all the neighbours that Suso was innocent and that she had told a lie. But what had happened in the intervening years? Henry Suso's prayer had been answered. He had become broken and humble like his Master. God had been able to accomplish a work of sanctification in Suso's life, freeing him from man's opinion's so that God's opinion alone mattered to him thereafter.

Are we willing to pay such a price in order to become like Jesus? Or do we still seek the honour of men?

God breaks us by allowing us to be misunderstood, misjudged, falsely accused and publicly humiliated. In all such circumstances, we must refuse to see the men who are harassing us. They may be our brothers or our enemies. It doesn't matter. Behind the hand of every Judas Iscariot, is our heavenly Father giving us a cup to drink. If we see the Father's hand in such situations, we'll drink the cup joyfully, however bitter and painful it may be. But if we see only Judas, then we'll take out our sword (as Peter did) and cut off people's ears (or their reputations) or whatever.

When we are attacked or falsely accused, God wants us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. It's easy to do that once we see that it is God's hand there, and not man's.

During the past years, I've heard "believers" say all sorts of evil things about me and my teachings. They have also made false accusations against me and my family members and written articles and books against me. But the Lord has always told me never to reply to them. So I've kept quiet. As a result the Lord has done a great work of sanctification both in me and in my family-members! God makes evil to work for our good.

In the Lord's own time I know He will clear away the clouds and make the sun to shine. But He is the One Who determines that time, not I (as we read in Acts 1:7). Until then, my task is to humble myself under His mighty hand. It is not my task to justify myself before anyone. Once I start doing that, I won't have time to do anything else.

As Paul said about Alexander the coppersmith, the Lord Himself will repay our enemies one day according to their deeds (2 Tim.4:14). So we can safely leave such matters of vengeance in His hands (Rom.12:19).

It is best to leave all matters with God. He knows what He is doing and He's got everything under His control. He's chiseling away at the rock to sculpture the likeness of Jesus in us. Some parts of the rock are very hard and He has to use false accusations and persecution to chisel out those parts. If we submit to His chiselling, we'll come forth in the end as Christlike men with spiritual authority.

When Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus could call him, "Friend", because He saw His Father's hand clearly. If we see the sovereignty of God in all our circumstances, it'll be easy to humble ourselves. And it'll be easy for God to exalt us at the proper time. God knows the right time to lift a pressure from our shoulders and to give us His authority. So let's wait for Him. No-one who waits for Him will ever be disappointed or put to shame (Isaiah 49:23).

To be exalted, as I said earlier, doesn't mean that God will promote us in this world. He won't make us head up big Christian organizations either. Personally, I'm not interested in being the head of any organization, leave alone a big one. I just want to be a servant of the Lord and of people - doing exactly what the Lord tells me to do and taking responsibility for those whom He commits to me - whether that be ten people or ten thousand. God decides that number - not I. And I'm certainly not interested in having a title or a position in Christendom. I'm also not interested in

exercising control over people or money or property. I want to stick to proclaiming the Word and serving others in this needy world.

Let us follow in Jesus' footsteps. Let people say whatever evil they want to, about us. If we honour God, He will one day honour us. If we're serious about following the Lord, we will find that God takes us through many painful experiences. But His purpose in all of them will be to free us from the opinions of men and from the chains that tie us down to earth - so that we can "mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31).

God will order our circumstances to so humble us before men, that we finally come to the place where we care only for His opinion. Then our spiritual authority will be really powerful. May it be so for all of us.

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