



The Life Best Lived

What Might Upgrade the Quality of Your Life?

There is a story told in ancient Korea of an older man who had long been known as a thief but because he was so clever, he had never been caught. One day, he was discovered stealing some spice from a market and found guilty of the crime. The judge sentenced him to five years in prison. Sadly, when he got to the jail, he looked about for some way of escape but found none. After a few days, he came up with an idea. He called to the guard and asked him to be brought to the king. The guard just laughed. Undeterred, the clever thief informed the guard that he had a precious gift for the king that would make him very happy. He told the guard that the king will even reward you after he receives it from me. Finally, after much convincing, the guard relented and got in touch with the king.

The next day, the king called for the thief and when he arrived at the palace, there was the king sitting high on his majestic throne along with the Prime Minister, the general over the armies, and the one in charge of the prisons. The king in a loud voice called for the thief to bring him his gift. He handed it to the king. A beautifully wrapped small box with gold ribbon and red paper. Excitedly the king ripped it open, only to find inside a plum pit. The king roared in anger. "What sort of gift is this?" The thief patiently replied, "It is a very precious seed. The tree that will sprout from it will produce gold plums. And many of them each season." The king was delighted. "There is only one issue", noted the thief. "If the person who owns the tree has ever stolen or been dishonest, the tree will only bear normal plums." "Oh my", cried the king. I have stolen from my mom because when I was younger, I was very selfish." The thief looked over at the Prime Minister. "Surely you sir have always been honest and true! You could take the seed. Dejectedly, the Prime Minister, gazed down at the ground. "It would do me no good. I have taken bribes many times to give away government jobs." "Ah, but General, I know you have been righteous and honest. You could plant the seed." The general looked away in shame. "I have become rich because I stole the pay from my soldiers." "Well, that may be," replied the thief, "but certainly the prison warden has been a faithful and honest man as he is in charge of those who have broken the law." "No", the warden dejectedly shook his head. "I have many times taken bribes from wealthy prisoners wanting a better place to stay."

"Well listen to you all", cried the thief. "You have stolen vast amounts of money from those who trusted you and you live lives of ease. I must spend the next five years in prison for stealing only a bit of spice from a store". The King glanced around the room, embarrassed for them all. "We can't let this man go back to prison. Let's all pitch in and pay his fine!" So that is what they did, and the thief left the palace a free man. Perhaps the greatest threat to humility is the unwillingness to see one's own sins for what they are. We all sin. Famously, the Apostle Paul stated, **...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...** (Romans 3: 23 NIV) How many of us though are willing to admit our sins in the middle of an argument, when the confession would be humiliating, when we have tried our best to forget them. When I was a kid, I helped a friend steal a pornographic magazine. I certainly never confessed what I had done to my parents, the store clerk or anyone else. I didn't want to admit my faults. Humility, at its core, is facing the depths of our sin and acknowledging it to those we try to impress, look down upon or criticize. Humility is perhaps one of the greatest attributes we can possess, a character trait that God loves and blesses.

James, the brother of Jesus succinctly puts it this way. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.** (James 4: 10 NIV) The term translated “Humble” is a command and is a directive to do so immediately. It is not so difficult to humble yourself when faced with someone who has clear authority over your future such as a police officer or your boss at work. Those who threaten your survival will probably gain your humble response such as a mugger with a gun or a lion who approaches you out on the savannah. You will most likely humble yourself before those you greatly respect such as a university professor or a great leader. There is a vast difference between humility that is thrust upon you and that which you freely give. The Bible has this to say about Daniel, the powerful prophet of God. **Then he (an angel) continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.** (Daniel 10:12 NIV) Humility is one of the great traits of those who truly walk with God. **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.** (Colossians 3: 12 NIV) **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.** (Philippians 2: 3 NIV) Those who humble themselves are blessed with a wisdom that the proud cannot possess. **When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.** (Proverbs 11: 2 NIV) The Apostle Peter reminds us that God has a special reward for the humble. **Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** (1 Peter 5: 5 NIV)

There are found in Scripture four levels of humility. Level 1: Those who don't humble themselves. Pharaoh is a classic example of this. Rather than let the Lord be in charge after the miraculous signs should have been sufficient to persuade him, Pharaoh refused to admit he was wrong and let the Israelites out of Egypt. **So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me.** (Exodus 10: 3 NIV) Level 2: Those who are forced to humble themselves due to circumstance. Ahab, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel was a horrible and evil king. Egged on by his murderous wife, Ahab faced the judgment of the Lord for his actions. When God threatened Ahab with judgment, Ahab admitted his wrong and humbled himself. **Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."** (1 Kings 21: 28-29 NIV)

Level 3: Those who humble themselves out of admiration and respect. Noah had been through a lot. For one hundred years he had worked on the construction of the ark. Then he spent nearly a year on it managing the vast array of creatures he rescued from the flood. If anyone deserved a break it was Noah. His idea of chilling was to take the grapes from his newly planted orchard and make wine from them, getting both drunk as well as naked in his tent. When his middle son Ham stumbled upon his intoxicated dad, he went back to his brothers and told them the hilarious discovery. His brothers weren't amused, however. In a sign of great humility they went to their father's tent and covered his nakedness. **But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness.** (Genesis 9: 23 NIV) Level 4: Those who humble themselves out of love. When Ruth decided to leave behind her family and friends to make a new life in Israel with her mother-in-law, she did so, not out of coercion or fear but out of love. Her act of humility is famously recorded in the biography of Ruth. **But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.** (Ruth 1: 16 NIV) There is in the humble, a certain giving of your life for the sake of others, a sacrificing of what you can have that others may be blessed and given a better life. Quoting a song, the Apostle Paul has this to say about Jesus. **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!** (Philippians 2: 8 NIV) If the road of the humble is the path our Lord Jesus took, it is always the right way to go.