

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (17)

Pride prevents quality of being

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, "Quality of being", the seventeenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Developing quality of being that is of true and lasting value is a very difficult process. The Scriptures show us the need to deal deeply with the self-life, the life of the flesh. One major aspect of the self-life that will prevent development of true quality of being is pride.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

The subject of quality of being is central in God's heart. He created us in His image with the potential that we can become like Him in His moral and spiritual perfection. But this path is very, very difficult, and God has made every provision for us, but it requires our deep and determined choice to develop in that direction.

So how can we develop such quality that will be long-lasting, that will endure, that will be of true value and meaning in eternity?

One major area that we must deal with in seeking to reject the self-life is the area of pride: the spirit of pride, the spirit of self-exaltation, wanting to be greater than others, wanting to be praised.

This attitude will very seriously hinder us from developing quality in our being because at the very heart of it, it will hinder us from recognizing and acknowledging where we are wrong and taking the corrective steps. A person who is proud is very unwilling to acknowledge even when he recognizes he is wrong because he wants to be praised, he does not want to "*lose face*" and therefore, he will insist that he is right, or he does not want to face the issue.

If we do not purposely and decisively learn to develop a humble and contrite spirit, it is not possible to develop true quality of being. This subject is very vast in its nature and its application. Today, we can only consider some major aspects to help us recognize the direction and how we should approach this area.

Why is it that pride is so common, so prevalent, so far reaching, and why is it that men are so easily proud? Why do we want to be proud? Basically, we know that it is not good to be proud in this kind of way: centred on the self, a self-seeking approach to life.

But then, when we ponder about it, it is not so difficult to understand: The reason for the self-life, the reason for going our own way basically has to do with the area of enjoyment – we want to feel good, we want to enjoy ourselves, and therefore the many things that we do arise from that.

It is not wrong to enjoy ourselves, it is not wrong to feel good, but it becomes wrong when it arises from the wrong basis.

God has given us many good things to enjoy. God does want us to feel good but only in the context of what is morally and spiritually good. If we live our lives well and we have deep fellowship with God, it is very enjoyable. And when we walk with God and are willing to obey Him, the things that we go through, even though difficult, we can still enjoy going through with God; and we can feel good when we live a life that is truly righteous.

So, there is nothing wrong with feeling good or enjoyment. But the problem is that there is a cost to being good.

So we want the enjoyment, we want the feeling, but we do not want the cost. And so, we find the two become separated: We learn to enjoy ourselves, we want to feel good, for the wrong reasons.

And this is where pride becomes so easy. It is very easy for us to develop pride because when people praise us, it feels good. When we are in a position of power, it feels good. We can enjoy such a situation.

But pride can manifest itself in many different ways. It does not always come in the same form. Some aspects of pride are very serious but some are not so serious, but we still have to deal with them.

The kind of pride that is very serious we can see in the evil one. Not only did he desire to be praised, but also he was prepared to take any course of action to satisfy himself. He wanted to be like God; he wanted to be worshipped; he wanted power over others. And he is prepared to take any course of action, however evil, however wrong, however vicious and malicious it may be to achieve his purpose. He wants to enjoy himself at any cost. This is very, very serious. And that is why God condemns the evil one so severely.

But there are various different forms of pride that may not be as serious but it will still prevent us from developing true quality in our being.

Yes, we want to grow well, but if we do something wrong, or we hold the wrong understanding, or we say something that we should not say, are we prepared to listen when someone else corrects us? Are we prepared to acknowledge when we recognize that we are wrong? If we are not, although we may not be strongly seeking to do damage to other people, but by so doing, we will damage ourselves. We cannot grow, we cannot develop; we will not change for the better.

A very major problem in life is the fear of man's opinion. So this kind can come about in many different ways. There are some who really want to be good but they are so afraid of what others will think of them and so, they may seek to live their lives in such a way that they will give a good impression, but the reality is not there. So then we live an artificial life - it is not real.

So if we ponder about it, pride is an aspect of the wrong attitude towards, and a wrong understanding of, our true worth.

It is associated with our sense of our true worth: We want to be someone really worthy, but there is a wrong attitude and that wrong attitude leads to a wrong understanding.

What is that wrong attitude?

If we want to develop true worth, we concentrate on meaning, on being good. But when we want enjoyment, we concentrate on what can bring enjoyment.

And so, when enjoyment is our attitude, our desire, then we will seek for situations that can bring that about. So when people praise us, when people think well of us, when we are in a position of power, when we have ability or we are attractive, this brings a sense of confidence, of enjoyment, of self-esteem.

So it is a wrong attitude towards true worth. And associated with this is a wrong understanding. We think that if we are great, we are better than other people then it is something really good. But that is not true. We think that if we appear good to others and they can think well of us, that is very good. But that is not true.

What you are worth is what you are. It is not what people think of you, it is not what you have done that appears to be good and effective. It is what you are.

So the only way to develop true quality in our being, where there will be true worth is to be what we ought to be, based on what is truly good – moral goodness. And we see that in the character of God. So it is in that context as we pursue God, seek to understand His character then we will understand how we can develop quality of being.

And to help us to understand this more fully and clearly, God Himself become Man, lived in this world, showed to us how it can be manifested in daily situations of life in the midst of temptations, pressures, difficulties and suffering: that we can maintain that spirit, that direction, to concentrate on meaning, on what is good regardless of what others think of us, regardless of how they may treat us.

But that does not mean that there is no place to consider how others may regard us, if the purpose is for their well-being. We do not want to stumble people unnecessarily: So bearing that in mind, yes, we bear in mind how we can help them to appreciate what is good – but not because we are afraid of man's opinion, not because we want their favour so that we can feel good. We must recognize the motive, the basis upon which we live our lives.

The Lord Jesus was regarded very poorly by many people. It did not matter to Him; so too, the apostle Paul was severely misunderstood, but he was all right with it.

What is important is: What are you in reality? And are you prepared to live by that which you ought to be?

So then, we see that at the heart of pride is the desire for self-exaltation: to be exalted, to be in a high place, to be in a position of honour, prestige, power, authority.

Is there anything wrong if we are in a position of power and authority, and we are recognized? Is there anything wrong with that?

If we think about it, we will also see that there is nothing wrong with that in itself. To be in an exalted position is not wrong in itself. It depends on the reality.

Are you in that position to be exalted? And what is your attitude? You want that exaltation so as to focus on yourself, to be able to be greater than other people, or it is because in reality, there is a quality and there is a meaning in it, and God sees fit for it to be so?

Let us look at **Isaiah 57: 15**

Isaiah 57: 15

For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.

So we see that God is the high and exalted One. There is nothing wrong in being exalted – but it is because He is rightfully exalted: He is a Being of moral perfection and He has almighty greatness and power. So He is rightfully exalted so that He can rule over the whole of His creation, so that He can be an example for all moral beings: how we should live.

He must be exalted so that we can behold Him, we can recognize Him. He must be exalted so that He can exercise His authority and power over all the nations, over all created beings: so as to administer justice and righteousness; to manifest His grace, His love, His compassion; to help to bring about moral beings of quality.

So God is the high and exalted One Who lives forever. He is the Creator of all things. His name is Holy. He is perfectly holy, perfectly good. So He is rightfully exalted.

But we are not the same as God. We are created beings. We do not have righteousness of our own by ourselves. Our righteousness comes from God's life imparted to us; we develop to become righteous as a result of coming to God, seeking His help, receiving His life, being transformed by Him.

If we do not recognize this properly, then we can seek to exalt ourselves, and that would lead to destruction of our being. We are created beings and we must take a humble position, and we must be contrite whenever we go astray.

Let us recognize that being humble is not the same as being contrite: A person who has not sinned must remain humble. A person who has sinned must be contrite.

The Lord Jesus, the perfect Man, was perfectly humble, but He never sinned, so He did not need to be contrite.

But we have sinned, so we must be contrite. Where we have gone astray, where we are wrong, we have to acknowledge, we have to change, we have to be corrected. We cannot remain as we are. But whether we are corrected or not, we must be humble.

“Humble” has to do with the preparedness to take any position assigned to us by God. “Humble” has to do with the preparedness to go through any situation in the course of doing what is right: People may not respect us; it may appear to be lowly; it may appear to be unrecognized, despised; but if it is good, if it is meaningful, then the humble would be prepared to go through it.

So God tells us this very clearly. He is the high and exalted One. And He says: “I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit”. So although God is high and exalted and He dwells in a high and holy place, He says: “I dwell *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit”.

This is a very, very great encouragement to us. The contrite and lowly of spirit refers to those who may not yet be pure and who continue to fail and falter and yet, God is prepared to dwell with us.

The Lord Jesus tells us: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". When we develop true purity of heart, when our character becomes like that of God, then there is a great freedom of fellowship with God, we can be very close to Him, our hearts are identified with Him.

But if we have not yet developed that quality of that purity, does it mean that we cannot be close to God? The answer is: Yes we still can be close to God, if we are humble and contrite. In the process of development, in the midst of faltering and failing, if we are prepared to humble ourselves, be contrite, ask God for forgiveness, correct ourselves when we know we are wrong, thank those who point out where we have gone astray, then God will dwell with us. He says: "In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite".

God is prepared to help us. We may feel very difficult, we may be very crushed because of our sinfulness; but if we are humble and contrite, God will revive us. But there is a condition: that we are prepared to be humble and contrite.

What is very helpful for us to recognize is that while we should not pursue the path of self-exaltation, God Himself will exalt those who are truly humble before Him. If we are truly humble as we ought to be, God will exalt us. But He will not exalt us in the way that many people desire exaltation. The way that God will exalt us is always based on what is morally good and meaningful.

So if we truly wish to be good, we concentrate on the moral quality of our hearts and developing in that direction, God will exalt us according to what is appropriate and helpful in the situation. The best example of course, is the perfect Man. The perfect Man was perfectly humble, lived a perfect life and was perfectly exalted.

Philippians 2: 5-11

- 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
- 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
- 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.
- 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- 9 For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
- 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Notice the apostle Paul emphasizes: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus". Pride is a wrong spirit; humility is the right spirit. So the Lord Jesus showed this spirit of humility to the highest degree. He existed in the form of God. He was equal with God in glory, in status, in power, in majesty. But He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant. He gave up all this glory and took on a very lowly position.

He was made in the likeness of men, and He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Death on the cross was not only very painful, but also very humiliating: The Creator of the world being ill-treated, spat upon, ridiculed, mocked at, by those He created. But the Lord Jesus humbled Himself. He was prepared to go through all this because of love.

So we are told: For this reason also, God highly exalted Him. So the Lord Jesus Christ is now exalted because He was truly humble and prepared to be good as He should be and shows to us what a perfect man ought to be. And so God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name. This is the kind of thing that people would like to have: a powerful name, a name that can command respect, a name that has authority over other people. But this is the name that God gave to the Lord Jesus.

“...that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”: The Lord of lords, the King of kings – the Lord Jesus exalted and glorified. This is what God bestowed on Him because He humbled Himself.

Let us now have a look at what happens if we do not maintain a proper spirit of humility and contriteness, what happens when we allow pride to enter into our hearts.

2 Chronicles 26: 14-21

- 14 Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones.
- 15 In Jerusalem he made engines *of war* invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he *was* strong.
- 16 But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.
- 17 Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men.
- 18 They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God."
- 19 But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.
- 20 Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he *was* leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him.
- 21 King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son *was* over the king's house judging the people of the land.

King Uzziah showed much promise. He was positive. He trusted God; he sought to live by God's ways in his earlier days. And as long as he sought the Lord, the Lord helped him. God was gracious to him, helped him, strengthened him, equipped him to fulfil his responsibility as king. He was marvelously helped until he *was* strong.

When he was not strong, he was humble. He did not do what he did when he became strong.

But we are told: But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly.

It is easier to be humble when you are weak. It is easier to be humble when you are a “nobody”. It is easier to be humble when you are quite incapable. But when you are capable, when you are recognized, when you have power, when you have authority, when you have strength, it is much easier to become proud. This is something that we need to recognize and to take care. When we grow stronger, whether physically or spiritually, whether in terms of natural abilities or in spiritual development, the danger is there: Will we become proud?

“...when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense”. It is almost certain that King Uzziah knew that this was wrong. He knew he was not supposed to do that. The priests were consecrated to do that; he was not supposed to do that. But he was unfaithful to the LORD his God. Because he was strong, he felt he could do almost anything he wanted. He was the king. Why could he not enter the sanctuary, why could he not burn incense on the altar of incense? Did not all this belong to his kingdom? Was he not the king?

But his kingdom was always subject to God’s rulership. God could dispose of him at anytime. He had not sufficiently recognized the importance of taking his proper place before God. He concentrated on himself, on his power, his greatness and so, he did what he should not have done.

But when we fail, there is still hope if we are prepared to be corrected.

Yes, we do fail. At times, we are tempted, we fall, we falter. God still understands. He is still prepared to help us; He is prepared to correct us. But the problem is we may not be prepared to be corrected. If we have done wrong, if we are not what we should be, if we have become proud and we are rebuked for it, what do we do?

If we are prepared to acknowledge we are wrong, humble ourselves, God will still forgive us, He will help us to learn from it and to become what we should be.

But the sad thing is that in this instance, Uzziah was unrepentant. He was not humble; he was not contrite. The priest opposed him, spoke on behalf of God, told him what he did was wrong. Uzziah recognized he was wrong, but he was not prepared to acknowledge. Instead, he was enraged, he was angry with the priest for telling him off, for telling him he did wrong.

He was very angry with them. So in that instance, God expressed His anger by judging him with leprosy. The leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.

God manifested His judgment in this instance through leprosy. It does not mean that anyone who has leprosy is judged by God but in this instance, it is God who did so. And so the priests hurried him out from where he was beside the altar of incense. And he himself recognized God's judgment, that God had smitten him and he also hastened to get out.

And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD.

He thought that he had authority not only to enter the house of the LORD but also to burn incense. Now, he was a leper; he was cut off from the house of the Lord. God's judgment was upon him.

The problem of pride can come about at anytime if we are not vigilant, if we do not maintain a humble and contrite spirit. King Uzziah did very well for many years; he had a long reign, but he ended up very miserable, in a very poor state.

We read in the New Testament the Lord Jesus denouncing the Pharisees again and again. He pronounced woes on them; He was very angry with the Pharisees. Why was it so?

There were many aspects wrong with their lives. Basically they were self-centred and there were many wrong desires within them. But one of the major aspects was this issue of pride. They wanted to be recognized; they wanted to be exalted before men.

Luke 11: 43

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places..."

"Woe to you..." – judgment, condemnation upon them.

"...you love the chief seats in the synagogues..." They treasured this thing: the chief seats in the synagogues – prominence, authority, recognition, praise. "...respectful greetings in the market places..." – they wanted to be acknowledged, praised, greeted in a respectful way.

But did they deserve that? No. They did not deserve that. Their hearts were not right. Their attitude was negative. They did not deserve respect; they did not deserve the chief seats.

Their desire was to be praised and recognized by men.

And this led to many outward deeds that may appear good, but in reality, the meaning in their heart was not good. In that kind of situation, they could still receive praise and honour from men, but they will not receive praise and honour from God; there will be no reward from God. Many people can be deceived, many people can even go along with the deception, but God will not accept that.

Matthew 23: 27-28

- 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.
 28 "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness..."

The outward and the inward, they are very different – quite the opposite. Whitewashed tombs... appear beautiful, but inside... full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness: And this portrayed the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees that the Lord Jesus rebuked. "...you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men..." – They appeared good: People could mistake them as being righteous. But inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. "...hypocrisy and lawlessness" are moral qualities that the Lord Jesus is referring to. The quality of their being was very poor, negative, but they appeared righteous. Righteousness is a moral quality but for the Pharisees and the scribes, it was only appearance. They appeared righteous but the reality within their hearts was hypocrisy and lawlessness.

So we need to recognize that the problem of pride preventing us from developing quality of being can be expressed and can come forth in many kinds of forms and situations. So we need to be alert so that we will deal with it in whatever form.

For the Pharisees, they may want to be exalted, they may want to be in a high position, but for many other people, they may not desire a high position.

They feel very embarrassed to be in a high position, but they may also have a similar problem in that they may feel very inferior and they long to be recognized by others, they long to be appreciated and recognized and when they are not, they feel inferior.

That is also a desire for recognition that is wrong. It is a wrong attitude and a wrong understanding towards our self-worth, our true worth.

When we become what we ought to be, there is no need for us to seek for man's approval. We need not be afraid of what others may think.

The question is: What would God say; what does God think? Would He say "Good!" or would He say "Bad!"? Because God knows everything, God is objective, but men are not.

Men can be deceived by our appearance, men can be attracted by the wrong things and also, men can be angry for the wrong reasons. Is that what we want from men?

We need not feel inferior because we do poorly in our studies, because you are not so pretty, because you are not so capable, because we do not hold a high position. There is no need for us to feel inferior.

The true dignity in us resides in the quality of our being.

When our hearts are right, when we have deep fellowship with God, we can be confident, we can be joyful, we can be peaceful, we can be very happy regardless of our position, our achievement, or our status in the world.

Let us consider a situation where pride can manifest itself even in contexts where people desire to be spiritual.

Luke 22: 22-26

- 22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"
- 23 And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.
- 24 And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest.
- 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'
- 26 "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant..."

Notice the context in which they wanted to be regarded to be greatest. It was a context when the Lord Jesus told them about His betrayal, that someone was going to betray Him. It was a very serious matter and yet, it was in this context they were arguing who would be regarded as the greatest.

The Lord said, "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. So they recognized it was a very serious matter. They were concerned, they discussed among themselves.

And **verse 24** tells us: And there arose also a dispute... "...also" tells us that it was at about the same time. As the Lord told them about His betrayal, they were also occupied with this thought: which one of them was regarded to be greatest? And there was a dispute; they did not agree. They wanted that position to be the greatest.

When we read a passage like that, we may be very surprised. How can it be that these disciples who had chosen to follow the Lord, these disciples specially chosen by the Lord could be disputing which one of them was regarded to be greatest? How could it be that they were so negative in their attitude? How could it be that pride was so serious in their lives?

If we look at it just from the angle that they wanted to be great, to be recognized, to be greater than other people like the people of the world – if it is just from that angle – we can say yes, that is quite bad.

But in the context, the likelihood is: their desire to be great was not like the people of the world. They wanted to be great in the area of the spiritual realm, in spiritual development, spiritual service, spiritual status. To them, that is something good. And it is true if you develop well spiritually, if you serve well spiritually, it is a good thing. So they wanted the best; so the best means the greatest.

So from that angle, it does not seem to be wrong. We want to be the greatest in the sense that we want to be the most spiritual; we want to be the one who has served the most; we want to be the one who has contributed the most to the kingdom of God. Is that wrong?

Yes, it is wrong: Because we are not concentrating on the true meaning of being good; we are not concentrating on what ought to be. We are comparing with other people so that we can exalt ourselves over other people. That is wrong.

But to want to be good, to want to develop well, to want to be appreciated by God because we are good, there is nothing wrong with that.

Two disciples wanted to sit on the right and on the left of the Lord Jesus. That may appear to be very selfish and indeed, there is that selfish element in it. But their thoughts probably were along the lines: Sitting on the right and on the left is a very good thing; it is noble, it is honourable. So they wanted that seat. But they were only concerned about themselves. They were not concerned about the others. Why not offer it to the others, to sit on the right and left? Why they?

So there is this spirit of competition, this spirit of comparison, this spirit of wanting to be better than others, of wanting to be exalted above other people, of wanting to have authority over other people: This is at the heart of much problem even in the spiritual realm, even for those who desire to do good in the kingdom of God.

So then we may say: "Then it is very difficult to be humble – even when seeking to be good, there are still so many pitfalls and dangers. How can we be truly humble?"

Well, you can ask yourself the question: What is your motive, what is your attitude, what is the direction of what you are thinking about?

If you have the desire to sit on the right and on the left of the Lord Jesus because you believe that that is a very meaningful position, because the Lord is so good and you want to be close to Him, would you be glad if someone else were to sit there? Would you be really glad if someone else is better than you are spiritually, develops more quality; they are closer to God than you are? Will you be glad?

If you cannot say "Yes", then something is wrong. Because when someone is closer to God than you are, that is very good. If someone has developed more spiritual quality than you, it is very good. Can you not rejoice in that? If you cannot rejoice in that, your attitude is wrong – clearly wrong – and you have to correct it.

We have to learn to develop our hearts so that we can truly and properly rejoice in what is truly good. Love rejoices in what is good, what is righteous, what is meaningful before God. If we love others, we should love them as we would love ourselves. Whatever we want for ourselves that is truly good, we also want for other people. Is this our attitude?

So if someone is praised by God, if someone is exalted by God, will we rejoice, will we be truly glad or will we be upset: "Someone is better than me; someone is closer to God than me" and so, we become miserable?

That is a wrong attitude which we must correct. One who is truly humble is very glad at whatever is good and wherever it is found; whether in yourself or in others, you will be glad. So it is not wrong if you develop well and you can see you have developed well and you are very happy. There is nothing wrong with that; you should rejoice in that. But you should also rejoice just as much when you see others developing well and even more if they become better than you are because you are rejoicing in what is good. It is not a self-centred attitude in life.

So then, let us consider briefly what a positive attitude of humility is like, how we should develop.

We have no time to go into detail but I will just bring to your consciousness two persons whom we recognize quite readily.

David was described as a man after God's own heart and we know that David desired very much to be close to God, to be faithful to God, to walk with Him. But we also know that there was self-life in David and he failed, and he failed seriously at times. But yet, after all his failures, the Lord Jesus is still called the Son of David and God still refers to the kingdom of the throne of David.

David was a man after God's own heart in spite of his failures. In spite of the fact that he went astray, deep in his heart he longed to be like God, but he had not yet properly developed his life. There was not yet the kind of quality that he ought to have.

But why was it that God still appreciated him?

It is because of the humble and contrite spirit. We know that David sinned and Nathan the prophet came to tell him and he said: "You are the man! You are the one who has failed; you are the one who has sinned". And we read:

2 Samuel 12: 13-14

- 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.
14 "However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

This is found in **2 Sam 12: 13-14**.

We see the contrast between King Uzziah and King David.

King Uzziah sinned by burning incense at the altar of incense. He was rebuked by the priest. He was enraged with him. He thought that he was the king. "How could you, a subject, rebuke the king?" He was very angry. He was not concentrating on moral meaning. If he concentrated on moral meaning, he knew that he was wrong, he should acknowledge, he should confess and thank them for pointing out to him but instead, he was angry.

David was the king. Nathan was the prophet. Nathan rebuked him for having sinned. David said, "I have sinned against the Lord". He did not seek to excuse himself. He was not angry with Nathan. He was humble, he was contrite. He acknowledged, "I have sinned..." And Nathan said to David: "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die." As far as we can tell, likelihood is Nathan sensed the message from God: God would forgive him. But there would be a consequence: The child would die as a mark of the consequence of his sin. And David would suffer in various ways; there would be consequences.

But God was prepared to forgive him, he could learn, he could develop. And so David wrote a psalm in deep repentance. He acknowledged his sins; he recognized. This is what saved him from destruction. If he had insisted that what he did was right, then David would have perished not just physically but spiritually. He was prepared to learn and he grew in that situation.

Another person that we know, we are familiar with, is the apostle Peter. The apostle Peter was an impulsive man but straightforward, well-meaning. He said many things very fast: natural thinking, fleshly emotions. So he failed many a time.

But the apostle Peter developed well because he was humble, he was contrite, he was willing to be corrected. The Lord rebuked him on various occasions. There was no sign of the apostle Peter reacting to that. Yes, when he denied the Lord, he wept bitterly. He “wept bitterly” was not an expression of his reaction towards the Lord for putting him through such a test. He wept bitterly at his own failures. He was very sorry that he failed the Lord, he recognized.

And the Lord was prepared to accept him in the midst his failures and told him: “Tend my lambs. Look after them, take care of them.” The Lord was still prepared to let him have a mission to fulfil.

And then we can see in the incident in **John 13** when the Lord Jesus wanted to wash the feet of the disciples: Again Peter was very fast in his response and he said: “Never shall You wash my feet!” He recognized the Lord Jesus as Lord but he did not recognize the contradiction. The Lord was going to wash his feet, and he said: “Never shall You wash my feet!” The Lord Jesus explained to him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”.

The Lord Jesus was prepared to help him understand. He did not rebuke Peter in this instance. He told him the consequences. "If you refuse to let Me wash your feet, you will have no part with Me. This is part of what I am seeking to do and it is important."

Peter responded immediately, again very fast: Simon Peter *said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head. If washing my feet is so helpful, then wash my hands and my head as well. I am willing to go through." Jesus *said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

So the Lord Jesus wanted to impart some spiritual principles by a physical situation. Peter did not quite understand and he had his own thoughts. But he was simple, straightforward, honest, and when the Lord Jesus taught him, he responded. So when the Lord Jesus told him, "I will only wash your feet", he did not insist.

He submitted and so we are told the Lord Jesus washed their feet. So we can see how the apostle Peter was prepared to adjust to the situations as he understood more. So he failed but his failure did not lead to degeneration. His failure led to learning, development.

So when we fail, we can learn from our failures; we can acknowledge and from there, we learn.

But if we are not prepared to acknowledge, how are we to learn? How can students progress if when they have made mistakes, and the teachers tell them, they refuse to learn. They say, "I am right!" even when they actually could recognize they were wrong because they could see, but they were not prepared to face it. That will lead to a situation where they will not be taught and helped.

And so even after Pentecost, even after the empowering of the Holy Spirit, even after Peter was recognized as a pillar in the church, he still failed and he was rebuked by the apostle Paul.

How did he take it?

Was he angry with the apostle Paul? Did he refuse to acknowledge? Did he insist that he was right? No, he did not. He was prepared to accept what the apostle Paul did and appreciated that.

And so in **2 Peter 3: 14-16**, we read the words of the apostle Peter that are so refreshing. It is very encouraging to see a spirit like that.

2 Peter 3: 14-16

- 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,
- 15 and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,
- 16 as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

His rebuke by Paul did not in any way hinder him from appreciating him: the apostle Paul, anointed by God enabled by God, wisdom given by God. The apostle Peter could recognize and appreciate. And he did not just recognize it as God speaking through Paul, but he said: “our beloved brother Paul” – there was a personal affection for him, a personal appreciation of him as a person.

And that was written towards the end of his life on earth after having been rebuked by the apostle Paul openly. This is an example of a humble and contrite spirit and because of this spirit, he could develop. And when we read **2 Peter**, we can appreciate the maturity in his heart as compared with what is recorded in the Scriptures in the gospels. The apostle Peter grew because he learnt from his failures.

So developing quality of being is a very difficult process and pride is one major area that will prevent us from developing that quality.

We need to ask God to search our hearts, to help us understand: Are we concentrating on ourselves, in terms of what people may think of us, our status, our position, our authority, our power, our influence over others? Or are we concentrating on what is truly good – to be like God in His moral goodness – so that whatever it may cost us, whatever the path may be, we are willing to go through it together with the Lord, seeking His teaching, His guidance, His forgiveness, His enabling?

And whatever exaltation there may be, we leave that to Him. We are not seeking for that kind of exaltation. The Lord Himself will know what to do.

The apostle Paul at the end of his life knew that there will be a crown of righteousness that God will give to him. But he said, “Not just to me but also to all who have loved His appearing”. It is for everyone who loves God truly.

The crown of righteousness is available to anyone who is prepared to be truly righteous.

Will we seek to help one another to receive the crown of righteousness? Would we be glad if others grow faster than us, become deeper and richer in their development, closer to God? Can we rejoice? Will we feel inferior because in some ways we are not as good as others? Or can we rejoice in concentrating on being what we ought to be and taking our place as God assigns to us, wherever it may be, whatever it may be?

These are questions that we need to consider and resolve within our hearts if we want to develop quality of being and in that state, contribute something truly worthwhile and meaningful in the kingdom of God.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to deal with pride in all its forms and become truly humble and good in the eyes of God.

Let us come before the Lord and ask Him to search our hearts, to help us recognize whether there are aspects in our lives that are not right, where we need to repent, we need to deal with.

Ultimately, we are seeking to develop true worth and true quality of being where we can have deep fellowship with God.

Are we prepared to ask God to search us and to submit to Him as He shows to us and respond and take the steps necessary?

If we are, then we will make progress. God is gracious. He will help us even when we have failed and we have sinned many, many times. God is still prepared to forgive us if we are humble and contrite.

But if we are not, then God cannot help us. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. So that is a very central aspect in the approach that God has taken.