

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 1: Humility”  
Romans 11:33-12:3, Proverbs (see below)

Selections from Proverbs on Humility

I.

The Lord hates ... haughty eyes, ... and a person  
who stirs up conflict in the community (6:16-19).

Haughty eyes and a proud heart—  
the unplowed field of the wicked—produce sin (21:4).  
The proud and arrogant person—“Mocker” is his name—  
behaves with insolent fury (21:24).

II.

The Lord tears down the house of the proud,  
but he sets the widow’s boundary stones in place (15:25).

Pride goes before destruction,  
a haughty spirit before a fall  
Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed  
than to share plunder with the proud (16:18-19).  
When pride comes, then comes disgrace,  
but with humility comes wisdom (11:2).  
Wisdom’s instruction is to fear the Lord,  
and humility comes before honor (15:33).

III.

Do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence,  
and do not claim a place among his great men;  
it is better for him to say to you, “Come up here,”  
than for him to humiliate you before his nobles (25:6-7).

Do you see a person wise in their own eyes?  
There is more hope for a fool than for them (26:12).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and shun evil (3:5-7).

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**Introduction**

We are in a room with one another. Someone comes into the room. And suddenly the whole *atmosphere* changes. You can't avoid breathing in what they are breathing out:

“I am better than you.”

“I don't have time for you.”

“Everyone should think like me.”

“I have nothing to learn from you.”

“You should be thankful for me.”

—

We are turning to the book of Proverbs to get some “wisdom for one-anothering.”

How can this book help us become the kind of people who live with one another in close community, and do it well?

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We start with *humility*. Before you can start to learn the other wisdom Proverbs teaches---how to use your passion, your sexuality, your influence, your power, your intellect for the good of all us---you have to learn the wisdom of humility first.

The call of Proverbs is “Get Wisdom!”

And the path to wisdom is humility. Get humility!

Ok. How? You can't just *become* a humble person. It's got to be taught and caught.

Let's start with 4 things:

1. The Resistance to Humility
2. The Rage against Humility
3. The Rescue of Humility
4. The Resurrection of Humility

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**1. The Resistance to Humility**

Let’s go back to that room again. The air is clear. Then someone comes in and pollutes the atmosphere by their *me me me* attitude.

What is going on in this person’s heart?

The resistance to humility. What resists humility? *Pride* (11:2).

To understand what the resistance to humility looks like in someone’s heart, we need to see that proud and humble people actually want the same things—but for different reasons.

**a. Both want wisdom**

The humble person wants wisdom so they *can help and serve, until the whole community flourishes*.

The proud person wants wisdom in order to *win*. To get more wealth, power, honor, fans, followers, likes.

Where did this come from?

God gave both Adam and Eve a perfect place, a perfect partner, and a perfect path to prosperity. He said— “don’t eat from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. *It will kill you. Trust ME, and you’ll become wise.*”

But they thought: “Ah— but if we eat, we can be wise. We can take control.”

Ever since Adam and Eve, everyone has wanted to *take* wisdom in order to *take* control—from God. From others.

Lewis Smedes says that the desire to *be* “God leaves us empty at the center. ... Those who are empty at the center ... are almost always arrogant.”

11:2 says that the humble get wisdom. But the proud try to grab it, manipulate it, and use *others* with it.

**b. Both want honor**

Have you ever woken up one morning and thought, “I want to disgrace myself today!”? No.

But Proverbs tells us (11:2) that if you’re proud, you’re heading toward *disgrace*.

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Look at the beginning of section III. (25:6-7). The proud person comes into the room and sits down in between the prime minister and the king. The king has to say, “Umm ... this seat is reserved for honored guests. Find another seat.” *Disgrace*.

The humble person sits in the back, and then, *someday*, the king calls out “come up here!” *Honor*.

We want to be honored. The proud demand it, now. The humble wait for it, and eventually receive it.

### 2. The Rage Against Humility

We all want wisdom and honor. The way to get them is humility. But we are resistant to humility. Why are we so resistant to humility? Because actually, underneath our Resistance to Humility is a deeper Rage Against Humility.

Look at Section I.

The proud person might *look* self-assured, confident. But underneath, (21:24) he's *furious!*

When you're proud, you're angry that it takes so much work to gain power, influence, wealth, and honor. And you're angry that you have to work so hard to hold on to it!

You pretend it doesn't bother you. But pretending is also hard work.

You have to (I. / 21:24) mock people. You have to pretend to respect other people. All so you can keep control.

Why are you so angry? Because (middle of I.) if you're proud, you've got what Proverbs 21:4 calls **a heart that is nothing but an unplowed field**. The Hebrew is tricky here. I think it means you have no depth of character. And when your life is only on the surface, you're always afraid that *you* are superficial. This leaves you nervous, furious, and miserable.

You haven't had your heart plowed. You haven't had the seeds of humility and wisdom planted deep in your heart.

Any group or church or community full of people full with unplowed hearts is trouble. The Lord loves peace, joy, collaboration, and the flourishing of communities. But the proud person (I. 6:19) destroys community life.

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We will never have the kind of church God longs for us to have if we resist humility; if we rage against humility.

What will we do with our unplowed hearts?

### **3. The Rescue of Humility**

Then comes the rescue of humility.

God opposes the proud. God destroys the tower of Babel. God exiles Adam and Eve from the Garden. But God gives grace to the humble. And he will *humble* our pride by his grace. How does he do it?

God is the only one who can literally say “everything began with me, and everything is for me.” But he enters into our proud world. And he comes not to tear us down or to kick us out. We’re proud! But he comes humbly. To rescue us.

Think of it! In part III. (25:6-7) the king is sitting among his great men. That’s normal. But King Jesus sneaks in through the back door. He sits the back of the room. Usually, he’s not *sitting*---he’s serving.

See the proud plunderers of the oppressed in section II. (16:18)? Jesus did not stand with them. He stood with the oppressed. The lowly of spirit. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt 5) aren’t just his words—they’re his *way*.

Humility comes before honor---see that at the bottom of section II. (15:33)? Jesus was perfectly humble— though he was Lord! But before God exalted him to the highest place, on the throne of heaven, God said to Jesus —look at section III. again—“come up here” (III. 25:7) — but not to the place of honor, but to the cross. Jesus goes up to Calvary, while proud people mock him in their arrogant fury.

Jesus Christ, God of gods, allowed himself to be (II. 15:25) torn down by the proud. He (III. 3:6) submitted to the Lord, but his path led to the cross.

Jesus knew that the only way that you could ever be pulled up out of your pride was if he could plow the field of your wicked heart and plant the seeds of pure grace. So he allowed himself to be utterly humiliated.

Jesus breaks our resistance to humility, and our rage against humility, with a rescue of humility. And when you realize how proud you really are, and you experience Jesus’ humility, you’ll never want to be proud again.

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Has your heart been plowed by Jesus’ humble Spirit? Has the seed of grace been planted there? Has it started to sprout and grow and bear the fruit of humility?

This is God’s rescue of humility in Jesus Christ! Have you been rescued?

#### **4. The Resurrection of Humility**

At the beginning of the book of Proverbs, we overhear a Father-son mentoring session. The father tries to show and tell the way of wisdom for his son. And the beginning of this wisdom, the father teaches, is humility.

Humility is one of those things that is both *taught* and *caught*. I can sit my sons down and teach them. I can try to get them to *catch* whatever humility I have gained.

But even though I’m not a wise sage, I have something that even the wisest Hebrew sages didn’t have: I have Jesus.

John’s gospel tells us that Jesus is the perfect display of his father’s character, He shows us exactly what he’s like. Everything he does, he learned from his father. It’s like Jesus caught his Father’s wisdom. And then he lived it. And he lives it now.

When we read the Proverbs and learn its humility, we learn it not just from a dead wise Hebrew man, but from a resurrected, living Jewish man who is also *the very* Wisdom of God in flesh.

In Jesus’ resurrection, humanity itself is raised up from its grave of pride. We, in Jesus’ resurrection, can walk in newness of life, humbly before God, and before one another.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ, which raised him from the dead, dwells in us. And now, if we belong to Jesus, we can’t *not* catch the resurrected humility of Jesus. It’s ours to take. Ours to catch.

We will continue to *teach* humility in our community, from God’s Word. But what we need most of all is for a few good women and men to *catch* the humility of Jesus. To breathe the fresh air of his humble Spirit. To begin, with humility, to make his new, resurrected life their own.

Who will teach us his resurrected humility? From which of you will we *catch* the new, humble, resurrection way to be human?

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Mother Theresa mentored younger women as they worked together. And she wanted to make sure that a resurrection of humility was both taught and caught in their community.

Here’s what she longed for. What I long for. What we long for. When a resurrection of humility happens among us, I’ll be able to ...

1. Speak as lot less about myself.
2. Keep busy with my own affairs and not those of others.
3. Avoid curiosity, gossip, and “insider” knowledge and power.
4. Accept small irritations with good humor.
5. Overlook the minor faults of others.
6. Listen charitably to criticism, even if the criticism is not charitable.
7. Let others have their preferences.
8. Take insults and injuries without striking back or despairing.
9. Go without being admired and praised by people.

We might sum this list up with what Tim Keller says is the ultimate joy of the Christian life: Self-forgetfulness.

He says that humility is not thinking *less* of yourself, but thinking of yourself *less*. We catch this one great truth, and rejoice in it: It’s not about me. It’s about Jesus, and what he’s doing among us.

### **Conclusion**

Have you experienced the supreme humility of Jesus Christ? Have you been rescued by his humility? Has his humble rescue smashed your resistance to humility, and crushed your rage against humility?

Have you experienced the resurrection of humility?

For the sake of our life together, let’s make sure the humility of Jesus continues to be caught and taught among us. And then our church will glow with resurrection warmth as we show humility to one another.

Amen.