

COVENANT

“EXALTED OR BROUGHT LOW”

- Week 5 -

Everyone take a deep breath. No really, go ahead, do it. Now exhale. One more time. In. Hold. Exhale. Good! How'd you do with your holy rest this past week? Hopefully it was more than just a couple deep breaths! If not, go back, work on the week 4 stuff again, then you can move on to week 5!

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we are on the back stretch of our series, and hopefully you're beginning to see the ways in which this prayer and our Covenant with God can work. God may also be working on you in one or two specific areas where you're holding on tightly to the control in your life... we call that a "conviction." So, this is a good time for a little check-up.

Question 1: As you've been praying this prayer and going through this series, where have you been "convicted"? Is there a specific area that this prayer or series has exposed where God may be asking you to let go of control?

As we've moved through the Wesley Covenant Prayer, the lines have gotten more and more challenging, asking us to surrender deeper aspects of our lives to God. These are difficult lines to pray. Letting God know that we will choose to be okay with times of bounty or scarcity, if we are cruising or suffering, if we are fulfilling our purpose or taking time to rest, can feel scary to pray. The hope is that by now, you're starting to feel a sense of peace as you are praying this prayer every day, and relinquishing aspects of control back to the One who should be in charge of it in the first place.

This week is no different. The line of the prayer we are looking at today can be worrying to say out loud.

**Let me be exalted for thee,
or brought low for thee.**

Umm, “brought low” doesn’t sound like a good thing. The original line from the prayer, written in 1784, is, “trodden underfoot,” which sounds even worse! Why would we pray for that? Well, this one isn’t as bad as it, at first, sounds. So, what do we mean by “exalted” or “brought low”? Here’s how we should think of this line, “God, when there are times where I’m recognized for following you, great. But, in all of my life, let me be *humble*.”

Last week, we prayed, “let me be employed for thee.” We all have a God-given purpose in life that we are to fulfill. And sometimes, that purpose gets recognized and rewarded. If God has given you musical ability, and you rock a killer karaoke set of Tina Turner songs... you might get applauded for your effort. If God has given you an over-developed sense of empathy, and a friend praises you for being the best listener she’s ever met, it feels good. That’s being “exalted” for what God has given you, and it’s okay to feel good about fulfilling that purpose. (Hopefully, you’re using your musical talent for more than “Rollin’ on a River” at karaoke.) However, in the midst of living into what God has in mind for you, we are also called to be humble, “brought low.”

Question 2: You know it, it’s our “Scale of 1 to 10” question... how humble of a human are you? (10 = Mother Teresa could learn a thing or two about humility from me, but I can’t say that, ‘cuz that wouldn’t be humble. 1 = I make Gaston from Beauty and the Beast look meek.) Be honest, this is a safe space. What makes humility difficult? Or, what makes it easy for you?

It’s important here to make a significant disclaimer. Don’t confuse humility with self-deprecation. Humility is not thinking less of yourself. You’re a valuable, worthy human being. God even calls us “masterpieces.” So, don’t confuse humility with self-criticism or fault-finding or low self-esteem. Humility is not thinking of yourself as worthless...rather, it is knowing your worth and being grateful to God for it.

The key to humility is *gratitude*. When we see how much we truly have to be thankful for, when we see how much God has actually done for us, the natural response is to be thankful. Whether we are exalted or humbled, focusing on the Source of the blessings in our lives keeps us grounded.

There’s a scripture that can help us understand this concept better. It’s from a collection of songs in the Bible called, “Psalms,” mostly written by an ancient king named, David. (He had more hits than Tina Turner... just sayin’.) We’re going to focus on the first two lines of this particular Psalm:

**I left a good job in the city,
working for the man every night and day.**

Just kidding... David wrote:

**¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
² Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—**

-Psalm 130:1-2 NRSV

“Bless the Lord” is just a churchy way to say, “Ain’t God amazing?!” David then makes two helpful points here. First, he says, let “*all that is within me*, bless his holy name.” This is the point our prayer is making with the line, “let me be exalted for thee, or brought low for thee.” We are to be grateful to the very core of our being for everything God has given us. Second, he says, “*do not forget all his benefits*.” Want to remain grounded in life? Start a record of everything God has blessed you with. In fact, David spends the rest of this “song” listing some of those benefits. (Feel free to read those at your leisure. It’s good stuff.) When we realize that all we have, the roof over our heads, the food on our table, the good relationships, the very life we lead, are gifts from God, gratitude seeps into the depths of our souls.

Question 3: Who is someone in your life who modeled humility for you? Did this person also display gratitude? What keeps you humble?

Gratitude is difficult when we’re experiencing tough times. We can often feel like we have nothing to be thankful for or that God has taken everything away from us. It’s okay to feel that way. As we said a few weeks ago, God is a big God... God can handle you being mad. Gratitude can be a difficult thing when things are going well, too, because that’s precisely when we tend to take those blessings for granted. So, good or bad, thriving or just surviving, it is an extremely helpful practice to list the things with which God has blessed us.

We often miss all that God is doing in our lives because we simply aren’t looking for it. When you take David’s advice, “don’t forget all His benefits,” and you begin to ask yourself where you’ve seen God’s blessings in your life, you can’t help but be “brought low,” made humble. You then begin to see those things in real time as gifts from God.

Three hundred years ago, in order to be part of one of John Wesley’s small groups, you had to ask yourself 22 questions every night as part of a daily examination. Five hundred years ago, St. Ignatius of Loyola taught his monks to ask 5 questions twice per day in a practice he called the daily *examen*. For this week and this *examen*, we’re only going to ask you to focus on one: how has God blessed you today?

Every night this week, before you drift off to Dreamland, ask yourself that question, “How has God blessed me today?” And if you need to, write them down. (A compiled list over time has a lot of impact, especially when things get tough.)

Question 4: This daily *examen* will be homework for you this week, but let’s start now. Take a look at your day today and share something, a blessing from God, for which you are grateful. Why does that thing mean so much to you?

Today's line of The Wesley Covenant Prayer is crucial to the idea of surrendering the control of our lives to God and fulfilling the Covenant relationship we have. When we see "all that is within us" as a gift from God, even the very life we live, and we are "brought low," made humble, we see how greatly God will take care of us. This allows us to trust God more with every aspect of our lives.

So as we close today, and pray this line of the prayer, "let me be exalted for thee, or brought low for thee," think of it in this way: "God, when there are times where I'm recognized for following you, great. But, in all of my life, let me be *humble*."

Let us pray:

**I am no longer my own but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt,
rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee,
or laid aside for thee.
Let me be exalted for thee,
or brought low for thee.
Let me have all things,
let me have nothing.
Let me be full,
let me be empty.
I freely and humbly yield all things
to thy pleasure and thy disposal.
And now, sweet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
I am thine and thou art mine.
And may this covenant made on Earth,
be ratified in heaven.
So be it.**

GratITUDE Week Guide:

In addition to your daily *examen*, follow this guide to help you remain humble and grateful this week:

- Day 1: Something about your home for which you are thankful.
- Day 2: A relationship, someone for whom you are thankful.
- Day 3: Something about yourself for which you are grateful.
- Day 4: A possession for which you are grateful.
- Day 5: A memory for which you are thankful.
- Day 6: Something you have been taking for granted for which you are thankful.
- Day 7: Where have you seen God working this past week?