

Wise People Are Humble



SABBATH—MARCH 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 30; Luke 18:9–14; Job 38–Job 40:2; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 3:14–18; Psalm 104:24.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ ” (Matthew 5:3, NKJV).

IN THE BIBLE, BEING HUMBLE IS AN IMPORTANT WAY TO BE. The greatest of prophets (special messengers), Moses, is named as the most humble person who ever lived (Numbers 12:3, NKJV). According to Micah 6:8, the main duty that God expects from His people is “to walk humbly with your God” (NKJV). Jesus, too, encourages that being humble is an ideal that the Christian should have: “ ‘Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’ ” (Matthew 18:4, NKJV).

After all, what does anyone have to boast about? Every breath, every heartbeat, every gift, and every talent comes only from God. In Him “we live, and move, and have our being [reason for life]” (Acts 17:28). When we look at the Cross, even all our righteousness (goodness) is as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Then how can we boast?

Our topic this week from the book of Proverbs is about being humble. Looking at ourselves, how foolish is it for us not to be humble?

**WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
(Proverbs 30:1–3, 32, 33)**

Read Proverbs 30:1–3, 32, 33. Together, what are they saying?

The humbleness in these verses is quite different from the usual self-glory (praise and honor of self) of kings in the Near East in Bible times. These kings often liked to boast of their wisdom and victories. Solomon himself is known as the wisest and richest of all the kings of the earth (1 Kings 10:23; Ecclesiastes 2:9). And there is Nebuchadnezzar, who announced: “ ‘Isn’t [is not] this the great Babylon I have built as a place for my royal palace? I used my mighty power to build it. It shows how glorious [powerful and great] my majesty is’ ” (Daniel 4:30, NIV).

Because our author understands his own limitations, he calls boasting “foolish.” The Hebrew word for “foolish” here is *nabal*, which is the name of Nabal, Abigail’s husband. His actions showed foolish pride too (1 Samuel 25). Such boasting suggests pride. It also makes it possible for the proud person to be embarrassed, angry, and quarrelsome (fighting or arguing a lot) when his or her weaknesses are shown. The apostle (teacher and leader) Paul also called some of his church members “fools” when they thought of themselves as wise and were boasting about it (2 Corinthians 11:18, 19).

Read Luke 18:9–14. Why might it be easier to be like the Pharisee (Jewish religious teacher) than one might think? How can we make sure that we do not fall into this same trap?

You have to feel sorry for people who boast. (People who boast are usually unsure of themselves.) It shows just how self-deceived and foolish they really are.

A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD? (Proverbs 30:3–6)

Pride arises in those who do not know the Lord in a personal way. The person who lives closely with God will be humble. This is because he or she is always in touch through prayer with the One who is greater than any of us. Think about the size of the universe. Think about the fact that we are worshiping the One who created that universe. And think about this same God who suffered in the Person of Jesus on the cross for us. Then it is hard for us to imagine how we could struggle with pride while we have these thoughts with us!

Read Proverbs 30:3–6. What do these verses tell us about the power, rulership, and mystery of God?

The wording “knowledge of God” means “knowledge about God.” In Proverbs 30:4, five questions are then asked. These questions force us to recognize just how much about God we really do not understand.

Read those questions in Proverbs 30:4. What challenge do they give to us?

Because God is the Creator (the message of the first four questions), He remains far beyond our understanding (the message of the fifth question). In the book of Job, God challenges Job with more of the same questions so that Job would know that he could not understand God or His ways (Job 38–Job 40:2).

God is the Creator. And we cannot fully understand Him. This should teach us an important lesson about how we should receive His written commands (the Bible). Bible thinkers are always seeking and asking questions. Our understanding of even the simplest things in nature is clouded and full of mystery. So, who are we to challenge the Word of God, even the parts that puzzle or disturb us?

Think deeply about the glory (great beauty) and mystery of the creation itself. What should these tell us about the glory and mystery of the Creator? Why should this glory and mystery give us comfort and hope?



The humble person lives closely with God because he or she is always in touch with God through prayer.

NEITHER TOO MUCH NOR TOO LITTLE (Proverbs 30:7–9)

These verses (Proverbs 30:7–9) hold the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. It is not by chance that this prayer quickly follows the identification of God as the great Creator (Proverbs 30:4) and the promise of His faithfulness (Proverbs 30:5).



If we lie, then we act as if God, who knows all things, is not real.

Read Proverbs 30:7–9. Why would someone ask these things?

Before we ask God for anything, it is important to make sure our relationship with Him is strong. If we lie, then we act as if God, who knows all things, is not even real. This is why the confession of our sin is a requirement for forgiveness (1 John 1:9). We cannot cheat God. He sees us exactly as we are. When we pray, we must be humble like the dead who are lying in the dust (Lamentations 3:29). This act and word-picture reveals both our deep respect and the knowledge of our spiritual nakedness in front of Him.

In Proverbs 30:8, the writer asks God not to “give” him poverty (being poor) or riches. The first time that the verb “give” is used in the Bible in connection with humans, it deals with God’s gift of food (Genesis 1:29). This is why in many cultures food is usually connected with prayer. This basic need (prayer) makes us dependent on the God of Creation. It teaches us that the experience of prayer is important for our safety and protection.

These two requests in the prayer combine into one goal: the glory (praise and honor) of God. If we get too little in life, we tend to steal and insult God. If we get too much, we do not feel the need for God and may even deny that He is real.

The Lord’s Prayer carries the same two ideas: (1) “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11) provides for our needs and not more; and (2) “ ‘Do not lead us into temptation’ ” (Matthew 6:13, NKJV) takes care of our needs.

Think about just how dependent you are on God. How can keeping that important fact ever in your mind help you to grow in faith? What dangers come when we forget this dependence?

THE ACTIONS OF BOASTFUL PEOPLE (Proverbs 30:12, 20)

Being humble is positive and brings blessings. But failure to be humble is dangerous and brings curses. Proverbs shows that being humble is good and positive and brings forth rewards and fruit. But Proverbs 30 also gives a serious warning about the dangers that come from pride.

Cursing your parents (Proverbs 30:11, 17). Agur, the writer of this chapter, begins with this topic. This is because cursing your parents is a serious sin and a terrible act of pride. Honoring and blessing one's parents is the only commandment connected with the promise of life (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:2, 3). The death penalty is given for breaking this command (Exodus 21:15, 17).

Self-righteousness (Proverbs 30:12, 20). The condition of sinners who think of themselves as righteous (good) is bad. This is because they will stay in their sin. They believe that they are pure and do not need forgiveness. This is why admitting our sins is so important in receiving forgiveness (1 John 1:9). The Laodiceans claim that they are rich, smart, and well-dressed. (But they do not know that they really are poor, blind, and naked.) They are warned by God to repair and correct their terrible condition (Revelation 3:14–18).

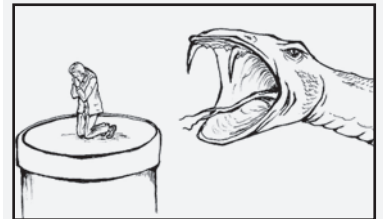
“Here is represented a people who are very proud of their spiritual knowledge and advantages. But they have not accepted the undeserved blessings that God has given to them. They have been full of rebellion [turning] against God. And still God has dealt with them as a loving, forgiving father deals with an unthankful wandering son. They refused to accept His grace,¹ abused His gifts, and misused His opportunities. They become too satisfied with themselves and do not thank God for His mercy or sincerely worship Him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 83.

*Contempt*² (Proverbs 30:13, 14). The picture showing the proud is not pretty. They have a proud look on their face, but the show of pride does not remain just there. It is also found in the proud attitude (feeling) they show to those whom they feel are below them. The symbols of the “fangs” and “teeth” (Proverbs 30:14, NKJV) show just how bad their actions are.

Think about how you have treated others. You even may have looked down on them. (Honestly, most of us have those feelings at times.) How can you make it right? How can you show the humble spirit needed to make it right?



Sinners who think they are righteous (holy) will stay chained in their sin.



The “fangs” of the wicked show just how bad their actions are.

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. contempt—looking down on others as if they are lower or worse than you.

LESSON FROM NATURE (Proverbs 30:18, 19)

All through the Bible, examples from nature have been used to teach spiritual truths. Here, too, using nature, Proverbs teaches us lessons about being humble.

Read Proverbs 30:18, 19. What is it saying here, too, about the limits of human understanding?

Agur, the writer, sees mystery in even many of the “common” things. There are very interesting examples of mysteries that he gives here. The first two are from animals. One is an eagle silently moving through the sky. Another is a snake silently moving along the earth. Agur then changes to two that include human actions: a ship on the sea and a man with a woman. Even today, with all our scientific knowledge, so many mysteries remain. It is very important that we never lose our wonder and enjoyment of how deep and mysterious life is. That attitude (feeling) will surely help to keep us humble before God.

Read Proverbs 30:24–28. What other mysteries from nature catch Agur’s attention and wonder?

It is interesting that Proverbs 30:20–23 deals with human foolishness, boasting, and sin. And now Agur quickly changes to the animal world. He points to small and humble creatures, even though he uses the same Hebrew word for “wise” for both animals and humans (Proverbs 3:13) and even God Himself (Job 12:13; Psalm 104:24). Even today, with modern science, how these creatures do what they do remains beyond our full understanding. How much more so their actions must have puzzled this wise man (Agur) in his time. And he was really wise because one of the great signs of wisdom is to admit just how little we know, even about the most common things.

Think about some of the “simplest” things in nature: the leaf of a tree, a drop of water, a seashell. How should the fact that even these things are full of mysteries keep us humble?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “We should respect God’s Word deeply. For the Holy Bible we should show respect, never putting it to common uses or handling it carelessly. And never should the Bible be used as a joke or changed into a clever saying. ‘Every word of God is pure’; ‘as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified [free of anything evil or sinful] seven times.’ Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 244.

“Christ’s first words to the people on the mount were words of blessing. He said happy are they who recognize their spiritual poorness and feel their need to be saved. The gospel is to be preached to the poor. It should not be shown to the spiritually proud, nor to those who claim to be rich and in need of nothing. Instead, it should be shown to those who are humble and sorrowful for their sins. . . . The Lord can do nothing about curing man until he realizes his own weakness and is stripped of all pride. He also needs to surrender himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to give him. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is held back. He has an unlimited pathway to the One who is fully God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 299, 300.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Think deeply about the plan of salvation and what was required to save us. We are so fallen, so impure, and so evil that there was nothing we could do to save ourselves from sin. We needed a Substitute, Someone who has the right to stand in our place. Our own works could not save us. Jesus’ righteousness (goodness) alone is enough to make us right with God. What should this fact tell us about why boasting and pride have to be some of the worst sins in sinful humans like us?
- 2 What are some of the different ways that our very life depends upon God? What are the things in nature itself that show us how God supports our life?
- 3 Think more deeply about the prayer in Proverbs 30:7–9. Look at the balance there. How do we find balance in all that we do? Why is this so important?