



KEEPING YOUR EYE
ON THE PRIZE OF ETERNITY
IN A TIME OF PASTORAL FAILINGS

GLORIOUS FINISH



DANIEL HENDERSON



A proud faith is as much a contradiction
as a humble devil.

STEPHEN CHARNOCK

Because of the extravagance
of those revelations, and so I wouldn't
get a big head, I was given the gift
of a handicap to keep me in constant
touch with my limitations.

Satan's angel did his best
to get me down; what he in fact did
was push me to my knees:

No danger then of walking around
high and mighty!

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7 MSG

HUMILITY VS. SELF-RELIANCE

Words cannot describe my deep indebtedness to and admiration for my brother Dennis. Eleven years my senior, he has been my hero since childhood. Dennis and his wife, Billie, have been married and in pastoral ministry for over fifty years. Early on, he was a nationally recognized youth pastor and conference speaker. During recent decades as a senior pastor, Dennis has led multiple churches in vital renewal while quarterbacking successful building campaigns.

At the age of sixty-six, he could have easily coasted to the finish line of ministry. Although he was leading a large church in north Texas, he willingly moved to southern Oklahoma to personally launch a new satellite location thirty miles away. Just five years into this endeavor, the young church is seeing significant impact in the community and already enjoying a brand-new campus, featuring a 550-seat auditorium. Needless to say, he is unusually gifted, amazingly competent and, by his own admission, significantly driven.

But on a recent early Sunday morning, he was at home reviewing his preaching notes when he felt an abrupt pain shoot from his lower back and down his right leg. Within minutes, the pain progressed to his left leg. In short order, both legs were numb and he was unable to

GLORIOUS FINISH

walk. During the week to follow he learned that he had experienced a very rare spinal stroke that occurs in just .02% of the population. The prognosis was uncertain as to the whether he would ever walk again. Rehab and recovery would be long and arduous.

During the ensuing months, Dennis was able to move from a bed, to a walker, to a cane. The doctors were completely amazed. Today, he limps noticeably. With a wry smile he concedes, "It isn't pretty, but at least I am able to get around." Honestly, as faithful and fruitful as Dennis has been, by my estimation, I would not think a trial like this would be necessary for a man still so vibrant in his early 70s. But, by his admission, this has been an experience of deep but helpful humility and a new hunger for holiness.

We never get so far in our service for the Lord that we are beyond another infusion of humility's grace. God loves us too much to leave us to any inklings of self-sufficiency that might shadow His glory.

HUMILITY COUNTS!

Of all the qualities that matter on the eternal scoreboard, humility is one of the most significant. In our desire to live for the glory of God

**Very often the Lord
will painfully pry (or
break) our fingers off
the hollow trophies
of earthly success,
exposing our shrewd
self-reliance, so that
we might exhibit
His grace.**

and pursue our calling to His eternal glory, we will inevitably find ourselves traveling the road of humility, paved with stones of disappointment, brokenness, and suffering. Very often the Lord will painfully pry (or break) our fingers off the hollow trophies of earthly success, exposing our shrewd self-reliance, so that we might exhibit His grace. This grace becomes a delight far beyond the empty echoes of self-glory.

Rhythms of authentic and consistent worship will inevitably lead to a desire for a deeper humility and a willingness to submit to the perplexing roads that lead us there. We have a soul-deep assurance that God will give us grace to accept the process and wisdom to celebrate the outcome. From our delight in worship, the Spirit imparts an instinctive desire for His glory rather than ours.

THE UPWARD-DOWNWARD JOURNEY OF GLORY

As we've noted, Paul the glory veteran had seen and experienced the wonder of Jesus in extraordinary fashion, including his visit to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1–6). Yet he makes a clear connection between this glory experience and God's sovereign and necessary gift of a thorn. The verses are familiar, but I hope you will read them with fresh eyes to see the connection between God's glory, our instinctive resistance to His processes, a deeper perception of our own weakness, and the beauty of grace that flows in greater measure to the humble:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7–10)

**The keys to humility
are a heart set on
His glory, a fresh
recognition of the
need for grace, and
a counterintuitive
delight in personal
inadequacy.**

The keys to humility are a heart set on His glory, a fresh recognition of the need for grace, and a counterintuitive delight in personal inadequacy. But as Paul affirms, this is no easy path and

one from which he sought relief on three different occasions. He was “harassed” by this trial. But seldom is the easy necessary and rarely is the necessary easy. As Spurgeon noted, “The gracious discipline of mercy breaks the ships of our vain glory with a strong east wind, and casts us shipwrecked, naked and forlorn, upon the Rock of Ages.”¹

The essential DNA of a leader who is “called to his eternal glory” with his eyes on the prize of eternity is the growing sense of humility that has been forged by hardship and heartache. Quoting Spurgeon again,

By all the castings down of His servants God is glorified, for they are led to magnify Him when He sets them on their feet, and even while prostrate in the dust their faith yields Him praise. . . . Glory be to God for the furnace, the hammer, and the file. Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below, and the earth shall be better tilled because of our training in the school of adversity.²

Author Gene Edwards summarizes the process: “Suffering was giving birth. Humility was being born.”³

THE SUBTLE SELECTIONS OF SELF-RELIANCE

The inevitable fruit of spiritual neglect is self-reliance. I say often that prayerlessness is a declaration of independence from God. This default autonomy seeks to manipulate and “power through” the journey of humiliation and brokenness, to the soul’s demise. Humility over self-reliance is a choice, forged by our ambitions and fueled by our rhythms of thought and heart.

I believe the great snare for most leaders is not public, scandalous sin but private, subtle self-reliance. In his book *Future Grace*, John Piper provides insightful clarity: “When God is neglected, the runner-up god takes his place, namely, man.”⁴ This is parallel to my proposal here that the fruit of worship is humility and the result of neglect is self-reliance.

Piper asserts that real belief, seen in a heart set to find satisfaction in Christ, is intricately linked to humility. A humble heart trusts the sovereignty of God. Unbelief, on the other hand, turns from God, seeking satisfaction in other things. Pride, he states, “is a turning away from God specifically to take satisfaction in self.”⁵ Conversely, he also affirms, “Humility knows it is dependent on grace for all knowing, believing, living, and acting. . . . It submits moment by moment to the sovereign rule of God over our daily lives and rests quietly in the tough and tender decrees of God’s loving wisdom.”⁶

Pride is like bad breath. Everyone knows you have it but you.

Steve Farrar warns, “Young leaders have a tendency to rely on their gifts. We tend to identify early where we are strong and capable. Certain things come easy to us because we are gifted. That’s where pride must be watched like a hawk.”⁷

No wise leader unashamedly advertises self-reliance. But pride

is like bad breath. Everyone knows you have it but you. Spurgeon, commenting on the subtlety of our independence from God, wrote,

When your soul becomes lean, your hearers, without knowing how or why, will find that your prayers in public have little savor for them; they will feel your barrenness, perhaps, before you perceive it yourself. Your discourses will next betray your declension. You may utter as well-chosen words, and as fitly-ordered sentences as aforetime; but there will be a perceptible loss of spiritual force.⁸

Yet, at the same time, as Piper asserts, “If we are getting our pleasure from feeling self-sufficient, we will not be satisfied without others seeing and applauding our self-sufficiency.”⁹ It becomes an empty exercise. The people sense and are suspicious of the very thing that drives us for their approval. As we will see in the next chapter, ministry “performance” begins to eclipse authenticity.

C. S. Lewis is brilliant at this point:

The pleasure of pride is like the pleasure of scratching. If there is an itch, one does want to scratch; but it is much nicer to have neither the itch nor the scratch. As long as we have the itch of self-regard we shall want the pleasure of self-approval; but the happiest moments on those when we forget our precious selves and have neither, but have everything else.¹⁰

THE CHOICE THAT SETS THE TRAJECTORY

The Father treats us as His children and therefore will bring discipline into our lives “for our good” and to produce “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:7–11). To have a clearer vision

of the throne, we need an enlightening wounding of the thorn. Sometimes this comes through measured experiences allotted over extended seasons via various burdens of illness, family difficulty, financial pressures, church conflicts, or chronic uncertainty.

Sometimes the Lord providentially conducts more radical surgery to get our attention and expedite our authenticity. Instead of the feeling that God is “wearing us down” it is clear that He is “wounding us deeply.” Tozer noted, “Triumphs are not won by men in easy chairs. Success is costly.”¹¹

Even then, we still have the power of a response—for better or for worse. I’ve heard it often, but first from my godly mother-in-law: “God chooses what happens to us, we choose how we will respond.” It sounds a bit crass, but with every trial we can choose to either worship with greater delight, embrace our own weakness, and receive fresh infusions of grace (humility), or we can question God’s goodness, resent His sovereignty, and take another lap around the mountain of defeat. This is not an easy process but one that we must embrace with trust.

You’ve probably had those crazy moments in the middle of watching a movie. The scene is tense, filled with drama and danger. The characters are in crisis. Dark music draws you in. Apprehension builds. Your palms are sweating and your pulse is elevated as you grip the armrests of your theater seat. Suddenly the scene ends, often with the main characters surviving the immediate calamity. The story ensues and you calm down, realizing it’s just a movie.

Of course, life is not a movie, but it is filled with scenes that feel very traumatic and threatening at the moment. As a pastor for over thirty years, I’ve sat, shared, and prayed with many people caught in the middle of a situation of heartbreak, trauma, loss, or fear. I’ve had my share of very dark scenes in my own story along the way.

The truth that brings great comfort in times like these is the reminder that the movie of my life is not over yet. As bad as the

GLORIOUS FINISH

present scene feels, it will pass and the story will unfold under the hand of our gracious and loving God, culminating in His eternal glory. I am also reminded that even when we do not understand the movie, we know the Movie Maker. He is good, gracious, and committed to His glory in our story.¹²

During my very darkest times in life, I've also pondered the scenario of waking up on the operating table in the middle of a major surgery. Blood is spewing everywhere and my inner parts are exposed. In a moment like this it would be natural to exclaim, "Doc, what in the world are you doing to me?!" But, in truth, the doctor is inflicting temporary and necessary pain to correct what is ailing in my body, carefully purposing to give me more years of health and life. The surgery will be over soon.

So it is with our journey in humility. We must trust the Creator of our life's movie. We must believe in the good intentions of the Great Physician. This submission is, once again, the fruit of a heart of worship and satisfaction in Him.

CALLED TO HUMILITY

This is why the Bible gives us the commands to humility. What God commands He gives grace and power to obediently choose.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:5-7)

It is fascinating, by the way, to see again the link between God's glory and humility. The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to sandwich this

call to humility between the truth that leaders are “partaker[s] in the glory that is going to be revealed” (5:1) and will be rewarded with “the unfading crown of glory” (v. 4), and our call “to his eternal glory in Christ” (v. 10).

Several other insights are clear here:

First, we are to obediently embrace and pursue humility. Pure and simple.

Second, humility is not just vertical but horizontal and will be evident in how we relate to others. Our humility is evident to “one another.” The grace that flows to a humble heart will produce genuine love (1 Cor. 13:4–8), the relational fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), and interpersonal wisdom from above (James 3:17–18). Lewis again is spot on: “A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”¹³

Third, God is displeased and even opposed to the pride of our self-sufficiency. This must lead us to the conclusion that the attainable successes of ministry in today’s context based on talent, technology, big donors, and cutting-edge strategies are not necessarily evidence of the blessing of God. Who wants to force a social media splash this side of eternity only to find out that it amounts to a mere raindrop in heaven because God actually opposed much of it? Grace was not the true source of our shiny efforts. Once more, Spurgeon is clear:

The attainable successes of ministry in today’s context based on talent, technology, big donors, and cutting-edge strategies are not necessarily evidence of the blessing of God.

GLORIOUS FINISH

The way to be very great is to be very little. To be very noteworthy in your own esteem is to be unnoticed of God. If you must needs dwell upon the high places of the earth, you shall find the mountain summits cold and barren: The Lord dwells with the lowly, but He knows the proud afar off.¹⁴

Fourth, our clear understanding of and delight in the caring nature of God frees us to acknowledge our natural and very human anxieties. Worship and prayer are the place where we truly find our joy in the Lord and affirm that “the Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:4–5). In prayer we exchange our anxiety for His surpassing peace (Phil. 4:5–7). This is the beautiful fruit of humility.

Crawford Loritts offers an excellent summary definition of humility: “The intentional recognition that God is everything to you, and that you are nothing without Him. It is the acknowledgment that life is not about you, and that the needs of others are more important than your own.”¹⁵ He notes that humility is both a decision and an attitude. I would add that it is also intertwined with our worship. Humility is a rhythm we must embrace daily. Loritts writes, “A humble person is more God-conscious and others-conscious than self-conscious. At the end of the day the humble person wants to know that all he’s done that day was done with the spotlight on the Savior.”¹⁶

THE COURAGE OF COSTLY CHOICE

I believe there is one more arena of choice that demonstrates humility and our great confidence in sufficient grace. If we fail to embrace these choices, we gradually engender self-sufficiency.

Over the years, I have asserted countless times that the comfort zone is the danger zone. Settling into a comfortable mindset ensures

that we are not living by an adventurous, God-focused faith, without which “it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

I have been impressed over and over again that Paul, Peter, and virtually all of the early Christians resolutely pursued what I call “the pathway of price.” We see this in

**The comfort zone
is the danger zone.**

Paul’s testimony in 2 Corinthians

11:7. He referred to “humbling himself” in his sacrificial service to these believers. He went on to validate the credibility of his ministry, recounting a litany of very difficult ministry experiences that included extraordinary labors, beatings, stoning, hunger, exposure, and other serious dangers (11:23–27). Beyond this, he testified of the constant pressure of “anxiety for all of the churches” (11:28). The account of these trials led him to tell of his glorious transportation to paradise. As we’ve seen, this resulted in his thorn in the flesh, experiences of weakness, and new infusions of strengthening grace. In my mind, the dots can be connected clearly. Glory (his moments in the third heaven fourteen years earlier), leading to a thorn, resulting in cherished weakness, connected to imparted grace, and compulsion to eager sacrifice—all woven together by humility.

Paul’s testimony in the face of suffering and death was clear. He did not count his own life as precious except to finish the course of proclaiming the gospel (Acts 20:24). To live was Christ, to die was gain, and whether in life or death, his passion was God’s glory (Phil. 1:20–21). He even viewed his violent death as a “drink offering” of worship to God (2 Tim. 4:6).

Of course we could talk about Peter, the other apostles, and the martyred saints of the ages. Even today, I must admit that the humblest people I’ve ever met are those who have paid a significant price for their faith. I can still see their faces in China, Cuba, and

GLORIOUS FINISH

at the annual mission conferences our church hosted with global ambassadors coming in from all around the world. Some of my own church members have exemplified this reality, as have pastoral colleagues I've encountered. It's not hard to spot—the glory of costly faith and cultivated humility.

I have learned that unchecked comfort leads to unlikely conformity to Christ. Which takes us to our last consideration.

EYES AND HEART SET ON A HUMBLE SAVIOR

Our call to eternal glory is always along the pathway of the footsteps of Jesus. Our hearts soar when we read that “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:9–11). Yet we are reminded that preceding this glory was His unselfish sacrifice. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

In his book *Humility*, Andrew Murray powerfully notes not only the humility of Christ in His death but also the way He exhibited it throughout His life. Murray highlights Christ's humble heart fixed on the glory of the Father by noting our Lord's regular use of the words “not” and “nothing.”

- “The Son can do *nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing*” (John 5:19).
- “I can do *nothing on my own . . . I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me*” (John 5:30).
- “I do *not receive glory from people*” (John 5:41).

- “For I have come down from heaven, *not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me*” (John 6:38).
- “My teaching is *not mine, but his who sent me*” (John 7:16).
- “I have *not come of my own accord*” (John 7:28).
- “I do *nothing on my own authority*” (John 8:28).
- “I came *not of my own accord, but he sent me*” (John 8:42).
- “I do *not seek my own glory*” (John 8:50).
- “I do *not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works*” (John 14:10).
- “The word that you hear is *not mine but the Father’s who sent me*” (John 14:24).

Murray wrote,

He was nothing, that God might be all. He resigned Himself with His will and His powers entirely for the Father to work in Him. Of His own power, His own will, and His own glory, of His whole mission with all His works and His teaching . . .

. . . His humility was simply the surrender of Himself to God, to allow Him to do in Him what He pleased, whatever men around might say of Him, or do to Him.¹⁷

As we raise the radar on our suspicion of self-reliance and reset our commitment to choose a costly humility, we “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). Our worship will lead to humility as Christ is formed in us.

A heart set on humility resets its affection each day on the truth, and the goal, of “Not I . . . but Christ” (Gal. 2:20). As Roy Hession

GLORIOUS FINISH

observed, “A ‘C’ is a bent ‘I.’”¹⁸ Let us affirm that our life is the not “our” life but the life of Christ living in and through us, manifesting His consistent, attractive, and glory-inviting character of humility.

Murray assures us with this admonition:

It is not until Christians study the humility of Jesus as the very essence of His redemption, as the very blessedness of the life of the Son of God, as the only true relation to the Father, and therefore as that which Jesus must give us if we are to have any part with Him, that the terrible lack of actual, heavenly, manifest humility will become a burden and a sorrow, and our ordinary religion be set aside to secure this, the first and the chief of the marks of the Christ within us.¹⁹

We seek the face of our humble Jesus *before* us, trust the life of Jesus *within* us, and manifest the character of Jesus living *through* us.

Whether God uses a spinal stroke on a Sunday morning, the crushing pressure of your current assignment, or some other tailor-made trial, may our glad cry remain, “Who is sufficient for these things. . . . But our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5).

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

[**MOODY PUBLISHERS**](#) [**AMAZON**](#) [**APPLE BOOKS**](#) [**GOOGLE PLAY**](#) [**WALMART**](#) [**BARNES & NOBLE**](#) [**CHRISTIANBOOK.COM**](#) 