

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 25

Penetrating The Wall Of Grace

by Sharon K. Griffiee

Hebrews 4:13-16 (NIV) - *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

It is easy to read these verses of scriptures and skip entirely over the basic spiritual instruction of the first few verses. Not wanting to spend time on the weightier issues, we head straight for what we consider to be the bottom line, "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Who doesn't want their needs met? Sounds easy enough. All we have to do, according to this last verse, is go to God with confidence and tell him what we need, and he'll be waiting with his mercy and grace to help us. We can approach the throne of grace with confidence, expecting God to come through for us.

It is not until later, when things don't work out the way we expected them to, when we don't get what we asked for, that we go away questioning God's real concern about our needs. Not only did we fail to get what we asked for, but also, we've run smack into a solid wall of resistance, as everything starts falling apart!

James 4:6b (KJV) - *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

Sometimes we have to learn the hard way what prideful human contriving can do to us. I received a letter from a brother who had been released from prison several months ago. He was in so much agony; he was at a loss for words. He had just been arrested and put in jail and was waiting to be sent back to prison. He wrote, "I made a mistake without counting the costs seriously. I took my eyes off of

Jesus. Bills were piling up. The truck was about to be repossessed, on and on. Feeling depressed, I self-medicated, which made matters worse. Being broke and tired of it all; I tried to commit a crime. The back slide wasn't but for a brief moment, but that's all it took. Why must I pay so hard for such a small mistake?"

He went on to say, "Why couldn't I find work? I prayed and prayed. Why? If I had found a job all this wouldn't have even come into play. Of course I have already repented to God. Now I'm trying to trust him to give me the strength and help to go on."

For the purpose of spiritual growth, let's take a closer look at this brother's dilemma, a plight that many face daily. Although he wrote in his letter that he was trying to trust God, he also was *implying* that if God had answered his prayer by giving him a job, he wouldn't have resorted to crime to try and get his needs met. This line of reasoning raises the very question of loyalty to God.

If our loyalty to God is based solely on what he will give us, then we need to consider the real possibility that we want the relationship with God for selfish reasons. We want something quick and easy and we believe God can make it happen. When all we are seeing of God's character is through a filter of deception [pride], our loyalty is naturally going to be misplaced. Our focus will be on seeing what we can "get" or "take" from God, rather than "receiving" what He freely gives. And what does God freely give? He freely gives his *grace!* But, here's the clincher, he freely gives his grace to the humble (who know they don't deserve it), but actively resists the proud (who think they do).

Obadiah 3 (KJV) - *"The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee..."*

Even though God loves the person, he hates the pride in them. Why? Pride is the nature of the devil. When you take your eyes off Jesus, all you are left with are the lies of the devil. What the proud fail to see is that no one can come in and take [steal] the blessings of God. God's grace is not given to those

with a haughty attitude who think they deserve it, or that somehow God owes it to them.

John 10:1 (KJV) - *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.*

No one can bypass having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, hoping to go straight for the "goods". Anyone who tries to enter the door of the sheepfold, trying to take the precious things that are reserved for God's children, will meet a mighty wall of resistance.

It is one thing for the humble person to go boldly to the throne of grace to receive help in a time of need. They are not going to God to "get" something temporary, but to "receive" something of eternal value. They have no intention of approaching God for the purpose of "taking" something, but for the purpose of "conforming" to the image of Christ. In short, the humble person recognizes their total dependence upon God and of their need for "spiritual instruction" on how to escape the temptations of the devil. Since Jesus lived in the flesh and was tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin, we too can learn how to avoid falling into the deception of sin. See: Hebrews 4:14-15.

By contrast, it is another thing entirely when the proud person heads toward the throne. They are going with an arrogant attitude, that of pushing, shoving, and demanding help. *If you are really there God, and you really do love me, it would be easy for you to do this favor for me.* The proud are so busy talking about what they want; they actually block their own answers to prayer. Insisting on having their own views heard, they are constantly interrupting the Holy Spirit, rather than quietly listening to the life-giving counsel of the Spirit. Pride cuts off God's grace.

The proud want the favor of God, without making a personal commitment to the relationship. They want the blessings of God, without having to go through the process of correction and discipline. They want forgiveness without genuine repentance. They want the benefits of God, without having to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. In other words, the proud want to be independent of God, live their own life the way they want to live it - that is, *until they want something!* Then they go to God pleading for help,

but because they go to him for the wrong reasons, their pride is exposed, causing them to hit the wall!

James 4:3-4 (NIV) - *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

Can a person filled with pride ever hope to penetrate the wall of grace? Yes, but only if there is a change wrought in their heart. Until a person comes to the place where they can recognize their own sin, they will not see the need to humbly seek God's forgiveness.

James 4:8-10 (Amplified Bible) - *Come close to God and He will come close to you. [Recognize that you are] sinners, get your soiled hands clean; [realize that you have been disloyal] wavering individuals with divided interests, and purify your hearts [of your spiritual adultery]. [As you draw near to God] be deeply penitent and grieve, even weep [over your disloyalty]. Let your laughter be turned to grief and your mirth to dejection and heartfelt shame [for your sins]. Humble yourselves [feeling very insignificant] in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you [He will lift you up and make your lives significant].*

Questions for Personal or Group Study:

1. What is the basic spiritual instruction taught in Hebrews 4:14-15?
2. What is meant by spiritual adultery? See James 4:8-10, Amplified Bible.
3. How does a person filled with pride block his or her own answers to prayer?
4. How are we deceived into actually becoming an enemy of God? See James 4:3-4
5. Why does God hate pride?
6. What do we need to do if we want to receive God's promise, that he will lift us up and make our lives significant?