

Unanswered Prayer: Pride

Pride is a common topic in both the Old and New Testaments. It is a human characteristic found in both the believing and non-believing and affects one's walk with God.

1. Look up the definition of pride: 1) search "studylight holman," 2) select "Holman Bible Dictionary," 3) select the letter "p," and 4) locate the word "pride."

2. Job has lost his wealth, health, and family. As the discussion revolves around suffering and God's justice and righteousness between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, a young man, Elihu, listens. Elihu is upset at the three friends, who only judge Job and don't explain his suffering, and at Job, who defends himself self-righteously and questions God's justice and goodness. What do you observe of Elihu's perspective of God and prayer? What does Elihu's name mean?

But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker,
Who gives songs in the night,
Who teaches us more than the animals of the earth
And makes us wiser than the birds of the sky?'
There they cry out, but He does not answer
Because of the pride of evil people.
God certainly will not listen to an empty cry,
Nor will the Almighty regard it. (Job 35:10-13, NASB)

3. A parable is a story that is recognizable and something the audience can identify with to illustrate and make a point. It is paramount to understand the original content / context of the story or the intended meaning of the parable is lost. How would the Pharisee and tax collector be viewed in the first century? What do you observe about the Pharisee's prayer? What do you observe of the tax collector's prayer?

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: "God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14, NASB)

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Teacher Notes

Pride is a common topic in both the Old and New Testaments. It is a human characteristic found in both the believing and non-believing and affects one's walk with God.

1. Look up the definition of pride: 1) search "studylight holman," 2) select "Holman Bible Dictionary," 3) select the letter "p," and 4) locate the word "pride."

Encourage the student to share his thoughts on this topic.

Undue confidence in and attention to one's own skills, accomplishments, state, possessions, or position. Pride is easier to recognize than to define, easier to recognize in others than in oneself.

2. Job has lost his wealth, health, and family. As the discussion revolves around suffering and God's justice and righteousness between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, a young man, Elihu, listens. Elihu is upset at the three friends, who only judge Job and don't explain his suffering, and at Job, who defends himself self-righteously and questions God's justice and goodness. What do you observe of Elihu's perspective of God and prayer? What does Elihu's name mean?

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Introduce the student to the Jewish Encyclopedia to find the meaning of the Hebrew name Elihu: 1) search "Jewish encyclopedia," 2) select "JewishEncyclopedia.com," 3) type and search "Elihu," and 4) select "Elihu."

Elihu means "He is my God," as in "He remains my God and does not change."

The Jewish Encyclopedia views Elihu (Job 32-37) as making the argument that God is the educator of mankind, who punishes only until the sinner has atoned for his sin and recognizes his wrong-doing. Then God has attained His object, to "bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living".

"Behold, God does all these things,
twice, three times, with a man,
to bring back his soul from the pit,
that he may be lighted with the light of life. (Job 33:29-30, ESV)

Ask the student: what do you observe of Elihu's comment of prayer?

"Where is God my Maker" – people want God to save them; but they do not honor Him as Creator and Source of wisdom.

"Pride of evil people" – people are prideful and indifferent to God.

Ask the student: what covenant is in force here? Help the student understand the difference between the Mosaic and New Covenants.

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Ask the student: if you lived in the first century, who would normally be perceived as righteous? Who was seen as the sinner?

In the first century, the Pharisee was seen as the righteous one and the tax collector was despised and seen as the sinner. Jesus' parable was a contrast of extremes and challenged this common perception to teach the concept of God's righteousness.

Ask the student: who determines whether one is righteous?

Only God determines who is righteous as exemplified with Abraham:

And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:6, ESV)

Ask the student: what do you observe about the Pharisee's prayer? Ask probing questions to help his observation.

The Pharisee trusted in himself that he was righteous and viewed others with contempt.

The Pharisee was praying to himself and compared himself to others. He raised his self esteem by debasing everyone else around him.

The Pharisee vindicates himself.

Ask the student: what elements of the Tax Collector's prayer gave him a better hearing before God than the Pharisee's? What do their contrasting prayer attitudes reflect of their feelings of God?

The Tax Collector recognized the absolute supreme judicial authority of God and his abject position before Him.

The Tax Collector recognized the absolute holiness of God and his sinful moral state before Him.

What attitude do you pray with?