

If you were planning on visiting a royal court any time soon, this is some pretty good advice in Proverbs. For the original audience of God's people of Old Testament Israel, this may have been a, "Well, no kidding," moment. It would have been unthinkable to just waltz into the king's presence without an invitation. In some cultures of the Ancient Near East that could mean worse than embarrassment but a death sentence. The thing is, God doesn't give His people these words to save us from certain social faux pas and potentially awkward situations. God gives these wise sayings in Proverbs to teach us how we are to live as part of God's kingdom. As important it is for one to know proper etiquette before a king, it's even more vital for you to know your place before the King, the Lord. Proverbs 25:6-7 says:

**Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,
and do not claim a place among his great men;
7 it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here,"
than for him to humiliate you before his nobles.**

It's possible that Jesus has these words on his mind in Luke 14. His parable—the earthly story with a heavenly meaning—directs us to picking your seat at a wedding feast and warns against assuming the place of honor for yourself. He states: **"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"** (Luke 14:11). Just as Jesus wasn't just teaching about how to pick your seat, so these words in Proverbs are more than how to conduct yourself in the royal courtroom. What is it then? Be humble. Know your place. Do not be overly focused on one's own self-importance, your rights and freedoms. Say, "You first," and put her needs and wants before your own. Lower yourself so she might be lifted up. No need to be concerned with being right, winning the argument, making sure your opinion is heard, listened to or followed. Be humble. Know your place.

You know the need to be humble, don't you? Very few people have patience for someone who is too full of and thinks too highly of themselves. There's a sense of satisfaction when we such a person have to eat a slice of that "humble pie" and he's knocked down a peg or two. But that's also the danger of pride: we can easily see it in others; it's hard to see in ourselves.

It's hard to see because being humble isn't how you get ahead in this world. We are told to not wait for that invitation to get the audience; seize the moment! Put others down and push them out of the way. You need to look out for yourself because no one else will. We are told, in some shape or form, that we need to sell ourselves, our brand, and where we excel. We do it for job interviews and college applications, the sports team, and social status so that we are noticed and listened

to. Pride hides itself behind words like self-esteem, self-worth, and how we view ourselves. Pride is hard to see because you just want to succeed at something even if it's just feeling a little bit better about who you are.

It can be so difficult to see because pride is so good at covering its tracks quickly looking to validate why you should feel the way you do. You know that you don't deserve anything but why does she succeed when you don't? You did the work didn't you? Why shouldn't you be rightly recognized; is it all for nothing? Pride points out how you have put others first, you've suffered enough, you did your time—when will it be your turn? Pride pleads that you are not the problem. It's because of what she said or he failed to do and they hurt you! Your pride doesn't want you to say sorry, unless you know you will receive something out of it. It doesn't want to admit you are in the wrong. Even when we do, so often it comes with a back-handed compliment or reason that somehow puts the fault back on the other individual. Pride is afraid of looking smaller, lesser, perceived as failure so it says, "At least I'm not like..." and is quick to ignore or downplay your own faults. It demands assurance from others and then is hurt when it's not the way you want or expect. Pride even is careful about handing too many compliments to others as if you telling him, "Good job," is something extraordinary for him to obtain or just in case you feed their pride too much and be "like them." We can even find pride in our own humility as we are quick to explain how we know we don't deserve anything and are unworthy of it all. But then we get upset, frustrated, annoyed when our time, our love, our service isn't returned the way we expect or we taken advantage of. It's hard to see the pride because it insists you are just trying to protect yourself and even those you love.

Even now, you might be telling yourself, "But that's not me." Who are you trying to fool? Your pride tells you that the sin in your life isn't as bad as hers. It tells you that you have control over this sin and you know where to draw the line so it doesn't get really bad. Pride encourages you to just focus on the parts of God's Word that you like and ignore the parts that make you uncomfortable—you don't need that negativity in your life! Pride tells you to not bother God with the little things; you can handle it on your own. Pride insists you need to be thinking about yourself and has little time for God with personal devotional life, bible study. Pride treats God as if he is on your beck-and-call. It brings God down to our level letting him know how he's been doing it all wrong or, at least, could improve. Pride wants God around to fix our lives, finances, government, marriage and relationships when it's the way we want it done. Pride insists if you are really, really, really sorry for what we've done and you are humble, if you promise to do better next it

will convince him to forgive. Pride even might step in and say that your sins are too great for God to forgive.

Pride even in our trying to be humble wants to make us the star, the focus, and leads us to forget our place. But where were you when the heavens were made and he set the foundations of the world? **Nothing on earth is his equal...he is king over all that are proud**" (Job 41:33,34). Hear Isaiah cry out, **"Woe to me! I am ruined"** (Isaiah 6:5) because he recognizes that he is as good as dead as he stood before God's throne. There's no place for pride before the one who demands you be perfect as he is. He hears no excuses for failures and has no time for comparison to anyone except to him who is holy. Know your place. Who has given the Lord counsel or knows his thoughts? Where would you be if he didn't form you in your mother's womb or gave you the breath to wake up this morning? Even the good things that you do and the accomplishments you've achieved are only because the Lord set them out for you to do. As easily as the Lord gives, so quickly he takes away. Those who chose to lift themselves up will be thrown down in ruin. **"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (Hebrews 10:31).

And it's for prideful sinners like me, like you, that Jesus humbled himself. Immediately after Adam and Eve filled with pride eat the fruit to be like God, He sets the plan in motion. Jesus stands before God's throne and tells him, "Remember our plan from eternity. We know how they are too filled with pride to see they need help. So I will take their place. You make the promise and we'll work time and history so that when the time is just right, I will lower myself, make myself nothing. I will lift them up by taking on their flesh and blood. I will gladly claim him as my brother and her as my sister. I will be perfectly humble following not my will but your will be done. I will not demand my rights, but put them first becoming their servant. I will not demand they listen and give me the honor that is rightly mine, but lovingly time and again reveal the Truth. I know many will reject me and not receive me. But I will go. I will lower myself to their sufferings, endure their temptations, I'll even fight their battle against that Satan and we'll make sure his head is good and crushed. I will fall into your hands knowing full well that all of this sin-filled pride has to be paid for. I'll become obedient to death—even death on the cross."

And that's what happens. The Father forsakes his Son. Jesus is crushed for your prideful heart. The price is paid in blood. The entire debt of your sin is canceled. "It is finished," he says. Jesus was put to death for our sins and then he is raised to life for our justification. You now stand not guilty before God and his throne because Jesus lives. That same Jesus given the name above every name is King of

kings and Lord of lords who has gone through the heavens to sit at the right hand of God living and ruling over all.

It's that same king who says to you, "Come up here" as he leads you to the baptismal font where you are washed of every sin and made heir of God's kingdom. Your self-worth doesn't come from you; it comes from Jesus' perfect life and innocent death. You are baptized. You are forgiven. That's how God sees you. He says, "Come up here" as he invites you forward to receive his body and blood that he gave and poured out for you. Here's what you are: forgiven and at peace with God. He encourages you, "Come up here," as he invites you into his presence, into his house where the King comes down to declare through his called servant: "Your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." He says, "Come up here," as he comes down to you to speak his Word and share his promises in His Word. He encourages you, "Come up here" to God's throne with your prayers. He assures you here, before the King, you have his mercy that he doesn't treat you as your sins deserve but will listen and in grace he answers.

Your king came down to you to lift you up to be with him. Your place is secured with him for all eternity. So that means we can be secure in the places that we are in today. He frees you from the fight of this world of trying to get ahead and from that pride that is so easily injured. He's freed you from the burden of trying to earn, keep, and prove your place with God. You are God's baptized child; your place with him is secured in Jesus' blood. He sets you free and then he sends you back out into the world. God worked through time, space, history, and eternity to put you in the place where he has you today. He doesn't need you; but he chooses to as he works in your heart and with your hands and mouth to carry out his good purpose. He put you in this place to use those gifts he gives to serve and love not for yourself but for the good of neighbor, your friend, your child, your spouse, even your enemy. He promises and assures you that when you serve even the least of these you are serving your king. That's your place. Amen.