

1 PETER 5:5-6

KNOW YOUR PLACE

⁵ Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Two figures come to mind when I contemplate humility. One is the oily character from Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, one Uriah Heep, who made the statement, “I am well aware that I am the umblest person going.” His humility was not so much the source of his pride as it was a tool to manipulate others. The other figure is the Centurion in Luke’s Gospel.

“Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.”⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Luke 7:6-8).

From the Centurion, and Jesus’ response, we learn that true humility is not self-denigration, but rather knowing one’s place. First, we need to know that God is the Sovereign Creator and we are his creatures, and therefore, dependent upon him. Second, we are to gratefully acknowledge where he has placed us in his ordered universe. There is a divine chain of command. Although we may not be eternally sentenced to the position we now occupy, we are responsible for how we react to those in authority over us and for how we exercise our authority over those we lead in the present. The way to lead in grace is to know that all authority comes from God, and that we are simply to be loving conduits through which God’s grace flows.

Kingdom authority is exercised for the good of its subjects, never to manipulate them for the leader’s advantage. Keeping that in mind will help us not to chafe under authority nor oppress with authority.

Lord, help me to honor those in positions of kingdom authority over me, whether their positions be institutional and formal or relational and informal. Make me ever mindful that you use imperfect vessels for your purposes so that I might grant them grace as I would want those who I lead to grant me. Amen.