

Forklift Theology

Michael McDaniel



Strange title, right? Let me explain. I have a vinyl siding business, and recently purchased a forklift to unload and position 12' long pallets of siding. Having never operated a forklift before, I learned quickly that the controls were opposite of what I felt was logical. For example, I pushed the lever forward to lift the pallet, since to me that appeared to be “up.” Wrong. It lowered the pallet *down* instead! Conversely, to lower the pallet, I instinctively pulled back on the lever, which—to me—logically meant “down.” Wrong again. It lifted the pallet *up*! The first few times driving the new machine, I found myself falling right back into my predictable pattern of dropping the pallet down when I meant to raise it up, and vice versa. I thought about painting the little arrow indentations on the knob with colors that would dictate the proper action.

Then the Lord brought back to my remembrance an old saying that could help me with my dilemma—“*The way up is down!*” That seemed to fit this situation perfectly. Now when I want to lift a pallet, I know that I must pull back on the lever—pull it *down*! It is totally counterintuitive to me, but, hey, it works! And isn’t that just how it is in God’s economy? The only way “up” is to first get “low” by humbling ourselves. This kind of thinking is foreign to the world’s mindset. In fact, it is downright ludicrous! Everyone knows that if you want to climb up the social ladder, you must promote yourself above others. Then, others will honor you and hold you in high esteem. But that is totally opposite from how God thinks! We learn in Isaiah 55:8-9: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Let’s look at some passages that reveal God’s *higher thoughts* to us:

Mt 23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Mt 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Lu 18:13-14 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Now that is *forklift theology*! Oh, we know these and many other scriptures that teach us that the way up—to be highly esteemed by God—is to be lowly and contrite of spirit. But how often do we find ourselves instinctively pushing the lever forward (to go up), when we should be pulling it back (down) instead? Sometimes we have to drop a few pallets in life before we learn this lesson. And, sadly, many never do learn this lesson. Our crafty foe has led us to be filled with pride and self, and we are driven to be puffed *up, up, up*! And that is precisely and predictably when we fall *down, down, down*! Not once, but over and over again. It is kind of like me instinctively pushing the lever up when I should have been pulling it down. Our Lord said that if I “exalt myself” then I shall be abased. On the other hand, Jesus said that if I *humble* myself ... I will be exalted. Not in the eyes of men, but in God’s eyes; and those are the eyes that matter, amen?

Humble yourselves

Now we come to the application—just how do I *humble myself* before God and man, so that God will lift me up? Some believe that you cannot rightly “humble” yourself, but that you must *be* humble inwardly by the new nature in Christ. While I agree with that sentiment to a degree, Scripture clearly says in James 4:10: “**Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.**” Again, Peter said: “**Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.**” (1 Pe 5:6) Therefore, we are to actively humble ourselves before God, and employ that *forklift theology* that says “the way up is down.” How do we accomplish this “descent”?

It all begins in our mind

Paul said in Romans 12:3, “*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*” Although there are many aspects of humility, we want to focus in on the idea that humility is having the proper perspective about God, ourselves, and others. The Puritan writer, William Law, said:

Humility does not consist in having a worse opinion of ourselves than we deserve, or in abasing ourselves lower than we really are; but as all virtue is founded in truth, so humility is founded in a true and just sense of our weakness, misery, and sin. He that rightly feels and lives in this sense of his condition, lives in humility.¹

True humility does not mean that we denigrate or demean ourselves, or constantly put ourselves down. That is false humility and contrived. Some equate self-abasement with some sort of self-flagellation, beating themselves up. No, a true sense of humility must come after we see ourselves as the sinners that we are, and our need for the Saviour. As we walk in this constant awareness of our *nothingness* and His *all-ness*, we walk in true humility. Matthew Henry also expressed this idea:

Humility is an estimate of ourselves as we are. It is a willingness to be known, and talked of, and treated just according to truth. It is a view of ourselves as lost, poor, and wandering creatures.²

How do you see yourself?

When we begin to see ourselves for who we really are, it can be very humbling. The more we see God for who He is, and realize what Jesus did for us, the smaller we become in our own minds. God becomes incomprehensibly large, and we shrink in comparison. Suddenly, our “good” does not seem so good anymore, and we realize the limitations of our own goodness. Our self-righteousness diminishes as God’s righteousness grows infinitely bigger. Our selfishness is exposed and God’s self-*lessness* is magnified. Finally, we realize that our love for others is pitiful compared to God’s

love for man. Our perspective begins to change, and we become very small in our own eyes, as God becomes preeminent. Our hearts become a funnel, willingly receiving greater love, joy and peace. (Ga 5:22) As Matthew Henry observed, “*humility is founded in a true and just sense of our weakness, misery, and sin. He that rightly feels and lives in this sense of his condition, lives in humility.*”

Destroy the self life

Let’s back up another step. Before we can truly see God for how great He is, we must destroy the power of the self life that feeds our pride. As long as we are on the throne of our hearts, God cannot be. As long as we are large in our own eyes, God will not commune with us. So many Scriptures tell of God’s intolerance of pride and self-centeredness:

Pr 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Ps 138:6 Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

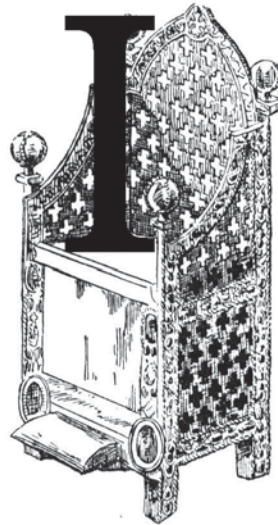
Pr 29:23 A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the

humble in spirit.

Ja 4:6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

God’s wounds that heal

How are we *dethroned*, so that Christ may reign? There are many ways that this can be accomplished. God may use discipline or trials and tribulations to break down the strongholds of *pride* and *self* in our lives. As He does this through His Holy Spirit, *self* diminishes and God increases. Why? Because any events in our lives that undermine



As long as we are on the throne of our hearts, God cannot be.

and destroy self, also exalt God and promote *humility*. J. Gregory Mantle, in his book *The Way of the Cross*, stated: “*True self-discovery wounds our pride and spoils the good opinions we form and cherish of ourselves.*”³ As this happens, the Spirit plants the seeds of humility in a prepared and plowed heart.

Humility through serving others

As we see God for how great He is, another wonderful thing happens—we begin to become increasingly aware of the needs and interests of others around us. Philippians 2:3-4 says: *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.* As we affix our gaze upon the Holy One, we will begin to also see His children and their needs. This is a sign that the immature selfish believer is becoming a mature selfless believer. He humbles himself and takes up the basin and the towel, as did Christ when He washed the disciples’ feet. The Master-Servant has shown us how to humble ourselves and serve our brethren. Matthew 20:28 tells us: “*Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*” Roy Hession, in his classic book *The Calvary Road*, stated:

“The low position we take toward the Lord Jesus is judged by Him by the low position we take in our relationship with our fellows. An unwillingness to serve others in costly, humbling ways, He takes to be an unwillingness to serve Him, and we thus put ourselves out of fellowship with Him.”⁴

Another wonderful quotation regarding Christian service is by F.B. Meyer:

“I used to think that God’s gifts were on shelves one above the other and that the taller we grew in Christian character, the more easily we should reach them. I find now that God’s gifts are on shelves one beneath the other and that it is not a question of growing taller, but of *stooping lower* and that we have to *go down, always down*, to get His best ones. *In Christian service, the branches that bear the most fruit hang the lowest.*”⁵

Is the way down too hard?

Forklift theology is an unpopular theology, and one that is rejected by the world. Even the religious world promotes

self-esteem, prosperity, and easy-believism ... all easy roads, and well traveled. Many are traveling these “upward” roads today, and few are on the downward path. How is it with you, today? Is what I have promoted too hard, and too unrealistic? Consider the question posed by Roy Hession, in *The Calvary Road*:

“Does it seem hard and forbidding, *this way down*? Be assured, *it is the only way up*. It was the way by which the Lord Jesus reached the throne, and it is the way by which we too reach the place of spiritual power, authority, and fruitfulness.”⁶

I am still new to my forklift, and when I want to lift the load, I still instinctively want to push the lever *up* instead of *down*. But now that little phrase keeps coming back to me before I push it ... *the way up is down*. True with forklifts ... true with life! ~

**This is a sign
that the immature
selfish believer is
becoming a mature
self-less believer.
He humbles
himself and takes
up the basin and
the towel.**

¹ William Law, as cited in *AGES Digital Library* (Rio, WI: AGES Software, Inc, 2000)

² Matthew Henry; *Matthew Henry Commentary* as cited in *AGES Digital Library* (Rio, WI: AGES Software, Inc, 2000)

³ Gregory J. Mantle, *The Way of the Cross* (Rod and Staff Publishers, Inc.; Crockett, KY; 1993); p.19

⁴ Roy Hession, *The Calvary Road* (CLC Publications; Fort Washington, PA, 2002)

⁵ F.B. Meyer, *Topical Encyclopedia of Living Quotations* (Bethany House, Minneapolis, MN: 1982) p. 102

⁶ Hession, *Ibid*



Michael and Kayra McDaniel live in Milbank, SD and attend Milbank Christian Fellowship, a group of zealous believers whose outreach extends from their next door neighbor to Tanzania. Michael can be contacted by writing to 47709 Reich Road, Milbank, SD 57252.