

From Pride to Praise: A Restoration Story
Daniel 4

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Introduction: Pride is a tricky thing. It’s a sin that is pervasive in all human hearts but often difficult to detect and diagnose. The core of pride is *unbelief*, turning away from God in Christ to find satisfaction in other things.

John Piper describes pride this way: *“Pride is a turning away from God specifically to take satisfaction in **self**. So pride is one specific form of unbelief. And its antidote is the wakening and strengthening of faith in future grace.”*¹ Humility can only exist in the presence and understanding of God alone.

Piper goes on to say, *“Humility can only survive in the presence of God. **When God goes, humility goes.** In fact, you might say that humility follows God like a shadow. We can expect to find humility applauded in our society about as often as we find God applauded.”*

Jeremiah identified major areas of pride in our lives: *“Let not the **wise man** boast in his **wisdom**, let not the **mighty man** boast in his **might**, let not the **rich man** boast in his **riches**, but let him who boasts, boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in all the earth. For in **these things I delight**, declares the LORD.”* (Jer.9:23-24)

We glory in our mind, our strength, and our material possessions, when God said He does not share His glory with another (Isa. 48:11). Our culture pushes us to glory in our **own self esteem, to find significance and value in what WE can do**, rather than find our worth through God in Christ. We are plagued with **self**, from boasting, to self-pity, to anxiety, and to lust, all of which glory in the belief that **we are the most valuable, important entity**, rather than God. We have a culture of selfies, and there is a reason why every time I'm on a Zoom meeting (which are graciously coming to an end), I look at myself much more than I look at anyone else (how do I look? how's my double chin? How's the bump on my forehead?). We have a hard time asking for help, admitting weakness, and acknowledging that we are NOT self-sufficient. If you've ever tried to help a loved one as they reach the last season of life you know how difficult it is for us to give up independence, to have our freedoms taken away, and to face loss well. The root sin of pride is the source of why we look to ourselves first and God last. Remember, God is **opposed to the proud** (James 4:6). Not neutral toward. Not saddened by. Not disapproving of. He is in **opposition toward!** But, he gives **grace to the humble**, those who humble themselves or those He will humble by His mighty hand.

Daniel 4 is a story of the humbling of the most prideful man in the world. It is a culmination of God working on a man's heart, of God's man in Daniel relentlessly being a witness and example, and ultimately a **testimony of a man** who was humbled in his pride, repented of his sin, and was restored in a relationship with the God who rules all things, all people, for all time. What we learn is captured by **Dale Davis**, *“For we are all of a bunch of Nebuchadnezzar clones, wanting to call our own shots, to direct our own show (puny as it is) and seldom --- except in rare moments of sanity --- stopping to consider how foolish our passion for self-deification is.”*

Testimony of God’s Rule (4:1-3)

¹ John Piper, Future Grace, p. 85-86

Daniel 4 is a long narrative but one story, so we'll try to take it in one big swath. As we observe this 37 verse retelling, we should notice a few things: 1) This is the only chapter in the Bible written by a pagan. It is the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar, written by him though it was most likely recorded and edited by Daniel himself, 2) Notice how it is framed: it begins and ends with **personal testimony, written in the first person**, switching in the middle to tell the story in the 2nd person. This is the King's autobiography of moving from **pride to praise**. 3) This takes place between 25-30 years **after** the fiery furnace of chapter 3, so Daniel is close to his 50's and Nebuchadnezzar is in 60's or 70's. Daniel 4:4 says that there was ease from war and everything was prospering, which would have taken some time to accomplish. This is the last recording of Nebuchadnezzar's life in Scripture.

Process of change

This is the **third major** interaction between God and Nebuchadnezzar. Remember back in chapter 2, God **REVEALED Himself** in a dream of a statue with the king at the head but with a great stone crushing the entire statue and ruling. His response: *"Truly, YOUR GOD is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a REVEALER of mysteries, for you have been able to REVEAL this to me."* (Dan. 2:47). In chapter 3 and the fiery furnace, he came to know God as a **RESCUER**, as the Big 3 were thrown into a massively heated oven and were unharmed, not even burnt at all, without smelling of smoke. His response: *"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and DELIVERED His servants, who trusted in Him, and set aside the kings command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God."* (Dan. 3:28). Now, Nebuchadnezzar was going to see God as a **RULER**, One who is absolutely rules over all things. *"That the living may know that the most High RULES the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will and sets over it the lowliest of men."* (Daniel 4:17).

Now, notice the timing of all of this. God continued to work on Nebuchadnezzar's mind and heart. Daniel continued to be a witness to the King as he advised him, counseled him, and served in his kingdom. Perhaps there did not seem to be any significant movement for decades, like it would never happen. But we remember, especially with our loved ones, that those God has called are those that He also justify and will also glorify (Rom. 8:30). We never give up hope that God will break through, even after times it **seems like they are turning, only to revert back**. Nebuchadnezzar seemed like he turned multiple times until the final time of humbling that lead to a new mind and heart. We never give up praying for, modeling, and sharing with those that we truly love of the greatness of God and the work of Jesus Christ.

Pleasure to proclaim

Nebuchadnezzar started his **testimony** by addressing his whole kingdom, desiring to let everyone know of what happened to him and what was revealed to him. His kingdom encompassed the whole world, so it was appropriate to cite all peoples, nations, and languages. It **pleased him** (verse 2) to display the signs and wonders that God had revealed to him. Instead of pointing to his own vast kingdom, he pointed the reader or listener to the greatness of God and His rule. Stop for a moment and consider the immense wonder of this. This prideful monarch, who was used to bringing himself glory and adulation, now wanted **everyone, anyone**, to know about the God that was made known to him and who actually ruled over all things. There was no fear, no **embarrassment**, no **hesitation**, and no **duty**. This was pure joy of telling about his God. *Is that how we share our testimony to others? Do we simply want all people and nations to know about the greatness of our God and the person and work of Jesus Christ? There is no greater work we can engage in, no greater lesson we can learn from a prideful man who discovered the true and real purpose of life: to know God and make Him known.*

Dream Recited (4:4-18)

Mighty are built up (4-13)

Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, another life-altering prophecy that left him fearful while sleep left him on his bed. The first recorded in chapter 2, he decided to test the magicians and wise men of his kingdom by **withholding the particulars of the dream from them**, challenging them to not only interpret the dream but actually tell him **what** he dreamed. This time he simply told them the dream, but they had no ability to interpret the dream for him. This is when Daniel came on the scene, with impeccable timing, to give the nagging interpretation to the sleep deprived king.

A few things to note in this section. **1)** The king definitely knew Daniel, and knew him well by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, which is named after the false god 'bel' of Babylon. Verse 9 gives a sense of relief from the king when he saw Daniel, **2)** The king was aware that the spirit of the 'holy gods' was in him and no mystery was too difficult for him (v. 9). Now this is presented in the plural for gods, but a case can be made for the singular "holy God". Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God was HOLY, and most likely because he had observed the life of Daniel along with the big 3. Daniel not only spoke of his God, but he demonstrated the fact that His God required holiness and righteousness, while the idols of Babylon would simply feed the desires of those that worshipped them. **3)** The dream itself was **simple**: a tree grew up and reached up to the heavens, strong and visible for the whole world to see. Its leaves were beautiful, fruit plentiful, and branches provided shade and room for animals. At this point a watcher, holy one, came down from heaven.

Mighty have fallen (14-18)

At this point, the serene dream became the stuff of nightmares. The angelic being said in a loud voice to chop the tree down, lop off branches, strip off leaves, scatter the fruit. It would have been like the crews around Simi cutting down trees on the street and putting the branches through the wood chipper. The tree came down quickly, violently, and completely. But then the angel said to leave the stump and roots and put a **fence of iron and bronze around it**. Then comes the odd but clarifying shift. The dream shifts from material to personal. The description moves to using personal pronouns "him" and "his". Perhaps in our day today it would not be outside of normal to name a tree and give it human qualities (like Karen Cooper who married a tree in Fort Myers, Florida to try to save it from being chopped down), but it would be odd for most cultures, even in a dream. This person would be wet with dew, meaning he'll live outside, with the animals, and would be given the **mind of a beast**. All of this would happen for **7 periods of time**, which most believe (including this guy) to be a **7 year period**. At that point the watcher revealed his purpose, that the living would know that the MOST HIGH RULES over all kingdoms of men and sets up and whoever He wills. It was this dream that he presented to Daniel for interpretation.

Interpretation Revealed (4:19-27)**Compassion displayed**

Now, truth be told, this doesn't sound like the most complicated of dreams (especially when we've already read the rest of the chapter!). In chapter 2, Daniel conducted an all night prayer vigil with his teenage friends to seek the Lord for the interpretation and events of the dream. In verse 19 it is clear that Daniel had no problem determining the meaning of the dream, but he did have a problem actually telling the dream to the king. He was **dismayed and alarmed for a while**, meaning he hesitated to tell the king for several minutes/hours. What is interesting at this point is that we might expect Daniel to **revel in the downfall of the king**. Remember, this was the king who took Daniel away from his home, held him captive his whole life, tried to kill his friends, and was decently pompous and full of himself. But Daniel was not **vindictive or spiteful to the king**. In fact, he was **compassionate and kind toward**

this conquering king, wishing the interpretation on his enemies rather than him. *What can we learn about being compassionate to those who are prideful, counter to our beliefs, and even cruel? Do we respond in compassion or hope for downfall. Do we laugh or feel badly when an elected official falls on the stairs up to his plane?*

Daniel, however, still delivered the news to the king. Much like Nathan the prophet to David in 2 Samuel 12, Daniel's message was simple: **you are the man!** You have grown strong, ruling over all the earth, but God will tear you down, chopping you down til you are driven to be like an animal, living in a field, eating grass, and you will do this for 7 years. This will take place **until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will.** However, the roots and stump will be preserved, meaning the kingdom will not be taken away.

Counsel delivered

This would have been shocking. For Daniel, who knew it was sure, he would have had to choke out the words. But he also gave him wise counsel about what to do in light of such news. This is the same counsel Isaiah gave to Judah years before: ***Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil deeds from before your eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless; plead for the widow*** (Isaiah 1:16-17). Here Daniel said, ***"Break off your sins BY practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed."*** The counsel was simple, the same that would be given today: **Repent of your sin, turn from them to God in Christ, serve Him obediently and operate in the righteousness He gives us.** The solution to all pride is belief, a turning by faith to the God who is the source of all goodness, joy, holiness, righteousness, goodness, and gentleness. Turn to God in humility and see Him in greatness and glory, turning from self to worship Him.

Prophecy Realized (4:28-33)

Patience Exhausted

Nebuchadnezzar proved to be just like us! He took this fearful, nightmarish news and did what most do in light of God's judgment: **nothing!** Days went by and nothing happened. Maybe the fear he felt, the conviction that began, and the understanding received was simply a dream. How many people respond the same way with the understanding of the true God, His glory and impending wrath: *nothing has happened yet, life goes on, and is pretty good, so nothing needs to change.*

After **12 months, it finally happened.** Notice that God was **patient**, giving Nebuchadnezzar ample time to repent, to humble himself, and turn. God is still patient, not wishing that any would perish but that all would come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). But His patience will reach an end.

One day the king looked out from the roof of one of his many palaces and observed all the works of his hands: a huge walled city with spectacles for the eye to behold. Hanging Gardens with the first "air conditioning", and manmade mountain for his bride since she missed the hillsides of her homeland, and numerous other wonders of the world. ***"Is not this Great Babylon, which I HAVE BUILT by MY MIGHTY POWER as a royal residence and for the GLORY OF MY MAJESTY."*** YIKES. Perhaps one of the most boastful, prideful statements recorded. Perhaps we never utter these words, but we often believe the same thing about ourselves: we take credit for what we've accomplished, what we've built, what we've made, what we've achieved and pat ourselves on the back. Remember, God will not share the throne or the podium. In **Acts 12**, **Herod** gave an oration to the people, and they responded, *"the voice of a god, and not a man!"* Herod did not correct them, and an angel of the Lord struck him down **because he did not give God the glory**, so he was eaten by worms. This is what happens to the king.

Pride Expelled

Immediately, a voice came down from heaven, "***O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you.***"

What happens next to the king would be the stuff of fairy tale if it were not true. There is a psychological condition called *lycanthopy*, a form of madness involving the delusion of being an animal, usually a wolf, with correspondingly altered behavior. Immediately, Nebuchadnezzar was driven out of his kingdom into the wild and became like an animal. He ate grass, his hair grew long like eagles feathers, and his nails were like birds talons. He literally went out of his mind. This took place for **7 years!**

There are several things to point out at this point. 1) Remember, that though he was driven out of his kingdom, God was going to preserve it for him. Much like David, his sin did not nullify his rule. Apparently the king had enough equity and loyalty so that no one took it over by coup. Most likely, there was a high ranking official who was loyal, wise, and influential who would have guarded the throne for the king! 2) God brought the king low to raise him up again. When God humbles us, it is an **act of His grace!** Much better to be humbled now than into eternity. God brings low so we can see Him, and in His presence is the fullness of joy. 3) God can take what we trust in immediately, at any moment. Think about this: The king had EVERYTHING you could want, including security, wealth, accomplishment, power, intellect and leadership. But it all came crashing down in a moment. This can happen to us, whether financially, circumstantially, or familialy, and God does it to bring humility so that we can see Him clearly.

Testimony of Restoration (4:34-37)

New Mind Returned

The chapter ends with how it began, with first person testimony. His reason returned to him. When God brings humility, it opens us to repentance, which leads to restoration through Christ. When we get the Spirit, we also receive the **mind of Christ** (1 Cor. 2:16) and can finally understand the truth that had been hidden from us. This allows us to be **transformed in the renewing of our mind** (Rom. 12:2), as we can for the first time understand God's Word and truth so that we are no longer conformed to the world. For the king, he went from praising himself to acknowledging God Most High: *For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation, all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.*"

Notice that the king still held onto his earthly kingdom, and he still spoke in terms of "my kingdom" and "my majesty", but he understood the source was vastly different. He was established, not by his own might, but by Someone else. Greatness was added to him, but it did not come from him. A new mind sees life through the lens of God's greatness and glory, and understands that whether we are brought low or have a season of much, it all comes from His hand so that we can make much of His greatness and exalt His name.

New Heart Restored

But the king did not simply receive a new knowledge in his head but also a new exultation in his heart. ***"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just, and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."*** He got it. His eyes were opened. He understood what Paul did about humility and weakness: "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10). Instead of praising his name and reveling in his accomplishments, he gave praise and honor to the One who RULES EVERYTHING and EVERYONE. Nebuchadnezzar found the peace and joy of being in the shadow of the wings of the almighty, and as he acknowledged and made much of Him, he walked in humility, repentance, and joy.

"But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 9:23-24). *'When all is said and done, that is the rock-bottom biblical answer to the question how to best fight pride. **Be stunned and satisfied that we know God --- and that He knows us.**'* (John Piper - Future Grace - p. 97).