

# Psalms 138:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

## Analysis

**Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.** This verse presents a profound paradox: the transcendent, exalted God relates inversely to human pride—drawing near to the humble while keeping distance from the proud. This theological principle appears throughout Scripture and stands radically opposed to human hierarchical thinking.

"Though the LORD be high" (יְהוָה רָם/ki-ram Yahweh) acknowledges God's transcendence, His exalted position above all creation. Ram means high, exalted, lifted up. Isaiah 6:1 describes seeing "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." God's highness encompasses His sovereignty, holiness, power, and transcendence—He is infinitely above creation, completely other, supreme over all.

"Yet hath he respect unto the lowly" (וְשָׁפַל יִרֶה/veshafal yireh) introduces the paradox. Shafal means low, humble, afflicted, poor in spirit. Raah means to see, regard, look upon with favor. The high God regards, notices, cares for, elevates those who are low. This isn't merely awareness but favorable attention—God looks upon the humble with compassion and grace.

This echoes the Magnificat (Luke 1:52): "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." God's economy inverts human hierarchy. While worldly systems elevate the powerful and ignore the weak, God exalts the humble and resists the proud.

"But the proud he knoweth afar off" (וְגָבֹהַּ מִמֶּרְחָק יָדָא/vegavo'ah mimerchaq yeda) presents the contrasting reality. Gavo'ah means high, haughty, proud—those who exalt themselves. Mimerchaq means from a distance, afar off. God knows (yada) the proud but from distance—not intimate covenant knowledge but removed awareness. While drawing near to the humble, God maintains distance from the proud. Pride creates separation from God; humility creates intimacy.

## Historical Context

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This theological principle—God exalting the humble and opposing the proud—runs throughout biblical history. God chose Israel not because they were great but because they were small (Deuteronomy 7:7). He chose David, the youngest son tending sheep, to be king over his older brothers (1 Samuel 16:7). He used Gideon's reduced army of 300 to defeat Midian so Israel couldn't boast in their own strength (Judges 7:2).

Proverbs repeatedly warns against pride: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). "The LORD will destroy the house of the proud" (Proverbs 15:25). "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 16:5).

Conversely, Scripture celebrates humility. "The humble shall see this, and be glad" (Psalm 69:32). "The LORD lifteth up the meek" (Psalm 147:6). Isaiah 57:15 declares: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity...I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

Jesus embodied this principle, describing Himself as "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). His Beatitudes begin: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). James 4:6 quotes this psalm's principle: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." 1 Peter 5:5 repeats it: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

Church history demonstrates this pattern. God used uneducated fishermen to transform the Roman Empire. He used Augustine, broken by moral failure, to

become the church's greatest theologian. He used Luther, a struggling monk, to reform the church. He uses the weak to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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1. What is the difference between healthy humility and unhealthy low self-esteem, and how does Scripture distinguish between them?
2. Why does God 'know the proud from afar off'—what is it about pride that creates distance from God?
3. How does Jesus as both 'high and lifted up' (John 12:32) and 'meek and lowly' (Matthew 11:29) embody the paradox of this verse?
4. In what areas of life might believers be tempted toward pride, and how can we cultivate genuine humility?
5. How should this principle that God regards the lowly shape the church's ministry priorities and treatment of marginalized people?

## Interlinear Text

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כִּי	בָּהֶם	! הִנֵּה	! שָׂפָל	! רָאָה	! גָּבִי
H3588	<b>be high</b>	<b>Though the LORD</b>	<b>unto the lowly</b>	<b>yet hath he respect</b>	<b>but the proud</b>
	H7311	H3068	H8217	H7200	H1364
מֵרָחוֹק	יָדָע:				
<b>afar off</b>	<b>he knoweth</b>				
H4801	H3045				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Isaiah 57:15** (Parallel theme): For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

**Proverbs 3:34** (Parallel theme): Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.

**James 4:6** (Parallel theme): But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

**Isaiah 66:2** (References Lord): For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

**Daniel 4:37** (Parallel theme): Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

**Luke 14:11** (Parallel theme): For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

**Psalms 51:17** (Parallel theme): The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

**Luke 18:14** (Parallel theme): 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.

**Luke 1:48** (Parallel theme): For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

**2 Thessalonians 1:9** (References Lord): Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;