

## LeaderLesson 5: Humility

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“My humility cries out to be noticed!”  
“I’m humble and proud of it.”

The problem with the virtue of humility is that as soon as we think we have it, we’ve lost it. Humility is like underwear – essential, but indecent if it shows. Humility is absolutely essential for leaders. The main goal for godly leaders is to reflect the life of Christ in their own lives. The character trait that best enables us to do that is humility.<sup>1</sup>

Philippians 2:1-11 contains significant teaching for us on humility. After challenging the church to lay aside their personal interests in consideration of others (verses 1-4), Paul tells us how to follow the example of the Lord:

<sup>5</sup> Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. <sup>7</sup> Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, <sup>8</sup> He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>2</sup>

From this powerful passage, we learn three things about the Lord that model true humility. First, Jesus didn’t selfishly cling to the outer expression of His divinity. Instead, He became a servant. A humble leader does not flaunt his or her position or power, but identifies with the weakest member of the team. Second, Jesus demonstrates humility through obedience to God the Father. A humble leader does not impose his or her will on God, but submits to His commands. Third, Jesus waited for His Father to lift Him up. A humble leader does not grab for power or position, or depend on titles to gain respect. He or she patiently waits for God to increase his or her influence. As the perfect example for godly leadership, Jesus set the perfect example of humility.<sup>3</sup>

Humility has fallen on hard times, though. Contrary to popular notions, humility isn’t a matter of weakness. From the Bible’s point of view, it is disciplined strength and other-centered power. Jesus’ humility was evident in His perfect obedience to the authority and will of the Father. He learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8) and sought always to glorify the Father and not Himself. He summarized His mission statement like this: “I have come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He came to serve, and offer His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). It’s one thing to claim to be a servant, but it is another to be treated as one. Jesus, the most powerful man ever to walk on earth, was also the most humble man who ever lived. His plan: never to promote self, but to please His Father by loving, serving and saving others. Because He knew who He was, Jesus was secure enough to serve others in humility.<sup>4</sup>

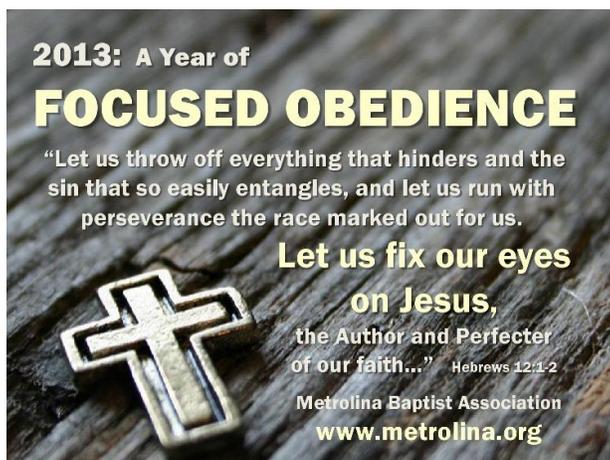
Are we secure enough in our relationship with God to live and serve in humility? Or do we strive to prove ourselves and in so doing seem to be more prideful than humble? Martin Luther said, “God created the world out of nothing, and so long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us.” Jesus set the example for us, and then said, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Oswald Chambers said, “Jesus Christ is always unyielding to my claim to my right to myself. The one essential element in all our Lord’s teaching about discipleship is abandon, no calculation, no trace of self-interest.”<sup>5</sup>

The Apostle Paul had the humble perspective when he said, “If I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all” (Philippians 2:17). Are we willing to sacrifice ourselves for the work of another Christian, to pour out our lives for the faith of others? Or do we say, “I’m not willing to be poured out right now, and I don’t want God to tell me how to serve Him. I’ll choose

what I do and where I do it, and I want to have people watching me admiringly.” Oswald Chambers asks: “Are you ready to be less than a mere drop in the bucket – to be so totally insignificant that no one remembers you even if they think of those you served? Are you willing to give and be poured out until you are used up and exhausted – not seeking to be ministered to, but to minister?”<sup>6</sup> If so, then you have learned humility, how to humble yourself before God on behalf of His people, and His Kingdom work. That’s the kind of leader we need in today’s church – ready to do whatever it takes, regardless of personal comfort or recognition, following Jesus’ example.

Mighty God,

I humble myself for abilities misused, opportunities neglected, words ill-advised;  
I repent of my sinful and inconsiderate ways, broken resolutions, backsliding steps, vain thoughts.  
Please bury my sins in the ocean of Jesus’ blood and let no evil result from my fretful temper, my unseemly behavior, my provoking pettiness...  
God of all grace, make me more thankful, make me more humble;  
Inspire me with a deep sense of my unworthiness from the depravity of my nature, my duties left undone, my unimproved advantages, my disobedience.  
With all my reasons for gratitude and joy, may I remember that I have reasons for sorrow and humility;  
Please give me repentance unto life;  
Cement my oneness with my blessed Jesus,  
That faith may hold to Him more immovably,  
That love may entwine itself around Him more tightly,  
That His Spirit may pervade every fiber of my being.  
Then send me out to make Him known to my neighbors.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *Handbook to Leadership: Leadership in the Image of God*, Kenneth Boa, Sid Buzzell, Bill Perkins. Page 67, 71. (This yearlong study is using this text as a primary source. Anyone who would like to go deeper on this journey for leaders is encouraged to get a copy of this excellent resource. It is also available on Kindle.)

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:5-11 HCSB.

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook to Leadership*, pages 67-68.

<sup>4</sup> *Handbook to Leadership*, pages 69-70. (See John 13:3-5 for more explanation).

<sup>5</sup> From [www.utmost.org](http://www.utmost.org) (with thanks to Brian Upshaw for sharing.)

<sup>6</sup> *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers (Updated Edition) February 5: “Are You Ready to Be Poured Out as an Offering?”

<sup>7</sup> Adapted and updated from “Humility in Service” in *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. Banner of Truth Trust, 1975. Page 180.