

A USEFUL STEWARD (Part I)

For those of us who wish to be useful stewards to the Owner, there are two essential attitudes that must be part of our spiritual and emotional makeup. They are not easy to have, since they are both entirely contrary to our sinful, fallen nature. Furthermore, if we attempt to acquire them in the flesh, all we will really gain is a cheap imitation, which will actually render us even *less* useful to our Master. In fact, the more vigorously we pursue them, the more elusive they will become. Their true acquisition requires surrender, not pursuit. In other words, there is nothing you can *do* to acquire them. Your interest is hopefully piqued, so let's examine the first of these two attitudes and how we can *properly* acquire it.

Attitude #1: Humility

Humility is possibly one of the most misunderstood of all spiritual attitudes. Contrary to what we have been led to believe, humility is not just thinking *less* of yourself. It is not thinking of yourself *at all*. In fact, even thinking about whether or not we are humble shows that we are not yet humble!

The foundational call of the gospel is not for us to simply become less so others can be more. It is to cease to exist at all—to die! (See Matthew 16:24–25; Mark 8:34–35; Luke 14:27; Romans 6:4–8; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 5:24.) Our problem is that our sinful flesh, after having been put to death, doesn't stay dead. It continues to rear its ugly head on a daily basis, and we have to continually re-kill and re-bury it. To see what genuine humility looks like, let's contrast it with the opposite, with which we are all quite familiar—pride. Pride is being filled up with self. It makes *us* the center of our attention and grants us *Most Important Person* status in our own mind. Do not be misled—pride is not merely thinking that we are better than everyone else; it is actually manifested in us when we spend more time thinking about ourselves than we do anyone else, including even God himself. Pride, in a word, is “self-centeredness.” If we are totally honest with ourselves, we can all admit that we spend far too much of our lives thinking and worrying about ourselves.

Paul warns us to avoid our natural inclination toward pride (self-centeredness) in Romans 12:3 (NASB) when he tells us, *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.*

Isn't it true that the worst of our bad behavior comes out when what we *want* is not provided, is taken away from us, or is ignored by someone else? Think about it. Why do we get angry with people? Why do we get our feelings hurt? What makes us fearful? What makes us spend too much money? What drives us to put on “masks,” pretending to be what we are not? What keeps us from taking risks? Why do we lock doors? Why do we fight back physically or verbally? Do you see? These are all indications that we are still “full” of ourselves—full of *pride*. Honestly, it can be quite embarrassing for us to admit just how alive and well is the pride inside of us.

Keep in mind the center letter in both *pride* and *sin* is the letter “l.” As long as “l” remains the center of attention, we will not be very useful stewards to our Owner. True humility, on the contrary, eliminates **me** from any consideration. To say it another way, humility is not just putting yourself at the end of the line so others can go first, it is being so focused on serving God and others that you do not even notice or care whether you are in the line at all. It is just not about *me*!

Andrew Murray has correctly described humility as “the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for God to be all.” True humility can only be acquired in death of self, transforming us from being internally focused to being externally focused. Only then will we lose ourselves as we become wholly attentive to honoring our Owner and blessing and serving others with all that He has entrusted to us to manage for Him.

Pride Takes Us Down – Humility Lifts us Up

The Bible is full of very pointed passages warning that being self-absorbed, self-centered, and selfish will take us down. Likewise, there are many verses which teach us that being totally attentive to God and to others (selflessness) will lift us up. Consider this compelling list of verses that contrast the destructive outcomes of pride versus the glorious outcomes of humility:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. (Proverbs 16:18, NASB)

Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10, NIV)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. (1 Peter 5:6, NASB)

Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:12)

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:14)

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

Possibly the most compelling example of true humility and its effects can be seen in the life of Jesus himself. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5-9:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him. [emphasis added]

We cannot overlook how this passage begins: *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.* If we claim to be Christ followers, people who want to be taken seriously by God and others, then we must surrender to *emptiness*, which enables us to achieve true humility. Once we are able to empty ourselves of ourselves, then God can both *fill* us up and *lift* us up to become like Jesus—a useful and impactful steward for His bidding. May we not postpone one minute longer our full surrender to the death of self, so God can raise us up to genuinely reflect the likeness of Christ to a world engulfed in darkness and without hope.

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E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University’s Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.