

A USEFUL STEWARD (Part 2)

In Part One, we examined the foundational attitude of humility, which addresses how we see ourselves in relationship to others. With this second foundational attitude, we will examine how we see ourselves in relationship to God, our Maker and Owner. With humility we see ourselves as being entirely *irrelevant*, while others are eminently important. With this second foundational attitude we see ourselves as being entirely *inadequate*, while God is eminently sufficient. These two foundational attitudes, humility and inadequacy, will radically transform every area of your life, if you allow yourself to embrace them. To better understand this attitude of inadequacy, let's go to the Book and see what we can learn.

Attitude #2: Inadequacy

The Bible is full of “aha moments” of inadequacy for many who ultimately became quite useful to our Owner. Jeremiah, when called to go preach to Israel, admitted, *Alas, Sovereign LORD, I do not know how to speak; I am too young* (Jeremiah 1:6, NIV). Moses, when commanded to lead Israel out of Egypt, asked, *Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?* (Exodus 3:11, NASB). Gideon, when charged to lead Israel against the massive army of Midian, questioned God's request: *Pardon me, my lord, but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family* (Judges 6:15, NIV). David, regarding being the leader of Israel, often asked, *Who am I?* (I Samuel 18:18, II Samuel 7:18, I Chronicles 17:16, I Chronicles 29:14, II Chronicles 2:6).

All of these biblical characters, when confronted with serving the living God, saw themselves as entirely inadequate for the task—and they were. But in spite of their acknowledged inadequacies, once they got themselves out of the way, God was able to use all the latent talent and strengths He had entrusted to them for His glory and purposes. The world was able to see *God* at work and not *them* at work!

A lady once admitted that when she finally made the decision to begin following Christ in her adult years, she imagined how blessed the Lord was going to be to have someone like her finally available to be used by Him. She reasoned, “I am attractive. I am intelligent. I am talented. I am well liked. I am influential. I am indeed ‘God's gift to the world.’” After decades of trying to serve Jesus, she finally came to realize that God was able to use her not *because* of her, but *in spite* of her. All her attempts to use her talents and gifts actually got in the way of God using her in the way He wanted. It wasn't until she realized how totally unworthy and inadequate she was before God that He was finally able to begin using her and all her positives in meaningful and effective ways. She had finally learned that she was not “God's gift,” she was “God's project.”

Strength is a weakness – Weakness is Strength

There is a strange spiritual paradox that is often overlooked and is the exact opposite of how we normally think: *The more gifted I am, the less likely it is that God can use me.* Think about this. *The more gifted I am, the less*

likely it is that God can use me. Here's why: if you can do something without God's help, God's involvement is not necessary. You will be the one glorified, not Him. This is *never* a good place to be. It is not until we see ourselves as inadequate, unqualified, self-seeking creatures that we will begin to allow God to use what He has created in us and add what we still need to make us truly useful. In other words, it is not what we *do have* that makes us useful to Him; it is acknowledging what we *don't have* and what we still need. Until we recognize our inadequacy, we will feel no need for Him to give us what we lack in order to be fully and properly equipped to serve Him.

Hudson Taylor summarized this truth so well when he said, "All of God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on Christ living in them." Paul said it this way: *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13, emphasis added). Even someone as strong, as smart, as committed, and as gifted as Paul recognized he was wholly inadequate to serve God without getting more from Him.

God informed Paul about his inadequacy. He told him, *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:9a, NASB). In light of this word from the Lord, Paul then concludes, *Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:9b-10).

There you have it, the secret of inadequacy! It does not *demean* what we do have; it *acknowledges* what we still lack. It opens our heart for God to fully equip us to effectively serve Him!

The story of Gideon's conquest of the Midianite army is a powerful example of God taking what little we do have and adding what we need to produce a God-sized outcome. This inspiring story is recorded in Judges 6-8.

Gideon, according to His own assessment, was totally inadequate for use by the Lord (a good attitude with which to start!). God knew what He had put in Gideon and what He wanted to add so he would be fit to destroy the wicked Midianite army. In preparation to fight this massive army, Gideon did all he could with the talents and abilities he had by gathering together 32,000 men to fight this ominous enemy army of more than 120,000 men.

It is what God tells Gideon about his efforts that is so instructive for us:

The LORD said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.' Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.' So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. (Judges 7:2-3).

Before God was done, Gideon's army was whittled down to only 300 soldiers to fight over 120,000 enemy soldiers. And to everyone's amazement (except God's), these 300 men routed the entire 120,000-strong army. You see, God had to *reduce* Gideon before he could *use* Gideon—and that is also true of us. In order to be truly useful vessels for Him, we need to acknowledge our inadequacy and be willing to come to Him for what we still lack.

We Are All Jars of Clay

We must come to realize that our adequacy is found not in ourselves or our abilities, but in the One who fills us up and makes us useful. Paul makes this truth clear when he says, *For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us* (2 Corinthians 4:6-7, NIV). The word Paul uses here for “jars of clay” is *ostrakinos*, which literally means *earthenware*. It was the word used to describe the most common, ordinary, everyday, run-of-the mill pots and jars. Paul correctly uses this Greek word to describe all of us. Isaiah also uses this same metaphor of pottery when he acknowledges, *We are the clay, You are the Potter; we are all the work of Your hand* (Isaiah 64:8).

You may have heard the term “crackpot” used to describe someone who was eccentric or foolish. The truth is, we are *all* “cracked pots.” None of us is very strong, and we all leak profusely. None of us has it all together. Consequently, we will have only a very limited usefulness to the Owner until we allow Him to repair our cracks and fill us with *His* glory, *His* power, *His* love, *His* wisdom, and *His* strength. Then and only then will we experience the transformation from being merely a vessel for *common* use to a vessel for *special* use (2 Timothy 2:20, NIV), fit to honorably serve and glorify our Owner and King!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — E. G. “JAY” LINK

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.