

HUMILITY: THE MISSING ATTRIBUTE OF LEADERSHIP Numbers 12:3

I. INTRODUCTION

What images come to mind when you think of Moses?

- Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*?
- The animated *The Prince of Egypt*?
- Michelangelo's statue? (complete with horns!*)

Whatever images we may have of this giant of history, a careful reading of Scripture will likely reveal discrepancies between fact and fancy!

II. THE FORGOTTEN ATTRIBUTE OF LEADERSHIP.

A. The Greatness of Moses.

On anyone's short list of the most influential men who ever lived, the name of Moses should occur. His greatness is seen in multiple arenas:

1) Law.

The name of Moses is virtually synonymous with the rule of law. This explains why statues and paintings of Moses are found in courtrooms and legislative assemblies all over the world.

2) Worship.

It was Moses who received the "blueprint" (Exodus 25:8-9) for the Tabernacle (which served as the plan for the Temple). This structure, these pieces of furniture and the accompanying liturgical ceremonies and practices set the stage for the entire Jewish understanding of what it meant to worship God. Doctrines of atonement, sacrifice, holiness, ordination, mediation, substitution, forgiveness, church discipline, etc. all find roots in Moses.

* The Hebrew phrase in Exodus 34:29 that describes the face of Moses as "radiant" is related to the Hebrew word for "horn." The Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate) mistranslated the verse as saying that "the skin of his face sent forth horns." Thus European Renaissance artists, who relied on the Vulgate, would sometimes depict Moses with a pair of horns on top of his head!



3) The Nation of Israel.

Prior to Moses, the children of Abraham (Hebrews) were only a loose association of tribes. They had no homeland, no government, no national identity. But with Moses, the tribes united and took on a distinct national, ethnic and religious identity. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:10).

4) Ethical Monotheism.

Alone, among all the peoples of the earth, the Hebrews worshiped one God. Moses gave this theology its distinctive form and joined to it a system of laws and regulations intended to describe the kinds of behaviors and attitudes pleasing to this God.

5) Author of the Pentateuch.

The message of the Bible would be incomprehensible without the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). Though not stated in the text itself, there is strong reason to believe that Moses is the primary author of these most foundational books that reveal the Person and purposes of God.

6) Liberator.

Many who have fought for social, economic, racial, and political liberation have seen Moses as their model and guide. "Let my people go," rings down through the centuries as the longing for freedom of those who are oppressed, from the slaves in the cotton fields to the theologians of liberation. The last speech Martin Luther King gave found its inspiration in the life of Moses.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life...but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you...."



B. The Humility of Moses.

1) The Most Humble Man on Earth.

Worldly thinking tends to associate “greatness” with pride, control, power and ego. In Moses, however, we see greatness and humility joined together. What God has joined together let no man separate!

Now Moses was a very humble (meek) man, more humble (meek) than anyone else on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3).

Our purpose in this study is to rediscover the vital link between greatness in leadership and greatness in humility (meekness)!

2) Even non-Christians are recognizing this link!

The **damage** that results when humility is absent in leadership is incalculable! Whether we are talking about leadership in the family, in the church, in the business world or in the nation, there are devastating consequences when leaders are not humble. On the other hand, when leaders embody genuine humility, the blessings and benefits are profound.

Jim Collins is one of the most influential writers today in the field of leadership, management and business organization. His book *Good to Great* (2001) has been a national best seller for years. Collins studied leadership in the most successful organizations in the country. The results surprised almost everyone. He discovered that the truly great leaders, the ones who are able to lead a company to greatness, are the ones who:

...channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It's not that (they) have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves. (p. 21).

Collins sees Abraham Lincoln as an example of this kind of greatness.

(Lincoln) never let his ego get in the way of his primary ambition for the larger cause of an enduring great nation. Yet those who mistook Mr. Lincoln's personal modesty, shy nature, and awkward manner as signs of weakness found themselves terribly mistaken, to the scale of 250,000 Confederate and 360,000 Union lives, including Lincoln's own. (p. 22).



In contrast, leaders with massive egos may have great leadership techniques, but their long-term impact on the company is negative.

Lee Iacocca, for example, saved Chrysler from the brink of catastrophe, performing one of the most celebrated...turnarounds in American business history.... Then, however, he diverted his attention to making himself one of the most celebrated CEO's in American business history.... His autobiography...sold seven million copies and elevated him to rock star status.... Iacocca's personal stock soared, but in the second half of his tenure, Chrysler's stock fell 31 percent behind the general market.

Sadly, Iacocca had trouble leaving center stage and letting go of the perks of executive kingship. He postponed his retirement so many times that insiders at Chrysler began to joke that Iacocca stood for, "I Am Chairman of Chrysler Corporation Always." And when he did finally retire, he demanded that the board continue to provide a private jet and stock options.... Iacocca's brilliant turnaround in the early 1980s did not prove to be sustained and Chrysler failed to become an enduring great company. (pp. 29-30).

As Collins interviewed the leaders of "great" companies he made a startling discovery. These leaders did not talk about themselves!

They'd talk about the company and the contributions of other executives as long as we'd like but would deflect discussion about their own contributions. When pressed to talk about themselves, they'd say things like, "I hope I'm not sounding like a big shot." ...Or, "I don't think I can take much credit. We were blessed with marvelous people." Or, "There are plenty of people in this company who could do my job better than I do."

It wasn't just false modesty. Those who worked with or wrote about the good-to-great leaders continually used words like "quiet," "humble," "modest," "reserved," "shy," "gracious," "mild-mannered," "self-effacing," "understated," "did not believe his own clippings," and so forth. (p. 27).

Collins notes one other fascinating characteristic of great leaders.



(Great leaders) look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well.... At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility. The comparison leaders did just the opposite. They'd look out the window for something or someone outside themselves to blame for poor results, but would preen in front of the mirror and credit themselves when things went well. (p. 35).

TABLE TALK

1. Think about a leader you have known well and worked with closely (father, boss, pastor, etc.). Does the word "humble" describe their leadership style?
2. What damage occurs when leadership is ego-driven?
3. What blessings occur when leadership is humble?
4. Where does genuine humility come from? How does one become humble?

III. RECOVERING BIBLICAL HUMILITY/MEEKNESS.

A study of God's word on the topic of humility (meekness) will help us to better understand this forgotten attribute of leadership.

A. Humility (meekness) is not:

I. Weakness.

Many equate meekness with weakness (thus the expression, "meek as a mouse.") However, in the Bible meekness is never weakness. In fact, some of the strongest characters in the Bible as described as meek, humble, lowly, gentle.

- Moses (Num. 12:3).
- Jesus (Matt. 11:29; Phil. 2:8).



2. **Being nice.**

Although “nice” seems to be what most people today think Christianity is all about, the term does not even appear in the Bible. Many adjectives can be chosen to describe Moses... the word “nice” does not come to mind!

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call “humble” nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what YOU said to HIM.... He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. (Mere Christianity. p. 99).

3. **Poor self-image.**

What sometimes passes as “humility” is in reality simply a poor self-image. Much of this form of so-called “humility” is just ego-centrism and self-absorption in disguise. True humility is not thinking badly about yourself. Rather it is not thinking about yourself at all!

4. The absence of **strength of will and resolve.**

Moses was humble... yet strong. Likewise, Jesus was “gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29), and yet no one in history had greater inner strength and resolve. If leadership is measured by influence, Jesus was the greatest leader of all time!

Jim Collins makes this point as well.

It is very important to grasp that... leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great.... (Great leaders are) fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce results. They will sell the mills or fire their brother, if that's what it takes to make the company great (p. 30).



5. The absence of **ambition**.

The Bible is not opposed to ambition. The Bible is opposed to **worldly/selfish** ambition! *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves (Phil. 2:3).*

Those who are genuinely humble are passionate and ambitious about:

- The Kingdom of God.
- The glory of God.
- The well-being of others.
- Justice.

When James and John expressed their desire to be great in the Kingdom, Jesus did not rebuke their ambition. He rebuked their understanding of what "greatness" means: "You don't know what you are asking!" (Mark 10:35-40).

6. The absence of **anger**.

Genuine humility is not incompatible with anger. However, in humble people we see anger expressed for the right **reasons**, at the right **time**, in the right **degree**.

- Jesus (meek and lowly) got angry (Mk. 10:14; John 2:15-17; etc.).
- Moses (the humblest man on earth) got angry (Ex. 2:11-12; 11:8; 32:19-20; etc.).

While most of Moses' anger is clearly "righteous indignation" and therefore justifiable, his struggle with "anger management" was a life-long ordeal and on one occasion erupted in ugly and sinful vindictiveness... with disastrous consequences (Num. 20:1-13).

B. What humility is:

1. An accurate view of **ourselves**.

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you (Rom. 12:3).



Listen to how C. S. Lewis describes pride.

If you want to find out how proud you are, the easiest way is to ask yourself, "How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me... or patronize me, or show off?" The point is that each person's pride is in competition with every one else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise....

A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.... (Mere Christianity pp. 94-96).

To help us understand humility, it may help to examine its opposite: pride. The following chart helps to underscore the difference between pride and humility.

The Proud Person

It's all about me.
Takes credit for success.
Seeks to place blame.
Unapproachable, feels unsafe.
Concerned with being respected.
Covers up sin.
"Lord, change them."
Compare self to others.
Concerned with sin's consequences.
My needs are all important.
Angry about the wrong things.
Critical.
Quick to hold a grudge.
Demands his rights.
Independent.
Self-protective
Loves to win.
Promotes self.
Self-glory.
Confident in what they know.
Self-conscious.
Loves to talk.

The Humble Person

It's all about God... and you.
Gives credit for success to others.
Takes responsibility.
Open, vulnerable, feels safe.
Concerned with being real.
Confesses sin.
"Lord, change me."
Compare self to God.
Concerned with sin's root causes.
Your needs are all important.
Angry about the right things.
Compassionate.
Quick to forgive.
Yields his rights.
Dependent (on God... and others)
Self-denying
Loves to see others win.
Promotes others.
God's glory.
Humbled by what they don't know.
Not concerned for self at all.
Loves to listen.



2. Power under control.

Meekness is not the lack of power... it is the right use of power... it is the decision not to use power in retaliation for a personal grievance. The idea behind one of the Greek words used in the New Testament relates to taming wild animals. Power under control!

- *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:5-8).*
- *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... Do not be proud.... Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evils for evil.... Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14-21).*

In biblical thought a lamb cannot be meek (in that he has no power, strength). However, a lion can be meek, humble! Think of Aslan's voluntary death in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Aslan gave his life. It was not taken from him!

- *No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again (John 10:18).*

C. The results of humility.

1. Only the humble are teachable!

- *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom (Prov. 11:2).*

2. Only the humble receive God's grace.

- *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5; James 4:6).*



3. Only the humble know how to **love**.

Proud people love themselves and, therefore, are incapable of loving God or others. In this they constantly violate the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-39). The "love" that comes from the proud person is in reality a camouflage for self-interest (i.e., I "love" you because of what you can do for me). Only the humble are able to love because only the humble care more about others than they do about themselves.

Agape is other-directed. Its greatest joy comes in promoting the interests of someone else! The proud know nothing of agape-love because this kind of love *is not self-seeking* (1 Cor. 13:5).

4. Only the humble will ultimately be **elevated to greatness**.

- *Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 18:4).
- *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted* (Matt. 23:12).

5. Only the humble will **inherit the earth**.

- *The meek will inherit the land* (Ps. 37:11).
- *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth* (Matt. 5:5).

6. Only the humble are able to **witness effectively**.

- *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness (meekness) and respect* (1 Pet. 3:15).

D. The call to humility.

Walking humbly is one of the primary goals of redemption.

- *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8).
- *...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle...* (Eph. 4:1-2).



E. But how can I become humble?

1. Recognize how to distinguish true humility from false.

Beware! There are false understandings of humility that one frequently encounters in the church. However, under scrutiny one discovers that these people are not genuinely humble, rather they are more likely, either:

- Suffering from a poor self-image, or
- Proud (proud of their humility!).

2. Invite the Holy Spirit to do His work.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance... (Gal. 5:22. KJV).

3. Obey the command: "Humble yourself!"

Don't wait to be humiliated. Humble yourself! Over and over in Scripture, we are commanded to humble ourselves:

- *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (II Chron. 7:14).*
- *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand.... (I Pet. 5:6).*
- *Humble yourselves before the Lord.... (Jam. 4:10).*

4. Know God...

Moses was humble because he knew God intimately (Ex 32-34; Num. 12:6-8). Humility comes naturally and automatically when we know God.

(If you really get to know Him)... you will, in fact, be humble – delightedly humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life. He is trying to make you humble in order to make this moment possible: trying to take off a lot of silly, ugly, fancy-dress in which we have all got ourselves up and are strutting about like the little idiots we are. I wish I had got a bit further



with humility myself: if I had, I could probably tell you more about the relief, the comfort, of taking the fancy-dress off – getting rid of the false self, with all its “Look at me” and “Aren’t I a good boy?” and all its posing and posturing. To get even near it, even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert (Mere Christianity. p. 99).

5. Admit you’re not!

The first step to humility is to admit you don’t have it! Indeed, confessing pride propels one forward in the quest for humility. If you think you are not proud... that only shows how proud you really are!

TABLE TALK

1. Share with one another areas of your life where you struggle with pride. How has this study affected your thinking about that area?
2. Look again at the chart on page 8. Where do you stand? What is God saying to you?
3. Think about the biblical command: “Humble yourself.” Share with your brothers some things that you could do to obey this command.

