

Steve Whitacre

SESSION 3 | Humility in Action

I. INTRODUCTION

II. MEEKNESS: HUMILITY IN ACTION

"Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3)

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5)

"Meekness is a controlled desire to see the other's interests advance ahead of one's own." *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, D. A. Carson, 20.

"What, then, is meekness? I think we can sum it up in this way. Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others... The meek man is not proud of himself, he does not in any sense glory in himself. He feels that there is nothing in himself of which he can boast. It also means that he does not assert himself. You see, it is a negation of the popular psychology of the day which says 'assert yourself', 'express your personality'. The man who is meek does not want to do so; he is so ashamed of it. The meek man likewise does not demand anything for himself. He does not take all his rights as claims. He does not make demands for his position, his privileges, his possessions, his status in life. No, he is like the man depicted by Paul in Philippians 2: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.' Christ did not assert that right to equality with God; He deliberately did not. And that is the point to which you and I have to come." Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount*, 68–69.

“It seems important to note that in the beatitudes 'the meek' come between those who mourn over sin and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The particular form of meekness which Christ requires in his disciples will surely have something to do with this sequence.” John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 42–43.

“[Meekness] is a Christlike quality, for he said ‘I am meek.’ As exercised towards people, meekness is self-subduing gentleness. But here [James 1:21] the direction is Godward, or rather towards the word of God, and it is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good... without disputing. It is the spirit which says a simple ‘yes’ to what the word teaches and commands, it is the mind disposed to learn—and to do so with prompt readiness.” J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of James*, 68–69.

“The spirit of Christian long-suffering, and of meekness in bearing injuries, is a mark of true greatness of soul. It shews a true and noble nature, and real greatness of spirit, thus to maintain the calmness of the mind in the midst of injuries and evils. It is an evidence of excellence of temper, and of inward fortitude and strength. ‘He that is slow to anger,’ says Solomon (Prov. xvi. 32), ‘is better than the mighty: and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city;’ that is, he shews a more noble and excellent nature, and more true greatness of spirit, than the greatest conquerors of the earth. It is from littleness of mind that the soul is easily disturbed and put out of repose by the reproaches and ill-treatment of men; just as little streams of water are much disturbed by the small unevennesses and obstacles they meet with in their course, and make a great deal of noise as they pass over them, whereas great and mighty streams pass over the same obstacles calmly and quietly, without a ripple on the surface to shew they are disturbed. He that possesses his soul after such a manner that, when others harm and injure him, he can, notwithstanding, remain in calmness and hearty good-will toward them, pitying and forgiving them from the heart, manifests therein a godlike greatness of spirit.” Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 87.

"But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."
(Psalm 37:11)

"The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel." (Isaiah 29:19)

"These 'meek' people, Jesus added, 'shall inherit the earth'. One would have expected the opposite. One would think that 'meek' people get nowhere because everybody ignores them or else rides roughshod over them and tramples them underfoot. It is the tough, the overbearing who succeed in the struggle for existence; weaklings go to the wall. Even the children of Israel had to fight for their inheritance, although the Lord their God gave them the promised land. But the condition on which we enter our spiritual inheritance in Christ is not might but meekness, for, as we have already seen, everything is ours if we are Christ's." John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 43–44.

"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5)

III. HUMBLE THOUGHTS

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." (Romans 12:3)

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

- Who is God?

"Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool... (Isaiah 66:1)

- Who am I?

“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)

- Who are others?

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:4–8)

“But how much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it; if you could really look at other men with common curiosity and pleasure; if you could see them walking as they are in their sunny selfishness and their virile indifference! You would begin to be interested in them, because they were not interested in you. You would break out of this tiny and tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourself under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers.” G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 12–13.

“Then let me go further; the man who is meek is not even sensitive about himself. He is not always watching himself and his own interests. He is not always on the defensive. We all know about this, do we not? Is it not one of the greatest curses in life as a result of the fall—this sensitivity about self? We spend the whole of our lives watching ourselves. But when a man becomes meek he has finished with all that; he no longer worries about himself and what other people say. To be truly meek means we no longer protect ourselves, because we see there is nothing worth defending. So we are not on the defensive; all that is gone. The man who is truly meek never pities himself, he is never sorry for himself. He never talks to himself and says, 'You are having a

hard time, how unkind these people are not to understand you'. He never thinks: 'How wonderful I really am, if only other people gave me a chance.' Self-pity! What hours and years we waste in this! But the man who has become meek has finished with all that. To be meek, in other words, means that you have finished with yourself altogether, and you come to see you have no rights or deserts at all. You come to realize that nobody can harm you. John Bunyan puts it perfectly: 'He that is down need fear no fall.' When a man truly sees himself, he knows nobody can say anything about him that is too bad. You need not worry about what men may say or do; you know you deserve it all and more. Once again, therefore, I would define meekness like this. The man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do. That, it seems to me, is its essential quality." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 69.

IV. HUMBLE WORDS

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."
(Ephesians 4:29)

a. Humility grows gratitude

"I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers..."
(Ephesians 1:16)

"The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:5-6)

"I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day." (2 Timothy 1:3)

b. Humility gives encouragement

“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” (Romans 1:11–12)

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

c. Humility asks questions

V. HUMBLE ACTIONS

“Meekness is quite compatible with great strength and ability as humans measure strength, but whatever strength or weakness the meek person has is accompanied by humility and a genuine dependence on God. True meekness may be a quality of the strong, those who could assert themselves but choose not to do so. The strong who qualify for this blessing are the strong who decline to domineer. Self-assertion is never a Christian virtue; rather, it is Christian to be busy in lowly service and to refuse to engage in the conduct that merely advances one's personal aims.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 99.

a. Serve joyfully

“But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” (Matthew 20:25–28)

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Galatians 5:13)

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10–11)

b. Welcome correction

“Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.” (Psalm 141:5)

“Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.” (Proverbs 19:25)

“It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.” (Ecclesiastes 7:5)

VI. CONCLUSION

“At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend.” John Stott, in CJ Mahaney, *Humility*, 29.



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