

Becoming “Meek and Lowly in Heart”

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I will never forget the first time Jeff tried to kiss me. We were standing in the entryway of my home when my mother unexpectedly walked into the room and caught him in the act. Jeff, being the fast thinker he is, said, “Hi, Sister Terry. Pat and I were just trading gum.”

Later my mother, in retelling the incident to my father, said, “Jeff’s confidence in a difficult situation amazes me. The fact that he can think that fast on his feet will certainly ensure his success.”

My father smiled at me and said, “Confidence is a great blessing to anyone who has it. But Jeff is also smart enough to know what to have confidence in. Both of you need to remember that your greatest strength and surest success will come through *humility* and dependence upon the Lord.”

I have thought a lot about my father’s wisdom, especially now when it seems our society appears to value success and the whole self-image package at almost any price.

Meekness and lowliness in heart are certainly not characteristics any contemporary young urban professional—an honest-to-goodness “Yuppy”—would want to claim. Instead, it seems that these young men and women want to be regarded as totally confident in manner, dependent upon no one, assertive,

and excessively protective of their image of self—in short, one who is *always* on the move *up*.

Yet so much that the scriptures teach us suggests that we ought to be on our way *down*, down into the depths of humility, stripped of our pride and our vanity, and, yes, stripped of a lot of our Yuppy-like materialism. Listen to this from the Savior:

But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

For [who] is greater, he that sitteth at [the table], or he that serveth? is [it] not he that sitteth at [the table]? but I am among you as he that serveth. [Luke 22:26–27]

It doesn’t sound as if the Lord has called us to astonish the world by marvelous enterprise, but he has said, “[Come] learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve has told us being meek and lowly of heart does not mean being used or abused—or being a “doormat” for others. “Meekness,”

Patricia T. Holland, wife of Jeffrey R. Holland, gave this devotional address at Brigham Young University on 21 January 1986.

he says, “is more than self-restraint; it is the *presentation of self* in a posture of kindness and gentleness, reflecting certitude, strength, serenity, and a healthy self-esteem and self-control” (“Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship,” *Ensign*, March 1983, p. 71; emphasis added).

In a recent episode of “Family Ties,” Michael J. Fox’s character, Alex Keaton, who is hardly your classic example of meekness and lowliness of heart, was explaining to his younger sister Jennifer why he had agreed to help her with a homework assignment. They were, he said in effect, true Yuppies at heart—solid competitors on their way up.

“When you were four years old,” he told Jennifer, “I watched you making sand castles with your friend Brucie. Brucie made a beautiful castle and your mound looked like the servants’ quarters. You were mad that he had made a better castle, and so you told him that the ice cream man was coming. Once Brucie looked away, you crushed his castle.”

“See, Jennifer,” Alex said, “you are like me. You will do anything to get ahead, even if it means crushing your best friend’s castle. I am proud of you.”

Of course, Alex on that show is something of a spoof, a caricature of materialistic upward mobility. But let’s take him at face value for a moment. Why is it so necessary always to be on top of the ladder and to be regarded by *others* as successful? Why is it so terrible to admit that we do have weaknesses or to admit that we do make mistakes and are not always as competent as we would like to be?

President Ezra Taft Benson warns us that one of Satan’s greatest tools is pride, which can “cause a man or a woman to center so much attention on self that he or she becomes insensitive to their Creator or fellow beings” (“This Is a Day of Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 34).

Satan uses that very delicate line between self-confidence and pride to blind us. He can keep us so frenzied in our efforts to protect

our self-esteem that we are blinded to the one quality that would assure it—true dependence upon the Lord.

The Lord reveals his secrets to the meek, for they are “easy to be entreated” (Alma 7:23). Indeed, I have come to realize that my own personal promptings from the Lord most often occur when I have been brought down into the depths of humility and suddenly feel a lot less confident in my own ability and much more dependent upon the Lord. He certainly uses my pain as his megaphone for an otherwise dull ear. I am beginning to see that the very experiences I would have chosen to run away from at the time have really been the major motivational turning points in my life. Perhaps this is the reason President Spencer W. Kimball, who achieved so much success through humility, said he worked on that challenge every single day of his life. He knew that if we were to achieve success in this life and eternal life in the world to come, we would need to become totally dependent upon the Lord.

When asked how to remain humble, President Kimball offered this formula:

First, you evaluate yourself. What am I? I am the circle. I am the hole in the doughnut. I would be nothing without the Lord. My breath, my brains, my hearing, my sight, my locomotion, my everything depends upon the Lord. That is the first step and then we pray, and pray often, and we will not get up from our knees until we have communicated. The line may be down; we may have let it fall to pieces, but I will not get up from my knees until I have established communication—if it is twenty minutes, if it is all night like Enos. . . . If it takes all day long, you stay on your knees until your unhumbleness has dissipated, until you feel the humble spirit and realize, “I could die this minute if it were not for the Lord’s good grace. I am dependent upon him—totally dependent upon him.”

[TSWK pp. 233–34]

That kind of counsel may not sound like something Alex Keaton can handle, but perhaps the rest of us could give it a try.

It seems very clear to me that if we can have much more confidence in the presence of God, then we will not be nearly so dependent upon nor need the approval, the acceptance, and the admiration of men. And we remind young Alex what the Lord has promised in return, “I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and great shall be your blessing—yea, even more than if you should obtain treasures of earth” (D&C 19:38).

May I share with you the greatest testimony I have of this truth. I have silently watched over the years as the confidence in the young man who once tried to kiss me has turned from

youthful courage to perfect faith and total dependence upon the Lord. He has always gone to the Lord for help, but never more than now—and never more than for *you*. And even though he is getting a bit lumpy, graying at the temples, and retaining more of his laugh wrinkles, his lowliness of heart makes him beautiful to me.

It is my prayer that we might have eyes that really see how pride can destroy our peace. And that our ears might really hear when he calls, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find *rest* unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29; emphasis added). Of that I bear testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.