

# The Irreplaceable Quality of Humility

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One of the Desert Fathers once noted that “Humans need humility and the fear of God, like the breath that issues from their nostrils.” And when it comes to being a lead worshipper, the heart standard of humility is just as irreplaceable a quality.

For any type of ministry, humility is the posture of heart that recognizes that God and God alone can do powerful and meaningful things. Great is the temptation to think that you yourself had something to do with a particularly poignant moment in a worship time. Especially if those poignant moments seem to come quite regularly. It’s easy to slip into thinking “Well, it keeps happening when I’m leading... it must have something to do with me!” Dangerous thoughts. Next thing we know, we’re praying less, preparing less and generally less dependent. As Darlene Zschech wisely puts it:

“Momentum can be your best friend. It’s like the breath of God causing one day to be more valuable and worthwhile than a thousand...But you can abuse that momentum if you stop digging for the gold that gave you that momentum in the first place. Momentum can give you a false sense of security... ‘We can do it’... But at what cost? Before we know it, we’ve abused the privilege and lost sight of the higher call.” [*extract taken from Worship Leader magazine*].

Sometimes we have a fairly incomplete picture in our minds of what a humble person looks like. Humility though is more than just a meek and mild “O, no, no - it wasn’t me, it was the Lord” response when someone encourages you in your worship leading. False humility is a tempting garment to wear, but even that involves thinking about yourself. At the end of the day, it is simply another cover up for pride. Humility only truly comes when we stop thinking about ourselves, and start to fix our gaze elsewhere.

The heart standard of humility expresses itself in a whole host of different ways. As a former US senator once commented:

“Humility is a manner, a viewpoint, an all-encompassing thing... Humility is expressed through actions... it can be demonstrated simply by stopping and listening to someone. Its essence is putting others ahead of yourself.... A real test of humility is how you handle criticism. The natural reaction is to throw up an immediate defence, a quick excuse, a spontaneous rebuttal. The humble way to handle criticism is to try to understand the reasons for the criticism, to look for what truth there might be in it.”

These great insights from the world of politics are just as poignant for our roles of lead worshippers in our churches. Humility isn’t just how you carry yourself on a stage in front of people. It’s not even what face-shape you pull when they say nice things to you. True humility starts long before you ever got up the front of the church, and touches every area of our lives. Do we seek to put others ahead of ourselves? Do we spend time with individuals, listening and preferring them? Or are we ‘only good with crowds’? That one’s a big fat red warning light. And how about when someone offers some constructive criticism of how we lead, or of a song we’ve written? How do we respond in the depths of our hearts? These are all good heart tests when it comes to the irreplaceable quality of humility.

Humility is picking up litter when no-one’s looking, just because you want to serve your community. Humility is letting someone else use your idea. Humility is wiping the toilet seat even when it wasn’t your mess, just so the next person has a more pleasant experience! Humility is listening to another, even when you yourself have plenty to say. Humility is random acts of kindness performed day in day out, for God’s eyes only. These are some of the tell-tale signs of a humble heart.

And, at the end of the day, humility cannot be mustered up, or learned by striving. It is the heart reflex of someone who has seen the greatness of God, and His amazing goodness in trusting us with the things of God. The humble person thinks about God, and because of Him, about others too. And as C.S. Lewis said, if you meet someone who is truly humble, “he will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking of himself at all.” (Mere Christianity, book 3, p114)