

# Pursue the Servant's Mindset

by Stuart Scott

When we counsel, we often encounter an underlying attitude problem to one degree or another. At times our counselees are defensive, resistant, stubborn, or disrespectful. Some debate whether or not they will obey God. Others grow poorly or not at all. Those we counsel display anger, impatience, fear, anxiety, and depression. All these are symptomatic of pride.

The fact is, we also face pride on the *other* side of the desk. As counselors, pastors, and disciplers, we often convey a neo-gnostic attitude, as if we're the experts or the professionals. Some of us talk down to those to whom we minister, rather than coming alongside of them. We may say things like, "I can't understand why you believe that!" "I can't believe you do such a thing!" or "I can't believe you think like that!" Some in ministry give the excuse, "I'm just not the compassionate type." Such counselors are not like Christ: He is full of compassion. We, too, need to exercise kindness and gentleness in ministering to others.

Some of us may believe or act as if we are the local Apostle, that everyone in the whole city with problems should call us.

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That's pride! We can be so critical that we act more like a guard dog than a shepherd. We know exactly what we're against, but people don't know we're *for them*. Some counselors emphasize doctrine and the exegesis of God's word as if they could stand alone, divorced from life. That's pride: knowledge by itself puffs up. Others of us may emphasize practical application to life without careful study of how God's word must undergird practice, thus offering mere morality without a vital connection to life in Christ. With such an epidemic of pride, the virtue of humility is perennially on the endangered list.

Consider Philippians 1:27-2:11: Conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel... Do nothing from selfishness—the word meant someone who didn't want to work, but just wanted the money—or empty conceit, literally, empty praise. With humility of mind, let each of you regard one another as more important than himself...Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus...who humbled Himself. The church in Philippi was near and dear to the apostle Paul's heart. He pleads for unity, and he teaches that unity can only be based on humility. The servant's mindset puts off the epidemic vice, pride, and puts on Christ's virtue, humility.

C.S. Lewis says, "Well, now, we have come to the center. According to Christian

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teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, grief, drunkenness and all that are mere flea bites in comparison. It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every vice. It is a complete anti-God state of mind."<sup>1</sup>

We know from 2 Timothy 3 that in the last time we will see people who are lovers of self, boastful, and arrogant. If pride *characterizes* your life, you can't be saved: only the poor in spirit are able to enter the king-

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dom of heaven (Matt. 5:3). God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Chrysostom said, "Pride is the mother of hell." More recently it has been said that the world's smallest package is a man wrapped up in himself. Pride is a root issue, deeply planted as the innermost layer of an onion. Many problems in life are just symptoms of the root issue, pride.

Scriptural references to pride abound:

- The temptation to Eve and Adam was, "Take this, disobey, and you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5).
- "In his pride the wicked does not seek God; in all his thoughts there is no room for God" (Ps. 10:4).
- "To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (Prov. 8:13).
- "The Lord detests all the proud in heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished" (Prov. 16:5).
- "Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils; of what account is he?" (Isa. 2:22).

Illustration after illustration of pride appears in Scripture. Uzziah served God for many years, growing prosperous, famous, and strong: "but when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly" (2 Chron. 26:16). Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance ruined his life, until he humbled himself before the Most High, praising the One who "is able to humble those who walk in pride" (Dan. 4:37). Belshazzar failed to learn his father's lesson, exalting himself, not God, and was destroyed for his pride (Dan. 5:18-30). The Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14 ended up praying only to himself because he considered himself so superior and right-

eous. The danger is always in thinking too highly of yourself. We never find the Scriptures saying, "You're thinking too poorly of yourself."

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul says, "What do you have that you did not receive?" So why do we boast of our achievements and abilities? Why do we rely on ourselves? In Ephesians 4:2, Paul tells us to live in a manner worthy of our calling, in humility, gentleness, patience, and long-suffering. So why are we proud, hard, impatient, and irritable? In 1 Timothy 3 we are warned not to bring new converts into leadership too quickly lest they become conceited, boastful and proud. James and Peter both say God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

Interestingly, six different Hebrew words are used for pride. All of them convey the lifting up of self, to be high, majestic, presumptuous, or rebellious. In the Greek, the words for pride occur in two different categories. One particular word group suggests the meaning of "strains the neck," "being held up high because of what one thinks he has made of himself or accomplished," "to magnify," or "haughty." The other word group in the Greek conveys a blindness, "to envelop with smoke." Throughout the Scriptures, in both languages, we find people portrayed as having a high view of themselves. While they're up there (on high) in their own thinking, they're blind. Biblical synonyms are vainglory, conceit, boasting, arrogance, sloppiness, presumption, haughtiness, being puffed up, high-mindedness, scoffing.

What's the definition of pride? If we could sum it up, it's the mindset of self, the pursuit of self-exaltation, a focus on the desire to control all things for self. In exalting himself, the person actually believes, "I am valuable and worthy. I am the source of anything good or wise or successful. I deserve the credit for whatever I achieve or acquire. I deserve love, admiration, and respect. All good things are *from* me, *through* me and *to* me. All honor and glory should go to me for my enjoyment and pleasure." Our instinct is to say, as Nebuchadnezzar did when he walked on the rooftop overlooking Babylon, "Isn't this Babylon that I have built by the power of my hands and for my glory?" Most people don't say those things out loud, but that is what they are thinking and how they are living.

That describes the arrogant. But what about those who are caught up in self-pity, who are self-absorbed with a sense of failure? Well, they are just on the flip side: they *want* to be good in and of themselves. They *want* to do things in and by their own power and might. They *want* everyone to serve them, like them, and approve of them. Both the haves and the have-nots are eaten up with pride. The whole self-esteem movement

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<sup>1</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: Touchstone, 1980.

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consists of have-nots hoping to be the haves. "Low self-esteem" is pride failing to get what it wants. The lustful cravings are still simply pride. Many, if they have God in mind at all, say He is here for them as a cosmic genie. They seek to domesticate God to their ends, or they just invent a totally different god of their own making.

Pride can be labeled as "practical atheism." Thomas Watson in *Body of Divinity* says that every man is a would-be God. Pride amounts to seeking to ungod God. What man doesn't realize is that there is no vacancy in the Trinity.

It's hard to put on humility if you don't think you have pride. The characteristics of pride can be understood as follows:

(1) Being blind, unable to see pride. Pride envelops itself in smoke unless you're in the mirror of God's word and God, by His grace, allows you to see your sin and its magnitude. Many people see the logs in other people's eyes and maybe the speck in their own. They may even say "I'm proud" and then move right on as if it were insignificant.

(2) Being unthankful. Proud people think they deserve only what is good. The result is, why should they be thankful? As a matter of fact, they may even complain because they think they deserve better. They tend to be critical and complainers. One of our professors at the seminary sized up a student, saying, "This person is a walking minus sign!" They may grumble, be discontent, see the downside of everything, be quarrelsome and divisive. No one is safe around this type of person.

(3) Outbursts of anger, withdrawing, pouting, being moody or impatient because one's rights or schedules aren't being met.

(4) Perfectionistic-type persons who want to be the best at everything are also proud. Why? Because it's self-serving. They brag and talk about themselves all the time. It reminds me of a cartoon of Garfield talking to Odie, the dog. He says, "Odie, I'm tired of talking about me. You talk about me for awhile." Some have an inflated view of their own importance, abilities, and talents.

(5) Seeking independence. Some proud people find it extremely difficult to work under someone else, to submit. They have to be their own boss. They say, "I don't need anyone. I don't need accountability for my faith and doctrine." Others cut themselves down with comments, but inwardly they crave self-sufficiency.

(6) Monopolizing conversations, being rigid, stubborn, headstrong, and intimidating, saying, "It's my way or the highway."

(7) Being consumed with what others might think of them, being man-pleasers or man-fearers.

(8) Being devastated by criticism.

(9) Not listening very well. They compose what they are going to say while you're speaking.

(10) Being unteachable. They know it all. They're superior. They can't learn anything.

(11) Being sarcastic, hurtful, jesting, saying, "That's just the way I am. That's my personality. I'm A-type. I'm dominant, choleric, lion, beaver, mule," whatever else you want to call them!

(12) Wanting to be praised or to be coaxed to serve. Unwillingness to initiate or commit to the right thing simply to please God. I like Jay Adams' answer to people who leave churches and say, "That was a cold place." He says, "Go warm it up!" Such people are just consumed with themselves, jealous, envious, not glad

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for others' successes, deceitful, covering up faults, rarely seeking help, fake, and hypocritical.

(13) Being defensive: "It can't be *my* fault!" Then they attack one another. Revenge, trivializing their sin, rationalizing it, justifying it, judging others by their own self-made standards. Often proud people rarely admit their sin or ask for forgiveness.

(14) Lacking in biblical prayer, in service to other people, and in sacrificial deeds of love. (Thomas Watson said, "We should pray without ceasing because beggars beg.") Instead, being touchy, irritable, or ultra-sensitive.

(15) Resisting authority, being disrespectful. We say he or she has a submission problem. No, they have a pride problem. It's displaying itself that way. This person is rarely concerned about the welfare of someone else. They view and judge others in terms of how others support them and *their* concerns, *their* ministry. They voice their preferences at times, even when not asked. When they do voice them, it's without compassion or consideration for others. They convey an unapproachableness. Even when someone points out a flaw, there's always a quick retort, minimizing it and moving on.

Isn't it clear that proud people are useless for God's kingdom? They are unfruitful. They tend not to learn through trials and afflictions, instead always saying, "Why me? Why is this happening to me?" Throughout the Scriptures you see the pride of position, ability, achievement, wealth and possessions, knowledge and learning, spiritual attainment, and even pride of spiritual experiences. It's like spiritual drunkenness that

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flies up like wine into the brain and intoxicates. It's idolatry. A proud man is a self-worshiper. G. K. Chesterton said we are like the donkey who thinks the shouts and the palms are for him when they really were for the Christ whom he carried.

Perhaps you have heard this illustration before. If one person calls you a mule, you might dispute it. If two call you a mule, start looking seriously for hoof-prints. If three call you a mule, get a saddle. For the proud person, it doesn't matter how many times different people say the same thing: nothing happens. Proud people minimize and rationalize. In the Bible, Satan,

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King Saul, King Uzziah, Nebuchadnezzar, the Pharisee (Luke 18), King Herod (Acts 12), and Diotrefes (3 John) are all examples of proud men.

I was talking to someone who helps people in Christian circles reconcile their differences and divisions. He told me one of the biggest issues among God's people is pride: pride lies behind strife and prevents peacemaking.

We have examined the epidemic vice of pride. Let's look now at the endangered virtue of humility. In 1 Peter 5:5,6, Peter says, "Clothe yourselves with humility" (literally translated "tie a knot"). Some suggest that Peter is alluding to when Jesus put on an apron and bowed down to wash the disciples' feet. He knelt down and tied a knot. We also are to tie a knot of humility about ourselves. It is an exhortation, which means God's grace can enable us to do it. It is a work of God's Spirit within, not a personality thing or something you stick on the outside. It's not "be like Jesus" outwardly only. It is produced with the life of Christ inside, the work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying us. But we have to work at it as well. Philippians 2 says it is an attitude. "Have this mindset."

Spurgeon said about humility, "The longer I live, and I think it is so with most Christians, the more I feel that everything must be of grace from the first to the last if I am to be saved. Grace chose us and grace redeemed us; grace calls us and grace renews us; grace preserves and grace must perfect us or else nothing will come of all our hope and desires. Our religion will be a flash in the pan, a disappointment at the last, and a failure forever."

Three hundred years ago Thomas Brooks wrote, "Ah, young men, young men, had others a window to look into your breasts and did your hearts stand where your faces do, you would even be afraid of yourselves. You would loathe and abhor yourselves. Ah, young men, young men, as you would have God keep house with you, as you would enter His mind and secrets made known to you, as you would have Christ to delight in you and the spirit to dwell in you, as you would be honored among the saints and attended and guarded by angels, get humble and keep humble."

We need that message today, don't we? It is, in fact, possible to walk humbly. I remember growing up hearing, "If you think you're walking humbly, you're not!" But that's not true! We're commanded to love, so I think it's possible to say, "As a pattern of my life, I'm seeking to be loving." It's the same thing with humility. As a pattern of your life, you can walk humbly before God. It is a motive and mindset that you display.

References to humility occur throughout Scripture. God says, "I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not give my glory to another" (Isa. 42:8). God is great; we are small. God says, "For thus says the high and exalted one, who lives forever, whose name is holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isa. 57:15). God comes to humble people.

You see the Lord Jesus displaying and describing Himself this way: "I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29). Later, He bows low to wash the feet of His disciples (John 13:3-17). He tells us to do the same. So does Ephesians 4:1-3: "Walk in this manner; put on humility." And Colossians 3:12: "And so as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."

The terms used in Hebrew and Greek for this character of humility all refer to bowing low, crouching. Bowing low used to be a sign of oppression and affliction in the Old Testament, an attitude of mind of one who bends down. It's an attitude of heart, the real you. It means to bring low, to yield, to give way to God's way. Humility is the pursuit to magnify Christ by bowing low in complete adoration and obedience. It's the pursuit of magnifying Christ, not self, realizing that all goodness, honor, and glory comes from God and needs to go to God. It confesses that anything good, wise, or helpful comes from Him and is done by Him or through Him, and the goal is for Him. Such a mind is what Christ displayed when He was here.

So how should we view others through the eyeglasses of humility? We should worship God by loving

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and serving others. The eyeglasses of pride look instead for opportunities to manipulate and use people. With pride, all is conditional. Not so with humility. Humility is sacrificially giving what is best for others. If others are unsaved, it's presenting the gospel to them. If they are believers, it's asking how we can help them in their sanctification. How can we help them be more like Jesus Christ? That's humility. That's the mindset of the servant, Jesus Christ.

I encourage anyone who is meditating on how to replace pride with humility to study the life of Christ in the Gospels. Jesus says He's meek and lowly of heart, so watch Him in action. Whatever Jesus said and did for our good was directed totally by the Father. In John 8:28 Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I am He. I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me. He who sent me is with me, and He has not left me alone. I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." It's what Paul recognized when he looked at God and man, and what God had done for man. He said, "From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever" (Rom. 11:36). Again, it's inwardly designed. It's a work of God in the heart of man. You can't put this on externally. It is God who produces it in you in relationship with Him. When someone cries out, "Oh, God, be merciful to me, a sinner," like the publican did, the Lord takes mercy and showers grace upon that individual. It is to be beggar-like in our minds. It's a daily mindset: from God and through God and to God belong all things. There's no personal authority for what I want. There's only delegated authority to accomplish God's will.

Here are ten different ways to display humility:

(1) Focus on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the author and perfecter of our faith. In the short epistle to the Philippians, you'll find the word Jesus, Savior, Christ, or Lord in 51 out of 104 verses. Paul was consumed with Christ. For Him, to live was Christ and to die was gain. His ambition, whether absent or present, was to please God. It should be your ambition as well. He yearned after knowing Christ. He focused on Christ.

(2) Be overwhelmed by God's goodness. A humble Christian will be thankful. Unthankfulness characterizes the unsaved (Rom. 1:21). Grumbling is a capital crime (1 Cor. 10:10). Thankfulness characterizes the humble believer. "Give thanks in all things, for this is the will of God" (1 Thess. 5:18).

(3) Commune with God. Be extremely dependent upon God in prayer. As I mentioned earlier, beggars beg. You will pray without ceasing. You can't help it. We need God. We need His grace. We'll be dependent

on Him in prayer.

(4) Serve others. Actively minister to other people. A humble Christian wants to be useful and fruitful. That's why we're here, to prefer others to ourselves, to share Christ with the unsaved, to help those who are saved to be built up in Christ. The humble looks for ways to serve. We won't wait to be asked, and no task will be too menial.

(5) Obey God's revealed will in all things. Romans 12 tells us that a believer is to be a living sacrifice with a mind renewed by the Spirit and word of God. Humble Christians won't be mystical and subjective but will

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apply God's word, both direct statements and indirect implications. They will seek His principles: "What saith the Lord?"

(6) Learn from others. Humble Christians are teachable. They know how little they know, so they're eager to learn. They're team players.

(7) Encourage others. Jesus always encouraged His disciples and those around Him. Paul did the same in the churches as he wrote to them. We need encouragement, reminding, comfort, and guidance every day, more and more as the day approaches for Christ's return (Heb. 3:12ff). Hebrews 10:24 says what fellowship is all about: "Encourage one another. Stir one another up to love and good deeds."

(8) Pursue integrity in private as well as public life. If it's not in your private life, you have no business exporting what you don't have. The humble life is an honest life that seeks to be blameless.

(9) Deny self by assuming no rights, living unto Christ, buffeting the body, keeping it under subjection, exercising yourself unto godliness, mortifying sins and the deeds of the flesh. The humble Christian accepts none of the "protect my boundaries" attitude that the proud person insists on in order to get what he wants.

(10) Think rightly or soberly about yourself while bowing low before God and others. John Bradford looked from his window upon the road to the gallows at Tyebourne. Day after day he saw poor, condemned prisoners being carried in a cart to die. He was known to say, "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God."

Examples of humility in Scripture abound. Abraham gave Lot first choice when they parted company

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and divided the land (Gen. 13). Moses was said to be "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). John the Baptist acknowledged that he was not worthy to untie Christ's sandals (Luke 3:16). Mary, the mother of Jesus, submitted herself completely to God's will: "My soul glorifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46). The tax collector beat his breast and prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I served the Lord with great humility and with tears" (Acts 20:19). Jesus is the standard for His people.

Consider how Jesus Himself replaces the following types of pride with His own humility.

- Birth and rank? "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55)
- Wealth? "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20).
- Respectability? "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46)
- Personal appearance? "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him" (Isa. 53:2).
- Reputation? "Here is...a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19).
- Learning? "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (John 7:15)
- Superiority? "But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).
- Success? "For even His own brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5). "He was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3).
- Ability? "For He was crucified in weakness, but He lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4).
- Self-will? "For I have come down from Heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38).
- Intellect? "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:28).
- Honorable death? "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed" (Luke 23:32).

Aren't Jesus' characteristics just the opposite of what is valued today? Without humility there can be no true repentance, no true faith, no true love and obedience. In counseling and ministry, if there is no replacement of pride with humility, no growing in lowly dependency and submission, then a person will not exercise true godliness. John Owens said, "There is indeed no better frame of heart to be attained in this life and whereby it is to the Word as the wax to the seal." That should be the state of our hearts. As wax is to the seal, so our heart needs to be impressed with the Word of God.

We can help our counselees learn to apply these

principles of humility by appealing to four areas: instruction, reproof, correction, and training (2 Tim. 3:16).

First, how can you instruct counselees? Encourage them to study God and read about His character. The sight of glory humbles, doesn't it? Watson said, "The moon has no cause to be proud of her light when she borrows it from the sun." Study Christ (Phil. 2:5). Focus on the life of Christ in the Gospels. By revealing God's glory and grace, the Bible teaches people what is right.

Second, reproof teaches what is wrong. The Bible teaches us to see our pride for what it is: sin! "Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked is sin"

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(Prov. 21:4). The life of Job illustrates the *process* of reproof. God presses Job with questions that lower Job and exalt God in Job's mind and eyes (Job 38-41). Interestingly, halfway through, Job says, "I think I'll be quiet" (Job 40:4f). At that point we might think, "Good, you got the message. Now we'll move on to the rest of the story." We need instead to linger, fully exposing and convicting pride in our own lives. The Lord says, "I'm not through with you yet. I have a few more questions for you." He goes on for two more chapters. By the end, Job doesn't say, "I'll be quiet." He says, "I repent" (Job 42:6).

Don't we tend to take too quick a look at the pride that shows up in our lives? Aren't we too slow to admit we need humility instead? We need to see and acknowledge pride for what it is: an awful, wicked abomination. It amounts to us saying, "From me and through me and to me belong all things!" How insidious! Acknowledge it as sin. Confess it. Say the same thing that God says about it and repent.

Third, correction teaches us how to proceed to make things right at the level of motives, thoughts, speech, and actions. This is not something external only. The change process does not bypass the heart. You don't break habits; you replace them by moving with God's Spirit. He touches and humbles the proud heart at the root of its motivations. If I just try to put on new thoughts and new actions alone, without replacing who I'm living for and what I want, I'm missing something great: the Lord! Paul says, "So we make it our

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goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (2 Cor. 5:9). We must come to a point where we are able to admit, "Lord, I've been thinking about *me* and what *I* want! I repent of that, at the level of motives. I love *you!*" God's word searches straight down into the heart. There's nothing deeper in the heart than thoughts and motives (Heb. 4:12). Motives and beliefs are transformed and replaced as we take to heart the word of God, with God's Spirit and other people helping us. We begin to consider how we can be useful and fruitful. It's an act of the will by the help of the Spirit of God "who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). Correction comes from inside the heart and results in Christlike fruit.

Finally, after instruction, reproof and correction, comes training in righteousness. The process continues as you *learn* humility. Enlist the help of people around you. Ask them to bring to your attention any evidence of pride in your life. Desire to walk humbly—not proudly—before God, to be useful and fruitful for the Master. Consider this illustration of what our orientation needs to be. Two men sat in the back of a church one morning after the message was given. When the pastor said "Amen," one man looked at the other and said, "Boy! I'm glad that sermon is over!" The other replied, "Actually, it's just beginning!" Pride does not die once and is done; it dies daily.

Meditate on how God wants to implant the truths of Philippians 2:1-16 in every heart. Humility makes us shine with God's glory. May our focus remain not on

ourselves but turn instead to our Lord Jesus Christ if we are to love and serve others well.

Let's pray to Him now.

Lord, there's going to be a day when thousands and thousands will say in unison, "Worthy art Thou, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power for

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Thou hast created all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created. To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." Lord, may we do here on earth what we will do in heaven: bowing low and lifting You high.

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.