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Pearl

“They that know God will be humble; they that know themselves cannot be proud.” by John Flavel (1627-1691), English Puritan Presbyterian minister and author

Introduction

A Kenyan medical student turned up on our doorstep one day at Friends Lugulu Hospital. Johnson grew up on a shamba (farm) not far away, and we knew his family. His parents were highly respected Christian leaders in the region. Student protests in Nairobi had temporarily closed the medical school. Weeks dragged into months.

“My mind is rotting while I wait for school to reopen,” he told us. “May I do some volunteer work at the hospital?” The next day he turned up in his white coat, as required in the Kenyan medical culture.

Early on, during his stay, water from a corner toilet leaked all over one of the wards. While staff diverted their attention hoping to avoid the unpleasant but inevitable task, Johnson observed
the situation, took mop in hand and cleaned up the mess. This kind and unpretentious act was quickly noted by other staff. They considered it a job for those of lower social status. And yet, this medical student, without a job description, did what nobody else wanted to do.

This young man went on to become a distinguished orthopedic surgeon and, ultimately, surgical director of a regional mission hospital. One day we showed up on his hospital doorstep, retold the old stories and celebrated the honor given to whom honor is due.

The theme of this newsletter is humility in leadership. It is a virtue that is difficult to measure in ourselves but one easily recognized in others. Two of the writers bring cross-cultural insights based on their service in East Africa and India.

May you find a story that sparks your imagination,

Judy Palpant, Editor

Plodding Through Discouragement

CMDA'S WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

by Al Weir, MD

...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1, NIV).

We had left Nigeria as career missionaries after very few years of service due to family health issues. I was struggling to find my place in God’s plan when Dr. Bill Johnson, a surgeon from California, tapped me on the shoulder at a CMDA National Convention, “I hear you want to do volunteer missions?” His team had received a request for an oncologist to come with them to Albania, and I jumped on board. I was excited about returning to international missions. God was going to use me again.

With a few months of preparation by cramming history and geography into my head, I found myself traveling with a dedicated team of healthcare professionals to Tirana. Albania had been the most rigid communist dictatorship outside of North Korea for a generation. Any religious practice had been punishable by imprisonment until 1991. Then the iron curtain fell, and a team of Christian doctors contacted the Albanian government to offer assistance. That was two years before I landed in a country where few people had a personal relationship with God, and all were suspicious of foreigners coming to tell them how to live. I was ready to introduce them to Christ and show them how to do oncology.
After introductions in the director’s office, I was escorted to the oncology hospital and met the Albanian doctors. They were disappointed. Oncology to them was a surgical specialty and I was a medical oncologist. They were polite, gave me a guided tour of the hospital, and then dismissed me into Albania with two weeks left to serve and nothing to do. All the plans, all that time wasted, another mission ended prematurely. Repeatedly, the words, “What are you doing, God?” pounded in my skull. I was young enough then to ask this as both a question and as a cry of failure.

When we as followers of Christ intentionally step onto a path where God has called, we may not discover the plan we imagined. Our own imaginations can romanticize God’s call into something that fits our personal preference, but God has an actual plan. If we are obedient, His plan will play out no matter what our imaginations, even though the path may not become the one we had envisioned. Many dedicated followers of Christ have accepted a mission from God only to be confronted with discouragement or disaster as they pursued that mission. I have no idea whether this is Satan trying to thwart the will of God or God allowing us to strengthen our faith through adversity, but I have seen it over and over. The truth for us is that we must plod on through the discouragements and complete the task to which God has called us, walking His path to His “kingdom come.”

I had failed in my past to complete a number of missions before I learned this lesson in Albania, where God let me grow my faith a bit. When I was rejected by the oncologists to whom I was sent, deeply discouraged, I plodded across the hospital compound to the Department of Hematology. There, again, I was rebuffed, this time by an angry chief who felt Americans had come to profit from Albanian difficulties. But God persisted. I told the chief, “Let me prove my sincerity. Give me a list of supplies you need, and I will do my best to return in the spring with all that I can.” That May I was able to return with $200,000 worth of donated supplies, everything on his list. The chief and I have now been friends and worked together for 27 years. A number of his associates are followers of Christ; a tremendous student movement for Christ has developed. God has done an amazing work in Albania, none of it because of me. But I was allowed to see His work unfold because I plodded through the discouragement and completed the task He had assigned.

Dear Father,

Help me to be faithful and persevere when you have called.

Amen

Humility in Leadership

by Peter Okaalet, MD

If the nurture of genuine humility is indispensable in Christian leadership, it is important to understand what one means by the word “humility.” It is equally important to understand what is not meant by this word. This latter component of our definition—the negative component—is especially needed in a day when many in the church are trumpeting a call to humility, but whose definition of the term is woefully inadequate or altogether false.

Some suggest pride is equivalent to certainty in doctrinal distinctions, whereas humility is the counterpart to doubt and uncertainty (see A Generous Orthodoxy by Brian McLaren, 36-37). In the swell of post-modernity, claims to absolute, objective truth are considered either illegitimate or the tools of domination (see The Gagging of God by D. A. Carson, 20)—those who make such claims are deemed the most arrogant. G.K. Chesterton observed this trend in his own day. As early as 1908, he wrote:
“What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert—himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason” (Brothers, We are Not Professionals, 162).

So, what is true humility? If it is not doctrinal uncertainty or cowardly passivity, then what is it? Simply, real humility is a turning away from self. Dr. Stuart Scott defines this aspect of humility well when he writes:

“[Humility is] the mindset of Christ (a servant’s mindset): a focus on God and others, a pursuit of the recognition of and exaltation of God, and a desire to glorify and please God in all things by all things he has given” (From Pride to Humility, 18).

So, where do we draw lessons on humility from? Do you know leaders in our contemporary society—within and without Christian circles—who are humble? What makes you draw the conclusion that they are humble?

In the Bible, there are people who we could describe as humble. Moses is one of them.

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

Joseph is another, he is one of my favorite personalities in the Old Testament (Genesis 37-50). This is one story worth reading again and again. Some leadership qualities I admire in Joseph: He was principled, humble, disciplined; he remained faithful to God in jail; and he never wavered from his commitment to follow Him. He showed grace and mercy to his brothers, even though they had sold him into slavery. He was wise, competent and strategic.

In closing, I am intrigued by the humble leadership demonstrated by Chancellor Angelica Merkel. “Germans Bid Farewell to her with Six Minutes of Warm Applause!” The Germans elected her to lead them, and she led 80 million Germans for 18 years with competence, skill, dedication and sincerity.

During these 18 years of her leadership of the authority in her country, no transgressions were recorded against her. She did not utter nonsense. She did not appear in the alleys of Berlin to be photographed.

On January 24, 2021, Merkel left the party leadership position and handed it over to those after her, and Germany and its German people were well positioned for a successful transition and bright future.

The reaction of the Germans was unprecedented in the history of Germany. Great numbers went out to the balconies of the houses and clapped for her spontaneously, giving her six continuous minutes of warm applause.

At a press conference, a female journalist asked Merkel: “We notice that your suit is repeated, don’t you have another?” She replied: “I am a government employee and not a model.”

At another press conference, they asked her: “Do you have housemaids who clean the house, prepare meals and so on?”

Her answer was: “No, I do not have female workers and I do not need them. My husband and I do this work at home every day.”

Mrs. Merkel lives in a normal apartment like any other citizen. It is the apartment she lived in before being elected Prime Minister of Germany and she did not leave it.
This is Merkel, the Prime Minister of Germany, the largest economy in Europe!

What an example of humility in leadership in high places!

Dr. Peter Okaalet is a physician who holds masters’ degrees in both divinity and theology from Africa International University, as well as a degree in medicine from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. On February 13, 2002, Dr. Okaalet testified before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on “The Role of Faith Based Organizations in the Fight Against HIV and AIDS,” in Washington, D.C. He was named as one of TIME Magazine’s Global Health Heroes, an honor recognized during the TIME Magazine Global Health Summit in New York, USA, in November 2005. From 1996 to 2011 he served as Senior Director, Health and HIV/AIDS Policy at MAP International. Currently, he is Country Director, SIM Kenya. Peter is married to Sarah and they have four grown-up children and four grandchildren.

Slipping out of the Spotlight

by John W. Yates, III

John Stott was said to be an architect of 20th century evangelicalism who shaped the faith of a generation. The following excerpt is from the April 26, 2021 Christianity Today article entitled “John Stott Would Want Us to Stop, Study and Struggle” and was written by one of his study assistants.

The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students conference in Marburg, Germany [convened at some point between 1996 and 1999], drew students from every corner of Europe and the former Soviet Union. John was the principal Bible teacher for the four-day gathering, speaking each morning for nearly an hour, with simultaneous translation offered through headphones in over a dozen different languages.

The translators were all volunteers, students with little experience who had courageously stepped forward to help. Recognizing what a challenge it would be for them to translate on the fly, John volunteered to meet with these students each afternoon in order to go over his talk for the following day.

These afternoon sessions became the highlight of the week for students and teacher. The eager translators asked for definitions and clarification, laughing often at John’s idiomatic English and occasionally indecipherable upper-class accent. John marveled at their energy and dedication and happily wore himself out making sure they were just as prepared as he was. When he spoke each morning, he slowed his cadence and paused after difficult sentences, allowing time for his new disciples to catch up.

Every evening, the other principal speaker, a noted evangelist, inspired the large crowd of students with amazing stories and incredible energy. English speakers were transfixed. The translators, however, were left behind and wrung dry, leaving non-English-speakers confused and playing catch-up. The talks were a tour de force understood by less than half of those in attendance.

While many leaders are known for their egos, John is rightly remembered for his humility. One of the hallmarks of that humility was his deep sensitivity to the needs of others and his tireless commitment to caring for those needs. Undistracted by concern for himself, he had the mental and emotional energy to attend to those around him.

While some leaders search for glimpses of themselves in the eyes of others, John looked into others’ eyes as windows instead of mirrors, seeking to catch sight of their hearts and minds.
On the final morning of that Easter conference, John insisted that the young translators come out of their soundproof booths and join him on stage in order to be thanked by their peers. It was the loudest cheer of the week, during which John slipped quietly out of the spotlight.

On this centenary of his birth, I pray that God would give the church more leaders like John Stott: leaders who...are humble enough not just to share the spotlight but to step out of its warm glow entirely in order to pass on the legacy of godly leadership to the next generation.

John Yates is the rector of Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. He served as John Stott’s study assistant from 1996 to 1999.

Risking Vulnerability: Cultivating Humility through Transparency

by Mathew Santhosh Thomas, MD

An incident occurred early in my missional journey that comes to mind frequently. I was visiting my boss, a senior leader, highly respected by those of us who were much younger. My purpose was to present to him a litany of challenges and complaints concerning my role.

Even before I could start with my own list, however, he began sharing challenges he faced in his own position. He even told me a few mistakes he had made. Finally, he asked me a question: “Am I failure? What do you think?” I put away my paper. No. He was not a failure. I left his office that day feeling challenged, disturbed and confused. Another day, I would tell him my problems, and I did. But this encounter left me with a new understanding of humility in leadership.

One key task of a leader is to build trustworthiness in his or her own life as well as to trust others. This requires openness, a kind of transparency that risks vulnerability. Yet, this kind of life is foundational in cultivating a humble spirit. There is a danger in doing this, especially in a cultural context of hierarchy, power distance, indirect communication, honor and shame. One might be considered weak and incompetent. Still, taking such a risk will ultimately build our own character and encourage those with whom we work.

Functional servanthood and positional downward mobility

Once, while working as a junior medical officer in a mission hospital, I was pleasantly surprised to see the founder and pioneer of the hospital functioning as one among equals of a medical team reporting to a very young leader. This senior founder assumed no positional or functional leadership role during this task. He had been there more than 30 years and had opportunity for at least another 20 years of active service.

This particular institution set time limits of two to three years on leadership roles. Once a person stepped aside, he/she was free to journey with others. The leadership role was seen as a function to be fulfilled by serving the community of the institution. Such structures facilitate a process of functional servanthood and positional downward mobility, which is good for one’s soul! As I came from an academic institution that was hierarchical and positional, this was a new and challenging paradigm.

Jesus is our ultimate example, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:6-7, NIV).
Community missiology and mission through humble service

Here we must consider two theological concepts that we know but often downplay. First, the kingdom of God is revealed through community. Second, the community engages not through power but rather humble service and brokenness.

Both in the Old and New Testament, God’s mission centered around building communities of His people who reveal the character of God and the values of His kingdom through their lives and relationships.

Jesus emptied Himself of all His power. The apostle Paul bears the same witness, and we see glimpses of this principle in the life of Moses. These examples in both the Old Testament and the New Testament show humility and brokenness that lead to dependence on God and interdependence on each other.

We know these things in theory. But when it comes to engaging as healthcare professionals, we often use our skills and knowledge independent of others. We live out the purposes of God as we understand them but still in the framework of a hierarchical team.

However, if we seriously consider community missiology and mission through powerlessness as the foundations of our life in this world, we will function differently, and these will contribute to a life of influence and humility.

- We will be intentional enablers of inclusive communities of caring, where mutual healing and growth can happen.
- We will submit to each other in the community of caring as members of the same family.
- We will see care not as a transaction between a professional provider and a disempowered consumer but rather as a journey where there is mutual accompaniment.
- We will see professional relationships differently, accepting vulnerability in knowledge and recognizing that we need each other in order to care effectively.
- We will recognize that caregivers are not only healthcare professionals, but also individuals who have families and challenges of their own.
- We will explore ways to move out of our institutions that wait for people to come in, recapturing the old paradigm of being with the people in an incarnational model of community and home.
- We will live and minister in dependence and interdependence.

In summary, if we want to lead in humility, we need to be transparent and open about who and what we are. We must cultivate “downward mobility” and “servanthood” as key values growing in our dependence on God and interdependence on each other. Finally, we must remember that we journey together as a community—one that might be weak and broken but one through which God’s power is made visible. In the end, it is not because of who we are or what we have, but because of what God does through us and what He pours into our lives!

Mathew Santhosh Thomas, MD, is a specialist in internal medicine, currently providing leadership in both academic institutions and rural missional healthcare settings. He was involved in pioneering new healthcare programs in HIV and TB and working with marginalized communities. He led Emmanuel Hospital Association, a network of 20 rural hospitals and 40 community programs scattered across North India. His other areas of interest include mentoring younger generations, leadership development and facilitating strategic planning. He currently functions as Training Coordinator for ICMDA and Regional Secretary of ICMDA for South Asia, based in New Delhi, India.

Announcements

- CMF Global is offering eight free slots at their annual Developing Health Course for healthcare professionals working in Global Health, especially in resource poor settings. It will be held on Zoom July 8-9 and 12-13, running
for half day each of these days. The course provides medical training, spiritual input and fellowship. Applicants should be healthcare professionals who are committed Christians and who are working in challenging settings. Most participants are UK nationals working abroad as missionaries or preparing to go, but there’s a desire to include others as well. Click here for further information. Please do not book a place before applying. Email globalcoordinator@cmf.org.uk for the application form or with questions.

- Alongside’s MedRetreat is an 11-day program designed specifically for healthcare professionals serving cross-culturally. It will help restore and maintain resilience as you process the stress and trauma you’ve experienced as a healthcare missionary. In addition to daily plenary sessions on critical topics, group debriefing/counseling and personal counseling sessions, there will be plenty of opportunity to unplug, relax, and enjoy ALONGSIDE’s beautiful campus. We encourage spouses and children to come as well! More information is available here.

- The new CMDA Learning Center is now available to all CMDA members. Any Christian (U.S. or non-U.S. expatriate or national) working in a healthcare setting may join CMDA as a digital member for free. Digital members may take any course at no cost. There are more than 30 courses, including topics on ethical issues, leadership, teaching healthcare in a global setting plus many more. Email cahm@cmda.org for instructions on how to join as a digital member.

- Interested in learning more about seeking a grant from USAID? The New Partnership Initiative, or NPI, is a good place to start. You can also sign up or their email update list to keep abreast of new opportunities.

- Duke University will host a five-day research course on spirituality and health from August 9-13, 2021 in Durham, North Carolina. Register early to ensure a spot. The course focuses on how to conduct research on religion, spirituality and health, and how to develop an academic career in this area. The course is open to all interested in learning about or conducting scientific research or academic work in this area, regardless of level of training. The course will take place at a location about five miles from Duke’s campus. Full scholarships are available for those residing in some developing countries, so please inform potentially interested and qualified national partners about this opportunity.

- ICMDA holds weekly webinars on Thursdays that provide useful and relevant material for healthcare missionaries. Click here for an archive of recent webinars, and click here for the upcoming schedule.

- The International Religious Freedom Roundtable is launching a global survey on the state of religious freedom, or freedom of religion or belief. They are looking for at least 1,000 people to take this survey worldwide, so please feel free to share this with everyone in your networks who have knowledge about this topic. Click here for more information and to take the survey.