



J. Paul Getty, the oil man, was a billionaire—and proud of it. He was at one time considered the world's richest man, but during the most active years in his business, he lived alone in a 72-room mansion outside London. Over a 25-year period, he had married and divorced five women. "I hate to be a failure," he said. "I would gladly give all my millions for just one, lasting marital success."

Getty gained a fortune. It brought him fame and power. But by his own admission, it did not seem to bring him happiness. His life is an object lesson for our age, which celebrates celebrity, wealth, power—and the pride that comes with it.

It's been said that pride is a mortal enemy to love, and if so, we can assume a mortal enemy to lasting marital happiness. That may be because pride, and its excessive focus on our egos, prevents us from seeing the world around us as it is, a world in which we are utterly dependent on the God who created us and dependent as well on those who, in turn, depend on us.

The antidote to pride is humility. It is an outlook on life that accepts reality. The reality is that God is the Creator, and we are his creatures. No matter how smart, how good looking or charming, how hard-working and wealthy, or how powerful we are, we are still creatures.

Humility is the acceptance of things as they are. It is seeing our place in the world, not as we would have it, but as it really is. Only the humble have a firm grasp of reality. The proud are inflated with who they think they are; the humble are content with who they really are.

Most of us think instinctively of pride as a high and humility as a low. When we're up, we're proud; when we're down, we're humbled. But humility actually falls in the middle, as a golden mean between the two manifestations of pride: the egoism that inflates our self-importance on some days and deflates our true selves on other days.

An adage used by Alcoholics Anonymous describes the way many people view themselves: "Greater than or less than, but never equal to".

This bouncing back and forth between the earth and the sky takes a toll on our own spiritual and emotional health. When we find that we will never scale the heights we envision for ourselves we become frustrated and dejected, and a burden to those around us, especially our families.

The model of humility is Christ. As Pope John XXIII put it, "the principal center of the divine instruction" is the Gospel passage: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart." In other words, this was no idle comment. It was the core of Christ's personality.

Christ not only preached humility to others, he lived it himself. Though he was the Son of God, he was born in a cave. He worked as a carpenter. He composed no great work of art; built no towering edifice; assumed no great political office. He died nailed to a cross, the fate of a common criminal. He did all this willingly. And yet, he became the central figure in world history.

His central mission was to serve others. If the acceptance of reality is the inward sign of humility, service is its outward sign. It has been said that humility is nothing more or less than the will to serve. Nothing makes it more difficult to serve God and those we live with than pride. Nothing makes it easier than humility, which opens our hearts to the possibility of serving a person other than ourselves.

There are many opportunities for service in the world, but none more important than those within the family. Christ's service was built on sacrifice. Our opportunity for humble service may mean a great sacrifice like putting a career on hold in order to tend to an ill spouse or child. It may mean nothing more than holding our tongue when criticized or helping a child with homework.

Humility is all about relationships. It is an acceptance of the reality that we are dependent on the God who created us, dependent on the love and help of those around us, and created in order to love and serve God and all his creation.

J. Paul Getty admitted to being a lonely man. He said that people liked him primarily for his money. According to one of his wives, he spent so much time building a business that he had no time to build a relationship with his family.

We don't need to be wealthy, famous, or powerful to fulfill our destiny. We just need to be humble enough to value the modest gifts we have and loving enough to share them with those around us.