

The 5 Traits Of Highly Effective Christians
A Servant's Heart

Over the years Hollywood has cranked out a flurry of disaster movies. There have been planes that are disabled in flight or crash, volcanoes that erupt, asteroids that head for earth, buildings that burn, and ships that sink.

One of those classic "ship sinking" movies, *The Poseidon Adventure*, was originally released in 1972 and just remade last year.

It's the story of an ocean liner that is capsized by a mountain-size tidal wave. When the water stops churning the boat is turned completely upside down but is still floating.

The problem is the passengers are so disoriented they're not sure how to get out. The Captain wants the survivors to stay put and wait for rescue. Finally a group realizes that the only way to get off the ship is to head the bottom of the ship because down is now up.

During their climb from the upper decks they encounter other survivors who think the plan is ridiculous. Even though everything was upside down they were so disoriented that they just knew that the way to be saved was to head for the bridge and the upper decks not the lower ones.

There is one pivotal scene in which a large group of survivors meet this group trying to get to the bottom. They ridicule the smaller group for their proposed route to rescue and then the larger group parts ways with the smaller group. One heads "down" to safety and the larger group heads "up" to drowning and death.

Here's what I want us to think about this morning. For the most part life is turned completely upside down. God says, "Do you want to save your life? Then loose it for My sake and the gospel."

This is week 4 of a 5 week series we're calling *The 5 Traits Of Highly Effective Christians*. In these 5 weeks we're looking at those traits, or characteristics, of Christians who are really successful at living out their Christianity. These are qualities that you'll find in people who take their faith seriously and have a consistent lifestyle that reflects God and His principles.

So far we've looked at Having a Biblical Mindset, Having a Heart for Worship, and being Passionate in Prayer.

This week we want to see that God's way to the top is to head for the bottom. A highly effective Christian has a servant's heart.

Here's a quote from Bill Hybel's book, *Descending Into Greatness*. He writes:

"In the vocabulary of our world "DOWN" is a word reserved for losers, cowards, and the bear market. It is a word to be avoided or ignored....it is a word that negatively colors whatever it touches. We say: DOWN and out, DOWNfall, DOWNscale, DOWNhearted and worst of all, DOWN under. And down's antonym is 'UP' -- a word in our high-voltage society that has come to be cherished and worshiped....a word reserved to describe winners and heroes. Unlike the word, 'down,' 'up' positively colors whatever it touches. We say things like: UPscale, UP and coming, UPper class, and UPWARDLY MOBILE. We believe in ASCENDING to fame, money, power, comfort, and pleasure. In our society UP is clearly the direction of greatness. From the world's perspective, it is the only way to go...just as a compass needle points north, the human needle points UP."

What does the Bible have to say about greatness? God comes like a tidal wave into our disoriented world and turns everything we're programmed to believe about "the top" upside down.

If we're going to be a highly effective Christian in our world we need an attitude adjustment. We need a heart like like God's heart. We need a servant's heart.

I. To Develop A Servant's Heart We Have To Understand God's Heart

Turn to Philippians 2 page 1043

Philippians 2 chronicals the most striking descent ever recorded in human history. It's the descent of Jesus from the highest position in the universe down to the lowest.

Philippians is what we call a "Prison Epistle." It's one of the New Testament letters that was written by one of Jesus' apostles from a Roman jail cell.

The apostle's name was Paul and he was in prison for preaching about Jesus to a culture that really didn't want to hear.

Phillipi (which is in Macedonia) was the site of the famous battle where the armies of Mark Antony and Octavius met and defeated the armies of Julius Ceasar's assassins in

42 BC. Brutus and Cassius committed suicide and the victors spent a fortune on Philippi, and granted it the status of Roman Colony which meant that it's inhabitants instantly became Roman Citizens.

In 49 AD Paul came to preach in Philippi and ended up in prison there. Despite Paul's misfortune Philippi was the first European city to accept Christianity. A church formed and now Paul is writing to the congregation.

Philippi was a great church but there was some disunity. Some people weren't getting along so Philippians 2 was his challenge to them to think like Jesus.

Read verses 5-9

If we're going to be Christ followers than it's so important for us to know how He lived His life. But to really understand Jesus you have to go back before the incarnation.

Jesus' existence didn't begin in the manger or even in Mary's womb. The one who was born to Mary is the eternal Son of the Eternal God. From eternity past He was one with the Father.

The Gospel of John puts it this way: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.* John 1:1-3

Long before the creation as we know it, the Son and the Father existed as separate persons even though they were one in essence.

But something happened. God had a plan of redemption. He created the human race to demonstrate His glory. He created them knowing exactly what would happen.

Adam chose to sin right there in the Garden of Eden. The first man choose to disobey his Creator. Sin entered the beautiful creation that God had made.

Sin entered and sin was ugly, but God's plan was to provide forgiveness for sin. God's plan was to magnify His own character and part of His character could only be shown if there was wrong to forgive.

Man's sin brough death and pain. We feel the effects every day all around us and in our own lives. But the amazing thing is God chose to experience those effects too.

The only way a perfect God could forgive is if a perfect sacrifice could be made for sin.

And the only perfect sacrifice for us was the perfect man, Jesus Christ.

So the Second person of the trinity left the indescribable glories of heaven to step foot on planet Earth. Jesus Christ, who was and is God gave up an element of His equality with the Father.

He couldn't give up the qualities of His inner nature but He could relinquish the right to outwardly express His inner nature. And even though Jesus Christ is fully God and had every right to display His attributes He willingly laid aside that right to come to earth as our Savior.

He voluntarily limited Himself to a human body. Think about that, the One who is very God of very God got hungry and thirsty. He got tired. He experienced pain, loneliness, and sorrow.

He didn't stop being God but He gave up the independent expression of His attributes of deity. Stuart Brisco tries to give a description of all of this in human terms:

“Somewhere back in eternity before the worlds were ever made, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit had a committee meeting. All three members of the godhead were there as they discussed what would happen. They knew about man's fall and they devised what we would call ‘The Plan of Salvation.’”

“This plan required that God should accept the punishment for man's sin Himself and thereby pay the price sin requires and give forgiveness freely to all who would accept it.”
“As this committee meeting held session it was decided that the Lord Jesus Christ should be the one who would lay aside all the trappings of His deity to be born as a baby, live as a man, and die as a criminal.”

I know this is hard to grab onto but think about what the Bible is telling us here. Jesus Christ voluntarily, in the greatest act of humility the world has ever known, chose not to hold on to the position that was His by right. He willfully and joyfully emptied Himself of all that His position afforded and was made in our likeness. And the suffered the ultimate abuse at the hands of His created ones and died for their sins.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name...

Talk about descending into greatness. Jesus was heading to the top and almost everyone He met along the way thought He was headed in the wrong direction.

An here's the practical application: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.* Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.

To develop a servant's heart we have to understand God's heart. Here's God wearing His heart on His sleeve. This isn't hard to figure out. This isn't God saying "Do as I say." It's God saying "Follow me and do as I do."

And isn't it just totally weird that we who call ourselves *Christians* have such a hard time living out the most basic characteristic of Christ. It's so hard for us to think like Jesus. It's so out of character for us to humble ourselves.

I. To Develop A Servant's Heart We Have To Understand God's Heart

II. To Develop A Servant's Heart We Have To Understand Our Own Heart

There's this strange phenomenon in psychological circles that says we need to love ourselves.

How many people in this room have ever heard this, "You need to learn to love yourself before you can love others?"

In fact Christians even try to use the Bible to prove that we're commanded to love ourselves.

Turn to Mark 12 page 896

The Scribes and Pharisees, who were the religious establishment in Judaism in Jesus' day were asking Jesus a bunch of questions in hopes of tripping Him up so they could discredit Him. Mark 12:13 says they were trying *to catch Him in His words.*

Jesus is just giving very straightforward answers to all their questions so we get to verse 28. **Read vs 28-31**

Out of the 660 commandments in the Law of Moses the most important is love God with all that's in you and love you're neighbor as yourself. Focus your life on God and others.

Notice, how many commandments did Jesus bring up? Two. Not three. He didn't say love God, love others, and love yourself.

The reason Jesus didn't tell us to love ourselves is because we already do. He said love your neighbor as you already love yourself.

There's no command anywhere in the Bible to love ourselves. Here's what you'll read: *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.* Ephesians 5:28-29

Notice husbands are to love their wives as they love themselves because they already love themselves. We're to love our neighbor as ourselves because we already love ourselves.

There's not one verse of Scripture that warns about being too humble. There are 93 references in the Bible to the words, "pride" and "proud." All are used in a negative context, either as a warning against pride or as negative examples of the proud. There is not one verse of Scripture that warns about being too humble, and there is not one verse that encourages a little more pride.

Here's the warning the Bible does give: Romans 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

Why do you think God has to keep telling us to love others as we love ourselves and to practice Christ-like humility? Because that's not where our heart tends to take us.

All of us have to deal with self-focus. Even the depressed person who goes around thinking nobody likes them, that they're not good enough, that they don't measure up, loves themselves. They love themselves so much they can't stop thinking about themselves.

Here's the ugly truth we have to face before we can begin to have a servant's heart. We all love ourselves first and foremost. We want to sit on the throne of our own little kingdom, our own little claustrophobic kingdom where we're the sovereign ruler. That's our nature. That's our heart.

That's why God has to break into our lives and say something totally radical like *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*

Remember Philippians is written to a church full of Christ followers. These weren't pagan idol worshippers floating around the Roman Empire somewhere. These were people who had put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.

In fact listen to this. This is verse 1 of Philippians where Paul let's us know who he's writing to. *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.*

He says, "I'm writing to all the congregation including the leadership. Including the elders and deacons." *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*

It's not going to come naturally. You're not just going to automatically think like this. So make sure you know your own heart and then grab onto God's priorities which are a reflection of God's heart.

Stop worshipping at your own throne and humbly bow before God's throne.

I. To Develop A Servant's Heart We Have To Understand God's Heart

II. To Develop A Servant's Heart We Have To Understand Our Own Heart

III. To Develop A Servant's Heart We Often Have To Suffer

No one likes to suffer. But isn't it interesting that Jesus had to suffer so that God's purpose could be accomplished? That ought to clue us in on the key place that suffering has in the scope of God's purposes.

Once we trust Christ as Savior, God's great purpose for us is that we have a servant's heart. God's great purpose for us is that all the idols be stripped away from our life. And God's not going to settle for anything less than our whole heart.

Turn to Jonah page 816

What is it that stands in our way of having Jesus' "Philippians 2" type mind? Why do we find it so hard to serve God and others? It's the idols of our heart that get in the way.

Jonah was God's prophet. He'd been specially called by God to bring God's message to Israel. That was fine with Jonah. Life was good. Then something happened that shook Jonah's peace and comfort to the core.

Look what God tells him. **Read 1:2**

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and Assyria was the enemy of Israel. God was calling Jonah to preach to his enemies. Today the ruins on Nineveh are outside of the city of Mosul in Iraq.

The Assyrians were infamous for the fierceness and cruelty. When they won a battle, which was most of the time, they would impale people on stakes and put them all around the conquered cities.

Now put yourself in Jonah's place. God says, "Leave your comfortable surroundings and go hundreds of miles away from home to a bunch of barbarians who are your countries enemies and who would just as soon split you in two as look at you, and tell them how rotten they are."

What an exciting ministry opportunity! Where do I sign up?

So Jonah ran. Jonah ran and God pursued him, not because He was short on prophets, or He couldn't raise up someone else to do the job. God pursued Jonah because He wanted Jonah's heart.

Jonah ends up in a boat in a fierce storm. The sailors say, "What should we do?" and Jonah says, "Throw me overboard." He'd rather drown than give up what he's holding on to.

They throw him into the water and immediately the storm stops.

Now here's where the amazing grace of God ramps up to an unbelievable intensity. If I were God I'd have been done with the guy. But fortunately I'm not God.

Instead God has prepared a great fish that swallows Jonah alive and God ends up saving Jonah from Jonah!

Now he's in the unbelievably terrifying position of being in pitch darkness, stomach acid burning his skin, water and sea weed wrapped around his head.

Finally Jonah prays. **Read chapter 2:1-9**

It became real evident to Jonah that he was where he was because God put him there. This wasn't just life in a fallen world.

And Jonah says, I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple. Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Jonah wasn't saying "OK God I give up. You win!"
Jonah was saying, "God here's my heart."

See what happens? We set up our idols. We crave whatever it is that we think we need; peace and comfort, people to love us, material things, success, whatever. We set up our own kingdom with our own idols.

We turn otherwise good things into idols of our heart. But God wants our heart. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, mind, and soul. He wants us to love our neighbor as ourself.

And if we don't hand over control to Him then He often uses distress to expose our idols for what they really are. They're impotent. When distress comes our idols can't do a thing for us.

Listen to this. In Jeremiah 10 God is exposing idols for what they really are. *Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.* Jeremiah 10:5 NIV

The people of Jeremiah's day had a knowledge of the living God and here they were making idols out of wood and worshipping them. When calamity comes that will do you as much good as a scarecrow in a melon patch!

And you know what? The same thing is true with our idols. People want to worship their marriage, their kids, their job, their house, their 401k and when God allows calamity to come those idols can't produce what our heart longs for. Only God can do that.

You know what the book of Jonah is? It's a portrait of the need of every believer in Jesus. Everyone of us needs our life laid bare so that we can center our thoughts, and affections, and hope on the living God.

He wants and deserves our hearts and He's the only one that can fill our hearts. And sometimes it takes suffering to change our heart from a self-serving heart to a servant's heart.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. In the life and example of Jesus Christ we have the greatest example of God's path to greatness.

The way to the throne was through the tomb. The way to the crown was through the cross. The way to exaltation was through the agony of Calvary. The way to a life lived in the power of God for us today is through humbly bowing the knee to Jesus as Lord.

It starts when I as a sinner come to the foot of the cross and say, "Lord Jesus, God who became flesh, forgive me. Thank you for taking the punishment for my sins upon Yourself. Now, Lord Jesus, change me by the power of Your resurrection life. Lift me up and set my feet on the solid rock."

That takes humility, doesn't it? That takes admitting that I'm not my own God. That

takes acknowledging I'm not my own Savior. It takes confessing that I'm responsible to Someone much higher than myself and that the way I come to Him is not my way, but His.

Then that ought to set the stage for how I live my life after I've placed my faith in Him. A servant's heart ought to grow out of my understanding of the very essence of the gospel.

He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.