

# HUMILITY

RECOGNIZING THE PEOPLE AND FACTORS THAT HAVE SHAPED MY LIFE



CHARACTER™  
**CORE**  
MAGAZINE  
BY STRATA LEADERSHIP

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# HUMILITY

C.S. Lewis describes a humble person as “not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.” We live in a selfish world. We are taught to look out for ourselves because no one else will—or more likely—we expect everyone else to look out for us. We get our feelings hurt very easily because we interpret everything that is said as if it was directed at us, even if the other person was speaking about an entirely different situation. That is the trouble with putting ourselves at the center of our own, and everyone else’s, universe—everything becomes about us and we are seldom happy for long with the results.

**Humility** is “Recognizing the people and factors that have shaped my life.” We are not self-made individuals. Yes, effort on our part has contributed to our success and who we are in life. But the support, encouragement, and help from others is key to realizing our full potential. The definition of humility has three main components:

**Recognizing.** Look around you. Take a moment to think about all of the people and circumstances that made you who you are today. When it’s appropriate, express your thanks to them for what they have done for you.

**People and factors.** Many things and even more people have influenced you over the years. Friends, family members, coworkers, teachers, and mentors have played a role in your development. It is important to also recognize that other factors have been involved—where you live, where you went to school, and the town, state, or country from which you came.

**Shaped my life.** Living life is a continual process. We are constantly being molded, influenced, and shaped by factors and people around us. My parents grew up during the Depression and that influenced how they shopped, cooked, saved, and worked. Recognizing that we are being shaped allows us to become intentional about what influences we allow into our lives.



## SHARE THE CREDIT

A humble person recognizes how others have contributed to his or her success: “I couldn’t have done it without Claire’s help.” “I’m grateful to be part of the team.” “A lot of credit goes to Jim—his creativity launched this whole project.”

- *Think of two or three individuals who made a significant investment in your life. What did they sacrifice on your behalf?*
- *What is something you accomplished in the past week? Who else played a role in your success?*

## ASK FOR HELP

Save time, effort, and headaches by asking for advice. Ask more experienced workers what a particular task requires. Ask your supervisor if there is something you can improve. Run decisions past someone who will tell you when you are wrong. Be teachable...especially when advice comes as criticism.

- *What are your particular strengths? How can your talents contribute to the team?*
- *What are your weaknesses? How can you improve or get help in these areas?*

## SERVE OTHERS

Life requires a number of unpleasant tasks. In these situations, the humble get the job done without arguing over job descriptions, drawing attention to their “humility,” or even thinking about how they are helping. To a humble person, there is only a need and the means to meet it.

- *Think of a leader you highly respect. How did that person show “servant-leadership”?*
- *How does the idea of “servant-leadership” apply to you at work or at home?*



Jim Priest currently serves as the CEO of Sunbeam Family Services. During his previous career as a lawyer, he specialized in civil rights, employment law, and other cases. He is a noted public speaker, an active member of his community, and credits his family as his inspiration.

# INTERVIEW WITH A NON-PROFIT CEO

JIM PRIEST

*Character Core Magazine recently had the opportunity to sit down with Jim Priest, CEO of Sunbeam Family Services, a non-profit organization established in 1907 which serves the vulnerable populations of Oklahoma. After our interview, Mr. Priest gave CCM a tour of Educare, a program designed to nurture early learning.*

**CCM:** Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet us at the Educare facility, give us a tour, and speak with us. Please tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

**Priest:** My name is Jim Priest and I currently serve as CEO of Sunbeam Family Services, a social service agency that has a 13 million dollar budget and employs over 160 people. Sunbeam provides services in four core areas: early childhood education, mental health counseling, foster care recruitment, placement and support, and a wide variety of services to senior adults—including Oklahoma’s only homeless shelter for senior citizens. I view my job to be the #1 encourager and developer of our employees, volunteers, and board members. I also try to be the #1 “friendraiser,” collaborator, and fundraiser for Sunbeam so that we can fulfill our mission.

**CCM:** What led you to work in the non-profit arena and, specifically, for Sunbeam Family Services?

**Priest:** I grew up in a blue-collar family in Syracuse, New York. My people were coal miners and although I grew up in a financially stable home, I was the first generation to do so. My dad always told me, “Never forget where you came from,” and that has been a song repeatedly playing in my head all of these years. I remember my family, one generation earlier, was a vulnerable family.

I knew that I either wanted to be a lawyer or go to seminary. I was the first in my family to graduate college and then I went to law school. I practiced law for 34 years doing trial work in civil rights, employment law, and insurance-related cases. For the last ten years of my law practice, I felt a calling to do something different, something that would have a wider, deeper positive impact on the vulnerable people in our community. I unsuccessfully ran for statewide public office in 2010 and then worked full-time with a small non-profit that provided substance abuse-related education while still practicing law. In 2014, the opportunity opened to lead Sunbeam and it was the perfect fit for me.

**CCM:** Who had the greatest impact and influence on your life?

**Priest:** Without question, my greatest influence was my dad, Ted Priest. He was a blue-collar worker and World War II veteran who quit school in the 8th grade to support his family during the Great Depression. He provided innumerable “wise sayings” (as he called them)—really “life advice” to me over the years. Dad was seldom wrong and never in doubt. He set high expectations for me but consistently communicated his belief that I could meet those expectations. He taught me to value every single person whether they occupied a seemingly low position on the totem pole of life, or held high office. His most frequent saying was “I’ll be right over,” which he always uttered whenever someone called him on the phone for help. Other great influencers on me include my mom, my wife Diane, my children, Zig Ziglar, John Maxwell, Judge Irving Younger, Sir Earnest Shackleton, Albert Schweitzer, Billy Graham, and various pastors and Sunday school teachers I have had through the years.



**CCM:** We have really appreciated getting the opportunity to talk with you today. You have shared, both in the video and in this interview, your story and some very important thoughts on humility. In closing, do you have some final words of advice on staying humble?

**Priest:** There’s a funny saying I often think about: “You’re a man who has a lot to be humble about.” It’s meant as a joke, but it’s really true. I recognize that despite the many opportunities I’ve been afforded and the things I’ve been able to accomplish, there is a great gap in me between what should be and what is. In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul states, “Not that I have already arrived at my goal...forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal.” A friend of mine paraphrased this as saying “I have not yet caught what I was caught to catch.” That’s me! I also recognize that I did not accomplish anything by myself, I stand on the shoulders of giants before me like my Dad. So I always strive to keep these two things in mind: You didn’t get here alone, and you have a lot to be humble about. As a practical matter, stay alert for opportunities to serve others—even if in seemingly small ways like filling others’ coffee cups or water glasses, or picking up trash. Work on developing a servant’s heart.



# HUMBLE PARENTING

by DR. GRACE WILSON



As parents we want to make clear decisions with regard to our children and our parenting. Sometimes, this means having confidence in your choices and carrying out discipline without wavering. This confidence and surety helps our children trust our guidance and accept our decision-making. We should be careful, though, that we remain humble in our parenting as well. Pride can lead us to make unhealthy decisions or to enforce unwise discipline on our children.

## THE INFLUENCE OF OUR PARENTS

Parenting with humility means recognizing the people and factors that have shaped our lives. This requires a bit of introspection. Think back to your own time as a child and the ways you experienced your parents. What messages (direct or indirect) did they pass on to you about yourself, or your family, or life in general? Are there ways they chose to guide you that were particularly effective, or perhaps choices they made that you feel were harmful to you in retrospect? Acknowledge the ways your parents shaped you, and think critically about ways you want to continue or depart from their parenting choices. In addition, think of other adults and authority figures in your life when you were young. In what ways do you want to emulate the choices of those role models?

## THE INFLUENCE OF OUR CHILDREN

Humility in parenting also requires considering the ways your children shape your life. We have much to learn from the significant others in our life—including not just our partners and peers, but our children as well. What are the ways they have taught you about yourself or about the world? What are the ways that the act of parenting has influenced you as a person? Consider sharing some of these reflections with your children and thanking them for the ways they have helped you grow over the years. This expression of humility will likely be surprising, but influential, to them now and in the future.

Ongoing reflection about the people and factors that have shaped our lives can help us to maintain empathy and connection with those around us. This humility is a foundation for caring and respect in relationships and should absolutely be communicated—even to children!



Jenn Morris is a retired law enforcement officer, and the former training manager for Kimray Inc. She is a frequent contributor to area publications, freelance writer, and a graduate of the University of Central Oklahoma.

# HIGH OCTANE HUMILITY

by SERGEANT JENNIFER MORRIS

Early on in my career, I was fortunate to work around what I like to call “high octane” officers. These were guys and gals who left line-up with purpose, had contacts within the community they patrolled, and were doggedly determined to prevent and solve crimes.

## HUMILITY GAINS TRUST

What made them unique, though, was not just their strong work ethic. What stood out to me the most was the way they interacted with people. One officer, in particular, fascinated me. I often watched the way he talked to citizens on calls and found myself trying to mimic his technique. He had a way of quickly gaining people’s trust.

On one particular call, he asked questions to a woman who was obviously distrustful of police. After only a few minutes of interaction with this officer, the woman was comfortable enough to smile and laugh. By the end of the call, she had invited us to have some of the dinner she was cooking. The experience was amazing.

## HUMILITY BUILDS RESPECT

After working with this officer for only a few months, it became clear that what made him effective at his job and well-respected in the community was his humility. You see, he grew up—and later worked—in the same community. He knew the people and the local history and he never forgot his roots and the reason he took the oath to serve.

## HUMILITY ENCOURAGES KINDNESS

On more than just a few occasions, this veteran officer was known to buy hot coffee for someone who was cold and homeless, or a bag of diapers for a mother in need. There was never any fanfare, he just quietly went about his mission of service. He believed that small acts of kindness mattered and he lived that philosophy out in his life. He would often tell me, “There’s nothing wrong with the people around here. They’re just poor. Remember that.” And I did.

## THE HUMBLE APPROACH TO LIFE

I learned a lot from him and the other officers in my early years on the force. They taught me the mechanics of being a patrol officer: good officer safety, application of search and seizure laws, how to respond to crime scenes, the fundamentals of assisting disaster situations, working dope, lifting prints—the list goes on and on.

Perhaps even more importantly, though, they taught life lessons as well—how your attitude shapes the outcome, how seemingly small things can have a profound impact, and how people of all backgrounds understand and respond to sincerity and compassion demonstrated in the spirit of humility.

The humble approach demonstrated to me by these outstanding officers created ripples through our community that continue to impact not only those they serve, but also every officer they train...including me those many years ago. I am forever changed, and, to this day, am inspired by their humble example of integrity and service.





# THE CENTER OF YOUR UNIVERSE

by DR. VIRGINIA SMITH

Who is at the center of your universe? How many times do you think about yourself and how the things that are currently happening around you are impacting your personal happiness? Have you ever noticed that maybe, just maybe, the more you focus on yourself, the less satisfied you are with life?

## HUMAN WORTH

C.S. Lewis famously said, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.” Sometimes we misunderstand what it means to be humble. Being humble doesn’t mean that, despite being a talented artist, you should think, and tell others, that you don’t draw or paint well. It is recognizing that yes, indeed, your artwork has beauty but realizing that it is just that—a beautiful work of art. The fact that you created something beautiful does not make you any more worthy as a person. Equally, if you can’t even draw a stick figure, it doesn’t make you any less. Who you are and what you are able to do is due, in very large part, to the contributions of others to your success. Maybe your art teacher in school recognized your talent and helped you to develop it, or perhaps your parents encouraged your efforts and provided the things you needed to grow as an artist.

## INTELLIGENT SELF-RESPECT

But why is it important to realize that you are not solely responsible for your successes and failures? Too much focus on yourself not only creates dissatisfaction but also increases the amount of pressure and stress you inadvertently place on yourself. Ralph Sockman referred to humility as “intelligent self-respect—which keeps us

from thinking too highly or too meanly of ourselves.” Humility builds bridges while self-focus builds walls.

But how can we develop our humility? How can we remove ourselves from the center of our own personal universe? There are many ways to grow in humility but here are two very important ones:

**Express gratefulness.** Very few things in life are the sole responsibility of just one person. The most successful quarterbacks realize that without a talented and hard-working offensive line they could not accomplish much on the football field. The same is true of an account executive, mid-level administrator, or CEO. Where would they be without the admin who answers the phone, compiles the reports, or follows up on emails? Research has shown that people who express gratefulness to others are happier, healthier, and more successful. Verbalizing your gratitude not only builds up those around you, but also helps you internalize the experience, making it real for you.

**Don’t take yourself too seriously.** When you experience success, enjoy the moment but don’t let pride take over. On the flip side, when you fail, don’t get down on yourself. Failure is a part of life and is an opportunity to learn and do better the next time.

Being the center of the universe is way too much pressure! Developing and growing our humility will help us live happier and healthier lives—and that is true success.





Nathan Mellor has a passion for serving leaders. Through his writing, speaking engagements, and coaching, he helps leaders shape their culture to reflect their commitment to character and competence. Nathan earned the doctor of education in organizational leadership degree from Pepperdine University, and he serves as CEO of Strata Leadership.

# REMEMBERING OUR ROOTS

by DR. NATHAN MELLOR

Recently, I bought a vintage leather mailbag. Although the United States Postal Service (USPS) stopped using them in 1970, citing better and more cost effective alternatives, you can still find a second-hand one from time to time if you look.

For some, the iconic cast-iron blue mailboxes bolted down on city streets throughout the United States represents the USPS. For others, the right-hand drive, “Dispatcher Jeep” that cruised through neighborhoods for over three decades is synonymous with the U.S. Mail.

But, for me, when I think of the Postal Service, I remember a picture made of my grandfather when I was a toddler, proudly wearing his uniform in front of his home. When I look at that picture, I can hear my grandmother’s voice as she shared with delight, “Did you know that your grandfather was the first letter carrier in the state of Ohio to wear shorts?”

## SHAPED BY OUR PAST

If you have not been to Marietta, Ohio, it is a beautiful and historic place. Inhabited initially by the Hopewell culture between 100 BC and 500 AD, Marietta became the first permanent United States settlement in the Northwest Territory in 1788. In the downtown area, most of the homes were built before cars were available.

Consequently, the lots are long and narrow. Most of the homes are built close to the street and are connected to one another by

a sidewalk that I assume my grandfather walked more than anyone else in the town’s history. At one time, there were likely small carriage houses for a horse and buggy behind the modest homes. Over time, they have been replaced with detached garages linked by alleyways.

Because the Muskingum River borders the town, and due to repeated floods, the houses are usually built up higher than the road and require several steps to get to the front porch and the mailbox. I often envision these steps when I think about my granddad going from house to house delivering the mail. How many steps did he take every day on his route? How many stairs did he have to climb? What was it like to carry a heavy bag of letters and catalogs every day? Did his pace speed up when it was raining? How many times did he slip on a patch of ice in the winter?

## INSPIRING OUR FUTURE

I write about him and other members of my family, along with teachers, coaches, and colleagues often. I do so because I am grateful for how they have shaped my life. I want to be connected. While no family or community is perfect, we tend to see what we look for in life and when we look for the good, it will often emerge. I’m inspired by the idea that granddad would get up every day, whether the weather was good or bad, when he felt great or when his body was sore and tired, he would carry his heavy satchel from house to house.

Consequently, I carry a leather bag that says “U.S. Mail” on the front to remember and to be humbled. When I feel the weight of that bag on my shoulder, I think of what he had to overcome in his life. I think of my own parents; I think of my family and I am reminded of how life is short, that what we do matters, and how choosing to be positive can make a difference.

As a leader, taking time to remember those who have gone before us, and to recognize those that are on the journey alongside us now, helps set a tone of gratitude. A humble leader is someone who knows themselves well enough to know they did not get where they are by themselves, and someone who is grateful for the investments made by others to open doors of opportunity.



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### ON THE COVER

Humility builds bridges of relationships.

### COMING IN MAY - ALERTNESS

Being aware of what is taking place around me so I can respond appropriately

GRATEFULNESS GENEROSITY DISCIPLINE TOLERANCE ENTHUSIASM HUMILITY ALERTNESS FLEXIBILITY COURAGE PUNCTUALITY DEPENDABILITY RESILIENCE

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