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### **The Bold and the Beautiful**

The tender-hearted are loved selfishly. They always have a swarm of bee-like people hovering around them looking for what they can suck out. These hearts have a problem. It's the issue of not being able to draw their boundaries. They refuse to refuse requests made, rather pushed onto them with the subtlety of manipulation. These dear ones who love to help and build people have walls with large holes letting the authoritative walk in at anytime, anyhow. Little do they realize the burnout that overtakes. Don't you miss out on a senior citizen's counsel to a young leader: "What you are doing is not good... you will only wear yourselves out... the work is too heavy for you... you cannot handle it alone" (Ex 18:18). They keep giving out, burn for others and in the process lose sight of their own crashing-down selves.

Assertiveness is viewed as a rude trait by a large section of the world, which has wrongly understood selflessness. Though submission is a virtue by Biblical standards, its eccentricity is a lack of assertiveness.

Submission is not letting yourselves be a human doormat. We cannot allow others to walk over our personal space and time. The non-assertive take on the guilt of others and are forced to take responsibility for somebody else's feelings. They unnecessarily lose their freedom of choice and allow being controlled by their own conflicts or by the manipulation of others.

“Do not give to dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs, said Jesus” (Mt 7:6). When help and favours are done crossing limits, at the expense of the doer's health, it might lose its value. People tend to take advantage and shred you to pieces.

We are not born assertive. It has to be learned rightly and developed over time by practice. Assertiveness is not aggressiveness. The aggressive are impolite and disrespectful of the personal boundaries of others.

Assertiveness is a polite, yet firm, skill of communication and relating to the community. It's the ability to say 'no' which helps you to evade overloading your schedule promoting balance. Closely linked to self-esteem, passive communicators allow aggressive people to abuse, manipulate and make a mess of their lives. They do not defend their personal boundaries. Passive Bathsheba, with unseen motives, gave in to the aggressive King David and let him have his way with her and with her innocent husband. Why didn't she stand up for her rights and fence her beauty with barbed wires? She chose not to. Little wrong decisions often lead to big mistakes. Though God brought good out of the ashes of that sin, the consequences lay at their doorstep. Both David and

Bathsheba had crossed boundaries of personal spaces. Fear of having to stand alone, losing the handsome King's favour, and lacking the courage to voice her opinion on marital integrity tied her tongue from saying a 'no' with all clarity (2 Sam 11).

Other passive personalities like the feeling of being called 'nice and easy to get along with.' They keep their opinions to themselves especially if those conflict with other people. Asserting ourselves will stop people from cheating us or talking us into something we might disagree with. Highlighting only this aspect, I would quietly confront, "Shame on you, Adam!" Couldn't he have reasoned and refused the offer? (After all it was a fruit!) He teamed up with Eve to cross the limits God had set and allowed his better-half to overstep on his opinion on obedience. We have the right to say 'no' when other's choices are forced on to us. Aren't we also given the healthy Word-wired vocal cords to voice our opinions and stand for them? Adam hadn't yet matured in his skill of assertiveness in the scenario of sin. He kept his feelings a secret in order to 'keep peace' with venturous Eve. He let her win and tearfully hugged loss for 'her sake' which was of no worth. He appears to have feared conflict (Gen 3).

Most who are passive have their needs unmet; because they hesitate to ask. If we need help or assistance, we need to ask. The assertive express their needs in an acceptable way and live fulfilled lives.

Queen Vashti was called by the king "to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to

look at.” She refused to go, earning the king’s fury. There cannot be a better example for unhealthy assertiveness. By asserting herself unwisely, she lost her queenship. She was sent away with a warning for the womenfolk of the land. Pride clouded her from discerning when and how to be assertive (Esth 1).

Priorities in the context of assertiveness should be black and white. The ash clouds of Europe’s skies should have no place here. A man who was the hero of Jesus’ parable in Luke 14:15 prepared a feast and sent out invitations. We read that some of these guests refused to turn up because their assertiveness was dictated by jumbled priorities — one had bought a field, one wanted to try out his oxen, and one was in the honeymoon phase of marriage! They all chorused, “I cannot come... because ...!” If you are being assertive for the wrong reasons, you are going to miss the feast! Ask God for wisdom to discern when, how and to whom to be assertive so you will not lose out on any God-given opportunity.

The disciple friends of Jesus ran up to Him and informed that a crowd of sick people were waiting for His touch and to hear Him. But Jesus, assertive with His priorities, “withdrew by Himself” to a place of solitude to spend time with His Father. Christ could have been easily misjudged to have turned down the needs of the disadvantaged and downtrodden. But He knew what He did. Need will always be there. We are not called to do everything. Christ was assertive to meet His own need of receiving power and strength from His Dad, because He had placed that on top of His list of priorities. Assertiveness is a godly virtue.

Of the ten virgins who were waiting to join the banquet with the bridegroom, five were wise and the rest foolish. Jesus beautifully paints in the parable that it was the wise five who assertively refused to help the foolish five who asked for oil in the last minute. The wise, who refused, refused with wise reasoning that if they would lend, there wouldn't be enough for both of them. If you are being assertive, be backed by facts which licentiate your assertiveness. The wise have put in careful planning for the worst of times and carried extra oil for the midnight, foreseeing closed supermarkets. The foolish five probably have always had passive friends who pulled them through in the brink of moments and had never let them learn the hard way. The wise also gathered courage to say 'no,' risking friendships. Relationships should not be a yoke on us. It should give people the freedom to be real. The foolish five, perhaps blamed, cursed and called them selfish, which the wise politely ignored, for their eyes were set only on the banquet of the groom (Mt 25).

Joseph, in Genesis 39, was just a slave with an attractive personality. His administrative and leadership skills, handsome physique and integrity were challenged by his master's wife who enticed him to bed. With all his given political authority, Joseph was still a slave. He refused the invitation and reasoned with her about loyalty to God and his human authority, Potiphar. When he realized his assertive answers were cornered, and pushed beyond verges, he fled, which again was an act of assertiveness.

The world will not let go of us that easily. Repeated assertive statements and actions have to be made, sometimes. Joseph's assertiveness was based on the truth

that wrong would never become right just because sin partied with the royalty. Be assertive to sin, in whatever position you're in. It's not position but power from Above is what we need, to be firm. Joseph's assertiveness landed him in prison but "the Lord was with him...and gave him success in whatever he did" (Gen 39:21,23).

Queen Esther was cautiously assertive and walked on pins and needles when she decided to ignore the rules of the palace and went in to the king, uninvited. The king held out his scepter as a sign of favour. Esther went with the risk of rejection and God honoured that step of courage. She was secure with her facts that her requests were just and that God wanted her to voice injustice. We need to be secure trusting God and His unchanging nature to face life's challenges. She campaigned the Jews to fast and pray with her as she took this huge step of faith. Could she have been wiser than backing her act of assertiveness with prayer? God worked behind the scenes and endorsed her assertiveness. Assertive people need to combine courage with careful planning, be open to advice and willing to act. So she was (Esth 4).

Husbands, conduct yourselves worthy so your assertiveness will be respected. Wives, don't take on your plate more than you can chew. Assertively delegate. Children, "Obey your parents in the Lord." There are parents who teach according to convenience and not conviction. Discern when to disobey. Parents, be firm with your kids and don't dance to all their tunes. They have to learn to accept "no's." Students, be assertive to the pressure of peer pressure. Married couples, draw your boundaries towards your parents and in-laws and help them to respect your privacy.

## **How to grow in Assertiveness**

- Know that you have the right to say ‘no.’ You don’t have to say ‘yes’ when you mean ‘no.’ Let your yes be yes and your no be no.
- Meet with people who tell the truth and help you set limits.
- Set limits and establish consequences with the irresponsible and controlling. Refuse unreasonable requests.
- Learn to give freely to those who legitimately need help.
- Feel free to formulate and express feelings, thoughts and desires, politely and firmly in a non-aggressive way. In expressing ourselves we needn’t hold grudges and store pent-up emotions.
- Learn to manage your anger. Do not repress. Control it and talk about it in a reasoning manner.
- Value others’ opinion and express your opinion in a way that will earn respect without hurting them. Speak up and give others a chance to speak.
- Ask for help and favours.
- Gently question rules and traditions that are unfair and insensible. Jesus asked, “Why do you break the commands of God for the sake of traditions?” (Mt 15:1-9). Sabbath is made for man and not the otherway round. Christ did not tolerate business in the Temple.
- Don’t worry about voicing a different opinion from others. Stand up for your opinion and stick to it unless a rational argument makes you see things in new light.

- Accept both compliments and feedback.
- Cushion criticism with compliments. Handle delicate issues sensitively and discreetly.
- Choose non-judgmental language. Avoid exaggerations and bullying.
- Avoid physically aggressive behaviour like slamming doors, shouting and throwing things.
- Use “I” statements and own responsibility.

Right assertiveness, the Bible way, respects culture.

The best way to take this road is to first practise with friends and family. Better relationships, a growing confidence, a healthy self-esteem and an enhanced physical and emotional health are rewards of this trait. As you grow in this virtue, friction, conflict and stress will be at it's lowest ebb. Productivity at home and work would be on the rise.

Come out of the shadows and be bold and beautiful for God!