

Encountering God's Word

SELFISH Proverbs 16:18, 19

God formed Adam and Eve in His own image. But in attempting to become like God, the parents of all humankind rebelled, separating themselves—and all who would follow—from God's grace. Solomon echoes that truth, saying, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Other verses in Proverbs declare that pride is an evil to be hated (8:13), leads to disgrace (11:2), and breeds quarrels (13:10). The arrogant are humiliated when their pretensions overreach their true status. They may suffer public embarrassment in this life and certainly will go down to destruction in the life to come.

Pride uses blessings to achieve personal comfort and power.

We also have self-esteem because of a position God gives us in this life. Peter was chosen by Jesus to follow and learn from Him.

But distortion of that privilege turned to pride. By the time he had spent most of three years following Jesus, Peter boldly promised, "Even if all fall away, I will not. . . . Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Mark 14:29-31). But a few hours later that same night, Peter denied Jesus three times.

Thirty years later, as a respected apostle and leader, Peter remembered his own pride in his younger days. Aiming his words first to youth, Peter said, "Submit yourselves to your elders" (1 Peter 5:5). He used a term that was often found in a military context, where it meant "put yourself under the authority of" a superior officer. (The same word was used by Paul in Romans 13:1, where he told Christians to "be subject to" the authorities in their government.) As Peter himself finally had learned, if we want to follow in the steps of Jesus, we have to learn that neither our nature nor our position is a license to feel superior to others.

Ty Cobb is known as one of the best baseball players who ever lived. He also is known as one of the least likable players ever. He was known to sharpen his spikes to injure other players. He fought with players, umpires, and even fans. He was openly racist. His career .367 batting average may never be surpassed, but his reputation will always be tainted by his pride.

SELFLESS 1 Peter 5:5, 6

Humble people recognize that creation in God's image and a calling to His service are not earned but granted. Therefore, they rejoice in what God has made them and find their worth in being His children.

This leads to a healthy relationship with God. God

loves humility. He "takes delight" (finds something pleasing and acceptable) in His people; He "crowns the humble with victory" (Psalm 149:4). Though proud and wicked people have "no room for God" in their hearts (10:4), humble people are glad to embrace God and accept His help. More importantly, God is glad to embrace them! Peter had heard Jesus himself say, "All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). He also recalled the words of Solomon in Proverbs 3:34, "God mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). When people are full of pride, they become rivals with God for the right to sit on the throne of their lives. On the other hand, when people humble themselves, they are in a position to receive God's grace. Therefore, it only makes good sense to humble ourselves and admit that all power is in the mighty hand of God (v. 6). Then, just as Jesus and Solomon promised, God will lift us up.

Humility also leads to a healthy relationship with other people. When we recognize that who we are is a gift of God, we are more likely to see God's goodness in others. Counseling humility for all Christians, Peter commanded, "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (v. 5). Compare the similar statement of Paul, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

This lesson of humility went against the typical thinking of the day. Both Greek and Roman writers confined this word *humility*

Humility uses blessings selflessly.

to slaves and low-class people. People who could hold their heads high in society did not need to debase themselves by practicing "humility." But society's way is not God's way. Since value comes from God alone, we are free to embrace others, regardless of social or economic status. For that reason it is better to ignore social station than to use position arrogantly as a way to exploit (Proverbs 16:19).

Sammy Morris was a young man from Africa who came to the United States to go to school. When he arrived at Taylor University in Indiana, the school's president asked him what room he wanted. Sammy said simply, "If there is a room nobody wants, give it to me." In that simple statement, Sammy demonstrated a humble spirit and showed where his priorities lay.

By knowing who we truly are in God, we can have self-esteem without arrogance. Humility goes hand in hand with healthy self-esteem.