

RECOGNIZING AND OVERCOMING PERILS OF PRIDE

By Jim Mathis

Recently as I was watching an interview with comedian and legendary talk show host Jay Leno, he commented about being a big believer in low self-esteem. He explained his perspective that if he begins to think he knows more than the next person, he is in trouble. Leno also observed that if we start to believe we know everything, that means we have decided to stop learning.

When Leno was hosting “The Tonight Show,” for example, he would never try to tell the lighting people or sound people how to do their job, something he had seen some TV hosts attempt to do. He reasoned that if a person was a lighting director for a major network TV show, they were the best at their job. It would be foolish to try telling them how to position the lights.

As business leaders, community leaders or political leaders, our job is to find the best people for each role and then listen to them. As soon as we start thinking that we are the smartest person in the room, we are inviting disaster. In the Bible, Proverbs 16:18 says, *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”* In other words, pride always foretells destruction.

Proverbs 11:2 says, *“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”* It does not get much clearer than that. Pride – or boasting about ourselves or our accomplishments – never ends well. This is a consistent theme throughout the Bible, as well as in secular wisdom throughout the ages.

When we hear somebody bragging about how smart they are, boasting about how much they know, it should always be a signal to take caution. In reality, they might be just talking to themselves trying to overcome their fear and insecurities about their own shortcomings.

But some people counter with, “Shouldn’t we be proud of our work, our kids, or our favorite team?” Bestowing praise and showing pride about the accomplishments of others is not the same as taking credit that others deserve, or assuming we were the only ones responsible for any success that is achieved.

To be successful at whatever we do, we must be continual learners. The faster the world changes, the better students we need to be. Pride, however, often prevents us from learning. Because learning requires that we put ourselves in a place where someone else is the master teacher or mentor.

We must admit there are things we do not know or are not skilled at doing. As Proverbs 13:10 tells us, *“Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.”* We can always find people who are smarter, more skilled, or simply better at doing certain things than we are.

Having been an entrepreneur, self-employed person and sometimes freelance worker, I have discovered we need to spend half of our time learning and improving our skills. If we have only six hours to chop down a tree, three of those hours are best used sharpening the ax – learning to improve ourselves.

As Ecclesiastes 10:10 in the Bible’s Old Testament states, *“If the ax is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of bringing success.”* Spending time bragging about how skilled we are with that ax is just not going to cut it – both literally and figuratively.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever worked with – or for – someone who seemed to know better than anyone else about practically everything? If so, what is it like to work with an individual like that?
2. What do you think about Jay Leno's suggestion that having "low self-esteem" is a good thing, meaning being able to realize that others might be better at doing some things than we are?
3. Do you consider yourself to be a continual learner, a person who is eager to discover new insights and understanding about many things – recognizing you do not 'know it all'?
4. How do you respond to people who demonstrate genuine humility, who seem to put others ahead of themselves and recognize the value and contributions of people they work with?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 15:33, 16:5, 18:12, 21:4, 21:24, 22:4; Philippians 2:3-4; Romans 12:10; James 4:6

Challenge for This Week

The Bible declares that "money is a root of many kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10), but some theologians have suggested that pride ultimately is the basis for every sin, including the love of money. Because pride causes people to desire more and more.

Is pride an issue for you? It can manifest itself in many forms, including insisting that we know best about virtually everything. It also can involve selfishness, self-promotion, self-centeredness, and many other ways of exalting self. If you find yourself wrestling with pride – and most of us do, to some extent – find someone to talk with about this, even being willing to accept their advice and their prayers.