

Putting Pride in Its Place

Daniel 4:1-37, Deuteronomy 8:17-18, 1 Peter 1:5-6, 1 Corinthians 4:7

Slide 1

Pride is one of the “Seven Deadly Sins,” along with greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth, but there’s also a kind of healthy pride.

A pride which values one’s abilities, celebrates achievement, and motivates positive behavior.

Paul refers to this in Galatians 6:4, *“Each one should test their own actions. Then they can TAKE PRIDE in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else...”*

Then, there’s God-focused pride, faith in the idea that GOD had when he made you. That kind of pride drives us to be our best and causes us to celebrate the goodness of God in our success.

On the other side of the coin is unhealthy pride. This pride takes the form of arrogance which displays an attitude of superiority and entitlement. An example of this is self-focused pride.

Nebuchadnezzar describes self-focused pride in Daniel 4:30, *“Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by MY mighty power and for the glory of MY majesty?”*

Self-focused pride is deadly. Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t aware of its danger until he had another dream. Listen as he talks about it.

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Daniel 4:4-8a, *“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.*

When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream.”

Have you ever tried to interpret your dreams, if you could remember them? Not all dreams have a meaning, but when they do, they reflect our deepest thoughts and emotions.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was the dream of an anxious man. It caused him to be “*afraid*” and “*terrified*.”

So, in an attempt to get to the root of his anxiety, he called for all the psychic experts to come and explain it to him, but none of those charlatans could interpret his dream.

I don’t know why Nebuchadnezzar didn’t call on Daniel first, since he knew that Daniel had a God-given gift for interpreting dreams and visions, but when all else failed, he called for Daniel.

Daniel 4:10-16, *“These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: ‘Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.”*

Nebuchadnezzar knew, like the tree, his presence dominated the skyline, and his kingdom was known and feared or as the scripture says, “*visible to the ends of the earth.*”

He provided food, shelter, and protection to all in his kingdom. Everyone depended on him, and he was proud of what he had built.

But in the dark of night, that reality turned into a nightmare. The tree falls, the fruit’s gone, and everyone fled. All that’s left was a stump which turned into a man with the mind of an animal.

The dream was the nightmare of a person with self-focused pride. It’s like that of a man or woman who has built an empire in business, or experienced great success at work.

It’s like that of a mother, who congratulates herself on being a super mom, with great kids and influence in her community.

It is like that of a successful investor, who gets on the computer to congratulate himself on the growth of his investments and the security of his “securities.”

It’s a nightmare that all could fall apart, destroying even the person’s identity.

Self-focused pride takes credit for everything that’s been achieved: abilities, opportunities, wise choices, and hard work.

Yet, lurking below the surface are the things that can’t be controlled: health, politics, the economy, and other people. Anxiety rises because so much could go wrong, and everything could come crashing down.

The worst fear for a person with self-focused pride is that they or their world might fall apart. This is why Proverbs 16:18 warns us, “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*”

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Daniel knew he couldn't sugar coat Nebuchadnezzar's dream, so he spared no words in interpreting it.

Daniel 4:23-25, "Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him. This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.

Daniel gave Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation, as bad as it was, yet he also gave him hope.

Daniel 4:26-27, The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Now, God is not intentionally cruel for the fun of it. All chastening has a purpose.

We may not know why, but God was kind enough to show Nebuchadnezzar that all would be okay once he recognized and repented of his sins.

But Nebuchadnezzar didn't listen. God gave him, like He does for us, plenty of time to think about his attitude and repent.

Yet, Nebuchadnezzar refused to see the light and like Daniel told him, his world fell apart. Was it a psychological breakdown, who knows?

Daniel 4:29-33, *"Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?' ... Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."*

Just as Proverbs warns *"Pride goes before...a fall,"* we have to understand that it may not always be like Nebuchadnezzar's, but it could be just as destructive.

The "fall" could be a moral disaster, as we see so often among powerful men and women who feel entitled to abuse their power and misuse people.

The abuse stays hidden, until it's finally exposed and their kingdom crumbles.

The "fall" could be less newsworthy like a rising star in the workplace who alienates people until they rebel, or a husband or wife who exploits their mate until love dies or the family is destroyed.

The "fall" could be personal: a man or woman who builds what they think is the life of their dreams, only to find that their world is empty.

Self-focused pride leads to a fall. The troubling truth is that no one is immune to self-focused pride, in fact you may be infected with it now, but there's hope.

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As we saw in verse 27 above, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar he had two choices. He could choose to humble himself or be forcibly humbled by God.

God offers us the same choice. We can humble ourselves, or we can be humbled by human frailty, personal failure, or circumstances beyond our control.

1 Peter 5:5-7 says, *“Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace (shows favor) to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*

The Bible tells us that *“God gives grace to the humble.”* God is gracious, even to someone He forcibly humbles, like Nebuchadnezzar.

In Daniel 4:34, we read, *“At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.”*

Even when our humility is forced, God is ready to graciously lift us up. How much better, though, to do as Peter said: *“Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*

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So, how do we humble ourselves? Well, first we must recognize God as sovereign. Nebuchadnezzar did this after a time period of “seven times.”

How long is “seven times.” It’s unclear what this time period is... perhaps seven weeks or seven months or seven years, regardless at the end of this time Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses.

Daniel 4:34-37, “At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

When Nebuchadnezzar raised his eyes toward heaven, his sanity was restored. He got a grip on reality: God is God, and he was not. Then he worshipped, meaning that he praised, honored, and glorified God.

This man, who had worshipped the idol Bel and other gods, now humbly worshipped the God Who reigns over all kingdoms and power.

As long as we hang on to the illusion that we’re sovereign; that we have everything under control, we’ll be unbalanced, full of anxiety, and set up for failure.

But, when we recognize that God is sovereign and in control, we can depend on Him to work things out. That’s why we worship Him. Worship is an exercise in humility.

Worship puts God in His place, and us in our place. The kind of worship that puts God in His place is focused on His praise, honor, and glory rather than our performance.

That should cause us to question our worship. Does our worship focus on us, or on God? Does our worship focus on what we're feeling and doing, or on God's greatness?

When we recognize the power and authority of God, it humbles us, while at the same time, making us strong and confident.

The second way we can humble ourselves is to give God credit for our abilities and opportunities.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul dealt with issues of pride and superiority. Some believers were proud to be followers of Paul, and others claimed superiority because they followed Apollos.

Paul pointed out that He and Apollos were merely *“servants of Christ entrusted with the mysteries God provided.”*

Then Paul questioned their self-focused pride in 1 Corinthians 4:7, *“Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”*

Think about it... What do you have over which you had no control. Intelligence?—good genes. Good looks?—your parents.

If you were born in a country like ours and raised in a stable home environment where you learned wisdom and common sense, you didn't arrange that.

Your educational and career opportunities weren't your own doing; God gave them to you.

In Deuteronomy 8:17-18 Moses warned the people about becoming proud as their wealth increased. He reminded them that God brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and fed them on the way.

Then he said, *“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.”*

Lastly, humility recognizes that the gifts God gives are not only for us, but for others, too. Give God credit for your abilities, then direct those gifts to the good of others.

Before Nebuchadnezzar lost his sanity, Daniel gave this advice in verse 27: *“Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.”*

Why did he say that? Nebuchadnezzar was misusing the power and authority God had given him, directing it only toward his own ends.

In his pride, he thought all that God gave him was for his own benefit, not for the benefit of others.

Peter points out that we are “stewards.” What’s a steward? It’s a servant who handles the master’s resources, not for their own benefit, but as the master determines.

1 Peter 4:10-11, *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms...so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”*

Serving others is a spiritual exercise, when we place the needs of others before our own.

Paul instructed believers in Philippians 2:3-4, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

If we humble ourselves before God, we won't be brought down in shame, but God will lift us up.

Slide 5

Conclusion

In closing, we again hear the message of 1 Peter 5:5-6, *“Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”*

If God gave grace to Nebuchadnezzar, whom He forcibly humbled, how much more will He give grace to those who repent of their self-focused pride, and humble themselves by...

...exalting Him in worship.

...giving Him the credit for our abilities and achievements, and

...serving others as stewards of God's gifts to us.

1 Peter 5:6, *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”*