

How to Kill Relationships and Irritate People

"Be Full of Yourself"

1 Peter 5:5-7

Mark Vroegop

5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:5-7)

During the month of August we are going to focus on the subject of relationships, coming to terms with the fact that sin can easily creep into our lives with the effect of the killing relationships and irritating people. Each week we'll be looking at a particular issue and a significant text to figure out what God's Word says about relationships. We are to going to look at the following topics:

- Being full of yourself
- Using anger to get what you want
- Living with unresolved conflict
- Saying whatever you want
- Never being satisfied

Did you know that God's Word has a lot to say about these issues? It does. So let me encourage you to pray every week that God would reveal to you how the Word of God applies to your life. If you are in a Small Group, let me encourage you to make full use the discussion guides that we are producing. And finally, I want to encourage you to consider buying a follow-up resource, particularly the book entitled Peacemaker by Ken Sande. It is the best resource I know on a biblical view of relationships and conflict resolution.

Why This Series?

Before we get into our text for today let me set the stage for you as to why the subject of relationships is important. Why is this worth talking about?

1. Relationships were God's idea. God designed us for relationship with himself and with one another. Relationships are important to God. The Father, Son, and Spirit exist in a beautiful relationship. The beauty of the Garden of Eden was the pristine harmony of relationship between Adam and Eve, and between God and Adam and Eve. Sin has tragically

affected both relationships, and were it not for the gift of grace through Jesus, which creates reconciliation with God and with people, there would be no hope.

2. We all have relationships. It seems rather obvious but it is worth noting that dealing with the subject of relationships is something that we can use every single day because every day we have relationship opportunities.

3. Relationships provide great joy or great pain. Think about some of your happiest moments and some of the most painful moments in life. I think it is safe to say that a vast majority of them included some kind of relationship dynamic, didn't they? Relationships are loaded with great potential for God-honoring joy and for gut-wrenching pain. Therefore, it makes sense to think carefully about them.

4. We have blind-spots. We do not see ourselves clearly. Rick Warren said this about Small Groups: "If you look around your Small Group and you don't see any problem people; it is probably you." It is helpful to think and pray about these matters because we all have blind spots.

There's not a single person in this room that doesn't need help in the areas that we are going to talk about over the next five weeks. We need God's word to be a mirror to our hearts. We need to know the truth about ourselves – even if it hurts.

Pride, Humility, and Relationships

1 Peter 5:5 gives us one of the most important verses on pride in the Bible. The statement is short but very important: "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility...for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1. Pride invites opposition

There is a clear and simple warning here: "God opposes the proud." You might consider this one of the rules of life that God has established in the universe. Pride invites opposition, from God and from people. In other words, pride creates many relationship problems.

What is pride?

The word for pride in 1 Peter 5:5 comes from two words that mean "to appear" and "over or above." It means to appear or think highly of yourself, that you are better than others. It is translated as arrogant, boastful, and insolent. These three words give us at least three ways that pride manifests itself in our lives:

- Arrogant – how I view myself or what I think about myself

- Boastful – what I say about myself
- Insolent – what I say about or to others; a condescending tone

Pride is a nasty sin because it is so sneaky and deceptive. Most proud people do not think they are proud? Why? Because they are proud.

The Bible has strong warnings about God's view of pride:

- Prov 6:16-17 lists seven things that are an abomination to the Lord – first on the list is pride.
- "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate" (Prov 8:13-14)
- "When pride comes, then comes disgrace..." (Prov 11:2)
- "By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom" (Prov 13:10-11)
- "Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished" (Prov 16:5)
- "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov 16:18-19)

Why does God take pride as such a serious sin? Here's why: the proud person trusts in themselves and seeks glory for themselves.¹ So pride is a problem of trust and glory. In other words proud people are competing with God. CJ Mahaney, in his book Humility, says "pride is when sinful human beings aspire to the status and position of God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence upon him."² Therefore the motive in pride is self-glorification. Proud people contend with God for supremacy.³ That was a helpful, simple, and devastating definition for me: *pride is contending with God for supremacy.*

What kind of opposition?

The second thing that we notice about 1 Peter 5:5 is the warning that pride invites opposition from God. The word "opposition" means to arrange against, and it was used of military forces when they positioned themselves in battle. Pride calls God to battle stations.

Moreover, the word is in the present tense so that means that the active opposition of God is happening continually. In other words, the proud person is setting him or herself up for opposition from God. The proud person is continually being opposed by God.

¹ Wayne Grudem, 1 Peter – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 194.

² C.J. Mahaney, Humility – True Greatness, (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishing, 2005), 31.

³ Mahaney, 32.

Now one of the ways that God opposes people is to allow them to run their own lives, to allow their self-centered, self-seeking, and self-glorifying hearts to run wild. The Bible often calls this God "giving them up" (see Rom 1:24, 26, 28), and it is frightful judgment. Listen, it is scary thing for God to say, "Okay, you can run your life...let's see how that goes."

How does pride affect relationships?

God's opposition through letting us run unrestrained with our pride has devastating consequences on our relationships. And the reason is that it destroys the foundation of what relationships are supposed to be based upon – glorifying God. So the reason that people are peace-breakers and the reason that they are peace-fakers⁴ is because of pride. The wrong goal will continually lead to relationships that just don't work. And the reason is very simple: God is opposing you. Your pride is killing relationships.

Jonathan Edwards said that pride is the worst viper that is in the heart...the greatest disturber of the soul's peace and the sweet communion with Christ. That is true, but there is more. Pride is the greatest disturber of sweet communion with others. Does anyone like spending time with someone who is full of himself or herself? I would argue that most, if not all, relationship problems are, at their root, somehow connected to pride.

Let me give you a list of things that I think pride creates in relationships:

- Argumentativeness – "People need to know that I disagree"
- Stubbornness – "I don't need to change"
- Unsubmissiveness – "If I was in charge..."
- Interrupting – "Your need to learn from me is greater than my need to listen to you"
- Easily angered or offended – "How dare they say that to me!"
- Jealously or envy – "Boy, if I were them I would..."
- Condescension – "I have a lot to offer people"
- Overbearing – "It feels good to be the center of attention"
- Divisiveness – "There's a lot of people who feel the same way I do"
- Defensiveness – "Well, what about you?"
- Slandering – "I don't want to gossip but have you heard..."
- Not Admitting Fault – "I'm not the problem here"

But pride also shows up in other ways that are passive and more hidden:

- Fear of man
- A critical spirit of others

⁴ Ken Sande, Peacemaker – A Biblical Guide to Resolving Conflict, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004), 22.

- Overly self-conscious
- Making comparisons
- Overly competitive
- Insecurity
- Not open to correction
- Listening to this list with other people in mind

Do you see how devastating pride is to our relationships? It invites opposition from God as he lets us go our own way. Pride is an assault on the supremacy of God, and it is the source of so many problems in our relationships – it kills relationships.

2. Humility invites grace

I am so grateful that this passage doesn't just tell us not to be proud. That would be disheartening. Instead it calls us to replace pride with humility. And we find here that while pride invites opposition, humility invites grace.

What is humility?

The word translated "humble" in 1 Peter 5:5 is a very important word. It is used throughout the New Testament, and it basically means "low-lying or something that doesn't rise far from the ground." Metaphorically it means that a person's heart and perception of him or herself is not elevated; they have an appropriate view of themselves. In other words, it means that a person views their life through the lens of God's greatness. Pride contends for supremacy; humility celebrates dependency. The contrast could not be any larger.

God loves, honors, and commands humility:

- "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:2).
- "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:29).
- "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3).
- "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4).

Humility impacts relationships. It speaks of an attitude which puts others first, which thinks of the desires, needs and ideas of others as more worthy of attention than one's own.⁵ And that is not how we normally think. That is not how our culture calls us to think.

Last week in one of the services I sang a little diddy from a public service commercial that I remembered as a kid. It was connected with the kids TV program – Captain Kangaroo, and it is called “The Most Important Person in the Whole Wide World is You.” Believing and living in that song will ruin you and it will destroy your relationships. God loves humility, not pride; He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

How does God give the humble grace?

By definition, grace is God's undeserved favor toward us. It is what we receive when he forgives us through the death, burial, and resurrection. Additionally it is the empowerment that he gives for Christians to live a life that is pleasing to him. To give grace means that God continually gives the desire, power, and ability to do his will.

1 Peter 5:5 indicates that God is ready to give grace to the humble person. It is as though the humble person through God-glorifying, other-centered living attracts God's gracious, undeserved, supernatural strength and assistance. God is personally and providentially supportive of the humble.⁶ In other words, you are doing life and relationships according to his plan. Humility is the plan!

Listen, the contrast between pride and humility is so great. A few years ago I found a list developed by Nancy Leigh DeMoss called “Broken People vs. Proud People.” Listen to a few examples:

Proud People	Broken (Humble) People
Focus on the failures of others	Overwhelmed with a sense of their own spiritual need
A critical, fault-finding spirit	Can forgive much because they know how much they have been forgiven
Looks down on others	Esteems others better than themselves
Independent and self-sufficient	Recognize their need for others
Have to prove that they are right	Willing to yield the right to be right
Claim rights	Yield their rights
Unapproachable or defensive when criticized	Receive criticism with a humble, open spirit

⁵ Grudem, 194.

⁶ Mahaney, 20

Do you see how great the contrast is? Do you see how much God-honoring good can be brought into relationships if we will just take the humble path? Remember, humility is the plan!

3. Cultivate humility

The final insight that we gain from 1 Peter 5 is the command to “clothe ourselves with humility.” Peter is commanding everyone who is reading this letter to take up the garment of humility and put it on. The implication is that one is to take up this garment and wrap it around existing garments. Peter may have had in mind the moment in John 13 where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet.

Regardless, the point is that relationships in the body of Christ need to be characterized by humility. They are to be wrapped in it, saturated by it, and marked by it. It is uniquely Christian to have relationships like this.

So how do we cultivate humility in our lives? Let me give you a number of practical suggestions some of which came from Mahaney’s book on humility:

- **Reflect on the wonder of the cross and the tragedy of sin** – John Owen said, “Fill your affections with the cross of Christ that there may be no room for sin.”
- **Begin each day by acknowledging your dependence upon God and your gratitude to God.** When your feet hit the floor go on the offensive – speak truth to your heart about your need of God.
- **Practice the spiritual disciplines.** Prayer, Scripture, memorization, and journaling set your spiritual sails headed in the right direction.
- **Seize your “down-time” for Christ.** Take your commute, your run on a treadmill, the last 10 minutes of the day and use them to set your mind on the right things.
- **Cast your cares upon him.** 1 Peter 5 links humility with the practice of casting our cares upon the Lord.

These relate to what we should internally. What about externally?

- **Celebrate the evidence of grace in others.** Be encouraging to other people. Find ways to purposefully and intentionally lift others up.
- **Find ways to serve others.** Put humility into action.
- **Invite correction.** Let me encourage you to do more than just receive it – invite it. Ask for it.

We need to cultivate humility. Some time ago I replanted some grass in my front yard. It was a messy process. I first had to dig up the old dead grass, replace the bad soil with new, put new grass seed down, and water it like crazy. Every day for 6 weeks I gave my front lawn

some attention. The growth was slow, and I need to work on it almost every day. That is what cultivate means.

Listen, cultivate humility is hard work but with God's help it is possible. Pride creates so many problems, and it really does kill relationships. It really is irritating. We need this reminder because we are, to some extent, full of pride.

And we need the Word of God to remind us that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Even if it hurts.

A few years ago I was having lunch with a fellow pastor in Holland. We were having a great time talking about life and ministry. But in the course of the conversation, he wiped his brow with the paper napkin which was at our table, and a fairly large piece of napkin remained in the middle of his forehead. We kept talking, and I was hoping that the piece of napkin would fall off, but it didn't. As he was talking I was thinking, "Do I tell him about the napkin or not?" Well, for whatever reason, I decided against it. My rationale was - I didn't want to embarrass him that he had a piece of napkin on his head. So, I never told him about the napkin. He walked out of Bob Evans with a dime sized piece of napkin in the middle of his forehead.

A few hours later he left me a voicemail on my cell phone. "Some friend you are," he said. "When I got into my car and looked in the mirror, guess what I saw – a piece of napkin on my forehead. You let me walk into public like that?" Needless to say, I felt pretty bad. A real friend would have said, "Hey, you can't see this but you've got a piece of napkin on your forehead." And that is what we need this series to do.

We need the Word of God to show us how our pride is killing our relationships.

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