

Pray or You'll Become Proud

1 Peter 5:5b-7

Mark Vroegop

"...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.

Once again we are beginning the year with a special emphasis on prayer. The reason is fairly simple: **Prayer is a non-negotiable for believers and the church.** We are commanded and called to pray. It is the engine that drives the ministry; it is the fuel of life-change; it is the key to power in the church. However, prayer is often the most talked about but least practiced discipline in the church.

Therefore, I like to start each year with a special focus on prayer. We began the New Year with a 24-hour bible reading and prayer event, and we have a special time of prayer planned for each day of this week. Let me highlight the events of this week for you:

- Monday: Downtown Noon Fast at the Parish Hall of Christ Church Cathedral
- Tuesday: ½ Day Prayer Summit - 8:30 -1:00 PM at the Church
Southeast Asia / Japan – 6:30 PM at the Church
- Wednesday: Noon Fast at Church
- Thursday: Noon Fast at the Brookside BEACH
- Friday: First Friday Global Prayer Nite – 7:00 PM at the Ministry Center

I would like to invite you to join our church leadership as we seek the face of God together. My vision for these days is to simply provide a venue for you to ignite a passion for prayer by praying with others. I'd like for you to consider the following:

- Come to as many prayer meetings as possible
- Bring your entire family
- Dads, you could come over lunch with your kids
- An entire Small Group could come together
- Husbands and wives could use the time to start the year off right
- You could choose to fast a few days over lunch and give your hour to prayer

Here is my promise to you if you come: You will be motivated to pray, and our time before the Lord will not be boring! We will sing, read Scripture, and earnestly seek God's face for our lives and our church in 2010.

The message title reveals our main thought from 1 Peter 5: **Pray or you'll become proud.** I trust that you will agree with me that pride is not a good thing to have in your life. Pride is a snake! It slithers in the grass of our lives, and rears its ugly head. There are few things more unattractive than a person full of himself or herself. So we can all agree that pride is not good.

However, knowing pride is bad is not the problem. The problem with pride is knowing when you've got it. Someone has said that pride is like bad breath – everyone knows you have it but you

But what if there was something that could be an early warning signal that pride was starting to take root. Or even better – what if there was something that could actually keep pride in check.

I believe that prayer can be just that. It is a pride thermostat. Prayer has the ability to measure the extent of pride in your life. But it also has the ability to change the spiritual temperature in your life. In other words, proud people do not pray, and prayer actually works to combat pride.

Therefore, if you don't pray, you will become proud.

So where do I get this notion that prayer combats pride? I get it from 1 Peter 5:5-7.

An Important Principle

The basis for saying that prayer is critical to combating pride comes from both a principle and a command that we find in 1 Peter 5. The principle sounds like this: "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." Now if you are a student of the Bible, you will know that this is not the only place that this principle emerges.

It appears in Proverbs 3:34 – "Toward the scornful he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor." The Proverb simply says that God gives the proud (also scornful, mockers, etc) a taste of their own medicine, but he gives help to those who know they are needy. He helps the proud man be humbled by humbling him, and He helps the humble man by giving him aid.

The second place that we see this principle is in James 4:6-8. Listen to the principle and for the connection to prayer:

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (James 4:6-8)

So the principle shows up here again. But what does the principle actually mean? It means two things:

1. Proud people receive divine resistance

To be proud means you are haughty, arrogant, stuck-up, big-headed, or think-you're-better-than-everyone-else. A proud person seeks glory for himself. It is a person who wants honor, fame, acclaim, and respect that would only be fit for God. C.J. Maheny, in his book *Humility*, defines pride as contending with God for supremacy. Proud people try to act like God.

Now these three passages say the same thing: proud people are resisted by God. The word "oppose" was originally a military term that meant to set oneself in battle against. In sports we even use the word to describe the other team. There is our team and then there is the

opposing team. So you could think of it as if you were picking teams for a pick-up game of football and Peyton Manning showed up. Imagine what you would think if you were on the other team. Really! Your only hope would be that maybe he wouldn't play in the 3rd and 4th quarter.

But the problem here is that the one doing the opposing is God. He is lining up forces to challenge and oppose you. In fact Ephesians 6:13 describes the way that believers are to "stand against" the devil. So the idea is that you are one team and God is on the other. You are playing life and God is on the other team! Sounds like a pretty hopeless game, doesn't it? To make it worse, the tense of the verb suggests continuous action; God is continually resisting the proud.

In other words, God is relentless in his desire to have us trust, rely, and hope in Him, not because He is needy. Rather, because trusting in Him is the very best for us. So don't be surprised if you start getting a big head if something comes your way to remind you who you really are. God resists the proud.

There are some stunning examples of what happens to proud people in the Bible. The first is the story of Herod Agrippa I who was giving a speech to a delegation from the cities of Tyre and Sidon. According to the early church historian, Josephus, he even wore a robe made of silver. While he is giving his speech, the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not a man!" And the Bible says (Acts 12:2) that God struck him dead. Actually, it says, "he was eaten by worms and died."

The second story is of King Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 4 we read that one day the king was walking around the royal palace when he said (v 30), "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" And the Bible says that while the words were still in his mouth (instantaneously), God responded with judgment. A voice spoke from heaven and the king went crazy. He lived out in the field, ate grass like an ox, his hair grew long, and his nails were like the claws of a bird (v 33). God did all of this to humble him. Eventually, God restored his senses to him and this is what Nebuchadnezzar said:

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble (Dan 4:37)

How does God oppose us? Sometimes by He does it right away and rather dramatically. Sometimes God just gives us what we want; he gives us over to our desires and allows the consequences to speak. Sometimes he takes the joy away. God works in various ways, but one thing is very clear: God always repays the proud person.

"The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride" (Ps 31:23). Proud people receive divine resistance. Thankfully, there is another way.

2. Humble people receive divine assistance

Humility is defined as being brought low. As it relates to our relationship with God, it means having a right understanding of yourself in light of who God is and in relationship to others. In other words, you know who you really are and you value others. It is an attitude of considering others more important than yourself; it means that you think about the needs of other people.

Humility is a spirit where you know that life is not about you. Of course, the ultimate example of this in the Bible is Jesus (see Phil. 2:5-8).

Now in God's economy humility is the key to receiving special help, grace, or divine assistance. By definition grace means the provision of what one doesn't deserve. It means that here, but it also means more. It is the ability, power, or resources needed. Therefore, grace could simply be defined as God's help. The focus isn't so much on what is given, but on the fact that it is God who is doing the helping. And the only people that receive God's help are the humble.

The writer of Hebrews says that because of the work of Christ (particularly his humility), we are to come to God in prayer to received help.

16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16).

The Apostle Paul was afflicted with some difficulty that he asked the Lord to remove. Jesus' response was:

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor 12:9).

Divine resistance or divine assistance - do you see the clear contrast? It is almost as if you can imagine Peter saying, "So do you want to be on God's team or not?" The fundamental principle that Peter lays down here is that humility is a much better choice.

Prayer Combats Pride

With that principle in our minds and hearts, let's turn to how prayer creates and cooperates with humility.

Now what word begins verse six? "Therefore." So everything that follows in verses six and seven is connected to what we just learned in verse five. The logic goes like this: Proud people are resisted; humble people are assisted. Therefore.... Therefore what? Two things:

1. Actively pursue humility

Humble yourselves! Now, there are a couple things that you need to know about this word.

- It is the same word used in verse 5
- It is a command
- It is a passive mood verb, which means that we are to allow it to happen

So the call to humble ourselves is a call to actively embrace humility – to cultivate it, facilitate it, embrace it, love it, cherish it, and live it. At the center of this is the issue of control.

Notice two things in verse six that center on God's control. Humility begins by acknowledging that we are not in control. Notice the Peter says that God is in control of (1) what is happening and (2) when circumstances will change.

Humility means submitting to God's mighty hand. Throughout the Old Testament, God's mighty hand¹ is used as an expression for God's ability to be in control:

24 'O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours? (Deut 3:24).

So God's mighty hand is a statement that he is in control.

But there is also a call to trust that God will change the circumstances when He sees fit. Notice that 1 Peter 5:6 says, "...that He may exalt you in due time." So there is a promised exaltation here, but it is conditional on two things. First, the exaltation comes because of the humbling ("...that He may..."). James 4:10 says the same thing: "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." Secondly, it is on His timetable. God gets to determine when change will come. It is due time, His time!

We are called to humble ourselves, resting our trust in God's control of all events including the answer to our prayers.

Follow the flow of the text: First, a principle: The proud are resisted; the humble are assisted. Then, a call to be humble by recognizing God is in control.

How is this all connected to prayer? It all comes down to verse seven and the word "casting."

2. Cultivate humility by praying

Get this! Prayer creates humility. It sets us in the right place. It reminds us who we really are. It acknowledges our need for help.

The key is the phrase "casting all your anxiety upon him..." The word "casting" is a participle, which means that it is linked to something else; it is not a stand-alone sentence.² Casting is directly linked to the command "humble yourself." It answers the question how. For example: "Get to church, driving as fast as you can" tells you to get to church and tells you how to do it. Or "listen carefully, taking good notes." In each case, I'm not only telling you what to do; I'm also telling you how to do it.

Humble yourself...casting your anxiety. Do you see the point? You humble yourself **by** casting. Humility and casting are absolutely linked. You humble yourself by casting your care upon the Lord. And how do you cast your care upon the Lord? Prayer!

But what does the word "anxiety" or "care" mean? The word refers to anything in life that could cause a distraction, grab our attention, or wrestle our affections.

In a good sense, Paul uses the word to describe his care or concern for the church at Corinth:

28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches (2 Cor 11:28) NIV.

¹ See also Deut 4:24, Ex. 3:19, Dan. 9:15

² Both the NIV and RSV miss this point by making verse seven a separate sentence.

And it is also used for the things of life that can rob us of what is really important. In Luke 8, "cares" choke out the message of salvation.

14 And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature (Luke 8:14-15).

Therefore, I don't think it is too much of a stretch to say that "anxieties" or "cares" is the stuff of life. In other words, God is calling us to cast the stuff of our lives on to him. Psalm 55:22 says it very well: "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you..."

Humility is something that God creates in us, and He has designed prayer to be a vital part of that process. Humble yourselves by casting your care upon Him.

Prayer creates humility and strikes at the heart of pride. How does prayer do this? Essentially, prayer brings us back to the fact that God is infinite, and we are finite. It reminds us that...

- I'm not in charge or control
- I cannot make it on my own
- My future is uncertain to me
- Life doesn't always make sense
- I need HELP!

And this is why proud people do not pray! They cannot stand acknowledging that they need help. So God keeps sending them hard things to push them to their knees, but they keep refusing to ask for help. Problems, difficulties, hardships, and pain all line up as an opportunity to humbling seek God. But instead they get mad. Proud people are usually angry people because they want control!

Peter says, "God resists the proud!" Humble yourself and cast all your care upon him! God's grace comes to those who choose this path. Praying combats pride because it brings us into the presence of God and calls us to confess our dependency upon God. Prayer is saying, "I need help!"

Applications:

There are so many ways that we can make this work our lives, but let me offer a few very practical ways for you to take this home:

1. **Receive Jesus today.** The first humble prayer that you offer is the first time you'll receive the grace of the forgiveness of your sins. The problem in your life is your sin, and until you acknowledge that you need Jesus' help, you'll never be free. Stop trying to run your own life! Get on your knees. Receive Jesus today.
2. **Worship Jesus.** Without Jesus God would always and eternally be against us. Because of Christ, we have access to the Father. He has given us the ultimate example of humility and prayer. We need to thank Him and worship Him for being like that.

3. **Repent of prideful prayerlessness.** You need to see prayerlessness as your declaration of independency from God. It is not that you are too busy. It is not that you don't have time. You have time to eat don't you? What's the difference? The difference is that you think you can't live without food and you think you can live without God. Repent of that.
4. **Pray more, never less.** Oh, how I hope that I've ignited a passion in your heart to pray more. Start your list. Mark off the time. Give up a lunch hour. Get up earlier. Go to bed earlier. Watch less TV. Do whatever it takes but pray more, never less!
5. **Pray with others.** Praying with other believers is a ballast to my prayer life. I pray so much better when I have regular check-points to be encouraged by praying with other people. You learn to pray by praying with others. You don't need a new book on prayer. You need to pray with others.

And so College Park, I'm calling you to pray. On this first full week of the New Year, I want to challenge you to pray with a new level of zeal, passion, and power.

E.M. Bounds said it very well:

"It is better to let the work go by default than to let the praying go by neglect. Nothing is well done without prayer for the simple reason that it leaves God out of the account. It is easy to be seduced by the good to the neglect of the best, until both the good and the best perish. How easy to neglect prayer or abbreviate our praying simply by the plea that we have church work on our hands. Satan has effectively disarmed us when he can keep us too busy doing things to stop and pray."

Let us not be disarmed! Let us not be proud. Let us embrace humility and God's grace by making the choice to pray.

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