

Narcissists! Get Real!

Self-Destructive Effects of Pride

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Classical Greek and Roman cultures had a particular aversion to pride, stigmatizing it as “hubris,” which often indicates a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation of one's own competence or capabilities.

They made virtually all their literary tragedies a variation on the theme of the self-destructive effects of pride and its offensiveness to the gods. So, even these worldly cultures recognized through observation and experience that pride is not good for society or the individual. When individuals and /or society as a whole become excessively preoccupied with issues of personal adequacy, power, prestige, pride and vanity, they are labeled “narcissistic.”

Even psychiatrists recognize through observation and secular reasoning that narcissists are self-destructive. In his January 8, 2013 article, “We Are Raising a Generation of Deluded Narcissists,” Dr. Keith Ablow (a psychiatrist and member of the Fox News Medical A-Team) wrote,

A new analysis of the American Freshman Survey, which has accumulated data for the past 47 years from 9 million young adults, reveals that college students are more likely than ever to call themselves gifted and driven to succeed, even though their test scores and time spent studying are decreasing.

Psychologist Jean Twenge, the lead author of the analysis, is also the author of a study showing that the tendency toward narcissism in students is up 30 percent in the last thirty-odd years.

This data is not unexpected. I have been writing a great deal over the past few years about the toxic psychological impact of media and technology on children, adolescents and young adults, particularly as it regards turning them into faux celebrities—the equivalent of lead actors in their own fictionalized life stories.

On Facebook, young people can fool themselves into thinking they have hundreds or thousands of “friends.” They can delete unflattering comments. They can block anyone who disagrees with them or pokes holes in their inflated self-esteem.

They can choose to show the world only flattering, sexy or funny photographs of themselves (dozens of albums-full, by the way), “speak” in pithy short posts and publicly connect to movie stars and professional athletes and musicians they “like.”

Using Twitter, young people can pretend they are worth “following,” as though they have real-life fans, when all that is really happening is the mutual fanning of false love and false fame.

Using computer games, our sons and daughters can pretend they are Olympians, Formula 1 drivers, rock stars or sharpshooters.

And while they can turn off their Wii and Xbox machines and remember they are really in dens and playrooms on side streets and in triple-deckers around America, that is after their hearts have raced and heads have swelled with false pride for “being” something they are not.

The word “pride” in Scripture is more frequently used to refer to a very negative character trait that can be described as arrogant, conceited, and haughty. It brings disgrace, breeds quarrels, goes before destruction and brings humiliation. There is nothing positive from that perspective.

An infamous person who brazenly flaunted his power and wealth is the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who erected a gold statue of himself and required his subjects to bow down to it, and who, as he walked on the roof of his palace, said, “Is not this great Babylon, that *I* have built for a royal dwelling by *my* mighty power and for the honor of *my* majesty?” (Daniel 4:30) We all recognize that as a very arrogant and prideful viewpoint.

The most certain feature of pride in Scripture is that it precedes a downfall, and the story of Nebuchadnezzar runs true to form: Immediately after voicing his boast, he was stricken with insanity and his kingdom was taken from him. He had a great deal of false pride for something he was not.

In Acts 12:23 we read of Herod, who flaunted his royal status, prompting the people to shout, “The voice of a god, and not of man!” I’m sure he loved hearing that! As a result, an angel of God infested him with worms and he died. Narcissists beware: God will bring you down. (I am not in any way insinuating that we have any narcissists in the church, but we certainly want to avoid any tendencies toward that.)

In his article, Dr. Keith Ablow continues,

On MTV and other networks, young people can see lives just like theirs portrayed on reality TV shows fueled by such incredible self-involvement and self-love that any of the “real-life” characters should really be in psychotherapy to have any chance at anything like a normal life.

These are the psychological drugs of the 21st Century and they are getting our sons and daughters very sick, indeed.

As if to keep up with the unreality of media and technology, in a dizzying paroxysm of self-aggrandizing hype, town sports leagues across the country hand out ribbons and trophies to losing teams, schools inflate grades, energy drinks in giant, colorful cans take over the soft drink market, and psychiatrists hand out Adderall like candy.

All the while, these adolescents, teens and young adults are watching a Congress that can’t control its manic, euphoric, narcissistic spending, a president that can’t see his way through to applauding genuine and extraordinary achievements in business, a society that blames mass killings on guns, not the psychotic people who wield them, and—here no surprise—a stock market that keeps rising and falling like a roller coaster as bubbles inflate and then, inevitably, burst.

That’s really the unavoidable end, by the way. False pride can never be sustained. The bubble of narcissism is always at risk of bursting.

That's why young people are higher on drugs than ever, drunker than ever, smoking more, tattooed more, pierced more and having more and more and more sex, earlier and earlier and earlier, raising babies before they can do it well, because it makes them feel special, for a while.

They're doing anything to distract themselves from the fact that they feel empty inside and unworthy. Distractions, however, are temporary, but the truth is eternal.

Watch for an epidemic of depression and suicidality, not to mention homicidality, as the real self-loathing and hatred of others that lies beneath all this narcissism rises to the surface. I see it happening and, no doubt, many of you do, too.

We had better get a plan together to combat this greatest epidemic as it takes shape. Because it will dwarf the toll of any epidemic we have ever known. And it will be the hardest to defeat. Because, by the time we see the scope and destructiveness of this enemy clearly, we will also realize, as the saying goes, that it is us.

When pride turns to narcissism, it can very easily lead to murder.

Equally infamous as an example of pride is the pompous Haman in the book of Esther. He erupts in pride and plots revenge when his personal enemy Mordecai refuses to bow down and tremble before him. When the king desires to honor someone, Haman says to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" (Esther 6:6). He accordingly proceeds to prescribe a pretentious show of glory for himself.

As elsewhere in the Bible, though, this pride goes before destruction, as Haman is forced to lavish his display of glory on his enemy, Mordecai, resulting in his own humiliation and disgrace. Eventually, the proud villain is hanged on the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

Morally, the most common manifestation of pride is oppression of less fortunate people. Spiritually, its root sin is disregard for God or defiance of Him. The leading self-delusion of proud people is their false security in themselves and their resources. The most important thing about proud people is that God opposes them, and the most predictable thing we know about pride is that God will bring it down.

Isaiah 2:12 For the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low—

Isaiah 2:17 The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day,

Pride in the Bible is always on the verge of being humbled, and eventually brought low.

If we want to avoid being brought low by God, we must be working at it ourselves on a daily basis. We have to monitor our motivations at all times, judging our own thoughts and actions before God has to step in and, in a very unpleasant way, bring us down.

The apostle James advises us, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:10). And the apostle Peter agrees and instructs, "Therefore humble yourselves under the

mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (I Peter 5:6). Is not that what we want? We want to be exalted, but at the right time, and by God, not by ourselves or by other human beings.

This is an area of our lives we certainly want to view more closely as Passover approaches.