



Curbing Your Craving for Praise

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In 1995, following a week when I addressed a large conference for Christian workers on the topic of brokenness, I experienced a dramatic increase in invitations to speak at other gatherings. I was truly grateful and deeply awed by what God had done. But the publicity poured fuel on a fire I had battled most of my life—a craving for human applause and recognition, or what the Bible calls “love of the praise of men” (see John 12:43).

I found myself relishing what other people said about how God had used me. I was quick to pass along complimentary letters, emails, and write-ups about my ministry to others in hopes that they would think highly of me. I loved seeing my name in print and at times would take steps to ensure that full credit was given to me.

As the scope of my ministry grew exponentially, so did my battle with pride and self-exaltation. And all this was taking place as I was traveling around the country delivering what had become my signature message on humility and brokenness!

As is always the case with sin, the solution was to get my pride out “into the light.” I realized that I needed to humble myself before others.

The Danger in the File Folder

One morning I sensed the Lord directing me to write a letter to about a dozen of my “praying friends”—men and women whom I knew cared for my soul. I admitted my struggle with pride to them and asked them to pray that I would be delivered.

One of those individuals wrote back and shared an idea that had come to him as he had prayed for me:

Perhaps for a season you might collect letters of commendation, praise, and anything that could be the occasion for pride. Do you have a fireplace? If so, once a week, light the fire, and then read through at least a few of them. Then tell the Lord that you know everything will someday be tried by fire and only the gold, silver, and truly precious things will last. At that point, toss some or all of the letters into the fireplace as a symbolic gesture.

As I read this suggestion, my thoughts flew to a file in my study that contained memorabilia related to that week in the summer of 1995. In that file I had placed flattering letters, published accounts, and articles about the event, reprints of my message in other publications, and other complimentary responses.

I understood at once that the file had served to fuel my pride and had been a means of the Enemy gaining a foothold in my life.

A Bonfire of Vanity

As the Lord would have it, a couple of weeks after receiving the letter from my “praying friend,” I was scheduled to be in the city where he and his wife lived. I contacted them, explained how the Lord had spoken to me, and asked if they would be willing to meet with me when I was in town to witness the burning of the material in my file. They graciously agreed.

A journal entry I made at that time offers a glimpse into what was going on in my heart:

There is a dying involved in walking through this process—dying to be able to ever go back and reread the words of praise, dying to anyone else ever reading and being impressed by what’s in there, dying to ever being able to draw affirmation or a sense of personal worth from those flattering words.

This exercise gets to the heart of some of the deepest needs in my life. Flesh dies hard—but I know that beyond the brokenness, there will be wholeness; beyond the death, there will be a new experience of His abundant life.

In the days after I placed the contents of that file into the fire, God began to grant me an unusually sweet sense of His presence. I found my heart growing in tenderness for Him, and His Word was quickened to my heart in richer and more personal ways than had been true for a long time.

New Life from the Ashes

You may or may not relate to my particular battle with pride as a public speaker. The point is that, whatever our form of temptation, pride and self must die. Then, through our brokenness, we will experience the release of the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus and the free-flowing power of His Holy Spirit.

Making It Personal

What causes you to struggle with pride? Your looks? Your intelligence? A particular gift or ability? Find some means—not just as a gesture but in reality—to give up your desire for worldly recognition. Several years ago, when I was ready to own a home, I bought a lot overlooking a river and had a house built. Once the house was up, a landscape architect met with me to propose a plan for the property. That fall I paid the landscaping company what seemed like a fortune and then sat back to watch.