

Overcoming Self-Sufficiency

By Mark Jarvinen

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, ripped jeans and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. He is intelligent, kind of esoteric and very, very bright.

He became a Christian while attending college. Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students, but are not sure how to go about it. One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with his outlandish wardrobe and wild hair. The service has already started, so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down in the center aisle, right on the carpet. (Although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, this had never happened in this church before!)

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick enough to cut with a knife.

About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Bill. This old deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and a three-piece suit. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified, He walks with a cane, and

as he walks toward this young man, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age with his background to understand this motley looking college kid sitting on the floor?

It takes a long time for the deacon to reach the young man. The church is utterly silent, except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do. What happened next, nobody expected. This elderly man drops his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowers himself to the beautifully carpeted floor and sits down next to Bill in order to worship with him, presumably so he won't feel alone.

Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control, he says, ***"What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget."***

(James Westervelt, Sermon Central.com)

Beyond personal surrender to God, which we considered last Sunday, serving God also involves having a proper estimate of ourselves, in order to overcome self-sufficiency. We read in **vv. 3-5**, ***"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."***

In order to overcome self-sufficiency we must ...

I. Think Humbly of Ourselves, Mindful of God's Grace (v.3).

Thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought is one of our greatest problems in living for Christ and serving God. An inflated ego indicates that a person's self-centered sin nature is still in control, even though that person might be attempting great things for God. As Christians, we know from experience that the battle between flesh and Spirit is real. For the sinful self to assert itself with a prideful spirit is a pervasively human tendency, even after we're saved. Perhaps you've heard of the man who was driving down the expressway in rush hour traffic when he received a call from his wife on his cell phone. She said, ***"Honey, you need to be careful driving home because I just heard on the news that some dork is driving in the wrong direction on the same road you travel home on."*** To which the husband responded, ***"Yeah, I know, It's not just one dork driving the wrong way; there are hundreds of them!"*** That's how oblivious we can be with regard to our sinful nature asserting itself.

Have you ever been around someone who always thinks they're right, and who boasts and brags about their abilities? Never forget this truth: God uses us simply because He wants to, not because we deserve it. It's all by His grace. Therefore, we shouldn't think too highly of ourselves. Paul was right when he said, in ***1 Corinthians 15:9-10 – "For I am the least of the apostles But***

by the grace of God I am what I am,” In his excellent book, Transforming Grace, Jerry Bridges accents this same point:

We are saved by grace, but we are living by the "sweat" of our own performance. . . . We seem to believe success in the Christian life (however we define success) is basically up to us: our commitment, our discipline, and our zeal, with some help from God along the way. We give lip service to the attitude of the apostle Paul, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10), but our unspoken motto is, "God helps those who help themselves."

Similarly, in his letter to the Philippians Paul admonishes Christians to – ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves”*** (Philippians 2:3). This is the attitude with which we are to serve God and others.

II. Celebrate the Diversity of Gifts in the Church (v.4)

In overcoming self-sufficiency, we must keep in mind that just as the different parts of our bodies have different functions, so too, in the Church of Jesus Christ we are one body, but each of us have been given different gifts and roles. We can't accomplish God's mission alone. If God's purposes are to be accomplished, everyone in the church is important. There's no need to be jealous of another persons gifts, because if you belong to the body of Christ, you have gifts of your own to be used for the common good. **I Corinthians 12:7** says, ***“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”***

Every Christian is uniquely shaped for ministry. Consider the acrostic **S-H-A-P-E**, developed by Rick Warren of Saddleback Community Church in Southern California, a tool that has helped scores of Christians identify their spiritual gifts and find their niche of service in the Church.

Spiritual Gifts (What we do supernaturally)

Hear (Where or among whom you do it – your passion)

Abilities (Innate talents & aptitudes)

Personality (How you do it – your personal style)

Experiences (Your spiritual resume)

- **Spiritual Gifts** – An analysis of Scripture points to gifts God gives to **communicate God's Word**, such as preaching and evangelism; **educate God's people**, such as teaching and encouragement; **demonstrate God's love**, such as hospitality and helping; and **celebrate God's presence**, such as leading worship or praying for healing. Where do you fit?
- **Heart** – Things that you're good at and love doing for which people often complement you, such as working with kids, or visiting a nursing home, volunteering with the disabled, or serving cross-culturally. It's your passion area.
- **Abilities** - Things you have an aptitude for, e.g. drama, writing, speaking, counseling, fixing things, music, tutoring, cooking, carpentry etc. You may have been born with them or are currently developing new skills.

- **Personality** – Are you reserved or outgoing? Facts oriented or feelings oriented? Do you like to work alone or with a group? Are you scheduled or spontaneous?
- **Experiences** – Out of what background did you come to faith in Christ? What painful experiences have impacted your past? What life lessons have you learned?

I'm shaped differently than you, and you're put together differently than I am. And that's a good thing. There's diversity among believers for a reason – to strengthen the body of Christ to reach as many as possible and incorporate them into the life of the Church.

III. Recognize Our Inter-dependency in the Body of Christ (v.5)

While we're uniquely designed or shaped for ministry, let's not forget that we've been made to function in **community** with one another. As **Romans 12:5** says, “... ***each member belongs to all the others.***” I will minister to the body out of the areas of my strength, and be dependent upon the ministry of the rest of the body in my areas of weakness. **I Peter 4:10** says, “***Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.***”

Nothing in Scripture more adequately expresses our inter-dependence as fellow Christians – how each of us function according to our strengths on behalf of others and allow others to strengthen us in our weaknesses, than **I Corinthians 12:14-26** :

¹⁴ Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. ²³ And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴ while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad (NLT).

There is no room for individualism in the body of Christ. We are **interdependent**. This is an apt word to describe the relationship I share and enjoy with the 7 other pastors that make up the Volunteer Chaplaincy Corps in the Eagan Police Department. I've been with the Chaplaincy Corps almost 10 years, but one statement from my training with Chaplain Coordinator, Debbie Brown, will always stick with me. She said ***"There's no 'I' in the word 'TEAM.'"*** When we're on a call, we're there to assist the police officers and community members in whatever little way possible. The spotlight is not on us. She shared one incident of a suicide in a home in which the pictures on the wall had become crooked. While in conversation,

she noticed how the other chaplain on that call, with no one in particular to talk to in that moment, was quietly and unobtrusively straightening the pictures to restore a sense of normalcy in the home of a grieving family. ***“That’s TEAM,”*** Debbie said. Here at CoJ, we must rely on other members of the body of Christ, just as they must rely on us. We’re TEAM.

CONCLUSION:

Experts tell us that **85%** of the success of people in the workplace is directly related to their interpersonal relationships. Bad attitudes hinder relationships. Some of the most gifted people in the world struggle to get along with others. In the body of Christ, let’s get over self-sufficiency and pride and determine to follow the example of Christ by serving others and by considering others better than we are. We are saved to serve for the honor of Jesus Christ and the extension of His Kingdom. **A-men.**