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# Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

## Pride

On April 10<sup>th</sup> at Augusta National, the great golfer Arnold Palmer was having a wonderful day, playing the last round of the 1961 Masters Tournament. He had won the Masters twice in the last three years, and was favored to win again. As he prepared to tee off on the 18<sup>th</sup> hole, he held a comfortable lead over the other players.

Palmer hit a very good tee shot. As he approached the ball for his second shot, he saw a dear friend in the gallery. The friend motioned him over and congratulated Palmer on the win. Palmer gladly shook the hand and smiled, and returned to the ball to line up his shot.

Can guess what happened next? Palmer completely botched the rest of the hole, landing in a sand trap, and then missing the green entirely. He shot a six for a double-bogey, and lost the lead to Gary Player of South Africa.

In an interview 30 years later, with LPGA hall-of-famer Carol Mann, Palmer mentioned the incident, and said he had never forgotten his humbling lesson about overconfidence (Mann, *The 19<sup>th</sup> Hole*).

Haven't we all experienced the truth of Proverbs 16:18? It says, famously,

Pride goes before destruction,  
And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

We may not have as much on the line as the first-prize purse at the Masters Tournament, but we have felt the disappointment of a mistake made more bitter because of our overconfidence. It's bad enough to mess up; it's much worse to mess up after talking big. It seems like pride almost guarantees our failure!

But God provides this warning for a more important reason than just talking smack on the ball field, or bragging before an exam. Pride is spiritually dangerous!

### **Pride prevents us from being thankful for our blessings.**

We are tempted to credit our own abilities. One day we find ourselves driving a nice car, living in a fine home, enjoying some of the finer things in life—and ignoring the Lord God (Deut. 8:11–19). Suddenly, God gets our attention by bringing us down a notch. Remember that we deserve none of the good with which God blesses us. And, it can all disappear in a moment. Thus, Paul says, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). James warns,

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet, you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil (James 4:13–16).

## **Pride makes us feel like we don't need God.**

Consider Jesus' words in Luke 18:9–14,

And He told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Such a haughty attitude prevents one from seeing his spiritual poverty. No matter how long we've served Christ, we must remember, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). God has provided examples where man's pride gets him in trouble, like the story of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9, the life of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:1–17, and the statements of Peter in Mark 14:27–31.

## **Pride makes us feel like we are more important than we really are.**

King Uzziah was one of the good kings of Judah. He gained the throne at age 16 and reigned for 52 years. Second Chronicles 26:1–15 says glowing things about him, “he did right in the sight of the Lord,” and “the Lord God prospered him,” and “his fame spread afar.” But suddenly the tone changes in verse 16, for

When he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense.

The Law of God commanded that only priests were allowed inside the temple, and only consecrated priests could offer incense on the altar. But Uzziah felt that he could do no wrong in God's sight. He had started to think of himself as God's buddy, God's pal. He pridefully decided that those laws didn't apply to someone as important and successful as he was. As the priests bravely chased in after Uzziah, God corrected his haughty notion:

But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord ... and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him. King Uzziah was a leper to the day of the death, and he lived in a separate house, being a leper (vv. 19–21).

**Pride makes us annoyingly and sinfully exalt ourselves over others.**

Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, because they “have seated themselves in the chair of Moses,” and “they do all their deeds to be noticed by men,” and “they love the place of honor at banquets” and “respectful greetings in the marketplaces,” and “being called Rabbi by men” (Matthew 23:1–12). Jesus encourages His followers, instead, to avoid such titles and attitudes, and live to serve. “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).

Need something to boast about? Listen to this: “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord” (Jer. 9:23–24).

—*John Guzzetta*

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**Quote of the Week:**

“It seems strange that in a society of super-sophisticated communication, we suffer a shortage of listeners.” —*Erma Bombeck*