



Humility vs. Pride

Featuring Brandon Slay

Olympic gold medalist

We hear a lot about pride within the athletic world. For example, we are told to take pride in our training, or to take pride in our accomplishments. Sometimes the word “pride” is even used in the way we approach our team activities and can become a motivator or inspirational tool.

In that regard, the word “pride” seems to be relatively harmless and can even be considered virtuous.

But unfortunately, that’s not always the case. Author CS Lewis, noted that pride, in its original form, is actually a destructive emotion within us that seeks to “exalt ourselves above” other people. It indicates an inflated sense of importance and usually spawns selfish behavior.

Brandon Slay knows all about that kind of pride. Although he went to a Christian school through sixth grade and his grandmother took him to church three times a week, he never developed a genuine relationship with God.

“In high school, I got addicted to myself and to success on the football field and on the wrestling mat,” Slay says. “Sports became my god. I believed that Jesus died on the cross, but He wasn’t the most important thing in my life. Success and being a world champion mattered more than anything else.”

After moving to Colorado Springs to train for the U.S. Olympic team, Slay slowed down long enough to realize that he was heading down the wrong path and potentially towards a future predicted within the wise words of King Solomon:

“Pride goes before destruction and haughtiness before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18/NLT)

“It was about 1999 when I realized I was a phony Christian,” Slay recalls. “I wasn’t living what I said I believed. The Holy Spirit, through God’s Word, and some people around me helped me realize that having an attitude of humility frees you up. Before then, I was putting all my eggs in one basket. Suddenly, winning the gold medal wasn’t the most important thing anymore.”

At the 2000 Olympics, Slay gave his best and won the coveted prize, but thankfully, he was ready to handle the notoriety and international attention. Instead of getting caught up in the hype, Slay chose to adopt a new approach that the apostle Paul taught about in his writings to the early Christians in Philippi.

“Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3/NLT)

For Slay, that meant resisting the temptation to stay atop that proverbial gold medal stand. He knew that keeping the glory for himself would ultimately destroy him.

“Reaching your Mt. Everest won’t fulfill you,” Slay says. “And not reaching it won’t destroy you. It’s just a thing. It’s just an accomplishment. It’s just a climb to the top. Yes, you can enjoy the view and it’s pretty when you get up there, but eventually you have to come back down. You can’t stay at the top of Mt. Everest for more than 30 minutes. You’ll die due to oxygen deprivation. The same is true in our lives. Eventually you have to step down from that platform. If you don’t, spiritually, you will die.”

That doesn’t mean we don’t give our best and use the gifts that God has given us. In fact, it’s just the opposite. We should give everything we have and compete with excellence. Our talents and abilities are meant to bring *Him* glory and allow others to see the work that *He* has done in our lives. Jesus modeled this attitude when He came down to earth from the heavens.

“He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:8/NLT)

That’s what humility looks like when put into action. And in the battle against pride, humility wins every time.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways have you as an individual athlete or with your team used the word “pride” in a positive way?
2. What are some ways that pride can become a negative part of an athlete’s life? Have you ever struggled with pride? If so, give some examples.
3. Brandon Slay talks about how we can die spiritually if we try to keep the glory for ourselves. Explain what you think that might look like in an individual’s life.
4. What are some ways that Jesus modeled humility during His time on earth?
5. What are some areas in your life where you need to follow Jesus’ example and allow humility to defeat any pride that you might be harboring in your heart?

Closing Prayer