

Introduction

Not long ago, I read an article titled **"Eight Things People Need to Quit Bragging about on Facebook."** Those eight are as follows and I quote the author: **"your awesome spouse," "your workout routine," "your daily updates," "your lunch/dinner," "your single status," "your quitting Facebook," "your great job,"** and **"your great kids."**

Whether we agree with the article or not, we can infer three keen insights into human life from it. First, bragging is a primary component of social interactions. Second, social media capabilities have dramatically increased the occurrences of bragging. And third, people dislike bragging. Nobody likes a braggart in other words, including God. I know He doesn't because of what He says in 1 Corinthians 13:4, **"Love does not brag"** and that's what I'm going to preach about today

Love

We begin with the Greek word **"agape,"** which is translated **"love."** Most people think of this love in terms of feelings and actions. We feel affection and compassion for others and act to achieve their well-being and joy over our own because we do. But the essence of love isn't that. If all we do is try to feel and act **"lovingly,"** we'll fail. I speak from experience. Just feeling and acting lovingly is one of the greatest burdens we can carry through life.

Galatians 5:22 implies why it is. It states that love is a **"fruit of the Spirit."** That means it's a condition or state of being that the Holy Spirit supernaturally creates, sustains, and continually perfects within us. That condition or state in turn causes us to feel and act lovingly. Love, in other words, is first and foremost something we are, not something we feel or do. We *feel* and *act* lovingly because we are loving. The feeling and acting flow naturally and easily from the being.

Now, there are two conditions for being loving. First, we must apprentice ourselves to Jesus. We arrange our affairs around being with

Him in order to become like Him and to learn and do all that He says. Second, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit in Him making us loving. We cooperate with Him in a practical way. We identify the particular feelings and actions that characterize love. We then try and train our best to cultivate those feelings and carry out those actions in daily life.

Verses 4-8 list 15 of those particular actions, one of which I'm focusing on today, in verse 4. Love does not "**brag.**"

There's a Braggart in Us All

There's a reason Paul includes this in his actions of love. It's because bragging is inherent in us all in our natural state. It's one of the easiest and most overlooked of all sins. Elton Trueblood wrote about gossip that it's "**such a pleasant form of sin.**" I'd say the same thing about bragging. It's such a pleasant form of sin, one to which most of us succumb. Paul mentions bragging in verse 4 and I'm preaching about it today because, apart from Jesus, there's a braggart in us all.

Notice Paul's point though. Love does not brag. Simple logic tells us, therefore, that to brag is to not to love. Bragging is unloving.

But as disciples of Jesus, we seek to be loving in all things. So, we intend not to brag and carry out our intention as best as we can.

A good place to start in carrying out our intention is learning what Paul teaches about bragging in verse 4. The Greek word translated "**brag**" is picturesque. It comes from a root word that connotes "**windbag.**" So to brag means to be a windbag. People can be windbags in one or both of two ways, each of which we need to understand and avoid.

Bragging – Boasting

One way is to boast. To boast means to tell something to others about us that we think is impressive. So a mother responded to her son's birthday invitation on Facebook, "**Connor can't come to the party because he'll be playing in an elite soccer tournament.**" Or a

man posted: **"I feel so foolish. I took a week's salary in cash to buy what I thought was a \$3000 monitor but it only cost \$400."** The mother was boasting about her son's athletic prowess and the man about how much money he made, which they thought were impressive.

There's a primary reason people boast. It's to promote themselves so others will think highly or well of them. I'd quickly insert here that there is a time and place for people telling others something impressive about themselves. That time and place is when and where doing so achieves some good for others or God's kingdom, which is their motive for telling it. That isn't boasting. It's boasting when their motive is self-promotion. They tell it so others will respect or admire them.

I read about three rules that some children drew up for their newly constructed tree house: **"1. Nobody act big. 2. Nobody act small. 3. Everybody act medium."** Those are perceptive rules aren't they, especially the first one. It reveals why people boast. It's to be big. They want others to esteem them and boast so they will.

Ironically enough, boasting usually achieves just the opposite result. Researchers from City University London, Carnegie Mellon University, and Bocconi University conducted a study on boasting. What they found is this: **"Most people probably realize that they experience emotions other than pure joy when they are on the receiving end of someone else's self-promotion. Yet, when we engage in self-promotion ourselves, we tend to overestimate others' positive reactions and underestimate their negative ones."** We dislike it when others boast to us, in other words. But for some reason, we think others like it when we boast to them.

Be assured, they usually don't. There's an old adage that says **"Self-praise smells bad"** or as we say it, **"Self-praise stinks."** That vivid metaphor explains the effect of boasting on others. It does to them psychologically what a bad smell does to them physiologically. What do people do when they see a skunk? They run! What do they do when they see a boaster? They run! Boasting is offensive and turns people off.

They know, if they're perceptive enough, what the boaster is doing. He's using them to make him bigger and them smaller and believe me, no one likes it. They then think less highly of him, not more highly, as a result.

So don't boast. Don't tell the impressive things we are, have, or do to promote ourselves. Disregard the human context when it comes to those things. Place how we appear to people in God's hands. Let Him be our public relations department. We'll be indifferent to whether or not others know the impressive things about us if we do. We are what we are, have what we have, and do what we do unto God and God alone, who then **"rewards"** us **"in secret"** to quote Jesus in Matthew 6:4.

Bragging – Conversational Narcissists

People can be windbags and brag in a second way – by dominating conversation. They take over the conversation and direct it to their thoughts, opinions, interests, concerns, experiences, likes, and dislikes. It's what researchers call **"conversational narcissism."** And the truth is that many people if not most are conversational narcissists.

They are because it's **"in"** them to be. In 2012 Harvard researchers conducted a study comprised of five brain imaging experiments. They found that people sharing information about themselves, no matter what it was, triggered the same sensations in the brain that are synonymous with eating food and having sex. People telling others about themselves, they therefore concluded, **"is on par with eating food and having sex."** Or to say it another way, people desire to talk about themselves to others as strongly as they desire to eat and have sex.

The consequence of course is predictable. Referring to various studies on conversation, Princeton psychology professor Diana Tamir and Harvard psychology professor Jason Mitchell claim this: **"Studies of human conversation have documented that 30-40% of everyday speech is used to relay information to others about one's private experiences or personal relationships."** They go on to point out that 80% of posts to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are

about the poster's own immediate experiences. Those statistics make it clear. Conversational narcissism abounds. Many people if not most are windbags, in other words, and it shows. They come to a person or group, impliedly say, "**Here I am**", and then become "**me-deep**" in conversation. They take over the conversation and direct it to themselves.

We can think of this in terms of what authors Brett and Kate McKay call "**shift-response**." During a conversation, the persons involved make *initiatives*, as they're called, that either give attention or get it. Conversational narcissists make initiatives that get attention. They do so through shift-responses. That means when the people with whom they're conversing say something, they "**shift**" the attention to themselves.

The McKays give an example – an imaginary conversation between James and Rob. It goes like this. James says, "**I'm thinking about buying a new car.**" "**Yeah?**" Rob answers, "**I'm thinking about buying a new car too.**" "**Really,**" James asks. "**Yep,**" Rob replies, "**I just test drove a Mustang yesterday and it was awesome. I want something with at least 300 horsepower and definitely leather seats. Did I ever tell you about the time my buddy let me take his Maserati out for a spin?**" and on he goes. Grasp what Rob did. James wanted to tell something, but Rob immediately *shifted* the attention to himself – to his thoughts about it, his experiences with it, and even his acquaintances. Rob is a conversational narcissist.

But we aren't. Being disciples of Jesus, we love others. And because we love them, we're interested in them. And because we're interested in them, we make initiatives that give attention not get it. We come to a person or group with a posture that impliedly says, "**There you are**", and become "**you-deep**" in conversation. We discern the thoughts, opinions, interests, concerns, experiences, likes, and dislikes of others and then direct the conversation to that. We ask questions like "**What do you think about that,**" "**What is your experience with that,**" "**How does that make you feel,**" "**What do you prefer**", and

more.

Recall a term I used a few moments ago, **“shift response”** – shifting the attention to us. Its opposite is **“support-response”** – keeping the attention on the speaker and what he or she wants to say. As verse 4 implies, shift-responses are unloving. Support responses are loving. So, as disciples of Jesus who love others, we commit ourselves in everyday conversations to support responses.

Let’s go back to James and Rob again. James says, **“I’m thinking about buying a new car.”** Rob acknowledges his comment, **“Oh yeah? I’m thinking about buying a new car too.”** But he keeps the attention on James by asking, **“So, what models are you looking for?”** James replies: **“That’s the thing – I’m not sure,”** which prompts Rob to ask, **“Well, what are the most important things to you – fuel economy, storage room, horse power?”** The conversation continues in that loving vein, focused on James. Rob is a conversational craftsman.

Conclusion

Those then are two ways that windbags brag. They boast and dominate conversations. But disciples of Jesus don’t or at least train and try not to. First, we don’t boast. We place how we appear to others in God’s hands. Second, we don’t dominate conversations. We avoid shift responses. We commit ourselves to support-responses instead.

This image on the power point sums it up well in closing. It expresses our motto. No bragging. Why? It’s because love does not brag. It’s unloving and so nobody likes it. Nobody likes a braggart.