

The Reference Letter

by Leslie Snyder

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

— Romans 12:3

When I was preparing to graduate from college, I began working on my resume. As a college graduate, I was proud of my education, my honors and achievements, and of the experiences I had accumulated. I was ready to meet the world and for the world to meet me! I had every intention of landing the perfect job after the first interview and beginning my life as a professional. Only one small obstacle was left to overcome: receiving a letter of reference from one of the hardest professors in my department. Because I worked in the department during my college years, I was very familiar with his procedure of writing letters of reference. I watched many highly capable, confident students walk into his office with the request for a reference, only to walk out of the office nervous, frustrated, and a little lost. I always thought it was a little comical until it was my turn. What was it that changed so much in the time it took to walk into the office and turn around and walk out? The assignment. This particular professor was happy to be a reference if the student wrote his or her own letter describing his or her strengths, weaknesses, areas of growth, and personal assessment of future potential. He would read the letter, make any suggestions for change and then sign the finished product. It was a daunting task and one that likely still makes graduates nauseous.

I don't remember what I wrote in my letter, but I do remember his comment. "You have a good grasp of Romans 12:3." At the time I had little understanding of what Romans 12:3 was all about, but I quickly looked it up in my Bible, underlined it and put it in my heart as a verse to live by.

Culture today could use a fresh dose of this truth. It only takes a moment to see why. Many athletes pound their chests, talk smack, and dance around the end zones in personal celebration. Actors and musicians seek fame and attention at any cost. Marketers and advertisers shout the mantra "it's all about you," and "You're worth it!" If you think the church has escaped this poison, think again. Success-oriented ministries abound, and many leaders have fallen hard thinking they were above the temptations that eventually seized them.

Philippians 2: 3-4 reads, "*Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand*" (The Message).

GOING DEEPER:

1. If you were to write your own reference letter, what would it say? Would it fairly and accurately assess your life and potential?

2. Try writing your own reference letter and then give it to someone who knows you well and ask for their feedback.

FURTHER READING:

Philippians 2: 5 – 11; James 4:7 – 8; Proverbs 16:18