

MONDAY MANNA  
DEC 13, 2021

## SOMETIMES 'KNOW-IT-ALLS' KNOW NOTHING

By Stephen R. Graves

You think you know it all, don't you? You probably would not say it that way (and neither would I), but we all generally trust our own perceptions. Even with an article like this one, you measure what I say against what you believe, your experiences, and the things you value. That is not always wrong, but it is definitely not always right. But you already knew that, correct?

The Bible talks a lot about the idea of overly trusting ourselves. One of my favorite books in the Bible, Proverbs, focuses on wisdom and folly. Toward the end, it drops this bombshell, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 26:12). In short: Overly trusting yourself is dangerous. Some self-confidence is crucial to living a healthy life, but not overconfidence.

The Bible discusses two different ways in which people become blinded by their overconfidence in themselves: Hypocrisy, and self-deception. The following is a look at both:

Hypocrisy. Hypokrites, the Greek word for "hypocrite," appears in the New Testament. It originates from the ancient Greek stage. Hypokrites refers to an actor wearing a mask on stage, literally, "an interpreter from underneath." A hypocrite presents one face outwardly while the true actor hides beneath.

In His "Sermon on the Mount," one of the things Jesus zeroed in on was hypocrisy. He warned, "Watch out for those who give money in order to gain attention from others. Or those who pray or fast for the same reason" (Matthew 6:1-18). These hypocrites were putting up appearances for public acclaim. It may fool people for a time, but it never fools God, who can always see behind the mask.

What about you? Where in your life are you acting? We all have gaps between who we are and who we aspire to be, but there are areas where we choose to wear a mask. Those decisions are dangerous.

Self-Deception. In his 1850 novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote, "No man for any considerable period can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true." Can you think of anyone this describes?

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In the New Testament's book of James, the author describes a person who looks in the mirror and genuinely does not see the person in front of them; they see someone who is patient, self-controlled, and reasonable (James 1:22-25). The problem is they alone see themselves as that person; everyone else sees through the veil. Self-deception is much harder to outgrow when one becomes convinced of a lie.

Is there help for the hypocrite and self-deceived? We all have blind spots. If we could see them, they wouldn't be blind spots. The good news is we can train ourselves to turn toward our blind spots. Here are some suggestions I have found helpful:

1. Give a few trusted people permission to speak on your life: a spouse, boss, friend, or pastor. What disconnect do they see between who you are and who you say you are? You might have to specifically solicit their opinion and not just give them the freedom to share whenever they want to. Most people just don't like playing that role.
2. Listen to and read from perspectives you wouldn't normally encounter. Train yourself to listen first and critique later. My friend, Max Anderson, writes a great newsletter that he always ends with the phrase, "Read widely. Read wisely." I love that phrase.
3. Carve out some time for regular reflection. Ask yourself the hard questions. Where have you faked it over the past week/month/year? Where have you been overly defensive? In what areas might you have blind spots? How long has it been since you last received hard feedback? It takes work to remove the mask, but it is worth it. Don't just consider yourself to be wise. Be wise.

Dr. Stephen R. Graves describes himself as an organizational strategist, pragmatic theologian, and social capitalist. He advises executives and business owners, as well as young entrepreneurs. He is author of numerous books and many articles, and a public speaker. His website is [www.stephenrgraves.com](http://www.stephenrgraves.com).

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a time when you were convinced you knew it all, only to discover later that you did not? Or perhaps you were self-deceived, convinced you were right when you were not. If so, describe that situation and what you learned from it.

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2.What is your reaction when you encounter a “know-it-all”? Do you experience annoyance, frustration, impatience, even anger? Do you find that many people you encounter every day, at work or in your personal activities, are self-deceived?

3.Do you agree with the definition of the word “hypocrite” as someone who is two-faced, who presents one “face” outwardly but is very different on the inside? Explain your answer.

4.How difficult would you find it to give certain trusted individuals permission to point out inconsistencies in who you truly are and who you say that you are? What about making an effort to genuinely listen to and consider other perspectives or points of view?

**NOTE:**

*If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:*  
Proverbs 14:6,8, 15:21, 17:12,25, 18:6-7; Matthew 7:1-5; James 1:5-8

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