

An Open Letter to Cam Newton

Note: This story is updated with new information. This is the grace I am talking about that we need to give. Here is my follow-up column on my website, which better explains my position.

Dear Cam:

During the 2015-2016 National Football League season, the whole world has become a witness to how you became a shining example of a man who thoroughly enjoys the job and talents that God has blessed him with. I believe the entire league owes you a debt of gratitude for how you made playing football look like fun instead of someone who is simply drawing a huge paycheck.

As the quarterback of the Carolina Panthers, you brought the joy of professional sports back to the city of Charlotte. Your antics—your dabs and Superman poses after you score touchdowns—may seem obnoxious and arrogant to some, but that could simply be jealousy. Your playful demeanor won over a lot of fans, including myself.

As a former resident of the city and admirer of the team—notice I didn't say fan—I thank you for what you've done to bring enthusiasm back to the Carolina Panthers. I have many friends back in Charlotte, and they're having fun with it, too.

We've watched as the Panthers had an outstanding season, winning 15 of 16 regular-season games. You cruised through the playoffs to the Super Bowl, and you were named the NFL's Most Valuable Player. You deserve every bit of the accolades you have received.

Unfortunately, when you and your teammates lost to the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl 50 on Sunday, your image took a huge

hit. It's not because you lost or because of your performance during the game. It was your demeanor in the post-game press conference that disappointed and shocked many.

You sulked. For the most part, you gave one-sentence answers to reporters' questions. Frankly, you acted like a 10-year-old child who had just had their cellphone taken away—not that a 10-year-old should have a cellphone.

You didn't own up to the six times you were sacked. You didn't own up to the two fumbles that led to 14 Denver points. You ended the press conference with the phrase, "I'm done, man."

Not cool, Cam, not cool.

I can't say that I've ever been a fan of yours. As an avid fan of the Alabama Crimson Tide, there's a natural tendency to dislike you because of your affiliation with Auburn University. You made us look bad during your senior year, and you won a national championship in 2010, which makes Tide fans' stomachs turn. But then that's just football.

I actually want to apologize to you for maligning you as a person. The controversy and scandal that surrounded you blinded my eyes so much so that I announced I wouldn't root for the Panthers any more when they drafted you. It was not my place to judge you, and I'm sorry I did. I did not give you the grace that Jesus would have. That showed my own character flaw. Again, I apologize.

As it turns out, I find my spirit actually grieving for you. I never thought I would ever say that. But as a man of God, I find myself now praying for you. Since I wrote this, a reader informed me that you indeed profess Christ, and that's wonderful. I apologize if I made any assumptions about that. Now it's all a matter of maturity in your walk with Him. Sunday's post-game antics only showed a sign of immaturity in you. You were hurt and disappointed because, for the first time in life on a big stage, things didn't turn out

the way you had hoped.

Cam, many people are going to call you out for your behavior on Sunday, and chances are, you don't care right now. Deion Sanders, himself a man of God, did just that on national television by saying, "You are the face of our brand right now, you can't do that. I understand the emotions of losing, but you can't do that. A Manning, a Brady ... all these guys who are a prototypical type of quarterback in our game, they're not going to do that ever. Would Drew Brees ever?"

What Sanders should have done was pulled you aside and talked to you about it in private. Or, he should have reacted like Marshall Faulk, who himself knows the pain of losing a Super Bowl. Faulk said, "I've been on that podium in that very same seat. It's tough, it's hard," said Faulk, whose Rams fell to the Patriots in Super Bowl XXXVI. "When I look back at how I handled it, I promised to never be that person again. Cam is going to learn from this.

Cam, remember this: Through it all, God loves you and wants you to draw near to Him so you can better handle the adversity in your life. This isn't the first time it's happened, and it won't be the last. But allow Jesus to come into your heart so that you can learn to deal with your trials and tribulations. He's inviting you to do just that.

I suggest you talk with teammate Charles Tillman, whom I interviewed on my Javelin podcast recently. He's a great man of God who can help you.

I know you're disappointed about not winning the Super Bowl, but that will pass. With your talent, you will be back there with another opportunity.

And as I always like to say, "there is that." {eo}