

PRIDE

Being a pastor, I get to know a lot of people.
I see them at their best and I see them at their worst.

I see people who are full of joy
and I see people who are struggling with depression.
I deal with people who are generous of heart and
who are making tremendous contributions to the lives of others.
And I deal with people who never seem to have enough to be content,
no matter how much they possess.

And here's what I've discovered.
People who are content and who add the most value to the lives of others
are people who have gotten over themselves.

They are not
self-centered, or
self-protective, or
self-justifying.
Somehow "self" is not at the center of their world.

Thomas a Kempis,
the author of the devotional classic *The Imitation of Christ* wrote

Thomas a Kempis: Great peace is with the humble man, but in the heart of a proud man
are always anger and envy.

In other words,
life gets easier and better when we get over ourselves.

And we know this don't we?

Here's a brief clip from the old movie Broadcast News.
 Holly Hunter has just told her boss
 that he is about to make a terrible decision.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeWduNomDqY>

Pride is a temple
 where we bow to worship at the altar of self.

And pride is a prison
 where we live and die trapped alone
 in self-importance and pain.
 And it's awful.

Pride was one of your three main complaints with yourself.

Guys on the survey wrote:

Pride gets in the way too often.
 My pride creates problems in my relationships.
 I put myself above others regularly.
 I'm too self-centered.
 My complaint is that I try and fail to die to self.

I've spoken on pride numerous times.
 As a matter of fact, I preached a three-part series on pride in church
 a few years ago.
 And I think those sermons were some of the best sermons I ever preached.
 Heck, who am I kidding?
 They were probably some of the best sermons **anyone** has ever preached.

I'd say number one:
 there's the Sermon on the Mount.
 Probably.

And then, there'd be my three sermons on pride.
 Which of the three was the best,
 now, **that** would be hard to decide.
 But I think all three would be right up there.
 So, I feel very confident we're in for a truly great session this morning/evening.

Actually, it's hard to do pride right in the amount of time we have today.
 It's a huge subject and it's really important that we understand
 what pride is,
 what it does to us, and
 how to overcome it.

In his sermon "Pride and Humility,
 the great 19th century English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote:

C. H. Spurgeon: There is no sin into which the heart of man so easily falls as pride,
 and yet there is no vice which is more frequently, more emphatically, and more
 eloquently condemned in Scripture.

Whenever I speak on pride,
 I feel a need to state there is a kind of pride that is positive and healthy.

We tell our children:
 Take pride in your work.
 Take pride in your appearance.
 And even,
 take pride in yourself.

By that we don't mean they should be vain or arrogant.
 We mean they should care about doing and being their best.
 And when they make progress and succeed,
 we want them to experience the joy and the satisfaction
 of a job well done.

Even the Bible tells us this kind of pride is commendable.

Galatians 6.4: Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in
 himself, without comparing himself to someone else.

We have all have gifts, talents, and abilities.

And it is biblical to be motivated to
do our best,
improve ourselves, and
make the most of the talents and the opportunities God has given us.

The pride that moves us to excellence is a good thing,
at least it can be.

However, the Bible is much more concerned about the
negative form of pride and
its destructive and corrupting power in our lives.

Let's take a few minutes
to understand what pride does to us
and why it's so destructive.

WHAT IS PRIDE?

Synonyms for pride are: vanity, conceit, arrogance, egotism, self-glorification,
boastfulness.

There are a number of Hebrew and Greek words which are
translated in the Bible as pride.

One common meaning is to lift oneself up to a high place,
either in our own minds
or in the sight of others.

Another common meaning is: to be swollen or to be puffed up.
I think of the puffer fish,
also known as the blow fish,
expanding itself so that others will believe it to be bigger
than it actually is.

The puffer fish is a particularly apt illustration of pride
 because not only does it inflate itself;
 most types also contain a toxic substance
 that is 1200 times more deadly than cyanide.

Pride is believing we are –
 or trying to appear to others – larger than we actually are.
 It is seeing ourselves or presenting ourselves as being above others.
 And it is poisonous to our souls.

Quickly, three reasons pride is so destructive in our lives.

1. Pride keeps us from being honest with ourselves.

The cornerstone of all emotional and spiritual growth is honesty.
 Being honest with ourselves about ourselves.
 Being able to see ourselves for who we are –
 the good and the bad and the ugly –
 and being absolutely honest about what's there.

But prideful men find it hard to be honest about their needs
 because being needy makes us feel weak and vulnerable.
 Prideful men find it hard to be honest about their motives
 because our motives are so often less than honorable.
 Prideful men find it hard to be honest about their failures
 because failures make us like everybody else.

There is much within you that is admirable and worthy of praise.
 But there is much within every one of us that is
 lustful and greedy and judgmental and angry.
 And to grow and to become more like Jesus
 we must be able to look at what's ugly and wrong at the core of our being
 and be honest about it.

Jeff Cook: Everyone has broken and disgusting spots in their lives that just won't heal right. Everyone fails. Everyone hurts those they love most. Everyone lacks the kindness, the courage and the wisdom they ought to possess. No one is solid inside; everyone is deficient.

All of us are broken, struggling and sinful.

And it's those things that we need to admit
if we are to become healed and whole.

But our pride is terrified and threatened
by those parts of who we are,
so it refuses to look at them or admit them.

Bottom line: You cannot hide from the truth and be whole.
You cannot deny the deepest realities about yourself and be healthy.

And that's what pride does.
It separates us from our true selves and from the deepest realities of who we
are.
It takes us away from our souls
and it takes our souls away from us.

2. Pride keeps us from being close to others.

It does this in two ways.

A. It keeps us from being honest with others.

If pride keeps us from being honest with ourselves,
it is even more determined that others will not become privy
to our defects and our deficiencies.

If I let you see my fears and my failures and my sins,
you may not respect me;
you may think me weak;
you may find me lacking,
less than what a man should be,
less than what a Christian should be.

So, we put up walls around our egos to protect our pride.
Only to discover later that we have made it impossible
for the love we need to get in.

Here's a clip from *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.
 Tom Ripley has lived his life
 pretending to be someone he's not
 and doing awful things to get ahead.

Clip: Talented Mr. Ripley

In the movies he says,
 I figured it was better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody.
 And because he can't let anyone know who he is –
 and wasn't able to even before he did the despicable things he's guilty of –
 he lives alone.
 That's what pride does to us.
 It keeps us from letting people see who we really are.

C. S. Lewis: Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another, "What!
 You too? I thought I was the only one."

When we cannot show our true selves to another person,
 we cannot be known.
 And if we cannot be known,
 we cannot be loved.

Pride keeps our wives from knowing us.
 It keeps our children from knowing us.
 It keeps other men from knowing us.

It keeps the friendship and the companionship we all need
 out of our lives because no one knows us well enough to say,
 "What, you too?
 We're alike?
 We're in this together?
 I thought I was the only one."

Because we are men,
 we need respect.
 Because we are human,
 we need love.

Sorry if that makes you uncomfortable.

But we need someone to know us,
 we need someone to care for us,
 we need someone to be our friend.
 And pride makes that impossible.

Pride keeps us from becoming close to others in another way.

B. It makes us judgmental of others.

I once heard Lionel Ritchie say entertainers are ego-maniacs with an inferiority complex.

They believe they are better than everyone else
 but with an underlying fear they may not be.
 So, they must be reassured over and over again.
 And that's how it is with pride.
 Pride is a very fragile palace.
 It constantly needs shoring up.

And the way we normally do that is by comparison.

Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector
 who went to the temple to pray.
 And Luke specifically states that Jesus told this parable
 to those who thought themselves righteous and looked down on others.
 In other words, to those who are proud.

Luke 18.11-12: The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

The Pharisee does what prideful men typically do.
 He compares himself to others.

And he states –

I'm not like other people.
 I'm different than other people.
 I'm better than they better than other people.

Pride separates us from others.
 It turns life into a competition.
 And if we are to win,
 we must discount the contributions and the worth of others.

So, even without knowing it,
 we exaggerate their deficiencies,
 we find fault with their efforts and
 we delight in their failures
 because somehow we think that validates our superiority.

When you hear yourself judging another person,
 you can be sure it is your pride speaking.

3. Pride keeps us from God.

Really it's worse than that.

The Bible says

1 Peter 5.5-6: All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Pride does not just keep us from God,
 it causes God to oppose us.
 That's because pride puts us in the position of God.
 We decide our own rules,
 we decide what we deserve,
 we decide when we have done enough, and
 we decide that we will be our own saviors.

The proud heart's confession of faith is:
 I am the Lord my God and I shall have no other gods before me.

The actor Leonardo DiCaprio put it this way.

Leonardo DiCaprio: As soon as enough people give you enough compliments and you're wielding more power than you've ever had in your life, ... you get a false sense of your own importance and what you've accomplished. You actually think you've altered the course of history.

Pride tells us that we are
 more important,
 more powerful, and
 more deserving than we are.

Proverbs 30.8-9: Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.
 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may
 become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

When we become rich,
 and it doesn't have to be riches in terms of possessions.
 The same dynamic is at work
 when you are rich in the praises of others, or
 in the positions you reach or
 in the accomplishments you have achieved.

At that moment there will be the strong temptation to ask:
 Who is the Lord?

And there will be an inclination to answer that question with the words:

I am.

I created my success.

And I'll decide what to do with it.

This is not theoretical.
 This is where most of you live.
 You've had successes.
 You are financially well off.
 You are respected in your work.

This is the time that you are most susceptible to the temptation of pride
 that will put subtle pressure on you to believe
 that you are the Lord your God.

And when you do that,

God will oppose you.

For your own good,

God will humble you and bring you to your knees.

Or, the passage that we just read from First Peter tells us, we can humble ourselves
 and God will lift us up.

And that's what we want to spend the rest of our time on.

Humility.

We can fight pride,
and we should.

But we will be most successful in fighting it
by cultivating its opposite – humility.

First, let's make sure that we understand what humility is and is not.

Humility is not being weak or timid.
Humility is not denying our gifts or our strengths.
Humility is not putting ourselves down or
feeling unworthy of the good things life has to offer.

In Matthew 5.5 we read

Matthew 5.5: Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

The word meek here is a synonym for humble.
As a matter of fact, more modern versions of the Bible translate Matthew 5.5 as
“Blessed are those who are humble.”

The Greek word that is used in this verse and is translated as “meek” or “humble”
is also used of a wild horse that has been brought under control.

Think of a magnificent race horse –
all the strength that's in its heart,
all the power that's within its being just waiting to explode.
It can't wait to get on the track,
run its heart out,
and show the world what it can do.
But – its power is under control of a rider
who loves it,
and cares for it,
and trains it so it can perform at its highest potential.

Now if you still want to be a wild horse,
 and run your own races;
 if you refuse the harness
 and swear that you will never be ridden,
 not even by God,
 then you are proud and not humble.

But being humble does not mean giving up your strength;
 it means letting God control your strength for his purposes.

Let me quote to you again from Spurgeon's sermon on pride and humility.

C. H. Spurgeon: Never ask to be a ... cringing, fawning thing: ask God to make you a man – those are scarce things now-a-days – a man who only fears God, who knows no fear of any other kind. Do not give yourselves up to any man's power ... or rule, but ask of God that you may have humility towards him, which gives you the noble bearing of a Christian before others.

Let's break it down.

WHAT IS HUMILITY?

Here are several ways of getting at it.

1. Humility is thinking of ourselves the way God thinks of us.

No more.

No less.

No different.

Tyron Edwards put it this way:

Tyron Edwards: True humility is not an abject, groveling, self-despising spirit; it is but a right estimate of ourselves as God sees us.

That means we are aware of our sinful nature and our desperate need for grace.

It means we know where we are most easily tempted and most often defensive.

It means we can claim our gifts and our strengths and delight in the things we do well.

The noted Bible scholar William Barclay wrote:

William Barclay: An honest assessment of our capabilities, without conceit and without false modesty, is one of the first essentials in a useful life.

And that's what the Bible teaches.

Romans 12.3-8: Do not think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So, if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

In this passage you find exactly what Barclay wrote.

Paul starts off by saying, "Don't think more highly of yourself than you should." But the rest of the passage focuses on the fact that you have been gifted.

And you are to claim those gifts, and with boldness and excellence use those gifts for the glory of God and the good of others.

Humility is able to say,
 "This is what I'm good at,
 and when the time comes,
 I can and I will step up
 and use my gifts in an effective way."

You've seen this clip a hundred times, I bet.
But it is a great illustration of humility.

Tiny little town of Hickory gets a washed up coach
who needs a second chance.
And miracles of miracles,
old Hickory ends up playing for the state championship.
(Based on a true story that took place in 1954.)

There is an immensely gifted young ball player on the team:
Jimmy Chitwood.
No one works harder in practice.

In games, he doesn't demand the ball,
he doesn't expect the team to revolve around him,
he's just one of five.
But he knows who he is
and what he can do.
And when the occasion demands,
he's ready to use the gifts he's been given.

Here we are in the state championship,
and the game's on the line.

HOOSIERS

Did you see Jimmy's humility?
He's not arrogant.
He's not angry when he's not chosen.
He's not full of himself.

But he is confident, sure of himself and ready to step up.

Humility is seeing yourself the way God sees you,
nothing more, nothing less.

How does God see you?

A sinner who needs saving.

A son whom he loves.

A work in progress.

A man who is gifted to make a difference in the world.

A servant of God and others.

Humility is being able to say all the same things about yourself.

I could never save my sinful self.

I need Jesus.

For some reason,

I am deeply, incredibly loved by God.

I haven't arrived,

there are still things I need to get right in myself to honor my Lord.

I am a man,

empowered and gifted to do God's work in the world.

I am a servant

who exists for a purpose greater than myself.

We must not believe we are more than we are.

But we also must not believe we are less than we are.

Humility is thinking of ourselves the way God thinks of us.

2. Humility is being other-focused.

Here's a classic definition of humility:

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less.

Humility is not self-denigration;

humility is self-forgetfulness.

It's not putting ourselves down; it's lifting others up.

It's not denying our gifts; it's celebrating the gifts and the successes
that others have.

It's escaping the prison of having to have our own way in order to be happy.

It is the freedom to give ourselves away to others.

The person who is focused on himself, even if the focus is on putting himself down or denying himself pleasure and recognition, is still focused on himself.

And humility is impossible when we are the center of our world.

3. Humility is knowing that our talents and our possessions are gifts from God and being grateful for those gifts.

I Corinthians 4.7: For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

I know you guys work long and hard.

And your success is largely due to your commitment to excellence.

But I'll still ask the question that Paul asks in I Corinthians 4.

What do you have that you did not receive?

Your very life is a gift.

Your health is a gift.

Your ability to learn is a gift.

Your college education,

even if you paid the tuition yourself,
you didn't pay anywhere near all of it.

ALL of your education at public schools
before college was paid by someone else.

Your natural talents are a gift.

You may have developed them,
but you didn't create them.

95% of the people on this planet will never earn what most
of us here do,

not because they aren't decent, intelligent, hard-working people,
but because they weren't blessed to be born in a country like ours
that provides

the opportunities we've had and
the rewards that a capitalistic system creates.

What do you call that if not a gift?

Hondurans.
 Hardest working people I've ever met.
 Per capita income there is \$2200/yr.

Your salvation is certainly a gift.

Humility says not "I am a self-made man" but "I am a God-blessed man."

Humility is a grateful heart,
 grateful to God and to others for all the gifts
 that have made our lives rich and good.

And grateful for the ways he uses us.
 I have this incredible life
 where God uses me to help others.
 There's nothing better.
 And it's a gift,
 it's a blessing.

Story about Mother Teresa

4. Humility is being awed by what God has done for us in Christ.

The best prescription for humility and the most effective antidote to pride is
 remembering what God has done for us.
 How indebted we are to his grace.
 How lost we would be without his mercy
 and without the sacrifice of Christ.

C. H. Spurgeon: Stand at the foot of the cross, and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed; see the thorn-crown; mark his scourged shoulders, still gushing with encrimsoned rills; see hands and feet given up to the rough iron, and his whole self to mockery and scorn; see the bitterness, and the pangs, and the throes of inward grief, showing themselves in his outward frame ... And if you do not lie prostrate on the ground before that cross, you have never seen it: if you are not humbled in the presence of Jesus, you do not know him.

You were so lost that nothing could save you but the sacrifice of God's only begotten. Think of that, and as Jesus stooped for you, bow yourself in lowliness at his feet. A sense of Christ's amazing love to us has a greater tendency to humble us than even a consciousness of our own guilt. May the Lord bring us in contemplation to Calvary, then our position will no longer be that of the pompous man of pride, but we shall take the humble place of one who loves much because much has been forgiven him. Pride cannot live beneath the cross.

The cross of Christ tells you three things.

1. You are incredibly loved and of immense worth.

That's the truest truth there is about you.
You are loved more than you can imagine.

2. You can never boast about being better than anyone.

You were so lost and, in such danger,
that Christ had to die for you.
You had nothing to commend yourself to God,
and you are saved only because he did for you
what you could not do for yourself.

3. The life that matters is the life that gives itself away.

The life that Jesus lived and gave to us as an example
was a life that came to serve not to be served,
that poured itself out for others, and
that went to a cross.

The prizes, the pleasures, the praises of this world,
do not a great life make.
The humility that forgets itself and gives itself away for others,
that is what true greatness is in the kingdom of God.