

Pride (Arrogance)

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.” Proverbs 11:2

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.” Proverbs 16:18-19

“Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.” Proverbs 18:12

“Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.” Proverbs 16:5

Well good morning. My name is Eric if I haven't had the chance to meet you yet. So the Bible speaks pretty strongly about pride. The warning is laid out pretty plainly in those verses, but also throughout Scripture in general. It's not some small, insignificant thing. It's a *big deal* and a huge threat spiritually. In fact, do you know the first place we are introduced to the idea of pride in Scripture? Genesis 3. If you're unfamiliar with the narrative of the Bible, Genesis is the *first* book, and Genesis 3 is when sin first enters the world and breaks God's good design for his creation. The Devil essentially has a conversation with the first humans in Scripture and tells them that God doesn't have their best interest in mind, and convinces them they would be better off if they just took matters into their own hands. He tells them they should be more self-sufficient and should really be the ones calling the shots. And they decide to roll with it. That's pride. So it's safe to say, I think, that pride is a very big deal. Which I think raises a very important question: **what *is* pride exactly?**

Put most simply, **pride is an attitude of self-sufficiency, self-importance, and self-promotion**. A sense of being in control or being the only that needs to have any say in your life. Pride says *you* are the center of things. *You* are distinguished as the focal point. *That* is the pride we are talking about today.

I think it's also important to say what we *aren't* talking about. We are not talking about what I'll call “good pride.” We're not talking about being proud *of* something or someone when it's warranted. This is the idea of a father saying to his son, “I'm proud of you.” Or someone who did a great job on a project, who worked hard, who used their gifts and abilities to produce something wonderful, and they are *proud* of their work. Paul consistently tells churches in his letters that he is *proud* of them. 2 Corinthians 7:4 Paul says, **“I have taken great pride in you.”** In 2 Thessalonians 1:4 he says, **“Therefore,**

among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring." Being prideful is not the same as being proud of something. It would certainly be weird for Paul to regularly brag about having something that is explicitly sinful. Does that make sense?

Giving a teaching on pride is a very interesting thing to me. After Kent's teaching a few weeks ago, I realize it might be my cynicism talking, but teaching about pride feels like a bit of a conundrum. Because if we really think about it, **the people who *most need to hear a teaching on pride are the same people who are *least likely to listen to and hear said teaching. The nature of pride is that it is blinding. The most prideful people aren't walking around thinking, "this is a huge problem in my life." They're thinking, "other people have huge problems."****

I know in a lot of sermons, we start to think "I wish *that* person in my life was hearing this." But at least for today, for this sermon, *please* just consider that you might be the one who needs to hear it. Just consider it. I ask that we all adopt Paul's posture from 1 Timothy¹ when he said he considered himself the worst of all sinners. Or bare minimum, roll with me in admitting that *if* you struggled with pride, you would probably be the quickest to dismiss the things I'm about to say. Go ahead and turn in your bibles to [Luke chapter 18](#), we'll end up there in a little bit. And as a disclaimer, we usually read from the NIV, but I felt like the ESV translation more accurately and effectively communicates the idea today.

We're going to dig into more of the nuances of it in a little bit. But I want to say I regularly struggle with pride and have for as long as I can remember. To which most people in the room, I assume, would not be wildly offended or shocked to hear someone say. The response is probably something like, "okay, so?". Now if I got up here and said, "I have consistently struggled throughout my life with theft, witchcraft, and orgies," I think it would elicit a different response. And it's because we've said some sins are big deals, and we've said others are small deals. And we tend to downplay the ones we either find more acceptable socially, or the ones we'd much prefer to continue living with instead of pursuing repentance.

And that's where things get really dangerous with pride. We live in a time and culture that runs on pride. "Believe in yourself. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. *You* are the master of your fate. *You* control your destiny. You deserve it. Do whatever makes you happy. Live your truth." All of those thoughts elevate *self* above everything. It's all about

¹ 1 Timothy 1:15

you. It *should* be all about you. And if you're not thinking about yourself above all, you probably just hate yourself. We're not only *okay* with pride, we expect and encourage it.

One reason I think pride is so tricky is because it can be so hard to spot. Because it's often the underlying cause beneath so many other things we experience in our lives. I think it's helpful to compare it to something like wind. Last weekend, we had some incredibly windy nights. Potential tornadoes in the forecast, 60 mph gusts, *lots* of wind. I was asleep the whole time, but I knew it had been windy. The chairs around my fire pit were on their sides. There were big branches scattered through the yard. There were lots of leaves all over the patio that I had *just* cleaned off. Even if I hadn't seen the forecast, I would still know it had been super windy. Because it's obvious. I didn't see the wind. In fact you can never actually see the wind. But the effects of it are pretty universally recognized. Pride is similar. It is often difficult to see on its own, but you can *often* see its effects.

I want to spend some time this morning unpacking a few ways for us to spot pride in our lives by going through some of the more noticeable symptoms, then look to Scripture for what to do about it. First, let's take a look together at Luke 18 starting in verse 9. In his ministry, Jesus spent a lot of time confronting people who were consumed with pride. And it's worth mentioning that in the Bible, the idea of pride is very closely connected to the idea of self-righteousness. While it isn't the same word, the amount of overlap between the two is significant. In fact, you can't really have one without the other. So with that in mind, let's read our passage for today and let's use it to identify a handful of common symptoms of pride:

9 He [Jesus] *also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.* **10** *“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.* **11** *The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.* **12** *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’* **13** *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’* **14** *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Let me just start by saying how much I love the book of Luke. We've been spending lots of time in Matthew over the past couple years, and there's a lot more figurative language and explanations of parables and teachings that take a little more work to dig through.

But Luke just hits you with thesis statements sometimes. Who was Jesus talking to? Who is this parable for? “Some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.” Very direct. I love it. And it sets us up really well to talk through some:

Symptoms of pride

While it isn't exhaustive, we can pull out a list of really common symptoms of pride from this passage that show up consistently in people's lives. And I want to be very clear, these may not seem like completely separate or distinct categories. They bleed into each other a lot, and that's because they are all subtle outworkings of the same root. You may identify with a few of these, you may identify with lots of these. **But if you don't think you identify with any of these, I'll tell you right now, that's a pretty great indication that you do indeed struggle with pride.**

So here we go, the first symptom of pride is **comparison**. Look at verse 11: ***“The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God I thank you that I am not like other men.’”*** He has no interest in talking about any aspect of himself other than how he feels like he's better than someone else. In the parable, the Pharisee is praying to God about how terrible he thinks other people are. Now, we may not pray directly to God about it, but I think our more common modern equivalent is talking to other people about it. This comes out as gossip a lot of the time. Or the more socially acceptable label of “venting.”

This can come up in all sorts of ways. The most obvious is how it happens in the parable. When we say things like, “I would never...” or, “I can't believe someone would...” “I would never make that mistake. I would never say that to someone. I would never treat my spouse that way. I would never be that irresponsible with my money. I would never let my child act like that.” “I can't believe someone would vote for a democratic candidate. I can't believe someone would vote for a republican candidate. I can't believe someone would continuously struggle with gossip, or alcoholism, or pornography.” I'm so glad I'm not like other people.

With comparison, we are much quicker to point out the flaws in others than we are to bring up our own. This is the tendency we have to highlight things in other people that we feel like will make us look better. Another closely related symptom would be **fault-finding**. We reduce people to the sum of their shortcomings. We're really quick to point fingers at people and try to catch them in the act. We're just looking for “gotcha” opportunities. We see someone succeed and think, “yeah, but what about this *other*

thing they're terrible at?" "Sure, they managed to do something good, but let's be honest, they tend to be pretty annoying."

Look back at how the Pharisee highlights really specific things he thinks are just awful in other people. **"Extortioners, unjust [people], adulterers, or even like this tax collector."**

Look at all the horrible people doing horrible things around me. Gross. He's just scanning the crowd trying to find someone he can tear down. This is the tendency when you hear a sermon, or read a passage of Scripture, or see a convicting quote on social media, and immediately think of all the people you know who *really* need to hear it. But you also speed around the turn when it comes to looking at your own life and how it should apply.

Which is a general posture someone has towards others when they struggle with pride. Which leads to our next symptom: **contempt for others**. The dictionary definition of contempt is, "the feeling that a person is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn." That's intense language. But that's exactly what the Pharisee is doing in the parable. It's also the whole intended audience of the parable as Luke so bluntly told us at the beginning. This is one that has really jumped out to me in my own life at times unfortunately. **Contempt often comes out in categorical statements about people. "I can't stand people who do..." Completely reducing people to one specific thing you dislike. It's a prejudice towards people. I vividly remember when I first started leading a LifeGroup when I was in college, and I said to someone in my group, "I don't know what I would do if a fraternity guy tried to join our group." In my head, there was no way someone who associated with a fraternity could ever be in my group. I wouldn't have it. I was convinced I was so much better than anyone who might be in that category that I was unwilling to even consider that they could be a person I could be friends with or brothers to. I had contempt for people.**

And in reality, what I was doing was comparing myself to someone I thought very little of. I was thinking of myself as the pinnacle of existence. I convinced myself that the only comparison in life was between me and other people I didn't care for instead of comparing myself to Jesus. What I was actually saying without saying it out loud was, **"the gap between me and someone like that is bigger than the gap between me and Jesus."** What a wildly bold and foolish idea. That's just one glaringly obvious example from my own life that I have had to repent of and it's something I have to constantly check myself on. And something I've had to explicitly ask other people to engage me on. I have to have other people helping me look out for those tendencies and helping hold me accountable because the nature of pride, like I said earlier, is that it is so blinding. We can't repent of something we aren't able, or aren't willing, to see.

But we do this all the time. You hear things like, “gosh, look at all those obnoxious woke liberals. Ugh, these terrible religious fundamentalists.” The bitterness and contempt just drips from our lips. And pride shows no allegiance to any particular group. It runs rampant through any and everyone.

Let’s keep going and finish the symptoms from our passage. Look at verse 12: “*I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.*” The Pharisee just comes right out with his self-righteousness. “Check out my spiritual resume.” Pride causes us to have the mindset of, “I am doing great.” It causes this thought to take root underneath everything you do that says, “people are so fortunate to have me around. Everyone can learn so much from me.” This often comes out as self-centeredness in conversations with other people and the way we go through life. When the quickest things to come out of your mouth are all the things you’ve accomplished or all the things you think you’re really good at. Or maybe when you’re having a conversation and you just can’t help but turn the topic back to yourself. It also shows up when you start to think about the elevated value of your time and resources. When things are either more or less worth your time depending on how much it benefits you. “It’s not really worth my time to spend it with that person. LifeGroup isn’t worth my time because we ‘just sit around and talk’ or ‘no one ever listens to me or follows up with me in the ways I expect or want.’” Or “I’m not giving my money to that person because they don’t deserve it or I’m not going to end up getting anything out of it. They wouldn’t do it for me.”

And what often happens is prideful people will feel offended by the very thought that they might need to learn from others instead of the other way around. And there’s a lot of defensiveness and resistance when there’s an area of growth brought to their attention. And it often ends up going right back to some of the other symptoms we’ve already talked about. “I need to be more generous? You have way more money than me, what are you giving away?” Comparison. “You bought a house that’s too big for you anyways, that’s a huge waste of money.” Fault-finding. “You know what, people with as much money as you don’t ever think about other people.” Contempt for others.

As much as I hate doing it, I’ll keep using my life as an example. Hopefully some of these resonate with you so I’m not the only one who feels convicted today. We see this in the way the Pharisee is highlighting how great he is in the hopes that everyone else sees his greatness too. Pride creates a desperation for attention. We often attribute this to extroverted people, but that’s one way it can sneak in. As surprising as it is to some people, I am quite the introvert. So I don’t want to be the center of attention all the time. But I also struggle with pride, so I love being the center of attention when it’s on my terms.

Let me explain: if I feel like I have the opportunity to impress people, my tendency is to work incredibly hard to make sure that thing is brought up. When people talk about how pretty the Smoky Mountains are, I have to willfully fight the urge to drop comments about how they're okay, but it's not quite the same as the Himalayas I saw every day growing up in Nepal. "Mt. Leconte is nice and all, I don't know if you've ever heard of a little place called Mt. Everest!" People are talking about how crowded a place is? Everything inside me wants to blurt out something blatant like, "it is really crowded, it reminds me of that one time I went to South Africa during the World Cup. It was pretty crowded there too." I always want to one up people with experiences or stories because I feel like I *need* the affirmation and attention from people around me. I feel a need to make my life or my experiences seem more significant than theirs.

It can also come out in more harmful ways. I love making people laugh. Not a bad desire in general. But I love it to the point where I will sometimes do whatever it takes to get that response, even if it's at the expense of another person. In my heart, I know it's not good to put someone down or make fun of anyone or criticize people. But if I can crush one person's soul and get 10 other people in the room to laugh as a result, my gut response is that it's totally worth it. The attention is worth the cost because my tendency is to do whatever it takes to get the kind of attention I want. I feel like I deserve positive affirmation more than that person deserves to be treated with kindness and respect.

Prideful people tend to not have a desire to learn from others. Not a longing for wisdom. Not feeling a need to seek out people in life who can help teach you and instruct you and push you to grow. There's a feeling that, at the end of the day, you don't really *need* anyone. It's everyone else around you that's better off because you're here, or worse off because you're not.

And the list could go on. Hopefully some of those symptoms are helpful for you to at least begin thinking about where pride might be hiding in your own life. At the very least, I hope it helps you start searching for it. But I don't want us to stop at just acknowledging its existence. Because at the end of the day, why change anything? What *damage* is it actually doing? My life feels pretty good. In fact, my pride tells me I'm actually pretty fantastic, especially compared to everyone else. But pride actually has a much larger impact on us.

And I think it's really important to mention that pride doesn't *always* come out as elevating yourself positively. Remember, pride is considering yourself to be separate from or *beyond* other people. Which often comes out as considering yourself better than others. But it can just as easily present itself through self-deprecation. It doesn't have to be "I'm too good for this," it can also be, "I'm too *bad* for this. Woe is me, I'm beyond

saving.” This is the thought that we’re too much for God. Or we’re too far gone. Or we’re unloveable. **Pride is a posture of considering yourself just out of reach.** Out of reach for others or out reach for God because we’re too good or too bad. I didn’t want to get all the way through this without at least bringing it up because it can be very easy to think you don’t struggle with pride because you think very poorly of yourself. C.S. Lewis said it well in his book *Mere Christianity*: “humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”

Impact of Pride

So I said it at the beginning with the definition of pride, but I think one of the most dangerous results of pride is ending up in a place of feeling self-sufficient. The prideful person thinks they’re doing alright. “Sure, I’m not perfect but I’m *decent*. I’m not a serial killer. I’m not a thief, I’m not a bad parent, I’m a *good person*. At least I’m not like *other people*” And this sense of self-sufficiency completely kills our capacity for joy. **Pride kills our capacity for gratitude.** What is there to be grateful for other than me? When pride takes root inside of us, nothing is a gift. Nothing is a blessing. In order for something to truly be a gift, I need to not deserve it. But that category doesn’t *exist* for the person with pride. Because in their mind, they deserve everything they have. “I worked hard, I’m really good at this, I’m *killing* it. So obviously anything good that I have, I have because I earned it.” That’s not gratitude, that’s entitlement.

In the passage from Luke today, the Pharisee is talking to God, and singing his own praises. “Thank you God that I’m so fantastic.” There’s no joy to be found in that. But look at the end of the passage in verses 13-14:

13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The tax collector is *painfully* aware of his need for something outside of himself. There was no doubt in his mind that he hadn’t earned any favor. In fact, he’s so caught up in his need and the ways he feels like he’s fallen short, he doesn’t even notice the Pharisee across the room who is vocally tearing him apart. He’s so consumed with his need for a Savior, that he can’t be bothered to hear the Pharisee. So which of these people do you think understands the gospel of Jesus as good news?

Pride causes us to think we don’t really have all that much we need saving from. Think of it this way: **I recently turned 30 and participated in sports too intensely earlier in life, so**

I'm becoming quite familiar with a dull ache in my body that just doesn't really go away. My shoulder kind of bothers me. My knee has a twinge, but it's just part of life. I still get around fine. Let's say I go to a doctor tomorrow and they say, "good news, take this pill one time and that ache will go away!" I'd respond pretty well. That's great! And in 3 months when that's normal, I'll probably forget the mild inconvenience that it used to be. Now imagine someone has a terminal illness. They were told with pretty much *absolute* certainty that they had 3-5 years to live at best. Imagine if they were to go to the doctor for their routine scan to check the progress of their illness and the doctor looks them in the eye and says, "it's gone. You're healed. Go live the rest of your life with the assurance that you've got a long healthy road ahead." That's not something they will soon forget.

Pride makes us see things the first way I described. We had a mild inconvenience and Jesus took care of it. Thanks pal. I know Jesus offers me forgiveness, but it's not like I'm his biggest project. I'm a side-hustle at best. What does forgiveness mean to someone who doesn't feel like they have all that much to be forgiven of? It's cheap.

But gospel humility makes us see things the second way. To the person who sees themselves accurately, there is no better news. To the person who sees the gap between themselves and God as the insurmountable chasm that it is, the person who sees the depth of their sin and their complete and utter inability to make things right between themselves and a perfect God, that person falls on their face in reverence. That person weeps with joy and can't contain their exclamations of praise for someone who would show them that kind of grace. The proud person has nothing to celebrate, while the humble person has *everything* to celebrate. Pride *destroys* our capacity for gratitude.

So I want to wrap things up today looking at and reflecting on Jesus' example in the beauty of the gospel. The gospel is good news and beautiful *because of* how undeserving we are of it. Look at [Philippans chapter 2](#), we'll put it on the screen:

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

We see a command in this passage to value others above ourselves. It says to “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.” Do nothing that’s just for you or about you or at the expense of others. Why would we do that? And how do we even know what that looks like? We have to look at Jesus. Jesus perfectly embodies the end of the passage from Luke. “The one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

If there was ever anyone who had any reason to, anyone who had the *right to* consider himself above others, it was Jesus. Jesus *was* God in the flesh. Jesus was completely perfect. Jesus never made a mistake. Jesus *was* better than everyone. But he “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.” He made himself lowly. He considered others above himself. He gave up equality with God, he gave up the comforts of Heaven, he gave up *everything* for our sake. The one who deserves everything instead gave up everything for you. For me. Jesus’ humility during his life is something to be marveled at, but Jesus’ humility in his *death* is even more indescribably beautiful.

The fullness of God in all his glory was willing to humble himself, not just to enter the world as a man, but to then be murdered on a cross for our sake, for the sake of those he loves. Jesus was willing to humble himself to the point of death to undo the curse that was caused by pride. And we are invited to follow in Jesus’ footsteps out of our pride. I want to end with a quote from a pastor in New York named Rich Villodas.

“Humility is not just doing a lowly task; humility is a life committed to the hard task of lowering one’s defenses. The most humble people are often the people who are least defensive. In Jesus we are invited into a life of lowering our defenses and cultivating humility.”

Rich Villodas

Communion