

This summer we're going through the book of Proverbs, a book that is all about how to live wisely. Tim Keller defines wisdom as "competency with regards to the realities of life." The wise person knows the right thing to do in the majority of situations where the moral rules do not apply. This morning, we will be looking at an aspect of character that can cause us to live foolishly, and that is pride.

There are many dire warnings against the dangers of pride in Proverbs. For example:

Proverbs 11:2 - When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Proverbs 16:18-19 - Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. ¹⁹ Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

Let's look this morning at three aspects of pride and why pride is so dangerous, and then three better ways to live.

1) Self-reliance

One dangerous aspect of pride is self-reliance, the belief that we can handle life ourselves and don't need any help. **Self-reliance is not entirely a bad thing**; after all, it is a good thing when a child learns to tie their own shoes, when a teenager learns to cook food and do laundry themselves, and when an adult can get their own home and pay their own bills. But a foolish self-reliance comes when we begin to think that we don't need anyone else, including God, in order to live our lives.

Proverbs 28:26 - Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.

A number of years ago, I wrote a Pulse article where I thanked all of the people who had helped get me to where I am today, and there were at least 50 people. The fact is that none of you got to where they are on their own; it took parents, relatives, teachers, friends, professionals, and many others to get us to where we are. **No one is self-reliant.** No one is a self-made man or woman.

This foolish self-reliance shows up most often with people who think they can figure it out themselves or overcome addictions on their own instead of admitting their needs for help. In fact, the proud often see advice giving as a personal attack because they are not humble enough to admit their need. The humble know that there are so many more things about them that could be pointed out, and that they need the perspective of others in order to grow and live wisely.

Proverbs 26:12 - Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them.

There is a reason that recovery movements begin with admitting our need for help, admitting that we can not overcome things on our own. But in order to do that, it takes laying down our pride and admitting that trying to be self-reliant is a foolish way to live.

As foolish as it is to try to be self-reliant and not accept the help from those around us, there is an even greater foolishness, and that is to refuse to accept God's help, to think that we can live life without God. After all, pride is what keeps people from accepting God's offer of salvation, because salvation is for those who know they are sinners and know that they are not good enough to save themselves.

Romans 3:20 - Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The proud do not think they need God. They think they've got it all figured out on their own. But the self-reliant are actually fools. Think of Jesus speaking to the church in Laodicea in Revelation:

Revelation 3:17 – “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”

Or Paul's words in **Galatians 6:3** –If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

None of you got to where you are without the help of others. And no one is where they are without the help of God, whether or not you acknowledge Him. The skills you have, the opportunities you were given, all of it is from God. I love how Tim Keller defined pride: **pride is cosmic plagiarism**. Plagiarism is when someone else wrote or created it, but I claim that I did it, and that therefore I deserve the glory and honor. You would naturally be outraged if I plagiarized from you or someone else and did not give the credit where it was due. But we are all guilty of that kind of pride. There is nothing good that we have done or accomplished that we do not ultimately owe to the grace and power of God.

1 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?

What do you have that you did not receive? And why do you boast as though you did not receive it?

The first way that pride leads us to destruction is self-reliance. The fool only relies on himself, not being open to the help of others or the help of God.

2) Self-obsession

Proverbs 21:4 (ESV) - Haughty eyes and a proud heart—the lamp of the wicked—are sin.

Haughty eyes and a proud heart are the lamp of the wicked. In other words, just as a lamp allows us to see the world a certain way, pride causes us to interpret everything through the lens of how it affects me. Our primary concern is our own glory and reputation, and we enter every situation unconsciously thinking “what will make me look good?” Pride causes us to walk into church thinking about our own comfort and glory, to seek out jobs and spouses and friends who will enhance our reputation, to take on projects and causes that will bring us greater glory, and to interact online in a way that will cause others to think well of us. And this leads to destruction.

Just think of the world where everyone is obsessed with themselves, and everyone enters situations and relationships thinking about how it will benefit them, how it will increase their own glory or get them what it is they want? That kind of world will be hell.

3) Self-identification

The third way pride affects us is that in order to feel good about ourselves, we have to find something that gives us a sense of self-worth and specialness and build our identity upon it. It can be anything. You may be finding pride in your sense of style, your great work ethic, your parenting, your political savvy, your morality, your open-mindedness, that you are not so uptight about things or that you take things seriously; you might be proud of your money, your status, or even the sports team you follow.

And once I have found that, I build myself up and gain pride by comparing myself with others. As CS Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something; pride only gets pleasure in having more of it than the next person. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about.”

Pride shows itself in all of the ways we try to gain an identity through comparing ourselves to others. A great Biblical example is found in Luke 18:9-14:

Luke 18:9–14 - To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The 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. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³“But the tax collector **stood at a distance**. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

How many of, whether spoken or unspoken, go through life feeling better about ourselves by comparing ourselves to others in a way that bring us greater glory? “God, I thank you that I am not like him or her...”

Proverbs 21:24 - The proud and arrogant person—“Mocker” is his name— behaves with insolent fury.

And don’t think that just because you have low self-esteem that you are not proud. The one who thinks lowly of himself is also self-obsessed and seeking to find his identity in something in this world. The difference is that he is playing the comparison game and losing, coming up on the short end.

Think of the consequences of this kind of pride, the pride that insists on doing things and figuring things out yourself, that is constantly thinking about your own glory and needs, and that tries to gain an identity by looking down on others. Think of how defensive we can get when people criticize us, how we can blame others for our problems, how hard it can be to admit our own sin our failures. This kind of pride leads to destruction. And I know that many of you are saying “I hope so-and-so is listening, because they really need to hear this.” But that is just another kind of pride, the refusal to accept that this message is really for you.

But there is a better way. Three better ways to live:

1) Admitting our need for help

Instead of a foolish self-reliance, we admit our need for help. When we admit our need, we open ourselves to God’s spiritual power

Proverbs 11:2 - When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Proverbs 13:10 - Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

The proud think they are self-reliant. The humble are willing to admit their need for help from God and from others. Think of Jesus' words that begin the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:3 - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The poor in spirit know they are spiritually bankrupt and are dependent upon God for everything. Just like those who are poor in material things have nothing material to offer, it is the same with those who are poor in spirit. We recognize that we have nothing of spiritual value to offer to God. Not that we in and of ourselves are worthless, because we are all made in God's image, but that we have nothing of spiritual worth to offer to a holy God. We can not save ourselves. We do not measure up to God's holy standard. We are desperately in need of God's grace and mercy. We need help.

This poverty of spirit is exemplified by the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14:

Luke 18:13–14 - "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Notice which person comes away blessed, or approved by God. It is the tax collector who simply cries out of his poverty of spirit, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Poverty of spirit is not thinking "God is so lucky to have me on his team" or believing that God owes you favor for your good life. It's responding like Peter did when Jesus hauled in that net of fish on his boat – go away from me, for I am a sinful man. It is Gideon or Moses, believing that they are unworthy of the call God has put on their life. It's Isaiah saying "woe to me, for I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips" upon seeing a vision of the Lord. It is admitting our sin and asking God for mercy.

Proverbs 28:13 - Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Self-reliance leads to destruction. Humility leads to salvation and to spiritual power. As Martin Lloyd-Jones put it, when talking about discipleship:

“There is the mountain that you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at that mountain which you are told you must ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it.”

How counter-cultural is this? Poverty of spirit is completely antithetical to the spirit of this world. Our world emphasizes self-reliance, self-confidence, self-expression. Believe in yourself. Express yourself. You can do this on your own. Poverty of spirit is the admission that we don't “got this.” It's a recognition that we are sinners, that we have blind spots, that we are always in need of God's mercy and grace. It's an admission that self-reliance is a joke. It's the realization that we can not even take our next breath apart from the power and grace of God. Again, this is not low self-esteem as our world thinks of it, wallowing in our own worthlessness. No - it is a proper appraisal of our condition before a holy God. As Dan Phillips wrote in his commentary on Proverbs: “It is not the case of a 6-foot tall man trying to convince himself he's only 2 feet tall, but standing next to a giant redwood and seeing himself dwarfed by it.” When we come to know our great God, we see how small we are. When we see the holiness of God, we realize how sinful we are. When we see the eternally good perspective of God, we realize how limited and warped our view of reality is. We will not trust in ourselves, or think too highly of ourselves.

As Jonathan Edwards put it: “The spiritually proud person shows it in his finding fault with other saints. . . . The eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home and sees so much evil in his own that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts.”

The better way to live is with humility, acknowledging our need for God and others. As Andrew Murray says, “Just as water ever seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds you abased and empty, His glory and power flow in.”

And as Paul said in **2 Corinthians 12:9–10** - But he said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

You want a life of power? It does not come from a foolish self-reliance, but from humbling yourself before the Lord. And if you want to grow in wisdom and in character, you need the wisdom and help of other wise and godly people in your life. Humble yourself and reach out for help.

2) Self-forgetfulness

As C.S. Lewis said, true humility is “not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less.” Humility is fundamentally a form of self-forgetfulness as opposed to pride’s self-obsession. The humble are those who are not entering every situation thinking consciously or unconsciously about what they can get out of it, but enter looking to see how they can serve others and glorify God. As Paul put it:

Philippians 2:3–11 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, **being made in human likeness**. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When you realize that there is a Father who loves you and cares for you, a Savior who died for you on the cross when you were at your worst, a Holy Spirit who will never leave you, then you can follow in Jesus’ footsteps by not being so concerned about yourself. You are loved. So go love others. Your needs will be met. So go and serve others. And if you get mistreated or mocked in the process, if the world doesn’t give you glory, that’s okay, because you know that they did the same to Jesus, your Savior, and you are sharing in His glory forever.

A Christlike self-forgetfulness is a better way to live than being self-obsessed. True glory comes to those who sacrificially love, who give their lives for others, not to those who point to themselves. **Think of the most meaningful funerals you have been to.** I would bet it was not based on the size of the bank account or worldly accomplishments, but based on the amount of sacrificial love given to people. The humble are the ones who will hear in the end, “well done, good and faithful servant.”

3) Identity in Christ

Instead of trying to build an identity based on what you are good at and comparing yourself to others, , the gospel declares that there is a better way. The gospel declares that we are so sinful, so evil, that nothing less than the death of the Son of God could save us. And yet, we are so loved that He willingly died for us. And this both humbles us and gives us an unshakeable confidence. **In Jesus, we gain an identity of one who is beloved, but not in a way that causes us to take pride in ourselves and look down on**

others. We are able to admit the worst about ourselves, knowing that God has seen it all and completely forgiven it and loved us anyways. **And then we go out to love and serve God and others,** not from a place of self-interest or trying to earn our self-worth, but from a heart that wants to love others as God in Christ has loved us.

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:8–10 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

When this becomes your identity, a sinner saved by the amazing grace of God, a rebel against God who has been forgiven and loved, then you live life wisely, with a humble confidence, not trying to gain an identity through self-reliance, or self-obsession, or self-identification, but through admitting our need for help, forgetting ourself as we are cared for by God, so that we might compassionately love and serve those around us instead of using them for our own glory, and finding our identity in Christ, the Savior who loves us and has given us eternal life. Let’s close with these words of Paul:

Galatians 6:14 - May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.