

What Does the Bible Say About ... Pride?
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1 Peter 5:5-11

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger must be subject to the elders.^[a] And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for

“God opposes the proud

but gives grace to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ,^[b] will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power^[c] forever and ever. Amen.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

Today I'm going to start a new occasional series of sermons on What does the Bible say about ... and today's subject is Pride.

So, what does the Bible say about pride? It says a fair amount, but we'll just take a few examples. Pride means "the quality of having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one's importance," according to Oxford Languages.¹ Synonyms for pride include self-conceit, hubris, arrogance, vanity, self-glorification. You get the picture. It is the negative pride we are talking about.

In our Old Testament lesson today, we hear about King Saul and his jealousy and hatred of David. Saul was **the man** for the Jewish people for a long time. He was king. But along the way he disobeys God and cuts his own path. For example, the Lord commanded that Saul kill all the people and sheep and livestock of the Amalekites. But instead, Saul lets their king live, and he lets his soldiers keep all their best livestock. (1 Sam. 15:1-9) Saul is saying to God that he knows better than God. I don't have to do **everything** God commands me to do. My plan is better. Then later he goes to Carmel and erects a monument to himself (1 Sam 15:12.) You must be full of pride and bubbling with arrogance to have a monument built for yourself.

¹ Oxford Languages,
<https://www.bing.com/search?q=synonyms+for+pride+&form=ANNT1&refig=7b4f98114c514ddeb36df81b839c4544>

Saul's problem really starts when David comes along. Saul can't handle that David is better than him at being a warrior and leader.

He couldn't handle that he wasn't as good or popular with the people, so he tried to kill David. And he also tried having David killed. Ultimately, Saul's life ends when he falls on his sword. He does not live happily ever after with his pride.

In addition to Saul's story of how his arrogance and ego ate him up, what else does the Bible say about pride? Well, let's look at what Proverbs 16:18-19 says: "Pride goes before ruin, Arrogance, before failure. Better to be humble and among the lowly Than to share spoils with the proud." That is according to the Jewish Study Bible. It goes on to say in the commentary that "Pride runs counter to trust in God," and pride is, "An arrogant overconfidence in one's abilities to control his fate prepares the way for disaster."²

And finally, we can look at Isaiah 2:12-17. "The Lord of hosts will bring all that is proud and arrogant will bring it low. Then man's haughtiness shall be humbled, and the pride of man brought low. None but the lord shall be exalted in that day."

² *Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1462.

Now, I'm not suggesting anyone here is so proud that they want to have someone killed like Saul. Or that our pride here will bring down the wrath of God like it says in Isaiah.

These stories are told to highlight to us that pride is dangerous.

Now, pride in its proper form is good. We can be proud of our work. We can be proud of our accomplishments. I suspect most people here are proud of their military careers. I'm sure there are a lot of people in here that are proud of their children. Perhaps you have been given awards for your service in a non-profit group. It's healthy to have pride in yourself and to have good and healthy self-esteem. That's what I think God would like for us, to feel good about ourselves and feel good about the positive things we have done in our lives.

But pride can become a negative, where it becomes self-conceit, as the great 20th century Christian author C.S. Lewis describes it in his seminal work *Mere Christianity*. The chapter on pride in the book is called, "The Great Sin." Lewis writes, "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete **anti-God** state of mind."³

³ *The Complete C.S. Lewis*, 103

The sinful pride that Lewis is addressing is pride that is at its essence competitive. This pride means we want to look and be better than other people. Lewis says that if we say someone is proud of being rich, or good looking, they are not proud of that exactly. They are proud of being richer, or better looking than other people, he writes.⁴

In other words, it's the looking down on someone that's the problem. If we look down on someone because they don't have as nice a car as we do, or as nice of a house, or they have a cardboard sign they're holding on the side of Fry Boulevard asking for help, we suffer from a case of pride. If we have gone to an elite college and we talk about it all the time, or bring it up to people we meet, perhaps we are making a point that we think we're smarter and better than you. Are we better than you? No. Not at all. God doesn't care about any of that. God cares about how we are living your lives. God cares about how we are treating our family, friends, and strangers. God cares about how much we are praying to God. God cares about if we are living our lives on the model of Jesus Christ.

But when a person is inflicted with a lot of pride, that is big trouble, according to C.S. Lewis. He writes, "As long as you are proud you cannot know God.

⁴ Ibid., 104.

A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”⁵ And that something above us that he is speaking of, is of course, God.

I believe that if we are prideful, we will all be humbled eventually. That’s what scripture is telling us. We will be brought low, and we’ll need to ask the Lord for forgiveness for our pride.

What are the consequences of the sin of pride? Well, people won’t want to spend time with us. Relationships can be ruined. It will push people away because we are arrogant and insufferable to be around. Or sometimes pride, our ego, gets in the way and we think we know everything, and we won’t ask for help. That can have some negative consequences too.

Now if anyone had a reason to be full of pride, it would be Jesus. But of course, he was the Son of God, and he was without sin, so he couldn’t fall into the sin of pride. The stories of his exploits are many in the New Testament: all the healings, the mass feedings, raising people from the dead.

⁵ Ibid., 105.

If anyone had a reason to look down on people, it would be him, but he didn't. He was also the man who washed the feet of his apostles at the Last Supper. That is humility. Our Savior is a humble servant. That is who we need to base our lives on.

The opposite of the sin of pride is the virtue of humility. It's admitting we don't have all the answers. It's not talking about ourselves all the time. It's not looking down on people who don't have the advantages we have. It is not boasting about our accomplishments, but instead, enjoying our accomplishments in a reasonable way. It's about being the people God wants us to be.

Fortunately for us, we can ask for forgiveness from God and change our ways. That is one of the reasons why our second hymn was chosen. Jesus knows when we are drowning in our prideful ways and through the love of God and God's "refining fire," God works to burn the prideful sin off us.

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⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."

Fear is behind the sin of pride. Fear we are not enough. Fear we don't measure up and we must let everyone know how great we are. Fear we will lose our position or be humbled. The corrosive toxicity of fear. We will all be humbled eventually. It's just a matter of what are the circumstances that bring it on. At that point of being humbled, we gain our strength back in praying to God for help and forgiveness, asking God to take away our pride. Amen.