

- **\*READ James 4:1-6\*** During this unprecedented time of social-distancing and quarantine because of COVID-19, there have been a number of slogans and mottos that have been shared to help preserve a sense of unity. Sayings such as **"Stronger Together"** and **"We're All In This Together"** have been shared across various social media platforms, TV & Radio commercials, etc. Let me state that I really love the idea behind supporting such mottos. There is a great danger during such a time as this for people to lose their sense of unity and community as we are not able to be together with one another as we are accustomed. This is a special time for us to put forth more effort than usual towards unity and a sense of togetherness.
- As I look around, I see a number of fantastic efforts being put forth that are aiding a growth in unity. Numerous individuals and companies are putting their money where their mouths are by financially supporting those who have been hurting in that way during this pandemic. I have also seen a number of individuals who are putting forth great efforts to highlight the good that is being done by people throughout this country and the world. I can't help but smile every time I see a car procession for someone's birthday or just to show love and appreciation towards those who are stuck in their homes.
- But sadly, there are also instances where efforts towards unity are not helped. Instead of coming together for the good of the country and her citizens, many within the political sphere are using this occasion as a means to throw political grenades at their opponents. There isn't only one side that is guilty of such, for it is happening all around. I recognize that there are genuine disagreements on policy as to which tactics will be best, but I have also seen times when pride is simply in the way of progress. Shame on our elected leaders and any individual who allows pride to be the cause of greater harm and conflict during a time such as this.
- And yet, this shouldn't be of great surprise to us for pride has been a thorn in the side of mankind from the very beginning. Pride was at the heart of the temptation given by the serpent to the woman, Eve. After she affirms the command of God to not eat of the tree for in the day they ate of it they would be doomed to die, the serpent says to the woman, **"No! You will not die," the serpent said to the woman. "In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.** (Genesis 3:4-6)
- This is the first, but surely not the last instance of pride being at the root of great issues experienced by mankind. From the text of **Genesis 3** all the way through the Bible to the book of James and even afterward, we see pride continually being the root of problems within the lives of mankind. This pride doesn't only have spiritual consequences, but there are real-life practical consequences that come as a result of pride being present.
- Dave Anderson is the founder of [learntolead.com](http://learntolead.com) which is a foundation dedicated to teaching men and women how to be better leaders and managers within the workplace first, but also in various positions in life. Mr. Anderson is quoted as saying, **"There are many reasons managers fail. For some, the organization outgrows them. Others don't change with the times. Some spread themselves too thin and work long and hard but not smart. Many abandon the priorities and disciplines that once made them great and never get back to them. A few make poor character choices...But all these causes for management failure have their root in one common cause: pride. In the simplest terms, pride is devastating. I'm not talking about the pride one has in their work or their accomplishments. I'm indicting the pride that inflates your sense of self-worth and distorts your perspective of reality."**

- That last sentence identifies the issues that are at hand. While it is entirely appropriate to have some sense of pride as in self-worth in who we are, what we work to achieve, and even in the Lord (**Jehoshaphat II Chronicles 17:1-5**), that pride must be kept in check to make sure that it stays focus on the right things and does not rise to the level of inflating our view of who we are, what we have done, and what we are capable of. When we begin to think too highly of ourselves, bad things will happen. There is a reason James warns against being full of pride! Therefore, we must strive to be a people who are humble in spirit even if everyone around us is full of pride.
- Our congregation's yearly theme for this year is focused on striving to live Godly in an Ungodly world, and this month's lesson will give attention to what the Bible says concerning avoiding pride, the problems that come with it, and how we can be an honorable people who are led by humility. Let's begin by simply considering some verses from the Scriptures concerning how God views the proud and prideful of heart. Around 100 texts address the issue, and the vast majority of them paint the proud and prideful in a not so great light. Here is a sampling of those verses dealing with this issue.

### I. The Bible Consistently Condemns The Proud & Prideful

- A. *"Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished."* (Proverbs 16:5)
- B. *"Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18)
- C. *"The pride of mankind will be humbled, and human loftiness will be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted on that day."* (Isaiah 2:11,17)
- D. *"For from within, out of people's hearts, come...pride...All these evil things come from within and defile a person."* (Mark 7:21-23)

### II. The Problems With Pride

A. Again, let me reiterate that the pride we must be avoiding is the type of pride that causes one to inflate their sense of self worth and distorts an accurate perspective on reality. This really goes back to the concept I introduced last year that I found in the book *"Leadership & Self-Deception"* of being stuck in the box. When we get stuck in our own boxes then we become disillusioned to reality. We begin to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to, and we don't see other people for who they really are. This type of pride is dangerous, damaging, and will lead many a person to ruin in their relationships with others and God.

B. I also really like the way John Maxwell differentiates between good pride in one's self and the sinful pride that is condemned in Scripture. ***"There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. "Good pride" represents our dignity and self-respect. "Bad pride" is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance. When you look at the word pride, notice the middle letter is "I". When you are full of pride on the inside, it makes you stiff, stubborn, and creates strife with others.*** What type of issues are created with others? Consider the following negative characteristics that are present within the hearts of those who are proud and full of this bad type of pride...

C. The prideful are self-centered.

1. Those who are prideful are those who believe themselves to always be the best and most important people in any given room. They expect for everything to cater to their every need and desire as the best person in the room. If their needs and desires cause others to be put out then so be it because they deserve for their needs and desires to be taken care of above another else because again...they are the best and most important people. Others do not matter at the end of the day because all that matters to this type of person is themselves.

2. When I think of someone in Scripture who fits this description, my mind automatically goes to Diotrephes of **III John 1:9,10**. This man wanted to run the church just how he wanted it run. He had taken over this congregation and ran it as a prideful tyrant. Surely we recognize that such a person would be miserable to work with...most because their would be no working with but only working for! This man would also fit into our next problem with pride...

#### D. The prideful lack the ability to handle criticism.

1. Those of the same ilk as Diotrephes cannot handle any sort of criticism whether it be constructive or not. Just as Diotrephes did not receive the authority of the Apostles, so do the prideful not receive instruction, teaching, or criticism from anyone...even those who actually know better and have greater knowledge, wisdom, or expertise in a particular situation.
2. Remember, prideful people have an inflated perception of themselves. They believe that they already has it all figured out. They know everything that needs to be known, and they don't need anyone giving advice...much less offering an actual criticism! Concerning those who refused to listen to the council wisdom, Solomon writes in **Proverbs 1:29-32**, *"Because they hated knowledge, didn't choose to fear the Lord, were not interested in my counsel, and rejected all my correction, they will eat the fruit of their way and be gluttoned with their own schemes. For the apostasy of the inexperienced will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them."*

#### E. The prideful will blame others for their failures.

1. What happens when those who refuse to listen to the wisdom of others fail in whatever it is that they are trying to achieve? Those who do so and are full of pride will only seek to blame others for their failures. These people believe they have all of the answers so any sort of failures must be the fault of someone else!
2. The reality is that the prideful person who lacks humility simply refuses to admit any mistake on his or her part. This strategy might work for the moment within their own minds, but those who are looking at things from the outside can quickly identify someone who simply refuses to be responsible for his or her actions. As I mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, these issues with pride aren't a new problem considering both Adam and Eve tried to pass the buck for their rebellion against God by eating of the forbidden fruit in **Genesis 3:11-13**.

#### F. The prideful will take all of the credit for successes.

1. On the other side of the coin are those prideful people who strive to take all of the credit when some great success is achieved. It does not matter if there were other people who made such a success possible...all that matters is that the prideful person receives all of the accolades for what has been accomplished. Scripture clearly teaches us this is a bad idea.
2. The example that first comes to mind is that of Nebuchadnezzar in **Daniel 4. Verses 28-33** are a fulfillment of a previous prophecy that would have the king reduced to a mere wild beast. This prophecy was enacted based upon Nebuchadnezzar's prideful proclamation, *"Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?"* The Lord quickly reminds the Babylonian king, *"King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared that the kingdom has departed from you. You will be driven away from people to live with the wild animals, and you will feed on grass like cattle for seven periods of time, until you acknowledge that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms, and he gives them to anyone he wants."*
3. Even the greatest, wisest, most powerful, and most influential person on this planet needs to pause and remember that all is possibly only through the grace provided by God. Failure to make such an acknowledgment will only result in God's judgment against our pride and others being turned off to our company.

### III. Humility: The Honorable Way

- A. Describing the life of humility as the honorable way of life might seem a strange description, but it is a Biblically supported description according to Proverbs 29:23. ***“A person’s pride will humble him, but a humble spirit will gain honor.”*** To live in this way is to live in a way that shows the Lord that we seek to walk in His ways, and it is only in walking in His ways that we will truly be honored by the one who gives true and lasting honor. However, this does not mean that living in a humble way is easy. In fact, the first point we want to consider is one of the most difficult things that any of us can do in this life...admit that we are not all that great.
- B. Choosing to be humble begins by acknowledging our weaknesses, shortcomings, & mistakes.
1. If pride is believing that we are the best without ever making a mistake then it would stand to reason that humility would be recognizing that we are not the best thing since sliced bread because we all have plenty of weaknesses and shortcomings, and we do make mistakes. If we desire to grow in humility within our character, then the first step is to truly make this acknowledgement about ourselves. We must be willing to admit that we’re not perfect.
  2. C.S. Lewis is once quoted as stating, *“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, you are very conceited indeed.”*
  3. This might be a difficult thing for us to do for ourselves, but the reality is that we would be the one person believing we are perfect because everyone around us already knows we are not perfect, God being first and foremost. Included in Hannah’s prayer to the Lord in **I Samuel 2** are these words, ***“My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is lifted up by the Lord. My mouth boasts over my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. There is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God. Do not boast so proudly, or let arrogant words come out of your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and actions are weighed by him.” (I Samuel 2:1-3)***
  4. Though it is difficult to admit our faults and acknowledge our imperfections, **Proverbs 18:12** gives us great incentive to do such. ***“Before his downfall a person’s heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.”*** We will never receive true and worthwhile honor from others or from the Lord unless we embrace humility as a foundation part of our character.
- C. Choosing to be humble is choosing to be like Jesus.
1. While we cannot be like Jesus in admitting our mistakes...well because Jesus made no mistakes...We can be humble like Jesus by humbling ourselves to lovingly and sacrificially serving others. In my opinion, no single text better describes Jesus’ humility as well as **Philippians 2:1-11** does.
  2. This text begins by encouraging the reader to seek unity with our brethren through being humble in spirit and not seeking our own wants or desires. Paul gives support for these admonitions by founding such a need squarely upon the shoulders of Jesus because He first lived in this way. He was willing to humble Himself in an incredible way by giving up His existence in heaven to come down to earth and live as a man. He was even willing to die as a man so that we might gain the benefit of His blood atoning for our sins. He did all of this for us! Oh and by the way...Jesus’ humility led Him to being honored in the greatest way possible by Him being given, ***“the name that is above every name...” (Proverbs 18:12 & Matthew 16:20)***
- D. Choosing to be humble allows for us to see the immense value in others.
1. First and foremost, we need to recognize that putting forth a concerted effort to humble ourselves will allow for us to see the value of God and His power within our lives. In **Psalms 20**, the author is focusing on God delivering David during battles, I want us to notice what is said in **verses 7-9**.

*"Some take pride in chariots, and others in horses, but we take pride in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand firm. Lord, give victory to the king! May he answer us on the day that we call."* When we humble ourselves, we recognize that we are not the true source of our strength and success...all of that comes from the Lord.

2. Additionally, we are able to see the value of other people who are in our lives. While we are up on our pedestal, it is easy to simply see others as tools to bring about our success and happiness. However, when we see that these people are actually people who are deserving of love and kindness...then we might be willing to take our eyes off ourselves and do good unto those who are around us. I have seen this so much during these crazy weeks. So many people have been seeking to serve their fellow man, and I have even been a recipient of someone who sought to aid in some needs they thought I might have.
  3. Friends, let me suggest that we will never see the needs of others and seek to provide for those needs...or we will never simply do something kind for another person if our eyes are fixed only upon our own selves. We must humble ourselves to recognize that others are around us doing great work, showing their value, and even adding value to our own lives. If you want to see a great example of someone who was willing to lovingly acknowledge those who also working all around him to his benefit and the benefit of others, I encourage you to read through **Romans 16:1-16** and note all of the different individuals who Paul recognized as being valuable to the efforts in the kingdom and the Gospel. If Paul was a self-absorbed and prideful man then I am confident he never would have noticed and certainly not acknowledged such people! No doubt that him taking the time to list these people by name was of great encouragement to those whom he listed.
- E. Choosing to be humble does not mean that we believe we lack value or ability.
1. I believe there is a misconception that humility means that we never do anything that could even possibly put us in the spotlight or show us as having done something worth noting. While I recognize the truth of serving and working in such a way that our left hand doesn't even know what our right hand is doing (**Matthew 6:3**), this does not mean that we do nothing at all! Yes, we are to be humble...but that humility keeps us from simply sounding the trumpet before we serve...it should not keep us from serving when we have the opportunity and ability to do such.
  2. I believe the text that shows this as being the expectation of God is **Romans 12:3-8**. This text gives a familiar warning that we not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but it does not say that we not think anything of ourselves at all. Instead, the instruction is to think "*sensibly*" of ourselves and properly identify the ways in which we can serve the kingdom of God and others. As we go about serving in the ways we are able, we need to make sure that we are keeping our motivations in check. We should not be performing any act of faith because we desire prestige or accolades. Instead, we ought to serve out of our love for God and our fellow man. When we do this...then our God is well pleased, and honor in His eyes will be ours to possess.

We live in a world where so many people only seem to care about themselves and don't you ever point out that they might be wrong in some way. That type of pride is too prevalent, but our God has called us to be better for Him. His Son humbled Himself so that we might humble ourselves before Him and acknowledged Him as the one true and living God who is worthy to be praised. May we all fight against the evil influence of the world and remain a people of great humility before God so that we might receive the great blessings He has promised to the humble. *"Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."* (**James 4:7-10**)