



STEERING CLEAR OF PRIDE: HUMILITY AS A LIFE SKILL



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Introduction

The story goes of an exchange between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October, 1995.

Americans: "Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision."

Canadians: "Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision."

Americans: "This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course."

Canadians: "No, I say again, you divert YOUR course."

Americans: "THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE UNITED STATES' ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 15 DEGREES NORTH. THAT'S ONE-FIVE DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTER MEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP."

Canadians: "This is a lighthouse. Your call."¹

Now this event likely never happened but the story is often shared as a warning against pride. The message is clear—pride leads to shipwrecks, so steer well clear lest you make a shipwreck of your life.

In this field guide, we're going to take a good, hard look at pride, its danger, where it derives from, and how we can (with God's help) defeat it. My prayer is that instead of unchecked pride causing a shipwreck of your life, you learn to steer well clear by cultivating a life of growing humility.

Now (changing metaphors slightly), pride is a slippery fish. We can all spot it (usually most easily in others), but few of us slow down to think about exactly what pride is. A good first place for us to start this field guide then is to consider a definition of pride.

So, here's my attempt at one:

Pride is a heart-disposition of self-exaltation, where I seek to put myself in God's place.

Breaking this down, first, pride is a *heart-disposition*. It has its root in the heart. The heart is where our thoughts and desires come from. Pride, therefore, is not something that is external to us, like a foreign fighter attacking from the outside, but instead it's a deadly enemy within seeking to sabotage our Christian lives, seemingly at every turn.

And next, my definition states that pride happens when I *seek to put myself in God's place*. The broadest category for this kind of substitution is called idolatry. However, what pride seeks to substitute in God's place is not external to me. It is me. Substituting *myself* in God's place. Pride isn't worshipping and serving someone or something else, but it's insisting that I am the one who should be worshipped and served.

¹ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/the-obstinate-lighthouse/>

And so, when we break it down like this, we see how dangerous and destructive pride is. Pride wants to put me in the place of God. No wonder Augustine said, "Pride is the beginning of sin."² And agreeing, CS Lewis further elaborated, "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."³

And so, from pride flows many other sins. Think about it—proud people also often struggle with slander, bitterness, fear of man, self-pity, conceit... just to name a few.

And pride is also very deceptive. It comes in different shapes and sizes. Not all pride is loud. Pride can be hidden behind politeness, prayer, or even years of seemingly faithful Christian service. It can even disguise itself in our lives in apparent humility.

Clearly, then, from the outset, steering away from pride is crucial if we are to grow as Christians and avoid causing great damage to ourselves and others.

But praise God, there is hope! The Bible teaches us that God's grace is greater than our sin. Additionally, God has provided a path for us to steer clear of pride. And what's more, as we, with God's help, slowly but surely put pride to death, we should expect to see victory in other areas of our lives too.

The prospect of victory should spur us on to proactively address pride and cultivate lives of humility. I hope that this field guide will be one step towards that in your life.

This field guide is going to be divided in three parts. First, we're going to look at the damage that pride wreaks in our lives. Next, we'll consider the roots of pride. Finally, we're going to see how to kill our pride and live lives of humility. At the end of each chapter there will be some questions for you to reflect on with your mentor/mentee.

So, let's get stuck in (I am British!).

² Augustine, *Confessions*

³ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Part One: Pride's Ruin

I knew better. Better than my mother-in-law. Better than the GPS. Better than the signs on the road. I definitely knew better than most of the other drivers on the road. It was a wintry day, and snow had been falling steadily. Where I live, half a millimetre of snow usually causes absolute chaos, and that day was no different. My mother-in-law was picking me up after a long day at work and we were heading back to their house for a family dinner. However, the roads were carnage. Gridlock. And I was hungry. This is when it hit me—an absolute flash of brilliance! I knew a shortcut down a country lane. And I was adamant it would get us home quicker. The road I had in mind was a country lane that happens to have a steep, sharp bend halfway down. It was on that bend that when we approached we skidded and spun, and eventually got stuck in the ditch off to the side of the road. Sitting there stuck in the mud made me realize my flash of brilliance wasn't so brilliant after all. Thankfully, no major harm was done to the car or anyone else's, but it was a close call. Even better news is that my mother-in-law is still speaking to me.

My pride almost caused great damage that day. Because that's what pride does. It ruins everything it bumps up against.

We need to consider how pride ruins if we're to know why we should daily seek to kill our pride. While identifying pride's risks is not a guarantee we will successfully kill it God often uses warning as a means to keep us from harm. Indeed, Jesus himself used Lot's wife (see Genesis 19) to warn us against becoming attached to this world.

We can think of the damage pride causes moving in two directions: vertical and horizontal. Let me explain: pride ruins our relationship with God (vertical), and it also damages our relationships with others (horizontal). The damage pride causes with God is primary and results in all the damage that follows with each other.

CS Lewis put it this way, "But pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God."⁴

Vertically, then, pride ruptures our relationship with God. Why? Because it sets us up to rival him. If we are putting ourselves in his place, then it stands to reason that we are putting ourselves against him, vying for the status that he uniquely possesses. And the consequence? God will oppose us.

Indeed, the Bible tells us three times that, "*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*".⁵

Why does God oppose the proud? Because there can only be one sovereign Lord of the universe, and despite what pride tells me, I'm not him. God says in Isaiah 42:8 that he doesn't share his glory with others.

Pride then puts us in complete opposition to God. And as a result, our relationship with God isn't just tainted or marred by pride—it is completely disrupted.

And what's more, if pride is left unchecked, it has eternal consequences. For if we live in constant opposition to God, the Bible says that when we die, we will experience his opposition forever.

⁴ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

⁵ Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

It's worth pausing there and just taking in the consequences of pride. Pride sets us up in absolute opposition to God. It means we set ourselves *against* him, and in response, he is *against* us.

But as with all sin, pride also has consequences in this life as well as the one to come. If we think about it, this makes sense. If we all go around, seeing ourselves as mini-gods, demanding that we are served by God and everyone else, it's no wonder that when we then come into contact with others acting in exactly the same way, there's friction.

And it should be no surprise that in a world full of pride, there's bickering and arguments, fights and even wars. Pride can lead to family relationships breaking down, and it can also lead to nations declaring war on one another.

The short of it? Pride ruins things.

And we see this truth played out in the Bible. In fact, the Bible gives us multiple examples of just how destructive pride is. But let's consider just one from the Old Testament. King Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, and during his reign, he achieved great power and glory. In Daniel 3, we see him setting up a statue that the whole land was commanded to bow down to...

And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. (Dan. 3:4-6)

And while the Bible doesn't explicitly say who the image was of, it heavily implies that it was an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. The statue looked exactly like him.

Now this is almost a perfectly worked example of my very definition of pride: *Pride is a heart-disposition of self-exaltation, where I seek to put myself in God's place.*

Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself. He commanded the whole land to bow down to this statue. And in so doing, he sought to take credit and receive glory and praise for his kingdom's greatness. He sought the place that only God deserves.

But as we know, God opposes the proud. In the story, we see God intervening and opposing Nebuchadnezzar. *"Those who walk in pride he is able to humble."* (Dan. 4:37).

And that's what happens in Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar is humbled by God.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. – Daniel 4:28-33

We see that Nebuchadnezzar's sanity is taken away from him. He acts like an animal and is driven away from those whom he had just commanded to bow down to him. In short, his life falls apart.

Nebuchadnezzar is a warning to us of the dangers of pride. No, we might not *literally* build a statue of ourselves and ask others to bow down to it, but we can act in all too similar ways, can't we? We, too, can demand our own way, insist that we know best, and we can force others to obey us even through subtle forms like emotional manipulation. And we too can seek to take the credit and glory and honour for things in our lives that come from God's good hand. We can fool ourselves into thinking that we are a bigger deal than we actually are.

And yet this passage warns us that God will ultimately not be mocked. He doesn't share his glory with others, and there will be consequences if we refuse to acknowledge him as Lord. No, we may not lose our sanity like Nebuchadnezzar does here, but the Bible is clear that we will reap what we sow. In this life, or the next, in one way or another. If we live with continued, unchecked pride, we will be forced to face the truth that we are not God. And this will lead to our undoing.

And that's exactly what the Proverbs teach us.

Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

And Proverbs 11:12 says, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom."

Whether then it is from the example of King Nebuchadnezzar or the pen of Solomon, the Bible consistently sounds the same message. Pride ruins everything. It brings destruction and disgrace.

And it seems then that we can either heed the warnings of Scripture, or face the consequences of our pride in our lives. So, let's just pause here and first ask some diagnostic questions of our hearts to try to discern if there is any unaddressed pride in our lives.

Why don't you grab a pen and paper, go away from distractions, and journal an answer to each of these questions. When you come back, share your answers with your mentor/mentee:

Reflection Questions

1. Where in my life am I assuming I "know better" than others—perhaps even better than God?
2. Do I seek recognition about anything in my life like Nebuchadnezzar, even in subtle ways?
3. Am I able to rejoice with those who rejoice? If not, in what areas is this struggle?
4. How do I take criticism? Am I defensive when someone points out something about me?

Part Two: Pride's Roots

I've recently taken up gardening, but am still pretty green at the craft (get the pun?) The first challenge of my fledgling gardening career was figuring out how to distinguish between a plant and a weed. And since then, those weeds have been the bane of my life! They pop up everywhere! At the beginning, I was content just to pull out the parts of the weeds that I could see; you know, the bits that were above the ground. I was chuffed that the garden looked lovely, at least for a time. The issue was that it wasn't long before the weeds came back with vengeance.

Sharing my frustration with a more experienced gardener, they smiled and told me I had to dig down and get *all* the roots out, and only then would they not grow back. I had to get to the root.

What is true of weeds is also true of all sin, and so of pride. We need to locate and deal with it at the root if we are to be successful in the long term.

So, having considered the ruin that pride causes. We're now going to consider its root. In doing so, we'll be setting ourselves up to learn how to best dig it out.

Let's begin by going back to see where pride has come from. And we see that pride's roots run deep. Indeed, pride predates humanity. The Bible indicates that pride started with Satan before the world was created.

We see this hinted at several times in the Bible. One place is in Isaiah 14, where Isaiah writes:

"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
You said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
... I will make myself like the Most High.'
But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit." Isaiah 14:12-15

Originally, the "Day Star" mentioned in this passage refers to the human King of Babylon; however, many theologians and pastors have understood there to be another referent here. This passage alludes to Satan's pride and his fall.

Though in the beginning Satan was a beautiful, radiant angel, reflecting the glory of God, it seems he grew jealous and desired for himself the glory that God alone has. Satan desired the throne that belongs to God, and in his pride, he fell.

If that was the first moment of pride in history, then it's no wonder we need only get to the third chapter of the Bible before pride again shows up in catastrophic fashion. In Genesis 3, we see the now fallen Satan tempting Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Let's pick up the story in Genesis 3:1:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. – Genesis 3:1-7

God allowed Adam and Eve (in his abundant generosity) to eat of any tree in the garden except one. They could enjoy all that they wanted, feasting on the bounty of God’s kindness. And even the restriction of not eating the fruit of the one tree was an act of kindness. The restriction reminded Adam and Eve that they weren’t God. They were people under God’s good authority.

And yet Satan came to tempt Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the one tree that they were commanded not to eat. His tactic? Appealing to the same pride that caused his downfall.

Satan’s downright lies and wily half-truths deceived Eve’s heart that day. Satan distorted God’s word and sowed the seeds of doubt in Eve’s mind. She then disbelieved God and disobeyed him as she succumbed to temptation, and she and Adam ate the fruit.

Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, and they thought that eating the fruit meant that they would somehow become God’s equal.

The sin of pride that was responsible for Satan’s fall had now infected the hearts and minds of Adam and Eve. And from that time on, it didn’t take long for pride to spread throughout the world like an infection. Whether it was in Adam and Eve’s prideful replies to God’s questions, (it wasn’t my fault!) or in the building of the Tower of Babel in an attempt to reach the highest heaven, pride quickly spread like a virus, causing untold damage to every human.

And since that time, the sin of pride has been in the heart of everyone who has ever lived. The same pride that was in Adam and Eve’s hearts lives in us, in my heart and yours. That’s the point that Jesus makes in Mark 7. Listen to what he says:

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” – Mark 7:21-23

Jesus’s words here are so important because it’s crucial we grasp exactly where pride comes from if we are ever going to be able to deal with it properly. Just like with the weeds in my garden, we need to get to the root of pride if we are to kill it in our lives. We need to understand that pride sits in our hearts. The heart is the place of our desires, affections, and reasoning.

And we need to grasp that any remedy that doesn’t ultimately address our heart is going to fall well short of achieving a long-term solution. It may well work for an hour or a day at a push, but without striking it at the root, pride will keep on rearing its ugly head, with vengeance.

We'll come to think more about the remedy for pride in the next section, but for now I want us to grasp where pride comes from. Its root.

And I want us to understand that what is ultimately needed for each one of us is new hearts. We need a heart that produces good, life-giving fruit, not sinful, poisonous fruit.

And the encouraging truth is that God, in Jesus, is in the business of giving people new hearts. He is able to change us from being those who seek our own glory and status to seeking God's glory and wanting to serve others.

In fact, he promises in the Old Testament that this is what he's going to do. Here's what the prophet Ezekiel prophesied,

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. – Ezekiel 34:24-27.

Ezekiel teaches us that God himself is able and willing to root out the pride from our lives. He shows us that God alone is able and willing to give us new hearts—hearts that seek to honour and follow him.

But how do we get this heart? And why, after we become Christians, do we still struggle with our pride?

Let's turn to our last chapter to see the answer to these questions and how we can cultivate humility in our lives.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you try to “pull the weeds of pride in your life? Are your methods only surface-level, or do they seek to get to the heart?
2. How does recognising sin’s spiritual origin deepen your urgency to address it?
3. In what ways do you see pride influencing how you view or treat others?
4. Pray that God will open your eyes to see any areas of pride that you are blind to at present.

Part Three: Pride's Remedy

In this final part, we will look at ways to steer clear of pride. First, we're going to see how only Jesus can give us a new heart, a heart that pleases him. Next, we'll consider four ways that we can (with God's help) fight pride in our lives.

Where pride goes to die

In the last section, we saw that pride comes from within us, from our hearts. And we thought about how, therefore, we need new hearts if we are ultimately going to defeat pride.

And praise God that is what Jesus came to earth to bring. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Jesus alone can make us spiritually new. He alone can fulfil the promise of Ezekiel to give us new hearts—hearts that don't seek our own glory but desire to live for God in all things.

But how does he do this?

Well, just as the problem of pride is a substitution of ourselves for God, so the solution to pride is a substitution too—only this time a substitution of God for us.

Jesus is the only person who has ever lived a completely pride-free life. Though he had every reason to be proud (he's God in the flesh!), he never sinned once, in thought or word or deed.

Indeed, though before his earthly existence, he enjoyed the praises of heaven and the worship of angels, he willingly humbled himself by taking on our humanity. The divine Son of God clothed himself in flesh. And he was born, not in a palace, or splendour, but in a feeding trough tucked inside a Bethlehem cave.

As you read about his life in the Gospels, you see that Jesus lived a humble life. His life wasn't a life of lavishness or parading his glory in pomp and circumstance, but humbly loving and serving others. He served even to the point of death.

Jesus himself said, “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” – Mark 10:45

Jesus came and humbled himself even to the point of death, though he is the only person who has ever lived who didn't deserve to die. But as Jesus said, his death had a purpose. You see, Jesus's death wasn't the tragic end of a good moral teacher. No, Jesus came to die for a reason—his death had a purpose.

Jesus's death was that of a substitute. He died *in the place* of others. As a ransom *for* others. In death, Jesus paid the penalty that sinners deserve.

Jesus did this so that we can exchange what is rightfully ours (the wrath of God for our sin) for what is rightfully his (a perfect relationship with God that stems from a clean heart). Jesus makes it so that the greatest swap of all time can happen—our sin for Jesus's perfection.

Jesus, in humility, substituted himself for an idolatrous, proud people. So that by his suffering we can not only be forgiven but also receive his righteousness.

This message is fundamental for us to grasp and respond to ourselves. In fact, nothing else in this chapter will be effective (at least in the long run) unless this foundation is in place in our lives.

So, just to recap: The solution to us substituting ourselves for God in pride is Jesus substituting himself for us in humility.

And yet you don't have to have been a Christian for very long to know that sin still remains. And that's true for pride also. Christians still struggle with pride. And that's because pride is both slippery and stubborn.

Though Jesus has done all that is necessary for our sins to be forgiven, on this side of heaven, we still need to seek to put it to death in our lives day by day. As Christians we are called to put to death what belongs to our earthly natures (Col. 3:5). And to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

Yes, we have been saved. We have been forgiven as Christians from all our sin. Praise God! And yet that doesn't mean that we can be passive in our Christian lives. No, there is work for us to do. There is pride for us to fight by God's grace.

So, practically, what does it look like to seek to put pride to death? How can we plot a course in our lives that steers well clear of it?

Here are four ways we can all seek to steer clear of pride in our lives and cultivate a life of humility.

1. Look up, not down.

First, a life of growing humility is cultivated as we focus our gaze on God. In other words, we are to keep looking up, not down. CS. Lewis said, "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."⁶

Now, of course, this isn't meant literally, that would be a strange sight and somewhat dangerous to only look up into the sky versus at the ground. No, what is meant is that we should have the eyes of our hearts focused more on God than on those around us.

You see, our thoughts and affections should be directed towards Him. And as we do that, so the thoughts and praise of man become strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.⁷

Back to Nebuchadnezzar, we see in Daniel 4 that his life was restored when he lifted his eyes to heaven and recognised that God alone was sovereign.

Look at what Nebuchadnezzar says towards the end of Daniel 4:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" – Daniel 4:34-35

⁶ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

⁷ Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

When Nebuchadnezzar looked at himself, and down on others, his heart puffed up with pride, which led to his destruction. But when he looked up to God and focused on his glory and greatness, his sanity and his kingdom were restored.

Again, Nebuchadnezzar is an example for us.

The key here is to be so consumed with the greatness of God that there is no room for pride in our lives. We must lift our eyes to recognize his greatness so that there is no room for us to mistakenly believe that we are God.

I indeed find that when my heart is most consumed with God's greatness and glory, I fear others less and am less tempted to act in proudful ways.

But what does this mean for us in practice?

Very simply, it means spending time often with the Lord to read about and meditate on His glory. To see the glory of God in His word, so that our gaze is on Him. And as we stare at God's majesty, and his glory, and his might, so we are less inclined to demand that people serve and worship us. As we are consumed with how great he is, we are less likely to be deceived into thinking that we are his equal.

There are many passages in the Bible that we can meditate on to focus on the glory of God, to have our gaze focused on him.

So why not spend some time reading and meditating on Isaiah 40, or Job 38 and 39, or Psalm 8? Even better, why don't you memorize parts of those passages so that you carry reminders of God's glory with you throughout your day?

And as you focus on these verses and chapters, pray that your eyes would be continually opened to the greatness of God. Pray for God to reveal more of himself and his greatness to you in his Word.

2. Confess your sin.

Second, to defeat pride in our lives, we should confess our sins to each other. James 5:16 says, "confess your sins to one another that you might be healed."

God commands this not because he wants us to go around being reminded of our sin all the time, but because, as we confess sin, we know more and more of God's forgiveness (1 John 1). In addition to knowing God's forgiveness, regular confession helps us grow in humility.

Proud people rarely confess their sins. Proud people always seek to blame others for the wrong that they do.

But confessing our sin is a key part of owning the truth that we are not God—that we are not sovereign—that we do not deserve to be worshipped and served, because we get it wrong. Often. Confessing sin is acknowledging to God and those around us that we are still works in progress. Instead of asking others to bow down to us, confession is when we bow down in brokenness before the Lord.

Confessing our sins to others means that we can stop pretending we have it all together. It means we can lower the mask of being better than we actually are. And by confessing, we can receive and experience God's grace for our sin.

Being reminded often of the gospel is a wonderful antidote to pride. As Milton Vincent points out in his helpful book *A Gospel Primer*, the fact that the Son of God had to die for my sin doesn't make me look good! It's a humbling thought that it took the death of Jesus to deal with my sin. And seeing as the cross proclaims to the world the depth of my sin, and yet it also proclaims my forgiveness, I am saved from having to pretend I am better than I am.

A good question to ask here is, do you have a spiritually significant relationship within your church? Someone with whom you can confess your sin and be reminded of God's grace regularly?

You don't need to confess your sin to *everyone*, but are you confessing it to *someone*?

And remember that our confession should be honest and specific. That too grows us in our humility, instead of glossing over our sin by using generalities, or minimizing it, we can honestly and openly confess all of it, knowing that it is all covered by Jesus's blood.

Friend, pride flourishes in isolation. But open confession of sin grows us in humility, as we acknowledge our sin and are reminded of God's grace.

If you don't have anyone with whom you can do this, then pray that you will find someone in your church. You might even approach one of your pastors and ask if they know of someone you could meet with regularly to confess your sins, read Scripture, and encourage one another.

3. Reflect on Jesus's humility

Next, to steer clear of pride, we can reflect on the humility of Jesus.

They say that those trained to spot counterfeit money don't waste time studying forgeries. They're not there to think about all the different variations of fake money. No, they spend their time studying the real deal. By knowing the genuine, authentic article, they are in the best place to spot frauds of all kinds.

I think the same dynamic is at play here. We could spend time looking at all the different types of pride. And there is some merit in that for sure. However, to cultivate humility, we can do no better than studying the real deal—and that's Jesus. Jesus is the one who was genuinely and authentically humble above all others.

Yes, Jesus is our Savior; he is the one who can give us new hearts, and he is also our example. We are to follow him.

Peter says this about imitating Christ,

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 1 Peter 2:21-22

And Paul in Philippians 2 can tell us to have the same mindset as Jesus, specifically in his humility:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only

to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus is our saviour and our example. He provides us with an example of humility to follow. In his life, death, and resurrection, he has shown us what a life of true humility looks like.

So, how do we reflect on Jesus's humility?

One effective way to do this is to read through the gospel accounts, and as you do, consider how Jesus displays great humility. Consider how he gently and patiently deals with those around him. How the outcast and the socially excluded are not below his time and attention. How he gave up his preferences for rest and solitude to serve others. How he deals patiently with the disciples rather than speaking harshly to them.

Study Jesus and his humility. And pray that as you do so, your life would reflect your Saviour's more and more. Pray that as you read, God would grow you in your Christ likeness. Pray the words of the great hymn from Kate Wilkinson:

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
live in me from day to day,
by His love and pow'r controlling
all I do and say.*

4. Serve others quietly

Finally, one way to cultivate humility and steer clear of pride is to be intentional in serving others. And to do so in quiet, behind-the-scenes kinds of ways.

In the UK, there's an acronym I recently learned from the students in our church: BNOC. It stands for Big Name on Campus. Basically, there are certain students on campus whom everyone knows. They're on the sports teams and are also popular on the social scene. If you're labelled a BNOC, you've basically made it.

However, that conversation with my students made me think of a different acronym. BNIH. Big Name in Heaven. I think there are people who aren't known in this world, but that everyone in heaven talks about. They may be looked down upon by those who are popular in this life, but they serve the Lord faithfully.

Let me tell you about Ed. Ed was a member of our church for 60 years. From a worldly perspective, Ed was not remarkable. He was a quiet, unassuming man.

And week by week, he would stand outside our church, inviting people from the streets into our service. He would also often volunteer for the jobs in church that no one else would do, faithfully serving in a very unassuming way. I think of Ed as a BNIH. Someone that this world may not think much of, but heaven is cheering on.

Now again, we're called to serve the Lord because he is worthy. However, when we're intentional about serving others, we grow in our own humility. Instead of exalting ourselves and demanding to be served, as we intentionally seek to serve others (even if our hearts aren't always there), we remind ourselves that we aren't the center of the world. We remind ourselves of others and train our hearts to seek to serve and care for them.

And so it's good to take stock here and consider how you are serving others. Are there ways in which you can seek to serve your church, particularly in unseen ways?

Perhaps it's serving in the nursery or volunteering to clean the toilets. Maybe it's seeing how you can bless a family or an individual who you know is going through a hard time. Giving up our time and resources to serve others is a wonderful way that we can grow in humility.

And actually, there is something extremely joyful in serving others, knowing that your Father in heaven is the only one who sees and that he is smiling.

Reflection Questions

1. How can the eyes of your heart be fuller with the glory of God?
2. Do you have someone in your church to whom you can confess your sins? If not, pray that the Lord would give you such a relationship with someone.
3. Think of 3 ways you can serve someone in your church 'behind the scenes' this week.

Conclusion

As we reach the end of this field guide, my prayer is that your heart has been stirred, not just with knowledge about pride and humility, but with a desire to be changed by the one who is making all things new.

Pride is subtle, persistent, and deceptive, but praise God, it is not stronger than His grace. Friend, Jesus came to die for the proud. He came to rescue us from our self-sufficiency, our self-glorification, and our self-dependence.

I hope you've seen that steering clear of pride isn't just about changing your outward behaviour, but it's about the transforming power of Jesus Christ working in us. First, he gives us new hearts through repentance and faith, and then he helps us as we seek to be intentional in rooting out all that is opposed to him in our lives. And he has promised to complete the work that he began in us until there is no more pride left.

We've considered how Christ humbled himself and then was exalted. And that is the pattern, too, for those who humble themselves under God's mighty hand. Just as pride has both worldly and eternal consequences, so does humility.

Those who are humble in this life shine as they make much of God and reflect him. And it's not only in this life that we see the consequences of humility. The promise that God gives in his Word is that the humble will be exalted in due time (Jas. 4:10). Humility gives glory to God—and results in receiving eternal glory from Him.

That is the path we're invited to walk. It's the path of blessing and joy.

It seems fitting to end this field guide with a prayer of another King—King David. In 1 Chronicles 29 we are at the end of King David's reign. The people had assembled and contributed to the building of the temple. And at this point, David could well have been tempted to be proud. And yet he acknowledged that all the resources and willingness to build the temple came from God, not from himself or the people.

In this prayer, David emphasizes that everything belongs to God and that the people's offerings are merely returning to God what is already his. Let's give the last words to David.

Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. – 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.