



Wisdom + Pride

4/21/24

Intro: Grab your Bible and flip to Proverbs 1.

While you're flipping there, I want you to think of a really proud person. Self-consumed, smug, overly sure of themselves. I'll give you a sec... got someone in mind? Proud people are the worst, right? Even if you like them, their pride is the worst thing about them, right?

Well I have great news! Today's sermon will be so good for them. As soon as the link is up, you can send this sermon to them and it will help... Maybe don't tell them, "you were the person that came to mind when Jon asked the question at the beginning." But you know, you do you.

Now there is some bad news. **Not nearly enough of us thought of ourselves.** Actually one of the worst aspects of pride, is we see it sharply in other people but not so much in ourselves.

And that's troubling because Biblical Wisdom lit says pride is enemy number in your life. Biggest thing causing friction in your relationships. Driving frustration and discontentment. And preventing you from growing in wisdom.

So the wisdom books and Proverbs in particular spend a huge amount of time on pride. More than 2/3 of the chapters in Proverbs talk about it, sometimes referring to the proud as the simple or the fool or the scoffer. And throughout Proverbs you start to see this paradox about pride:

If you think you're wise, you're a fool. But if you know you lack wisdom, you are on your way to becoming wise. In other words, **pride is anti-wisdom.** **Proverbs 1** tells us why. V. 1 - *The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity, 4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— 5 Let the wise* (Ok pause.

What's that next word:) **hear** (Hear. Listen. Mark that word. Skip down to v. 8, tell me again.

what's the 1st word:) **8 Hear**, (same word. Hear. Listen!) **Hear my son, your father's instruction,** (Skip down to v. 20. The author paints this gripping picture: **20 Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; 21 at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: 22 "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? 23 If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.**

Wisdom is crying out in the streets. Would anyone like some wisdom? Anyone tired of being simple and foolish? I'll give you God's wisdom! Just ask! But what happens? V. 24 - the rest of the chapter tells us they refused to listen and wrecked their lives. We'll come back to that.

Here's our big idea for now: **Listening is a prerequisite for wisdom.** But Pride says no. I'm good... I'm smart on my own. I have to listen to my heart and do what makes me happy.

--> **So with that warning in mind, here's what we'll see in Proverbs today:**

1.) The nature of pride. 2.) The danger of pride. And 3.) The antidote to pride

Let's start with **1.) The nature of pride** (what it is)

Prov. 6:16-17 - *There are 6 things that the LORD hates, 7 that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes,* If you made a list of the top 6... or even 7 things God hates... abominations to Him. Things that disgust Him... Singe his nostrils... Haughty eyes, aka pride is number one on the list. That's a big deal. Very strong language. Maybe you didn't even know God hates things. Why this?

Well haughty eyes are eyes turned up and looking down at others. Full of superiority/judgment. Look at **Proverbs 21:4** - *Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.*

So haughty eyes reveal a proud heart and this Proverb calls them the lamp of the wicked. That means pride becomes the lens through which you look at the world.

So the first thing we see from Proverbs about the nature of pride is: **Pride needs to feel better than others.** It needs to look down on others. And this shows up in tons of ways:

I'm smarter than. More fit, more attractive, prettier than. More successful than. Funnier than. More hip and savvy. More popular. More educated. More caring. People aren't really proud of being rich or smart, but being richer or smarter. The comparison is what makes you proud... being above the rest. Or at least, not being seen as less than others.

--> **That's pride. That's the 1st thing we see. Here's the 2nd in Proverbs 8:13 -**

Proverbs 8:13 - *The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.*

Once again, super strong language. God hates it and connects pride and arrogance to the way of evil. Why? There's a massive clue in the Hebrew word used for arrogance:

gā'ôn - It's the same Hebrew word used for pride in Proverbs 15:25 + 16:19. But normally, it's a word used to talk about God. It means exalted. Majesty. But pride takes the weight of glory and majesty that belongs to God alone and tries to place it on ourselves.

That's the 2nd thing we learn about the nature of pride: **Pride puts us in God's rightful place.**

Pride makes us look to ourselves for identity, supremacy, wisdom, authority.

And this is ancient. It's what Satan dangled in front of Adam and Eve. "Don't you want to be like God?" When they bit, they bit pride-poisoned fruit. And pride spread into all humanity..

See humanity's created state was one of correct humility. We saw God correctly. We saw our need for God correctly. We weren't full of ourselves. So we could be filled with God's joy, love, hope, peace, patience. We lived in humble dependence on God. But pride rejects all that. Pride stiff-arms God and pushes him out. **And so, pride is not just sin, but the root of all sin.**

Lewis Smedes - *Pride [...] is the arrogant refusal to let God be God. It is to grab God's status for one's self. In the vivid language of the Bible, pride is puffing yourself up in God's face. Pride is turning down God's invitation to join the dance of life as a creature in his garden and wishing instead to be the Creator. Independent, reliant on one's own resources. Never does pride want to pray for strength, ask for grace, plead for mercy, or give thanks to God.*

This is why God hates pride. And also why the proud hate God. Whether they'd say it or not.

Whether in a religious or an irreligious way. Pride broke our relationship with God and now it tries to fix the problem by puffing ourselves up. But in the process, it pushes God out.

One more quote I love on this idea:

C.S. Lewis - *The problem is, when you come up against God, you come up against a being in which you are entirely inferior in every regard. Your pride demands that you have nothing to do with him. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. 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.*

Proud, haughty eyes are looking down. But God's up! Reigning. All glory and majesty.

And this also shows us one last important note on the nature of pride:

Pride is self-consumed. It's not just thinking too highly of yourself, it's thinking of yourself too much. The proud self is constantly aware of itself. Desperately. Always thinking about how I'm looking, how I'm doing, how I'm performing, how I'm being treated. An illustration:

Our body parts do not call attention to themselves unless something's wrong. I never come home and Erica asks - "how'd today go?" and I respond "Wonderful, my right elbow worked correctly all day! Look at how it extends. And bends right back. It reached for books and pencils on my desk. All. day. long!" No, elbows only call attention to themselves if something's wrong.

But pride calls attention to itself all the time. I've been snubbed. Not respected. Not sought out.

"Well yeah I did hurt that person and run from my community... but they didn't chase me hard enough when I ran..." Wait, what? That's pride.

And here we see one of the sneakiest things about pride. Insecurity and low self-esteem are actually a form of pride. We tend to think of pride as swagger and arrogance... But low self-esteem is still focused on you. You get down on yourself. Beat yourself up. Hate yourself even. But you're still *thinking about yourself* the whole time. The difference between you and someone who feels superior is you're convinced you're losing. But you're playing the same game!

Ok, let's summarize. From Proverbs we see that **Pride is the competitive, self-focused root of sin that pushes God out and prioritizes our sufficiency and supremacy. Now that's a very big definition. Let me bring all that down and make it more practical by giving you a number of ways to recognize pride in yourself:**

- Comparison pride. Compare your intelligence, ability, looks, maturity. It's ok to know what you're good at. So long as you remember every gift you have is from God.
- Some of us do this in a loud, braggadocious way - "look at me, I'm the best". Others of us do it much more internally. A constant low grade judgmental inner dialogue.
- Are you a sore loser or a sore winner? Pride.
- Do you feel the need to one up people? "Great story. But I got a better one... Great joke. Let me tell a funnier one."
- The amount you **complain** reveals your pride. These circumstances aren't good enough for me. But, Jesus, God of the universe, bent down to scrub dirt off his disciples' feet... even Judas... So as His followers, remind me what circumstances are we too good for?
- Are you easily and frequently offended. I can't believe you said that.
- Are you easily angered or annoyed? Pride. Do you have a hard time taking a joke?
- If your feelings are hurt, is your first instinct to jab back? Pride.
- Unresolved conflict because you won't own your contribution to the conflict, apologize and ask for forgiveness... that's pride.
- When you are corrected, is your first reaction to defend yourself? Or attack the person? Or write them off because they aren't as smart/wise/mature as you?
- Do you need to be the center of attention? Do you feel uneasy if no one is listening to you?
- Do you generally feel the need to voice all your thoughts, opinions?
- Ok this is a hard one - Can you rejoice when someone else gets a good thing even if you really wanted it? Even if you think you deserve it more or need it more?
- **If you are prayerless, you believe you are self sufficient.** Which is pride.
- Secret sin. More concerned with how people see you than how God sees you. Pride.
- Spiritual pride - I look down on others who aren't as spiritually mature as I am. Maybe people in your LG. They don't know what I know. They're not as disciplined as I am. But what do you have that you did not receive by grace?

--> How we doing? Anybody getting lit up? Just me? Worst case you're thinking, "I'm good on all of those." Oh no, that means you're the most blind to your pride! ... Point 2:

2.) **The danger of pride** (where it leads.) Proverbs rings this warning bell over and over.:

Proverbs 3:34 - *Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*

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

Proverbs 15:25 - *The LORD tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries.*

Proverbs 16:5 - *Everyone who is arrogant in heart is offensive to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.*

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

Proverbs 29:23 - *One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.*

Are we catching the theme? Pride goes before destruction. Pride leads to disgrace. Pride brings you low. God punishes the proud. Scorns the scorner. Ok, but why? A few reasons.

The first two are very practical, pragmatic reasons. In pride, we don't learn from our mistakes.

The proud reject critique even from those who love them. And secondly, they don't seek input because they think they're good on their own. Like we said up front, pride won't listen.

Think about it, have you ever known someone doing something stupid but they won't listen to you. And they do the stupid thing and it brings chaos and pain? And you love them, so saying "I told you so" doesn't even feel good?

Parents, is there anything more infuriating than your kids not listening when they are wrong and you are right and their pride leads to pain? You try to tell them and they won't hear.

There's a bad idea that floats around that says the only way to learn is from your own mistakes.

Now of course our mistakes can be a great teacher. But you can also learn from other people's mistakes! Or here's another way to put it. I lobbied for this to be the subtitle for our Wisdom series. Wisdom: Letting other people pay your stupid tax.

Ya'll know what that is? A stupid tax is the price you pay for a lack of wisdom. The cost of mishandling situations. Due to a lack of experience or knowledge or wisdom.

- So once upon a time, I knew some people doing really well investing in stocks. Specifically what are known as penny stocks. So I talked to Erica and said, I want to take a portion of our savings and invest it. And she hesitantly said ok. And then I did what's known as buying high and selling low. I paid a literal stupid tax. Didn't know what I was doing. And Erica to this day likes to remind me of those losses... Which to be fair, is pride in her... And that's called deflection... which is pride in me.

So practically, wisdom is humble enough to look for input. To learn from other people's mistakes by listening. To let others pay the stupid tax for you. But pride won't. Cause you think you know better. You trust your own heart and understanding too much.

Another stupid tax illustration that's a pretty good picture of the proud life. I was once building a tree house for my kids. Big old platform between 3 trees in our backyard. And I was up on a ladder... that wasn't exactly on level ground. Anybody else every try this little manuever? I could have so easily asked someone to come stand at the bottom of the ladder for me. But I didn't. I had it. And what's worse is I'm literally standing on the very top of this A-frame ladder. Above the rung that says "Do not stand on or above this rung."

And with the smallest of movements, I feel the ladder topple underneath me. So now I'm hanging on to the joists of this treehouse platform with sharp metal actively slicing into my arm while I scream for someone to come set the ladder back under me so I can get down. I still bear the scars.

God is telling us in Proverbs that he's set the world up in a way that pride is a bit like that.

In our pride we're always climbing, elevating ourselves but we're standing on a wobbly ladder.

Takes almost nothing to topple over.

- We ignore the good advice or critique of good friends... it blows up in our face and we end up paying a stupid tax we could have easily avoided by humility.
- We complain and compare ourselves to others and belittle them until we find our relationships topple... they end up wounded or even worse destroyed.
- We can play the insecurity, low self-esteem card so many times that loves ones have a hard time knowing when to take it seriously. Don't know when to trust you.

--> As a pastor who has walked with people for decades now, I hate seeing pride bring destruction and disgrace, but I can tell you the Proverbs are true. It always does. Over and over.

And there's another way in which pride leads to destruction that's fascinating but also scarier. It's a cosmic reason. I wonder if you noticed God's activity in some of the Proverbs we just read?

Proverbs 15:25 - *The LORD tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries.*

Proverbs 3:34 - *Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*

Proverbs 16:5 - *Everyone who is arrogant in heart is offensive to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.*

What's going on here? The Lord tears down the proud's house? He's scornful to the scorner. Be assured, He will punish the arrogant.

Certainly, that isn't just talking about here on earth. Because there are plenty of proud people living in mansions. Plenty of scorners who scorn proudly right up to their death beds. The arrogant and rich often know how to abuse earthly systems of justice to avoid punishment.

But God says, you're not getting away with anything. You're not hiding anything. Of course this broken world doesn't always see perfect justice, but someday.

See pride's whole goal is to get glory. To show yourself superior. To get exalted treatment. And if that's who you are, you're on a collision course with the reality of God's nature and God's future.

How terrifying that in your pride, you could think it's working. And God could be shaking His head. "Well hey. That doesn't sound very loving. That's not nice." Ok, go back to Proverbs 1.

Proverbs 1:24-33 - *Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, 25 because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, 27 when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. 28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. 29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, 30 would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, 31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. 32 For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the*

complacency of fools destroys them; 33 but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”

Hopefully, at some point in life you humble yourself and see your need and dependence on God. Because in this life or the next, *at some point* your world is going to fall apart. And when it is, you come to find out that there's a hard, brutal reality to wisdom scorned. When proud foolishness leads you to weeping, you won't find wisdom shedding an empathetic tear. You find her saying, "I called out in the streets! I *begged* to give myself to anyone with the humility to listen."

Now hear me, God is unbelievably patient. Unbelievably gracious. Even to the most foolish. And at some point, unrepented, our pride pushing God out and pushing God out, and fighting for supremacy and fighting for God's place in our own lives. At some point, God says ok.

And if you find yourself trapped in pride, as your pastor I just want to plead with you for a this morning... you're setting yourself up for a fall. You're setting yourself in opposition to God. And nothing is more terrifying in the entire universe than for God to be against you. Which leads us to pt.3

3.) The antidote to pride (what do we do about it?)

Proverbs 16:19 - *It is better to be of lowly spirit with the poor than divide the spoil with the proud.*

Proverbs 3:34 - *Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.*

16:19 says humility is greater than all the riches of the world. 3:34 says God gives favor to the humble. So the question is how do we get it? How do we be free of the indwelling sinful pride poison that's infected every human since the garden? Proverbs 16:19 says better to be lowly of spirit. You know what that reminds me of? Jesus. Like all the time, but especially in the sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Why? For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The antidote to pride is a little gospel humility 2 step.

Step 1 - see yourself rightly in light of who God is. And let that give you an appropriately lowly spirit. See God, he knows everything. He is actually the most beautiful. The wisest. The most glorious. Not us. All *gā'ōn*. All majesty... All glory rightly belongs to Him. Not us.

Compared to Him, no matter how much you know, you know nothing.

No matter how beautiful you are, you're barely noticeable.

No matter how much wealth you have, you're a peasant.

So step 1 is to see yourself as rightly small in front of His *gā'ōn* glory and majesty. But by itself it's not enough. If you stop there you could just end up focused on your own unworthiness. Still focused on you. Still caught in the pride trap.

So, gospel humility Step 2. You have to see that the one and only radiant God of all glory bent low for you. That's what Philippians 2 says Jesus did. He emptied Himself. He left the glory and majesty of heaven. Took on flesh as a human. Lived in poverty. Experienced cruelty. Rejection. Betrayal. Forgave without ceasing as His enemies lied about Him. Destroyed His reputation. Allowed Roman soldiers to strip Him bare. They crowned Him with mockery. Ripped out his beard. He allowed them to lift Him up as a fool to be mocked and spit upon.

What's happening? All His *gā'ōn* was stripped from Him. Why? To save you from your pride. To humble you. And love you. At the same time!

All the physical and spiritual calamity our pride deserved was put on Him. The destruction and punishment our pride demands flowed down on His head.

And the more you set your eyes on Jesus. Every day, the more your pride dies. It shrivels up. And humility flows in. I can't puff myself up enough to fix my problems, and I don't have to. Because He lowered Himself for me. I can't be good enough on my own, but He was good enough for me! What do I have to brag about? I needed Jesus to die for me.

And what do I have to complain about? The son of God died for me.

And why am I getting down on myself? The son of God was brought low to lift me up!

Jesus emptied Himself of all glory, so we in repentance could empty ourselves of our pride and find His love, His Spirit, His patience filling us. Filling us up to the brim.

His mercies are offered new every morning and the humble rejoice to receive them.

Let's pray.