

What's wrong with me? Pride

Message for Sunday, October 15, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Proverbs 6:16; Romans 12:12-3

Children's Message: Luke 18:9-14, parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

In that story, the Pharisee was very proud of himself. He looked down on other people, thinking he's better than them. Pride is when I think I'm better than other people.

I'd like to show you what pride looks like. It's like me and this balloon. *With each statement, I blow another breath into the balloon.*

-) Did you see that person throw a candy wrapper on the ground? I *never* do that.
-) Ha ha! I fooled the goalie and scored a goal.
-) I am so smart. I got an A on that test.
-) etc.

Ask the children for more examples. Keep blowing until it bursts!

Jesus says, "The proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honoured." It's not good to be proud.

Message: "What's wrong with me? Pride"

I want to say right up front: much of what I'm going to say today is based on a sermon by Bryan Wilkerson, pastor of Grace Chapel, a church in Massachusetts. His sermon was highlighted in an article I read this week, and I just said, "Wow! That is so good."

1) We have a problem

Have you ever noticed the problems that other people have? Some people, all they do is talk, talk, talk. Then there those who don't talk at all; you never know what they're thinking. Or when there's a job to be done, you can count on some people to have some kind of excuse why they'd love to help but it's simply not possible right now. Then there are people who love to complain; all they do is point out faults in other people's lives.

Like I just did.

If we're honest, we'll all admit that we have problems in our lives. You know it's wrong to

gossip, but your ears perk up when you hear some juicy news about someone. You start the day with a plan for what you're going to do that day; and when it's over, you wonder where the time went, and nothing was accomplished. Someone else has a wonderful vacation or a promotion at work, and instead of feeling happy, you're envious. "What's wrong with me?" we sometimes ask.

We're not the people we want to be. We know we can do better. Oh sure, we can look around and we say, "I may not be perfect, but at least I'm not like so-and-so." But deep inside we know there's something not right.

What is this something? And what, if anything, can make us better?

That something is sin. I am a sinful person. You are too. We all are. Not only do we fail to live up to our own standards, we miss the mark of what God created us to be.

Starting today, I'm doing a series of messages on The Seven Deadly Sins. The purpose here is to use this list as a kind of tool, to help us identify where we have problems, to understand the nature of those problems, and to look at ways to help us overcome them.

A little background on the seven deadly sins. They go back far in history, even back to the Old Testament part of the Bible.

Proverbs 6:16, New International Version:
There are six things the Lord hates,
seven that are detestable to him.

It goes on to list a collection of vices, including some of those on our list. So there's a biblical precedent for this idea.

The list we are familiar with originated in the monastic movement of the early church, around the third century. Men and women who desired to be closer to God began retreating to the desert to escape the evils of the world. They took refuge in remote caves and huts—alone, at first, but before long in communities. To their surprise, they discovered that no matter how far they removed themselves from the evils of society, those evils had a way of finding them and spoiling their communion with God and with each other. To their

dismay, they discovered that those evils were actually inside them: that they brought them with them wherever they went. Over time, they identified seven dark tendencies they believed to lie at the root of their problems. Dealing with the seven sins became a central theme of the monastic life and community.

Now, a series like this could get dark and discouraging real fast. We don't want to focus just on what's wrong; we want to get better. So each week, I'll identify a corresponding virtue to each of these vices. In contrast to the "deadly sins" I'll call them "The Seven Healthy Virtues." We'll look at what the Bible gives as antidote to the sin, to lead us to the virtue.

2) Pride is the worst of them all

The traditional list of deadly sins begins with pride. In fact, that passage in Proverbs 6—the things the Lord detests— begins with "haughty eyes"— *haughty* meaning *proud* or *arrogant*, looking down on others.

Jesus continually confronted the pride and arrogance of religious and political leaders. We read earlier in the service the story of proud Pharisee who boasted to God in prayer how faithful he was, especially compared to that dirty tax collector. God was not impressed. The Bible has hundreds of verses which talk about pride; dozens of people whose lives are twisted and torn because of pride.

It is clear that God has zero tolerance for pride. But why?

The dictionary defines pride as "a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements." What's the problem with that? Isn't self-esteem a good thing?

The problem with pride is that it pushes God out of the picture. It refuses to acknowledge that anything I achieve is possible only because of God's grace and gifts to me. With pride, it's all about me.

Taking this biblical view of pride, I'll define pride as "an unholy preoccupation with self." There's nothing wrong with being occupied with ourselves to a degree: we need to look after our needs, after all. The problem with pride is we become occupied

with ourselves first—*preoccupied*—putting our needs and interests ahead of others.

Now we see why pride traditionally comes at the top of the list. If these sins are deadly, then pride is the deadliest of all because it separates us from God. Instead of worshipping and serving God, we worship and serve ourselves. Oh we may not use those words, but our actions speak far louder than our words.

Pride makes you a fool. How so? It keeps you from ever learning from your mistakes. It keeps you from learning from criticism. Because it's always someone else's fault; it's never your fault.

The problem with pride is that we can spot it easily in others, yet completely overlook it in ourselves. What are the some of the symptoms that you have "an unholy preoccupation with yourself"? Name-dropping. Mirror-looking. Calling attention to yourself. Putting other people down. Always having to get your way. Needing to win every argument. Grabbing credit whenever you can. Not being able to apologize. Leaving God out of the conversation. Thinking that it's always about you. I could have titled this message, "You're So Vain, You Probably Think This Sermon's About You."

Here's something interesting: Tim Keller, a preacher in New York, explains that pride can take another form: the inferior type of pride. This is when you're always down on yourself; you don't like how you look; you don't like yourself. This is just as preoccupied with self as the other kind of pride. You're still comparing yourself with others; you just coming out on the lower end. It's still "all about me."

3) What we need is humility

Pride is the sin; the corresponding healthy virtue is humility. But what, exactly, is humility? The dictionary says, "Lack of pride."

The Bible is helpful here.

Romans 12:3, Good News Bible:

Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you.

We're not supposed to think too highly of ourselves, because that's pride. But we're not supposed to think too lowly of ourselves, either. The New Living Translation puts it: "Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves." That honest evaluation is not to be based on what others think of us, or what we think of us, but rather on what God thinks of us: "according to the amount of faith that God has given you."

The Bible tells us in many places what God thinks of us. It tells that he loves us in spite of our sinfulness. It tells us that we are of incredible value to him. It tells us that when we turn to Christ in repentance and faith, we can be forgiven for our sins and be made new from the inside out.

Thomas Merton, a spiritual guide of the last century, put it this way: "Humility is being precisely the person you actually are before God." Humility isn't thinking poorly of yourself. It's simply being honest with yourself and others and God as to who you really are and what's really going on with you.

Do you see how liberating this is? When you know precisely who you are before God and in Christ, you're free. You're free to admit you're a sinner. You're free to say, "I'm sorry." You're free from having to manage other people's impressions of you. You're free from having to compete with everyone else. You're free to do good without needing people to notice. You're free to let others have their way, free to lose graciously, free to rejoice in someone else's success or good fortune. If that's not the basis for a healthy self-esteem, I don't know what is!

4) How to move from pride to humility: through worship

Let's do a quick review: the problem is pride: an unholy preoccupation with self. The alternative—the healthy virtue—is humility: being honest about who we are before God. But how do we get from A to B, from pride to humility?

I suggest the path is through worship. If we go back to that passage in Romans, a couple of verses before it says this:

Romans 12:1, Good News Bible:

So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer.

The shift from pride to humility comes when we have a proper understanding of our relationship with God. God made us; we didn't make ourselves. God loves us, even when we hate ourselves for doing something stupid. God shows mercy, forgiving our sins, welcoming us home into his family. Worship is the natural response to God's actions. And humility is the natural attitude in worship.

Every time we stand before God and sing "Holy, Holy, Holy," we remember that he is God and we are not. Every time we stand and sing, "In Christ alone, my hope is found; He is my light, my strength, my song," we remember how loved and secure we are in Christ.

When we stand before God, we are free to be our true selves. We can be honest with God and with one another.

Next Steps:

-) Have a look in the mirror. A very special kind of mirror: the one which shows you what God sees in you. Be honest about who you really are.
-) Recognize that even though there's a lot of crap in there, God still loves you. Just the way you are. Even more than you love yourself.
-) Realize you don't have to prove yourself to God or anyone else. You are free from that; you can just be yourself.
-) Now worship. Give thanks to God for all his mercies.