



Part 1: Pride | Pastor Joe Wittwer | April 19, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Today we kick off *The Big 7*, a series on the Seven Deadly Sins. The first one, and deadliest, is pride: pride, greed, gluttony, sloth, anger, envy, lust. While this specific list isn't in the Bible, it's been a part of the Christian tradition since the early church fathers, and all of these sins do show up throughout the Bible, such as in **Galatians 5:19-21**. In medieval times, a monk, Evagrius Ponticus, identified thoughts or attitudes that make life in community difficult and make us susceptible to temptation. And later Pope Gregory gave them their current form as the Seven Deadly Sins. Just as important, they identified corresponding virtues to help us overcome these sins. As we go through *The Big 7*, we'll look at the spiritual disciplines that can help us develop these virtues. Our starting point in all this, of course, is our desire to be close to God, which we do by inviting Jesus to change us from the inside out. God wants to help us be more like Jesus. This week, we take a shot at pride.

1. **Pride: thinking too much of yourself.**

What is pride? Is it always bad? Webster's Dictionary gives three definitions: 1) Inordinate or excessive self-esteem; thinking too much of yourself. 2) A reasonable self-respect. 3) Delight arising from some act, possession or relationship. So the word "pride" is used in both good and bad ways, which raises the question, "Is all pride wrong?" Healthy self-respect is not sin. Being proud of your kids is not sin. Being proud of a job well-done is not sin. Here's a verse that defines both pride and humility: "*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you*" (**Romans 12:3**). The bad form of pride is excessive self-esteem; thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. There is no fault of which we are less conscious than pride. What does pride look and act like?

- Taking more credit than we deserve.
- Bragging; constantly talking about ourselves, drawing attention to ourselves.
- Comparing ourselves to others and always coming out better.
- Looking down on others; being judgmental, condemning.
- Being self-righteous.
- Selfishness.
- Keeps us from God; we feel no need of God.
- Independence—"I don't need others."
- Leads to bad decisions—pride comes before a fall (**Proverbs 16:18**).

Perhaps the most insidious part of pride is that it keeps us from God. You cannot be proud and know God. God is humble. We know that because of Jesus, who came as a servant (**Philippians 2:5-7**). He said that He came not to be served, but to serve, and He set an example of service: "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (**Matthew 11:29**). To be proud is the opposite of God. That's why the apostle Peter writes: "*Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'*" (**1 Peter 5:5**).

Pride keeps us from coming to God. [Read **Luke 18:9-14** together.] Jesus warns that pride is the great temptation for *good* people, *religious* people, *Christian* people. It is so easy to

become self-righteous and take credit for our goodness and forget that we are sinners who need God's mercy. Here's an ancient prayer that helps: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

2. Humility: thinking of yourself with sound judgment.

Humility is being comfortable with who you are, the good and the bad. It is being comfortable with a measure of self-confidence and a measure of self-doubt. It is being comfortable with knowing that God loves you deeply and calls you both His child and a sinner. Here's how the apostle Paul puts it in **Romans 12:3**: "*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*"

How do we cultivate humility? C.S. Lewis wrote: "The first step is to realize that one is proud." The first discipline to help us is simply confession. We ask God to identify pride in our lives and confess it back to Him. A second spiritual discipline that helps us overcome pride and develop humility is community. In fellowship, we can confess to other, too. **James 5:16** says, "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*" Alone, we can live happily in our self-delusion. But when we are part of a community, a family, a small group of friends where the masks come off and we're real with each other, our pride is exposed, and with love, confronted. Another spiritual discipline that can help is worship. When we worship God, we are focusing our attention and affection on Him. We are thinking of Him, looking at Him, adoring Him, and loving Him. Worshiping God, we focus less on our selves. Finally, submission is a practice that puts another first and thereby confronts our pride. Whether we're interacting with a boss, a police officer, a spouse, a parent or child, or a neighbor, putting him or her first helps us learn to live in humility and think of ourselves with sound judgment.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. Do you agree that pride makes you more susceptible to temptation and sinning against others? What are some examples in your own life that you're comfortable sharing? (The examples can even be small things.)
2. What are things you do that help you focus less on yourself and more on God or others? [Leaders, here are some examples if your discussion stalls: Singing in church? Assisting a family member or friend or a neighbor in some way? Participating in a small group or service group? Being a person who listens well, perhaps even for confession.]
3. What makes it difficult to "think of yourself with sober judgment," that is, to reasonably judge yourself? What are some ways we can get an objective look at ourselves so that we can respond with confession and repentance and allow God to build His character in our lives?
4. How does it feel when someone takes credit for something you've done? How do you think God must feel when we take credit for gifts He's given or things He's done, and in what areas of your life are you most likely to do that? What are practical ways we can be credit-givers instead of credit-takers with both God and others?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- This week, take extra time to listen to others, to ask them questions about themselves or their interests; try not having the "last word" in a discussion, even if you think you're in the right. At the end of the week, journal about what you learned from this experience.
- Be quick to confess your sins to God and others (as appropriate), and also look for opportunities to highlight the accomplishments of others.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Pray for God to help expose pride in your life (a prayer that's *dangerous* to sin!) and to help you in dealing with it.
- Confess those sins you're struggling with to each other and to God (**James 5:16**), knowing He is faithful and just to forgive you and purify you (**1 John 1:9**).
- Thank God for sending Jesus to show us the way past the Seven Deadly Sins, and pray that this series and these discussion would bring about significant spiritual growth in your lives!
- Bring any other praises and requests before God that arose during our discussion.