“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling.” (Proverbs 16:18, NASB)
“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

Most Christians are familiar with Scripture’s presentation of pride’s dark side and heed its indirect warning—avoid the sin of pride. Only infrequently are Biblical references cited regarding positive pride and its benefits. Consequently, most Christians devalue pride and avoid all appearances of it in order to eliminate confusion and possible sin. Yet, a positive and Biblically healthy pride exists.

Confusion about pride also comes from:

- A fear self-conceit or becoming overly proud.
- The false belief that pride in oneself is always wrong.
- The false belief we should only give credit to God.
- A lack of biblical clarity about pride.

The Fear of Becoming Overly Proud

Some people view reasonable self-pride as acceptable, but avoid it because it may lead to exaggerated self-importance. Christians want to avoid this sin because they know God hates it (Proverbs 8:13) and stands in opposition to prideful people (James 4:6). Beyond disrupting one’s relationship with God, pride can result in stumbling and destruction (Proverbs 16:18), self-deception (Jeremiah 49:16), quarrels (Proverbs 13:10), loss of position (Daniel 5:20) and disgrace (Proverbs 11:2). People often fear what they do not understand, and so it is with pride. It is important to gain a proper understanding of God’s definition of pride and the boundaries of its dark side, so we can be free to enjoy and express constructive pride.

Pride in oneself is always wrong

We are told to humble, rather than exalt, ourselves. This directive is often accompanied with the implication or an assumption that we should not feel, think or express anything good about who we are or what we have done. This extreme measure can be just as damaging as excessive pride, and results in poor self-esteem and distortion of a person’s self-image. This is not what God had in mind.

We should only give credit to God

Some Christians look upon people who take credit or responsibility for a good outcome with silent disdain. They react with indignation to glory "stolen" from God and placed on a person as a crown. They teach that all glory is to be given to God. Without question, God deserves unlimited glory. However, it does not mean we should avoid all glory and refuse to take any credit for our efforts. Scripture tells us that God shares and gives us glory (Romans 8: 17,18; I
Corinthians 11:7; and Hebrews 2:7 [Jesus as a man and all humankind]). *Glory* in the Greek is defined as dignity, worthy of honor and praise.

**The Lack of Biblical Clarity About Pride**

Most people do not know what the Bible says about pride beyond its negative connotations. The result is confused thinking and incongruent behavior. For example, our speech may discount the worth and goodness of self-pride, yet we celebrate our own victories and achievements (scholarships, new jobs, graduations, sports achievements, retirement, etc.) with pride. When people celebrate their own or others’ accomplishments they are saying a person’s effort and success are worthy of some pride and glory.

**THE NATURE OF PRIDE**

There are many Greek words that define pride. Some are translated as glory, boasting and self-confidence. All three are used both positively and negatively in scripture. Empty glory, vainglory, haughtiness, bragging, high-mindedness and self-conceit are spoken of as evil. Contemporary dictionaries also recognize the two sides of pride and refer to it as either an excessively high opinion or importance of oneself or a dignified self-respect and feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction and a sense of worth.

A review of scripture helps us develop a balanced perspective of pride. Maintaining a biblical perspective requires taking into account *all* that God has to say on a given subject. Let’s examine some contrasting biblical statements regarding pride.

First, we are to avoid the dark side of pride and boasting:

- “In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill, and he prayed to the Lord, and the Lord spoke to him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem… However, Hezekiah humbled the pride of his heart…so that the wrath of the Lord did not come on them….” (II Chronicles 32:24-26)
- “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” (Proverbs 27:1)
- “The proud look of man will be abased and the loftiness of man will be humbled….” (Isaiah 2:11)
- “…the arrogance of your heart has deceived you.” (Jeremiah 49:16)
- “But when his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] heart was lifted up and his spirit [“mind”—in the Hebrew] became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne….”” (Daniel 5:20)
- “but God has chosen the foolish things of the world…the weak…the base…the despised…so that no man may boast before God.” (I Corinthians 1:27-29)
- “…love does not brag and is not arrogant.” (I Corinthians 13:4b)
“For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves…they are without understanding.” (II Corinthians 10:12)

“…you boast [rejoice in the Greek] in your arrogance [bragging in the Greek]; all such boasting is evil.” (James 4:16)

Pride’s sinful attitude is deceitful, unloving and evil. It places a person above others (in his own mind) and often forgets God. As a consequence, God’s wrath is kindled and He humbles the proud through the revelation of truth and His chastisement. Since humankind has a great propensity to become proud, God warns us and helps us avoid pride by choosing the foolish things of the world to embody wisdom.

The Bible also encourages us to embrace the healthy side of pride and permits “necessary” boasting:

“‘My soul will make its boast in the Lord.’” (Psalm 34:2)

“Let another praise you.” (Proverbs 27:2a)

“…we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours…” (II Corinthians 1:14)

“We are… giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.” (II Corinthians 5:12)

“But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us… not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but… as your faith grows, we will be within our sphere, enlarged even more by you.” (II Corinthians 10:13-15)

“For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge….” (II Corinthians 11:5,6a)

“…I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.” (II Corinthians 11:17,18)

“Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable.” (II Corinthians 12:1)

“For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, but I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me” (II Corinthians 12:6)

“But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.” (Galatians 6:4)

“…so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory [boast or rejoice in the Greek] because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.” (Philippians 2:16)
It's good to have reasonable pride in God, others and ourselves. Boasting is sometimes necessary so people know the truth—especially in the light of false rumors or theology, which can lead people astray. Paul boasts of his spiritual gifts and human experiences, which lend him credibility.

An example of positive boasting is when a job applicant tells an interviewer the truth about his or her talents and positive characteristics, and how he or she could benefit the company. Revealing the truth about oneself is not wrong, but the attitude behind it could be. Beyond sharing necessary information, flaunting one's abilities or achievements doesn't profit or better a person, nor does it enhance the kingdom of God.

God expects us to use spiritual discernment (the ability to judge correctly) in deciding when and how to express pride and boasting, rather than avoiding them.

SEEKERS OF GLORY

One Greek word used for glory that is widely and frequently used in the New Testament means dignities, honor, praise, respect and worship. Scripture tells us God, angels and people possess this glory. Another word for glory in the Greek means to boast or rejoice and is used in a good or bad sense—we can rejoice in the truth or boast about our evil deeds.

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory.” (Psalm 115:1a)
“…do all to the glory of God.” (I Corinthians 10:31)

Christians often conclude this attitude is the only one we should have throughout our lives. As a result, recipients of honor often shun praise and credit, instead giving the glory to God. This happens more commonly in church and religious events, less in personal celebrations. No one can argue that God deserves exceeding glory, for who is like Him? There is none above Him. The “Not to us…” part of giving glory is correct when we understand that no human characteristic or thought exceeds the Lord’s, and we are not to take credit for what belongs to Him. However, to say people should not take any credit or glory for their work or personal achievements is contradictory to the Bible’s teaching.

Clearly, we should not directly seek our own glory. Jesus said in John 8:50, “But I do not seek My glory…. ” Yet, He asks God for it when He says, ““Now Father, glorify Me together with Yourself…. ” (John 17:5a) Jesus walked among men, clothed in the flesh and emotional body of a human being, and yet remained fully God. Despite this, He did not create His own glory; He asked God to make it happen.

In His Priestly Prayer, Jesus states, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them [His followers]…” (John 17:22a). It is a present glory and, likely, a future glory to be revealed (I Peter 1:7). The present glory of Christians is affirmed in scripture in saying we are His chosen people, a royal priesthood, ambassadors of God, loved, redeemed, His poem and empowered by His gifts and the Holy Spirit that indwell believers.

Indirectly seeking our own glory is expected and acceptable. People’s use of rewards in business, the health industry, at church and in Bible stories is evident and extolled. Odd though it sounds, Christians seek humility in part for the reward of being exalted. In a similar way, Paul says he willingly suffered and died to his sin nature, “in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:11) The resurrection, heaven, a crown and accolades from God are rewards that partly motivate our right behavior and the indirect seeking of glory.
The glory of humankind in this life and in the one to come are exemplified in the following verses:

- “In a multitude of people is a king’s glory.” (Proverbs 14:28a)
- “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.” (Proverbs 19:11)
- “The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair.” (Proverbs 20:29)
- “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.” (Proverbs 25:2)
- “‘How can you believe, when you…do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?’” (John 5:44)
- “To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.” (Romans 2:7)
- “But glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good….” (Romans 2:10)
- “…if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” (Romans 8:17b)
- “…the glory of the children of God.” (Romans 8:21b)
- “…he [man] is the image and glory of God… the woman is the glory of man.” (I Corinthians 11:7b)
- “But we all… beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory….” (II Corinthians 3:18a)
- “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (I Peter 5:4)

We need to permit these and similar verses to balance our understanding of the good side of gloriying and add it to our healthy boasting and pride. Holding a reasonable pride securely is pleasing to God and allows us to more enthusiastically celebrate others' accomplishments, receive appropriate admiration and praise, and enjoy a healthy self-respect.

CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNBALANCED VIEW OF PRIDE

Too high or too low a view of pride is detrimental to one’s mental, social and spiritual health. The negative consequences can include:

- Poor self-esteem (critical self-statements, avoidance of nurturance)
- Identity confusion (am I good or bad?)
- False humility (public self-abasement to gain praise or reduce guilt)
- Relational conflict (others avoid both the proud and the self-loathing)
- Passive prayers (lack of being bold and wrestling with God)
- Abandoning God (I am a rock and an island)
- False guilt (wrong to feel any sense of self-pride)
- Depression (sometimes a consequence of guilt and self-loathing)
Limited and weak faith (not believing God could use you for great things)

A CONTINUUM OF PRIDE

Our comprehension of a subject is often deeper when we consider the extreme ends or its polar opposites—such as day and night, or right and wrong. It is more difficult to describe what lies between those two extremes—twilight (in the case of day and night) and perhaps appropriate behavior (in the case of right and wrong). This is also true about pride. We more readily understand pride by comparing its two extremes—over-emphasis (excessive self-admiration), and self-loathing (self-disrespect). These will inform and challenge us to develop a comprehensive, balanced and guiltless view of pride.

Locating one’s position on the following continuum of pride can lead to self-understanding and information necessary to develop a personal plan for change. Once the position is ascertained, one can ask why there is a difference between that spot and guiltless pride.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO PRIDE</th>
<th>PRIDE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-loathing</td>
<td>Absent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pernicious</td>
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It is essential that we discern not only good pride from bad, but also whether or not and how it exists within ourselves. We all have heard people say something similar to, “I am not proud, and I feel good about that.” Most have concluded this statement reveals someone who feels proud about not being proud. This can be an accurate evaluation, but so also the idea that a person can have a good sense of pride about not landing on the negative end of the continuum.

Self-loathing

A person who is self-loathing has no sense of pride, only disdain. They treat themselves in a manner that is:

- Abasing (not just humbling, but belittling or degrading)
- Punishing (physical or emotional flogging)
- Esteem crushing (tearing down of respect)
- Dividing (self comes apart and is at war within)

We are the only created life form capable of self-loathing and self-punishment. Most Christians believe it is wrong to hate people. Paradoxically, some view self-loathing as a badge of honor. To them, it is honorable to chastise the sinful body, mind and heart, and to discipline them into righteous submission. They seek to control their fleshly appetites and sin, such as pride. This belief contains some truth. However, its virtue and spiritual maturity are only skin-deep.
In Colossians 2:20-23, Paul challenges us to reconsider our self-made religion (rules) and our self-abasing behavior, which “are of no value against fleshly indulgence.” Self-abasing has its rightful place in the framework of proper and reasonable humility, but when it includes self-hate and exaggerated self-criticism, it becomes an act of vengeance against oneself.

In psychology, masochism refers to people who take pleasure in mental and physical acts of self-harm or being harmed by others. Some think martyrdom is a form of masochism. It is if a person believes he or she is bad and deserves it; it isn’t if a person dies for God or as a testimony of faith. Masochistic pleasure can be derived from many things, such as sexual feelings, or directly and indirectly inviting others to punish them through physical or verbal abuse.

On a different side of the fence, some people think self-punishment is good because it can remove guilt and lessen the fear of God or others punishing them for offenses. Though acts of self-loathing may lessen the feeling of guilt, the actual source of guilt remains. This belief holds that Christ’s work of removing guilt is not enough. Accepting the finished grace-work and love of God is too simple. They think they deserve to suffer, and can't just depend by faith on Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf. This belief is not correct, but it is understandable—we're taught from childhood that being responsible means we should pay our own debts, and not let another do it.

Self-punishing people go beyond being their own judge, and take up the offices of jury and executioner, as well. What they forget is that judging our sin, allocating discipline and carrying out the sentence is a work reserved exclusively to God.

The epitome of self-loathing is low self-esteem and a dysfunctional, divided self-image. These limit our involvement in God’s work in the world in a way that is similar to the limitation of Jesus’ miracles in His own hometown because of their unbelief. People with low self-esteem (esteem means "positive thought or consideration" in the Greek) lack sufficient self-understanding and/or deny some positive truths about themselves. It is hard for them to accept God’s love, goodness and grace, and to believe He can work through them significantly.

A divided self-image is at war with itself. It can be observed when people treat themselves well in some ways, but also unlovingly and disrespectfully. For example, some people feel self-love and self-hate and, consequently, become confused about how to treat themselves. They may believe self-love is wrong because they have a sin nature. Yet, also believe self-hate is wrong because God loves them.

Further division results from hearing verses such as, “Your righteousness is as filthy rags,” (Isaiah 64:6) and “There is no one who is good” (Romans 3:10). These can leave us riddled with confusing thoughts and feelings when we entertain other truths like, “God sees you as perfect in Christ” (Hebrews 10:14) and “God loves you so much that He died just for you” (John 3:16). James 1:6 tells us a praying person who doubts or is confused “…ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Our views on pride often leave us in a double-minded state. We need to develop one clear image about who we are and our accurate worth, importance and sin.

**Absent Pride**

Those with a complete lack of self-pride or awareness of its life within them have neither an evil or pernicious pride (exaggerated self-importance and self-worth) nor a healthy pride (any satisfaction or pleasure coming from accomplishments or from a sense of self-worth or self-respect). They are neutral, giving it little to no thought or feeling. Its absence may seem innocent enough, but it is harmful and far from what God wishes for us.
To say pride is not an important issue is to disregard or rationalize the serious and frequent attention given to it by scripture. We all have experienced feelings of pride. Its significance is understood in researcher’s results, which have recently demonstrated pride to be one of six universally recognized facial expressions.\(^1\) It has the power to build people up or lead them astray from reality, to add to the quality of life or threatens one’s relationship with God.

Some harmful effects of defending against thoughts and feelings of pride include:

- Restricting other emotions
- Feeding our sin nature
- Energizing the war within ourselves

As the theory goes, if people dam up one emotion, like pride, they often end up restricting or putting up a firewall against others. Once a person discovers the ease and the benefit of relieving a troubled feeling through coping or defensive mechanisms, they will employ them to manage other troubled emotions. Most of these mechanisms are learned and become automatic and unconscious over time. The damming of emotions often results in an exaggerated or exclusive use of logic—living one’s personal and professional life in a computer-like fashion.

Cutting off pride feeds the sin nature. The sin nature is not static—it shrinks and expands depending on what we do with it. Chapters six through eight in the book of Romans tell us something about the process of becoming enslaved. Sin is our master until Jesus sets us free, but if we feed our sin nature by dwelling on sinful thoughts and engaging in fleshly activities, it will again try to become our master.

We indirectly feed the sin nature when we cut off truth and reality through use of psychological defenses (denial, rationalization, etc.). It may feel like, “Out of sight, out of mind,” but it is not true. Whenever we defend or avoid the truth, it does not die, but is alive in our unconscious. There, the sin nature feeds and grows on the energy of the cut off emotion and influences people’s future thoughts, feelings and behaviors. For example, if a person denies he or she is angry with God, the anger will take up residence in the unconscious. The energy of anger will often inappropriately leak into our communication or other behavior. It can cause a person to feel less connected to God and his or her faith, may eventually result in a crisis of faith.

The sin nature becomes more powerful with use, and atrophies with disuse. For example, the more a person eats sugar or drinks caffeinated beverages, the more they may crave them. But, the appetite for them greatly diminishes if they are avoided for a short few weeks. When the sin nature is nourished, it takes control until we are mentally enslaved or physically addicted. Those who cut off the truth about their pride become vulnerable to the wiles of the sin nature, because those unattended elements can grow into an evil form of pride.

When the sin nature gains greater control Christians will experience an increase in internal warfare. The indwelling sin nature will wage war with a Christian’s soul (mind, will and emotions), spirit and the Holy Spirit within (Romans 7:17-23). They will be conflicted between what they know is right and the urges that propel them in a different direction. Beyond self-conflict, the sin nature finds expression in relational conflict.

The internal war is often seen in the recurring struggles in closes relationships, where insignificant issues result in big arguments and the same conflicts are repeated again and again. A common experience is a wife who relentlessly pursues more love and attention from her

husband, while the husband increasingly withdraws from the relationship, often spending additional time working and/or being silent. Without understanding and resolving the underlying problems, they are doomed to repeat the same mistakes.

Most women are overly driven to pursue more love and relationship with men because of God’s curse—“...Yet your desire (run after, overflowing, longing in the Greek) will be for your husband” (Genesis 3:16). The drivenness can also be the result of not receiving sufficient love from one’s family of origin, which often leads to inappropriately seeking healing through the martial relationship. The unconscious, sometimes conscious, part of a husband is angry over the woman’s attempt to control him. She reminds him of a controlling parent, often his mother. Also, men have an ill-conceived understanding of masculinity. To many, being a man means not being like a female. Men avoid developing so-called feminine characteristics, such as: being emotional, submissive, weak, or too romantic in order to feel masculine.

Weakening the sin nature through starvation (consciously avoiding sin) can prevent an escalation of this internal war. This tactic is especially significant when used the first time one is tempted, as sin cannot gain an emotional foothold. Consciously facing and refusing to deny negative or troubling thoughts or feelings can also starve the sin or old nature, which would otherwise feed off the unconscious emotional energy.

Avoiding any troubling part of life is most often detrimental to good health. It is critical that we all embrace cut off thoughts, feelings and experiences (past and present) and work toward resolving them.

**Pernicious Pride**

God is in opposition to those who have pernicious or evil pride because it is harmful to their relationship with Him, others and themselves. Its characteristics are evident in people who are:

- Conceited
- Deceived
- Self-exalting
- Arrogant
- Braggarts
- Exaggerators
- Disrespectful
- Users of others
- Controlling
- Blaming

Negatively prideful people are given to exaggerating the truth, devaluing others and ignoring God. To keep their inflated self-esteem intact they refuse to see their own shortcomings and sins. They obsessively desire and believe they are entitled to everyone’s attention, respect, nurturance, praise, and even worship. They fantasize about and embellish their conquests, accomplishments and character, and let others know of their supposed greatness.

The excessively proud use God and people for their own selfish purposes. They manipulate people with promises and smooth talk, and can become angry and seek to harm those who oppose them. They believe they are not responsible for their troubles and conflicts, but project all blame onto others. They may feign confession and apologetic behavior if it is in their best
interest. They seek relationships with people who will serve them, require little in return, take the fall for problems and are easily influenced by their bewitching and convincing ways. If they are able to hide the obnoxious side of their pride, others can be attracted to their great confidence and dynamic personality.

Pride-driven people desire to establish their own kingdom on earth. In their own eyes, they are special, worthy and good—they are God. Though they may praise some people when it makes them look good, they believe others are beneath them. This helps them feel good about themselves and eliminates the competition regarding who’s in control and who’s the greatest. These characteristics also describe narcissists and the powerful, charming and influential Lucifer (Satan), who abandoned heaven to establish his own glory.

Pernicious pride can begin at any age, although it most frequently has its origin in the formative years (1-5 years old). The full manifestation of evil pride often occurs in adolescence or young adulthood. Some psychologists believe that narcissists lack any identity except the one they build—a god-like hero, which they will defend at all costs.

Pernicious pride develops in many ways. First, a lack of parental love and affirmation of childrens’ individuality can create an exaggerated craving for attention and admiration. Parental inadequacies may leave children with little or no sense of worth or importance. These children live in survival mode and seek relief from anxiety, despair, fear, rage and loneliness by attracting attention from anybody who will recognize their existence. Later on, they look for attention and admiration primarily in people they consider special or as having significant social status.

Second, evil pride may develop when a child’s inherent temperament encounters parental exaggeration of the child’s goodness and giftedness, while denying his or her weaknesses. The youngster is told things like, “There is nothing you can’t do, if you put your mind to it.” These vulnerable children come to believe what they’ve been told (regardless of actual ability, potential or opportunity) and expect others to treat them similarly, all the while avoiding contrarians.

A third way pride develops is through success, especially if it is quick. Initially, people may have a healthy sense of pride. But any feeling or thought can be corrupted. Sin can corrupt healthy pride by adding a few exaggerations, which causes the person to savor the powerful feelings. Eventually, a person can become addicted to how great it feels to have the world at his or her feet. Over time, such people believe they are what they think and say.

Unduly proud people will be brought down from their lofty and deceptive pedestals to face the truth and reality of who they are. All who possess too much pride will be humbled in this life and/or in the one to come. God is able to bring us face-to-face with ourselves because He knows the depths of our thoughts.

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A narcissistic personality, which is similar to Obvious Pernicious Pride, is described as:

- an inability to empathize
- expecting special favors, a sense of entitlement
- manipulative or exploitive behaviors
- an inability to receive direction
- extremes in emotional reactions, both positive and negative
- idealism, an unwillingness to deal with reality
- an ability to make initial positive impressions

feelings and behavior. No one will escape the truth about oneself, even the secrets one hides from himself or herself (Psalm 20:12). The truth about who we are will be understood in the light of the righteousness and holiness of God, thereby producing in us an inescapable humility.

**Guiltless Pride – True Humility**

Guiltless pride is a positive, healthy and righteous pride. It is free from any feeling of guilt about being proud. It belongs to those who have an accurate self-perception, who have properly balanced self-worth, self-importance and humility. Guiltless pride is also free from:

- Shame
- Self-loathing
- Effects of harmful humiliation
- Pretension
- False humility

Guiltless pride is a state of appropriate humility. Humble people are realistic about their good and bad qualities and often see others as having value for who they are (created human beings), not what they can do. It is a state of modesty—being lowly in heart and mind. Lowly doesn’t mean thinking of oneself in degrading ways. People are lowly in comparison to the greatness of God.

Being humbled or humiliated is confusing to most people because it can be painfully helpful or devastatingly harmful. Words used to convey these concepts translated from the Greek include humbled, brought low, depressed and humiliated. However, there is a difference between God’s helpful humiliation of people, and people’s harmful humiliation of others. God’s view and use of humility during people’s earthly lives is always positive:

- It seeks to end self-deception
- It hopes for a functional relationship
- It establishes the equality of all people
- It reveals His greatness
- It prevents us from creating unrealistic heroes
- It serves as a testimony for observers

We can be severely wounded if we are humiliated by another’s evil desire, or a mistake that causes people to laugh at or think less of us. Many people carry the shame, guilt and grief of humiliation for years with a stunning effect on their self-esteem and self-image. If a person gains self-awareness and develops a determination to overcome the negative impact, this type of humiliation may have some redeeming value. However, most people end up with a substandard opinion of themselves, even to the point of self-loathing. This kind of humility has no spiritual value.

False humility also has no spiritual or eternal value. It is a role one plays and it doesn’t represent one's true character. It is meant to deceive others in order to gain admiration and respect. Such people are only interested in making themselves look and/or feel better, not in the welfare of others. They use false humility in an attempt to end self-loathing or to increase peer group status. They do not see themselves as equal to others, but below. They do not truly possess
the heart of a servant. A classic example is the public fasts and prayers of the self-pious Pharisees, whose only gain was empty human respect. Jesus said of them, "They have their reward already" (Matthew 6:2).

True humility includes a submissive (not passive) spirit obedient to God. Jesus exemplified humility when He “humbled Himself by becoming obedient” (Philippians 2:8). True humility is learned and developed by embracing our ever-growing knowledge of who God is and who we are. That knowledge creates a lowly heart and a mind that understands we are innately no better than anyone else, even though we may be gifted with greater abilities and our accomplishments exceed those of some others. God’s view of us lifts us up from the depths of self-loathing to a comforting and guiltless pride.

RESOLUTION

Recovering from the absence, avoidance and inflation of pride is a challenge requiring courage, study, prayer and a new self-image and theological beliefs. Understanding the reasons for their existence can provide direction for setting goals necessary to achieve health. Make up a list of what has created and influenced the development of the harmful pride, along with one or more things that may remedy each item on that list.

For instance, if loneliness drives a person to seek attention and that attention is gaining by tooting one’s own horn, then give attention to others—we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). This by itself will not fully meet one’s need, so having at least one more solution will be necessary. Another example is avoiding confrontations and taking the anger for another out on oneself. Instead, learn to be assertive and properly manage anger by directing it to the source of the relational problem. The result will limit or halt self-loathing (and some depression).

One giant step toward healing low self-esteem and a poor self-image is to search out the wondrous truth of his or her glorious Christian identity. To do so is to be freed from self-condemnation (overly critical self-statements) and self-punishment (guilt-removing penance) that devalue a person. If we are “in Christ” we are special, worth more than the birds of the air, valuable enough to die for and accepted for who we are now. By combing the scriptures we see the wonderful and glorious image God has of us because of Jesus’ work. (For more on this important subject, in early fall, 2009, search the Therapeutic Articles in our Library for: “Christian Identity: Feeling Good About Being You.”)

Spiritual maturity encompasses achieving guiltless pride and reveling in its goodness. God enjoys the wholesome pleasure of others, just as we do when those we care about are delighted or happy. Guiltless pride is part of our new identity “in Christ.”

The following steps may be helpful to you in developing healthy pride:

Self-Loathing to Guiltless Pride

- Let the truth of the Bible teach you about good, guiltless pride.
- Do not attempt to remove your guilt through self-abasement.
- Discern the difference between true and false guilt.
- Do not listen or give power to self-derogatory communication.
- Think on those things that lend to self-esteem and self-respect.
- Refuse all forms of self-punishment.
- Let God take His rightful seat in determining chastisement.
Stop directing anger at yourself and ask, “Who is it for?”
Seek a professional evaluation for possible depression.
Develop a healthy self-love, which can overcome self-hate.
Look for, accept and enjoy the good praise and love of others.
Speak the truth about yourself to others, which includes the good.
Seek to understand your new identity “in Christ.”
Be cautious about messages regarding humility.

Pernicious Pride To Guiltless Pride

Understand that your fears may try to overpower your resolve to change.
Assume there is some self-deception and understand it.
Explore your sin nature with someone you trust.
Find the truth about yourself by listening to others’ perceptions.
Join a support and accountability group.
Surrender your sense of entitlement.
Do not directly seek glory, praise, honor or attention.
Study humility and accept its wisdom.
Recognize your need for God and seek to serve Him.
Confess your guilt about pride.
Humble yourself by associating with the lowly.
Share control, blame, worth and importance with others.
Edify and esteem others, regardless of their status in life.
Seek professional help if you cannot accomplish the above.

May those who are self-loathing be elevated to a place of self-respect, those who are overly proud be gently humbled, and all find peace and comfort in developing guiltless pride.