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Proverbs: Pride (Part 1)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this session, Steve Gregg delves into the topic of pride and its manifestations, using Proverbs as a guide. He explains that although God created us for a purpose, we should not become self-focused and prioritize our own happiness and desires above all else. Gregg stresses the importance of humility, which he defines as acknowledging the gifts and talents that we have without feeling a negative sense of pride, and recognizing that we are just a small part of a larger body. He cautions against thinking shallowly and judging solely based on surface appearances.

Transcript

The last topic in Proverbs that we want to be looking at, although it will take more than one session to look at it all because there are a lot of Proverbs on this, is the general subject of pride and its many manifestations. When we were talking about the world and its traps, we have referenced 1 John 2, verses 15-17, where the world and its traps are described as falling under three headings, the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. The lusts of the flesh are those things that are natural desires of the body that are not in themselves wrong, but can be wrong.

They can go wrong. They can lead you wrong. In fact, they shouldn't lead you at all, except in the general sense that your appetite leads you to eat when you need food and so forth.

But you shouldn't have your life guided by those desires, though they have their own value in God's purpose. And so we looked at what the Proverbs say about some of those issues, and then we were talking about the lusts of the eyes, which although the terminology doesn't immediately suggest this idea to us in our language, but lusts of the eyes refers to greed or acquisitiveness, or the desire to possess things, particularly money and possessions. And so we found there are a lot of Proverbs that in one way or another touch on that theme, have something to say about it.

And we've spent three sessions looking at that subject. And now we come to the last category of the world's traps, and that is the pride of life. Now, when John uses the term

the pride of life, it's not entirely clear how he means that.

Why not just use the word pride, pride of life? Some translations translate the boastful pride of life, but I'm not sure why the word boastful isn't in the Greek, just pride of life. And it seems obvious that not all pride is necessarily dark and sinister and evil. To be proud of your kids because they do well is not an evil thing.

Even to boast in God, the Bible says, is not a bad thing to be proud of God. But there is a pride of oneself that is very much an enemy of the soul. And one of the things that the Bible indicates in many places is that what God desires in us is humility, because humility is simply being in touch with reality.

Some people think that God just wants us to grovel about ourselves and see him as great because he's an egotist of some kind. But actually, it's not God's ego that's at stake here. It's the order of things, the order of reality.

God is the truth that will set you free, you know, to the extent that you are deceived about reality, to that extent, you will not be able to operate as you were created to operate in reality. And God is God and we are not God. And therefore, to be humble before God, to be submissive to God, to give him his proper reverence is simply to be in touch with reality and to live according to truth.

To be otherwise is simply to be deluded. And that's not a good thing. So when God desires that we worship him and honor him and exalt him and not ourselves, he's just expecting us to to operate in the realm of reality as opposed to delusion.

It's not so much that he's got an ego about it. He made us so that we and all the creation function best, most profitably for his purposes and also for the good of the created things, that they operate best when they're in their proper relation to each other and to him. We are the pinnacle of God's creation.

Human beings are. We were made in his image. And that is something to honor.

We should honor that in each other. James said that it's inconsistent for us that we bless God with our mouth and with the same mouth we curse men who are made in the similitude of God. It is not honoring to God to dishonor his image, which is in other people.

If I came into my children's room, I found that they were throwing darts at a target. The target was a picture of me. I would think that to be disrespectful to me.

And if they said, no, it's not you, it's just a picture of you. It's just your image. It's not you.

We're not throwing darts at you, just at your image. I would not be much comforted by

that. To me, my image represents me.

Why would they choose me as a target? My image? Obviously, what is done to me, to my image, in essence, is showing what they think about me. And Jesus said, inasmuch as you do it to the least of these my brethren, you've done it to me. Because we bear his image.

Our neighbors bear the image of God. Therefore, there is a dignity in being human that we need to not forget. And our culture may forget that at times and think that we're just another kind of animal.

Maybe even less than other animals. Every other animal needs to have their rights preserved. But man's rights can be eroded because man is, for some reason, esteemed as not having as many rights as animals have in some circles.

Animals have their place in the food chain. They're given a pass when they do what comes naturally, even if it's at the expense of lower animals than themselves. And yet, we don't have that same right in the eyes of some people.

So that in our society, human dignity is a concept that is being lost. And it is not wrong to have a sense of the dignity of being a human being. It's not the same thing as pride.

It's not sinful pride. It is a proper self-esteem to recognize that you are made in the image of God and therefore bear a dignity that comes with being a child of God. Even the non-Christian bears that dignity in some measure.

The non-Christian is not a child of God in the same sense we are, because we're not born again. But they are creation of God and they are made to reflect him. And they are his fallen children.

The Apostle Paul made it clear in Athens when he was speaking to the Athenian philosophers that we are all God's offspring. And so, as God's offspring, we bear a destiny, at least a potential destiny, of reigning with him forever. And that's what he's called us to do.

That's the glory of our calling. That's the glory of our humanness. And that's a good thing.

We shouldn't think lowly of ourselves so much so that we neglect that. That we don't realize that we really have importance. We have value.

And even fallen man has that value. He's marred. But the image of God is not obliterated.

Some forms of theology with their doctrine of total depravity almost make it sound like the devil had more power to obliterate the image of God than God had to put it in there.

That there's nothing left of the image of God in there. That the doctrine of original sin forgets that there's such a thing as original righteousness too.

There is original sin. There is sin in us from birth. But there's also humanness made in the image of God.

There's a sense of right and wrong. In most people there is also a sense of desire to be connected to the creator. That's a dignity and a glory of being human.

Now that's awareness of that. And to live with that sense of importance is not pride. The pride that is sinful is a sense of self-importance vis-a-vis God or vis-a-vis other people in the sense that I don't see myself as that much lower than God.

And I even see myself as higher than other people. In other words, it's seeing myself out of focus, seeing myself at the center. It's actually I am in focus, everything else is out of focus.

The camera lens is focused on one object, everything else is less important and is therefore not as focused. And the sinful form of pride is that which sees oneself as the center and the most important thing. Reality, of course, would see it otherwise.

That God is the most important thing. God is the center of the solar system. Everything else does well when it orbits around him.

And everything that orbits around him is of equal value. That is, every person in one sense has equal innate value. Now I say innate value because some people actually do better things with their lives and their lives do have more value than other people's lives.

Because some people waste their lives and produce nothing from their lives. But potentially, innately, human beings all have equal value. Not all have equal gifts.

Not all have equal intelligence or equal talent or equal good looks or equal opportunities. But everybody has equal innate value who is made in the image of God. And therefore, even though not all can achieve the same amount of impact on their society, for good or for ill, all people have the opportunity to fulfill the purpose that God made them for.

And to fulfill God's purpose for your life is to do the best thing anyone can do. And if God's purpose for your life is not as dramatic or sensational or prestigious as that which he has for somebody else, in his sight that doesn't matter. Obedience to him is what matters.

To be humble before him. To do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly before your God is what God desires from all people. And therefore, all people have that same innate value in that they can all fulfill God's purpose for their life.

The problem is that we often will evaluate people, or even ourselves, on the basis of

contributions that are made rather than how well we're really stewarding everything God has given us. Some people have more talent, more ability, more opportunities than other people have. And therefore, they accomplish more rather effortlessly, even making very little sacrifice, even compromising a great deal in terms of obedience.

Still, with the little bit they do right, they accomplish more than what some people accomplish putting out all their efforts for God. And therefore, we see some people really accomplished who don't really deserve as much credit before God because they're not as obedient to God. And yet, they're getting more attention in the world than some people who are more obedient to God and don't get as much attention.

But we then are mistaken if we begin to evaluate the people based on how the world appreciates them. And many times we will evaluate ourselves that way. Now, there's of course the opposite problem too, and that is that we often will devalue ourselves because we don't accomplish as much as what somebody else does.

And that's not any more in touch with reality either. To simply recognize that if we are doing what God wants, we're doing as much as a person can be expected to do and can receive as much reward as somebody who accomplishes more and does everything God wants. But we often evaluate ourselves on the basis of performance or impact or what people call success or the world's way of valuing things.

And if we measure up well in those areas, we feel that we're better than other people. Now, if we don't measure up well, that doesn't mean we won't be proud. It's possible for a person to have very little to be proud of and yet to be very proud because they're a legend in their own mind.

Or because they simply are so self-focused that they consider, they would not say out loud that they think they're more important than anybody else because it would sound ridiculous. But they live every day with the assumption that they're more important than everybody else. You know, I see this so easily in cases where somebody loses a loved one.

You know, their loved one dies. Their wife, their child, their husband, their mother or somebody dies younger than they wished they had. And the person suddenly loses their faith in God.

They say, how could God allow this to happen? And I think, well, wait a minute. Didn't you know before your loved one died that people are dying all the time? That people like you are losing their loved ones every single day. Didn't that ever challenge your faith in God? Why is it that when it happens to you, suddenly God has got to give an answer for himself? You never made him give an answer for himself when other people were suffering like you're suffering now.

And it just shows, that very reaction shows that people are so self-focused that they think they're the only one who's important. It's not so much that they find it easy for other people to suffer. Everyone has some problems, you know, explaining why God, who's good, would allow so much suffering in the world.

But we can live with it. We can put that aside. We can put that out of our mind and say, well, God is so good.

He knows what he's doing, whatever. But as soon as it hits us, if we suddenly think, well, this is something that God really needs to explain. I'm not sure God is so good after all.

And people do react that way. Well, then it shows that what we're saying is that I'm more important than everybody else, at least to me. And you might think, well, of course you'd be more important than everybody else to you.

You are the one whose needs you're responsible to fulfill. You are the one who has to provide for yourself, feed yourself, look out for yourself. How could you not be the most important person in your life? Well, that is naturally the case, of course, by nature.

Self-preservation is our strongest instinct. But that becomes, of course, like the other issues, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. Those are things that are not always in themselves bad, but they easily become bad.

There's nothing wrong with the fact that you want to feed yourself when you're hungry or that you want to sleep when you're tired or that you like pretty things and don't mind having them around you and would like to have your environment an attractive place rather than an unattractive place. Those are God-given human traits that have a value. And no doubt a certain pride of life has a legitimate place.

The fact that you do make it your responsibility to take care of yourself in a way that you don't make it your responsibility to take care of everyone else in the world. It's not wrong for you to protect yourself when you can't protect everybody on the planet, because you are, in a sense, your responsibility. You do have some responsibility for yourself.

But when that sense of self-responsibility becomes such a self-focus, that suddenly my needs and my happiness and my desires and my pleasures are more important than everybody else's. So much so that everybody else's are really kind of fading into oblivion in my mindset because I'm so focused on seeking what I need. And then I'm suddenly offended when I don't get what I deserve, when someone slights me, when somebody doesn't recognize my accomplishments, when somebody is elevated above me.

So many things can make me resentful and make me demonstrate that I'm sinfully proud. Because just as a person has to bring their fleshly desires and their lusty eyes under the rule of God's spirit and God's law, God's word. In other words, just as we have to govern these drives that we have from a spiritual place, a set of spiritual convictions,

so also we have to govern this tendency to care about ourselves most and to see ourselves as the most important person and put that more in proper perspective and say, okay, in some respects I have to take responsibility for myself in a way I'm not, I can't and am not required to take the same amount of responsibility for somebody else.

There's a sense in which that's true. Everybody has personhood and expected to manage their personhood. There is a sense in which I'm responsible to make sure that my relation with God is right before I go around pulling specks out of everybody else's eyes.

I am important to me. My spiritual well-being is my responsibility as well as, to a certain extent, my physical well-being. All that is true.

But of course it reaches that point so easily where it becomes the main thing and it becomes all important and I can think of very little else except how the world, how people's activities, how circumstances are impacting me and my happiness and my ego. And that's where, again, Christianity calls us to make some radical infringement upon our natural urges. Our urge to be exalted, our urge to be appreciated, our urge to be thanked and acknowledged when we've done the right thing, our urge to be admired.

Those things, if we have that urge, then we have something we have to do about it. Just like if you have the urge to have sex with somebody who's someone else's wife, you have to stomp on that. You need to inhibit that.

You need to fight against that. Likewise, when you have that urge to place yourself above other people or even to insist that other people put you on the same level as themselves because sometimes people will wrongfully, in their pride, put themselves above you and you know they don't deserve to be there. Instead of being offended by that, what do you do to react to that? Well, the answer in Scripture is you humble yourself.

And it's interesting because people often pray that God will give them humility and I don't suppose there's anything wrong with praying for that. Certainly humility is a good thing to have and desire, but humility is simply the act of being humble and that is our responsibility. God can make you humble, but I don't know if that's desirable.

If God humbles you in the Bible, that's sort of a last resort. You're supposed to humble yourself. Throughout Scripture, it's your responsibility to humble yourself.

Humble yourself. That means bring yourself down. Humble means low.

Make yourself low. Stop rising up in your own opinion of yourself and bring yourself back down to where you belong. And if you humble yourself and walk humbly before your God, well then you'll be... God will never have to humble you.

When you don't humble yourself, then of course you're inviting God to humble you and

usually when God humbles you, it's more like humiliation than humility. It's more like chastening. It's something to impose upon you a sense that you should have had already of your own mortality or your own stupidity or your own evilness.

And when God allows you to see that and you're totally crushed and broken, well that's a healthy thing if you were too proud. It's more healthy to not get that proud in the first place and not have to have God forcibly humble you because he commands you to humble yourself. What's it mean to humble yourself? It means that you don't exalt yourself in your own mind or verbally or in your actions or you don't seek to get the attention that is not appropriate for you to have.

And so being humble doesn't mean that you have a false sense of unimportance. Like I said, you do have dignity as a child of God, as a person made in God's image. And beyond that, even beyond the basic dignity that exists in being a human, you have other things about you that God has given you that are particular to you, that are good things that some people don't have.

You might be physically strong and skilled and athletic. You might be physically attractive. You might sing well.

You might do many things well. You might build things well, fix things well. You might be more intelligent.

You might be born into a better family and have better connections than somebody else. All of these things are particular gifts that God has given you and you shouldn't think them to be nothing. You shouldn't think that they don't confer some kind of potential that is good in you.

You should recognize that whatever you have that is good is something that you can acknowledge as such and use it without being proud in a negative sense of it. See, Paul said to Philemon in the book of Philemon, verse six, he said, I pray that the fellowship of your faith or the communion of your faith might be made effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus, that your impact for God will become more effective, he says, as you acknowledge, not deny, not ignore, not pretend as you acknowledge every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus. Some manuscripts say every good thing that is in us in Christ Jesus, making it more general and more universal, but like we all have the same good things, but some manuscripts say every good thing that is in you.

The point is there are good things in you and acknowledging them to be there and to their being good is not proud. It's not bad. If you deny that they are there, you will never have confidence in them.

And I say in them, I mean, in God's gift to you. If God gives you a task to perform, he has

given you certain gifts that will make you good at that. And you should trust that the gifts that God has given you are adequate and valuable and useful and can be used to good purpose.

On the other hand, if you do have gifts, and of course you do, everyone does, if you have gifts that other people lack, then Paul says over in first Corinthians four, verse seven, as sort of a deterrent to pride of a wrong sort. In first Corinthians four, seven, Paul says, for who makes you differ from another? That is to say, if you have things other people don't have, if you are in some respects superior to other people, which is the case, everyone is inferior to other people in some areas and superior to others in other areas. But if there's areas, let us say, of superiority, superior giftedness or superior advantage that God has given you that isn't universal, that everyone doesn't have, he says, who makes you differ from another person? What do you have that you did not receive? In other words, as a gift, you received whatever thing you have as a gift from God, you didn't earn it.

Now you might say, but I did. I worked very hard. I went and I got an education.

I disciplined myself and so forth. Your ability and opportunity, that was also a gift from God. You may have made good use of it.

If you've worked hard and exploited the opportunities that God gave you and have accomplished something with it, that is to your credit, no doubt. But even your ability to do that, the opportunity you had, the health and the intelligence that you had that made it possible for you to do that, even the character that allowed you to discipline yourself to go through that regimen, all of that is something God gave you because not everyone has that. Not everyone could do that.

And so what do you have that you've not received? If indeed you receive it, why do you glory? That means why do you boast as if you had not received it? That is why do you act as if it's your accomplishment when in fact it was a gift that God has given you? And so this is what the Bible teaches that we should not be denying when God has given us something good. When I was younger in the ministry, I knew early on from my studies of the Bible that humility was important. And I knew also that I had a few gifts that got people's attention in the ministry.

I lacked a lot of gifts too that I wished I had. There were a lot of gifts I wish I'd had, both natural and spiritual. And I was often very mindful of that deficiency.

But there were also some gifts that I did have, which would sometimes draw compliments. As a younger person, not quite understanding what humility is supposed to be like, I always thought I was supposed to kind of deny these things. You know, like it's proud to let people compliment you and let it go by like that.

You have to say, no, no, no, that's really nothing. I'm not really anything at all. I'm not

good at that really at all.

You know, someone says, well, you do this well. Oh, yeah, I don't really do that very well at all. You know, I mean, there's so many people do that so much that I'm really pretty bad at that.

Feeling like that's the way to be humble. Like you deny as true the things that are in fact true, that God has given you. Humility doesn't require that you ignore areas where God has given you some kind of a superior gift in some area.

Those are the things you should really value as gifts. But that's it. You have to recognize that they are gifts.

You can't take credit for what the color of your eyes is. You didn't make any choices about that. Even your parents didn't consciously choose what color your eyes would be.

Maybe you don't even care about the color of your eyes. And that's I'm not sure why anyone would. But the point I'm making is there are things about you that are part of the package that God made when he made you, including physical and spiritual and intellectual traits.

And they're all gifts to you, just like the color of your eyes is a gift to you. You wouldn't boast about the color of your eyes, I trust. Now, many times people, because of, let's say, their good looks or their intelligence or their sports ability or their musical ability or something else that the world esteems, they get so many compliments in that area that they begin to feel like they can really use this.

They can really exploit this, not for the glory of God particularly, but just for more of that kind of attention. People begin sort of addicted to praise, addicted to attention. Everybody probably wants the right kind of attention.

There are people who seem to be wallflowers and reticent. They seem to not want any attention. I don't know what goes on in their heads, but it's very probable that they really, in their heart of hearts, would love to have the right kind of attention for the right kind of people.

I don't know. All I know is I think I'm like most people in the sense that there's a natural desire for people to acknowledge your accomplishments and to think highly of you and to respect you. And where you have areas of failure and shame in your life, you would prefer they don't find out about those because that would mar their general high opinion of you.

I know I have that in me. I'm pretty sure most people have it in them. That's kind of a human thing.

And it's understandable enough. But to humble yourself would mean that you do not allow people to place you on some kind of a pedestal that you know you don't deserve, even though you have some traits or talents that can be exploited to place you in that position and can give you that feeling that people look up to me, people speak well of me, people love me. To say to yourself, to your own heart, say, you know, this is not something that I can take any credit for at all.

This is, whatever it is, it's what God gave me. And yet it's so tempting. I would imagine for somebody who's extremely good looking growing up and everyone compliments them about their looks in a world where good looks are extremely valued, for a person to begin to think themselves better than someone who doesn't have those good looks.

Very easy. Easy to feel that way because the world so affirms people who are good looking and pretty much ignores or even mocks people who are not good looking. That it would be easy for someone with those kinds of, that kind of gift to feel important.

And what the danger is, of course, that we will believe what the world is saying about us. That the world we know has values that God does not share and that Christians should not share and that we will begin to assess ourselves by what the world says. And that's the danger too, even if what the world thinks about us is bad, like we're not good looking, we're not smart, we're not articulate, we're not able to impress people.

The world might think badly of us to accept what the world thinks is the mistake. Paul said in Romans chapter 12, verse 3, for I say through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Don't think of yourself more highly than you should, nor less highly than you should.

It doesn't say you should think of yourself unreasonably negatively, but you should not think of yourself more highly than is appropriate because why? Well, because you're out of touch with reality then. You should instead think soberly. A sober person is not drunk and a drunk person is not in touch with reality to the degree that they're drunk, they are impaired.

They are reality impaired. They think they're sober, but they're not sober. They think they can drive and walk on a straight line, but they can't do that.

They think they're funny, but they're not. They think they're sexy, but they're not. You get drunk enough, you're out of touch with reality.

Instead, you should be in touch with reality. You need to be sober. You need to think soberly about yourself.

And that's what humility is. It's not an unnatural or unrealistic low self-image. What humility is, is just being in touch with reality.

And the reality is you are better than some people in some respects. That is, you have superior advantages and gifts over some other people. But there are people who have those same gifts and others superior to you.

So, what's the point? What's the point of making comparisons? You can always find someone who's better and you can always find someone who's worse. If you're tending to want to have a higher self-image than you should, you'll always focus on those people who are worse than you and say, I'm better than they are. If you tend to be, you know, a self-deprecating person to an unrealistic extent, you may say, well, everybody's better than me.

I mean, yeah, I can do these things well, but there's so many people who do it better. So that you're making comparisons with other persons in yourself. Paul said, in comparing themselves one to another, they're not wise.

You're not going to be compared in the end to other people. You're going to be compared to Christ. And true humility comes by using Christ as the standard for your comparison.

Obviously, since you cannot live in life without making comparisons between things, you also cannot fail to make comparisons between yourself and other people. You might say, I wish I was as much of a servant as that person is. I wish I could play football like that person can play football.

I wish I could sing like that person can sing. I wish I could do this or that. I wish I would look as good as that person looks.

I wish I had the opportunity that person had, had that kind of money, that kind of family connections and so forth. I mean, all kinds of things you could wish you had, because you're comparing yourself with other people. And again, in so far as you compare yourself with people better off than you, you'll feel bad about yourself or compare yourself with people worse off than you, you feel great about yourself.

But neither of those are accurate comparisons. That's not really the standard by which anyone's going to be measured. You're going to be measured by Christ.

And what that means is, of course, there will always be occasion to be humble. If you compare yourself with the right set of people for the purpose, you can make yourself feel great and superior all the time. If you compare yourself with Christ, you will feel there's much room for growth.

That doesn't mean you'll live in condemnation, because if you're focused on Christ, you'll also be aware of grace and his love and his acceptance and so forth. You're accepted in the beloved, but you also, in evaluating yourself, always feel like, well, there's so many stages above me between me and Christ, so much room for improvement, that it doesn't

really make sense to think much about myself as particularly important vis-a-vis anyone else. That's not the comparison that will make any sense.

I need to think soberly about myself. I need to be in touch with reality. That's what humility really is.

Humility is not anything else but being in touch with reality. Humbling yourself means that you bring your behavior and your thoughts and your speech into conformity with that awareness. You don't speak proudly.

You don't act proudly. You don't try to be the life of the party and get all the attention to yourself, because you don't figure you deserve it. Why should everyone have their attention on me? If I have something to contribute, if I have some way that I can benefit these people, then let them pay attention to the extent that it will benefit them.

But insofar as my ego is concerned, I shouldn't have any particular interest of being the center of other people's attention like I'm the center of my own. I need to cultivate a humble attitude, which means that over time I realize that although I don't deny any of the good things that God has put in me, realizing that if I do that they are just gifts that God has given me, then if someone has less than me, instead of being proud, I need to feel compassion that they have less of this or that gift. I need to realize that their importance must lie in other areas that are not as visible, that they are as important as I am.

It's very much easier to love people if you realize that they are just like you in most respects. They are made in the image of God, they are fallen, they have certain strengths and certain weaknesses, and they're no different than you in that respect. What do you have that makes you different from another person? Whatever you have, what have you received? Our self-centeredness is something we need to always be resisting.

Sometimes we just need to make ourselves think about other people and how they are as important as we are. I'm sure all of you have done this at some time or another. I certainly do it from time to time.

I'm just driving down the freeway and I've seen hundreds of cars going by, and I think in every one of those cars there's someone who's just as all their concerns, all their relationships, all their trials are just as important to them as mine are to me, and I don't even know they exist. I only know they exist because their car moved. I didn't even get to look at their face.

And there's millions of others, billions of others I never will even see on the freeway, but just the ones I see. There's so many, and God knows the number of hairs on their head just like He knows the number of hairs on my head. I mean everything that's going on in

their life, all their concerns are as important to God as all my concerns are important to God.

That those people are just as worthy to be the center of attention as I am. Not that any of us are worthy to be the center of attention. The point is that if I think that I should be, it's very humbling to realize that there's so many other people who have an equal claim on being the center of the universe.

If any of us have that claim, then everyone has it. And when you find other people annoying or even evil and despicable, to think how would, you know, that is somebody else's son or daughter, just like I have sons and daughters. And even though my children do things that are despicable or shameful or embarrassing to me, they are my son and my daughter.

They're unconditionally loved. And that person there that I find so annoying, I probably find them annoying because they exist at the periphery of my life and they intrude into my complacency that I'm trying to maintain in my bubble around me, trying to maintain my own center here. And anyone who intrudes in a way that's irritating to me, it's just I find them annoying because I assume that they're not as important as I am.

And yet I think that is somebody's son or somebody's daughter just as important to that person and to God as my children are to me and to God. I mean, to suddenly get in touch with reality and say, who am I that I should expect anybody else to cater to me or notice me or think anything special with me? Or who am I to complain when I have trials when I don't complain that everybody else has trials? I mean, why are my trials different than anyone else's? Who am I? That's the question that humility asks, is who am I? I'm somebody. But when I discover the truth about who I am in relation to God and to everyone else, it kind of puts you in a right place.

You realize that I'm really nothing but somebody who's received gifts from God, grace from God, a different set than someone else has, but no more important or loved in the sight of God, no more worthy of praise or attention than somebody else. I'm just one of God's children. I belong to his family.

I'm one of the kids. I'm a member of the body. Everybody else's concern is as important as mine.

Once you don't put yourself in a place of supreme importance, and we do it naturally all the time. So that's what humbling yourself is, is causing yourself to stop doing that. Stop thinking that you're really any more important than anyone else.

That's when, of course, you are being humble. And humility can become a character trait that is a habit of thinking. Once you've really, you've gotten the revelation that you're not so important, not more important than anybody else anyway, and that revelation

kind of just burned into your brain and it's a regular part of your consciousness, then you'll be typically more naturally more humble than you were before.

But when you're not feeling humble, you've still got to humble yourself. And that doesn't mean you think, it just means don't exalt yourself. Don't do, I mean, if somebody praises you for something, to thank them and say, you know, I'm really blessed by God to have received such a gift, you know, it's no more or less important than someone else's gift, but it is truly a good thing and I'm thankful for it.

That's not unhumble, to acknowledge that when people commend you and compliment you. So there's a lot of things in Proverbs that have to do with the general self-focus and self-interest that is part of the pride of life. In chapter 3, verse 7, Solomon says, Do not be wise in your own eyes.

Fear the Lord and depart from evil. Instead of thinking of yourself as clever and wise and smarter than other people, concentrate on something more worthy of your attention, like fearing God and staying out of trouble. Fear God, see yourself in your proper relationship with God and do the right thing.

That's much better than sitting around thinking of yourself as wise and clever and important and superior. In chapter 12, verse 15, he says, The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise. A lot of these Proverbs that are in this list here, they use that expression, in his own eyes.

Talking about one's self-esteem, someone's own opinion of oneself. A fool, by definition, makes foolish decisions and does wrong things just because they're not wise. They're not doing wise things.

We're talking about a person who's a fool here and the fool is defined by his foolishness and therefore the fool is, generally speaking, going the wrong way, making foolish choices, but he doesn't think so. In his own eyes, everything he does is right. He does not consider that anyone else's opinion has any value, or at least not anywhere near as much as his own, so he will not heed counsel.

The person who heeds counsel is wise because that person is thinking, somebody else might be as smart as me. Somebody else might be even smarter than me. Somebody else might actually hear from God something that I haven't heard from God.

To heed counsel is to bring yourself down to the level of other people and say, your opinion could be as good as mine, in some cases better, but the fool does never have that sense. He never feels that his opinion is not superior. Everything he does is fine and if he receives criticism, those people just don't understand.

Those people are not as wise as he is. That's a fool who thinks that way. It's pride, a foolish pride.

In chapter 16, in verse 2, it says, All the ways of man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits. Now, what this says is you need to be aware of thinking in a shallow sense that you have, that everything you're doing is righteous and pure. It's so easy to justify and rationalize things that you do that are really not that right and to find a way to say, well, it's pure, I'm pure, you know, my motives are good or whatever.

But no matter how much we may fool ourselves, God is paying attention to what's the real motives, what's really in the heart. He's weighing the spirit. He's assessing what's going on inside, in our own eyes.

You know, man looks on the outward appearance and we're man. We can hardly see our own hearts. God looks on the heart.

Man looks on the outward appearance and that's, you usually think of that in the way we judge other people. We can only make judgments of the outer appearance. In a little deeper way, we can assess ourselves because we really know what we're thinking and what we're not saying.

But there's a deeper part of us that we don't readily see that God is weighing the deep motives. I'm not saying we can't see that if we look for it, but often it's a deeper place than what we're looking for. We're willing to satisfy ourselves with our basic surface explanations of who we are and why we do things.

And we can always find, if we try, some way to be pure in our own eyes, to make our actions right to us, to our assessment. But it's much more important to realize that God is weighing us at a deeper level, at the core of where our deepest commitments and motivations lie. And of course, I think the implication is we need to kind of look at ourselves at that deeper level too.

The tendency is to look at the surface, or at least just below the surface, when we're assessing ourselves. But we need to look deeper than just below the surface, at the deepest core of what makes us who we are, and the choices we make, and so forth. In chapter 18, verse 2, it says, A fool has no delight in understanding but in expressing his own heart.

The fool just likes to express his own opinion. He's not particularly interested in gaining more understanding. He just assumes his opinion is as good as it gets.

Many people feel that whatever they think, simply because they think it, it's self-validating. It's valid because it's what they think. Now, I don't know that any of those people would be here, because I don't think Christian people who are very mature are susceptible to this to the same degree.

But you do find religious people, Christian people I guess we could say, who have a bit of this, especially when it comes to debating, say, their theology. Because many times

people have adopted their own set of views. Either they've adopted them from other people, from their denomination, or books they've read, or teachers they've heard.

Or they've just come up with them on their own, and they're quite sure that they're right. And because they're sure that they're right, they don't really care to understand anything more. They've decided that they already know.

All they're looking for is a forum in which they can spew their opinions. And they assume that everyone should have the same appreciation for their opinions that they have themselves for their opinions. And that's a rather foolish position.

I'm aware that some of the views I teach are controversial, although I don't have any interest in being controversial. I'm just aware that some of the things I believe happen to have that status in the body of Christ. I'm also aware that nobody who doesn't know me should necessarily respect my opinion until at least they get to know me and find out if I have something behind it.

That is, when I walk into a new situation where no one knows me, I don't expect people to be all ears and say, Oh, Steve, let us hear your sage wisdom on this subject. Because I realize that there's nothing, I mean, there's someplace in their head too, and they don't know me. And I try to picture if I was them, and someone else was me coming in, how would I think about them? You know, I wouldn't just assume that this person's opinions are canonized.

I mean, I would assume that this person has to earn the right to be heard, and he needs to hear what we have to say too. And yet, there are people who don't have that self-image. They just feel like when they walk in, everyone should know that they are the final authority on all subjects that they might wish to speak about.

And they can't imagine how anyone would even question them. They're not interested in gaining understanding. They're not there to learn.

They're there to teach. That's from the fool's attitude. He doesn't have any interest in gaining understanding.

He just wants to express his own views. He doesn't want anyone to challenge him. He doesn't want to hear someone else's views.

What good are someone else's views if they're not mine? And I am the one who's always the most important person. My opinion is the most important opinion. Why should I be bothered hearing someone else when I can use the same period of time and tell them what I think? That's how a fool, a proud fool is.

That's pride. Chapter 18, verse 11, says the rich man's wealth is his strong city, like a high wall in his own esteem. Again, we've looked at this when we're talking about money

and attitudes for money, but a person's own esteem, a person who is wealthy, thinks himself to be secure, thinks himself to not be dependent, not vulnerable, and yet a person always needs to see that whatever position they're in, God can bring them down from there.

They are not self-sufficient. The more we have built up security systems around ourselves, whether it's wealth or walls or padlocks on our doors or whatever we have, whatever our security system is, we may feel secure wrongly because we're pretty confident that we can take care of ourselves now. And in fact, God, if we're humble as we should be, we recognize that God could just remove all that, could pull the carpet out from under all of that, and we'd find ourselves just as vulnerable as anybody else.

We have to always be humble before God in our sense of dependence upon him, even when it looks like we're in pretty good shape for a while, maybe for a long time to come. Remember the man that Jesus described that had a lot of wealth, and he said, soul, you have laid up many goods for many years. Be at ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

And Jesus said, God would say to him, you fool, to say your soul would be required of you. And the man did not have any security or immunity to death, even though he was quite well off. In chapter 20, verse 6, 20, verse 6 says, most men will proclaim each his own goodness.

But who can find a faithful man, a faithful man, a man of integrity, a man who's telling the truth? Most people will proclaim that they are good. And if they don't use that term, because it seems a bit gauche, I'm good. I'm a good person.

Most people aren't quite that socially inept. But nonetheless, they like to proclaim it in other ways. They like to point out that everything they've done really was justified.

Everything they've done is really the right thing. They are right in their own eyes, and they proclaim their own goodness. That's pride.

But to find a faithful person is harder than it sounds. You'd think by listening to all men that they're all faithful people. They're all good men.

They're all trustworthy. They're all people of integrity, because that's what they proclaim themselves to be. But to find out who really is, that's a pretty hard thing.

Just like Solomon said, you know, who can find a virtuous woman? So also, who can find a faithful man? Men and women are pretty much in the same boat. Not very many of them are faithful. Not many of them are virtuous.

Though, despite the shortage, you wouldn't know there was such a shortage by listening to people talk about themselves, because most people proclaim themselves to be good, whether they are or not. In chapter 21, verse 2, every way of man is right in his own

eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts. We've seen that same thought in an earlier proverb.

So after 25, verse 27 says, It is not good to eat much honey, so to seek one's own glory is not glory. The person who magnifies himself isn't really magnified. They're glorifying themselves.

That's not real glory. And yet the proud person glorifies himself, magnifies himself, exalts himself. But that's not really glory.

That's not really honor. That's not really respectability. What's respectable is when somebody else sees reason to honor you.

Chapter 26, verse 12, Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There's more hope for a fool than for him. Now, in the same chapter, verse 16, uses the same expression. It says, The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.

So the man who is a sluggard is wise in his own eyes. And if a man is wise in his own eyes, there's more hope for a fool than for him. And when you see that, you know, Solomon had almost no good things to say about fools.

He certainly had nothing good to say about fools. Yet, by comparison to a sluggard or a man who's wise in his own eyes, which is also what sluggards are, he said, a fool is better than that. The man who's a fool has a better prospect in life than the man who thinks he's smarter than he really is.

In chapter 27, in verse 2, it says, Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth, a stranger, and not your own lips. Don't commend yourself. If there's something about you to commend, somebody will notice.

Somebody will commend you. Likewise, don't promote yourself. If you should be promoted, you will be.

God will promote you. And a person's own virtue, if it really exists, will be noted. And it may not be noted as... a person may not get as much credit as they fully deserve for being virtuous, but it will not go unnoticed.

You'll be respected. People will think of you as you should be thought in most cases. But less so if you go around praising yourself, if you go around pointing out your own virtues and your own accomplishments and hope to impress people that way.

It doesn't really make the impression you're hoping it'll make. It makes the opposite impression. Chapter 28, verse 11, The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor, who has understanding, searches him out.

So even though a man may think himself wise, he may be not as wise as somebody else,

and the somebody else may be someone that he would have never suspected to be even on his level, because he's assessing himself by a false standard. He's rich. This other person's a pauper.

I'm obviously more successful. I'm obviously better. I'm obviously wiser than this person.

But in fact, that's a false gauge of judgment, and it may be that a one who is not wise can search out the man that thinks himself wise and is not. Chapter 28, verse 26. 28, 26 says, He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.

A person who trusts in his own heart is simply somebody who trusts himself and does not fully understand his own fallenness, doesn't understand his own limitations, doesn't understand his own propensity to do sin or to be wrong, to make the wrong decision. A person who trusts his own heart in the sense that this is talking about probably is someone who spurns counsel, doesn't think anybody else should be listened to because they trust their feeling in their own heart, you know, and just follow your heart. Well, sometimes following your heart may be okay, but there's times when you're trusting your heart to the degree that you're neglecting counsel because you're wise in your own eyes, and you don't think anyone else could possibly see things as clearly as you.

And so in chapter 30, verse 12, he says, There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness. There's a certain kind of person, a generation, a certain family type that are pure in their own eyes. The Pharisees seem to be a good example.

They're not washed from their filthiness. Jesus said they were like whited tombs, very attractive and clean and pure on the outside, but inside full of defilement and dead bones. So also there's people who are quite sure that they are in the right.

They are righteous people. But they're judging from a false standard, of course. Whenever you think very highly of yourself in any area, you're probably not using a good standard.

You might be because you might, in fact, have some virtues that measure up well to a proper standard. But even then, there's nothing to be proud about. But more often than not, when people assess themselves to be good and pure and all that, they're not looking at all the evidence.

They're wicked in another sense, deep down inside. You can almost always fight for some good thing that you've done and wanted to do. Almost always look deeper and say, I can think of something very devious in me that could want that.

There could be a reason I'm doing this good thing. That isn't really all that pure. Now, I'm not saying it would always be the case, because there is such a thing as pure motives.

There is such a thing as a pure heart, you know, who will dwell in God's holy place, who has clean hands and a pure heart. You can have a pure heart, but you have to be careful about thinking you do, because it's easy to convince yourself that you're pure when you haven't gotten anywhere close to it. And so to examine your own selves and see if you're in the faith is what Paul says we have to do from time to time.

We don't want to be morbidly introspective and always just thinking of ourselves and being hypercritical of ourselves. That's not what he's recommending. But we need to be careful about the assumption that we often make that, you know, we're good folks.

In some cases, if we looked a little deeper at our real motives, we'd find that a different assessment is more realistic. So, those are just the beginning. Most of those proverbs we just looked at are the ones that talk about a man's own eyes, his own self-esteem, and so forth.

There are other proverbs that touch on the general topic of what pride does in the life, and we'll get to those eventually too.