



LifeSpot ... Humble yet?

Poison of pride

"Proud humanity," Isaiah 13:12 (MSG). History in two words. Politics, academics, sports, business—we might start out in any of these with good motives. But give us a good gulp of success, and see how quickly we're intoxicated with pride. With pride's poison in our bloodstream, each success swells up self and diminishes God. Finally, self is all, and self is worshiped. "Look at this. . . And I built it all by myself!" Daniel 4:30 (MSG). When we set ourselves up as gods, a few might worship us, but most will perceive our pride and retreat from us. This second group is a God-send. They drive us to Jesus for healing. "Come to me. . . I am gentle and free of pride." Matthew 11:28–29 (NIRV).

Positive focus

To feel pride is not necessarily to commit a sin of pride. There is positive pride—appreciation for something good, and praise to God for it. Paul took pleasure in ministry. "I think the work I do for God and others is very important." Romans 11:13 (NIRV). Paul was proud of believers. He wanted believers to be able to be proud of him. He was proud of the Cross of Jesus. James reassures us it's good to take pleasure in the success God gives to ordinary people. James 1:9. This Bible teaching should keep us from slithering through life in the shadows, too "humble" to enjoy the light of day. It's a matter of focus. "God, I'm proud of you! I'm taking pleasure in the excellent things you're doing in my life, and in the lives of people around me."

Choice for God

In Lucifer, it was pride that got sin up and running. In Napoleon, pride cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians in one campaign. Napoleon was a brilliant commander, a national hero. But pride drove him to demand the title of emperor. At his coronation, he took the crown from the pontiff, and placed it on his own head. At age 51, he died in exile with stomach cancer. What's left of his body lies in a fabulous tomb in Paris. What remains of his soul is sealed in its destiny before God. This is a reminder that self-importance dies with the world itself. But when we're humble before God, he lifts us up—and gives us life beyond any simple or fabulous tomb! Matthew 23:12; 1 John 2:16–17.

In Christ alone

Here's good news—when I believe, I stand 100 per cent holy in *Christ Jesus*. Romans 8:1. *In Christ!* It's a description that occurs about 240 times in the New Testament, with good reason. "We owe it all to Christ." Romans 8:37 (NIRV). As for my holiness, it's never enough to be worthy of Heaven. If I ever suggest I've got enough obedience for God to accept me, please alert me that the halo around my head must have slipped, because it's looking like a noose around my neck. Every step of my Christian walk must be in humble knowledge that the power and the glory belong to God, and not to me. "So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall." 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIRV).

Eyes directed

The proud have unidirectional vision. They look down on people. As C S Lewis pointed out, when you're always looking down, you can't see what's above you. When you're eight years old, you look down on the little kids and feel great to be no longer one of them. But superiority vanishes when the shadow of an overgrown 15-year-old looms over you. How can we realize a balance of healthy self-esteem and constructive humility? By looking *up*, way up. Beyond ourselves. Beyond the bigger person who looms over us. Jesus knelt to serve humble people, and stood tall to confront intimidators. When our vision is fixed on him, we can do the same. "Keep your eyes on Jesus." Hebrews 12:2 (MSG).

Thoughts on Jesus

I must be alert to the symptoms of my pride. The desire to express myself on every subject. The impulse to defend or hit back when criticism comes. A feeling of grandeur when I think I perform better than somebody else. Self-admiration for my status and accomplishments. The urge to question and criticise. A desire to control. Slowness to acknowledge when I'm wrong. Spending money I don't have to impress friends I'll never retain. Reluctance to step in and help with lowly tasks. This is the short list. Then there's Jesus. "Think of yourselves the way Jesus Christ thought of himself. . . . He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave." Philippians 2:5–7 (MSG).

Totally forgiven

When Jesus was born, church leaders didn't notice. Why? They were too busy running something—the church. When John the Baptizer preached truth, religion scholars rejected it. Why? They were already "the proud owners of God's revelation." See Jeremiah 8:8 (MSG). When Jesus taught fresh faith through humility and compassion, people objected. Why? The upstart teacher was a threat to sacred tradition. At last, when they succeeded in nailing Jesus, people congratulated themselves for a job well done. This is the face of pride. Pride is the ultimate sin for which Jesus died, and for which he stands ready to extend forgiveness—full and free. "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Luke 23:34 (NIRV).

Jesus only

Superstars. Idolatry on parade. Talent and success are not sinful, but the arrogance and amorality they often generate are the opposite of Christ. Among the famous, few are known for humility. It's hard to know who's most at fault—superstars themselves, or the people who worship them. Christianity breeds its own superstars. "Did you see. . . ? Did you hear. . . ?" When we quote our spiritual superstars and recommend them more than we quote and recommend Christ, we need to repent. Sooner or later, our heroes will fade, disappoint, or die. What we need is *transfiguration*, Matthew 17:1–8. On the mountain-top, Moses and Elijah disappeared, and the disciples were left with a solitary focus: Jesus only.

Lifted up

Jesus said a lot about humility. Joy in meekness. Becoming like children. Choosing a modest place at the table. Praying in simplicity. See Matthew 5, 18, and 23; Luke 14 and 18. *Humble dependence on God*—in Jesus' teachings, miracles, and actions, this is a driving theme. "The most important person among you will be your servant. Anyone who lifts himself up will be brought down. And anyone who is brought down will be lifted up." Matthew 23:11–12 (NIRV). Are you learning to serve faithfully, instead of craving applause? Do you desire to be unknown, except to God? If so, you are a child of the Kingdom. You have no need to lift yourself up, because Christ is doing that for you.

Four ways

How can we stay humble? Self-deprecating humor helps. When John F Kennedy was asked how he became a war hero, he replied "It was involuntary. They sank my boat." Relentless acknowledgement helps. J S Bach began his music compositions with "Jesus help me," and ended them with "To God alone be the glory." A third way is to embrace and learn from sorrows. Bach is an example here, too, as he patiently bore a cross in the loss of family members, and in struggles with church and society. Here's a fourth way—go opposite to society in your connections. "Be willing to be a friend of people who aren't considered important." Romans 12:16 (NIRV). On this one, let's fill our minds with the example of Jesus!

Glorious solution

For those of us who fail to learn humility through most of our lives, there remains one glorious solution—old age. Perhaps the main purpose of old age is to bring the virtue of humility. If pride is nourished through physical stamina, superb talent, strenuous pursuit, empire building and sex appeal, then old age is perfectly suited to take care of it all. Not to worry—things lost mean better things gained, things missed along the way. Like simplicity, contentment, intimacy, generosity. The better plan, of course, is not to wait until senior years for these superior blessings. Long before you reach old age, pray "God, make a fresh start in me. . . . Put a fresh wind in my sails!" Psalm 51:10, 12 (MSG).

Basking in beauty

Pride is a problem, but simulated humility is not the solution. *Simulated*—it looks like the real thing, but it's a sham. Examples? Fumbling fearfully through life, too "humble" to believe in God's power and my potential. Inability to accept a simple compliment sincerely given. Reluctance to step in and help because others can do it better. Viewing myself relentlessly through the eyes of someone who despises me, rather than through the eyes of the Savior who respects me. Ironically, simulated humility is actually pride—preferring my perspective over God's promise! Real humility brings us to Jesus in tears, takes him at his word, accepts his blessing, and enjoys a life that basks in his beauty. James 4:5–10.