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YOU CAN SEE IT AT BAGGAGE CLAIM

1 Peter 5:5-6

In a recent psychological journal article entitled *The Deeper Roots of Youth Anxiety*, Joseph Davis related the story of a 19 year old woman named Meghan who was on a scholarship at a fine, top university. But she was despairing about herself. She said the college she was attending was her “safety school.” She was going there because she didn’t get in to her first choice for college. So she wanted to prove that she should be at a better school like her dream college by acing all her classes and becoming the president of a bunch of organizations. But, she said, “That is not really happening. I am, if anything, a mediocre student, and that makes me so angry at the world and at myself for not being the best. She said, “I want to impress someone, but I end up being impressively unimpressive, and that crushes me.”

What is crushing that young woman is her aching need to prove something about herself, to be impressive, to do something that will win her notice and approval. That is an unbearable burden indeed. She is making everything about herself and proving how terrific she is. Contrast that attitude with something observed by UC Irvine psychiatry professor Aaron Kheriaty in an article in the journal *First Things* titled, *The Era Of The Narcissist*. The article referenced the magnificent cathedrals of Europe. He noted that there is is something that stands out to modern minds. That feature is that we don’t know who designed and built most of them. That’s not so much because their names have been forgotten, lost in the mists of long ago. It’s because the architects and builders of those magnificent structures did not sign them or put their names on them. They built them to the glory of God and were unconcerned with getting credit for their work. This is almost unimaginable to us today. Something in western society began changing in the so called Age of Enlightenment. The focus shifted from the glory of God to the glory of humans. That change is starkly represented by philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau in his dedication to his book, *Confessions*. That dedication reads, “To me, with all the admiration I owe myself.” Hold on a moment, I think I’m going to be sick.

Rousseau’s ego may seem quite different from Meghan’s state of mind, but though it might not be obvious, they are both fruits of the same tree. That tree is an obsession with self. It is putting self in the middle of all things, and the Bible calls that pride. It turns out to be a disastrous quality. Unfortunately, it is a quality we all have to one degree or another. God wants us to not have that kind of pride, warning us that it is disastrous. He points us in an entirely different direction. We will learn about that today in 1 Peter 5:5-6.

WHY IS HUMILITY IMPORTANT?

Peter tells us to clothe ourselves with humility. This is a frequent message in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:2 tells us to be “completely humble.” Not just humble, but completely humble. I wonder about that thought. Can you be partly humble? Doesn’t that mean you’re not humble? Whatever the case, we get Paul’s idea. Be completely humble means let humility be the defining character of your heart that manifests itself in everything you are and do. Colossians 3:12 uses the same image Peter does, telling us to “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” What do you notice about people? If you are asked to give a description of someone in a particular incident you will likely include what they are wearing. We notice people’s clothes. Peter and Paul said something people should notice about us is our humility because it is so obvious. In Matthew 23:12 Jesus said, “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” So obviously, humility is important.

Verse 5 says something so startling it should capture our attention. “God is opposed to the proud, but shows favor to the humble.” Literally it says God “gives grace to the humble.” Pride and humility are opposite poles. If you are on the pride end of the spectrum, God is against you! You have gained God as an enemy. He’s against you. He is opposed to you. Those words are found 3 times in the Bible, here, in Proverbs 3:34 and in James 4:6. It would be attention grabbing if God said he is against the proud once. But to say it three times is like putting it in all caps or bold type. Or maybe both. We had a birthday dinner for Carissa a couple of weeks ago with all the family there. At one point Ella crawled under the table, which her mom and dad did not want her to do. Anna said, “Ella Rae, come out right now.” When the middle name comes out, you know she means it. We all know the middle name is used for emphasis. I have given my parents a bit of grief over the middle name they gave me. I don’t like it at all. But it has one advantage. It’s a useless middle name because they never once used it to reprimand me. But most kids know when the middle name comes out it means trouble. When God says something three times it’s like using the middle name. It means trouble. We had better pay attention.

Proverbs 16:5 says, “The Lord detests all the proud of heart.” Man that is strong language. Think about that for a moment. What do you detest? Yesterday we were out in the street talking to our neighbors Michael and Leila, when one of those big, fluorescent green flying beetles briefly orbited me. I knew what was going to happen. I told Laurie, “Hey, an old friend of yours is here to visit you.” Laurie detests those beetles. She had a somewhat traumatic encounter with one of them when she was in her teens and one flew inside her blouse. She now has a nearly pathological hatred of them. Sure enough, the beetle spotted her and flew straight for her. She screamed and ran across the street toward our house intent on finding shelter. They are truly detestable to her. If we are proud, God feels about us. He detests us! We are like odious, despicable beetles to him.

So God says pride is a big problem and being humble is crucial. But why is pride such a problem? Why is God so opposed to it? C. S. Lewis said pride is, “the essential vice, the utmost evil…Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison…Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

I know Christians who would be horrified by and condemning of someone who committed adultery. Yet those same people are actually insufferably proud. Adultery clearly is a terrible thing, but compared to pride it is a mere flea bite. Lewis says pride is the complete anti-God state of mind. That’s drastic, and certainly no place we want to be. Why would Lewis say that? One man defined pride as aspiring to the status and position of God and refusing to acknowledge our dependence upon him. Charles Bridges defined pride as contending for supremacy with God. It is easy for us to think we don’t do that, but any time we make life about ourselves, any time we think we know better than God, any time we choose our way over his, we are putting ourselves at the center of all things. We are aspiring to God’s position and contending with him for supremacy.

This explains why pride is the utmost evil. It is the root of every other vice because every other thing the Bible calls sin begins with us deciding we will choose our way rather than God’s. We are competing with him for supremacy, putting ourselves in the center. Every bit of evil that exists in us and in the world begins with pride.

At a motel Laurie and I stayed at recently Laurie took a picture of something we saw there that was pretty funny. The parking lot in the back near our room was a bit cramped. So the management has posted a sign ordering, “Do not back in to parking spaces.” There was a parking space right in front of that sign, and in that space was a car that had backed in. Now maybe the driver of that car was an exceptionally oblivious and clueless person, but you could not miss this sign. It was right there in front of that space. Some driver said, “Don’t tell me what to do. I know what’s best. I do things my way. In so doing that person proudly asserted he or she knew better than the management what was best. That’s pride. Wo do the same thing with God every time we exert our will rather than doing and seeing things God’s way.

Our pride separates us from God. Peter said God gives grace to the humble. That’s because we will only be open to Grace when we know and admit that we need it. Grace is something good we don’t deserve but are given nonetheless. That only happens when we are humble enough to admit we don’t deserve it. Remember how Jesus started his most famous sermon. In Matthew 5:3 he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Being poor in spirit is admitting one’s poverty of soul, it is humbling oneself. Gaining the kingdom of God begins with humility, admitting our need.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is that people who are helpless and unable to make themselves good enough and holy enough to be deserving of God’s love and acceptance, to be included in his kingdom, have been given a priceless gift. God made it possible for them to be forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ when he took all their wrong upon himself and paid for it when he died in their place. Now God offers this incredible gift to all freely. We only need to accept it by faith. But that will only happen if we admit we need it. It only happens when we admit that we are helpless and unable to deserve this. As long as we think we are fine without the gift, we will not accept it. In other words, our entire relationship with God begins with and is founded on us humbling ourselves and admitting our need and helplessness. That is the polar opposite of pride.

Our little grandson, Wesley, had a toy that had come apart. He was trying to put it back together, but he was doing it wrong, so it was never going to work. I let him keep trying for some time, thinking maybe he would figure it out. But it became apparent he was not seeing how it was supposed to work and he was starting to get frustrated. I said, “Wesley, let me help you with that.” When he really doesn’t want something he has a standard way of responding. He waves his hands back and forth as if waving you off and says, “No, no, no.” That was his response. The toy was not going to get put back together. He didn’t know how to do it. As long as he did not admit his need for my help, it wasn’t going to get done. That’s how we are with God. We must start with humbling ourselves and admitting we need his help, his grace. As long as we are proud and insist that we are just fine doing things our way, we will always be separated from him.

So pride is a big problem because it separates us from God. That’s the fundamental and most devastating problem of the entire human race. Every evil, every wrong, all of the human condition, stems from that problem. Every proposed solution to our issues will ultimately fall short if it doesn’t start with fixing that problem. But that separation from God inevitably results in other problems. In other words, our pride causes us other problems.

It causes us huge problems in mental health. It results in us struggling to accept ourselves and creates tremendous personal stress and lack of peace. Think of the story of Meghan, the college student who is crushed because she thinks she is impressively unimpressive. She is trying to establish a sense of identity and worth apart from God. She is trying to found her life on her own pride. The struggles she is having are a result of her own pride.

Pride also causes tremendous problems in our relationships with other people. I recently read a story about Steve Jobs. He and Steve Wozniak were co-founders of Apple Corporation. In the early days of the company as it began growing fast the Board of Directors decided to issue name badges so employees would know each other’s name. The badges were given a number based on when they were hired. This led to a problem because Jobs and Wozniak started at the same time as founders of the company. Because Wozniak did the engineering for the Apple II computer, the board assigned him badge number 1 and Jobs badge number 2. Jobs couldn’t stand being number 2. He appealed the decision but the board said no. So he came up with another idea. He asked to be given the number 0, because it came before number 1. That’s the kind of thing pride does for us.

Proverbs 13:10 in the Holman Christian Standard translation says, “Arrogance leads to nothing but strife, but wisdom is gained by those who take advice.” The New Living Translation puts that bluntly, “Pride leads to conflict.” Where there is pride there will be conflict. Remember that pride is competing with God for supremacy. It is putting oneself at the center of all things. What happens when a group of people all put themselves at the center of all things? Since there can only be one who is at the center, there is going to be conflict. On our recent flight home from Seattle, I saw what that produces between people, in three small incidents that followed one on the heels of the other. The first was the “I’m getting off the plane first” problem. You’ve seen it on every flight you’ve ever taken. As soon as the plane gets to the gate people pop out of their seats into the aisle to stake their claim to that position so they can get off the plane faster. They don’t want to wait for the aisle to begin clearing in front of them, because, horror of horrors, some person across the aisle might stand up first and they’d have to wait for that person. Hey, I’m as anxious as the next guy to get off the plane, but doesn’t it make sense for us all to just be patient and wait our turn? I can see the pride, the “me first” of others in that situation. But I also see my own. I am amazed how much it irritates me when someone in a seat farther back jumps up and insists on coming up and blocking my access to the aisle. Hey, that person is cutting in line! My pride can’t stand it.

We got off the plane and headed for baggage claim. We only had carryon bags, but when we got to the gate for our flight the airline people were plaintively pleading with people to let them check their carryons for free so there would be space in the overhead bins. We foolishly chose to heed their pleas, so now we had to wait for our bags. But four flights had landed in short order, and for some inexplicable reason the airline had chosen to download the bags from all those flights on one carousel. So there was a huge crowd of people waiting for bags. In that situation what would make sense would be for people to stand back some distance and make room for others until they spotted their bag on the carousel. Do you think they did that? Are you kidding? They went right up to the edge of the carousel and made a solid wall three people deep, lined shoulder to shoulder, completely blocking others from even being able to see anything on the carousel. Hey, if they didn’t stake out their spot and hold their ground, some other person might get in there in front of them and be able to retrieve their own luggage first. Human pride puts “me first,” so I’m standing right here and I don’t care about other people.

We weren’t quite done. We got our bags then went outside to wait for the shuttle bus that would take us to the parking lot where we had left our car. It was 11 PM so we hoped we wouldn’t have to wait long for the shuttle. To our joy just as we got out to the bus stop the shuttle was arriving. But before we could get there a guy got in front of us. That would have been fine, except it turned out this guy and his buddy were returning from a fishing trip to Alaska. They had a cart overloaded with not just their luggage but with huge boxes full of fish they had caught. There were probably 10 of these big boxes, each 4 or 5 feet long, on his cart, plus luggage. This guy was determined that he was going to get on that shuttle bus with all of his fish and his gear, which meant he had to beat everyone else. So he wheeled his cart in the way. He put it in a spot where no one could ace him out, but he got it so close, the door to the bus couldn’t open. His fish boxes were in the way. That guy was not making people happy. He was operating on the me first plan, which is the definition of what pride does.

Pride always creates conflict and separation from other people. That started in the Garden of Eden. The heart of the problem for Eve was pride. I know better than God what is good for me, I’m choosing my way. As you know that was a disaster that has horrific results in the lives of everyone of us to this day. We know that created distance between the first two humans and God, but it also separated the two humans. Adam, looking to take care of himself, blamed Eve for the problem. And so it began.

Proverbs 26:12 says, “Do you see a person who is wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them.” When you are proud, you are going to be worse than a fool. You will make foolish decisions, and you likely won’t even know how foolish they are because you are too proud to listen or to see and admit the truth.

One thing that has amazed me is the pandemic we are going through. Oh, I’m not talking about the covid pandemic. I mean the pandemic of pride that has resulted from the virus pandemic. I watched my son go through 3 years preparing for med school by essentially getting a second bachelors degree in biochemistry after he’d already graduated from college, then 4 grueling, intensive years of medical school, followed by 3 more even more grueling years of training as a resident. I got an inside look at what he had to learn. There is no way I can tell you how in depth and how massive the amount of material he has had to master actually is. He had to learn the human body’s systems and processes as well as diseases down to the cellular and molecular level. Consider what it would be like to dedicate nearly every waking moment of your life for 10 years to study a subject. Being an emergency doctor at the Level One Trauma center for all of Orange County he has had more face to face, hands on experience with covid than almost anyone. During the height of the pandemic last year he was the senior resident in the covid ICU. He has been battling on the front line to save people’s lives. What has astounded me is the number of people who tell us in effect that they know more than he does about the corona virus because they have read some stuff on the internet. Yeah, that’s about the same as his training, right? I’m not campaigning here for a particular position in the many debates about covid and the vaccines. I’m saying what is missing in so many of the arguments and the division that is rampant in our nation today on that subject is humility. There is a boat load of hubris out there, and where there is pride there is going to be conflict. We’re seeing that play out first hand.

If everyone approached the subject with humility and said, “I want to listen more than I want to talk and argue. I admit that I don’t know very much,” the level of heat in many of these discussions would be seriously lessened. Proverbs says, “do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them.” What’s terrible about that is Proverbs tells us there is no hope for a fool! Pride has reared its ugly head from every angle in this pandemic, and the result is predictable. There is a lot of conflict and division, because wherever there is pride, there is conflict and division.

C. S. Lewis said, “Pride is spiritual cancer. It eats up the possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense.” Our pride keeps us from loving others. When our pride takes hold we are not and cannot love another person. Even more frightening, we won’t even be able to see that we are loving. We will think we’re doing fine because we are too proud to see the shameful truth about ourselves. Pride also means we will never be content, never at peace. But that last comment really caught my attention. Our pride even destroys common sense! It means we are going to do and say dumb things. Things a person with an ounce of sense would not say or do.

Laurie has had a periodic on line conversation with a zealot for some medicines that this person claims obviate the need for vaccines for Covid. These medicines, the zealot preaches, are much better, safer and more effective than the vaccines. Laurie pointed out Toby has informed us that these medicines have been put to the test in rigorous trials similar to any medical medicine or treatment, and every time they have proven unhelpful. The zealot’s response was, “The doctors want to discredit these medicines and not use them because they don’t make money from them.”

Somehow that person, who is a good, nice person, didn’t notice how offensive that claim is. This person had just slandered horribly the good name of our son, saying his motive is to make money and that trumps helping patients for him. What an unkind, unloving, presumptuous thing to say about anybody! It also reveals ignorance, because it fails to realize that what doctors prescribe in an emergency department has exactly zero to do with their income. There is no connection whatsoever. Remember what C. S. Lewis said. Pride eats up our ability to have common sense. I believe that was an example of that truth. How could that person have not known that was a terrible thing to say? When you’re proud, you lose common sense. You do and say dumb things and you make bad decisions that might hurt you and others. Again, I’m not arguing about vaccines and medicines, I’m saying when you are proud you lose common sense, and that is just what happened in that instance.

The problem is, none of us think we have an issue with pride, right? Yeah, those proud people create a lot of problems, and God detests them. I’m glad I don’t have that problem. None of us wants to think we’re unloving, and none of us wants to think we’re proud. However, to the contrary one writer said that none of us are immune to the effects of pride and that it infects us all. Another said that the problem of pride is universal in humans. And that is correct. It is a built in part of our fallen human nature. There are some things you can look for that are tells, that reveal the presence of pride. This is sort of like those “you might be a redneck” jokes like I told last week. Like, “You might be a redneck if you’ve ever mowed the lawn and found a car.” “You might be a redneck if you ever lost a tooth opening a bottle.” Well, here are some, “You might be proud if” statements.

You want credit or attention for yourself. Who doesn’t? Some time back we did a new song at church. After the service a friend said to me, “I love that new song Laurie found.” I barely stopped myself. I had actually found the song and suggested it to Laurie, and my knee jerk reaction was to say, “Actually I found that song. It is a great one, isn’t it?” I managed to stop myself, but it took effort. Well, I was just trying to be accurate and make sure that person knows the truth. Yeah, right. There is that instantaneous desire for credit even in something as small as that. That is pride, and it exists in all of us.

You have to be right. It’s weird, but people can be convinced of their need for God’s grace, and humble themselves before him, and still in other areas of life feel this big need to prove they are right. That’s just another form of pride. You feel like you deserve something. You are not very good at listening to people, especially people who might disagree with you. You want to talk, argue, not listen. You are often critical, at least in your mind, of others and find it easy to see their blemishes. There’s a character in the classic book, *Pride and Prejudice* named Mr. Darcy. At one point it is said of him, “Mr. Darcy never looks at any woman but to see a blemish.” Seeing the blemishes of other people and dwelling on them is evidence of pride. Thinking you are better than others, talking about yourself a lot, being unwilling to submit to those in authority, being unable to receive criticism of any kind, name dropping, are all evidence of pride.

There’s a huge evidence of pride that is key in these verses. It is that you refuse to trust God. You do things your way, not his. You get angry at God if he doesn’t make your life go the way you want, if he doesn’t follow your plan. Humbling ourselves before God means we accept what he does and allows in our lives.

WHAT CAN HELP ME BE MORE HUMBLE?

Fine, pride is a big problem, it is destructive, and I have it. Got it. But what can help me be less proud, more humble so it plays a smaller part in my life?

**Ask God To Change Your Heart**

This is the most obvious step. Becoming humble isn’t really a self help project. It is a part of the transformation God wants to bring about in us. Pride is deeply embedded in us, so we need his divine power to root it out.

**Count On Grace Continually**

Remember what makes you acceptable to God. Remember what gives you value and keeps you loved by him. It is not you, your abilities or your effort to do better. It is the grace of God and his grace alone.

When we view ourselves and life through the lens of the cross of Christ it drains us of our pride. One of the hardest movies to watch that I’ve ever seen was *The Passion of the Christ*. It portrayed graphically, painfully, the relentless brutality and horror of Jesus’ torture and execution. When you see that and think, “This happened to him because it was what it took to rescue me,” there is no pride whatsoever. The more aware we are of the cross and of God’s love and forgiveness it brought, the less pride we will have.

Most of you remember the infamous bungee cord incident. We were helping Carissa move and at one point as I was anchoring a bungee cord on the car, Laurie moved to be out of the line of fire. But you know when someone makes something foolproof, someone will make a better fool. I thought I had it anchored, but it slipped off the rail and that thing fired like a bullet and hit Laurie in the face. When you see your beautiful wife in pain, bleeding, uncertain if her eye has been damaged, when you take her to the hospital and they have to stitch up her face and you fear you’ve scarred her for life, there is zero pride. There is regret, grief, and a world of guilt. No pride at all. That was nearly 20 years ago, but to this day if that incident comes up I still feel regret, grief and guilt. But I also feel enormous gratitude to Laurie, because she has forgiven me and still does not hold it against me. But there is still zero pride. I feel terrible when it comes up and would love to never hear the words “bungee cord” again. When we remember the cross, the grace of God, there will be regret, grief, guilt, and gratitude. But no pride at all.

**Focus On The Character Of God**

Isaiah 40:22-23 says of God, “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.” Then he quotes God in verse 25, “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?”

Pastor and author Francis Chan asks, “What if we really believed this? What if we really believed God sits above the earth on his throne, and that the most powerful people are nothing before him?” As we are more and more in awe of the glory, holiness and majesty of God, we will be less and less obsessed with ourselves.

Isn’t it good to be proud of what we do, proud of who we are? Aren’t you telling us we need to abase ourselves and have a low opinion of ourselves, and beat us up? Not at all. The answer to those questions was given by the late Brennan Manning in his book, *Ruthless Trust*. He wrote, “On the contrary, a poor self image reveals a *lack* of humility. Feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, inferiority and self hatred rivet our attention on ourselves. Humble men and woman do not have a low opinion of themselves, they have no opinion of themselves because they so rarely think about themselves. The heart of humility lies in undivided attention to God.”

**Continually Give Thanks**

The act of giving thanks immediately reminds us that we have been given something we don’t deserve. It is instantly humbling.

**Look For Evidence Of Grace In Others**

One of the best ways we can help ourselves be less proud is rather than criticizing, seeing ourselves as above others, look for and comment on the good things you see in other people. Look for God’s grace in their lives.

One last practical thing you can do to help you with pride is to remember its effects. Remember it distances you from God, it separates you from others, it causes conflict, it inhibits your ability to love and it destroys your common sense.

So here is something you should continually say to yourself. ***When I am proud, I am stupid!***