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## PRIDE

Youth are naturally inclined to have a high opinion of themselves.

—Benjamin Keach

As a pastor, I am occasionally approached by young men declaring their desire to go into pastoral ministry. While some of these young men are mature beyond their years, others have a zeal without knowledge. One particular young man who expressed his desire to become a pastor was knowledgeable in theology, was seemingly up to date on every contemporary Christian controversy, and knew his Bible fairly well. But one thing this young man did not know was the extent of his prideful heart. Pride is an ancient foe that resides within the heart of man, but it is one of the most difficult sins to recognize in ourselves. This young man was not ready to be a pastor because he was puffed up with conceit (1 Tim. 3:6). Thinking too highly of himself and of his readiness to be a pastor, he quickly grew impatient and left our local church when we did not affirm his desire. I bring this example to your attention because pride, while common to us all, is especially common in young people. As Benjamin Keach declared,

How ready are [young people] to be taken with pomp and vain-glory! If religiously inclined, and not savingly enlightened, then they are swelled up with pride, ambition and aspiring thoughts, admiring themselves and

condemning others, as if they were wiser than everybody ... And if irreligious, then they scoff, and jeer at all who are virtuous, or truly godly ... and they glory in their strength, beauty, great wit, and natural accomplishments. Youth are naturally inclined to have a high opinion of themselves.<sup>1</sup>

While Keach does not explicitly place pride among his list of sins common to young people, neither does he ignore it. Pride permeates the sins on his list because pride declares, “I know best! I know what is best for my life, not God!” Since it is intertwined with the sins on Keach’s list, it is fitting to begin with the sin of pride, which is so common to young people.

### WHAT IS PRIDE?

As we set out to define pride, it is helpful to begin with Adam and Eve, who inherited God’s very good creation. They were created in God’s image, given dominion over the earth, placed into a garden teeming with life, blessed with fruitfulness, and given the earth and its fullness to enjoy. What else could they want? Nevertheless, they listened to a serpent who had given them nothing, questioned God’s goodness, and then sinned against God. Why did they follow the serpent and sin against God? This is an age-old question that has been the subject of much debate and speculation. At the very least, we can say that Adam and Eve followed the serpent and sinned against God because they were prideful and desired to be like God in knowing good and evil.

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<sup>1</sup> Keach, 2:236.

As we consider the original sin in the garden, it is helpful to begin with the prohibition that God gave to Adam after He placed him in the garden. Genesis 2:16–17 reads:

The LORD God commanded the man, saying,  
“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,  
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and  
evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you  
eat of it you shall surely die.”

God’s instructions were clear: Adam could eat of any tree except for one. He could enjoy the garden and eat of its fruit but was to refrain from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The penalty for transgressing this command was certain death. God could not have been any clearer in His instructions: Do this and you will die.

After God placed the man in the garden (Gen. 2:8) and created the woman from the man (Gen. 2:21–23), Genesis 3 recounts how the serpent entered the scene and tempted the woman, asking, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1). This initial question caused the woman to contemplate God’s command, which we can assume Adam taught her based on her response, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (Gen. 3:2–3). The tree that was placed in the midst of the garden to which the woman was referring was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:9), and the woman knew that God had commanded her husband and her to refrain from eating of its fruit.

The crafty serpent did not stop at questioning God’s command but went on to oppose it altogether, saying to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,

knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4–5). This was not merely a temptation to recognize good and evil but to be the arbiter or mediator of good and evil, to determine right from wrong. As such, it was this statement from the devil that enticed the woman to look at the fruit of the tree and to desire it even though God had strictly forbidden her from eating of its fruit. So “she took of the fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6). John Piper notes that “eating from this tree would mean a declaration of independence from God,”<sup>2</sup> and that is precisely what the man and woman declared when they ate of the forbidden fruit. They effectively said, “We know best. We do not need God to tell us what to do or to teach us right from wrong. We will decide what is good and right.” This heart attitude serves as the epitome of pride, which is essentially an overinflated view of oneself.

Assuming they knew what was best for their lives, Adam and Eve rejected God’s command and followed their own desires. Rather than looking to and trusting in God, they elevated themselves to God’s position. Puffed up with pride, they desired to be God, and the consequences of this sin were grave. J. C. Ryle explains: “[Adam] was not content with the place God assigned him. He tried to raise himself, and fell. Thus sin, sorrow, and death entered in by pride.”<sup>3</sup> This is the current state in which we find ourselves today. Ryle goes on to write:

Pride sits in all our hearts by nature. We are born proud. Pride makes us rest satisfied with ourselves,—think we are good enough as we are,—stop our ears against advice,—refuse

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Crossway, 2009), 34.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), 19.

the gospel of Christ,—turn every one to his own way. But pride never reigns anywhere so powerfully as in the heart of a young man.

While pride is inherent to us all, it is especially common to young people, manifesting itself in various ways, which we will now consider.

## MANIFESTATIONS OF PRIDE

Since the essence of pride is to think too highly of oneself, pride manifests itself in a number of ways. In his book *From Pride to Humility*, Stuart Scott lists thirty ways in which pride manifests itself. Here are a few:

1. Lack of gratitude
2. Anger
3. Viewing yourself as better than others
4. Having an inflated view of your gifts and abilities
5. Hyperfocus on your lack of gifts and abilities
6. Talking too much
7. Talking too much about yourself
8. Drawing attention to yourself
9. Making excuses when you are in the wrong
10. Lack of prayer<sup>4</sup>

Let us consider each of these manifestations of pride, beginning with a *lack of gratitude*. In the words of Stuart Scott, “Proud people usually think they deserve what is good ... As a matter of fact, they might even complain because they think

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<sup>4</sup> Stuart Scott, *From Pride to Humility* (Focus Publishing, 2002), 6–9.

they deserve better.”<sup>5</sup> Does this not describe young people? Especially those who grumble and complain because they did not receive the toy they wanted or because they do not like the food set before them. Instead of exhibiting thankfulness, young people whine because they believe they deserve better. Possessing a spirit of pride, they feel entitled to what they receive and complain when they do not get what they want.<sup>6</sup>

Another manifestation of pride is *anger*. Stuart Scott writes: “A person most often becomes angry because his ‘rights’ or expectations are not being met.”<sup>7</sup> Just consider how often a young boy erupts in anger when his sibling is playing with his toy, or how frequently anger gushes from a young girl who catches a sibling wearing her clothes. Time and again, anger spews from the mouth of a child whose siblings do not do what they want them to do.<sup>8</sup>

Pride can also rear its ugly head in the form of *viewing yourself as better than others*. How many children criticize their siblings or peers for little annoyances while ignoring the planks within their own eyes? Children have a natural propensity to see the sins of others while neglecting their own sins, innately supposing that they are better than others.

Furthermore, pride often arises in *having an inflated view of your gifts and abilities*. Teenage boys, especially, enjoy showing off their physical abilities. Competition is one thing, but an unhealthy arrogance in the gifts and abilities God has given is another. Young people often boast in their strength, energy,

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<sup>5</sup> Scott, 6.

<sup>6</sup> While young people often grumble and fail to give thanks, adults display just as much pride when we feel entitled to the gratitude of those in our care.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, 6.

<sup>8</sup> While young people are quick to anger, adults often get just as angry when their children fail to obey.

or intellect, yet forget they brought nothing into this world and that every gift and ability they have is given by God (see 1 Cor. 4:7). On the other hand, the young person who is down on himself or herself because of their *lack of gifts and abilities* may not appear to struggle with pride, but as Stuart Scott writes, “This is still evidence of pride because one is focused on self and wants self to be elevated.”<sup>9</sup>

*Talking too much or talking too much about oneself* is another way in which pride is displayed. Young people often talk too much because they unwittingly possess a high view of themselves, believing they are the most important person in the room or that their thoughts are more significant than the thoughts of others. Even young people who will not talk at all are often hyperfocused on what others might think of them, which also falls into the category of pride because the focus is on self.

Likewise, pride is manifested through *drawing attention to oneself*. You have probably observed a young person stand in a room full of people and practically shout, “Look at me, look at me!” Or perhaps you have noticed that a child whose sibling is receiving their parent’s attention will do everything they can to draw that attention back to himself or herself. A proud heart demands the attention of others.

Additionally, the proud person will *make excuses when they are in the wrong*. As Stuart Scott writes, “A proud person will make a great many excuses such as, ‘I was tired,’ or ‘I was having a bad day.’”<sup>10</sup> How true is this of young people? Instead of taking ownership of wrongdoings and sin, young people constantly shift the blame. I cannot begin to tell you how many

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<sup>9</sup> Scott, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, 9.