

Pride

"Slaying the Seven" Series, August 2 & 3, 2025 (Communion) | Genesis 3:1-7

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Why is pride the deadliest deadly sin?

Jay Gatsby puts flesh on pride.

Jay Gatsby is the star of the show in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

We meet him when he is master of a mansion on the Long Island Sound.

The lawn of the mansion is manicured to perfection. The gardens are elaborate. The pool inviting. The dock, leading to more entertainment.

Gatsby threw parties just about every night—elaborate affairs drawing celebrities; authors; wealthy, powerful, and interesting people. The parties lasted all night.

Gatsby is a figure at once mysteriously remote but always impeccable, always the perfect host.

One naturally asks the question, "Why?" The answer can be found in a mansion across the bay housing Daisy Buchanan, the wife of another wealthy midwestern man, the woman who got away. Gatsby bought the house and put on the show looking to impress everyone so that Daisy would see him, find him worthy, leave her husband, and come back to him.

It's pride in the flesh. You expect the arrogance and ostentation. But the rest is more subtle.

We are expected to love him. Then judge him. But what if, instead, we understood him? And saw ourselves and our own pride in him in surprising ways?

Pride speaks to us with a chorus of voices.¹

The voices of pride are always speaking, but also always changing, and even always hiding, looking for an opportunity to deceive us.

What messages do those voices push on us? Here are five you may have heard:

"You are better than that." This is the familiar note that pride takes, an arrogance that we are good, even that we're better than others. This comes out toward people AND toward God.

"You should be in charge of your own life." This is another familiar sound of pride. No one else will make the rules for us, including God. We make the rules and decisions ourselves.

"You deserve attention and need approval." Pride tells us that we should be the center of attention, but also that we need approval. So, we create public images and manage them carefully in person and online. That's pride!

"You are the star of the show." When we are the star of the show, our needs and agenda come first, and we neglect others. Including God. He has to take a back seat to the REAL star.

"You deserve better than that." Pride tells us that we deserve to be treated a certain way. If we don't get it, we become bitter. We expect people to be a certain way. If they fall short, we judge and criticize. Even Christians. A proud person is a critical person.

Have you heard the voices of pride speaking to you? How loudly? Be warned.

Pride is a sin, and all sin may seem to be equal, but God has a strong aversion to pride.

With pride, we don't belong to God; we belong to someone else, usually ourselves.

God speaks of that as adultery and rebellion, violating our covenant with Him.

But in grace, God calls us to Himself. Away from pride. Away from Satan.

It is a battle that started at the beginning of time and has been raging ever since. Inside us, even. It is a battle God intends to win, and He invites us to be with Him on the winning side.

Pride came before the Fall.

In Genesis 3:1, we meet Satan who had already sinned, and pride was his downfall.

Scripture repeatedly tells us that the serpent was Satan, and Isaiah 14 tells us how he fell. It's a picture of the downfall of the King of Babylonia and a picture of Satan's rebellion and fall.

Isaiah 14:12 affirms Satan's fall:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! ..."

Isaiah 14:13 tells us why:

"You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven ...'"

Isaiah 14:14 adds:

"... will make myself like the Most High."

That's the essence of pride, the thought that I can and will take God's place.

Instead, **Isaiah 14:15** tells us,

"... you are brought down to Sheol ..."

Now Satan brings that same pride into the Garden of Eden to infect the human beings. He questions God's goodness, "Is God holding out the best stuff from you?" We wonder.

Then in Genesis 3:2-5, pride is lurking in the background as the woman weighed Satan's words.

First, the woman corrected Satan, "No, God didn't say that. We can eat fruit."

But she told her own lie, "God said not to even touch the tree, or we'll die." God didn't say that. Eve made it up. She was questioning God's goodness, thinking she might be able to do better.

Satan jumped at the opening in Eve's thinking, "No, you won't die. You'll become like God." He nursed the idea that God was holding out on the humans. Can you hear the voices of pride? "You deserve better. You should be in charge!" Tragically, those voices were persuasive.

In Genesis 3:6, pride won out as the man and woman each took the thrones of their own lives.

Eve ate. Then Adam ate.

They agreed with the notion that they deserved better. That they are better. That they should be in charge. So, they took charge by eating! Now they too will be like God.

Then in Genesis 3:7, the results are painfully evident already.

They saw the difference between good and evil and knew that what they had done was evil.

They suddenly felt vulnerable. Afraid. Guilty. And ashamed. They realized they were naked. So, they created clothes to cover and protect themselves.

Pride was the first sin, but is pride also possibly the last sin?

Satan will not be destroyed until very near the end.

Revelation 20 tells us that he will be thrown in the lake of fire forever.

So, his pride will be in creation until that point.

Then those who belong to Satan will be destroyed. Pride will be in their hearts until then.

Then Death and Hades will be destroyed last, the results of pride.

Pride was the first sin. Will it be the last sin to be destroyed as well?

That is difficult news to hear because pride has always tended to spread.

Pride paves the path to other deadly sin.

Sin multiplied outward from pride in *The Great Gatsby*.

Gatsby's parties were filled with gluttony and went all night.

Many guests were there because they wanted to BE Gatsby or someone famous; that's envy.

Gatsby's money came from a criminal underworld motivated by greed.

There was lust. Daisy's husband cheated on her; then Daisy cheated on him.

When each discovered the other's affair, there was wrath. Destructive wrath.

And in the lazy drawing rooms of the wealthy, there was sloth. It's all there!

Pride led to all of the seven deadly sins in *The Great Gatsby*, just as Fitzgerald thought it did for the whole world of the roaring twenties, and just as it does for all of us!

Gatsby shows us that pride is like a wrong step on an icy driveway—you'll end up falling.

That could be said for all of the deadly sins. Deadly sins are deadly because they produce other sins.

Pretty soon, sin is piling up in our lives, damaging our souls and causing us unforeseen consequences and heartache.

Pride isn't a simple sin. Pride is the first sin. It spreads worse than any other sin.

Letting pride loose is like stepping onto an icy driveway. Pretty soon, you have fallen and you're sliding toward gluttony, lust, envy, greed, wrath, and sloth. Pride is dangerous.

I wrestle with pride.

You may not be surprised because you may think I'm naturally arrogant. That's probably fair.

But two years ago, when we were studying the Minor Prophets, I preached on the book of Obadiah. It's about Edom's sin of pride. That led me to studying pride's many forms.

And I was shocked to find pride wrapped tightly around my soul. Is it ironic that I couldn't see my pride? Of course. That's the nature of pride. It blinds us to our pridefulness.

I saw pride hiding in my soul in places I never dreamed. I realized I am a desperate approval seeker. I expect my life to go a certain way and whine like a baby when life doesn't go the way I expect. And I saw an unkind streak in my soul—that I am highly critical.

If pride is like a snake, the snake was coiled around my heart. I asked God to uncoil the snake. It has been a slow, difficult, and painful process. Don't ask God to cleanse your heart unless you are ready for

a little pain in the process. But slowly, God is uncoiling pride from its iron grip on my soul. And He can do the same for you. *How can we uncoil pride from our souls?*

The Gospel humbles us and dismantles pride directly.

Jesus humbled Himself on the cross.

In Philippians 2, Paul gives us a dramatic overview of what Jesus did for us.

Paul says that

... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself ...

Jesus didn't hold onto the privileges of Heaven which belonged to Him. He let go of being the privileged star of the show.

Instead, He came to Earth and took human form. Paul goes on,

... taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

He didn't come as a king or noble but as a peasant.

Then Paul adds,

... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is the very opposite of pride! Seeing it all in such stark language makes Jesus' sacrifice all the more poignant. And potent. Jesus' humbling of Himself takes pride apart at the seams. When we make Jesus' sacrifice OUR story, it systematically deconstructs our pride!

Paul tells us to follow Jesus' example and humble ourselves, but it is never that easy.

In verse five, Paul began by telling us to let the same mind be in us that is in Christ Jesus.

Later, Paul adds that Jesus' humility is what God honors as Jesus is now resurrected, ascended, glorified, and destined for the worship of all creation.

Paul wants us to think and act like Jesus. Humbly.

But doing that is never just as easy as making that choice.

Thankfully, the Gospel does some of that work in us naturally along the way.

Salvation humbles us, for a start.

As we are coming to faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit shows us our own sin. We can't hide.

When we are required to face our sin, it's humbling. We see our flaws, which isn't easy. And we see how we are anything but a good bargain for God. And we see our need.

Then we have to ask for help! We accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness based on His goodness, not our own. And we take God's grace, on our lack of merit, not on our merit.

And we come to a similar point every time we confess our sin to God.

That's humbling. That's a start on learning and practicing humility.

Sanctification shapes the image of Jesus, our Humble Savior, inside of us.

When we come to faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside our souls.

He works inside of us, making us new and holy.

He is shaping the image of Jesus inside us like a sculptor. Think of our newly converted souls as being like a block of rock.

God the Holy Spirit chips away at us—taking away what doesn't belong there, taking away sins like pride, until what's left is the image of Jesus in us. Perfect. Humble. Pride-free.

God's Spirit is doing that every day in our hearts.

Worship makes it difficult to remain proud in the face of our glorious God.

We are confronted by the Gospel again, by God's goodness, by our sinfulness, and by the fact that we do not deserve what God has done for us.

We come into the presence of God's glory. We are confronted by His bigness, goodness, and overwhelming power. We are none of those things. If we're paying attention, open to reality, and honest, we are bowled over by the glory of God.

How then can we be proud? How can we not be humble?

Can we do more than wait and tell ourselves to "be humble!"

Nick Carraway retreated to the Midwest at the end of *The Great Gatsby*.

Nick Carraway was the narrator who watched everything that happened in *The Great Gatsby*.

Nick admired Jay Gatsby—whoever he really was. In a way, he despised him, too. And everyone else and every bit of pride and excess he saw on the Long Island of the roaring twenties.

He went back home to the Midwest where he grew up. The Midwest of real snow, real homes, real lives, and real people. No more loose handling of money and power. Or lies and lives.

Nick Carraway went home to the illusion of innocence. Can't we do better?

We, too, tend to retreat. Sometimes we retreat into nostalgia, pretending that the place we came from is untouched by pride. But sometimes we retreat into a small, little world of our own making where we are masters. We put up castle battlements around our little world, pull up the drawbridge, feast, and criticize everyone outside our little world.

Retreating like that is nothing more than pride revisited. We can do better.

The way author Anne Lamott says she gets ready to write may be able to help us with our pride.

As with many authors, the voices in Lamott's head can bottle up her creativity.

So, before she starts to write, she does a mental exercise to quiet their voices.

She closes her eyes and takes a moment to quiet herself. Then she starts to hear the voices.

There's the critic who finds her as articulate as a houseplant. She visualizes that critic as a mouse. She picks the mouse up by the tail and drops it into an open mason jar.

There's the snarling voice of failure that threatens her if she ever stops writing. Plop. In the jar.

The contractor, insistent lawyer, and needy colleague? All in the jar.

She puts the lid on, then she puts them aside where she won't see or hear them.

Now she can hear the voices of the characters in her stories speaking, telling their own stories.²

What if we did the same thing with the voices of pride in our own minds?

What if we pictured them before us as little mice?

There's that voice that says we deserve better. We pick it up by the tail and put it in the jar. It claws at the jar for a minute, trying to get us to keep being critical.

There's the voice that says we are the star of the show. In the jar.

There is the voice that's sometimes saying we deserve attention and sometimes telling us that we will never be good enough. That one will squeal as you pick it up and put it in the jar.

The voice that says you're better than all that goes into the jar a little more easily.

Last, there's the voice that says you should be in charge of your own life. As you reach to pick it up, it puts its claws into the tabletop and doesn't want to go. Rip, plop, and close the lid.

Set the jar aside so that you no longer hear, see, or even think about those voices.

Now, with the voices of pride silenced, we can hear the One Voice That Matters.

That's the voice of God, and that voice speaks to you with humility. It speaks humility over you and into you by the power of the Holy Spirit. What does it say?

It says, "I love you, and I want you to love me." When we realize we are loved—personally—by our Almighty God Who made us, that He has forgiven us, that He has a plan for our lives that is best and right, that He is preparing eternity for us, and that He gave it to us all at the cost of the life of Jesus Christ, then we can let Him be in charge. Even when life doesn't go the way we want. That's humility.

It says, "I love you, and I want you to love others. In the way that I love you." It isn't always easy. They don't always love us back. They don't always do what we want. Then again, we haven't always loved God back, and we haven't always done what He wanted. That's not part of the equation. God tells us to love others, the way He loves us. Period. That's humility.

Humility slays the seven deadly sins at their source.

We've been asking in this series how we might slay the seven deadly sins. It was never going to be something we do on our own. God has to change us. But we don't just sit around and wait for God to do something. There are things He expects us to do.

Prideful rebellion is where sin started, so humbling ourselves before God is where sin will end. Pride is the first and last sin. It's the source and path to the other deadly sins. To all sin, really. Pride will have to go.

As humility roots pride out of our lives, the path to the other sins begins to close. We will not be perfect this side of eternity, but humbling ourselves before God now is one beginning of the end. Let's slay pride with humility.

¹ Jonathan Edwards described pride in penetrating detail in his essay, "Undetected Spiritual Pride."

² <https://mbird.com/literature/anne-lamott-on-dropping-whiny-guilt-mongering-voices-into-mason-jars/>