

# ***“The Deadly Sin of Pride”***

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Hello, everyone! I love being surrounded by such goodness. “None is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart” (Moroni 7:44).

Meekness is a dimension of true discipleship. Pride and defensiveness stand in the way of a consecrated life and impede learning, growth, and progress.

So how do we replace pride and defensiveness with meekness?

I want to begin by responding to a scriptural invitation—I’m going to “remember . . .”

It was 1976, and life was good. I was thirty-six, I’d been home from my previous mission for about two and a half years, I had decided to return to the profession of nursing, and I felt good! Then, Wham! I was called to go on another mission. This time to Indonesia. They had called a nurse from England who was a convert, and they felt it would help to have someone “seasoned” to go with her (that means old). We would be the first sister missionaries in Indonesia. *No thanks!* I thought. *Been there, done that!* But I decided to go to the temple to see if I was right.

Don’t ever do that if you’re not ready to hear the answer.

Then I started thinking, “Hey! This is my reward for the tough missions I’ve already served!” I approached the Language Training Mission (LTM) with big plans. I had served several missions, I had worked on learning other languages, I’d been teaching at the LTM and knew my way around, and this was going to be a piece of cake. “I’ll show these younger missionaries how to do this!”

I entered the LTM in September of that year with all humility.

There were two of us in the entire place learning Indonesian. My companion was from England,

yes, but she had grown up in Malaysia. The Indonesian language is almost exactly the same as the language of Malaysia. Not like Spanish and Portuguese—more like Spanish in Mexico compared to Spanish in Argentina.

Pride Goeth Before . . . a Fall (Proverbs 16:18)

It was quickly apparent who was the slow one in the class. I'll give you a hint: Her initials are M. E. E. I still remember our first test. I got two things right: My name and the date.

Well, friends, the entire year and a half was sort of like that. It was hard! It was extremely challenging and humbling. And it's one of the best things I've ever done. I'm so thankful for what I learned and felt and for those I came to love so dearly.

Early on, our mission president assigned two local companions to work with us, Darsi and Endang. One of the responsibilities he gave us was to teach them English. He said it would help them all the rest of their lives. Indeed, they both were able to get excellent employment later, partly because of their English skills. Endang, for example, has been teaching Seminary and Institute for about twenty years.

Darsi was exceedingly shy. She was tiny and quiet and frightened to be in front of others. But she learned English very rapidly. Within a short while she was reading Church books and magazines along with the scriptures. Both Darsi and Endang helped me with Indonesian as well, and as time went along, my language improved, and I became more confident and comfortable in using it.

Towards the end of my mission, I received a letter from a dear friend, Arlene Flanders. She was a member of the Relief Society General Board, and she and her husband were traveling to Asia and wanted to visit me! She said she'd love to speak to the Relief Society sisters and asked if I'd be willing to translate for her. Would I! Of course! Oh, that would be such an incredible way to finish my mission!

Early in 1978, they came—all the way to Central Java. The time came for Sister Flanders to speak to the women, and they were gathering. And then an interesting thing happened. I suppose, as I look back, that the Spirit had been trying to contact me for quite a while, but my pride in what I was about to do had kept me from hearing. So the Spirit *shouted*: “Edmunds! Who should be doing what you're doing?” This was a question I had formulated to help myself not take over and “show off” instead of “showing how.”

Instantly I knew the answer, even though I had a nanosecond more of pride and a little tantrum (“But I want to do this! I've been looking forward to it! This is my *last hurrah!*”). I knew that Darsi was the one who should translate. I whispered to Sister Flanders, and she understood immediately. But it took some talking before Darsi agreed (and by now I was almost frantic. I knew it had to be her, not MEE).

I said something silly like “I’ll be right behind you, and I’ll help you if you need me.” Ha! I say Ha! because there is no way I could have done what she did. She translated into Indonesian, but when she could sense that some couldn’t understand, she switched to their native language: Javanese! Even now I think of the difference in what it would have meant to me compared to what it meant for her. For me it would have been a sweet journal entry. “I was a *star!*” For Darsi, it was an amazing and life-changing experience. A few weeks after I had returned home from Indonesia, I heard that Darsi had combined a couple of doctrinal talks about welfare by President Marion G. Romney and had spoken in a district conference. That is incredible!

Friends, I could keep you here forever with true stories of my personal struggles with the sin of pride. Do you ever struggle, too? Does it sometimes seem like pride is the most annoying interruption in your life, jumping in when you think you’re doing fine, trying to smother your little store of meekness and humility?

### Pride Leads to Destruction

The author of Proverbs declares that “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

President Howard W. Hunter adds, “Surely the lessons of history ought to teach us that pride, haughtiness, self-adulation, conceit, and vanity contain all of the seeds of self-destruction for individuals, cities, or nations.”<sup>1</sup> Then he reminds us that President Ezra Taft Benson said, “The only true test of greatness, blessedness, [and] joyfulness is how close a life can come to being like the Master, Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

In my soul-searching, as I prepared to share my thoughts with you today, I’ve come to the conclusion that there are three critical reasons why pride leads to destruction:

1. Pride separates us from God, from each other, and from our true selves—from who we really are.
2. Pride lures or just plain jerks us off the straight and narrow way. Can’t you just feel it some days, pride trying to pry your fingers off the iron rod?
3. Pride gives us that transitory, falsely strong sense of “Hubba-hubba, ding-ding, baby, you’ve got everything!”

### Pride As a Deadly Sin

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins and is exceedingly deadly itself, deadly and deadening.

In an *Ensign* article, Elder Joe J. Christensen said: “An insightful man, Robert J. McCracken, wrote: ‘If we make a listing of our sins, . . . [pride] is the one that heads the list, breeds all the rest, and

does more to estrange us from our neighbors or from God than any evil we can commit. . . . [Pride] is not only the worst of the seven deadly sins; it is the parent sin, the one that leads to every other, the sin from which no one is free.’ ”<sup>3</sup>

One thing that strikes me forcefully in this quotation is that pride does more to estrange us from each other and from God than any other evil we can commit.

From President Ezra Taft Benson’s incredible sermon on pride in general conference in April 1989 comes the following: “Most of us think of pride as self-centeredness, conceit, boastfulness, arrogance, or haughtiness. All of these are elements of the sin, but the heart, or core, is still missing.

“The central feature of pride is enmity—enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen. Enmity means ‘hatred toward, hostility to, or a state of opposition.’ It is the power by which Satan wishes to reign over us. . . .

“ . . . The proud wish God would agree with them. They aren’t interested in changing their opinions to agree with God’s.”<sup>4</sup>

I strongly recommend a rereading and a careful study of President Benson’s message. Look in the *Ensign* for May 1989.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks describes further how pride can separate us from God and from each other: “The pride of self-satisfaction is the opposite of humility. This attitude insulates us from learning and separates us from God. . . .

“ . . . A person who has the pride of self-satisfaction cannot repent, because he recognizes no shortcomings. He cannot be taught, because he recognizes no master. He cannot be helped, because *he recognizes no resource greater than his own*. . . .

“Preoccupied with self, the pride of self-satisfaction is always accompanied by an aloofness and a withdrawal from concern for others.”<sup>5</sup>

Elder Oaks quoted Henry Fairlie, who discussed the seven deadly sins. Listen to what Fairlie says about the ways in which pride separates us from each other and eventually even separates us from who we really are:

“Pride may excite us to take too much pleasure in ourselves, but it does not encourage us to take pleasure in our humanity, in what is commonly shared by all of us as social beings. The turning into ourselves has turned us away from our societies. It is a sin of neglect: it causes us to ignore others. It is a sin of aggression: it provokes us to hurt others. It is a sin of condescension: it makes us patronize others. All of these are turned against our neighbors, and when in our Pride, we do not realize how aloof we have become, and how cut off even from what in our own nature we should most deeply know and enjoy.” Fairlie concludes that our self-absorption has produced a “self-improvement” that “is measured only by how good one feels about oneself.” In this there is only “discontent,” which “is always one of

the punishments of Pride”<sup>6</sup>

The scriptures abound with condemnations and cautions about pride. In Proverbs 6:there is a listing of the six things the Lord hates. “A proud look” is at the head of the list.

The Lord warns us in Doctrine and Covenants 38:39, “Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old.” And in Proverbs 28:25 we read, “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin has cautioned: “Pride and vanity, the opposites of humility, can destroy our spiritual health as surely as a debilitating disease can destroy our physical health.”<sup>7</sup> Oh, isn’t that the truth? Think of the shock when you’ve heard that a friend has cancer or MS or some other terrible disease. But did you hear that *Edmunds has pride* and is *critically ill spiritually*? That’s got to be even worse!

How does pride destroy our spiritual health? Among other things, maybe it keeps us from hearing and hearkening to the counsel of a prophet. Is it pride that keeps us from doing things President Gordon B. Hinckley has asked us to do, such things as trying a little harder to be a little better,<sup>8</sup> freeing ourselves from the bondage of debt,<sup>9</sup> attending the temple as often as we can,<sup>10</sup> being faithful in our tithes and offerings,<sup>11</sup> and being more cheerful and optimistic?<sup>12</sup>

Does pride ever keep us from being modest and appropriate in our dress, speech, and behavior? Does pride keep us from repenting and from forgiving? Does it keep us from praying earnestly and honestly?

With pride, it’s who you *know*. With meekness and humility, it’s who you *are*.

So pride does separate us from God. And it does separate us from each other.

And it may also separate us from ourselves—from our own godlike nature, our own innate goodness. It may keep us from doing what our hearts would prompt and even compel us to do.

Pride interferes with so much of what we really want in life: the precious blessings of meekness and humility; peace of soul and contentment; a sweet relationship with our Heavenly Father, the Savior, the Holy Ghost, our family, and others.

Pride may interfere with our ability to be grateful, satisfied, and content. It leads to misery and regrets. Pride may lead us to be increasingly negative, critical, pessimistic, judgmental, competitive, and contentious.

Pride makes us falsely confident, thinking we can succeed without any help from anyone, including God. C. S. Lewis said that “a proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”<sup>13</sup>

Meekness and humility remind us we’re “in process.” We are invited to try a little harder to be a little better even when we’re already pretty good.

Pride keeps us from being willing and able to submit. It takes meekness and humility to submit,

but as King Benjamin has taught, that's the only way we'll ever become genuine Saints and more childlike and Christlike. "For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

"There is one vice of which no man in the world is free," wrote C. S. Lewis, "which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. . . . There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others." Lewis says further, "according to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. . . . it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice."<sup>14</sup>

### Avoiding and Overcoming Pride

How can we avoid and overcome the sin of pride? Benjamin Franklin said that pride "is the last vice the good man gets clear of."<sup>15</sup> Well, that's encouraging!

In his autobiography he elaborated: "In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as *pride*. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself; you will see it, perhaps, often in this history; for, even if I could conceive that I had compleatly overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."<sup>16</sup>

As President Spencer W. Kimball noted: "When one becomes conscious of his great humility, he has already lost it."<sup>17</sup>

Pride is like a pop-up on the screen of our lives. Do you know what I mean? It sometimes gets through our filters; it sneaks through our barriers. We might catch ourselves in a meeting or lesson thinking something like "Boring . . ." Or "Hello! . . ." Or "Duh! . . ." Or how about "Boy, that was a waste of my time!" Or even, "Honey, don't ever try out for *American Idol*."

One of the biggest steps to avoiding and overcoming pride is the first step—Recognizing it.

Maybe if we were more honest with each other about our struggle with this deadly sin we could help each other more effectively.

Here's a quotation I love, attributed to Francois René de Chateaubriand: "In the days of service all things are founded; in the days of special privilege they deteriorate; and in the days of vanity they are lost."<sup>18</sup> One way to avoid pride is to love—to be involved in service—genuine, no-strings-attached kindness to one another. Pure love. Charity.

Another way to avoid and overcome pride is through gratitude—appreciating and expressing thanks more often and more sincerely. Elder James E. Talmage put it this way: “Gratitude is twin sister to humility; pride is a foe to both.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the strongest impressions to come to me during my preparation for today (besides being so *proud*) is this: One of the worst and most damaging things about pride is that it can keep us from receiving joyfully and gracefully any commendation or praise from our Heavenly Father.

That is one of the worst consequences of allowing pride to separate us from God. There are times when He wants to say to us, “Good for you! Good job! Well done! Thank you!” And what we do? We talk back: “Oh, You’re just saying that. It wasn’t that great. You and I both know it could and should have been better. I’m such a mess! If only . . .” *Don’t talk back!* Sometimes we may think it’s a way to show humility and meekness, but it’s pride!

What if the Savior had done that during the days of creation? He comes back after a busy day of separating light from darkness, or water from dry ground, and His Father says to Him, “Well done.” And instead of smiling and feeling happy, He had to talk back: “Do You think the dark is a bit too dark? Did we make too many stars? Do You think anyone will mind that the water’s wet?”

That did not happen, did it. His Father said, “Well done,” and They likely rejoiced together over how wonderful it all was at the end of every single period of creation.

We neither give nor receive enough positive comments from each other, and it’s so often pride that keeps these good things from happening:

“Thank you for that beautiful musical number.”

“The one who usually accompanies me was sick, but I guess it turned out OK.”

“Thanks for the lesson.”

“I ran out of time, as usual . . . Why does Nora always have to interrupt me!”

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “Pride is the universal sin, the great vice. . . . Pride is a damning sin in the true sense of that word. It limits or stops progression. The proud are not easily taught. They won’t change their minds to accept truths, because to do so implies they have been wrong. Pride adversely affects all our relationships. . . . Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. I repeat: Pride *is* the great stumbling block to Zion. We must cleanse the inner vessel by conquering pride. God will have a humble people. Either we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble.”<sup>20</sup>

Wow. We can either choose to be humble—to allow our life’s experiences to deepen our faith, our courage, our hope our meekness, and our charity—or we can choose to resist change and live consumed by our pride until a day shall come when we are *compelled* to be humble. Ouch.

## Denying Ourselves of Ungodliness

Moroni, at the end of the Book of Mormon, asks us to “deny [ourselves] of all ungodliness” (Moroni 10:32). Pride is ungodly. It is godly to be humble—to be teachable, forgiving, submissive, kind, peacemakers, one heart and one mind with our fellow travelers. Can we do that? Can we get a little better every day? Can we help each other to become increasingly meek and humble? More pure in heart. More faithful and true. Holier. Happier.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Advocate with the Father, and He has done all He can to help us return to our heavenly home. May we respond to His meekness with our own!

Be thou humble in thy weakness, and the Lord thy God shall lead thee,

Shall lead thee by the hand and give thee answer to thy prayers.

Be thou humble in thy pleading, and the Lord thy God shall bless thee,

Shall bless thee with a sweet and calm assurance that he cares.

Be thou humble in thy calling, and the Lord thy God shall teach thee

To serve his children gladly with a pure and gentle love.

Be thou humble in thy longing, and the Lord thy God shall take thee,

Shall take thee home at last to ever dwell with him above.<sup>21</sup>

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Howard W. Hunter, “Come unto Me,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” *Ensign*, December 1988, 2.



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- <sup>3</sup> Robert J. McCracken, *What Is Sin? What Is Virtue?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 11–12; quoted in Joe J. Christensen, “Resolutions,” *Ensign*, December 1994, 66.
- <sup>4</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, *Pure in Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 109, 91–92; emphasis added.
- <sup>6</sup> Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1978), 45, 52; quoted in Oaks, *Pure in Heart*, 92.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Straight and Narrow Way,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 65.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, “We Have a Work to Do,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 88.
- <sup>9</sup> See, for example, “The Condition of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 6; or “Thou Shalt Not Covet,” *Ensign*, March 1990, 4.
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, ““Oh, that I Were an Angel,”” *Ensign*, May 2002, 6; or “Keeping the Temple Holy,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 49–52.
- <sup>11</sup> See, for example, “Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, August 1997, 6; or *Cornerstones of a Happy Home* (pamphlet, 1984), 9.
- <sup>12</sup> See, for example, “Each a Better Person,” *Ensign*, November 2002, 100; or “If Thou Art Faithful,” *Ensign*, November 1984, 92.
- <sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 111.
- <sup>14</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 108–9; quoted by Robert L. Millet, *Alive in Christ: The Miracle of Spiritual Rebirth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997), 68.
- <sup>15</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, 1732, 57; as quoted in Oaks, *Pure in Heart*, 94.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Carlton House, 1944), 103–4; emphasis in original.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 233.
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted by Vaughn J. Featherstone, *More Purity Give Me* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1991), 15.

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<sup>19</sup> James E. Talmage, *Sunday Night Talks*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1931), 483.

<sup>20</sup> Benson, “Beware of Pride,” 6, 7; emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> “Be Thou Humble,” *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 130.