

Concrete Vision: Pride Obscures Vision

If you are to have the abundant life God desires for you, you must first do something that seems counter intuitive. We falsely think that to have more of the abundant life, we must spend more time thinking about ourselves and our life. We think we must make everything in our life about our life. This ends up being one of the biggest impediments to receiving the life God wants to give us. This week we will spend some time learning how to get out of our own way so that God can bless us more fully.

Day 1

Practice Gratitude

There is really nothing new or revolutionary here. We generally do not give thanks for the many blessings that we have, instead we only complain about our situation. One time when I was cleaning out my garage, I started growing more and more frustrated with the amount of stuff I had. What was so ridiculous about the experience was that not only had I been the one to accumulate all the stuff, it was also a sign of the blessing that God had given in my life. When you are frustrated and irritated by God blessing you, something is wrong, and you should not be surprised if the blessing ceases. As we practice gratitude today, let's see if we can trace back all our blessings to God. Can we clearly see God's greatness and glory at the end of a string of actions that have caused us to be blessed? If I do well on a project or a test, can I see the hand of God in each step that led to that outcome? Can I thank him and give him praise for the mental capacity I have? For the energy and interest in the topic? For the food that has allowed me to pursue the study? For the parents that taught me to work? For the teachers that have assisted me? For the opportunity to take the test? I will have to admit that when I was in school, I generally just mentally complained about the fact that I had to take a test. Now that I am long out of school, I just generally mentally complain about the difficulties I encounter in completing the projects I am responsible for. Can we work on changing that today? Let's spend some time pondering just how much we have to be grateful for today.

Verses: Philippians 4:19, Colossians 3:15, James 1:17

Prayer Topics: Abundance, Joy, Blessings

Day 2

Embrace Criticism Joyfully

If it is true that our blessing, the ability to live the abundant life, is the result of our conformity to God, then we should be very grateful to receive information about how to do that more completely. I find that this is not the case, especially in myself. I know of very few people who are really, genuinely joyful at receiving criticism. If we really wanted to pursue all the abundant blessings that God desired for us, and if we were truly convinced that this could come only through conforming ourselves to Christ, we would be truly thankful for those who gave us pointers in this regard. So why aren't we joyful when we are criticized? I believe it is because we secretly think the joyful life is found in conforming our lives to our emotions rather than to Christ. We secretly believe that the answer is to do as we please, to do the thing we want to do. Fulfilling our desires becomes our top priority rather than conformity to Christ. How many times have we been let down by the fulfillment of our desires? How many times has the promise of joy eluded us just as we reach the place we thought we would find it waiting for us? All of this comes from the fact that we, like Korah in scripture, believe that we are holy as we are. We secretly want God to bless us just as we are, without the need for sanctification or conformity to Christ. All of us must work to convince ourselves that accurate criticism is a blessing and a key to the abundant life God has for us. When we do this, we will find ourselves welcoming criticism with true joy. Spend some time today thinking about criticism that really stung, and see if there is any truth in it. If there is, think about how you could take action on it to further your blessing. If you can, thank the person that gave you that criticism, and if you can't, thank God for it.

Verses: James 1:19-20, Proverbs 15:31, Proverbs 27:6

Prayer Topics: Humility, Failure, Progress

Day 3

Enjoy Life

One of the unfortunate side effects of pride is the sourness it gives to life. This is strange, because most people embrace pride as a way of making their lives better, but the truth is that this rarely happens. If we picture a diva, we generally picture someone who has high demands because they want only the best. They want only the best, because they think it will give them a better life, one with more enjoyment. However, when we picture the diva, we picture someone who is never satisfied, someone whose standards are never met, someone who is constantly disappointed, annoyed, or angered. Obviously, this is no way to enjoy life, and the unexpected truth is that true enjoyment of life comes from genuine humility. The genuinely humble person is constantly surprised at their good fortune, constantly pleased by their lot in life, and genuinely thankful for their blessings. True joy can only be found in thanksgiving, and thanksgiving is germinated in the soil of humility. Today's "assignment" is a pleasant one- just enjoy the day to the greatest extent possible. Try to catch yourself feeling annoyed or irritated, and seek to find reason for thanksgiving in the moment. Think of all the things about your day that could be used as fuel for gratitude to God. See if you can make this a habit, and watch the results in your life.

Verses: Ecclesiastes 3:9-15, Romans 15:13, Proverbs 11:2

Prayer Topics: Contentment, Expectations, Gratitude

Day 4

Laugh at Yourself

C. S. Lewis observed that the thing pride hates most is to be laughed at. For us as human beings, this comes very naturally, as most of us right out of diapers do not enjoy being mocked, made fun of, or laughed at. When one of my sons was young, he was very small for his age, and the kids at school took to calling him “mini-me.” This bothered him a great deal, and I remember having a conversation with him where we decided to watch some movie clips of the character “mini-me”, and I encouraged him to mimic the mannerisms next time they called him the name. The next time it happened, the kids laughed at his impression, and the experience turned to one of acceptance by the group rather than mocking. People like people who can laugh at themselves, and people like being liked. The truth is pride kills relationships, and the ability to laugh at yourself gives them life. What are the most ridiculous things about you? Could you laugh at those things if they came to the attention of others? What makes you unable to do so? What would it take to be able to laugh at the ridiculous aspects of your nature? What would be the change in your life if you could develop the ability to laugh at them? Would it make your life better or worse? How does the grace of Jesus make it easier to laugh at yourself? What do you think of people who have the ability to laugh at themselves? What do you think about the people who can't? Which type of person lives the more abundant life?

Verses: Romans 12:3, Mark 10:45, Philippians 2:3-11

Prayer Topics: Flexibility, Amiability, Agreeability

Day 5

Study and Train

Living the abundant life is difficult when you are stupid. Studying and training helps to make you smart. Pride convinces you that you don't need to study or train, you are already smart just because you are you. This is as simple as it gets, yet our pride will complicate and obscure this simple truth, and convince us that we already know. We read an article, we watched a video online, therefore we are experts. The humble person is fascinated with the world, because he sees so much of it. The prideful person is fascinated with himself, because that is all he sees or is interested in. The humble person is a lifelong learner that gets more and more effective with age and experience, while the prideful person becomes more ridiculous as he falls further and further behind. The humble person gets ever-greater joy from life as he learns to connect more and more of what he has learned, and comes to understand and appreciate the world in a deeper way, while the prideful person becomes more bored with life with each passing day. If you would like to live the abundant life, help put your pride to death by learning to study, train, and become more skilled in any area of life that bears fruit. How can you start today?

Verses: 1 Timothy 4:7-8, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Romans 12:2

Prayer Topics: Practice, Improvement, Perfection