

James presents two possible paths of life (James 4:6). We may choose a path of pride or we may choose the path of humility. The former is tied to Folly and leads to disgrace. The latter is tied to Wisdom and leads to honor (Proverbs 3:35; 11:2). The following questions will hopefully help us choose and stay on the right path.

1. **What is pride and what is humility?**

- a. *Pride*: our own evaluation that we are worthy of honor and our attempts to receive or keep what we believe is the recognition that is due us.
- b. *Humility*: acceptance of God's evaluation of life and God's command to treat others more highly than ourselves.

2. **Is it dangerous to be proud? Why/why not?**

Yes, because God opposes the proud (James 4:6). His opposition may reveal itself in that pride leads to disgrace (Proverbs 11:2a) and to destruction (Proverbs 16:18; 16:5).

3. **How then is humility better?**

God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; Proverbs 3:34). Humility leads to wisdom (Proverbs 11:2) and must precede honor (Proverbs 15:33).

4. **Is it wrong to seek honor? Why/why not?**

It is right to desire honor but problems may arise in thinking ourselves worthy of honor (that's pride), seeking honor from men rather than from God, or attempting to bring honor to ourselves. Cf. Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Colossians 3:22. Do those things which will result in honor from Him, but don't honor yourself (Proverbs 25:6-7a, 27; 27:1-2).

5. **How do I recognize if I am proud?**

- a. *Quarreling* – Proverbs 13:10a; 20:3; cf. James 4:1
- b. *Refusing correction* – Proverbs 13:10, 18
- c. *Answering before listening* – Proverbs 18:13
- d. *Mocking* – Proverbs 21:24; 3:34
- e. *Picking the best for oneself* – Proverbs 25:6-7a
- f. *Seeking one's own honor* – Proverbs 25:27
- g. *Revealing confidences* – Proverbs 25:7b-10
- h. *Seeking the best for oneself rather than the employer* – Proverbs 27:18; cf. Colossians 3:22-25
- i. *Excusing oneself for not getting work done* – Proverbs 26:16

Pride is not always obvious, as the surprising example of the sluggard shows. Therefore, we must be especially alert to its signs and be on guard against it.

6. **How do we avoid pride and gain humility?**

- a. We must both withdraw from pride and pursue humility.
- b. Understand who God is, because "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10)
- c. Understand God's evaluation of us, that our problem is thinking too much of ourselves and not too little.
- d. Avoid prideful actions and undertake humble ones. *E.g.*, Proverbs 6:2-3. (See point 5 above.)
- e. Especially accept correction as this is emphasized in Proverbs. Even the words of our enemies may have some truth in them. Our own children in the attitudes and actions may mirror our own hearts.
- f. Pursue righteousness. What is true for a nation (Proverbs 14:34), is true for the individual as well. "To fear the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13a) and fearing the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is this Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The opposite of pride is being poor in spirit and that means we recognize our spiritual poverty. Nothing within us and nothing which we have can win us acceptance with God. We must humble ourselves and throw ourselves completely on the mercy of God.

The humble recognize that they deserve punishment. And those who trust that Jesus Christ has paid for that punishment in His death receive freely from God the gift of a righteous standing in Christ before Him. They will not be ashamed. They will be honored.

Humility and not pride should characterize us as children of God. This is the path on which we should be traveling. A life of pride will only end in disgrace. True honor awaits those who humble themselves before God.