

## THE GREATEST SIN

Have you discovered the *secret* to a fulfilling and successful career, a strong and fruitful marriage, and a life in which no one has the power to ruin a single day for you? Sounds unrealistic? Well, it's not. Read this "*tough love*" message carefully because it may be the most important message you have ever read. One request first however: **Please "lower your defenses" and open your mind to some serious self-examination. An OPEN MIND is the ONLY avenue through which one can learn. ARE YOU CAPABLE OF AN OPEN MIND?**

*Let's Hope So.*

The *secret* to which I refer is to rid one's life of the one and only *spiritual cancer*\* that has been the cause of **every** failed or struggling marriage, **every** broken friendship, **every** career disenchantment, and **every** life still **seeking complete contentment**. Ironically, it is this same *spiritual cancer* on which the great majority of people—at least in large part--- will unknowingly base all their decisions, large and small, including choice of career, school, home, car, and sometimes even a spouse! What's even worse is that despite the harm caused by this *spiritual cancer*, **PEOPLE ARE VERY RELUCTANT TO RID THEMSELVES OF IT-----**

***INSTEAD THEY TRY TO GET EVEN MORE OF IT!!!***

So, what is this much sought-after *spiritual cancer* that destroys lives while causing so much pain and despair? What is this thing that is so "*precious*" that the great majority of people will discard spouses, siblings, careers, friends, --and even a JOY-FILLED LIFE—in order to retain it?? No, it is not just money, power, or fame. It is something much more internal than external. It is that very basic inborn desire for a person to be "lord" over everything in his or her life-----the desire to be a "god."

***The spiritual cancer to which I refer is called---PRIDE.***

**ATTENTION:** Now, the extremely prideful person may be tempted to stop reading this message now, because he or she has long been secretly convinced that: **"FEW PEOPLE KNOW MORE THAN ME ANYWAY."** But again, I would encourage you— **for your own future's sake—to read on with your defenses down and an open mind.**

First of all, what is this thing called *pride*. I am **not** referring to the warm admiration or affection we convey when we say, "I'm *proud* of you." Instead, I refer to the "HEY, LOOK AT ME; LOOK AT WHO I AM, HOW I LOOK, AND WHAT I HAVE" kind of pride that *may be flaunted openly or much more discreetly*. Pride is by its very nature in *competition* with the pride of others which explains why *prideful people have great difficulty being completely content in life* until they rise higher, have more, or look better than everyone around him or her--**which of course never happens**. For as long as there is a single person with more power, money, fame, talent, muscles, or "stature" in some other way, he or she will *jealously* see that person as someone to be "conquered" while, of course, looking down upon those who have already been "conquered." Interestingly enough, the prideful person will view it differently—"There's nothing wrong with competition. That's what America was founded upon. It brings out the *best* in people." Well, not so fast. It all depends on the *source of your motivation*. If your competition is rooted in *jealousy and envy* as described above—there's a problem that could be of *eternal* proportions. Ex. "The love of money"(a.k.a. GREED) provides tremendous "steam to drive one's economic engine" that often results in people climbing over the backs of others or even utilizing dishonest or immoral means to seek that *seemingly unattainable goal called complete contentment*. That does **not** "bring out the *best* in people." **"For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil."**(James 3:16) Every crime or sin that is committed is rooted in selfishness. *Thus, the more one is selfish, the more often he or she sins*. That's why the Lord says, **"Your thoughts are not my thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."**(Isaiah 55:8) So what does that mean? Well, it means that if your ambitions find you constantly comparing your present "status" with other people's "status," then your *heart* or "*emotional input/output center*" - is "out of order" and in need of repair. Instead, we should find ourselves working and living ENTIRELY for the ONE who made us—***content with our best efforts, irrespective of the efforts of others. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, AS WORKING FOR THE LORD, and NOT FOR MEN."***(Col. 3:23) Notice that it did not say "*for yourself*" or even "*for both*"---No, it definitely said **"for the Lord."** So, if you are having a jealousy problem, then your *heart* is "*out of order*," and other "*kinds of evil*" are going to present a problem for you too. --- *All because of that nasty spiritual cancer..... PRIDE.* You see, pride is not only the source of jealousy, envy, and selfish ambition, but it is also the reason why people try to "out-sex," "out-drink," "out-buy," and "out-perform" other people. But we have already concluded that *everyone* can't be "conquered," therefore unfortunately--*contentment will always seem to be "just out of reach."*

***Therein lies the dilemma.***

Now, if you don't truly believe any of that "Bible stuff," then you might as well stop reading here; BUT you should put this paper in a drawer marked "Open in case of Emergency"—for one day....you'll need it.

The reason why pride is "*The Worst Sin*"\* is that it is the predecessor of ALL other sins. Prideful people are constantly, secretly and perhaps subconsciously comparing themselves to others, rather than to the true "standard for comparison"—Jesus Christ. **Pride always seeks superiority in self and inferiority in others:**

"My race, religion, country, profession, income, school, physique, talent, I.Q., home, car, family tree, or even church is better than yours, therefore I am superior to you"---secretly thought of course. Consequently, there is a covert "ranking" of each individual encountered, searching for some area of "inferiority" on which to "declare superiority" over the individual---secretly, of course. Sometimes it may even be necessary to openly criticize or secretly gossip about the individual in order to "reinforce the victory." Even passing individuals in a hallway requires a quick "ranking" to determine if a "hello" is warranted. It's important to make a good impression on those who may be able to help the prideful person achieve his or her goals, so a "hello" is gratuitously given in that situation. However, the "hello"---if given--- to someone of "lesser rank" is given with the expectation of a reciprocal "hello," otherwise the person of "lesser rank" is quickly labeled as a "jerk"---perhaps never to receive "the honor" of such an exchange again. After all, remember that the prideful person has already "declared superiority" over practically everyone; therefore those of "lesser rank" could at least give him what he really "deserves"---you know---attention, respect, "worship"---all the things a "god" should get---all given in the form of a *pride "booster shot."* Now, anyone who supplies an adequate pride "dosage" will find favor, but anyone who "fails" to meet some "god"-determined standard will very quickly be discarded as "inferior." Now, those who do practice such prideful behavior will recognize it easily. ***However, no one who claims to be a Christian should try to justify or be satisfied with a "heart that acts or reacts" in such a manner. As we will see, coming to know God better---or even having a genuine relationship at all---cannot be done while maintaining a prideful heart which promotes an anti-Christ-like "hierarchist" state of mind leading one to treat people according to where they fall in some "pecking order."*** In contrast, there is yet another type of person who simply *cannot relate* to such behavior at all; people who possess a heart that is NOT threatened by extending a genuine, cheerful "hello" or a warm embrace---*expecting nothing in return*--- but instead having only compassion for those people whose prideful hearts do not enable them to genuinely reciprocate the gesture. These joyful people almost look as though "Someone else" is handling their problems for them, and they tend to ***treat everyone the same-- no matter their "status."*** ***This person's heart is exhibiting true unconditional love and forgiveness—the "free gift" of God's love, expecting nothing in return.*** What's the difference? You got it---PRIDE. *Surrender of pride in our relationship with God and our interactions with people "molds" us to be more "Christ-like" and strengthens those relationships in a way that Bible "knowledge" alone-- simply cannot.*

Now, the reason why this *spiritual cancer* destroys so many marriages today is that **pride and love are mutually exclusive.** The *more* prideful the person, the *less* true love of which he or she is capable. That's why the vows say--"***Love is not proud.***"(1 Cor. 13:4) As a result, since prideful people secretly think themselves better than others, the prideful person finds that the people around him or her always seem to fall short of expectations --- not "performing" as well as the prideful person expected. The prideful person is then very rehearsed in peevishly "zeroing in" on the perceived imperfections of others with criticism, sarcasm, blame, or gossip while being conveniently ***BLINDED to their own shortcomings*** which often include impatience, grudge-holding, rudeness, stubbornness, and generally defensive behavior. Whenever the prideful person makes a mistake, there's typically a good reason---*usually caused by someone else.* But when others make mistakes, the prideful person is very helpful in pointing out where the blame rests. (i.e. Luke 6:42--"*speck*" in OTHER'S eye, "*plank*" in OWN eye) *His finger rarely points to himself.* Therefore, even a spouse can soon "fail" to live up to these *unrealistic expectations of never making mistakes*, so the prideful person may then decide to find someone else who might be able to "*meet my needs.*" Consequently, we now have even more of the resultant "sins of pride" during this "idol worship of self" including hostility, quarreling, or even rage. "Pride-filled" marriages without **TRUE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE** are destined to be full of *resentment and secrets*---a recipe for failure that even *Viagra* won't fix. Unfortunately, people rarely listen as the minister quotes the wedding vows:

***"Love is PATIENT and KIND. Love is NOT JEALOUS, SELF-SEEKING, PROUD or RUDE. Love does NOT DEMAND ITS OWN WAY. Love KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS. (1Cor.13) "Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God— for GOD IS LOVE."***(1 John 4:7) *In contrast, PRIDE is impatient, jealous, self-centered, stubborn, rude, and unforgiving— often leading to divorce--- even repeated over & over, and learned generation after generation.*

**This TRUE LOVE must be obtained as a FREE GIFT from God upon SURRENDERING PRIDE.**

Furthermore, prideful people, unfortunately—as long as they choose to remain prideful—**cannot enjoy the “fruit” of a Spirit-filled life.** (*Gal. 5:22*) ***“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: LOVE, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and SELF-CONTROL.”***

This **lack of SELF-CONTROL** takes the form of an “untamed tongue,” uncontrollable sexual lust, insatiable material pursuits, or food/substance abuse often resulting in a **blinding, distorted self-image**. This holds true from your house to the White House. The elusive quest for *contentment and prideful glory* may even lead to “addiction” to competition, diets, exercising, sports, hobby “hopping,” or even “noble” causes like work; often at the expense of daily Bible study, church, time with family—you know, the really *important activities*. This *lack of self-control* will insidiously bring an individual to increasingly heavy burden (pride before the fall--Prov.16:18) squelching the joy and peace in life—while saying, “I can handle it” or “I don’t have a problem.”(Rom.7: 9) This is called---**DENIAL**.

This widespread sin leads an individual to behave quite differently *outside vs. inside* of church as God’s powerful ever-present *relationship is not felt everywhere*. This is known as a **defiled character or a secret life** requiring an exhausting charade of acting as though “all is well.” (Romans 2:16) (James 4:7-10)

This is called---**HYPOCRISY**.

Pridefulness comes in several forms. There is obviously the arrogant *prima donna*—known by all except the one in question, of course; but also the one who just seems to need attention. There is the imbittered—“*Life has never been fair to me, but I guess I’ll just tough it out*” kind of person that is something like a ruminating “time-bomb.” There is the one who tries desperately to “please people,” but then holds grudges against those who simply cannot be pleased. (By the way, you can’t please everybody.) There is even the *spiritually prideful* person who has a “*you’re wrong, I’m right*” attitude about his own “*religion*”—*among other things*--- and finds it difficult to simply love and accept people across denominational borders or even of the same faith. Finally, there is one other form of pridefulness—the outwardly pleasant person who feels he or she is either too busy or has “*not sinned*” enough to need a constant, minute-by-minute relationship with God. This person may actually think that his sin is “*not as bad or serious as others*” so his commitment to constant worship and service to God in all activities of day to day life is simply “*not as necessary*” for him as for others forgiven for “*worse sins*.” **Wrong! This may be the most BLINDED form of pride.** We are ALL equally lost prior to being “reborn” by God upon **surrender of pride.** (Rom.3:23) He loves us all equally; the **ONLY DIFFERENCE** is *how much we love Him* and whether we actually **KNOW HIM PERSONALLY**. In due time—between now and the deathbed---life will prove this “nice” person’s faith in self and people to be woefully inadequate. There is a common denominator among ALL prideful people; that is, a conscious or perhaps unconscious shortcoming in the area of **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND FORGIVENESS toward EVERYONE**---that seemingly impossible task that is most closely accomplished by those who have been---**genuinely humbled**.

**Now, THERE’S a good-enough reason to SURRENDER PRIDE!---RIGHT?**

Back to the Bible. This scripture, *Gal. 5:19-23*, should now sound familiar:

(1.) ***“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, fits of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God.”***

(2.) ***“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: LOVE, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and SELF-CONTROL.”***

Now, one is either “chained” to paragraph 1, or one is “chained” to paragraph 2. Which is it for you?

But then someone may say, “Well, I live in paragraph 1, but I’ve received forgiveness.” Are you sure?

***Matt.6:15---“If you forgive those who sin against you, God will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive those who sin against you, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*** (There should be no past unforgiveness.)

***1 John 4:20---“If someone says “I love God,” but hates another, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?”*** (genuine love for everybody)

***1 John 5:18---“We know that those who have become a part of God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, for God’s Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot get his hands on them.”*** (sinful lifestyle=death)

***Ephes.5:5*** You can be sure that no sexually immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the K’gdom of God.

***1 John 2:15*** “Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you. When you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and the **PRIDE** in our possessions. These are not from the Father. These are from this evil world. This world is fading away, but if you do the will of God, you will live forever.”

**Attention: The following is a VERY IMPORTANT PARAGRAPH!!**

But some might say, “Well, *everyone* is prideful!” and that is indeed the case for the great majority of people around us. But there is a small subset of people who seem to behave a little “differently.” No, not just “nice” people—smaller than that; and not just churchgoers—even smaller than that. They seem “weak,” yet somehow “strong”—no “chip on the shoulder.” They seem to always have *peace and contentment* despite facing similar circumstances as others doing the same job or activity. They tend to be able to make “lemonade” out of “lemon” situations. They tend to have marriages that stay “fresh.” In the “food fight of life,” they seem to be more “observers” than “participants.” They *humbly* seem not to seek or even need the “approval” of others, as though they have already been “*approved*.” They probably also tend to talk freely about that “Jesus Stuff” that most people just can’t understand, or are “too busy” to deal with since there is so much “other stuff they would rather be doing.” They also tend to forgive people unconditionally—no matter what the infraction— as though they KNOW that they themselves have received, not only a “*death pardon*,” but also a “*get out of jail free card*” with the Great Commission that they live and work for the One who freed them. Many even talk passionately about “the life they have given up” as though that life no longer even existed! Well, I’m afraid that this— **“*peace which transcends all understanding*”(Phil. 4:7)** is beyond the mere human reasoning or rationalization of the prideful man, not because of his intelligence, but rather because he has not been allowed to understand it. *One cannot even fully understand the comparatively “tiny joy” of eating ice cream if one has only heard of it, seen others enjoy it, but has NEVER PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED IT THEMSELVES*. You see, the more prideful, “*faith in self*” that one possesses, the more “wisdom and understanding” he *thinks* he has, but really--the more **blinded to the truth** he actually is. However, the *less prideful*, “*faith in self*”--- and the *more faith in “Someone else”*--- that one has, the more *true wisdom and understanding* he or she is given. And in reality this **“Someone else”(God) knows all** our thoughts, actions, and motivations for everything we do---and of course, **He also knows where our true faith lies**. You must admit---the person who “lacks the self- control” of his or her tongue, lust, drinking, spending, gambling, etc. as well as lacks complete peace and contentment in life---**lacks true wisdom**---a lesson people often learn “the hard way,” but *even then*--- insist on “clinging” to pride. **“If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find true life.”**(Matt. 10:39) True wisdom and godliness is via a “narrow gate” (Matt. 7:13) that can only be found upon *surrender of pride*.

**What are some signs of a prideful heart?** Do you tend to resent authority? (employers, teachers, police, other leaders, etc.) Are you constantly frustrated by life’s lack of fairness? Do you find you simply can’t trust anybody? (“Oh, I’ll just do it *myself*!” attitude). Do you hate it when someone snubs you or doesn’t give you the recognition you “deserve?” Do find yourself treating people “like they deserve?” Are you striving to live up to *expectations of people* with some degree of fear of failure or performance anxiety? Are you unable to say, “I love you” or “I was wrong” to people with ease, even those you don’t know well. (Yes, we are called to love people even if we don’t like what they do—unconditionally. No, we are not called to love them only on the “condition” that we *like* them.) Are you a “sore loser”—getting angry with yourself or others in competition? (Is it difficult for you to simply accept your best effort rather than insisting on a winning result?) Do you usually prefer or insist on being “in charge” during group activities? ***These are all signs of an unforgiving attitude resulting from “displaced faith.”*** If we expect “undeserved mercy” from God, then we must give the same to others. If all one’s faith and trust is in God, realizing that---**God is in control**---it makes trust in people much less important. If one gains ALL his “approval” from his *relationship with God*, then approval from other people becomes unnecessary—not in a defiant manner, but rather in a *humble manner*. Having *nothing left to prove to oneself or to others*, the now **humbled person is free to love and accept oneself, others, and circumstances**. **RELIEF!!** Now, do you have difficulty professing your faith to others, especially *outside of church* where it may not be a “safe” subject to discuss? Is your “pride at stake?”—Are you distracted by past *GUILT* or what the other person may think about YOU and all this “Jesus Talk?”(instead of what God thinks) **“So you see, it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all--- it is dead and useless...Do you still think it’s enough just to believe there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?”(James 2:17-20)** i.e. With regard to being “clothed in Christian love,” if your faith is not “shareable,” then it’s NOT “wearable.” “*Lukewarm-ness*” is rejected. (Rev.3: 16) I’m afraid that if you are convicted by this scripture, you can’t just go out and do a few “good works” to be O.K. (Ephesians 2: 9) You’re busted. You must first get your heart “in order,” so that you can then share the message as if you have just found “Hidden Treasure” (Matt. 13: 44)-----Not like teaching Ancient History 101. It’s kind of like DEATH (of self); you just KNOW when you’ve arrived. (Gal.2: 19-20)

Now, ironically, prideful people often **blindly** do not want to accept that they themselves are “proud,” but they truly **despise arrogance and conceit in others**. *The more “proud” a person is, the more he or she hates arrogant people. WHY? They are in competition!! Whereas, truly humbled people simply have compassion for prideful people as they “patiently endure” their association.* God’s call to “die to self” and thus be transformed into Christ’s image is not possible while maintaining “pride in self.” I’m sorry,--- but there is really room for **only one Lord** in this **one-on-ONE RELATIONSHIP**, and not even the “best” of us qualify. That is why the “proud of self” **spiritual cancer must be eradicated** to the point of “shame of self” before one can “die to self” and have God “fill the void” and exhibit His Christ-like Spirit **through** the individual. The prideful person is much more concerned about being revealed and shamed by *people* instead of this “other God” who may seem to him or her to be very far away--- if He even exists at all! (*i.e. a greater fear of people than of God....troubling.*)  
*He is NEVER far away; PRIDE pushes US far away from HIM.*

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**“Mere Christianity”** by C.S. Lewis

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(one of the most renowned Christian authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

**“In God you come up against someone who is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as ‘nothing in comparison’—you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. 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.”** *“That raises a terrible question. How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves to be very religious? I am afraid it means they are worshiping an imaginary God. They theoretically admit to themselves to be nothing in the presence of this phantom God, but are really all the time imagining how He approves of them and thinks them far better than ordinary people: that is, they pay a penny’s worth of imaginary humility to Him and get out of it a pound’s worth of pride towards their fellow-men. I suppose it was of those people Christ was thinking when He said that some would preach about Him and cast out devils in His name, only to be told at the end of the world that He had never known them.”* (reference: Matt. 7:21-3)

\*\*\*\*\***Matt 18:3** Jesus said, “I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of heaven. Therefore, anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”\*\*\*\*\*

**SO, WHAT’S THE SOLUTION?**

Well, you must first get a “made-up mind” that “the pride way” is the WRONG way, even if it is the most popular way. You must be willing to **surrender your pride** and allow your heart to be changed by God. *If you are a TRUE BELIEVER, you have to believe that just as God made you, He can also change you---upon surrendering pride.* The only question is IF AND WHEN this “heart transplant” ever happened to you; *not just a decision of the mind made by you one day, but rather a subsequent change of the “heart, mind, soul, and body” that was done to you as a result of a wholehearted surrender of any prideful lordship of your life.* (“repentance” James 4:7-10) If so, people around you would likely say they can see an **effortless and natural projection of God’s love**: patience, forgiveness, mercy, humility, and constantly seeking to meet the needs of others. People would know that you are indeed unique, and you would likely recognize and seize the opportunity to **share the source of your joy**. If you are not sure that such a “transformation of the heart” has occurred in your life, then perhaps it has not-- or maybe there has been a recurrence of *the deadly spiritual cancer of pride*. That can change however-----it is a matter of your **“free will” & “blind faith.”** *This change of heart by God changes our perception of our SAME SURROUNDINGS such that our reactions to life’s challenges—yes, even death---have a Christ-like peace and contentment not possible while defending pride.* You see, pride is the sign of a **“hard heart”** that is reluctant to forgive or trust and is often insecure, unrealistically perfectionistic, and secretive. **Pride is the “armor of the weak”** because a **defensive posture** promotes a **“chip on the shoulder”** attitude. Whereas, **humility is the “armor of the strong”** because there is no prideful “chip” to be “knocked off.” God is the only One who can change a self-absorbed hard-heart into a servant’s soft-heart of mercy, humility, love, compassion, patience, and true joy. *Anyone can ACT like a Christian; it’s only important that we have a God-made soft-heart that REACTS like a Christian.* Certainly even strong Christians make mistakes, but your life is either dominated by selfish, prideful pursuits or by the freedom and contentment of a humble, loving character. The prideful person may now say, “I don’t want to be any different than I am now, but later if I do, I’ll just change myself.” Now that is true lordship of self! But the godly Christian who is in **fellowship** with God says, **“CREATE IN ME A PURE HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A STEDFAST SPIRIT WITHIN ME.”** (Psalm 51:10) *God loves us all equally, BUT..... He will NOT overtake or uplift a life that is being pridefully “clung to.”* Again, it’s a matter of **“free will.”**

Consider a few scriptures?

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**(Luke 14:33)** “No one can become my disciple without giving up EVERYTHING for me.”

**(Matt. 5:8)** “Blessed are the PURE IN HEART, for they will see God.”

**(Titus 1:15)** “Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are defiled. Such people claim they know God, but they deny Him by the way they live. They are despicable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good.

**(Matt. 22:37)** “You must love the Lord your God with ALL YOUR HEART, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”

**(Luke 14:26)** “If you want to be my follower, you must love Me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.”

**(Matt. 16:24)** “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be if a man gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

Society says, “Be Proud and Look out for #1,” but God wants to make us Christ-like—humble; serving others first—while HE amply meets our needs. Thus He gives us strength and contentment we cannot gain on our own. God insists on being #1 in our lives—not simply a part of our schedule. (“...no other gods before Me.”)

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**STEP 1: (JAMES 4: 7-10)** “So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, sinners; purify your hearts, hypocrites. Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on Him, He will lift you up and give you honor.” Divorce, job loss, substance abuse, sexual addiction, debt burden, or severe illness are God-sized problems that require a God-sized solution. That requires an “on your knees” relationship of the heart, --- a “broken and contrite spirit” trusting God more than oneself.

**STEP 2: HUMBLE YOURSELF TO PEOPLE:** It is not possible to enjoy the benefits of a close relationship with God while practicing “hierarchism” toward God’s children. **(James 2:12)** “... REMEMBER YOU WILL BE JUDGED BY THE LAW OF LOVE, THE LAW THAT WILL SET YOU FREE, FOR THERE WILL BE NO MERCY FOR YOU IF YOU HAVE NOT BEEN MERCIFUL TO OTHERS.”

**(Matt. 6:15)** “If you forgive those who sin against you, God will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Only the Holy Spirit empowers one to love and forgive people.)

**BE WILLING TO YIELD TO OTHERS:** Furthermore, we should “turn over a new leaf” in interpersonal relationships, always putting the needs of others ahead of our own. As a result we find that people will usually be so grateful for such a rare, selfless attitude that they will “bend over backwards” to meet our needs. Lower your expectations of people such that you are never unforgiving. “Play the hand that’s dealt you rather than always complaining about your cards.” Love and accept people even when you don’t agree with what they do. We are to “love your neighbor as yourself”—loving the sinner while hating the sin. As we practice the principles of TRUE LOVE, God will mold our hearts to be more “Christ-like.” Be patient and kind—even if you don’t feel like it. Refuse to be jealous or proudly drawing attention to yourself. Instead of pointing out the shortcomings of others, point out their strong points. Become a “forgiving machine,” always merciful and never stubborn and inflexible. **NOTE:** The one who seeks earthly perfection is always frustrated, critical, cynical, and likely spends too much time looking in the mirror. You simply must seek perfection elsewhere---from God.

Also, be content and accept yourself in the same manner that God loves us--- just as we are---minus the pride. As Paul said, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...” **(Phil. 4:12)** That was BEFORE cars, television, and air conditioning! He also said, “This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it; Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the WORST of them all.” **(1 Tim. 1:15)**

Now, this man who wrote most of the New Testament did NOT sin more than any man in history; but he was completely humbled in knowing that had he not completely surrendered his life to God, he was as doomed as the greatest sinner on earth—we all are. He was devoid of any pride that he was “better” than anyone else---and yes, that is possible. Jesus even humbly washed the feet of His disciples showing us how to humble ourselves to those around us. (John 13) The Ultimate Humbling Experience would be to have to explain one day why you were simply “too good” to be the portrait of love and humility as Jesus lived and taught.

**Remember: The foundation of Christianity is discovering the “bankruptcy of faith in self,” leading to surrender of pride and a HUMBLE “walk” in God’s will. . Whether Christian or not, unforgiveness and preoccupation with the “imperfections” of others--- signifies an even greater “imperfection” within oneself.**

Step 3: **SEEK THE COUNSEL OF A GODLY PERSON WHOM YOU TRUST.** (If you don't trust ANYBODY, seek someone you **SHOULD** be able to trust.) This is especially true if you are "heavy-burdened" with the guilt of "skeletons in the closet." God is the only genuine "baggage handler" and "closet cleaner."

***"The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out."*** (Prov.10: 9)  
Complete faith and trust in God frees one from distrust and failed faith in people, and allows one to simply love and accept people just as they are—unconditionally. Unlike with people, faith in God can ALWAYS be trusted.

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(1.) Understand that the state of the heart is determined when we are **ALONE, ONLY SEEN BY GOD,** or when we are challenged by people or difficult circumstances that illicit our **REACTION.**

(2.) Understand also that each selfish, prideful act or word of disobedience builds more pride, but each humble act or word of unconditional love—freely given away while expecting nothing in return—helps tear down a harmful, prideful heart. **Sin forgiven is sin confessed & surrendered.** (i.e. life-changing repentance)

(3.) Understand finally that growing in Christian love and unlearning destructive prideful practices of the past is often a painful process that becomes easier and easier with time and God's help. However, it is much less painful than allowing pride to grow unchecked until frequent "bad days" become a "bad life."

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***"God sets Himself against the PROUD, but He shows favor to the HUMBLE."***(James 4:6)

***"The person who wishes to boast should BOAST ONLY OF WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE."***(1Corin.1:31)

***"As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead. It doesn't make any difference if we have been circumcised or not. WHAT COUNTS IS WHETHER WE REALLY HAVE BEEN CHANGED INTO NEW AND DIFFERENT PEOPLE. May God's mercy and peace be upon all those who live by this principle. THEY ARE THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD."*** (Gal.6: 14-16)

"Am I trying to 'save' everyone," you ask? Certainly, not. Part of *surrendering one's pride* is understanding that one can't even "save" himself, much less anyone else! I am, however, trying to shed a little "light" in a very **PRIDEFUL** and **BLIND** world where the painful results of that *spiritual cancer called PRIDE* are clearly seen every day. "Who am *I* to write this paper," you ask? Well, I am a formerly very prideful person---with a clear vision of the past and present---who "once was blind, but now I see" that I am "*nothing in comparison*" to Him. That's why you should believe it. I pray that you will. **Just remember:** If you frequently face a "lack of competence" around you, it is instead likely due to a lack of *God's love and forgiveness coming from you.* That's NOT a matter of opinion; it comes from the One who made you. ***"He who belongs to God hears what God says; If you do not hear, it is that you do not belong to God."***(John 8:47) Also, if you want to go through life..... *pridefully* "picking and choosing" whom you love and forgive,....then get ready for someone very close to you to "choose" YOU, NOT to love and forgive.....But now you will understand *why....They learned it from YOU.*

Thanks for this time of self-examination.

***(John 8:32) "And you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."***

***(Gal. 1:10) "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."***

\* Ref: "Mere Christianity"

By C.S.Lewis

P.S. The prideful person may now be tempted to discard this message as "rubbish" or may even reread it in search of some nebulous detail that might serve as a reason—or excuse—to then discard it entirely. Or he may even decide to attack "the messenger," but remember that humility is the "armor of the strong." ***Only those content with sin and "darkness" should be upset with a message of "light."*** If you are convicted by this message, I hope that you too will choose to become "formerly prideful"..... and **SEEK GOD'S INFINITE GRACE.** Some might say, "I'm too old to change; I can't give up my pride--It's all I've got!" But you are never too old to **BE changed,** and if "all you've got" is a *spiritual cancer*, then you have nothing to lose..... ***but much to gain.*** ***(1 John 3:7) "Dear children, do not be led astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he(Jesus) is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin(habitual sin), because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who are the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."***

**"I CANNOT PRAY, IF..."**

(author unknown)

I cannot say "Our" if my faith has no room for others and their needs.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Father" if I do not demonstrate this RELATIONSHIP in my DAILY LIFE.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Who Art In Heaven" if all my interests and pursuits are in earthly things.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Hallowed Be Thy Name" if I, who am called by his name, am not holy.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Thy Kingdom Come" if I am unwilling to give up my own sovereignty and accept the righteous reign of God.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Thy Will Be Done" if I am unwilling or resentful of living HIS WILL in my life.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "On Earth As It Is In Heaven" unless I'm truly ready to give myself to His service here and now.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread" without expending honest effort for it or by ignoring the genuine needs of my fellowmen.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Forgive Us Our Trespasses As we Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us" if I continue to harbor a grudge against ANYONE.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Lead Us Not Into Temptation" if I deliberately CHOOSE to remain in a situation where I am likely to be tempted.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Deliver Us From Evil" if I am not prepared to fight in the spiritual realm with the weapon of prayer.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Thine Is The Kingdom" if I do not give the King the disciplined obedience of a loyal subject.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Thine Is The Power" if I FEAR what my neighbors and friends may say or do.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Thine Is The Glory" if I am seeking MY OWN GLORY FIRST.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Forever" if I am too ANXIOUS about each day's affairs.

^3@}3^

I cannot say "Amen" unless I honestly say, "cost what it may, this is my prayer".

^3@}3^

REMEMBER: The Christian walk is indeed a "walk," not a "run." The one who is constantly "pursuing" contentment by earthly means is still "searching." The one who simply "walks" daily with God has no "burning desire" to "chase" after anything else-- except an even closer relationship with Him.

The "race" is over; he or she was "lost," but now has "found" contentment in Christ. God bless you.

**HOW TO MAKE HEAVEN YOUR HOME**

(Pray this prayer to God from your heart and on your knees—He waits for you to surrender your pride.)

"Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and I need your life-changing GRACE and FORGIVENESS. I now turn from my sins and personally invite Jesus to be the Lord of my life. I promise to live for You as You reveal Yourself to me through your Word, the Bible. In Jesus name, I pray, Amen.

1. "For all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23
2. "For the wages of sin is DEATH, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Rom. 6:23
3. "Unless you repent, (turn from your sins) you will likewise perish." Luke 13:3
4. "For if we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart, we shall be saved." Romans 10:9
5. JOHN 3:3 "Jesus said, 'I assure you, unless you are BORN AGAIN, you can never see the Kingdom of God.'
6. JOHN 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him(trusts) will not perish but have eternal life. There is no judgment awaiting those who trust Him. But those who do not trust Him have already been judged for not believing in(trusting) the Son of God....The light came from heaven into this world, but they loved the darkness more than the light... They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness."