

## “Are Ye Stripped of Pride?”

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I am grateful to be with you today. I pray that the Holy Ghost will be with us and that you and I might be taught and edified by the Spirit.

One summer many, many years ago, my mother decided it would be a great project for her children to refinish the dining room chairs. The chairs were painted a dark cherry color, and my mother had discovered that underneath that paint was good, hard maple wood.

I will never forget that experience. We began by applying a nasty solvent called toluene to all the painted surfaces, and then we scraped the paint off. Once the paint was removed, we had to sand the wood with several grades of sandpaper in order to remove the very last bits of paint and to prepare the wood for a new finish. When the sanding was finally done, we applied a finish to highlight the grain and enhance the wood’s natural color. In the final step we sealed the new hardwood finish with two coats of varnish. Those chairs were transformed!

I think about that experience every time I read Alma’s penetrating question to the members of the Church in Zarahemla:

*Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold*

*ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.<sup>1</sup>*

The words “are ye stripped of pride?” evoke in me images and smells from that summer. I think of toluene and scraping and stripping and sanding to get down to bare wood. When I think of the finishing process with a vibrant color and the protecting sealing varnish, I think of the description of the Savior as “the author and finisher of our faith”<sup>2</sup> and the words of King Benjamin to his people:

*Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his.<sup>3</sup>*

My message today is about being stripped of pride. I want to talk with you about overcoming pride and becoming humble followers of Christ.

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### **Pride—The Universal Sin, the Great Vice**

Twenty years ago President Ezra Taft Benson delivered a powerful sermon on pride. It is a talk all of us should read carefully and often. Speaking in general conference, President Benson said:

*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. . . .*

*Pride affects all of us at various times and in various degrees. . . .*

*Pride is the universal sin, the great vice.<sup>4</sup>*

Pride in all of its manifestations has played a central role in the struggle between good and evil, a struggle going back to the War in Heaven. The seriousness of the sin of pride is rooted deep in the doctrines of salvation.

In premortality we lived with our Heavenly Father as spirit sons and daughters. In the premortal council, Heavenly Father presented His great plan of happiness through which we could obtain immortality and eternal life.

Our Father knew that all of us would sin and “come short of the glory of God,”<sup>5</sup> so He sent His Beloved Son to atone for our sins, redeem us, and give us the strengthening power to become more like Him and our Father and ultimately receive the greatest gift of God—eternal life.

Here is the Great Truth in the Father’s plan: Through the Atonement of Christ we can receive peace, joy, happiness, and eternal life with our Heavenly Father. There is a Redeemer! Jesus Christ, the Holy One of Israel, is the only “name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup>

The Father’s plan was not received well by all of His children. Lucifer, a son of the morning, rebelled against the Father, against His Beloved Son, and against the plan. He presented his own proposal:

*Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.<sup>7</sup>*

There are several things to note about Satan’s proposal:

1. Satan would replace Christ; indeed, there was no need for Christ and no need for an atoning sacrifice at all.
2. There would be no agency. Everyone would be redeemed; no one would be lost.
3. It would surely happen, and Satan would be the sole reason why.
4. Therefore, he should have God’s honor and glory.

Here, in stark contrast to the Father’s plan and the Great Truth, was Satan’s Great Lie: You can obtain joy, happiness, and eternal life without Christ, without God, and without any special effort on your part; and Satan would make all this happen without any sacrifice, pain, or suffering on his part—rather by the sheer force of his power.

It was and is the Great Lie by the father of lies. It would not have worked. It was contrary to the will of the Father and to eternal laws of justice and mercy. And there, right in the middle of the Great Lie, at the very center of Satan’s rebellious, diabolical scheme, was pride. There was pride and all of its sordid offspring—arrogance, selfishness, greed, vain ambition, unrighteous dominion—on a cosmic scale.

The Father rejected Satan’s proposal. Then, driven by deep, deep pride and enmity toward the Father and the Son, Satan made war in heaven. He “accused [our brethren] before our God day and night”<sup>8</sup> and pushed the Great Lie with such deception and persuasion that a third part of the hosts of heaven followed him. But the forces of righteousness “overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the

word of their testimony.”<sup>9</sup> And so Satan “was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”<sup>10</sup>

Satan continues his war against God and us in the mortal world, where we are subject to the frailties, weaknesses, and temptations of the natural man. As it was in the premortal realm, so it is on earth; pride is at the heart of Satan’s war on God and on His children. It has been that way since the days of Adam.

But pride has become especially critical in our day. We live in the dispensation of the fulness of times when the Lord is blessing His children with great knowledge, remarkable technologies, expanded opportunities for learning, and unprecedented wealth. With these blessings, however, comes this warning from the Lord:

*It must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give; but beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old.*<sup>11</sup>

Beware of pride! This is the warning voice of the Lord to us now, in our day. We have obtained so much control over the resources of the earth, so much understanding of the biology of life, so much capacity to travel and to communicate instantly that we have become “puffed up” in our learning and our apparent control and power. Pride and its children—materialism, envy, arrogance, greed, thirst for recognition, and lust for control and dominion—have become rampant in our culture and society. Modern Babylon is awash in pride.

The Book of Mormon prophets saw our day and spoke powerfully about modern-day pride. In his prophecy of the last days, Nephi saw that many would “be puffed up in their hearts”<sup>12</sup> and “wear stiff necks and high heads.”<sup>13</sup>

Hundreds of years later Moroni wrote these words about our day:

*Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.*

*And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts.*<sup>14</sup>

The Book of Mormon was written for us. It bears witness of Jesus Christ and warns us of the perils of pride, both in prosperity and in adversity. In the story of Laman and Lemuel, we see two proud brothers who murmured and rebelled and were filled with resentment and anger in the face of the loss of their home and possessions, their afflictions in the wilderness, and their failed expectations of leadership. Despite visits from angels and even the voice of the Lord and many other blessings and miracles, pride took root in their souls, their hearts were hardened, and they rejected the Lord and His prophets.

We also see this same pattern of pride, hardness of heart, and rejection of the truth in the face of prosperity. Indeed, the Book of Mormon is a record of an entire people greatly favored of the Lord who succumbed to the temptations of pride, rejected the Lord, and were destroyed.

The message is clear: Whether in prosperity or in adversity, if we are not diligent and faithful, even the elect of God, even those greatly blessed by the Lord, can fall prey to the Great Lie and become hard-hearted, self-absorbed, stiff-necked, and puffed up in their pride.

This is something we see all too often. You may have seen the interaction of pride and adversity among people you know. Perhaps because of some setback or a failed expectation or some other problem, a faithful member of the Church feels some resentment, some sense of being a victim unfairly treated. That resentment grows and festers and feeds on pride until it turns to anger and even bitterness. Over the years the member stops coming to Church, fails to keep the commandments, and finds ways to rationalize sinful behavior.

Or perhaps you have seen the interaction of pride and prosperity. It happens to wonderful people who in their college years are full of promise. These are people of great ability and spirituality. They marry in the temple, attend some of the country's finest graduate schools, and graduate with distinction. They are blessed with beautiful children and wonderful family lives. They are active in the Church and serve in positions of responsibility.

But something happens to them on the way to a life of service, joy, and happiness. What happens is pride. Somewhere along the way the honors of men, wealth, power, and recognition become more important than their love of the Lord, the love of their spouses and children, and their service in the kingdom. They divorce, leave the Church and their families, and become wholly worldly in their attitudes and their behavior.

The effects of pride, whether in adversity or in prosperity, are deadly. As Alma prophesied:

*They that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.*<sup>15</sup>

This calamity comes little by little over time. Pride and its effects are like a thin film of darkness that begins to settle on the soul layer by layer, year by year, until the light of the gospel grows dim. Such people become hardened in their hearts, selfish in their behavior, and puffed up in the pride of their eyes.

There is always, of course, hope. The proud and selfish souls can come back. But after years of darkness and so many layers of pride, it will take a lot of spiritual solvent and a lot of spiritual scraping and sanding to get down to a bare soul and a soft heart. And think of the time they have wasted, the opportunities for growth and becoming that they have lost, the

lives they could have saved, and the joy they could have received had they seen what was happening early on and acted on it to change. Had they just recognized those first thin films of pride, they might have repented and sought the Lord's redeeming power right then. Had they seen it and acted, they could have humbled themselves and been stripped of pride.

Well did the Lord warn us: Beware of pride. Beware; be alert; be on guard against the perils of pride. May I suggest some things to watch for, some things of which we should all beware? I think of this list as red flags of pride. These red flags are like the little flags that landscapers put on the lawn when they have applied dangerous chemicals. Thin films of pride come with warning flags like the following:

1. Do you find yourself critiquing the talks in sacrament meeting?
2. Are you critical of others? Do you look down on others? Do you scorn or ridicule them?
3. When adversity strikes, do you hear a voice inside that says, "Why me?"
4. Do you react to prophetic counsel by ignoring it, being upset by it, or interpreting it to suit your own desires?
5. When you do something good, do you hear a voice inside congratulating yourself?
6. Do you feel self-gratification and a sense of importance in your knowledge and skill?
7. If someone you know receives something good, do you hear a voice inside saying, "What about me?"
8. Do you find ways to let others know of your success without appearing to boast?
9. If someone corrects a mistake you made, do you feel defensive and resentful?
10. When someone does something that creates inconvenience for you, do you feel annoyed?

I could go on. There are many, many red flags of pride.

Brothers and sisters, I did not get this list from a book. I have firsthand experience with the questions I have asked you, and I know that if you and I ever feel any of them or hear any of them in our minds, we need to recognize them for what they are—the echoes of the Great Lie, the beginning of a call to enmity with our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In that moment of recognition, we stand at a crossroads between two paths. We can follow the path of the Great Lie and act on those prideful feelings, or we can follow the path of the Great Truth and choose Christ. It is a choice. Are we going to keep our covenants, or are we going to break them? To reject the Great Lie and choose Christ takes an act of will. We have to consciously say to ourselves: “I am not going down the path of the Great Lie. With faith in Christ and with His help, I am going to walk the path of the Great Truth.”

Heavenly Father’s plan to help us make that choice was beautifully summarized by Alma in his words to the people of Ammonihah:

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering.*<sup>16</sup>

We must first catch ourselves in the moment when prideful thoughts or feelings come and then act in faith to choose Christ, seeking God’s help in prayer. This is what Alma meant when he admonished us to “humble [ourselves] before the Lord . . . and watch and pray continually.”

But that is not the end. We must not only catch ourselves in prideful thoughts and feelings, not only choose Christ in that moment, but through the Atonement of Christ and the

power of the Holy Ghost repent of our sins, receive forgiveness, and be led by the Holy Spirit to become “humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering.”

When we choose Christ, acting in faith to humble ourselves before Him, we put ourselves in the hands of the Master Finisher. As we do His will, He will help us be stripped of pride and become meek and lowly in heart, filled with His pure and perfect love.

The Lord’s finishing process may not always be pleasant. He will chasten and correct and give us experiences that polish us. If we are steadfast and immovable in doing what He wants us to do, we will not be deflected from the true path by adversity or prosperity. We will become the humble followers of Christ, and the day will come when He will seal us His.

Being stripped of pride and becoming meek and lowly in heart is not easy. We cannot do it by ourselves. But there are patterns of life we can establish that will help us beware of pride, remember Christ, humble ourselves before Him, and put ourselves in His hands. I will leave you today with four patterns:

#### **Pattern Number 1: Never Do Anything to Drive the Spirit Away**

The Holy Ghost is essential to the Lord’s finishing process. But the Spirit is very sensitive to any degree of unrighteousness. Don’t do anything or wear anything or say anything or read anything or listen to anything or watch anything or go anywhere that would drive the Spirit away.

#### **Pattern Number 2: Don’t Let the World Get into Your Heart**

Never set your heart on things—on money or houses or cars or clothes or any other thing. Don’t let a career or power or the honors of men get into your heart. They can get there very easily if you are not careful. Set your heart on the Lord and His kingdom, on your fam-

ily and the temple and the things of eternity. Always live modestly within your means, and always pay your tithing and give a generous fast offering.

### **Pattern Number 3: Serve the Lord**

Accept and always magnify callings in the Church and volunteer to be of service in the kingdom. When the promptings of the Spirit come sending you on the Lord's errand to rescue a lost soul or to comfort one in need, act on those promptings quickly as soon as you can.

### **Pattern Number 4: Stand in Holy Places**

Make your home a sacred, holy place where the Spirit may dwell. Be in the chapel to partake of the sacrament every Sunday and prayerfully renew your covenant to "always remember him and keep his commandments."<sup>17</sup> If you live near a temple, go often to the house of the Lord. Relive those sacred ordinances and covenants. Reflect on your gratitude for the plan of salvation and for the Great Truth of the Atonement, on its power in your life, and on your need for the blessings and strength that are in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, I know that if we establish these patterns in our lives we will beware of pride, we will be true to our covenants, and we will be in the Master's hands. You and I have much work to do. The Lord is moving with power in the earth preparing us and the kingdom for His return. Given all the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, you and I need to be like Ammon, the son of Mosiah, a great and mighty missionary who said:

*Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things.*<sup>18</sup>

This combination of humility and courage is what we need, and it is precisely what comes

to those who reject the Great Lie and humble themselves before the Lord. Listen to the way President Henry B. Eyring described the process that occurs when we remember the Great Truth of the Savior and put ourselves in His hands:

*Those memories, if we choose to invite them, can produce a powerful blend of courage and meekness. No problem is too hard for us with his help. No price is too great to pay for what he offers us. And still in our greatest successes we feel as little children. And in our greatest sacrifices we still feel in his debt, wanting to give more. That is a humility which is energizing, not enervating. We can choose that shield as a protection against pride.*<sup>19</sup>

Brothers and sisters, our protection, our hope, our salvation is in Jesus Christ. I bear witness of Him, the Holy One of Israel, the Light and the Life of the World. He is the Living Son of the Living God. This is His church and kingdom. I know that if we humble ourselves before Him and put ourselves in His Hands, we will be stripped of pride and He will polish us and finish us and seal us His. I know that is true.

I invoke the blessings of our loving Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son upon you this day, that you may become the humble followers of Christ and that the peace, joy, happiness, and power of heaven may flow into your life and into the lives of your families and loved ones now and forever. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **Notes**

1. Alma 5:28.
2. Hebrews 12:2; see also Moroni 6:4.
3. Mosiah 5:15.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4, 6.
5. Romans 3:23.
6. 2 Nephi 31:21.
7. Moses 4:1.

8. Revelation 12:10.
9. Revelation 12:11.
10. Revelation 12:9.
11. D&C 38:39.
12. 2 Nephi 28:9.
13. 2 Nephi 28:14.
14. Mormon 8:35–36.

15. Alma 12:11.
16. Alma 13:28.
17. D&C 20:77.
18. Alma 26:12.
19. Henry B. Eyring, “A Child of God,” BYU devotional address, 21 October 1997.