Today we continue the sermon series for this Summer, “Life Lessons from Proverbs through Disney’s Magic.” These messages leverage inspiring moments from Disney movies to bring life-giving lessons from the Book of Proverbs, such as wisdom, justice, and friendship, among others, into sharper focus. So far, we have covered the themes of wisdom, righteousness, speech, trust, friendship, and diligence using movies such as Lion King, Mulan, Bambi, Raya and the Last Dragon, Toy Story, and Ratatouille.

Today’s message is about Pride, and the primary Scripture we are referencing is Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

But before I get into the subject, there is an important distinction between sinful pride and what we might call “healthy pride” or “commendable pride.” Sinful pride is an inflated sense of one’s personal status or accomplishments, often leading to a lack of consideration for others. It is a self-focused attitude that breeds arrogance and fosters division.

On the other hand, healthy or commendable pride refers to the satisfaction or joy we derive from the accomplishments or qualities of someone else, especially someone we have guided or supported. For example, as a father, I tell my children, “I’m proud of you,” to express my delight in their growth, achievements, and character. This kind of pride comes from a place of love and encouragement. It is about appreciating and affirming others, not elevating oneself.

We can also experience healthy pride in our achievements from a place of gratitude and acknowledgment. For example, this form of pride is characterized by humility and a recognition that our abilities and opportunities ultimately come from God. It is a way of saying, “Look what God has enabled me to do,” rather than, “Look what I have done.”

So, the key difference between these two kinds of pride lies in their focus and their fruits. Sinful pride is self-focused and breeds arrogance, division, and disregard for God. Healthy pride is others-focused and God-focused, cultivating encouragement, gratitude, unity, and love.

With this in mind, today, we are discussing the bad kind of Pride that leads to sin. The Bible has many things to say about Pride, which are not positive. The Bible warns against it because pride leads to sin. Proverbs 11: 2 states, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace…”

This is clearly played out in the first story of the Bible in the book of Genesis. Genesis 3 presents a profound account of how sin entered the world, and it distinctly reveals that pride was at the root of these catastrophic events. When the serpent first tempted Eve to disobey God, it did by luring Eve towards pride and self-fulfillment, making her believe she knew better than God. Here is the heart of the story,

Eve said, “[B]ut God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’ “But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:3-5

Of course, Eve was deceived. One can argue that she did not know better. Still, it was pride that pushed her and then Adam too to reach for the forbidden fruit. God instructed them not to eat from that tree, but they fell for the temptation. Pride convinced them they could become like God, independent of him. The serpent knew they would never attain a God-like status, so it deceived them to destroy them.

This highlights a stark truth, as stated in Proverbs 16:25: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” Considering this and the Adam and Eve story, we can agree that pride leads to sin and sin to death.

There is a Disney movie titled “The Emperor’s New Groove.” In this movie, Emperor Kuzco, the film’s protagonist, is a youthful and carefree ruler. His pride is evident in the way he treats his subjects with disdain, dismissing their needs and wants for his own comfort and pleasure. However, soon he is caught in the trap of pride, leading to his downfall. His pride blinded him to the treachery of his advisor Yzma, who schemes to kill him, but her servant accidentally transforms him into a Llama instead.

The movie opens with a song called “Perfect World,” which describes the character of Emperor Kuzco. Here is the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uT4ySwoh27Q&feature=youtu.be>

Did you catch some of the lyrics? Here is what the song says about Kuzco,

“He’s the sovereign of the nation  
He’s the hippest cat in creation  
He’s the alpha, the omega, a to z  
And this perfect world will spin  
Around his every little whim  
’Cause this perfect world begins and ends with [Kuzco].”

Before his fall and transformation into a Llama, Kuzco considered himself the center of the universe, a god-like being deserving of everything with no consideration for the needs of others. He was consumed by pride, unaware of its subtle and insidious nature (just like Eve and Adam).

This kind of pride is dangerous; it is destructive as it is seductive. It always masks behind the façade of noble and righteous acts “I am better, more deserving,” making it even more deceitful.

There is a similar story in the Bible about a man name Nebuchadnezzar. The story of King Nebuchadnezzar is found in the Book of Daniel.

In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king of his time, boasts about his accomplishments, saying, “Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). However, the moment he said this, a voice from heaven proclaimed his punishment for his arrogance, turning him into a beast-like figure, stripped of his glory much like Kuzco in his llama form (see picture on screen). Soon after that, he was driven away from people and lived among the wild animals. Eventually, he recognized God’s sovereignty (Daniel 4:32), and his pride was replaced with humility.

Emperor Kuzco and King Nebuchadnezzar’s stories are a powerful testament to James 4:6, which says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Jesus taught a parable specifically about this in Luke 18:9-14. In this parable, a Pharisee, confident in his righteousness, thanks God that he is not like other people: robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even the tax collector praying nearby. Meanwhile, the tax collector humbly asks God for mercy. Jesus concludes the parable by saying,

“I tell you that this man (the tax collector), rather than the other (the Pharisee), went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In this parable, Jesus taught that the Pharisee’s pride prevented him from truly understanding his own spiritual state and standing before God, illustrating Proverbs 26:12, “Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them.”

These stories and characters from the Bible show us how pride blinds us, disconnects us from others, and, most importantly, from God. They demonstrate the dangers of self-exaltation but also teach us the grace and exaltation that come with humility.

Now, let’s turn a mirror to our hearts and ask ourselves honestly: Are we, like Kuzco, Nebuchadnezzar, or the Pharisee, taking pride in our virtues while looking down on others? Like Adam and Eve, are we striving to be above God by disregarding his teachings and wisdom? Or are we, like the tax collector, humbling ourselves before God, recognizing our need for his mercy and grace?

Let’s be careful how we answer these questions; pride is a master of disguise. Perhaps most of us would not experience pride in such drastic ways as Kuzco, Adam and Eve, and Nebuchadnezzar. Still, we struggle with it in more subtle yet pervasive ways, for example: (1) When we are unwilling to learn from others. Pride can cause us to devalue others, assuming we have nothing to learn from them. (2) When we selectively listen to people based on our biases or prejudices, asserting that some people’s thoughts, experiences, and perspectives are more valuable than others. This is pride-induced discrimination. (3) But perhaps the most insidious form of pride is an unwillingness to admit when we are wrong or that someone else knows better than us.

The challenge with these forms of pride is that they can be more challenging to identify and address because they are often masked by justifications, discrimination, and biases.

Let me ask again: Are you struggling with pride? Jesus gives an example of how to deal with it.

In the book of Philippians, chapter 2, we find the perfect blueprint to counteract pride: self-emptying humility, a concept often referred to as “Kenosis.”

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:5-8

These verses beautifully illustrate the absolute humility of Jesus Christ, who, although being God himself, chose to empty himself of divine privileges to take on the form of a servant. He humbled himself, submitting to the will of the Father, even to the point of death on the cross.

Jesus’ actions stand in profound contrast against human nature, for example, Adam and Eve. While they pursued to be God-like, desiring to elevate themselves to attain knowledge and power, Jesus voluntarily abandoned divinity status, lowering himself into a servant to reconcile humanity—including Adam and Eve.

So, while Adam and Eve’s pride led to humanity’s fall, Jesus’ humility led to humanity’s redemption. This stark contrast demonstrates the destructive consequences of pride and the transformative power of humility.

As I conclude, here is an excellent quote from C.S. Lewis that explains this masterfully,

“[P]ride always means enmity... Not only enmity between man and man but enmity to God. [I]n God, you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you acknowledge God [in this way] - and, therefore, understand your insignificance 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.”**

According to Lewis (and Proverbs and Jesus), the secret to combating pride lies in looking upward, not downward.

Here is the invitation and good news: Let’s not look down on people and away from God. Let’s not allow pride to take root in our hearts. Let’s maintain a humble attitude towards each other and before God. Let’s look up to God and learn and follow his wisdom. Let’s learn from Jesus, who said, “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” And the good news is that, truly, there is blessing and rest for those who reject pride and welcome humility, as James 4:10 reminds us, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”