

August 28, 2026



NEWSLETTER



MIDDLETOWN
SDA CHURCH

SELF-EXALTAION:THE PATHWAY TO PRIDE



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August 2026



ORIGINS OF SIN: PRIDE



By: Reneé Russell

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before destruction.” Proverbs 16:18

Welcome back to the Middletown SDA Church Newsletter. We hope that you have been blessed by this series thus far and that you will continue to learn more about the origins and progression of sin. In this issue, we will examine self-exaltation—how it develops, how it gives birth to pride, and where pride ultimately leads. We pray that through this message, we will be spiritually encouraged to walk with Christ in newness of life and remain on the straight and narrow path that leads to Him.

The tale is often told of a great king who built a magnificent glass tower that seemed to touch the sky. Standing at its highest point and looking down upon his kingdom, he declared himself master of time and earth. Everything he saw below, he attributed to his own wisdom, power, and accomplishments. Yet the king quickly discovered that greatness built upon self-exaltation cannot stand. A sudden wind swept through the kingdom and shattered the tower of glass. In a moment, the monument to his greatness came crashing down. The king who had attributed his achievements to himself was forced to confront a humbling reality: he was neither the author of time nor the ruler of the earth.

Though this is merely an illustration, its principle is not new. Throughout the Bible, we find men and women who allowed success, position, beauty, knowledge, or power to turn their eyes away from God and toward themselves. What begins as self-exaltation, when left unchecked, develops into pride; and pride, when cherished, can lead the heart into rebellion against God.

In this issue, we will examine the lives of 2 kings who allowed pride to influence their lives. Through their experiences, we will recognize not only the destructive nature of pride, but also the transformative power of repentance and deliverance. Most importantly, we will see the heart of a loving God who desires to redeem humanity and deliver us from the strongholds of pride.

King Saul: When Pride Refuses to Bow

When I think of pride, one of the first kings who comes to mind is King Saul. His story is one that we know well and often use as an example of the dangers of pride. Yet Saul's journey did not begin with rebellion.

The Bible describes Saul as a "choice young man, and a goodly," who initially demonstrated humility and had no ambition to become king. Israel, however, desired an earthly king like the nations around them. God warned them of the consequences of their request, but nevertheless permitted them to have the desire of their hearts and so Saul was chosen to become Israel's first king.

During the early part of his reign, Saul experienced success under the direction of God. But as his position and influence increased, something within his heart began to change.

The turning point becomes especially evident when God instructed Saul to utterly destroy Amalek. Instead, Saul spared King Agag, along with "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings" and everything that appeared valuable. He obeyed God—but only as far as he thought necessary.

When Samuel confronted him, Saul did not humble himself and accept responsibility. Instead, he justified his actions. He claimed that the animals had been spared so they could be offered as sacrifices to the Lord. Then he shifted the responsibility to the people.

Saul's response reveals one of the dangers of pride: pride does not merely disobey; it attempts to justify disobedience.

Samuel responded with the solemn words:

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."

1 Samuel 15:22–23

Because Saul rejected the word of the Lord, God rejected him from continuing as king. The servant of the Lord tells us, "Saul was in disfavor with God, and yet unwilling to humble his heart in penitence." PP 622

This was Saul's great tragedy. His failure did not have to be the end of his story. God desired repentance, but Saul's pride prevented him from truly humbling his heart. From this point onward, we see a downward progression. Pride led to stubbornness; stubbornness led to continued rebellion and rebellion separated him further from God.

Near the end of his life, Saul desperately sought direction from the Lord, but received no answer, "neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Instead of allowing this moment to bring him to genuine repentance, Saul sought counsel from the very familiar spirits that he himself had previously commanded to be put away.

How far pride had carried him!

The king who had once been chosen by God was now seeking answers through a forbidden source. Saul's life demonstrates that cherished pride is rarely stationary. When it is not surrendered to God, it can gradually carry a person farther and farther from Him.

King Nebuchadnezzar: The Beastly Encounter

We can contrast Saul's experience with that of another powerful monarch—King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar is famously known as the Babylonian ruler who destroyed Jerusalem and carried God's people into captivity. Yet while God's people were physically captive in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar himself was being held captive by something far more dangerous: pride and self-exaltation.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled over Babylon, one of the most magnificent kingdoms of the ancient world. During his reign, however, God gave him a troubling dream. The king summoned the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans and demanded that they reveal both the dream and its interpretation, but...

They could not!

Enraged, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. Because Daniel, and his companions were numbered among the wise men, their lives were also threatened.

Daniel's response, however, was remarkably different from that of the Babylonian wise men. Rather than relying upon himself, Daniel turned to God. He requested time and then joined Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in prayer, seeking mercy from the God of heaven. It was during this season of praying that God revealed the mystery to Daniel.

Daniel then stood before Nebuchadnezzar and described the great image the king had seen: a head of gold; breast and arms of silver; belly and thighs of brass; legs of iron; and feet composed partly of iron and partly of clay. Finally, a stone "cut out without hands" struck the image, breaking the kingdoms of this world into pieces.

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ORIGINS OF SIN: PRIDE



By: Reneé Russell

Continued...

Nebuchadnezzar was told, "Thou art this head of gold." — Daniel 2:38
Yet the dream contained a lesson that extended far beyond Babylon's greatness. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would not last forever. Other kingdoms would rise after his, and ultimately the God of heaven would establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed.
Upon hearing the revelation, Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and acknowledged, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets." — Daniel 2:47

It appeared that the king had learned his lesson. But **recognition is** not always surrender. "For a time afterward, Nebuchadnezzar was influenced by the fear of God; but his heart was not yet cleansed from worldly ambition and a desire for self-exaltation. The prosperity attending his reign filled him with pride." — Prophets and Kings, p. 503

Nebuchadnezzar recognized the God of heaven as a God, but he had not yet fully surrendered to Him as the God who rules over the kingdoms of men, sets up kings, and removes them according to His will.
We see this clearly in Daniel 3, when the king constructed an enormous image of gold and commanded representatives throughout his kingdom to bow before it. Anyone who refused would be cast into a burning fiery furnace.
But in a time of great apostasy, God had faithful men who would not bow. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood before the most powerful monarch in the world and declared that their God was able to deliver them. But even if He chose not to, they would neither serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods nor worship the golden image.

Their refusal infuriated the king.

Nebuchadnezzar commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual and ordered some of the strongest men in his army to cast the three Hebrews into the flames.
Then something happened that the king could not explain.
He rose in astonishment. Had they not cast three men bound into the furnace? Yet Nebuchadnezzar now saw four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and he declared that the form of the fourth was "like the Son of God."

This raises an interesting question:
How did a heathen king recognize the Son of God?
The answer is found in the testimony of God's people.
"The Hebrew captives had lived their faith before Nebuchadnezzar. Through their lives, their character, and their words, they had presented the principles of righteousness and taught those around them about the God whom they worshipped. They had spoken of Christ, the coming Redeemer. Therefore, when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and saw the fourth Person walking among the flames, he recognized the One of whom he had heard." —
What a testimony!

Their faithful lives had preached before the miracle ever occurred.

Nebuchadnezzar's story reveals several powerful themes: the danger of pride, the progression from self-exaltation to idolatry, the power of prayer, the influence of a Godly example, and God's persistent desire to save.

Unlike Saul, Nebuchadnezzar was not raised with the knowledge of the true God. He had been born into a culture saturated with idolatry. Yet God did not abandon him. Again and again, God revealed Himself to the king.

He revealed Himself through Daniel.
He revealed Himself through prophecy.
He revealed Himself through the faithfulness of the 3 Hebrew boys.
He revealed Himself in the fiery furnace.

Yet, pride remained.

Eventually Nebuchadnezzar stood upon his royal palace, looked across magnificent Babylon, and declared:
"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built... by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" — Daniel 4:30
There it was again: I have built. My power. My majesty.
The king had forgotten the One who had permitted him to possess everything he was boasting about.

God then allowed Nebuchadnezzar to be brought down from his exalted position. For a period described in Scripture as "seven times," the mighty ruler of Babylon lived like a beast of the field.
The man who had spent his life looking down upon everyone else finally learned to look up.
Nebuchadnezzar testified:
"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me..." — Daniel 4:34

Those words capture the turning point of his story:
"I... lifted up mine eyes unto heaven." The king who once exalted himself now exalted God. Nebuchadnezzar concluded his testimony by saying, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase." — Daniel 4:37

Here we see the beautiful contrast between Saul and Nebuchadnezzar. Both men struggled with pride. Both were confronted by God. Both experienced the consequences of their choices. But their stories ultimately moved in different directions. Saul continued resisting humility, while Nebuchadnezzar finally looked toward heaven. And therein lies the hope of this study.

Pride does not have to have the final word. The same God who humbled Nebuchadnezzar desired to restore him. And the same God desires to deliver us today. He does not expose the pride within our hearts merely to condemn us, but so that we might recognize it, repent of it, and allow Him to transform us.
The question, then, is not simply, "Do I have pride?"

Perhaps the greater question is:
When God reveals pride in me, will I defend myself like Saul—or will I finally look toward heaven?

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"God's Word is plain. Its teachings cannot be mistaken. Shall we obey it, just as He has given it to us, or shall we seek to find how far we can digress and yet be saved? Would that all connected with our institutions would receive and follow the divine light, and thus be enabled to transmit light to those who walk in darkness." —Evangelism, p. 271.

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." — Matthew 11:28

Everyone is welcome! Come with an open heart and leave with renewed hope in Jesus Christ. We look forward to worshipping with you and studying God's Word together.



NATURE FEATURE



The Beaver's Sabbath

Did you know that beavers have been observed showing fascinating patterns of work and rest?

These industrious animals spend much of their time building dams, gathering food, and maintaining their homes. Some accounts have even noted reduced activity on the Sabbath, offering a beautiful nature illustration of God's invitation to rest.

The beaver reminds us that although there is a time to work diligently, there is also a time to **stop, rest, and remember our Creator**. Just as God rested on the seventh day after His work of creation, He gave the Sabbath to us as a special time to set aside our daily labor and enjoy fellowship with Him.



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



MIDDLETOWN SDA CHURCH

**Christ, the Author of
Liberty: The Higher
Allegiance**
-Claudia Douglas

MESSAGE FROM RELIGIOUS LIBERTY LEADER

“When enthusiastic crowds sought to take Jesus by force and make Him an earthly king, He did not seize the political momentum. Instead, He withdrew alone to the mountain (John 6:15). He knew that the liberty He came to give could never be secured through political office, legislative victories, or civil enforcement.”

– Read more on the next page.



THUS SAITH THE LORD...

The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. The gospel of the grace of God, with its spirit of self-abnegation, can never be in harmony with the spirit of the world. The two principles are antagonistic....

But today in the religious world there are multitudes who, as they believe, are working for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ as an earthly and temporal dominion. They desire to make our Lord the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, the ruler in its courts and camps, its legislative halls, its palaces and market places. They expect Him to rule through legal enactments, enforced by human authority. Since Christ is not now here in person, they themselves will undertake to act in His stead, to execute the laws of His kingdom. The establishment of such a kingdom is what the Jews desired in the days of Christ.

– God's Amazing Grace, p 13

MINISTRY HIGHLIGHTS

Wednesday

Children's Bible Study: 6:00 PM

Prayer Meeting- 7:00 PM

Apologetics Bible Class- Thur. 7 PM





RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



By: Claudia Douglas

Christ, the Author of Liberty: The Higher Allegiance

When the feet of the Savior trod the dust of this earth, He entered a world fractured by intense political polarization. The Jewish nation chafed under Roman occupation, divided into warring factions—some calling for violent rebellion and others compromising for political favor. Yet, in the midst of this explosive social climate, Jesus consistently refused to align with any earthly political movement. As Ellen G. White notes in *The Desire of Ages*, “The government of Israel was at that time under the control of Romans, and the Jews were chagrined and dissatisfied... But Jesus did not interfere with those in power. He did not attempt civil reforms, nor attack national abuses, nor condemn national enemies. He kept aloof from earthly governments” (1898, Chapter 55, para. 3).

“My Kingdom Is Not of This World”

When enthusiastic crowds sought to take Jesus by force and make Him an earthly king, He did not seize the political momentum. Instead, He withdrew alone to the mountain (John 6:15). He knew that the liberty He came to give could never be secured through political office, legislative victories, or civil enforcement. Standing later before Pontius Pilate, the representative of the world’s greatest empire, Jesus declared the foundational truth of Christian liberty: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight... but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). The temptation to merge the spiritual with the political remains a powerful snare today. In *The Desire of Ages*, we are given a stark warning concerning this very mindset: “They desire to make our Lord the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, the ruler in its courts and camps, its legislative halls, its palaces and marketplaces. They expect Him to rule through legal enactments, enforced by human authority... Since Christ is not now here in person, they themselves will undertake to act in His stead, to execute the laws of His kingdom” (White, 1898, Chapter 55, para. 11).

A Transformation of Character, Not Systems

Jesus came to transform the human heart. He did not come to reform the Roman state or to alter civil laws; When asked to arbitrate a legal inheritance dispute, He declined, asking, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” before pointing His listeners to the deeper spiritual issue of covetousness (Luke 12:14). Furthermore, when Peter drew a physical sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to resist those who had come to arrest Jesus, Christ healed the wounded man and rebuked His disciple (Matthew 26:52; Luke 22:50–51). Christ demonstrated that the methods of earthly political warfare have no place in the advancement of His kingdom.

Our Citizenship in the Heavenly Government

By drawing a sharp line between the things of Caesar and the things of God (Matthew 22:21), Jesus reminded us that human governments hold only a temporary, delegated authority (John 19:11). Our primary allegiance belongs to a heavenly government. This higher allegiance does not require indifference to civic responsibilities or human suffering; rather, it governs how Christians engage society, ensuring that no political party, leader, or ideology takes the place that belongs to Christ alone.

When we allow ourselves to be consumed by political polarization, we forget that our true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). True religious liberty is found when we stop looking to earthly laws for our ultimate security and instead rest entirely in the Savior, treating those with opposing views with the same grace and freedom that Christ extends to us.

Living the Higher Allegiance in 2026

As we navigate the unique cultural complexities and deep political divides of 2026, the temptation to rely on earthly power structures is stronger than ever. Digital echo chambers and polarized public rhetoric constantly pressure believers to choose a side and treat political opponents as existential enemies. Yet, our calling has not changed; God calls us to have a pure faith, untainted by earthly alliances.

When Jesus commenced His earthly ministry, He announced His divine mandate by declaring, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

In this current year, let us stand distinctly as “a peculiar people,” set apart from the moral darkness and confusion of the world. By resting our security in the heavenly government, we are freed to love unconditionally, speak with grace, and point a fractured society beyond earthly systems and toward Christ, the ultimate Author of our liberty.

References

- New King James Version. (1982). Thomas Nelson.
- White, E. G. (1898). *The Desire of Ages* (Chapter 55, “Not with Outward Show”). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

The DANGER of PRIDE

Pride goeth before destruction,
and an haughty spirit before a fall. Proverbs 16:18

I did
this all by
myself!



PRIDE
can make
us feel big,
but it can also
cause us to fall.

THE TALLEST TOWER



Micah loved building things. One Sabbath afternoon, the children were given blocks and challenged to build a tower together. At first, everyone worked as a team. Ava made a strong base, Caleb found the right blocks, and Micah carefully stacked them. Soon, their tower was the tallest one in the room! Everyone cheered.

Micah looked at the tower and smiled. But then he began to think, "This tower is only standing because of me." When the teacher congratulated the group, Micah quickly said, "I built most of it!" They really didn't do much." Ava looked hurt.

Later, Caleb noticed that the tower was beginning to lean. "Micah, I think we should fix the bottom before it falls," he warned.

"I know what I'm doing," Micah replied. "Mine is the tallest tower here!" He added another block. The tower wobbled.

"Maybe we should stop," Ava suggested. But Micah wanted everyone to see just how high his tower could go. He reached up and placed one more block on top.

CRASH!

Blocks scattered everywhere. Micah stared at the fallen tower. A few minutes earlier, he had been boasting about how great he was. Now there was nothing left to boast about.

His teacher sat beside him. "Micah," she said gently, "do you know what caused the tower to fall?" "The bottom wasn't strong enough," he answered.

"Yes," she said. "But something else was falling before the tower ever came down—your heart. You stopped listening. You stopped appreciating your friends. And you became so concerned about being the greatest that you couldn't see the danger in front of you. That's what pride can do."

Micah remembered how he had treated Ava and Caleb. "I'm sorry," he told them. "I acted like I did everything myself. Will you forgive me?" They smiled and forgave him. "Can we build it again?" Micah asked. "Yes," Ava laughed, "but this time we're building it together!" And they did.

Their second tower wasn't quite as tall—but Micah learned something much more important: It is better to have a **humble** heart than to stand at the top of the tallest tower.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Pride can begin with a small thought:

- "I am better."
- "I know more."
- "I don't need anyone's help."

If we allow those thoughts to grow, pride can cause us to:

- Stop listening
- Treat others poorly
- Refuse correction
- Forget that our talents and blessings come from God

Jesus teaches us a different way—the way of

HUMILITY.



WORD SEARCH CHALLENGE

Directions: Find and circle the words from the list below.
Words may be hidden horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

- ★ PRIDE
- ★ HUMILITY
- ★ OBEY
- ★ SAUL
- ★ DANIEL
- ★ KING
- ★ REPENT
- ★ SELF
- ★ HEAVEN
- ★ FALL

H	P	R	I	D	E	T	Y	O	B	E	Y	M
D	A	N	I	E	L	G	H	S	E	L	F	U
R	E	P	E	N	T	M	J	K	I	N	G	N
B	V	H	U	M	I	L	I	T	Y	U	Z	A
Y	H	E	A	V	E	N	C	A	L	M	L	F
S	A	U	L	R	E	S	P	E	C	T	O	L
C	H	O	B	E	Y	E	R	T	Y	U	A	L
G	F	A	L	L	R	E	J	O	I	C	E	V



Remember:
God opposes the proud,
but gives grace to
the humble.
1 Peter 5:5

SECRET MESSAGE

After finding all the words, use the leftover letters (in order, reading left to right, top to bottom) to complete this Bible promise!

"GOD GIVES _____
TO THE HUMBLE."

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James 4:6

August 2026

DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHT



On August 23rd, the Children's Ministry Department had another wonderful opportunity to serve during our **Back to School Fun Day**. It is always a blessing to reach beyond the walls of the church, connect with our community, and give in areas where there is a need.

Our children were able to experience firsthand the joy that comes from serving and giving to others. More than simply providing back-to-school support, this outreach was an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ through kindness, generosity, and service.

We pray that experiences like these will continue to teach our children that they are never too young to make a difference. May they develop hearts that are willing to serve and always remember the words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." — Acts 20:35

Thank you for reading!

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