

## What Holds Us Back: Pride as a Response to Our Anxiety

“The overwhelming amount of psychic energy necessary to maintain an inflated self depletes the energy needed to achieve our actual potential.” -- Terry Cooper

### Pride in the Bible

1. “Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’” (Daniel 4:28–30).
2. Genesis 12:11–13 - As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12 When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”
3. Genesis 16:1–2 - Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”
4. Gen. 37:19–21 - “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. 20 “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”
5. Exodus 1:11 - “ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor . . . ”
6. Exodus 32:2 - He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”
7. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been (1 Kings 11:3–4).
8. 1 Kings 21:4–7 - So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors.” He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat (v. 4).
9. Nebuchadnezzar said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30).
10. Luke 18:9–14. Who are you?
11. John 9:34 - To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.
12. John 11:47–50 - “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.” 49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

### The Subtlety of Pride - Karen & the Pride System

## The Concept

1. “Karen” means, “a woman perceived as entitled or demanding beyond the scope of what is appropriate or necessary.”
2. I learned a lot about pride from a woman named Dr. Karen Horney. She was a psychoanalyst in the early 20th century.
3. She began to think about low self-esteem. She began to realize that people viewed themselves negatively in part because they compared themselves to an inflated view of what they should be. “Gradually and unconsciously, the imagination sets to work and creates in his mind an idealized image of himself. In this process he endows himself with unlimited powers and with exalted faculties: he becomes a hero, a genius, a supreme lover, a saint, a god” (*Neurosis & Human Growth*, 22).
4. But what happens when reality conflicts with this illusion? “What does it do to a person when he recognizes that he cannot measure up to his inner dictates? To anticipate the answer briefly: then he starts to hate and despise himself” (*ibid.*, 85). He cannot be what he has imagined himself to be, and so he has low self-esteem or self-loathing.
5. So, she concluded that self-loathing and low self-esteem involved a *pride system*. “And since pride and self-hate are actually one entity, I suggest calling the sum total of the factors involved by a common name: the pride system” (*ibid.*, 110–111).

Examples -- here are some ways that she applied this. This list also includes some observations from a Christian commentator on Dr. Karen, Terry Cooper. Here are a list of some issues.

- Believing that we can attain perfection and continually looking at things we should have done. “In this event he keeps reiterating the word ‘should’ with amazing frequency. He keeps telling us what he should have felt, thought and done. He is at bottom as convinced of his inherent perfection as the naively ‘narcissistic person, and betrays it by the belief that he actually could be perfect if only he were more strict with himself, more controlled, more alert, more circumspect” (*Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis*, 98).
- Thinking we are glorious but not wanting to work for glory. “Because the main goal is the attainment of glory, he becomes uninterested in the process of learning, of doing, or of gaining step by step—indeed, tends to scorn it. He does not want to climb a mountain: he wants to be on the peak” (*Neurosis & Human Growth*, 38).
- We have a sense that everything should be easy and work out right. “The world should be at my service, and I should not be bothered” (*ibid.*, 43). She explains, “‘Not to be bothered’ usually implies being exempt from criticism, expectations, or efforts—even if these latter are in his own behalf” (*ibid.*, 44).
- Overestimating the seriousness of wrongs done to us. “It is in our real interest . . . to examine our own reactions when we become preoccupied with a wrong done to us, or when we begin to ponder the hateful qualities of somebody, or when we feel the impulse to get back at others. We must then scrutinize the question of whether our reaction is in any reasonable proportion to the wrong done. And if

with honest scrutiny we find a disproportion, we must search for hidden claims” (ibid., 57).

- Putting up with suffering and abuse longer than we should. “Some persons allow abuse because their idealized self is demanding that they be the epitome of patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and long-suffering” (Terry Cooper, *Sin, Pride, & Self-Acceptance: The Problem of Identity in Theology & Psychology*, 138).
- Putting together the idea of pride with self-contempt, Cooper says that, “Beneath the negative view of one’s ‘stupidity,’ there is often a pride that expects omniscience” (ibid.). Ironically, Dr. Karen says, “The compelling need to appear omniscient may interfere with the capacity to learn” (cited in ibid., 139).
- Being upset that people don’t like us may hide a “grandiose” view that everyone should like us. “Perhaps what is overlooked in this ‘obvious’ form of low self-esteem is the underlying pride system that says that everyone ought to like me or that I am completely lovable. The constant attempt to win approval and affection is based on a conviction that we can win those things from everyone. There is a double grandiosity here: (1) that we can control what others think of us and (2) that everyone will like us if we simply work at it. Thus, even here, pride and low self-esteem appear to be mixed together” (Cooper, ibid.).
- Expectations of perfection & continual self-scrutiny. “Surely unrealistic self-demands, expectations for perfection and severe self-scrutiny are born out of a pride system that expects us to extend ourselves beyond our own human limits. . . . Thus, in the midst of my own self-condemnation, perhaps I should raise the question, ‘Just who do I think I am?’” (ibid., 150).

Here’s something I found insightful: “the ending of our life would not threaten us if we had not falsely made ourselves the center of life’s meaning” (Niebuhr, NDM 2.293).

False Humility & False Guilt - there are things that we actually should have guilt about, especially our unwillingness to trust in and rest in our heavenly Father. However, it’s worth considering how much of our guilt is false guilt, failure to meet the expectations of an inflated self.