



Pride and Shame Are Two Sides of the Same Coin

The choice between pride and shame is a false binary—transcending both enables a growth mindset more conducive to durable Christian discipleship.

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IDENTITY

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We are almost to June, a month often known as LGBT+ Pride Month.

Pride is a loaded term. But it's easy to understand why pride feels a lot better than shame and hiding in the closet, especially when [sexual feelings](#) can be fundamental to one's identity. And superficially, pride seems to be not only the opposite of shame, but also superior in every way.

Shame feels lonely and paralyzing (because it is). Pride feels liberating and connecting. If my *only* choice were between pride and shame, of course I would choose pride.

But those are not our only two choices. And pride and shame are not actually opposing choices; they are just two sides of the same limiting coin. Pride does not actually liberate or connect us. It isolates us in a different way than shame does, but just as profoundly.

The Twin Errors of Pride and Shame

As C.S. Lewis [wrote](#), Satan “always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he relies on your extra dislike of one to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors.”

As near as I can tell, Satan is the author of both pride *and* shame. He introduced pride by rebelling against Heavenly Father and launching the War in Heaven for his own glory, permanently separating him from God. Later, he introduced shame in the Garden of Eden by convincing Adam and Eve they needed to hide from Heavenly Father when they made a mistake.

Pride and shame both cause us to look at ourselves as either the cause of our problems or the source of our redemption. They both estrange us from God. The fundamental error of both pride and shame is that they center the story on us rather than on the redemptive power of Jesus Christ to redeem and reconcile us. Ironically, self-worship and self-loathing are two sides of the same self-focus that inhibit devotion to Christ.

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When we are stuck in this false binary, we can quickly flip back and forth between shame and pride, dysfunctionally ping-ponging between them: hating ourselves, then thinking we are justified in staying where we are because the standards are unfair.

A Better Way

The better way is where true liberation, true freedom, and true discipleship are found: in a [covenant relationship](#) with God. It is a place of consecrated living, spiritual peace,

and abundant joy. Covenant relationship is not primarily about our weaknesses or strengths, but to whom they are consecrated, and how well we are connected to others. We no longer worry about hiding our flaws, but repent of them. We no longer need praise and affirmation from others to feel good about our own characteristics and accomplishments. We recognize that *as* to ourselves we are weak, but *with* God we can do *all* things.

This is a place of humility, which is distinct from putting oneself down. This is a place of gratitude, which recognizes the hand of God in all aspects of our lives, while still acknowledging our own challenges and weaknesses. It is a state of spiritual resilience that allows us not only to receive inspired correction but also to welcome it, knowing it always comes from a place of love and a desire to help us improve. We can cease our striving, either out of a misplaced need to prove ourselves and earn love, or out of a misplaced need to get praise and recognition from others so they know how good we are. (Note how both of these impulses—shame and pride—spring from underlying insecurity.)

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Perhaps the best *scriptural* term for the antidote to pride and shame is meekness, as Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles discussed [at a 2017 BYU Devotional](#), and again during [April 2018 General Conference](#). He taught that the most valuable learning comes through *experience*, not merely intellectually understanding something, because experience allows us to repent, which helps us grow.

When we understand that the goal of life is gaining these experiences, we realize that opposition doesn't mean it's time to give up or we're failing. Instead, it's how we learn to place our faith in Jesus Christ, not in outcomes, as my friend Blake Fisher [puts it](#).

But, as Elder Bednar teaches, being meek does *not mean* being “weak, timid, or passive.” Rather, it is the quality of being God-fearing, righteous, teachable, patient in suffering, and willing to follow gospel teachings. Meekness is being receptive to divinely directed counsel and correction.

Neither Pride Nor Shame Leads to Change

On that theme, Elder Bednar [shared](#) a remarkable story he has never forgotten. Then Elder Henry B. Eyring told him, “President, if you have not been rebuked lately by the Holy Ghost as you are praying, then you need to improve your prayers.”

Those who are stuck in shame will hear this and crumple. They will not be sufficiently grounded in their divine identity to understand that inspired correction is something to welcome, and when divinely ordained, always comes from a place of love, a conviction in our innate goodness, and a desire to help us improve. If even Elder Bednar and Elder Eyring need it, then we certainly should be receiving this kind of correction frequently as well.

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On the other hand, those in the grasp of pride will hear this and take offense. They will discard the counsel because the tone was wrong or the message was painful. They are unwilling and unable to look at the beneficial principles that may underlie a harsh or poorly-timed delivery method.

Shame tells us that we aren't worthy of the Savior's Atonement. Pride tells us we don't need it. Both alienate us from a relationship with the One who alone can offer relief, peace, and transformation. Jesus Christ and His Atoning power enable us to conquer these traps and consecrate our experiences for our good.

As we focus on making and keeping our covenants, our relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ deepens, and our gaze naturally lifts upward toward the Father and His Son. This conscious ascension—choosing to look to Them instead of being consumed by our fallen nature's tendency toward pride or shame—is what allows our behavior and life focus to follow, gradually elevating us to become more like Them.

The pride-and-shame trap is just one of several traps that can occur when a shallow understanding of the gospel is combined with secular worldviews. Rising above these false dichotomies enables us to experience the true growth and blessings that the restored gospel offers, including in approaching our [sexuality](#). All of us—regardless of our specific challenges—can find hope, community, and the blessings of the restored

gospel. I second Elder Bednar's observation that "walking in meekness will help us to press forward through the messy middle." In doing so, we can **receive** "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

About the author



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