

Fatal Distractions: Conquering Destructive Temptations



Kay Arthur, David & BJ Lawson



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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



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P R E S S

FATAL DISTRACTIONS: CONQUERING DESTRUCTIVE TEMPTATIONS

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mothers' group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. (This person's function is *not* that of a lecturer or teacher. However, when this book is used in a Sunday-school class or similar setting, the teacher should feel free to lead more directly and to bring in other insights in addition to those provided in each week's lesson.)

If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the group with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.

- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the “insight boxes,” which appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.
- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week’s lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week’s discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don’t want to slow the pace too much. It’s much better to leave everyone “wanting more” than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

FATAL DISTRACTIONS: CONQUERING DESTRUCTIVE TEMPTATIONS

If you are a Christian, you have already made the most important decision of your life: you have surrendered your life to Christ! But you've probably discovered by now that the Christian life is not problem-free. Yes, you have the Holy Spirit living in you to provide guidance and strength, but you still struggle to live the way you know you should. This is because you are battling two enemies: Satan and yourself. Your nature was changed when you came to know Christ and He made His Spirit to dwell in you (1 John 4:13). But the Spirit dwells in a body of flesh,

which is why you still find yourself struggling to do the right thing.

All of us commit individual acts of sin. But you may have noticed that certain sins seem to be more of a problem for you personally. Sometimes we wrestle with certain sin patterns or habitual sins—behaviors we fall into when we try to get our needs met apart from God. The source of that struggle is called *the flesh* or *the old man*. And if we live in the flesh rather than by the Spirit, these habitual sins will distract us from our pursuit of righteousness. They can literally kill our spiritual growth and keep us from maturing in our journey with Christ.

The early church identified a number of “capital sins”—the sins from which they believed most other sin originates. The church fathers named seven sins that are so corrupting, so evil and dangerous that for the last seventeen hundred years, they have been commonly called the seven deadly sins. And they are deadly—deadly to your spiritual growth. That is why we call them *Fatal Distractions*.

In this study we’ll be identifying and discussing six of these seven deadly sins, sins that can distract you from nurturing your relationship with God and, left unchecked, can even be fatal to your spiritual journey: *pride, anger, jealousy, gluttony, slothfulness, and greed*. (We’ve decided to omit the seventh sin of *lust*, because

we already have multiple Bible studies on the problem of sexual sin, including *The Truth About Sex* and the 40-Minute study *What Does the Bible Say About Sex?*)

As you learn more about these fatal distractions in the weeks ahead, we encourage you to ask God to help you identify, through His Holy Spirit, any subtle ways one or more of these sins has taken hold in your life and to help you conquer these destructive temptations, so that you can walk in victory with Him.

WEEK ONE

Of all the sins that can distract us from living effectively for Jesus, pride is one of the most insidious. It twists our perspective on the good gifts of God. We are tempted to believe that any successes or blessings come through our own efforts or depend on our own abilities. Pride takes our focus off God, and life becomes all about us, our accomplishments and goals.

This week as we consider what God says about pride, the first of our six fatal distractions, carefully examine your life for any evidence that this fatal distraction has taken root in your heart.

OBSERVE

Let's start by looking at Uzziah, a man whose life illustrates the way pride creeps into our thinking.

Leader: *Read 2 Chronicles 26:3–5 aloud.*

- *Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each reference to **Uzziah**, including pronouns:*

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

2 CHRONICLES 26:3–5

³ Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jechiliah of Jerusalem.

⁴ He did right in the sight of the LORD according to all that his father Amaziah had done.

⁵ He continued to seek God in the days

of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him.

2 CHRONICLES 26:16–21

¹⁶ But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

¹⁷ Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men.

¹⁸ They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about King Uzziah in this passage?
- What was his primary focus?

OBSERVE

After telling how God “marvelously helped” and strengthened Uzziah until “his fame spread afar” (26:15), the Bible describes a change in Uzziah’s life.

Leader: Read 2 Chronicles 26:16–21 aloud. Have the group say and...

- draw a box around each reference to **Uzziah**, including pronouns.
- mark the word **proud** with a **P**.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Uzziah in this passage?

- Verse 16 starts with the word *but*, which shows that a contrast is about to take place. What contrast did you observe between these verses and the previous passage you read?
 - When did Uzziah become proud? How did his pride affect his behavior?
 - Discuss what he did wrong, according to verse 18, and how it was related to a pride issue.
 - What does verse 19 suggest about the extent of King Uzziah's problem with pride?
- incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God.”
- ¹⁹ But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.
- ²⁰ Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out

of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him.

²¹ King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land.

- Do these verses indicate that Uzziah repented? Explain your answer.

- Uzziah's distraction was subtle, almost undetectable. Pride took root in Uzziah's heart and eventually blossomed into out-and-out rebellion. If you ever were to find that same attitude in your own life, what would you do?

OBSERVE

Let's consider another Old Testament king who succumbed to the temptation of pride. God had saved King Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. Many people brought gifts to the Lord and to Hezekiah—so many that other nations took notice of his exalted situation. Let's see what happened next.

Leader: Read 2 Chronicles 32:24–26 aloud.

Have the group say and...

- draw a box around each reference to **Hezekiah**, including pronouns.
- mark each occurrence of the words **proud** and **pride** with a **P**.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Hezekiah in verse 25?
- What consequences resulted from his attitude and actions?
- In what ways was his response to God's discipline different from King Uzziah's?
- What was the result of Hezekiah's response?

2 CHRONICLES 32:24–26

24 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill; and he prayed to the LORD, and the LORD spoke to him and gave him a sign.

25 But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem.

26 However, Hezekiah humbled the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah.

PROVERBS 8:13

The fear of the LORD
is to hate evil; pride
and arrogance and
the evil way and the
perverted mouth, I
hate.

PROVERBS 6:16–19

¹⁶ There are six
things which the
LORD hates, yes, seven
which are an abomi-
nation to Him:

¹⁷ Haughty eyes,
a lying tongue, and
hands that shed inno-
cent blood,

¹⁸ a heart that devises
wicked plans, feet that
run rapidly to evil,

¹⁹ a false witness
who utters lies, and
one who spreads strife
among brothers.

OBSERVE

We've already seen that God doesn't let pride go unnoticed. Let's see what more we can learn about His view of this sin.

Leader: *Read aloud Proverbs 8:13; 6:16–19; and James 4:6.*

- *Have the group say and mark each reference to **pride**, including synonyms such as **haughty** and **arrogance**, with a P.*

DISCUSS

- What does the Lord have to say about pride in these scriptures?

OBSERVE

The Bible is quite clear in its description of pride and warnings against its dangers. Let’s look at a few more verses to see what we can learn about this fatal distraction.

***Leader:** Read aloud the following passages, from Proverbs 16:5 through 1 John 2:16.*

- *Have the group say and mark every reference to **pride**, including synonyms such as **haughty**, **arrogant**, and **boastful**, with a P.*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about the one who is proud from these verses?

JAMES 4:6

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

PROVERBS 16:5

Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; assuredly, he will not be unpunished.

PROVERBS 21:24

“Proud,” “Haughty,” “Scoffer,” are his names, who acts with insolent pride.

ROMANS 12:16

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant.

2 TIMOTHY 3:1–2, 5

¹ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy...

⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.

1 JOHN 2:16

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boast-

OBSERVE

What will happen to the one who is proud?

Leader: Read aloud Proverbs 15:25; 16:18; and Luke 1:51–52.

- Have the group say and mark each occurrence of the words **proud**, **pride**, and **haughty** with a **P**.

DISCUSS

- What will happen to the proud?
- Who will execute these things?

ful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

PROVERBS 15:25

The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow.

PROVERBS 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.

LUKE 1:51–52

⁵¹ He [God] has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.

MARK 7:20–23

²⁰ And He [Jesus] was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.

²¹ “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,

²² deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensual-

OBSERVE

Self-righteousness goes hand in hand with pride. The Pharisees, for example, were proud of their detailed attention to keeping the law. They were extremely careful about such things as the foods they ate and ceremonial hand washing. However, Jesus taught His followers that external behaviors matter less than what’s in our hearts.

Leader: *Read Mark 7:20–23 aloud.*

- *Have the group say aloud and mark the word **pride** with a P.*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about pride from this passage?
- What types of behaviors did Jesus group together with pride, and what does this reveal about the seriousness of this sin?

OBSERVE

Throughout His ministry Jesus exposed the self-righteous attitudes of the Pharisees, who took such pride in believing themselves to be holier than others.

Leader: Read Luke 18:9–14 aloud. Have the group...

- draw a box around each reference to the **Pharisee**, including pronouns.
- mark each reference to the **tax collector**, including pronouns and the phrase **this man**, with a dollar sign, like this: \$

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about the Pharisee?
- What did you learn about the tax collector?

ity, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

23 “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

LUKE 18:9–14

9 And He [Jesus] also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust,

adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

¹² 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- What difference(s) did you notice between the two?
- Discuss how pride can bring a halt to a person's spiritual growth.
- Pride causes us to emphasize self rather than God. Like the Pharisee, we begin to view ourselves as important. What is some evidence to watch for that may indicate pride has become an issue and needs to be dealt with?
- Examine yourself: who do you behave more like—the Pharisee or the tax collector?

OBSERVE

In light of God's view of pride, we need to know how to avoid it—and how to weed out any arrogance that has taken root in our lives.

Leader: Read aloud Proverbs 29:23; 1 Peter 5:5–6; Philippians 2:3–8; and Matthew 23:10–12. Have the group...

- mark every reference to **pride**, including synonyms such as **empty conceit** and **exalts himself**, with a **P**.
- draw a squiggly line like this  under each occurrence of the words **humble(d)** and **humility**.

DISCUSS

- How is it possible to avoid or overcome pride?
- When it comes to overcoming pride, what one thing do all these scriptures have in common?

PROVERBS 29:23

A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor.

1 PETER 5:5–6

⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3–8

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of

- Look for the word *but* in 1 Peter 5:5–6. What contrast is being made?
- What instructions did you find in these verses to guide us in dealing with pride?
- What will God do when we follow these instructions?
- From all you have seen in this week's lesson, have you identified areas in your own life where pride has crept in? In what ways, if any, has it become a distraction, keeping you from being as effective as you could be in your journey with Christ?

- Perhaps you realize that pride has invaded your life. What must you do to keep it from stunting or even killing your spiritual growth?
- By humbling yourself under God's hand, you are saying, "He is God and I am not." You acknowledge that everything good in your life—all you are and all you have and all you will accomplish—is a gift from Him. Are you ready in humility to trust Him with every area of your existence? Are you willing to submit yourself to Him?

a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

MATTHEW 23:10–12

10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.

11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

WRAP IT UP

God has made it clear that He hates pride:

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverted mouth, I hate. (Proverbs 8:13)

He knows the damage it can do to our lives and particularly to our relationship with Him.

Pride is one of Satan's favorite weapons of warfare because it causes us to take our eyes off God and place them on ourselves. This sin often creeps in unnoticed, in ways that seem benign, such as taking pride in the good things God has given us: family, jobs, influence, and success. If allowed to go unchecked, pride can change our attitude toward God and undermine our relationships with others.

Pride always overemphasizes self. It tempts us to believe we know better than God and that we can succeed apart from Him. Pride isolates us from God and keeps us from being totally devoted to Him. This fatal distraction kills our spiritual growth, preventing us from being fruitful in carrying out His plans and purposes for our lives.

By contrast, when we choose to clothe ourselves in humility, acknowledging God's authority and sovereignty in our lives, He will use us and exalt us in His own way and His own time.

This week:

- Ask God to examine your heart for any pride that might have crept in. If God shows you areas of pride, acknowledge it and

confess it. This may be difficult because often it has so captured your heart you may refuse to admit there is a problem.

- Ask God to forgive you for being prideful. (Make sure you say the word.)
- Pray that God would give you the ability and strength to turn away from pride. (Sometimes God does this through disappointment and brokenness. But remember He breaks us in order to bless us.)
- Ask God to give you the discernment to detect pride when it tries to creep into your life.
- Remember where you came from and how far God has brought you. Acknowledge your total dependence on Him, and thank Him for all that He has done in your life.