

Bible Study Guide: Promoting Self – The Challenge of Pride

Luke 9:46-50

From the Series: An Orderly Account – Encountering Jesus in the Gospel of Luke

Hook (to open the group conversation)

Ask one of these questions to get everyone talking right away:

- “Have you ever caught yourself in a conversation that suddenly became all about you—or felt annoyed when someone else got more attention than you thought they deserved?”
- “Why do you think even Jesus’ closest disciples struggled with pride and competition, even while walking right behind Him?”
- “What’s one way pride shows up in everyday life that people rarely admit?”

Let the group share briefly (keep it light at first). This sets up the heart issue without anyone feeling immediately exposed.

Brief Outline and Summary of the Main Passage (Luke 9:46-50)

Right after the Transfiguration and the healing of the demon-possessed boy, Luke shows three back-to-back failures of the disciples in the closing verses of chapter 9. In this section (vv. 46-50), we see their pride exposed.

While walking on the road, the disciples quietly argue among themselves about “which of them was the greatest” (v. 46). Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, takes a child and places him by His side. He says: “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great” (vv. 47-48).

Immediately after, John reports that they tried to stop an outsider who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name “because he does not follow with us” (v. 49). Jesus corrects them: “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you” (v. 50).

Summary: Even Jesus’ hand-picked disciples were infected with self-promotion and tribal superiority. Pride made them competitive with one another, threatened by outsiders doing good in Jesus’ name, and blind to their own hearts. Jesus responds by pointing them to childlike humility and redefining greatness as becoming the least.

This passage is a sober warning and a gracious invitation: pride destroys, but the gospel cures.

Discussion Questions (3-4 for deeper conversation and application)

Choose 2–3 per session depending on time. Encourage honest but gracious sharing. Remind the group that we all struggle with pride—this is why we need Christ.

- 1. Identifying Pride:** The sermon describes pride as “ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self.” In the disciples’ argument and John’s complaint, we see both superiority (“we’re the inner circle”) and fear of inferiority (“who’s the greatest among us?”).
 - Where do you most often see pride showing up in your own life—through comparing yourself as superior, feeling inferior and seeking attention/pity, or both? How does this self-focus steal joy from relationships or ministry?
- 2. What Pride Destroys:** Pride divided the disciples from each other, isolated them from true intimacy (even with Jesus), made them callous toward suffering people, and distorted reality so they couldn’t see their own sin right after witnessing Christ’s glory.
 - How have you seen pride damage friendships, marriages, or church life? In what ways does pride keep us from rejoicing with others or from being honest with God and people?
- 3. The Deception of Pride:** C.S. Lewis noted that pride is the vice we easily spot in others but rarely confess in ourselves. The sermon points out that even religious efforts to “conquer” pride can feed it.
 - Why is pride so hard to detect in our own hearts? Have you ever applied a sermon on sin mainly to others rather than yourself? What might that reveal?
- 4. How It’s Cured (Application):** Jesus uses a powerless child as the model: total dependence, having nothing to offer, looking up in need. He points to the gospel—Christ, the greatest, became the least and died for us.
 - What does it look like practically to approach God and others with childlike humility instead of self-promotion? How does fixing our eyes on Jesus’ humble sacrifice (Philippians 2) free us from the need to inflate ourselves or weaponize our weaknesses?

Hints for Adult Neighborhood Group Leaders

- **Create safety:** Pride is sneaky and universal. Start by admitting your own struggles with it (briefly). Model vulnerability so others feel free to be honest without fear of judgment.
- **Keep Christ central:** Every discussion should circle back to the gospel. Pride is the root sin; only grace received as a helpless child cures it. Avoid moralistic “try harder to be humble” answers.
- **Watch the room:** Some may lean toward superiority (defensiveness, one-upping), others toward inferiority (self-pity, fishing for compliments). Gently redirect both to the cross.
- **Prayer time:** Close by praying for the Holy Spirit to expose hidden pride and replace it with gospel humility. Ask God to help the group rejoice in others’ blessings this week.

Hints for Middle and High School Sunday School Teachers

- **Make it relatable:** Teens deal with pride through social media likes, sports/grades rankings, cliques, drama, and “who’s the most spiritual” in youth group. Use examples like arguing over who’s the best athlete, musician, or most popular Christian kid.
- **Keep it visual and active:** Show a photo/video of a toddler fully dependent on parents. Ask: “What does this kid have to offer adults?” Tie it directly to how we come to God.
- **Language adjustment:** Use “self-promotion” or “making it all about me” instead of heavy theological terms at first. Contrast “flexing” (superiority) vs. constant complaining for attention (inferiority).
- **Gospel application for students:** Many teens feel pressure to perform for parents, teachers, or peers. Show how Jesus frees them: the greatest in God’s kingdom is the one who serves without needing credit. Role-play humble responses in school drama or sports.
- **Engagement tip:** Have them journal or text a group member something encouraging without expecting anything back—this week’s “anti-pride” assignment. End with prayer that the Holy Spirit would make them more like Jesus, who became least for us.

Closing Reminder for All Leaders:

This text exposes our hearts, but it does not leave us in despair. Jesus knows our prideful reasoning perfectly—and still sets a child before us and points to His own humble,

sacrificial love. True greatness is found only in receiving Him and becoming like the least. May the gospel uproot pride in us and fill us with childlike dependence and joy in Christ.