All who have read the Book of Mormon know that one of the recurring themes of the Nephites and Lamanites is what is commonly called the “pride cycle.” This occurs when people allow their focus to be drawn away from God and begin comparing themselves with others. It is not solely the bane of the rich. Anyone can be caught in this current. In fact, the drift away from God is very much like being caught in a riptide in the surf.

A riptide, or undercurrent, is a strong current which runs beneath the surface of the water and whose presence is difficult to detect for the novice swimmer in the ocean. In Australia, because the country is surrounded by ocean, much of spring, summer, and autumn leisure time is spent at the beach and in the surf. Occasionally, there is a strong undercurrent which can move you away from the part of the beach where you entered the water without your really knowing it. Sometimes you can be taken deeper and deeper into dangerous waters unless you constantly take note of your position and make the needed adjustments to the speed or direction in which you are swimming.

Pride is like this undercurrent. Unless we keep our focus on our Saviour, we can drift away from the safety provided when we focus on Him.

So what is pride? President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, taught us what it really is: “At its core, pride is a sin of comparison, for though it usually begins with ‘Look how wonderful I am and what great things I have done,’ it always seems to end with ‘Therefore, I am better than you.’

“When our hearts are led with pride, we commit a grave sin, for we violate the two great commandments. Instead of worshipping God and loving our neighbor, we reveal the real object of our worship and love—the image we see in the mirror.

“Pride is the great sin of self-elevation. It is for so many a personal Rameumptom, a holy stand that justifies envy, greed, and vanity” (“Pride and the Priesthood,” Oct. 2010 general conference, emphasis added).
But you may be thinking to yourself: “Pride is a sin of rich people – and in West Africa, the people are not rich!” Well, you don’t have to be rich to fall prey to this sin. In fact, President Ezra Taft Benson, a former President of the Church, told us: “Pride is a sin that can readily be seen in others but is rarely admitted in ourselves. Most of us consider pride to be a sin of those on the top, such as the rich and the learned, looking down at the rest of us. There is, however, a far more common ailment among us—and that is pride from the bottom looking up. It is manifest in so many ways, such as fault finding, gossiping, backbiting, murmuring, living beyond our means, envying, coveting, withholding gratitude and praise that might lift another, and being unforgiving and jealous” (“Beware of Pride,” Apr. 1989 general conference).

It can be seen in those who have a sense of “entitlement,” a feeling that they are owed something by others or by the Church. Some feel that because they are pioneers or have been members of the Church for a long time, they have more rights than the more recently baptized or that they deserve to have priority consideration over others because they have served in the past in leadership callings. The Savior’s parable of the laborers in the vineyard (see Matthew 20:1–16) teaches us that the Lord does not look on such things as the natural man might. Instead, He looks at what we have become. We must develop a similar vision to His because this very sense of “entitlement” has been described by Church leaders as an “evil” because it is a manifestation of pride.

C.S. Lewis, in Mere Christianity, described the sin of pride the same way when he wrote: “According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. . . It is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn’t a technology problem like radar malfunction—or even thick fog. The cause was pride. Each captain was aware of the other ship’s presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late.

There is a formula in the scriptures which describes pride. It is found in Helaman 12:2, in which Nephi, the son of Helaman, describes the state of pride that so often follows the Lord’s blessing
them with peace and prosperity. He ends the verse by providing the fatal formula: “. . . and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.”

Ease + Prosperity = Pride

Prosperity and ease will come to the Saints of West Africa. It has already entered the lives of some. When it does, we must have already built within us an immunity. A testimony will not be sufficient. It wasn’t sufficient for Saul, David, or Solomon, and it wasn’t sufficient for Laman and Lemuel or for countless others.

We need to strive to develop a daily habit of prayer and scripture study and to always focus on God and His plan of happiness and especially on our Savior and His atoning sacrifice. The book of Haggai in the Old Testament teaches us the importance of focusing on the things of God and His holy house, the temple, rather than on our own houses or possessions.

“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled [paneled] houses, and this house lie waste?

“Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways” (Haggai 1:4–7). The Lord tells the people in a very clear way, through the prophet, that there is no point in putting other things before Him, because they will come to nothing. That principle still applies!

But we also see pride today, evident in West Africa amongst members of the Church. Weddings, and sometimes funerals, are an obvious example. When we focus on the things of God in relation to weddings, we focus on the temple sealing. However, what we see in practice is that the focus often seems to be on the traditional ceremony or on the civil ceremony which is performed by the bishop, with the temple sealing seemingly treated as an afterthought. Lavish parties and decorations are prepared and hundreds are invited to the non-temple celebrations, all to see the pomp and expense associated with the two families whose children are uniting.
The non-temple part of the marriage seems to be primarily focused on the things of the world and can be an expression of pride. When we focus on God, we focus on the temple. Sometimes we see few family members and no friends at, or outside, the temple to share in the most important aspect of this union, even when many family and friends are Church members who live in proximity to the temples in Accra or Aba. This is one way we can put other things before God, and it needs to change.

So how do we consider our ways and counteract this great evil of pride?

Perhaps the example of one of the true heroes of the Old Testament can teach us something. Jonathan was the son of Saul the king. He was the obvious heir to the throne and was a man of impeccable character. He was loved by the people who actually saved him from death after a decree by his father caught Jonathan in its declared punishment. Jonathan was as brave as anyone and with just his armor bearer at his side, he fought and killed a whole garrison of Philistines. Despite this, when David was anointed king instead of him, Jonathan pledged his loyalty to David. He saved David’s life and protected this man who was to take the throne that would otherwise have been his.

Why did he do this? It was simply because Jonathan had his eyes firmly set on what God wanted. God had declared His will that David was to succeed Saul on the throne, and Jonathan both accepted this without question and then dedicated himself to seeing the Lord’s will done.

In addition to accepting the Lord’s will and assisting it to be carried out, we can help others in the way that the Savior Himself taught. We read of His methods in D&C 84:106, 108: “And if any man among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also. . . . Behold, this is the way that mine apostles, in ancient days, built up my church unto me.”

In other words, we should not just think about ourselves and how we are doing spiritually. We need to reach out to others and bring them along with us by putting our arms around their shoulders and mentoring them. They will then grow stronger as will we. By this, we can defeat the tide of pride that might otherwise swell up within us. When we submit to God’s will, we develop humility and patience.

“For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and
becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

This “submission to God’s will” described by King Benjamin only comes when we seek it. By divine plan and somewhat counter intuitively, this submission actually expands our freedom and enables us to shake o the shackles of pride. To achieve this, we must pray earnestly for it.

However, our prayers should bear no resemblance to those of the Zoramites as described in Alma 31. They would stand on the top of a high stand and there compare themselves vocally to those who they believed were of lesser value than themselves. Their vanity, pride and materialistic nature were obvious. They would declare that they were special and would be saved as “a chosen and a holy people” (verse 18). Contrast this to the humble prayer of Alma. Alma’s prayer invokes the qualities mentioned by King Benjamin as previously quoted from Mosiah 3:19. “O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people” (Alma 31:31).

He then continues to seek the Lord’s help as he tries to do what was described in D&C 84:106, 108—that he might bring with him others who are not as strong. “Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee” (Alma 31:35).

The other ingredient found here and in all similar examples and which is needed to combat pride is the attitude of serving others. When we look to do for others rather than to receive from others, then we discover a powerful antidote for pride.

Please study this article with your family and discuss what you can do to invoke the antidote to pride so that you and they are protected when the assault of ease and prosperity occurs and so that you will build immunity to the debilitating attitude of entitlement. Determine prayerfully and with real intent what you must change in order to foster attitudes of service, gratitude, humility, and faith in our Savior as the key focus in your life and in the lives of your family members.

When we do this, it blesses us forever. “And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true. And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:29–30).