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What's up Traders Point family? Good to see you. Want to welcome everybody across all of our physical locations, those of you joining us online.

And before we jump in, I just want to acknowledge the fact—I know that probably most of you are aware that the CDC made an announcement this last week about masks. And you may be wondering what the are the implications for us. And I just want you to know that this next week our leadership will be discussing all of that and we'll be sure to let you know.

Mostly, I just want to thank you. I know that this has been quite a journey over the last year-and-a-half—lots of opinions and I just want to thank you for your grace, your patience, your understanding and most importantly your unity as we continue to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus—even though all of us have various opinions and so I just appreciate that.

Well, I came across a really interesting article several years ago. The title of it really caught my eye: *Marked Up Birds Become Sexier and Exude Testosterone*. And I had to read it. So I read the article. Basically what it's about is that there was a group of scientists who took some lighter colored, male barn swallows—this is a bird—and they took a marker, and they darkened their feathers.

And when they did that, it actually changed the bird's body chemistry, boosting their testosterone and they actually became more attractive to female barn swallows. And there was a professor by the name of Kevin McGraw, at Arizona State University who said this. He said:

"Other females might be looking at them as being a little more sexy, and the birds might be feeling better about themselves in response to that"

And I thought, "Well, of course they do Professor McGraw. You needed a science project to tell you that?"

And I'm reading the article and I couldn't help to be reminded of a time when my wife and I were getting ready to go on vacation together and we were going somewhere warm and tropical, and it was at the end of a long Indiana winter. And my skin was looking like a nice, pasty white—I had a good mayonnaise white going on.

So, I'm not proud of this but it's true. I bought a package of spray tans. And darkened my feathers for my wife. And it didn't go well, alright? I'll save that story for another message. But, as I'm reading this I was like, "Okay, it turns out that there is not a lot more going on upstairs in the mind of a male barn swallow than there is in a male human."

See, that's the thing. Insecurity, I think you would all agree, insecurity can cause us all to do some unusual things. And that's what we're talking about in this series. And as it turns out, insecurity is just the flip side of:

## PRIDE

And pride is our Achilles heel. If you know anything at all about Greek Mythology then you know that Achilles was the most dominant warrior for the Greeks, the guy was absolutely indestructible and unbeatable, but he had a weakness. What gave him his strength is that when he was a toddler his mom dipped him into this water that gave him his super-natural ability. But when she did that, she held him by his heel. So his heel didn't make it in.

And so as he grows older, you could strike him anywhere: on his head, on his chest, and it wouldn't phase him. But if you struck him on his heel, that would be his ultimate demise.

Now, you and I may not be able to relate to that specifically, but every one of us has a weakness or a vulnerability of some kind in our character that we need to keep an eye on, that we need to keep in check because it can bring down our marriages and it often does. It can bring down our relationships, it can bring down our career, our reputation, ultimately our relationship with God.

All of us have an Achilles heel. It manifests itself in different ways, but it's the same for all of us. And our Achilles heel is just simply pride. Now pride, not in the sense of: I'm really proud of my kids. But pride in the sense of: I don't think my kid is getting enough playing time and I'm going to give the coach a piece of my mind about it.

Pride not in the sense of: I'm really proud of this business that we started. But pride in the sense of: My sense of self-worth and identity is tied to that business.

Pride not in the sense of: I am proud of who I am. But pride in the sense that: I get defensive, and I even get angry when somebody points out an area of sin in my life, or maybe an area where I need to grow.

Last week we said that pride, oftentimes when we think about it, we think about somebody who's got a big head, or he's too big for his britches, or whatever analogy you want to use. But pride isn't just thinking too highly of yourself, another form of pride is thinking too lowly of yourself. And what those two things have in common is that it is an unhealthy preoccupation with self.

And when we get preoccupied with ourselves, and we're all guilty of it, I'm guilty of it, then we develop blind spots, and we lose perspective—we sort of lose our way.

I said this last week. I just want to remind you of it again:

The root of almost every sin issue that we struggle with, and you trace it back, is pride in some form.

This is why God's Word, very lovingly but very directly over and over again warns us about pride, our Achilles heel, throughout Scripture. God just says things like, "Pride comes before a fall."

One of the most startling things that it says, we looked at this last week from Proverbs 8. God says:

*"I hate pride and arrogance..."*

That's a strong word. You see the word hate and maybe that's the only word that you see, but please don't mis-understand. God is not saying that he hates prideful or arrogant people, He says He hates the pride and the arrogance that is within people. And I've just got to confess to you, it's within me.

See, this is one of the most uncomfortable things about my job. Whenever I put together a message series, I'm like, "Okay, we're going to preach on this particular theme," then God puts a magnifying glass over my life when it comes to that subject.

I've just got to tell you, it's like clockwork. Every time we put together a message series on marriage, or I'm going to preach on marriage, guess what happens in my marriage? We get into an argument. I get stubborn. And then I'm sitting there going, "I'm going to preach on this?"

Same thing with pride. I knew this series was coming for months and months. Actually this was a series I was going to do before the pandemic hit. Then the pandemic hit, and I pivoted, and then we came back to it. I knew for 18 months that we were going to do this series. Guess what has happened over the last month of preparation? God put a magnifying glass over it.

Here's the deal with pride. It's sort of like weeding your landscaping or weeding your garden. You see pride pop up in your life in some form and you pull the weed, but then you turn around and there's just another one that has taken its place.

And I've got to be honest with you. Pride has popped up in my marriage. It pops up in my relationship with my kids, and my friendships. As much as I hate to admit it, pride pops up in my preaching and in my leadership—I wish that weren't the case and I'm just confessing to you that it is. And denying it, minimizing it, or rationalizing it only empowers it.

See, the collective teaching of Scripture on this particular subject, if you boil it down, it's basically God saying this to us. God says, "I do not want you to think too highly of yourself. I do not want you to think too lowly of yourself. I want you to think lightly of yourself." And that means ordering your world. That means trusting that God has our best interests in mind. So, for every single one of us we can choose the path of pride, which promises something that it never delivers, or we can choose the road of humility and we can trust what God has to say about it.

Here's the thing. Every time God urges us toward humility, that doesn't mean that He's trying to minimize us, it doesn't mean that He's trying to minimize your gifts and your accomplishments,

and your achievements. Ironically, He's trying to maximize them.

See, whenever we choose the path of pride, what we're trying to do is... It's a short cut to glory. It's a short cut to purpose. It's a short cut to meaning. And it always leaves us feeling empty.

I checked out just a few of the verses on pride. Psalm 37:4, this is a promise. *God says: "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires."*

God genuinely wants to give you the desires of your heart. And He says, "Man, if you fully give Me your heart, then I will give you your heart's desires."

James, chapter 4, verse 6:

*"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

The image that comes to my mind when I read that verse—have you ever had a kid and you're holding them at arms-length and he's swinging at you. It's this idea that God is opposing the pride in our lives, but He gives grace to those of us who are humble.

In James, chapter 4, verse 10 it says:

*"Humble yourselves before the Lord," and who will lift you up? Say it out loud with me, "and he will lift you up," and then it says this, "in honor."*

That's an astounding thought. I've read that verse for years and years and years and years—this word jumped out at me. The God of the universe actually wants to honor you? He will be the One to life you up in honor. That's an amazing thought.

Here's another way of saying what that verse says:

God wants you to eat a feast from the table of purpose rather than settle for crumbs off the floor of pride.

God's inviting you to the table. Why would you ever pass that up for just the crumbs you get off of the floor of pride? And, ironically, the path of pride promises to lift us up, but you play it out long enough and it will eventually leave you feeling pretty low about yourself.

Back in 2009, when Tiger Woods kind of fell from grace he had this to say. He said:

*"I knew my actions were wrong. But I convinced myself that normal rules didn't apply to me. I thought only about myself. I thought I could get away with whatever I wanted to. I felt I was entitled. I was wrong. I was foolish."*

That's a hard lesson to learn. And all of us, we've had that played out in our lives. We haven't had the spotlight that somebody like Tiger Woods has had on them, but all of us know that feeling.

See, humility means trusting that God will be the One who lifts up in due time. And I think that this is what Jesus was really trying to get at in Matthew, chapter 18. If you have a Bible handy... This will also be on the screen. But in Matthew 18, Jesus' disciples asked him a question that every single one of us asks in one form or another. Now, we may not ask it the way that they asked it, but this question is bouncing around in our minds. And they verbalize it in verse 1:

*"About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?'"*

That's a pretty bold question, don't you think? And we may not be courageous enough to verbalize it in that way, but we all think it, don't we? Even just subconsciously in every room you and I walk into, that question in some form is being asked.

When you walk into the weight room, when you walk into the board room, the classroom, the ladies' room—I don't know what you all do in there. And we don't walk in and go, who is the greatest. We don't do that. But we do walk in and wonder where we fit. We wonder who has the most power and influence. We wonder who has the most influential voice.

That's what the disciples are asking, "Jesus, who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" And how Jesus responds to that would not have been what they were expecting. They didn't see this coming.

*"Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins'" isn't that important, that that's the first thing that he says, "unless you turn from your sins" another word for that is repentance, "and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."*

What an astounding statement. It actually says, "Well, you all have an opportunity to be great. Just turn from your sins. Humble yourself as a little child. You'll be great.

And in that moment—they were not expecting that. They were like, "Jesus, this doesn't make any sense. They were leaning in looking for a promotion. They were wanting their egos stroked in that moment. They were wondering if Jesus was going to announce His succession plan and say, "When I'm gone so and so is going to be in charge." That's what they wanted to know.

They were all jockeying for position. They always wanted to ride shotgun with Jesus. And instead, Jesus grabs a child, there was apparently a child in the room, He grabs him, pulls him over and says, "Hey, you want to be great? Become like this child."

Now, this creates all kinds of questions. It creates questions for me. One of those questions is for as long as I can remember (I don't know about you) but for as long as I can remember as a kid growing up, it felt like every adult figure in my life was telling me to grow up. They weren't saying, "Hey, you're great just the way you are."

No. They were like, “Hey, you need to grow. You need to mature. You don’t have enough experience.” And so because of that, I couldn’t wait to grow up. And here Jesus says, “No, it’s sort of the opposite.”

Here’s another question that I asked. Are kids really that humble? I mean you just go serve in the Kid’s Ministry for a week and you tell me. I’ve got four kids at home and they are amazing, I love them, they are little blessings—the word humble doesn’t really come to mind.

I mean, when was the last time you ladies who have really little kids at home, when was the last time your toddler came in and said, “Mommy, you’ve had a long day. Just kind of sit back and I’ll do the laundry.” That doesn’t happen.

So Jesus says, “Become as humble as a child,” and I’ve just got to tell you, I haven’t met that many humble kids. What in the world is He talking about? I think what Jesus is driving at here is not necessarily characteristics of a child, He’s talking about the dependency that a child has on others. He says, “A child is completely dependent. Everything a child has is the result of the love, the hard work and reliance on his parents, or the adults, in his life.

And Jesus is saying, “Listen. You don’t need to earn my love because you’ve already got it. You wonder if you have access to God? You’ve got it. Through Me and through the sacrifice that I made for you. You don’t need to live your life grasping for the respect of others. You don’t need to live your life trying to exalt yourself. Trust that I will do it for you, just be humble like a child and rest in that truth.”

I love how Tim Keller put it several years ago. He said:  
“The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 am for a glass of water is a child. [With God] we have that kind of access.”

God is essentially saying that insecurity and pride is really a restlessness of our soul that we don’t trust that He’ll actually exalt us, that He’ll actually give us the desires of our hearts, that He’ll actually give us a purpose worthwhile, so we cling for it. We reach for it ourselves. We don’t like the idea of being dependent. I don’t. We don’t like the idea of being out of control, so we cling to pride to give us some sense of control.

What I want to do in the remainder of our time is I just want to throw out three empty promises that pride makes that it never delivers on. So if you’re taking notes here’s empty promise number one:

Pride promises to make you (and me) BIGGER, but always leaves you feeling smaller.

Always. I don’t know about you but so much of the time when pride wells up within me, it’s honestly, at the end of the day, because I’m wondering if anybody is going to notice my contributions and accomplishments.

I'd really like to be humble, but what if nobody notices? So, I've kind of got to tell you how humble that I am. I fall into these traps and I get really good at it. I don't know about some of you. I get really good at the subtle art of exalting myself because I don't really trust that I will be exalted in any other way.

It's been nearly 14 years ago that God moved our family to Indianapolis to serve here at the church. I've got to tell you, that when I came to Traders Point, this was my dream job, and it still is. You've got to know that prior... This is the job I always dreamed of.

As soon as I got called by God to go into ministry—which I couldn't believe it—the biggest church I'd ever served at as lead pastor before I came here was a church of about 180 people. And Traders Point, at the time, 14 years ago was one location and we were just under 2,000 people. It was like going from a Ford Fiesta to a Ferrari. I was just like, "This is incredible."

And I was like, "I've got to get in there fast before people realize that I'm not qualified." And here's the thing. When I landed my dream job, those of you maybe you can relate to this, when you land your dream job you want other people to know, "This is it. I'm living my life of significance."

Here's what I did. When I was filling out my Facebook profile, under the description of who you are, this is what I wrote, alright? One month after getting here, I wrote, "Lead pastor of Traders Point Christian church, a church of 1,900" and then I added the + mark, "on the northwest side of Indy," 1,900 +, now why did I do that? Well, because we weren't quite 2,000 yet but we were well over 1,900 and I wanted people to know.

And every time I opened Facebook and I read that, I cringed. I just wanted people to know. And it was as if I just began to feel this subtle conviction from the Holy Spirit, maybe the opposition of God, like, "Man, why do you have that on there? What does it really even matter anyway?"

See, when I tried to exalt myself, I didn't feel very good about it. And after a little while I took it down, but that doesn't mean that I still don't struggle with that.

What does it look like to puff yourself up? What does it look like to exalt yourself? We see this all of the time in our lives and in the lives of others. I was trying to think about this last week, "Well, what are some ways in which we all try to exalt ourselves?" One way is the:

#Humblebrag

You know the humble brag, right? It sounds humble but really, you're bragging. And we get really, really good at this, especially on social media. I found a few examples of this. This is on twitter:

"I'm wearing a ponytail, rolled out of bed from a nap, at the bar w/ my guy and guys r still hitting on me. Like really?"

Wow, you are so humble. Here's another one:

“Can we start a media campaign to question how I got into Columbia too? Still scratching my head how I got accepted & demand answers.”  
Oh, you’re so smart.

“I just did something very selfless. But more importantly, it was genuine & I know that it means a lot to the person in the long run. #soworthit”  
Like, wow. You know?

Those are examples of people going, “I just don’t know if other people are going to notice my humility, so I’ve got to tell you about it.”

Here’s another form of exalting ourselves. It’s just the:  
Know-it-all

You ever been around a know-it-all? Like there isn’t anything new that you can tell them because they know it all. You ever had somebody, you just look at him and you go, “You know what? Thank you. I’m so glad that God has blessed me with your presence today. Tell me more. Tell me more. I need to be enlightened by your expertise.”

Another one would just be:  
The “One-upper”

Ever been around the one-upper? It doesn’t matter what you say to them, they’re going to one up you. You’re like, “Hey, we’re getting ready to go on vacation.”  
“Oh, man. Where are you going?”  
“Gatlinburg.”  
“That’s nice. We’re going to Cabo.”  
“We’re getting ready to go on our anniversary dinner.”  
“Oh, man. That’s amazing. Where are you going to go?”  
“Outback.”  
“Oh, we just went to Ruth’s Chris.”

It doesn’t matter what you say, they’ve got a better story, they’ve got a better example, they’ve got a funnier joke. You’re talking to them and you can tell they’re not even listening to you. They’re just locking up the next thing that they want to say to you. And they can’t shut up about their kids, or vacations, or their opportunities.

So, what do we do when we see people puff themselves up around us? Think about that for a minute. What do you naturally want to do when you see somebody exalt himself in front of you? You want to knock them down. It’s like that Whac-A-Mole game. Going to knock you down. That’s just naturally within us.

How about this question. What do you naturally want to do when somebody is genuinely humble? Not a humblebrag, not like fishing for compliments, but genuinely humble. What do



you want to do, naturally? Well, you want to lift them up. You don't even have to believe in God to have that impulse.

The question I want you to ask is: Where does that come from? Where does that come from inside of us that when we see somebody exalt himself, you want to knock him down, when you see somebody humble himself, you want to exalt him. And I would contend with you that is your Creator within you because that's what God does.

There are 150 verses in God's Word on pride. Now, I will not go through all 150 of those, alright? You're welcome. But if I could just give you a brief survey of a handful of those verses that capture what all 150 say it might be this: 2 Samuel, chapter 22, verse 28:  
*"You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty" that's just another word for arrogance, "to bring them low."*

*Proverbs 16:5:*

*"The Lord detests" He detests it, "all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished."*

Jesus even weighs in in Matthew 23. And He's basically saying the same principle. He goes:  
*"For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

That's a promise. So you either get low or you will be made low. Those are your only options. In 1 Peter 5:5—Peter was a guy who struggled with humility his whole life. He said:  
*"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

You see a theme developing? This is just a sampling of all 150 verses in the Bible on this. If I could put what God has to say in His Word about pride and humility into a sentence from these verses, I might just say this. It's that:

Your pride is an invitation for God to oppose you.

Now I know that that is a startling statement. Just let that sink in for a minute. Isn't life hard enough? Why would you want to make it harder by inviting God to oppose you?

Now please hear me. I'm not saying that God is trying to control you. I'm not saying that God is trying to crush you. I'm not saying that God is trying to dismantle your life. No, no, no. This is an act of love. God is saying, "Listen. The path of pride will always lead to a fall. So the most loving thing that I can do is when I see it in your life, to oppose it because it's unhealthy and it will eventually bring you down."

However:

Humility is an invitation for God to bless you.

And when you are genuinely humble, God is the wind at your back. God wants to bless every area of your life. He wants to honor that kind of humility. Scripture just keeps coming back to

this over and over and over again.

But I think there is something within us that at times we just really wrestle with this. Is anybody going to notice my humility? When we try to self-promote, we almost always feel worse about ourselves than we did before.

So knowing this, knowing that God opposes the pride in us, and that humility is an invitation for Him to bless us, why would we ever choose pride? Well, I think it's because pride believes this:  
If I don't elevate myself, who will?

And ultimately this just keeps coming back to that. Like, how will I get the raise or the promotion if I don't make my gifts and abilities known? And honestly, we live in a society that sort of rewards that. Like, dog-eat-dog. You better get out ahead. You better stand out from the pack.

Kind of like being invited to speak at that thing, people don't know about me. How will people know about my gifts and abilities?

My wife is out of town this weekend and already it's gone through my mind. She's got a list of things to kind of keep in order around the house. And I don't really clean house well, but I do pick up. I pick up extremely well.

And I've already thought about it when she comes back on Tuesday. I'm going to pick up the house so well. And here's the thing, because I've lived through this before, when she walks in the door and she doesn't notice how well I picked up, I'll tell her, "Hey, did you notice that there are no dishes in the sink?" It's just like how is she going to know, right?

You see, humility promises this:  
If I refrain from elevating myself, God will.

And that requires faith. Like, do you really trust that God will do what He promises that He'll do over and over and over again in Scripture. And almost every time that I reach for pride, every time I try to elevate myself it's because I don't really trust that God will do the elevating for me.

We just see this played out. I like what you've thought of for your own examples. I'm sharing examples from my life, you've probably thought of examples from your life, but even when we look out at the lives of others, people who are full of pride, we lose respect for them, don't we? Just think about people who you work with and if they are prideful people. You don't have very much respect for them.

Think about professional athletes. You can have somebody who is extremely talented but if he is full of pride, we normally don't like him. We don't cheer for him.

But then think about the other end. Think about an athlete who is really, really gifted but he's also really humble. Oh, man. We adore him. We cheer for him.

This is the thing playing out in our life. And I would say this. I want to speak to all of the leaders in the room. Anybody who is leading anything, one of the marks of all great leaders is humility. You just see it in them.

Here's empty promise number two:

Pride promises to give you influence, yet you'll never keep influence without humility

You might get influence because of your giftedness and ability; you won't keep it if you're not humble. And we see this from a passage that we read last week—the description of Jesus' leadership from Philippians 2. It says:

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."*

Now, that verse can be sort of be mis-understood or mis-applied. You might read that and go, "Oh, well I guess I just need to be everybody else's doormat." That's not what that's saying. "Oh, I guess I just need to devalue myself." That's not what that is saying.

So what does that practically look like in life? Well, here are a couple of examples. Maybe instead of trying to be right all of the time, listen to that other person's perspective even if I disagree. Instead of looking for this person to affirm me, I'm going to work really hard at encouraging them.

Instead of wondering what this relationship can do for my career, I'm going to look for ways to serve them. Instead of just talking about myself all of the time, I'm going to ask some really, really good questions because I feel like I have so much to learn, and I think I can learn from this person.

Now, when we begin to take that kind of posture, here's what happens. Everybody gets elevated. I love this quote from Harry Truman. He says this:

*"You can accomplish anything in life, provided that you do not mind who gets the credit."*

How would that change your marriage? How would that change your workplace? How would that change your friendships if you were just like, "You know what? I don't mind who gets the credit. I'm just going to serve." This is what Jesus did. Jesus lived this out.

Several years ago I was at a conference and there was a pastor named Andy Stanley who was preaching a message and the title of it was called The Most Important Person in the Room. And he was actually talking about the time when Jesus washed the disciples' feet. It was about 10 years ago, and he said something that was really startling for me.

He goes, "You know what? At some point in everybody's life you're going to walk into a room and realize that you're the most important person in the room." And here's what he was saying.

You're the boss now. You're the leader now. You've just been around longer than anybody else. You've got a little bit of age and experience under your belt, so other people are looking to you.

And I know that we don't often think about it that way, but he's right. At some point in your life you will walk into some kind of room, whether it's a board room or a living room, and you'll realize, "People want to know what I have to say. I've got the most influence here."

And then he said this. He goes, "What you choose to do with that influence matters more than anything." And if you're just trying to get the glory for yourself then it will ruin you. But if you give it away to others, you'll elevate other people and that's exactly what Jesus did.

Jesus, the God of the universe, He got down and He washed the disciples dirty, smelly feet. That's an example to you and me that there isn't anybody who has become so elevated or so respected or who has so much power that they can't serve others. That's what we need to do—serve others.

*It goes on in Philippians and urges us toward this. It says:*

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:" Well, who was Christ Jesus? Well He was, "...being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" He did that for you and me. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place."*

And from that example we get this principle that I shared with you last week. It's really the dominant thought for this whole series. Is that:

Appropriate humility is knowing who I am and where I thrive, so God created me and here's what He created me to do. Why? In order to make a difference in the lives of others.

That very generally is for every single one of us. It's our life purpose. Now, the specifics of that will look different for all of us. But you will never find your purpose in life if you don't grasp this. You were created by God. You have infinite value. He created you with certain gifts and abilities, not for yourself, but to make a difference in the lives of other people.

So what are some take-a-ways for us from this message? Here's what I want to just urge you to think about doing here in the following weeks. I want to ask you to sit down at some time. Maybe it's early morning or maybe it's late at night. Whenever you think the clearest.

And I just want you to make a list. I want you to make a list of every person who believed in you. Every person who helped you get to where you are right now. Maybe somebody gave you a shot before you were ready. Maybe it was a teacher. Maybe it was a coach, a friend who believed in you before anyone else did.

Can I say it this way? They served you. They washed your feet. They cared about you, and they wanted you to succeed. They wanted you to win. They spoke living words into you. Just make

a list of those people. Go all the way back to your childhood.

And then how about this? Go thank them. Write them a letter. Send them a text. Give them a phone call, an email, whatever, “At a strategic time in my life, I really needed your voice. I really needed you to believe in me. Thank you.”

Now here’s part two of the homework. Make another list. Make another list of people in your life right now and they need you to believe in them. Make an effort to land on some other’s list of important difference maker. Just reach out. Give them a shout. Encourage them. Say, “I really see this in you. I think God is going to do something significant through you.” Bless them with your words and watch what God might do with that.

Let me give you one last empty promise that pride makes. Maybe the most important one:  
Pride promises you don’t need God when you desperately do.

Pride promises self-sufficiency. Pride promises autonomy. Pride promises, “Hey, man. You can do this on your own. You don’t need that. That’s a crutch. It’s a lie.”

And right now there is somebody who I am speaking to and you’ve kept yourself from fully following after Jesus. Maybe you have all kinds of reasons for that. But I just want you to strip away all of those reasons and recognize that the biggest thing that is actually keeping you from God is your pride. See, that’s what pride does. It just crowds God out of our lives.

Psalm, chapter 10, verse 4 says it so well:

*“In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.”*

So when it comes to your thought life, is there any room for God? When it comes to your heart, are you craving that margin, craving that room for God to work?

I’ve just got to tell you that this is a never-ending struggle. I’ve been following after Jesus for nearly three decades and there is still that thing within me that wants to continue to push God out. I think I’ve got it on my own. And He’ll continue to make me low, continue to break me. And it is an act of love that brings me back to Him over and over and over again.

About a month ago I was with some other pastors in southern California, and we spent a day with a retired pastor, a man who served faithfully for 30 years. And we oftentimes hear about leaders who fail or flame out—they embarrass everybody, but there are also a lot of leaders who run the race well. And I want to sit at their feet.

So we were sitting at the feet of this man who served a great church for 30 years and he was just sharing with us principles and wisdom, just encouraging us.

And God really used him to speak something into my life that I wasn’t even totally aware that I even needed. And it’s kind of related to this. At one point during the day he made a statement

that was so startling to me that I had to write it down in my journal. He said, "Listen." He said, "Full-time ministry, preaching and teaching and serving people," he goes, "it is damaging to your soul."

I've never heard anybody say it that way before. And we said, "Tell us what you mean by that."

And he traced it right back to this whole thing, "You do this long enough and you begin to develop some skills and some abilities where you can actually begin to do ministry without leaning into the power of God in your life, without humbling yourself to Him over and over again. In other words you become a professional pastor and you become a pretty crummy Christian."

And he goes, "When that happens that is damaging to your soul." He said let me just give you an example. He goes, "Every single one of you know what it is like to stand on a platform like the platform I'm standing on right now and to speak to a room full and to a bunch of people online giving a message from God."

And I knew exactly what he was talking about when he said that there will be these moments, few and far between, but there are moments when I'm preaching and it's as if the Holy Spirit says, "Move over, I'm driving." And I begin to say things I didn't even know I knew. And I can see it on your faces, that God's Words are speaking through my feeble words and it is moving me.

And this retired pastor said this. He goes, "Fellas, there is power in that." And he said, "Where you'll go wrong is you'll want to reach out and grab some of that power for yourself. And when you do that, God will oppose you and it will be damaging to your soul."

He goes, "You've got to continue to remember that you cannot crowd God out of your life, not crowd God out of your ministry. You need to be completely dependent upon Him. You take the gifts and the abilities and the opportunities that He has given you and you use them to make a difference in the lives of others."

Now, I know that the vast majority of you are not in full-time vocational ministry. But if you're following Jesus, you are in ministry. The call to Jesus is a call to serve. But take what I just said and apply it to your life. Where are you tempted to reach out and grab power? Where are you tempted to read your own headlines? Where are you tempted to make much of yourself? Are you crowding God out? Are you crowding God out of your marriage right now? Are you crowding God out of your friendships, crowding God out of your career?

Is it just a Sunday thing? You give God today and you've got the wheel the rest of the week. Where is it that God is calling you back to Him? Humble yourself and trust Him. Humble yourself. Turn from your sins. Humble yourself. He will give your life purpose. And He will exalt you.

Lord God, forgive us when we reach out for too much power and control, even in the name of humility. I just pray right now that we would rightfully put you in the place that you deserve, the throne of our hearts and that we would realize that aside from Your grace we have nothing. And everything that You have given us is on loan. And so we want to use it for the good of others to make a difference in this world. That is why we are here. That is the purpose of life.

So, God, forgive us when we try to exalt ourselves because that really comes out of our own insecurity. And give us the faith to serve for Your glory and for the good of others and for the furthering of Your Kingdom. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.