

Chapter Four

**BREAKING THE
SNARE OF PRIDE**



*Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.*

—PROVERBS 16:18

Gateway Church, where I serve as lead pastor, is a relatively new church. It's also a large church. The rapid growth has been a tremendous blessing, but sometimes it's also been a cause for stress.

We held our first service on April 23, 2000, Easter morning, with a little less than two hundred people in attendance. The next Sunday our numbers dwindled to sixty-eight—and we counted one pregnant woman twice. That first sermon must have been a bomb. But by the end of the first year, our attendance was regularly about two hundred people. I felt good about that. The church seemed to be growing steadily and manageably, the way it should. The pace felt brisk, but I felt on top of things.

By the second year, we'd tripled our weekly attendance to six hundred people. That amount of growth felt exciting but nerve-racking at the same time.

By the end of the third year, we had tripled again to eighteen hundred people.

And by the end of the fourth year, we had doubled that—thirty-six hundred people.

By then I was leading by scramble management. It felt as if I were holding on to a speeding train with one hand and was completely horizontal, like a flag flying off the end of that train. I wasn't holding on with two hands, not even holding on with one hand. I had two slim fingers holding on to the end of that train. And what truly frightened me was that I was supposed to be the engineer.

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Then Gateway's attendance absolutely exploded.

At the time I'm writing this book, we have about twenty-seven thousand people attending Gateway each week, with more than fifty thousand in attendance Easter Sunday. We currently hold twenty-two weekend services at five locations across the Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex. We see about five thousand people a year profess faith in Christ for the first time.

The numbers are staggering to me—and I don't mention them to brag about anything I've done. I mention those numbers for the exact opposite reason, in fact. There is absolutely no way I could have ever produced any of what has happened.

By contrast, here's what it looks like when Robert Morris thinks he's in control. Once, during Gateway's fourth year, I took a quick vacation in the mountains of Colorado. For months I'd been feeling nervous and anxiety-ridden and exhausted. The pace at the church was killing me, and I desperately needed a rest.

There, looking out on the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, I opened my Bible to the book of Exodus, and I poured out my heart in prayer: *Lord, now I know why Moses argued with You as much as he did. Moses was a reluctant leader, and so am I. I don't know if I can do this. I'm always so stressed-out. This church is too large. It's unmanageable. It's gotten too big for me, and I don't think I can go on.*

And God impressed upon my heart in a clear, quiet voice, *You're right, Robert. Gateway Church has gotten too big for you. In fact, everything I've ever called you to do is too big for you. This church growth hasn't happened because of anything you've done. It's all happened because of Me. Now trust Me in this. Go get some more people to help you lead, and then hang on for the ride.*

Do you see the root problem in my initial prayer? It wasn't that I was stressed—that was only a symptom. The root problem was I thought I should be able to handle Gateway Church on my own. That was an indication of my pride. It was me nodding my head toward self-sufficiency.

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Pride occurs anytime we say or think, “Thanks, God, but I got this.” And it can easily become a demonic trap.

You see, the only reason I’m allowed to preach God’s Word is God’s grace. The only reason I’m allowed to minister to others is God’s grace. The only reason I’m allowed to introduce a person to salvation in Jesus Christ is God’s grace. The only reason I can live or move or breathe is because of God’s grace.

Each day God extends a gracious invitation to me. He wants to carry me by His strength, and so He invites me to be on my knees every morning, saying,

God, the events of this day are beyond me. The sun will only rise because You say it will. By Your power and mercy this day I will listen for Your voice and do Your will. I will serve You wholeheartedly with the power You give me, and only with that power. This day is of You and for You and from You. I am Your servant. You lead; I’ll follow. Amen.

Yours is a similar invitation.

God has called you to a ministry that’s beyond your own strength. You may not think that you have a ministry beyond yourself, but you do.

It might be as straightforward as going to work each morning to a job where you’re called to be salt and light to a world that desperately needs Jesus. Or it may involve caring for your children so that the next generation rises up to praise the name of God. Maybe you’re in a marriage that’s difficult, and you need to remind yourself daily to love the person you’re yoked to because God commanded you to love. Or maybe you’re caring for your elderly parents, and it burdens your heart to see them struggle with the brutalities of aging. Or maybe God is calling you to lead a small group at your church or speak the Word of God each week to a Sunday school class of fifth graders or work in the nursery in the strategic ministry of caring for the church’s very young.

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Whatever your ministry is, *you can't do it in your own strength*. That thought is both staggering and freeing. Staggering because when you grasp the totality of what God has called you to, then the dream emerges as bigger and deeper and wider than you first imagined. Freeing because if your calling is truly of the Lord, then you can have the full assurance that Jesus is in control—and wherever God guides, God provides.

Being totally dependent on God isn't an easy truth to grasp. The point is never that we see ourselves as worthless, incompetent, or inept. We are paradoxically called to be both powerless people and capable people at the same time. Powerless because it is always God who acts in us to work all things “according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). Capable because we are always called to see our identity in light of what God says about us. We are children of the king (2 Corinthians 6:18). We are a chosen people and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9 NIV). We are wholly and dearly loved heirs of God (Romans 8:17). And as Philippians 4:13 reminds us, we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens” us.

The apostle Paul showed confidence in who God had called him to be and what He had called him to do when he wrote about himself: “*Imitate me*, just as I also imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Are you dependent on God for everything? Are you both capable and powerless at the same time? If not, that's a root of pride—and it's a big problem.

Whenever I talk about pride, I encounter people who insist they're not proud. But that's a dangerously prideful thought in and of itself. In fact, the number-one open door to spiritual oppression that I've seen over the years in believers has come from this area. Pride is a foothold the devil loves. He loves it because it's so prevalent in people's hearts. And he loves it because it's so sneaky and difficult to detect.

Let's look at three ways pride can show up in our lives and what can be done if it does.

#1: Trusting in Our Own Strength

Do you consider yourself a strong person or a weak person? Wait. Don't answer the question too quickly, because the correct answer may surprise you.

The Bible says we are only strong when we are weak (2 Corinthians 12:10). We are strong because of God's power moving within us (Philippians 2:13). God invites us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:10). But He never expects us to depend on our own strength or to go it without Him. When we try to do that, that's when we fool ourselves and open the door to oppression.

You know who thought he was a strong person apart from the Lord? Peter.

And the Lord showed him otherwise.

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed over the cup and the bread and distributed the food to His disciples. Then a short fight broke out among the Twelve about who should be considered the greatest. Jesus resolved the squabble, and then He turned to Simon Peter and spoke this strange line: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31–32).

This amazing passage of Scripture contains a warning we often overlook.

Jesus predicted that Peter would fall away, and we know that Peter understood what Jesus was saying because in the very next verse he tried to dispute it: "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death" (v. 33). Then came Jesus' famous forecast. "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me" (v. 34).

But let's go back and examine that powerful warning in verses 31–32—the promise we often overlook. Note how Jesus said to His disciple Peter, an open follower of Christ, that Satan had asked to sift him.

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The Greek word translated “asked” here is stronger than our English word. It means to ask for something with success—to both ask for and receive it. So really the verse could be translated this way: “Simon, Satan *has asked and received permission* to sift you like wheat.”

The New American Standard Bible translates that phrase with even more force: “Satan has demanded permission.” He has demanded permission only because he has a right. Jesus was warning Peter to watch out because Peter had left a door in his life open to spiritual oppression—Satan has a right to go through open doors.

We have an even clearer picture in a conversation recorded in two of the other synoptic gospels, Matthew and Mark. Jesus said to His disciples,

“All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

‘I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep will be scattered.’” (Mark 14:27)

Right away Peter spoke up. “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be” (v. 29).

You can almost hear the vehemence in Peter’s voice. The disdain. The arrogance. “Look, Jesus,” Peter was saying, “all these other weaklings might stumble. But I won’t.” Then Jesus made His prediction about Peter denying Him three times.

I think Jesus was saying to Peter, “What part of the word *all* don’t you understand? *All* of you are going to deny Me. All! There’s a scripture in the Old Testament that says you will.”

But Peter didn’t get it. “No,” he said in effect. “The Bible is wrong.” That’s pride. He thought he was strong enough to stand.

That wasn’t the first time Peter struggled with pride. Back in Matthew 16:21–23 another conversation between Jesus and Peter was recorded:

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From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Wow, Peter! A person needs to feel awfully good about himself to rebuke Jesus. Note how Jesus didn’t even use Peter’s name in response. He looked right at His disciple and addressed Satan. Whether Satan was *in* Peter or *on* him or *around* him or *influencing* him is unclear from the text. But we do know for sure that Jesus looked right at Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan.” Peter was trusting in his own strength. He had opened the door for Satan to influence his thinking—and ultimately the words that came out of his mouth.

Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers, along with the “officers from the chief priests and Pharisees” (John 18:3), came to arrest Jesus, one of Jesus’ disciples tried to take on the whole garrison.¹ Guess who that was? Big, tough, strong Peter, of course (v. 10). According to the various gospel accounts, the officers came with a “great multitude” (Mark 14:43) as well as a “detachment of troops . . . with lanterns, torches, and weapons” (John 18:3–4). And Peter attempted to fight them with one sword. That’s trusting in your own strength. Peter didn’t get very far, but he did succeed in cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant.

Because of Peter’s pride Jesus had said to him, in effect, “Satan has a right to influence you. You’ve opened a door to him because of your pride, and now he will influence you, and you will deny Me.” That’s exactly what happened later on the night Jesus was arrested. Peter was outside the high priest’s house, in the courtyard. There, he warmed his hands over a fire. A servant girl took a good look at him and insisted that Peter was a disciple of Christ. Peter started cursing and swearing,

saying, “I don’t know Him.” He did that three times, just as Jesus had said, before hearing the rooster crow (Luke 22:54–62).

The pattern of insistence and denial isn’t that uncommon among Christians. Many mature believers fall into this trap, even today. They’ve walked with the Lord a long time, and then they begin to trust in their own strength. They insist that they can accomplish something or resist temptation on their own or that they can get through a difficult patch if they isolate themselves from other believers.

First Corinthians 10:12 lays out a strong warning for all of us: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

The straightforward solution to the problem of pride, of trusting in our own strength, is to depend on the Lord always.

#2: Trusting in Our Own Righteousness

“By grace you have been saved, through faith . . . not by works” (NIV).
Right?

Ephesians 2:8–9 is a passage we love to rattle off anytime someone questions us about trusting in our own righteousness. Of course we don’t trust in our own righteousness. We trust in God’s grace.

Or do we?

Trusting in our own righteousness is a trap that more of us fall into than you may think. Remember the story of Job? The condensed version is that Satan and God have a great discussion in heaven—some would call it a contest—to see what would happen if a particularly righteous man down on earth had everything he valued systematically taken away from him.

In Job 1:6–7, Satan comes to present himself to God, and God asks, “From where do you come?”

“From going to and fro on the earth,” Satan answers, “and from walking back and forth on it.” This is right in line with what we know of Satan, that he goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

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The rest of the conversation goes like this:

Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?”

So Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”

And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.”

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. (vv. 8–12)

Basically, God gives Satan permission to oppress Job. This is a problematic idea for some people. But the passage is not difficult to understand when we read the rest of the book.

Later, when Job’s life has been wrecked, three of his friends show up and try to comfort him. (You don’t want friends like these, by the way). “Look, Job,” they keep saying to him, in essence, “are you sure there’s not an open door in your life—something the enemy’s been able to use against you?” And they rattle off a list of wrongdoings Job has potentially done. But Job says, “Nope, nope, nope. I haven’t done any of those wrong things you’ve listed.”

Then, in chapter 32, a young man named Elihu speaks. He’s been sitting near the friends the whole time, just listening, but now he basically says, “I didn’t say anything all this time because I figured all you guys are old dudes and eventually you’d get the right answer because you’re so wise. But none of you have figured it out yet, so I’m going to tell you what the problem is here.” Elihu spends a while longer setting up his case; then he hits Job with the clincher in Job 33:8–9:

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*“Surely you have spoken in my hearing,
And I have heard the sound of your words, saying,
I am pure, without transgression;
I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me.”*

Did you catch it? That’s the sin of Job’s life revealed.

Job believed he was righteous because of the lifestyle he led, not because of the righteous Person he knew.

For thirty-one chapters of the Bible, Job has basically been saying, “Hey, compare me to anybody, and you’ll see I’m a good guy. I’m righteous.” But Job wasn’t righteous—not at the core. He led an upright life, sure. But he was only righteous because of God, and that’s whom he failed to give credit to. Job’s sin had opened the door for Satan to oppress him, so God granted permission to Satan to go to work.

Believers can so easily fall into the same trap. We think, *Oh, I haven’t done this, and I haven’t done that, so God must think I’m swell.* We fall into pride because we think that our righteousness comes from us and not from God. But we are not righteous because of what we do. We are righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ alone! Whenever we begin to believe otherwise, that’s pride.

God’s answer to Job comes at the end of the book of Job. God exposes the man’s sin of pride by comparing his finite works and understanding to the infinite works and understanding of God. God asks,

*“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements?
Surely you know!” (38:4, 5)*

You can almost hear the divine sarcasm in God’s voice as He continues—for almost seventy verses! “Have you ever told the sun when

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to come up?” (I’m paraphrasing here.) “Does lightning come to your throne and ask where to strike? Do you go hunting for lions and tell eagles how to fly?” (Job 38:12, 25, 39; 39:27).

God ends with this telling statement to Job: “Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?” (Job 40:8).

And to his credit, Job hears these words and repents.

If only more Christians would do the same!

Many mature believers are righteous when it comes to their living, yes, and righteous living is good. Acting the opposite way certainly isn’t the solution; unrighteous living only hurts us and opens the door to the demonic. But righteous living does not make us righteous. Only the blood of Jesus Christ does.

A man came to me for counseling once and spent the bulk of our time listing the various troubles he was experiencing. He insisted the troubles were all due to what other people had done wrong. He capped our session by saying, “I’ve always done the right thing.”

I flinched when I heard that and thought, *No, you haven’t always done the right thing. Nobody has always done the right thing.*

He was trusting his own righteousness. And that’s pride.

The straightforward solution to this pride problem? Always keep in mind that our righteousness comes from God.

#3: Trusting in Our Own Wisdom

Debbie and I once counseled a couple who were clearly going in the wrong direction. Near the start of the meeting the problem became evident. I pointed out to the husband a few scriptures with little response from him. After that I stayed fairly quiet throughout the rest of our time together. When we were finished and got in the car, Debbie pursed her lips together. “Hmm,” she said, “I thought you would say a little more than you did. What happened in there?”

“The husband is not going to listen no matter how hard we try,”

I said. “I could tell that about him almost immediately. He thinks he’s smarter than his wife and wiser than both of us put together, and he had decided early on that he wasn’t going to listen to biblical counsel.”

“So what’s going to happen?” Debbie asked.

“God’s going to send the enemy to oppress him,” I said. “Hopefully then the husband will repent.”

How did I know this?

There’s a powerful biblical story found in 1 Kings 22. Ahab was the king of Israel, and he was having a rough go of it. To begin with, he had married extremely poorly. His wife’s name was Jezebel, and as we saw in the previous chapter, she was one of the most wicked queens Israel had ever known. Ahab’s other big concern was that the city of Ramoth Gilead, which used to belong to Israel, had been taken by Syria. Ahab wanted the city back, but the king of Syria was a bit too powerful for Ahab to attack all by himself. So he found himself in a quandary.

King Ahab met with Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, who recommended asking a prophet to call on God for advice. So Ahab called the four hundred prophets on his payroll and asked them if they should attack Ramoth Gilead. All four hundred of them said, “Yes, go! God will be with you.”

But Jehoshaphat wasn’t convinced. “You got any other prophets?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’ve got one other,” Ahab said, or words to that effect. “His name is Micaiah, and he’s a true prophet of the Lord. But I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me. A couple of years ago I put him in prison.”

I love the next section of this story, which I’ll quote directly from Scripture:

Then [Micaiah] came to the king; and the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall we refrain?”

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And he answered him, “Go and prosper, for the LORD will deliver it into the hand of the king!”

So the king said to him, “How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”

Then he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, ‘These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.’”

And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?” (1 Kings 22:15–18)

Micaiah initially came to Ahab reluctantly. His attitude was, *Well, whatever I say, you're not going to do it anyway, so I may as well tell you whatever you want to hear.* But Ahab pressed him for the real answer, so Micaiah gave it to him. “Don’t attack the city. You’re going to fail.”

Then we come to this telling portion of the story:

Then Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. And the LORD said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?’ So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, ‘I will persuade him.’ The LORD said to him, ‘In what way?’ So he said, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And the LORD said, ‘You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.’ Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you.” (vv. 19–23)

The phrase “all the host of heaven” usually refers to angels, but the phrase makes allowance for fallen angels being present near God’s throne too. Notice in this passage that they’re standing both on the Lord’s right

hand and on his left, just as in the judgment of the “sheep and the goats” (believers and nonbelievers) described in Matthew 25:31–46.

Hold both the sheep and the goats and the story of Ahab and Micaiah in mind for a moment, and let me show you another scripture that further defines the host of heaven.

Second Kings 21:1–17 tells the story of Manasseh, who was twelve years old when he became king over Israel and reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. Manasseh was a horrible king. He led the nation in idol worship. He practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He even burned his son alive in an act of idolatry. And according to verse 5, “he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.”

Manasseh wasn’t building altars for God here. He was building altars to idols. He worshipped angelic beings. They may or may not have been fallen angels—either way, building altars for all the host of heaven was clearly deemed wrong.

That’s important. Remember we just read in Job where Satan stood in front of the throne of God, and God gave Satan permission to do something. Now look back to the description of Micaiah’s vision in 1 Kings 22:20–23. This passage shows the Lord sitting on His throne, a lying spirit talking to Him, and God giving the spirit orders. Note who is always in control. There is not a battle in heaven between God and the devil. The devil is a created being. God is the Creator. God is always in charge, and He will sometimes use the enemy to fulfill His own purposes. Whenever we sin, we open a door to the enemy, and God may give permission for the enemy to oppress us the same way He allowed Simon Peter to be sifted like wheat.

Why would God ever do that? Mark this carefully—it’s always for our own good. God is a good Father, and He only disciplines us out of love (Hebrews 12:6 NIV). Do good parents ever discipline their children? Absolutely. Good parents discipline their children because the parents don’t want the children going the wrong way. And one way our

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heavenly Father disciplines us is by letting us get tripped up in our own pride and humbled.

At Gateway, we have both Saturday evening and Sunday morning services, and sometimes the message will be recorded on Saturday evening to be replayed the next morning. I noticed that many of the leaders for these evening services were saying the word “tonight” a lot, which didn’t translate well on the video for our morning attendees. So I focused hard and trained myself to say only “today” in those messages. Then I made a big deal to our leadership team about doing the same.

Guess what happened the very next time I got up to talk on a Saturday?

I said “tonight.” Several times! And I was humbled.

Proverbs 16:18 is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. Usually we hear this verse quoted like as “Pride goes before a fall.” But look carefully at what the verse actually says:

*Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Pride does not go before a fall. Pride goes before destruction. Look at the verse again. What goes before a fall is a haughty spirit. But pride goes before destruction. When we have pride in our lives, we will be destroyed—or at the very least, humbled. And one way this can happen is for God in His grace to send the enemy so we go into bondage. If, in bondage, we then humble ourselves and cry out to God, “God, set me free!” He then will set us free.

Or think of it this way. Dabbling in sin is like strolling in front of an oncoming bus. God sees the danger we’re in and forcefully pushes us out of the way. We might fall down on the pavement and get scratched up in the process. But the forceful push is actually a push done out of love. Being pushed out of the way prevents us from being destroyed by the oncoming bus.

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How does this relate to the danger of trusting in our own wisdom? James 3:14–15 describes it clearly. “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.”

If we’re dabbling in sin, in other words, chances are good that conscience or the people around us are warning us that we are in danger. But we’re not listening. We think we’re smart enough to somehow escape trouble. When that happens, James says, we’re listening to the voice of demonic wisdom. We falsely believe that no one can correct us because we somehow have a corner on truth. We think we’re either smarter than other people or have more experience or that somehow we’ve studied harder or thought through an issue more thoroughly. Pride is working overtime in our lives. The door is hanging wide open, and the snake is slithering in.

So would God ever grant permission for Satan to oppress a believer?
Absolutely.

We just saw it with Peter.

We just saw it with Job.

We just saw it with Ahab—a man who wasn’t following God but knew God’s truth nonetheless.

Now think about this: Peter and Job both experienced Satan’s oppression, but they repented of their pride. What was the result? Peter became one of the preeminent apostles in the New Testament church. Job had everything Satan had destroyed restored to him—and doubled.

But Ahab?

Ahab didn’t repent. He went into battle against Ramoth Gilead anyway, and he was killed. That was no coincidence either. Ahab disguised himself and went into the battle—dressed in ordinary armor instead of the king’s robes. But the Bible says a certain man drew his bow at random and shot an arrow that found its way into the joint of Ahab’s armor (1 Kings 22:34, 37–38).

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Ahab refused to be shoved out of the way of the oncoming bus, so the bus ran over him. God allowed that arrow to destroy Ahab.

The straightforward solution to this third pride problem? We must always trust in God's wisdom alone, and not in any wisdom that doesn't come from God or isn't in alignment with His Word.

Hope for Today

Maybe you read this chapter, and now you're feeling overwhelmed. It feels as though you have a lot of work to do in your spiritual journey. Perhaps you believe you need to get yourself cleaned up first so that God will accept you.

You have pride in your life, yes, and that needs to go. You can't rely on your own wisdom, so you need to seek out biblical wisdom. You're standing in front of an oncoming bus, and you need to get out of the way quickly.

Are you feeling tired already?

But hang on—let me emphasize the work of God in this situation. God always loves us, and the real work of life change always comes from God. Yes, He works with our consent. And yes, there are some things we need to do. We need to repent of our pride and other sins. We need to obey God's commandments and His voice. We need to consent to His leadership in our lives. But the heavy scrubbing of making us clean always comes as a work of God.

I remember when Debbie gave birth to our son, Josh, and I held him right after he was born. The nurse said, "Here, give him over. Let's clean him up first, Dad."

But I didn't hand my son over. (Not right away, anyway.) I didn't care if Josh was cleaned up or not. I just wanted to hold him.

That's the way God feels about us. God holds us when we're bloody and goey and covered in afterbirth. He sees our sins and our spots and

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blemishes and loves us in spite of the mess. We don't need to get ourselves cleaned up before we approach God. God always welcomes us with open arms.

Will you pray with me right now?

Holy Spirit, I pray that You will draw every person to Your side who is struggling with pride. Help us to identify pride in our lives and then repent of that pride. We rely on Your strength, not ours, to cleanse us of this pride. We rely on Your righteousness, not ours. We rely on Your wisdom, not ours. Thank You for always loving us and caring for us. Amen.

That's what's necessary to break the snare of pride. God forgives us and works in our lives to make us free. That's really good news.

The bad news is that pride is only one snare that can entangle us. In the chapters ahead we'll look at other doors believers leave open that let in the enemy and, therefore, rob us of joy and leave us defeated.

Questions for Contemplation or Group Discussion

1. Pride means trusting in your own strength, your own righteousness, or your own wisdom. Give some practical examples of how you've seen any of this in your own life or the life of someone you know well.
2. What does it mean to be dependent on God for everything?
3. The chapter says, "Trusting in our own righteousness is a trap that more of us fall into than you may think." What does this mean? Have you ever seen examples of this in your own life?
4. Why is it difficult to remember that God is in control when we are in the middle of a battle?
5. The chapter says, "The real work of life change always comes from God." Explain how this works and what our responsibility is—and isn't—in the midst of that.