



Sunday, July 12, 2020
Sermon Series: Didn't See It Coming

When Pride Gets the Best of Us
Pastor Vern Christopherson

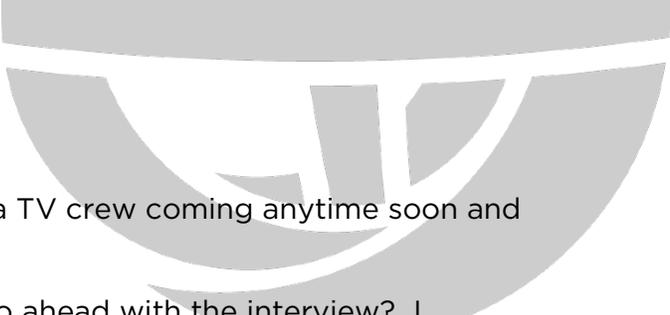
Galatians 5:22-6:5 THE MESSAGE

²²⁻²³ What happens when we live in God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in the orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. ²³⁻²⁴ Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good—crucified. ²⁵⁻²⁶ Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.

⁶ ¹⁻³ Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived. ⁴⁻⁵ Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.

In the early stages of COVID-19, the telephone rang one morning at church. It was a TV reporter from KAAL, Channel 6, in Rochester. She asked to interview me about what was happening in churches as the Coronavirus was beginning to spread. Could she come by in 30 minutes or so?

"Sure," I said, "I'll meet you at the front door" and then hung up. The church was mostly shut down, but there was construction going on and a few staff were in the building. I was sitting at my desk. And then I looked down at what I was wearing – baggy blue sweatpants and a raggedy sweatshirt. And I hadn't shaved in at least a



couple of days. Obviously I hadn't been thinking of a TV crew coming anytime soon and I'd clearly let myself go.

That's when I panicked. What should I do? Go ahead with the interview? I couldn't do that! Self-respecting pastors don't look like this, do they? In a moment of clarity - or perhaps desperation - I marched down to Pastor Jason's office and barged in. I'm not even sure I knocked. "Jason, KAAL is coming by, you need to do this interview for me - please!" Jason, cool as a cucumber, readily agreed. And, watching the interview later that evening, let's just say, "I made the right call." Jason came through looking poised and polished and dressed appropriately. I heard from a number of church people about what a nice job he'd done. All I could think was, "Whew! He sure saved my bacon on that one!"

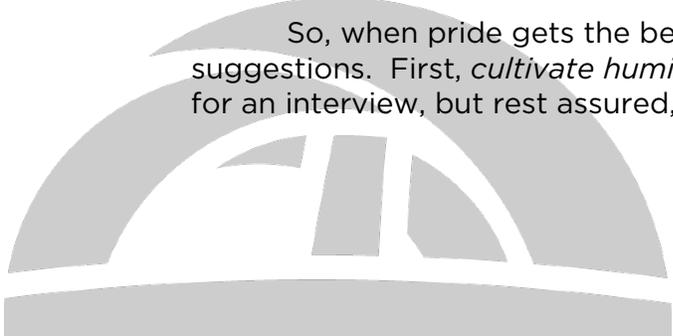
Truth be told, I normally spend about two minutes a month focused on my personal appearance. You've probably already figured that out about me. But then a TV station calls and suddenly I get all flustered with what others might think of me.

There's a word for this. It's called pride. Now, a certain amount of pride can be a positive thing - a desire to make a good first impression; a feeling of healthy self-esteem; a commitment to follow through on a project and do a good job. Taking pride in who we are and what we do can definitely be affirming.

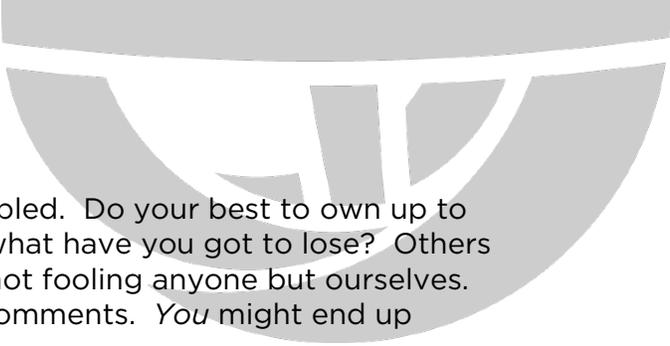
But let's be honest, sometimes pride gets the best of us. You know what I mean. We see people who are too proud to ask for advice, even though they desperately need it. We see people who aren't willing to apologize, because it's hard to admit they've done anything wrong. We see people who love to go on-and-on about all their accomplishments, even though their friends have long since stopped listening to them.

Pride might be one of those qualities that easier to spot in others than in ourselves, but it's there, and maybe more than we care to admit. Pride might seem relatively harmless, but it's not always so. It shows up *when we compare ourselves to others*. We often don't feel smart enough or good enough, and it bothers us. Another symptom of pride: *We tie our self-worth to our latest performance*. If it didn't go well, we often fret and fuss and make excuses. Timothy Keller says: "When work is your identity, success goes to your head, and failure goes to your heart." Yet another symptom of pride: *We have trouble celebrating other's successes*. It can feel like a zero-sum game. There's only so much success to go around. If another person is getting all the attention, that means you're not.

I like what Paul says in Galatians in the Message version: "Each of us is an original." Do you believe that? I hope so, at least some of the time. I'm afraid, though, that the more we compare ourselves to others and tie our worth to our latest performance and secretly begrudge another's success, the more likely we are to get puffed up with pride. And we often don't see it coming until it starts to do damage, sometimes lots of damage. It can end up fostering jealousy, creating divisions, stifling compassion, suffocating love.



So, when pride gets the best of us, what can we do about it? I have three suggestions. First, *cultivate humility*. Stuff happens. Maybe the TV station doesn't call for an interview, but rest assured, something will happen. Like it or not, life gives us



plenty of chances to fall flat on our face and be humbled. Do your best to own up to these moments and be honest about them. Really, what have you got to lose? Others can often spot our weaknesses a mile away. We're not fooling anyone but ourselves. Paul says it like this: "Be careful about your critical comments. *You* might end up needing forgiveness before the day is out."

A second suggestion for dealing with pride: *find somebody to serve*. The Zumbro high schoolers had a mission trip to Guatemala lined up for this week. Our Youth and Young Adult Minister, Jen Gruendler, was going to accompany them. The trip got cancelled, of course, because of our pandemic. So, Jen has come up with some new plans. It's called "Serve Local." The youth will be serving through Open Table, passing out burritos and books to those who could use a helping hand. They'll be working on painting a mural that will go outside the new youth drop-in center on the second floor. The mural will have themes of welcome and connection and safety. They'll be doing some outside projects for seniors through Rochester Family Services. And last but not least, they hope to do some highway clean up too.

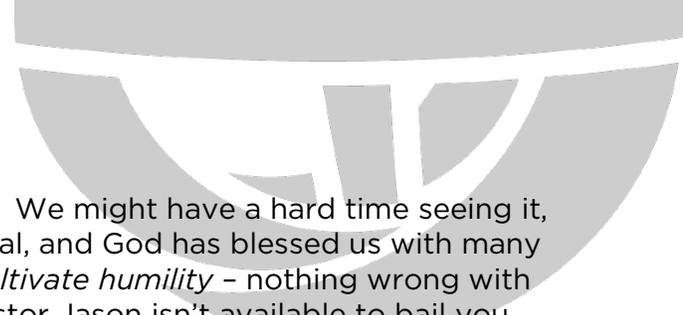
Paul writes: "Stoop down and reach out to all who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you're too good for that, you're badly deceived." Granted, these *serve local* projects won't be quite as exciting as a trip to Guatemala, but like any opportunity to serve, they're bound to make a difference, both for others and for themselves.

A third suggestion for dealing with pride: *never lose your gratitude*. I did a graveside service for Elmer Kiphuth yesterday at Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis. Elmer was almost ninety-nine years old. He was one of the most joyful persons I knew. Elmer was born on a farm near Hillman, MN. He went to a one-room country school. He got through the eighth grade, but then, because our country was in the middle of the Great Depression, Elmer was told he needed to stay home and help out on the farm. Despite Elmer's help, the family lost the farm during the Depression. A few years later they managed to scrape together just enough to buy a modest resort on Pleasant Lake.

Elmer never forgot his humble beginnings. He met his future wife, Marilyn, at that resort. They moved to Minneapolis, and Elmer found work in the grocery business. He was genuinely proud of what he was able to accomplish with only an eighth-grade education. Elmer's secret, I think, was never feeling like he did it all himself. Sure, he worked hard and accomplished much, but he never forgot the help of others, and beyond that, he never forgot that ultimately everything he had was a gift from God.

Because Elmer never lost his gratitude, the pride he felt was less about himself and more about trusting God to take care of him, come what may. When Elmer lost Marilyn after 37 years of marriage, he was alone for a few years. On Easter Sunday he got up and went to church. On the way home he stopped at a neighborhood grocery store. He knew the owner. The owner asked him to wait a few minutes. Soon he got introduced to a woman named Alice. Before the day was over, these had two shared a cup of coffee. And Elmer and Alice went on to have 39 years together. For those keeping track at home, that's 76 years of wedded bliss. Gratitude and joy were at the heart of most everything Elmer did.





Friends, pride sometimes gets the best of us. We might have a hard time seeing it, but it's there. We forget that each of us is an original, and God has blessed us with many good gifts. If pride starts to show up in your life, *cultivate humility* - nothing wrong with laughing at yourself once in a while, especially if Pastor Jason isn't available to bail you out. *Find someone to serve* - there are plenty of folks who could use a helping hand and you'll have less time to worry about yourself. And finally, *never lose your gratitude* - you've probably been blessed in more ways than you can count.

Paul gets the last word on our pride: "Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you've been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life." Amen.



