



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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ROMANS 12:16

Romans Series: How God Changes People

[PRAYER] Lord, I so thank you for the work you're doing in each person here. You've brought us all here together today under your direction and leadership. There's no accident about our meeting today. This is part of your sovereign grace that we might connect with each other in one way or another and that the most important things may be said today because of a comment made from one to another. Lord, as we open your word now we ask that you would be ever-present in our hearts to be able to help us to receive the word with gladness, to have receptive hearts, and ask that you would teach us some important things that will affect how we live in the rest of this week. Bless us now as we look at your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Most of the time I open the Bible to prepare for my sermon on Sunday and I'm rather excited about what the week is going to contain and I'm excited about the passage I'm going to teach and I really get into it. There are other times, like this week, where I feel like saying to God, "God, could someone else preach this passage? I just really don't want to do this one." Because this one is very personal to me and it touches me in a personal way in my own life.

But at Calvary Chapel we teach verse by verse, and one of the benefits of teaching verse by verse is that we cover all kinds of things through the scripture. If I were to teach topically I'd be able to pick and choose the things that fancy me, but when I go through verse by verse there's a sense of anticipation, a sense of I wonder what God is going to say this week to us as we continue to go through the passage verse by verse.

I start my sermon on Sunday or Monday for the next week and as I do I'm asking the Lord to teach me and then I try to live through that passage in the course of the week so I have something to share with you that comes from my own heart. Actually I'm asking the Lord to preach the sermon to my heart so when I get up I've got something from my heart that I'm sharing with you, not just from the text or just something from some study, but it's really something that comes from my heart as well.

So this is a verse that is a challenging one for me and I'll share more about that with you. It's in Romans 12:16. It's the next verse in our series. So look there with me.

It says this in Romans 12:16 – *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.* Pride is one of those things I wrestle with and I'll share some more of that with you.

But before I do, let's look at the first part of this passage because there's some important information there as well. So let's look at the first words where it says *live in harmony*. The words *live in harmony* basically mean in Greek have the same mind or be in agreement. Be in agreement with each other. Notice that the idea of being in agreement is tied to this idea of not being proud. So humility is somehow connected to harmony in relationships. Somehow we get those two things tied together.

This is a really important truth I don't want us to gloss over. Humility and harmony are tied together. It's not just taught here in the book of Romans, but it's taught other places in the Bible. So to let it sink in a little bit, let's look at a couple other verses so you can see what the Bible is saying about this.

Peter says this in 1 Peter 3:8-9. *Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.* Hidden within humility are some kind of ingredients that allow harmony to take place in relationships.

Here's another passage that says something very similar. Philippians 2:2-4 says – *Then make my joy complete by being like-minded (that's the same idea, having your mind together in agreement), having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. (Here's the word conceit again.) Rather, in humility (there's the word humility) value others above yourselves, not looking at your own interests but each of you to the interest of others.* There's something about humility that God has designed that keeps like-mindedness or humility in place. So the two of them are very important.

Let's me just show you one more passage. I'm not going to read this whole passage, but I want you to see the whole passage and I'm going to take the first part and the last part. You'll want to look at the rest of it to see it in context, but the first part says – *What causes the fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? What's the solution down in verse 6? God opposes the proud but gives favor to the humble.* So somehow, again, humility will address the fights and quarrels that we experience in life.

All of those verses tie together the idea of humility with harmony. So it would be simple to say this: If there's tension in a relationship then someone in the relationship needs to be a little more humble, not so prideful. I think we can say this from this passage. The challenge is to know who is it. Is it me? Do I need to be more humble? Or is it the other person that needs to be more humble?

Frankly we all need to ask ourselves regularly, maybe it is me. Or maybe it is the other person. But we always have to be wondering, is there something in my life that needs to change here? Because I think we have a tendency to view life from our own little pedestal and we see everybody else and we start viewing ourselves as right and other people are wrong. So we want other people to be humble. And if they would be humble we would get along with them just fine.

But I think the principle here is we've got to at least consider whether we're the ones who need to have a little more humility. We tend to push it off and wish other people would be humble.

It just reminds me of the two boys, Ralph, who's seven years old, and Carl, who's five years old, and they bicker a lot with each other. They happen to come to breakfast this morning and they're doing their normal bickering thing because mom is making pancakes. They're coming out of the pan one at a time, so they start arguing about who's going to get the first pancake. They're saying, "I should get it first," "no, you got it first last time," and they're bickering back and forth. So mom wisely says this: "Now boys, if Jesus were here, He'd say, 'My brother can have the first pancake.'" Carl who's five years old thought about that and he says to his brother, "Ralph, you be Jesus."

Now I think that's what we do a lot with each other. We've got tension in a relationship, we've got disharmony, whether it's in a home or a place on the ball field, at school there's some disharmony going on, it's the other person. "If they would change, I'd be fine." That person needs to develop some humility in their lives.

We need to be able to deal with this, I think, in some particular ways. Because I think that pride sneaks into our lives and pride says, "I'm right; you're wrong. If you would change we would be fine." This is where the rub comes for me.

I'm going to share personally from my own life. Usually I'm able to kind of work this through personally, come to some conclusions that are general and share them. I got kind of stuck on the personal side this week, so you're going to get some of that from me today as I just continue to reflect on my own life because I have a challenge in this particular area.

Let me explain to you how part of this came about. I grew up in a very loving home with loving parents who wanted the best for us as kids. They wanted to raise confident kids, so they would put us in situations where we would be developing confidence on a regular basis.

For example, on a regular basis (it seemed like almost every evening) before I went to bed, my dad would play a game with me. There were two particular games we would play. One is chess and the other is rummy. We would play those games together and I would often beat my father, and I would feel pretty good about that. He would send me to bed kind of gloating and feeling good about myself because I had just beat my father.

Now it wasn't till years later that I learned that my father was often letting me win. When I had my own children and was playing games with them, I can now imagine what it was like for my father as I was eight, ten, twelve years old, and I was playing these games with him. Because you're playing rummy and I'm sure he would put cards down that he knew I needed. He would just watch my eyes get big, knowing that I was about to get some points, and I would play them and then I'd be excited. So my dad was quite good at allowing me to win and then making a big deal about it in the course of things.

So over that period of time, I often went to bed thinking I was better than my dad and I grew in confidence in a lot of areas in my life. I was pretty good, I said to myself.

I don't think confidence is bad. In fact I want to suggest to you that I help parents develop confident children even today. I think confidence is a good quality. Because confidence contains

several different beliefs. It's the belief that I know something that others don't know. It's the belief that I have good ideas that work, the ideas are right. It's the belief that I can take initiative and I can be successful. It's the belief that I have something to offer others. It's the belief that when there's a problem I can fix it. It's the belief that I'm right, I'm capable, and I'm competent.

I'm a confident person. I'm not afraid to make mistakes. I have bad ideas and that's okay because I believe bad ideas often lead to good ideas. The problem is that there's this temptation that's built into confidence that is a nagging problem for me, and that is pride. I don't want to be known as a prideful person. I like being confident. I think confidence is good, but I think sometimes that can get us into trouble or get me into trouble because pride is so close to confidence that I can easily cross the line, then negative things start happening in my life and in those relationships that I'm involved in.

So the passage says *live in harmony with one another* and then it says these words: *do not be proud*. The word *proud* is to think highly of yourself, which is very interesting compared to the next line, which says *be willing to associate with people of low position*. So lower and lower are kind of reflected there. Don't think too highly of yourself. That's what pride means. And then it says *do not be conceited*. Conceited means don't be wise in your own estimation.

I don't think confidence is bad, but I do think it crosses the line at points and it becomes arrogance or it becomes conceited, and in those moments that's when people get hurt. So I've hurt people in my life because of my confidence/pride. I don't want to be known as an arrogant person. I've caused myself great pain at times because I've stepped out when I shouldn't have or I said things that shouldn't have come out of my mouth or have handled situations that aren't the best.

I hope that as I demonstrate confidence in my life and come in contact with you that you would give me grace. If you sense that I'm overstepping my bounds and I'm being arrogant or conceited or prideful, the words that are being used here, I hope that you'll correct me. Because one of the things I've learned that's really important is that correction is valuable. It's something that we need in our lives. Because here we are in the center and when other people are reflecting, sometimes they reflect things to us that reveal "oh yeah, I need to work on that."

My parents, I'm sure, saw the arrogance in me as I was growing and tried to help me a number of different ways to try to curb that without killing off the confidence. It's a hard thing. You're trying to do both of those, right? So they would help me in a number of different ways.

My dad told me at one point, "If someone says you have a tail you can ignore it. But if three people say you have a tail, you better turn around and look." The idea is you need to be sensitive when you're sitting on your little pedestal looking out at life. If other people are telling you something maybe you need to think about what they're saying. Because maybe if there's a number of people saying the same things you've got a problem that needs to be addressed and you need to take some action to adjust that.

Now my parents knew that the solution for me was humility and tried to teach that to me. So that's been a lifelong process that I'm trying to grow in in my own life. But I don't think that it's

just me with confidence that experiences this particular challenge. I think anybody who has a strength and a particular character issue has a tendency that pride can take it in a negative territory.

So let me show you what I mean by that. Someone who is hard working can look at other people and look down on them and say they're lazy. You see, there's this inherent strength that a person has that if pride sneaks in there they can look at someone else and they can say, "That person isn't as good as me. They aren't as hardworking. Therefore I view that person as lazy." Or "I'm compassionate. I care about others, and that other person doesn't do that. They must be selfish." So there's a way to look down on people when pride sneaks into our life. Or someone who's very independent can view other people as weak when pride sneaks into their lives. For someone who's emotionally sensitive to other people, they can view other people as superficial if they don't have depth to their lives at all. For someone who's clever in their lives, they can view other people as incompetent.

So I'm convinced that pride, although it is a challenge in my own life, I'm not the only one who struggles with this. I think that anybody who has a strength in their life in a particular area must address the pride area or it crosses the line. That line is a very important one. It comes between humility and pride.

I want to draw attention to that line a little bit today, so I'm going to share with you several differences between pride and humility and some scriptures that go along with them. Just because maybe in the midst of this, although these are all passages and statements that I need to work on in my own life, maybe there will be something in here that will be helpful for you as well.

Pride says, "I'm right," but humility says, "I need to listen to advice." Here's a verse that really illustrates that idea. It says, *Where there is strife, there is pride*. Going back to the same issue that Romans 12:16 is telling us to live in harmony instead of being proud. So there's an important thing that we're trying to address here that's deeper in order to help or understand what that looks like. So he's saying, *Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice*. So the advice that comes alongside is going to be very important to help someone address deeper issues that are going on.

My dad used to tell me that wisdom is in *a multitude of counselors*. That's a quote from scripture, but he would just ask me, "Who are your counselors?" As I was a teenager I started developing counselors.

It's important to choose counselors, young people, that aren't just your friends. Having friends as counselors is great, but you need to choose other people who are wise, who've been around a little bit longer who can give you some insight and wisdom. I would suggest always parents should be counselors. That doesn't mean you always have to do what they're saying when you're getting advice from them, but you're listening to them because they know you well.

My wife is a great counselor for me and I appreciate what she says and how she reflects life back to me so that I can process the things well. Everybody needs counselors in their lives. These are

the advisors that you can go to to get help, to get strength when you're making a decision or you're trying to understand something about your life.

Let's go to another statement that pride makes and that statement is this: "I'm God's gift to the world." Now there's some truth to that. We are all God's gift to the world, but there's a way to look at this in a prideful way that draws attention to me. I am God's gift to the world. When we look at it from a biblical perspective I would suggest that humility says that I need to recognize God's grace. That really in order to be effective I'm a conduit of God's grace. God wants to pass His grace through people to other people, and so He'll use you and me to do that. So if we recognize that I'm not God's gift to the world, but in essence God is using His grace, which is His gift, to go through me to bless the world, that's what humility is.

A scripture that illustrates this very well says – *He gives more grace. Therefore it says: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* Why does He give grace to the humble? Because they become the conduits that can receive that grace and pass it on to other people in an effective way.

Let me tell you a story about my own life. When I graduated from seminary I was pretty confident. I went to Hawaii to pastor a church with my father who had just started the church and it had 40 people when I came. My dad was very gracious with me. He allowed me to be the senior pastor with him. We co-pastored and he gave me a lot of freedom to try out new things. I feel sorry for that first congregation that I worked with. But my dad was very gracious and allowed me to work with him in that regard.

After the eight years that I was there the church had reached a size of 240. I was feeling pretty good about myself because it was more true in that day that numbers were very important to me and I valued myself in some ways based on the numbers that we saw. We had gone from 40 to 240 and I was ready to go and do something bigger for the Lord.

I decided to leave Hawaii and I moved to New Jersey and I started pastoring a church with Ed Miller and two other guys, and we worked together there in that church. The Lord used that church to develop some real humility in me. It was a very difficult church, but it was a church that I cherish because I learned so much. God did so many things in my life as a result of that church. The depth of relationships and my depth of theology, so many different things happened in the midst of that situation. But the church had some defects in it and it eventually died.

I moved to Africa or went to Africa for some time and during that nine-month period of time I was really frustrated with the church and I was ready to quit. I was done being a pastor and I was going to go into business. So I spent some time kind of planning what I was going to do, going into business and moving forward. But about halfway through that nine-month period of time the Lord reconfirmed my call to be a pastor and reaffirmed my love for the church. So it started to come back to me, this desire to come back to this area and plant another church and try again.

So I came back, I decided that we would be part of a Calvary Chapel and start a Calvary Chapel in the area. I announced that we would be starting a Calvary Chapel. We started a small group and the small group grew out of our home rather quickly. Within a couple of months we were in

a community center. We had 60 people coming into the Bible study. It was obvious we could start on a Sunday morning.

Now let me step back because in the previous church where I was that didn't do too well, we worked hard to try to grow the church. When I went there was about 80 people in it. Its maximum attendance that it had was 156 people. That was important to me. I remember that – 156 people were in that church. At its highest point (maybe it was on Easter, I don't know when it was), 156 people came on that one week.

When we started Calvary Chapel Mercer County there were a lot of people involved in the church and on the first Sunday we came there were so many people we didn't even know all the people who were serving. It was just a real weird situation and an amazing situation. But do you know what happened on that Sunday morning? When they counted the number of people that were there, do you know how many people were there? 156. The Lord used that to say something very important to me. To say this: You need to make a change. And when you make that change you need to think about how you work on this whole area of numbers.

Let's move to another statement about pride. Pride makes a person full of themselves, where it's very clear to me that humility means to be full of the Holy Spirit. So one of the things I need to do in my life in order to not cross the line into arrogance is I need to be full of the Holy Spirit.

That's why I like this verse in Galatians, *the fruit of the Spirit is*, and there are a number of things, there are nine of them, but one of them is meekness. Now meekness is not weakness. The real word there is strength under control. That's what confidence is. Confidence is strength under control. But when it crosses the line, it's no longer under control. It's crossed a line, an inappropriate line. So we need to recognize that this meekness, this humble response will help us to not be full of ourselves, to be full of the Holy Spirit. That's what we want.

We want the Holy Spirit to control our lives. So we need to know how to handle things like praise. See I think praise is really valuable and frankly many of you have encouraged me in my personal life through praise. So I don't want you to stop doing that, thinking that I'm on the edge of arrogance all the time. Because I do think that praise is valuable. I think it's encouraging and I often go away just grateful that God is working in people's lives as a result of the ministry that God has given to me. So praise is important.

My dad used to say this to me: "You have to be careful of praise. Praise is like perfume. You could enjoy its fragrance, but don't swallow any of it." In other words, don't let it get to your head. I think that's important for us as we start seeing things happen in life and people start admiring or giving us praise. It's not because of something we've done; it's something that God is doing through us. Pride says, "Look at me." Humility says, "Look at Jesus."

I really like what John the Baptist said when his own disciples came and said, "Hey John. We've got a problem. Jesus' disciples are growing. He's having more than you." John said this as part of his response: "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

That's always true in our lives. When we start thinking that we have to somehow be great in ourselves or get the focus on ourselves then that's when we cross the line. We want Jesus to increase in our lives. And if we can keep that focus on Jesus then the humility is able to come alongside that strength, such as confidence in our lives.

Pride says, "I'm important." Humility says, "I need to value others." Let me show you the verse that describes that. It says, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit*. That's our word there again, *conceit*. Rather, *in humility value others above yourselves*.

See, there's something about this idea of prideful "I'm important, you need to listen to what I have to say because I'm the person here who has the ideas, I'm the leader here." Instead of saying that, we need to value others and give to others. When we do that then good things start to happen in our lives in some really good ways.

My dad used to say this: "If you think you're indispensable, put your finger in a bowl of water and take it out and see what impression you've made." It's a way to just reflect on your own humility and limitations that we have.

The next one says this. Pride says, "I want to be great," and humility says, "I need to be a servant." I want to be great; I want to be a servant.

Two of the disciples, James and John, came to Jesus, privately of course, and they said, "Jesus, when we get in the kingdom can one of us sit on the right hand and one of us sit on the left hand?" In other words, could we have the best seat? We want to be great just like you. Jesus had some teaching to do to all of His disciples, but in this case with these guys He says, *"Whether you sit on the right or left, that's not for me to give. That's for the Father to give."* But He also says, *"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."*

Here's another thing to focus on for me in my confidence is that I need to be a servant. Being a servant is what's going to help me stay within the boundaries so I don't cross the boundary and become arrogant in my relationships with others.

Ed Miller has taught me some good things in this regard. We had to apologize in the last church where we were pastoring together. He taught me what a mature apology is, which I really didn't understand. I really appreciated his ability to be verbose in an apology, to express his humility in the midst of a failure or a mistake. He's also taught me how to listen well.

He works at the National Center for Biblical Parenting with me. Sometimes we have lots of resources to go into a church. We help churches build parenting ministries and we have things to offer. But he has this great and winsome way of listening first by saying to them, "What are you already doing in your parenting ministry? I'd like to hear what you're already doing." His ability to listen first is a way of being a servant. So I really like that.

Another thing is to just point out, "I'm right." When you're working with someone else and they're making a mistake – "I just want you to know, I was right with that!" Pointing out our right is a tendency when pride steps in, so valuing relationships becomes so important.

Look at this verse, which I think is helpful. It's about knowledge. Because sometimes we have knowledge in our lives. "We know what the Bible says about this." Or "we know what's right because we've lived life for a while." The scriptures say *knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*. That idea of building someone up is so important. Is it possible that I have another idea, another person has an idea, we're trying to work things out and I say, "Okay, we'll let you do your idea even though I don't like it as much as my idea. Or I think my idea is better." Is it possible that someone else could have their way and do their idea? That's what he's talking about here, I think, in this passage.

Let me share one more with you. "I can do this on my own" is what pride says, and humility says, "I need to pray." Why? Well because that's what prayer is all about. It's about humility. In 2 Chronicles 7:14 it says this – *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray (do you see how humility and prayer are tied together there?) and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land*. Well there's a lot to say there about prayer, but I'm just trying to point out the one idea that's there that has to do with prayer and how prayer helps us develop humility.

I want to tell you about this idea of being a practical atheist. If you haven't heard that, I just want you to understand that some of us as Christians are practical atheists. What that means is we're living today as if God doesn't exist because we haven't contacted Him today, we haven't asked for His advice, and we haven't asked for His input. So we're living today as if He doesn't exist. So we're living like a practical atheist. I don't want to be a practical atheist. So I would suggest that when we come before the Lord we need to be careful that we come before Him in all that we have and all that we are and that prayer is a way of connecting with God to be humble.

I'm going to read a story from the Bible to you that has made an impression on me in my life. It's a story from Daniel 4. It's a story about Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and so Daniel came in and he interpreted the dream. I'm not going to read about the dream and the interpretation, but I'm going to read about what happens then afterwards because you get the rest of the story as I do. This story comes from Daniel 4 starting in verse 28.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Do you see what he did? He started thinking that he was something. He was full of himself, that he was right, that it was because of him, that he was God's gift to the world. So because his kingdom grew beautifully he started taking that personally as if somehow he had done that.

Verse 31: *Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."*

Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Those are scary ways for me. *Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.* Nebuchadnezzar learned a valuable lesson about the important of God in his life. I would suggest there are some times in our lives where we think of ourselves too highly. That's what the word means, *proud*, in our passage today. We think of ourselves too highly.

So do you see in the passage it says that one of the solutions is to be willing to associate with people of low position? When you think of someone of low position, you might have somebody in mind. But I would suggest that low position is -- when you're arrogant, when you're prideful, everyone else is low. I think the solution is we need to start associating with other people and we'll see that they have a story, that they are people that God is working in their lives.

I like this picture of the turtle on the fencepost. You know what you learn by looking at this picture? That turtle did not get there by himself. That turtle had help getting there on that fencepost. He gets to see this great perspective. He gets to see these great visions of things that are going on. But he didn't get here by himself. He can't take pride in the fact that he got himself up there.

I think we all need to learn the lesson of the fencepost and the turtle. I certainly need to learn it. I'm a turtle on a fencepost. I think it's important for us to recognize that pride can creep into our lives and it can cause us to cross the line. Sometimes it doesn't cross the line in a big way and bad things happen. Sometimes I cross the line and just hurt some relationship and damage something or make some stupid mistake or something because of arrogance and pride. So it's something we all need to work on in our lives, I think, that God would protect us and keep us humble.

We're going to worship the Lord and I trust the Lord will speak to you in the midst of this next song. *All Who Are Thirsty* is the song. It's a song that will draw us into just being thirsty for the Lord. As we do, I just want to encourage you to consider what's going on in your own life.

If God would have you experience some new thing today, maybe you'd like to come up for prayer. We'll have a prayer time. There will be prayer counselors up there. It's an opportunity for you to come forward and to get some prayer for some area. Maybe the area is big, maybe it's small. Maybe you've got something going on, you're trying to make a decision this week, or maybe you've got some issue happening at work that you just need some prayer for. Whatever is going on in your life you'd like prayer for, now is the time to get some prayer for as we sing this song together.

Let's stand and worship the Lord.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and we thank you for the work that you've done in our own hearts. Lord, I pray that you'd continue to grow me in my own life. I need to be aware of the line when it's crossed. Thank you for your grace that you give to me and you give to the rest of us as we try to live the life that you've called us to live. So bless us. Lead us forward. Now Father, as we do business with you we ask that you would take Jesus home into our lives, each one, that we would be able to implement the things not just taught here but the things you want in our own hearts and lives. In Jesus' name.