

"Pride"

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Date: 29 June 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Good to see you all this morning. As Tyler mentioned, there is an overflow! By blessing our kids in the children's ministry wing. Well, with that being said, would you turn with me to the book of 2 Chronicles, chapter 26? That's page 351 in the Pew Bible. We're going to continue our series in 2 Chronicles today. We're looking at these ancient stories that even when they were written, they were ancient stories meant to direct God's people for a new day.

Okay. Page 351, 2 Chronicles, chapter 26. And our passage this morning is about a problem that most theologians and spiritual writers in Christian history have identified as the main problem in the human condition.

This is the one seed from which all of the weeds and thorns of our human moral condition grow. This is the source of all our other problems. But the problem with this particular problem is that it's very easy to see in others, but it's very hard to see in yourself.

You know, like when there's birthday cake in the office break room, it's easy to see when your co-worker has some leftover icing on their cheek, you know, because they're like always a mess, right? Just like their work, total mess.

But it's not so easy to see the icing on your own face, because you know, you couldn't resist having a piece either, and you're often a mess, just like me.

[2 : 0 2] So what is this root problem, this fountainhead of our broken moral condition? What's this stain that's so easy to spot in others, but we can't seem to recognize it in ourselves?

Well, the problem that 2 Chronicles 26 confronts us with is our pride. Pride is the theme of our passage today.

And this chapter is going to show us first how it grows, and then second we'll see where it leads, and then third we'll consider what to do about it.

So that's our outline, how pride grows, where pride leads, and then what to do about it. So let's dive into our passage looking at verses 1 through 16, and we'll consider how it grows.

But as we turn to God's Word, let's pray together. Father, we thank You for Your Word that addresses so often the problems we don't even know we have, and the questions so often we need to be asking what aren't.

[3 : 0 7] So we ask for Your help and for Your Spirit to work as we come to Your Word this morning, to lead us deeper into Your rivers of grace, deeper into communion with our Lord Jesus Christ, our only hope in life and death.

In His mighty name we pray, amen. All right, 2 Corinthians 26, verses 1 through 16. All the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was 16 years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.

He built Eloth and restored it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers. Uzziah was 16 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 52 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jekeliah of Jerusalem.

And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God.

And as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper. He went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke through the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabnah, and the wall of Ashdod, and he built cities in the territory of Ashdod, and elsewhere among the Philistines.

[4 : 14] God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians, who lived in Gerbal, and against the Mayanites. The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong.

Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the angle, and fortified them. And he built towers in the wilderness, and cut out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain.

And he had farmers and vine dressers in the hills, and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil. Moreover, Uzziah had an army of soldiers fit for war in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by Jael the secretary, and Messiah the officer, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders.

The whole number of the heads of fathers' houses of mighty men of valor was 2,600. Under their command was an army of 307,500, who could make war with mighty power to help the king against the enemy.

And Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. In Jerusalem, he made machines invented by skillful men to be on the towers and the corners to shoot arrows and great stones.

[5 : 39] And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud to his own destruction.

Let's stop there. So 2 Chronicles chapter 26. It's all about a man named Uzziah, who at the age of 16 is put on the throne of the southern kingdom of Judah.

His father, Amaziah, was taken captive in war and was put in prison in Samaria. So the people take Uzziah and they make him basically a co-regent to rule in his father's absence while his father is a prisoner of war far away.

And what happens to this teenage king? Well, according to the first half of chapter 26, his reign is incredibly successful. Look again at verse 5.

And then in verses 6 through 15, the chronicler shows us just how prosperous Uzziah's reign becomes.

[6 : 50] In verses 6 through 8, we're told that he has great military success, subduing the Philistines to the west and the Arabians and Mayanites to the south and the Ammonites to the east. But it's not just his foreign policy that succeeds.

His domestic work is also a great success. In verse 9, he revitalizes the urban center of Jerusalem. And in verse 10, he makes important advances in agriculture as well. Lastly, in verses 11 through 15, we see how powerful he becomes.

His standing army is massive, fully outfitted, and equipped with cutting-edge technology. And because of all this, the word begins to spread about Uzziah.

He's not just making local headlines anymore. The New York Times, the Washington Post, the London Times are starting to put him on the front page. His fame spreads beyond the walls of Jerusalem and the fields of the Shephelah, beyond even the Philistines and the Ammonites.

Yes, all the way to Egypt. Even the great empires of the day, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, they're turning their heads and noticing. They know the name Uzziah.

[8 : 08] In other words, what we see here is that Uzziah gets what so many of us today are hoping for, utter success.

He's powerful, he's wealthy, and he's famous. His own people love him, and his neighbors far and near have to respect him.

In fact, Uzziah is perhaps the most successful king since King Solomon. That's what verse 2 is alluding to when it mentions that Uzziah built Eloth and restored it to Judah.

You see, Eloth was a port city far to the south on the Red Sea. It was a great shipping center that connected Judah to the trade routes of the ancient world, especially the east. And not since Solomon, the great King Solomon, had the kingdom of Israel or Judah controlled that strategic city, but Uzziah did it.

Uzziah began to forget that his success, his prosperity, wasn't ultimately because of his wisdom or his strength or his hard work.

[9 : 39] Verse 5 clearly says it was God who made him prosper. Verse 15 says his fame spread far because he was marvelously helped.

In other words, God was helping Uzziah. God was causing him to prosper. But as Uzziah grew strong, he forgets that it was all due to God's help. And so he grew proud.

Friends, this is often how pride grows in us. Rarely is it in times of adversity or trial.

In those times when things are hard, when life is challenging, when fears and anxieties hit us on every side, those are usually the times when we're calling out for help, right? No, it's most often not times of adversity that bring about the greatest spiritual danger.

But it's times of prosperity, when things are going well, when our work, when our relationships, when our finances, when our reputation, when they all seem to be going great.

[10 : 44] That's when pride begins to grow. Because we look at all we have and we start to think, surely this is because of what I have done.

Uzziah began to believe his own press. And so do we. I wonder, are you in a successful season right now?

A time of prosperity, a time of strength. Keep in mind, you don't need to be fabulously crazy, wealthy, or healthy to be in a season like that. You don't need to, like, rent the entire city of Venice for your wedding in order to be in danger of this, right?

Maybe you're just in a good season. Work and family, friends and finances, they're all just going well. Things are strong. Is that you today? Then be careful.

Be careful that your eyes don't start to look at these good gifts you've received and your heart says, this is because of what I've done.

[11 : 57] I'm the one who achieved these things. My hands have made this great success. My strength is my own making. Be on your guard. Pride grows in the soil of success.

When we forget that God is the giver of all our gifts, that's how pride grows. But tragically, the life of Uzziah here in 2 Chronicles 26 doesn't just show us how pride grows.

It also shows us where pride leads. This is our second point, where pride leads. Let's pick up the story back in verse 16. So 2 Chronicles 26, verses 16 through 23.

But when he was strong, he grew proud to his own destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

But Azariah the priest went in after him with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor. And they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense.

[13 : 09] Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord by the altar of incense.

And Azariah the chief priests and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead. And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out because the Lord had struck him.

And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death. And being a leper, lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the Lord.

And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land. Now the rest of the Acts of Uzziah, from first to last, Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, wrote, And Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings.

For they said, He is a leper. And Jotham his son reigned in his place. But when he was strong, he grew proud to his destruction.

[14 : 32] Pride leads to destruction. But how? How does it do so? Well, first, because we refuse to honor our God-given limits.

Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense inside the sanctuary before the altar of incense. Now on the surface, you might ask, What is the big deal? After all, wasn't it commendable that the king would want to worship and pray to God?

Isn't it good for a king to be the sort of man who seeks God? But God had commanded, you see, that only the priests were allowed to enter that part of the temple to burn incense.

Uzziah might be a great king, but God had placed a limit on who could and could not enter that part of the temple and perform that function. But in his pride, Uzziah started to think that the limits, the boundaries, they didn't apply to him.

After all, look at all he did for the nation. Wasn't it thanks to Uzziah that they had peace and prosperity on all sides? Surely the rules don't apply to such a great king as him, right?

[15 : 43] And that's what pride does. In putting ourselves above other people in our pride, we inevitably put ourselves in the place of God.

In elevating ourselves above the rest of humanity, we put ourselves in God's place. We might not think of it that way. We might not think that when we consider ourselves better than others, we're making ourselves out to be little gods.

But the proof is in how we disregard God-given limits. We begin to think that we can draw the lines where we think the lines should be drawn.

I can spend money how I want to spend my money. I can sleep with who I want to sleep with. I can work as many hours straight as I choose to work. I can worship the way I want to worship.

You know, those rules might apply to others, we think, but not me. Pride. Pride rejects God's good limits. And this leads to our destruction.

[16 : 48] After all, reject God's limits around work and rest, and you will burn out. Reject God's limits around sex and marriage, and you will wreck your relationships.

Reject God's limits around amassing wealth and power rather than sharing it, and you'll lose the ability to even enjoy the things you have. You'll always want more and never have enough. Pride will lead you to reject God's limits, and it will lead you to destruction.

But pride leads to destruction in another way, because pride causes us to refuse to listen to correction.

When Uzziah enters the temple with the incense censor in his hand, ready to offer his prayers in that inner place, Amaziah, the chief priest, with 80 other priests, come, and they do something incredibly courageous.

They stand in the way of the king, and they rebuke him. Now, keep in mind, Uzziah's not just any king. He's the best king that people have seen in generations. The nation is flourishing.

[17 : 55] The borders are secure. The cities are safe. The cost of eggs is reasonable again, right? Who would want to stand up to a king like that? It's no wonder that the chronicler calls these priests men of valor.

It takes valor to speak a timely word of correction, especially when that word is directed at someone who has clearly done much good and brought much benefit to the people of God.

May our church be that sort of place where we have the courage, the valor to lovingly correct each other, where we care more about honoring God than just keeping some fragile, prosperous peace.

But tragically, notice what happens. God, in His mercy, sends a rebuke Uzziah's way. But when Uzziah hears this godly rebuke, this loving and timely correction, how does he respond?

In anger. He rejects the word meant for His good, and He rages against the priests. Brothers and sisters, do you see how pride leads to our destruction?

[19 : 23] We need the loving words of correction from our fellow church members. This is one good reason to become an actual member of a local church, so that you can tell the other people of that church, I want your correction in my life.

I want the discipleship. Yes, I want the discipline that comes from being a known member of a church family. We need those loving words, but pride puts us above that rebuke.

And instead of melting our hearts in repentance and sorrow, pride inflames our hearts in anger. And so pride makes us fools.

Loving correction in the church is like medicine for our souls. Medicine rarely ever tastes good, right? It's bitter at first, but then it brings healing.

And pride would have us reject this medicine like fools, not because it's bitter, but because we think we don't need it. We think, who are they to tell me what I'm doing wrong, right?

[20 : 34] Pride will make you reject godly correction, and that will lead you to destruction. But finally, pride leads to destruction because it will ultimately separate you from God.

When Uzziah rejects the rebuke of Azariah and the other priests, what happens? And isn't it interesting that God gives Uzziah the chance to turn and repent?

In his mercy, God sends correction. But after Uzziah rejects that rebuke, what happens? God immediately causes him to break out in leprosy.

Now, in the Old Testament, leprosy was a term used for kind of any sort of contagious skin disease. And if you had a condition like that, you were immediately barred from the temple and from nearly all forms of public life for that matter.

Now, on the one hand, this exclusion was a means of maintaining public health. It just prevented diseases from spreading. But more importantly, that exclusion had a very symbolic function as well.

[21 : 43] You see, in the Old Testament, God gave Israel a whole set of rules about what it meant to be ritually clean or unclean. And these rules were meant to teach them a spiritual lesson about God's holiness and human sinfulness.

Sinful human beings cannot have fellowship with a holy God. It's like holding wax up to a flame.

The wax will melt and burn up in the face of the fire. You know, whatever shape it might have had, it proves to be nothing in the face of that great heat.

And because of our sin, humans are like wax in the face of God's holiness. We think we have shape and form. We think we have strength.

But it all proves to be nothing. It's of no avail in the presence of God's great holiness. And so, to teach the people of their drastic inward need for cleansing, for atonement, about the reality of sin and holiness, God gave them this outward lesson, this outward lesson that no one outwardly unclean could come into the public assembly.

[23 : 06] And one of the things that made you outwardly unclean was a skin disease. You see, what's happening here in verse 19, when God strikes Uzziah with leprosy, is that God is causing Uzziah's outer life to reflect his inner life.

You see, Uzziah's pride had already separated him from God, had already led him into unfaithfulness. Uzziah's pride had already made him inwardly unclean, and now his outer life would demonstrate what was true on the inside.

God brought Uzziah's hypocrisy to an end that day. Now everyone would see what his pride had truly made him.

In his pride, Uzziah had elevated himself, but in reality, pride brought Uzziah down to nothing. And for the rest of his life, Uzziah, the greatest king since Solomon, is a non-entity.

Not only is he barred from the worship assembly at the temple courts, he's also barred from the civil assemblies and his position as king. Uzziah's son Jotham has to be brought in as a co-regent to reign in his place.

[24 : 27] Uzziah is functionally dead even while he lives, all because of his pride. Pride leads to destruction.

Uzziah exalted himself. He took the credit and praise that God alone deserved, and as a result of exalting himself, he became nothing, not just politically, but spiritually. He lost the most important thing a human being can ever have, the thing that's our highest good, the thing that's our only lasting satisfaction.

He lost fellowship with God. And friends, pride will do the same to us. It will lead us to destruction. We will reject God's limits.

We will reject God's correction. And in the end, God will exclude us from his presence. Because there is only one God who deserves worship.

And when at last God removes his gifts from us, because in our pride we refuse to acknowledge him as God and give him thanks, then we will see on that day how empty we've become.

[25 : 37] And in that empty state, on the last day, we will be forever excluded from his presence and goodness. Pride will lead to our eternal destruction.

So this is how pride grows, and this is where it leads. Like Uzziah, it grows in our successes, and it leads to our destruction. And that leads us to our last question.

What do we do about it? What do we do? And who of us does not feel the urgency of this question? Because who of us doesn't feel some of those same tinges of pride that Uzziah felt as he won his first battle, or built his first tower, or received his first accolade of human praise?

Who of us is immune to this seed of pride that will surely grow to our destruction? And what is the answer to human pride? How will pride not drag us all down into the depths of nothingness?

What hope is there for us humans? And you know, here's the real problem with pride. If I try to fight pride on my own, how can I not be the one who then takes pride in my victory?

[27 : 01] It seems that the moment I defeat pride, it comes right back to defeat me. Because look how humble I've become. I'm probably the most humble person I've ever met.

I wrote a worship song about it. It's called Humility. Humility. Let's all sing it together. It's a bit like boxing a shadow, you know. With every swing at pride I take, I miss the substance, and it still clings to my every move.

So you see, friends, the answer to pride must come from outside of ourselves. It's first and foremost something that must be done for us.

By another. By another. And what if there was another? What if there was one who could deal our pride a lethal blow?

What if there was one who could enter into our human condition and undo pride at the very roots? What if there was one who could, in our own humanity, expose pride for what it is and then give us the gift of real humility?

[28 : 12] And in giving us real humility, restore to us our real humanity as creatures. Creatures forgiven and restored to God.

Friends, listen. Friends, listen. This is the good news. The Bible is the story that culminates in a king.

A king who actually does have the right to stand in the place of the priest. A king who actually does have the right to stand in the place of the priest. He can approach the holy God because he himself is one with God, being God's only son.

And this king didn't consider his equality with God something to be exploited or used for his own gain, for his own glory, for his own fame.

No, this king didn't puff himself up in pride, but emptied himself and took human form and entered our very human nature. And in our human nature, he humbled himself and became obedient to death. The one who deserved to live chose to die in the most humiliating way on a cross. He emptied himself. He limited himself. He was obedient to death for proud sinners like you and me. And because he humbled himself, God exalted him.

[29 : 50] God gave him a name that's above every name so that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. You see, friends, Jesus Christ is the only one who dealt the fatal blow to human pride. And if you see that his humiliation was for your sake, that it was your death he died, that it was your pride he came to atone for, if you're starting to see that, then the Spirit of God is beginning to work faith in you.

And by that same Spirit, you must bow your knee to him and confess with your tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the only real answer to the problem of human pride. You can try to practice greater self-awareness. That's fine. You can work to receive criticism. That's good. You can learn to accept help and support from others. That's good. But the only thing that will get down to the root of pride, the only thing that will dislodge the root of pride in you, the pride that wants you to be your own master and receive the exaltation for your work, the only thing that will dislodge that for good is the message of grace, sheer undeserved grace, one through the humility of Christ and offered to you free of charge. You get all the blessing and he gets all the credit. Your sins are forgiven and he gets the praise. Your heart's made new and he gets all the honor. Eternal life is yours to enjoy, but you get none of the exaltation because this was not a work of your hands. He won the battle. He built the tower.

He deserves the fame. He is the king who is also the rightful priest. And you know, this humility that the grace of Jesus Christ brings, if you receive it into your life, it'll begin to work its way through your whole life.

You'll be able to go through times of adversity and times of prosperity. And though you may be tempted by pride, it won't get the upper hand. Why? Because if your very life is a gift of grace through Jesus Christ, if it's only by grace that you have any hope to stand before God, then is not everything a gift of grace through Jesus Christ?

Is not the Father the one who sends rain on the just and the unjust? What do we have that we did not receive?

[32 : 38] And if I received it, then surely there's no cause for pride, but all the more cause for humility. Because who am I that I should be given such undeserved gifts?

You see, brothers and sisters, the gospel will turn your successes into soil for greater humility. And humility will lead you into deeper communion with Christ and through Christ to eternal life.

In humility we find our most lasting substance, because in our humility we'll be like Him, the exalted one.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we pray quite simply this morning that by Your Spirit, You would cause the same mind that was in You, our humble King, to reside in us, Your people, who have heard this message of grace and who have responded in faith.

Lord, break down the pride in our hearts. Break down the pride that causes us to think that we deserve the good gifts we've received.

[33 : 58] Lord, make us a people of rich humility. And in making us a people of humility, God, make us a people who serve and who love, who are humble enough to receive and give correction, who are humble enough to accept Your good limits, who are humble enough to give You all the praise that You deserve.

We ask this in Jesus' mighty name, Father. Amen.