

# VICE VERSA

WEEK ONE

from pride to humility  
(there is a God, and i'm not him)

# super sized

When I was a kid, few things in life were better than going to McDonald's.® After climbing through the playground and smelling the hamburgers and french fries, my friends and I imagined that heaven was decorated with golden arches. The climax of the McDonald's experience was the moment I got my hands on the Happy Meal.® This lunch box had everything a kid could want: a hamburger (or chicken nuggets if you preferred), fries, a small drink, and of course the thing that made a Happy Meal so happy—the prize.

For years, I ordered a Happy Meal every time I went to McDonald's, and I loved it every time. I had no idea that there was anything else on the menu. I had seen my parents eat some things at McDonald's that I never found in my Happy Meal box, but I thought those options weren't available to kids. That's why I've never forgotten the day my Happy Meal world was shattered.

I think I was seventeen when I discovered Big Macs® and super-size fries thanks to my grandfather. (OK, maybe I wasn't 17, but I was pretty old, because my parents kept me on Happy Meals as long as they could to protect the family budget.) In the middle of a day fishing with my father, my brother, and my Papa, we went to McDonald's for lunch. Papa said some words I'll never forget: "I'm paying. You can order anything you want." For the first time, I looked at the menu and saw exotic offerings like Quarter Pounders with Cheese® and the Filet-o-fish,® and they became real to me. The super-size fries and extra-large drink I got with the No. 1 value meal I ordered dwarfed what I had always received with the Happy Meal. And to be honest, while sometimes I miss getting the prize, I have never gone back to ordering Happy Meals.

## Read Daniel 4

- Which best describes Nebuchadnezzar's view of God in verses 4-30?
  - Happy Meal
  - super-sized

- Which best describes Nebuchadnezzar's view of God in verses 31-37?
  - Happy Meal
  - super-sized

If life is all about climbing the ladder, being the man (or woman), and being the most popular, then Nebuchadnezzar had it made. He was the most powerful man in the most powerful nation of his day. In fact, he was so powerful that all his power went to his head. He thought life was all about him, his credit, and his glory. That's why Nebuchadnezzar is the perfect person to look at as we open our study of *Vice Versa*. He was proud, and pride and self-centeredness are at the heart of every sin. But Nebuchadnezzar had an experience with God—one like something out of a science-fiction movie—that let him know who God truly is. Once Nebuchadnezzar saw God as he truly is, his life would never be the same.

Our world today tells us that life is all about us, and we have become Nebuchadnezzars of sorts. Still, with all of us acting like we are God, we find ourselves becoming less and less free. That's why Nebuchadnezzar's awakening (and ours) to the truth that **there's a God, and I'm not him**, is so important. As long as we think of God as a Happy Meal-sized being who gives out prizes, pride is possible. But when we awaken to our super-sized God, we really begin to understand who God is and in turn who we are. This is the crucial first step on the journey from vices to freedom and particularly on the path from pride to humility.

- How has your view of God and life been Happy Meal-sized in the past?

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- How has your view of God grown in the past? Explain those situations.

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- Where in your life now do you have a Happy Meal-sized view of God?

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- What would it take for you to see God as he really is?

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## prayer exercise:

Ask God to show you how he is super-sized in this study and in your life.

# treasure or trash

Genesis  
3:1-13

When I was growing up, my family had a dog named Dusty. I know Dusty is not an original name for a dog, but everyone else in my family had names beginning with D, so we thought the dog should too. Dusty was a good dog, other than his magnetism for fleas, his table manners, and his tendency to run off, especially when we were in a hurry to get somewhere. He was fun to play with and snuggle with, and he was always good for a laugh.

Dusty loved to eat “people food.” Somewhere along the way, he was fed from the table, and once he tasted what we were eating, his Alpo wasn’t very appealing to him anymore. Memories of meals at my house feature the members of my family sitting around the table and Dusty’s head bobbing up at the corner, looking to see what was for dinner. Dusty whined and was never satisfied until he got some of our dinner.

One night, Dusty’s hunger got the best of him. Mom had cooked a turkey that evening, filling the house with the type of aroma that normally only came at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Dusty got some turkey for dinner, but I guess the smell was more than he could bear, because at 3 a.m. the entire family was awakened by terrible sounds of pain coming from the kitchen. We all ran downstairs to find Dusty lying on his back, covered in grease, and the turkey carcass pulled out of the trash, picked clean of any meat. Dusty hadn’t just eaten the turkey; it looked like he had bathed in it.

I’ve often thought back to that night and wondered what was going through Dusty’s mind. He had to think we were holding out on him and trying to make him miserable by not giving him all the turkey he could handle or allowing him to pick the bones clean. So he decided to take matters into his own paws—and once he did, there was no turning back. And in the end, the decision that Dusty thought would bring him more pleasure and more freedom brought him the worst stomach pain of his life.

Read Genesis 3:1-13

■ What did Adam and Eve do wrong in this chapter?

- touched the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
- ate fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil
- planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

(You may want to look at Genesis 2:17 before you answer, because what God really said and Eve's version are different.)

■ What did the serpent tell Eve would happen if she ate the fruit?

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Dusty's turkey dinner helps me understand what must have been going on in the hearts of Adam and Eve when they sinned against God. The serpent convinced them that God was holding out on them, and as a result they were no longer content to be made in God's image. They wanted to be "like" God—or, more honestly, to be God. But their choice to eat the fruit did not turn out the way they planned or the way the serpent promised. Instead of finding freedom, they found themselves hiding in the bushes in fear of God, their innocence compromised and their world broken. As in Dusty's case, there were consequences to their actions.

The truth is, you and I wouldn't make very good gods. We think we would be more free if we were in charge, but every time I take my life in my own hands, I come away disappointed. Sure, at first things may seem better, but the further I get down the road of serving myself and trying to become my own god, the more I realize that I'm not very good at it. That's because I was never meant to be a god, and neither were you. There is only one God; it's not me, and it's not you either.

When we let God place his value on us instead of trying to be him ourselves, we can become truly free. God's not holding out on us. He does really have our best interests at heart. Pride tells us that we are our own gods, but

humility accepts our position as made in God's image and trusts that freedom comes from finding our identity under God's authority.

- Have you ever made a decision that you thought would make you freer only to find yourself with less freedom later?

- yes
- no

If so, explain that situation.

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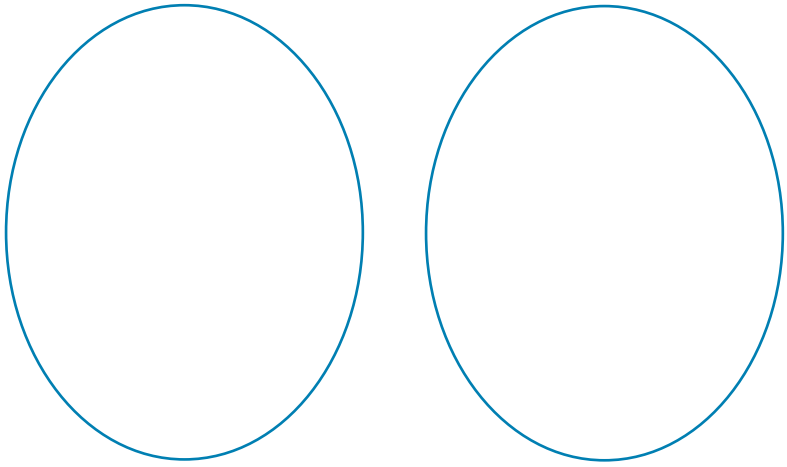
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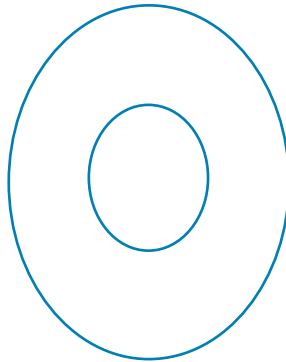
### prayer exercise:

Use the diagrams on the next page to reflect on your relationship with God. The first diagram pictures how we try to find our identity outside of or in competition with God. The other shows how we find our identity inside of God. Spend some time asking the Spirit to show you places in your life where you are trying to be God or find your identity outside of him. Ask him how you can find your identity in him. Write what God places on your heart around the diagram as a prayer.

Us vs. God



Us in God



# the pride god hates

Luke  
18:9-14

It happens all the time. Every time certain football players reach the end zone, they celebrate like crazy. And as the rest of us watch these celebrations, we have to ask ourselves whether we love them or hate them. No one can deny that end-zone celebrations in the National Football League have never been more noticeable. In fact, people often end up talking more about the celebrations than about the games. From Terrell Owens signing a football with a Sharpie® that he had tucked inside his sock, to Joe Horn faking a cell-phone call, to the variety of dances and actions other players do, it seems that there's a memorable celebration almost every week during the football season.

These celebrations can be entertaining, but they also make me think about pride, because they draw attention to the individual, not the team. The pride on display in the end zone makes it seem that the team concept is dead. In professional sports, pride seems to be the norm.

## Read Luke 18:9-14

Fill in the blanks

Luke 18:9 says, "To some who were

\_\_\_\_\_ of their \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and looked \_\_\_\_\_ on  
everybody else, Jesus told this parable."

Like any good communicator, Jesus had a target audience in mind when he told this story. It was a group of people that made Jesus furious throughout the gospels—the proud. Jesus showed little patience for the arrogant.

When you think about it, it's ridiculous for any of us to struggle with pride. A person characterized by arrogance has really lost sight of who God is. The best cure for pride is being in the presence of God. The more time you spend in his presence, the more you realize that God is bigger than you are, and the more you notice that pride is not part of God's character.

Jesus is humility in the flesh. Throughout the gospels, we see how our Savior came not to be served but to serve. He let the children come to him. He washed his disciples' feet. He gave his life as a sacrifice. When you think

of this, it's no surprise that people were attracted to Jesus. The lost ran to him, but the prideful religious establishment had problems with him.

One of the biggest problems with Christianity today is that the world often sees Christians as prideful and arrogant. The truth is, they are right to think that way. The Christian religious establishment of our day often acts much like the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. This is a huge problem. If we are going to share Jesus with an unsaved world, then we need to become more like Jesus by getting rid of pride and growing in humility. Jesus isn't looking for more Pharisees; he's looking for people like the tax collector—and like himself—who are humble.

■ How does this parable make you feel?

- convicted
- assured
- confused
- thankful

■ With whom do you identify in this story?

- the Pharisee
- the tax collector

Why?

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■ Why do you think the Lord loves the humble so much?

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## prayer exercise:

Spend some time reflecting on what you read today and ask yourself some tough questions. Are you more like the Pharisee, who was full of pride of arrogance, or are you like the tax collector, truly aware of your need for the Savior? Where are there pockets of pride in your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you places in your life that are marked by pride and use this time to confess these areas. Celebrate the humility of Christ by praising him for the person he is. Tell God how much you appreciate his humble example and ask him for the courage to walk in the same way.

# the pride God likes

- Does God want us to ever brag or boast?
  - yes
  - no

Explain your answer.

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Life is full of things that are just plain odd. For example, why do we drive on a parkway and park on a driveway? Once, when I was driving, I saw a man standing on his head on top of a billboard. I guess he was trying to make a political statement or something, but the only statement that came to my mind is, "Man, is *that* strange."

The Bible is full of things that seem to be odd. The plagues in Egypt and Noah building a boat before it had ever rained are just two examples of this. But one of the oddest things in the Bible is something God told Jeremiah.

## Read Jeremiah 9:23-24

- Do you find it odd that God told his people to boast in something?
  - yes
  - no

Explain your answer.

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- Why would God want us to boast about something?
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When I read the Bible, I consistently ask myself this question: “What does the Father call Christianity?” I’m tired of making Christianity what I want it to be. Jesus is looking for people to follow him on his and his Father’s terms, and I want to be one of these people. I want to know him.

It’s exciting when we begin to see who God truly is. Hebrews 1 tells us that Jesus reveals who the Father is. Jesus constantly told people who God is and what he is like. Even more, Jesus revealed what God is truly like with his life.

Jeremiah 9 foreshadows what Jesus wanted everyone to know. God wants us to know him. This is exactly what God told Jeremiah to tell people to boast in. If there is one thing in this world that we are supposed to take pride in, it is the fact that we know God. At its most basic level, Christianity is about truly knowing God. This is to be the pursuit of our lives.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the English word “know” in this passage is translated from the Hebrew *yada*. This word describes an intimate and close relationship. God is not saying that he wants us to know a lot about him. Instead, the Lord is saying that he wants us to know him intimately. He desires to walk with us in very close communion. God desires intimacy with us, and this passage tells us that we can boast and take pride in knowing him in this way.

- Do you know about God, or do you know him? Explain your answer.

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- Why do you think God tells us to boast about knowing him? Why is this so important?

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### prayer exercise:

Take some time to talk to the Father about your desire to know him. Ask him how you can become a person who boasts about knowing him. Pour your heart out to him and tell him how you want to know him in this way. Ask him to show you what it means to "yada" or truly experience him as your Father.

# freedom in humility

- What is your dream job?
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- Imagine applying for this dream job. What are five things that you think a potential employer would be looking for from a candidate?
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Many times, we treat being a Christian like it's a job. We try to build our resumes with lots of good works so that God will like us—and so that we can be proud that we deserve to be Christians. That's what was happening in Philippi when Paul wrote and said that, although he had a great resume, it wasn't what brought him freedom. Humility did.

## Read Philippians 3:4-6

- What did Paul say he could take pride in or have confidence in? (Check all that apply.)
  - He was a Pharisee
  - He was righteous and faultless

- He was good-looking
- He was an exemplary Jew
- He did his job well
- He was rich

- What things are you tempted to take pride in?

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Most of the things Paul said he could take pride in were good things, and they were sources of pride for many people in his day. But Paul went on to say that he found real freedom not in the things he could take pride in but in the things he could be humble about because of God.

**Read Philippians 3:7-9**

- What did Paul say about the things he used to take pride in?
- verse 7: "I now consider \_\_\_\_\_"
- verse 8: "I consider them \_\_\_\_\_"

Pride leads us to try to earn everything we can so that we can brag about it, and it causes us to do good deeds in order to earn right standing with God. But Paul reminds us that righteousness does not come from anything we do; it comes from God himself. Humility leads us as Christians to be honest about who we really are—good, bad, and ugly—and allows us to celebrate what God has done in our lives to transform and redeem us. That's what Paul did in these verses, and it's what God wants us to do as well. Instead of seeking to earn our way into God's good graces, we can live in a way that humbly gives God thanks for saving and changing us. This is the way to freedom in humility.

## prayer exercise:

Thank God for the freedom that humility brings. Ask him to show you ways that you're trying to earn his favor. As he does, tell him you're sorry for showing pride in these ways. Ask God to show you ways that you can live a life of thankful humility instead.

