

Stories that Change Everything | Rich Fool

Petie Kinder | Luke 12:13-21

Well church, how are we doing this weekend? Good. Good to see all of you all. If this is your first time I'm Petie, one of the pastors here, and we're thrilled that you have joined us this weekend.

I realize that if this is your first time today—or maybe you've had your first time with us over the past month or so—you may have had a Traders Point experience where you've yet to hear a message from our lead pastor, Aaron Brockett. You need to know that that is actually for a reason. He is currently away on a study break, something he does every year that our Elders give to him as a way for him to refresh and re-energize and spend some time with his family and then to spend some time studying in preparation for the upcoming semester of ministry.

You should know that leading this church and preaching, especially at the level that Aaron does every week requires him to take some intentional time to get back—kind of back away from it and rest and get ready. He's actually going to be back up here in a couple of weeks to preach and it's going to be incredible. He's having a great time away really getting refreshed and ready for this next season.

If you had the chance to go last Wednesday night, in downtown Indy there was a huge convention in town—The North American Christian Convention. There were 3,000 plus church leaders from all over the country gathered. Our very own lead pastor headlined Wednesday night and I'm telling you all, if you didn't get to see it you would have been so proud. My man preached the lights out. It was incredible. It was awesome.

It was actually one of those moments for me when I sat back and realized, as I'm watching him preach and all of that... There is this phrase that I've heard before that what is exceptional can become expected. And I think with him that oftentimes we may be guilty of that. We see him get up here week in and week out and deliver such great teaching to us and leadership every week that we just kind of expect it.

But we need to make sure that we keep in mind that that is exceptional. He is incredibly gifted. We are so blessed to have him. So when he gets back here in a couple of weeks let's be generous with our encouragement, generous in our appreciation—yeah, let's do it right now! Love it! All campuses—love it. I didn't even have to ask you to do it. You just went for it. Beautiful. Beautiful.

Well, grab a Bible and get to Luke, chapter 12. We're going to be in Luke 12 today as we continue our series called The Stories that Change Everything. What we've been talking about are all of these stories—Jesus would use stories when he was in front of a big group of people

to illustrate who God is, what he's like, and kind of how he functions in the world. And these stories have been changing everything for us. These stories change how we view life, how we view God, and how we understand this whole relationship thing.

So today we're going to be digging in to a story that Jesus told that gets to the heart of one question that you and I are always asking, alright? It's a question that we're asking in every season, in every stage of life. We're always working toward an answer to this one question. The question is this: Will I have a good life? We're asking that question in every season, in every stage of our life and we're always working toward the answer.

For instance, when I was in second grade I was for sure asking the question: Will I have a good life? Now the way that I was answering that was that I was putting all of my efforts and all of my energy toward getting Nicole to be my girlfriend, okay? Nicole was this girl in second grade that I had the hots for. I thought she was incredible.

Now, the reason I wanted Nicole to be my girlfriend—I was convinced that if she would say yes that I would have a good life. But the reason actually had very little to do with how cute she was. It had very little to do with her marriage material prospects—whether or not this could turn into a romantic relationship. I wasn't thinking about any of that.

Nicole had one thing going for her. She was two heads taller than everyone else in all of second grade. So I just knew that if Nicole were my girlfriend, we would win at basketball every day during recess. I could feed her the ball in the low post, she would just hold the ball over the kids' heads and dunk it in. It was incredible. I just knew that this would secure the good life.

Fast forward to high school, alright? High schoolers in the room at every campus, you know that there is one thing that stands between you and the good life and that is passing your driver's test. If you could get your driver's license and you could get a car to use that driver's license to drive, you're just convinced that that will lead to the good life.

Now for all of us in the room who have passed the driver's license test, we know that all that happens is that is we start driving, we develop road rage, and it's actually not all that fun, okay? It's not that great.

If you go to college—if you're a college student in the room at every campus—you are thinking there is one thing between you and the good life and that is proving to the world, "I can secure gainful employment." And if you don't know if that's possible, if you're like doubting yourself and wondering if that is possible, I just want to let you into a little window in your parents' soul—they don't know if you can either. You've given them no reason to be confident. They are preparing for you to be 30 living their basement, okay? They are thinking that in the back of their heads.

For me, now I'm married. I have three kids. My definition of the good life—the one thing standing between me and the good life is 8 p.m. If I can get to 8 p.m., put the kids down, it's an

uninterrupted conversation with my wife—that’s where my bar is, okay? That’s all I want in life right now.

We’re all, in every season, in every stage, asking the question: Will I have a good life? We’re putting our effort, we’re putting our energies toward answering that question. Now, what Jesus is going to do in this story today is that he is going to show us that the place we typically go to answer that question—and there is a place that we typically go to answer this question, all of us mostly spend our efforts and our energies and our attention in one location to try to answer the question: Will I have a good life? and Jesus is going to show us that that place where we go actually doesn’t give us a very good answer. And so instead, through this story, he’s going to give us a different and a better place to go to find the answer to the question: Will I have a good life?

Luke, chapter 12: we’re going to start in verse 13. But before we do I need to make sure that you are ready. If you’re ready I want you to turn to your neighbor and say the same thing that my kid always says to me. I say, “Hey, are you ready?” And he’ll always say, “Dad, if you stay ready you ain’t got to get ready.” So I want you to turn to your neighbor and say, “If you stay ready you ain’t got to get ready.” Go for it—at all campuses. Go. You’re going to be using that one. It’s going to spread like wildfire: If you stay ready you ain’t got to get ready.

Alright, let’s jump in. Luke, chapter 12, verse 13 says this, “Then someone called from the crowd, ‘Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me.’ Jesus replied, ‘Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?’ Then he said, ‘Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.’”

Now pause for a second. This is an interesting situation because Jesus is teaching in a setting much like this where there is a crowd of people and someone stands up in the crowd and yells out: Teacher, I need your help with something. It’s kind of like a Judge Judy situation. He’s got a little dispute going on with his brother. There’s a family inheritance that apparently one brother is holding onto. And this brother wants his share of it.

Now this is a very common practice in first century. Rabbis were often brought civil disputes to settle. And so he just thought: Well Jesus is a Jewish teacher. He’s kind of like a Rabbi. He can solve this for us, right? Now, keep in mind—make no mistake about it. This guy who stands up in the crowd and asks Jesus to settle his dispute, he is absolutely asking the same question that we’re asking. He’s absolutely asking the question: Will I have a good life?

He is attaching receiving his share of his inheritance to his quality of life. He’s thinking: Man, if I get this inheritance I could maybe do the things I’ve always wanted to do. I can maybe buy the home I’ve always wanted to buy. I can maybe start the business I’ve always wanted to start. At the very least it will make me a much more eligible bachelor for the ladies. At least I’ll have that going for me. At least I’ll have this.

See, he's thinking that if he doesn't get the inheritance that his life won't be good—his quality of life. And this is where you and I typically go. This guy is going to the same destination, the same location, that we typically go to answer the question: Will I have a good life? When that question gets answered all of our brains and our hearts tend to go toward a standard of living. Will I have the home that I want? Will I be able to get my dream home? What kind of car will I drive?

And those are vain kinds of things. You're like, "Do you really care about that?" Well, I think we all care about: Are we going to be able to go out to eat. Are we able to go on a vacation? Am I going to be able to send my kids to college? What kind of standard of living am I going to be able to achieve and sustain. That's typically the place we all go.

Now keep in mind you've got to be very careful here when you are reading the Bible to not read into it things that Jesus isn't actually saying. Notice in the passage Jesus does not say that it's sinful to have wealth. He doesn't say that it's wrong to have a certain standard of living. He doesn't say it's wrong to be able to afford things. He didn't say any of that: no, no, no.

He just says that you've got to be careful, you've got to be careful and then he says life is not measured by how much you own. It's not like there is anything wrong with having wealth. There's not anything wrong with having money in a bank account. There's not anything wrong with having all of these comforts and pleasures and luxuries—you just can't go there to answer your question. Going there just won't answer the question: Will I have a good life? It actually won't impact you.

Now this is the brilliance of Jesus because Jesus knows that what just happened in the crowd is going to relate to many of us, right? Some of us are identifying with this guy who just said: Hey, can you help me with this because I would like to get my inheritance because there are many of us in the crowd at every campus who would think to ourselves, "Man, if I could just have a little bit more, if I had just a little extra money in the bank, if my salary was a little higher, if we could just afford this one thing, then I would have the good life. There are some of us here who think, "I don't have enough. If I had a little more, then we would be good."

But that only covers a portion of the crowd because there is another portion of the crowd at every campus who actually is not asking that question because they've got enough. There are many of us in every room at every campus who feel like we're taken care of—that we've actually done well for ourselves financially, we feel like we are blessed, you know—we're good.

So Jesus is actually going to come in and tell a story on the opposite end of the spectrum. This one guy is on one end of the spectrum thinking that he doesn't have enough—Jesus is going to tell a story about someone on the other end of the spectrum who has more than enough. Let's take a look at what it says.

Verse 16 says, "Then he told them a story: 'A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, "What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.'" Then he said,

“I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, ‘My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!’”

Now pause right there. You know what you are thinking because I know what I’m thinking: That’s the good life. Most of us at every campus would sign up for that in a heartbeat. The problem he’s talking about sounds so awesome, right? I produce fine crops. Who doesn’t love fine crops? I’ve got so many crops that I’ve got to tear down my barns and build bigger barns. Who doesn’t love bigger barns? We all love bigger barns.

I’m making so much money that I’m going to sit back in my chair and I’m going to talk to myself. You noticed he talks to himself—I’m going to talk to myself. Who doesn’t love to just sit back and talk to themselves? Life is good. You’re just sitting there talking to yourself, “I’m set for life. I’ll eat, drink, and be merry!” I love eating. I love drinking. I love being merry. This sounds incredible. This is the life that we would all love to have. This is the preferred future for many of us.

Now, unfortunately, Jesus is about to take this story into a very hard right turn. There’s an unfortunate and an unexpected thing that is about to happen to the rich man. Look at verse 20. It says this, “But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’ Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”

See, we may not have an inheritance issue that we’re trying to settle with a sibling. We may not have an issue of needing a bigger barn to store all of our crops. We’ve all got our unique little situations financially, standard of living, what we’re working toward. But Jesus is giving us a universal caution here, a universal warning that the quality of your life will have absolutely nothing to do with your financial standing. The quality of your life will have absolutely nothing to do with your financial standing.

And for those of you in the room who have made some money for yourself, you know the wisdom in this. If you’ve climbed the ladder—maybe you started at the bottom but now you’ve made something for yourself. If that’s you, you know that this is true. Once you think you’ve got enough, all of sudden enough moves, right?

“Enough” is a moving target.

Enough is a moving target. Just when you think, “Okay, I can have this standard of living, I could drive this car, we could live in this kind of house, we could live here, we could go on this one vacation,”—you get there, you achieve it, all of a sudden you’re like, “Well, could we go on another trip? What if we got that house? What if I drove that car? Man, it would be nice if I had that much money in my savings.”

All of a sudden enough moves up a little bit. And then you get there and you work hard to get a promotion and you achieve that next standard and all of a sudden enough moves up a little bit. Enough keeps moving on you, right? And that's why Jesus said that you've got to be so careful; you've got to be so careful that greed doesn't creep into your heart.

One preacher put it like this: Greed is the constant desire and destructive pursuit of more.

Now, none of us set out to do this. No one, when you're asked in second grade, "Hey, what do you want to be when you grow up?" say, "Oh, I would like to be greedy." No one goes that route. But when you're chasing enough, when you're convinced that your standard of living is going to directly correlate to the quality of your life and you're constantly pursuing enough, what you do is you constantly desire more and you do things that are destructive to you in your pursuit of more.

See, you have to be so careful because life is not measured by how much you own. That's the interesting thing. Just so you know, if enough is a moving target—you need to know that you can hit it. It's actually a target you can hit. There are people in the room at every campus who have enough. They have done so well for themselves that they are set financially and they are set financially for the long haul and they are set financially to give their kids things when they pass on. You can actually hit the target enough.

But even if that's you, even if you are listening right now and you're like, "You know what? I've got enough. I'm good," even if that is you, you still know how true this wisdom is—why Jesus said you'd be foolish. If you are chasing this target enough, when you actually hit it you realize it was actually the wrong target. You get all of this security and this stability and then something happens inside and you're like, "Why am I still not happy? Why am I still not content? Why does it feel like something is missing?"

It's because Jesus said that's actually not how the quality of your life is measured. The quality of your life is measured by something else. Instead he says that you should actually focus your efforts and energies not on building worldly wealth, you should actually your efforts and your energies on building a rich relationship with God.

See, he's trying to drive this principle deep down into our... It's a simple principle but it is a life-changing principle: The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your relationship with God! If you want to have the good life this is the standard. The quality of your life is going to be determined by the quality of your relationship with God.

Now here's the deal. I just said those last three words relationship with God and nobody fainted, nobody set off fireworks, nobody went running up and down the aisles and celebrating. It was just like, "Oh, a relationship with God."

Those three words when put together are utterly crazy! It's insane! The Fourth of July celebrations you're about to go through this Wednesday should pale in comparison to the way that we celebrate those three words relationship with God because that's crazy talk.

It's crazy talk that the God who created the heavens, the earth, and everything in it, the God who spoke the solar system into existence with a word, the God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-seeing the God who created everything who has taken billions and billions and billions of people, thousands and thousands and thousands of years—to even try to figure out how this world works, that God wants to know you. He wants to have a relationship with you. Little ole us—he wants to have a relationship... That is crazy talk.

And this is where Christianity separates itself from the pack of every other world religion. See there are so many religions out there that say that God is this, God is that, but to say that God wants to know you... Not only that, God took it a step further because God knew that in order to have a relationship, relationship requires relate ability. In order to have a relationship with somebody you've got to be able to relate. And God, had he not come down to earth and put on flesh and put on bone and live and breathe as Jesus, because that's who Jesus is—God in the flesh—had he not done that there is no way that he could have related to us.

Can you imagine? You come to God in prayer and say, "God, I'm really struggling with my nine to five, I really don't like my job. My marriage is a mess and I'm just not happy right now. I'm feeling kind of depressed." And God is in heaven going: Ew, sounds rough. I don't know what that's like but that's really bad. You have fun with that. No, no.

Instead we appreciate that we have a God who came and put on flesh and bone and he lived among us and Scripture says that he was tempted in every way that we are tempted. Whatever you're going through right now, God can look at you and say: I know exactly what that's like. A relationship requires relate ability. God put on flesh and bone. He wants to know you.

And not only that these last three words relationship with God— Jesus takes it a step further: not only will I put on flesh and bone so that I can relate to you, I'm going to add a fourth word into it because he sticks a word right here and he says: You can have a rich relationship with God. Not just that God wants to know you, like as an acquaintance, as a casual friend, he wants to know you well. He wants you to know him well.

Those kinds of friendship, those kinds of relationships where you're sitting there talking to him on the front porch and you look down all of a sudden at your watch and you're like, "Oh my gosh it is later than I have stayed up in years and this is not good," because time flies because you love talking to him, you love hanging out and it's that kind of relationship that God wants with you. The kind of close relationship where you finish each other's sandwiches—Frozen fans in the room. That kind of a close knit deal.

God wants to know you. He wants to know you well. And Jesus says that this is actually how you get to the good life. If you want a good life, you need to develop, you need to put all of your efforts, all of your energy, all of your work—not for building earthly wealth, it's not that that is evil; it's not a bad thing. You've just got to be careful. If you want the good life you put everything you have toward developing a rich relationship with God.

Now, if you're here for the first time, you're new around here or maybe you're at one of our campuses and maybe you wouldn't think of yourself as a Christian just yet, you're still kind of figuring things out and you're skeptical of it. I get it. I also know what you're thinking right now. You're thinking, "Okay, relationship with God. How is that supposed to happen?" And you're also a little scared right now like, "Is this where church gets super creepy and we start talking about meditative yoga poses? Are we all going to do child's pose in just a second? What's happening here? Are we all going to put on brown robes and start like chanting things and walking around like... How can I have a relationship with God?"

That's why this story is so beautiful. That's why this story changes everything because there's a detail in this story that Jesus includes. We've already read it. There's a detail that he includes that helps us pave the way for a rich relationship with God. Developing a relationship with God is actually not that complicated. It's much like we develop a relationship with anyone else. But there is a mistake that we make before we even get to the table. There is a mistake that we make that oftentimes prevents us from even being able to start a relationship with God.

If you go back to the story as you're reading through it did anything pop out to you as different about this parable? If you've been tracking with us this summer then you know that there is a character in this parable who is actually not, strangely enough, in hardly any of the other parables? The character is God. In a lot of the other parables we've told, God's not actually in the story. He's implied. He's just not included.

So like the parable of the sower, there is a farmer who casts seed out. It's implied that God is the farmer who casts the seed. Think about the parable of the prodigal son. There's a son who squanders away his inheritance and runs away from his father but there's the father there waiting for him. It's implied that the father is God. Think about the parable of the talents. There is a master who entrusts to money to his servants. It's implied that the master is God.

In this parable Jesus makes no mistake about it. God is actually in the story. And what's even more interesting is that the rich man is completely unaware. I mean think about it. He's sitting there in his living room having a conversation with himself about all of this money that he's got and all of these plans that he's got. He sits back and he says, "My friend," he's talking about himself and he calls himself my friend. He's talking to himself as if no one is around. We don't talk to ourselves when people are around. You look around to make sure that nobody is there to hear you.

The rich man is sitting there talking to himself and someone needs to knock on the door and be like: God is in the room. He's right there. He's in the chair. He's right there. Someone needs to tell him because this rich man had completely forgotten about God. And that's actually the problem in this story.

See the problem in the story is not that he made money. God is not opposed to profit. The problem in the story is not that he made a plan as to what to do with his money. God is not

opposed to planning. The problem in the story is that he kicked back and he ate and he drank and he was so merry. God is not opposed to pleasure. God is opposed to the one thing that we know is very clear in Scripture. God is opposed to pride. God is opposed to pride.

James 4: 6 puts it like this, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

He is 100 percent opposed, he is in direct opposition to; he will have nothing to do with the proud. Now when I say that word proud we typically don’t think of ourselves, right? When we hear that someone is prideful or arrogant typically we go to the most extraverted, loud, boisterous, cocky, confident person we can find. Maybe you think of a world leader. Maybe you think of Hollywood actors or actresses.

To me, I think of one person who is the most proud person I know, the most pride blaring person I know—my favorite athlete, Conner McGregor, okay? Conner—he’s one of my favorites. I love him. He’s such a good fighter. He’s so talented, so gifted, he’s so skilled. But man, he knows it. He thinks he is the greatest thing since sliced bread and he loves to talk about it.

One of my favorite things that Conner did when he first came into the sport, he wasn’t a champion yet, he was very unproven, but he had one phrase that he said over and over. He said, “I didn’t come here to take part. I came here to take over.” That is so arrogant, so cocky and also super awesome. It is tattoo worthy—great, great line.

So when you think of proud and arrogant maybe you think of someone like that, but that’s a very limited, very narrow definition of pride and arrogance. See pride is, most of the time, way more silent and way more subtle than that.

Consider this verse from Deuteronomy, chapter 8, verse 14. It says it like this, “Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God, who rescued you...” “Don’t become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God, who rescued you...”

Actually one of the absolute biggest forms of pride manifests itself when we forget God, when we make our plans without him, when we don’t acknowledge him, when we don’t defer to him, when we don’t ask him for what we need, we don’t thank him for what we have. Pride, at its very root, is the act of forgetting God.

Think for just a moment how this story would have been different had the rich man remembered God. Like when he sees all of this increased wealth coming his way, “God, thank you so much for providing for me.” When he doesn’t know what to do with all of his extra resources that he’s got, “God, what do you think I should do with this? Can you give me some wisdom?” When he comes up with the idea to build bigger barns to store the crops, “God, thank you for this idea but help me to understand if this idea is really of you.”

When he kicks back and he says to himself: I'm set for life, what if instead he turned his voice to God and said, "God, thank you for providing for me. Help me to be a good steward of the resources you've given me. God, thank you for peace and stability but, God, help me to use my peace and stability in such a way that benefits others and that is obedient to you."

I mean he sits back, he kicks back, and he drinks and he says: God, I'm eating and drinking and I'm being merry. What if he turned his voice to God and said, "Thank you for these things that you have blessed me with. Thank you that I get to experience this but, God, help me not to worship the things that you've created instead of worshiping the Creator. Just think how different this story would have been had he only remembered God.

And I just wonder if you're in the same boat today. Have you forgotten God? Have you neglected his word? Have you ignored the prompting of his Spirit within you? Have you bought your own stock and taken too much credit for your own success?

Have you tried to control your life by constantly worrying and obsessing over things that are really out of your control? because that is a massive form of pride. Have you fallen prey to the pressure and the burden of feeling like everything depends on you? because Jesus actually said that if you're weary and burdened you should come to him because his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Oftentimes in our pride and our arrogance, we take on responsibility that isn't ours. We take on burdens that weren't meant to be carried by us. In our pride and our arrogance we think that we are capable and we're able and we're the super heroes and we've got to fix it all, we've got to figure it all out, and we forget that there is a God in heaven who is intimately involved in the details of our lives.

There is a God who says: I will give you everything that you need. You don't have to worry about it. You don't have to worry about where you are going to live, what you're going to drink, what you're going to eat—I'm going to take care of you, you don't have to worry about it. There is a God in heaven who says: I will work all things together for the good of those who love me. You can trust me.

Have you forgotten God? You see, when we forget who we are, who we really are, and who he is pride just wells up within us. And you've got to get real about it. You've got to get real about who you really are and who you really aren't and who he really is because if you can't take care of the pride issue you can't get into a relationship with God.

Just think about the mathematical equation here. God says that if you want to have a good life it requires a rich relationship with him but he absolutely opposes the proud and he will have nothing to do with them. If you don't take care of your pride you can't even come to the table to have a relationship with God.

See, the relationship is the easy part. Developing a relationship with God is not super complicated. The mechanics of it are very easy. We come to his word. We read the word. We read the Bible. God speaks to us through his word and then we speak to him through prayer—back and forth. Back and forth, read the Bible and pray—read the Bible and pray. We listen to God we pray. We read the Bible we pray. Over and over and over—it's the mechanics of a relationship with God. It's not the most complicated thing in the world, it's simple. Simple is not always easy but it's simple.

It's not because reading your Bible makes God love you more. It's not because praying more makes God love you more. No, this is just how you develop a relationship with him. It's why we do things like Daily Bible reading. If you haven't signed up for Daily Bible reading I would highly encourage you to. You can use the website: tpcc.org/dailybiblereading and sign up for it. It gets you an email in your inbox at five a.m. every morning and it will give you some Scriptures—just a few verses and some thoughts to pray over and just to talk to God and just begin developing that relationship with him.

But man, if that is not your thing, okay—no big deal. There are thousands of resources in our world today that can help you develop a rich relationship with God. There's a thing, I'm not sure if you've heard of it, it's called Amazon.com. And you get on there and you type in things you want to learn about and it populates thousands of books that have been written about it. Then, take it a step further, when you order it they fly it to your house via a drone and they bring it in your chimney and you can just stay in your reading spot and within two hours the book will just plop down on your lap and you can begin to know... It's so easy! The resources are everywhere. It's amazing.

We've been blessed. The information and technology age has given us no excuses when it comes to resources. There are resources everywhere but that's not the problem. See the information and technology age has given us resource after resource to develop a rich relationship with God but the problem it has not solved is the problem of our desires. Why is it that we have all of these resources, we have all of these Bibles, we have all of these apps—why is it that in our hearts we actually don't want to? What is that? What is it in our hearts that makes us actually want to go through a whole day forgetting about the God who created everything in this world, including us? What is it in us that makes us not even read the Bible?

See that's why this is not a go read your Bible and pray more sermon. Like if I said, "Guys the application of this, real easy. Crack out your Bibles. Be on your knees. Pray more. Hallelujah. See you next week. That doesn't actually doesn't change anything. What that would do is that would cause some of you..."

The vast majority of you probably wouldn't do anything with it and the other portion who tried would go like maybe three or four days. You try to pray for fifteen to twenty minutes—I mean that would turn into nap time because you'd fall asleep and then you'd get halfway through Genesis and be like, "Ah, this is confusing. I'm out." And it would be over because the problem is not will power. The problem is not self-discipline. The problem is our pride.

The problem is that, in our pride, we've convinced ourselves that we're okay without him. We've convinced ourselves that we're okay without reading the Bible. We're okay without praying. We've got this thing covered. We're good. And until you get real with God about that, about that pride inside of you, you can never develop a rich relationship with him.

Here's the deal: Life with God starts with death to pride. Life with God, a rich relationship, with God, starts with you getting real with yourself and real before God and going to war with your pride.

I experienced this in a life altering way when I was in my mid-twenties. My wife and I had moved to Seattle, Washington. It was my first ministry position coming out of college. We moved out there to work with a church plant. We started a church from the ground up to reach people who nobody was reaching. And man, I was convinced that I was doing big things for God. I was convinced that I was going all out. I was like the brave, courageous guy for God doing great things.

I can tell you, looking back on that time in Seattle, that my dependence upon God was pretty pathetic. I read my Bible but I read my Bible getting ready to preach. I didn't read my Bible like it was my all-sustaining source of life—the very word of God. I didn't read my Bible to develop a rich relationship with him and I certainly didn't pray to him. I mean, I prayed before meals. I prayed at the end of a sermon. I prayed before ministry meetings. I didn't pray like my life depended upon him. I didn't pray to develop a rich relationship with him.

Quite frankly, looking back, I was pretty big on myself and I thought I was pretty capable. I'd use some spiritual words to make it not sound so bad, but I depended upon myself, my own strength, my own capacity and I thought I was doing big things for God. I wasn't concerned about developing a rich relationship with God. I wanted to develop a successful career for God.

You know what? God let me go with that. You know like a parent sometimes with a kid who wants to make a stupid decision, you just kind of have to let them go just so that they can learn. God let me go. I lasted about three years doing it in my own power and my own strength. But three years in I completely burned out. My marriage was a mess. My wife was a mess. My faith was a mess. I was so depressed. I went to counseling for a year. I lost my job in Seattle. We had to move back to the Midwest with my tail tucked between my legs. It was awful.

Honestly, I came to this place where I didn't know if I wanted to follow God anymore. I certainly didn't want to do ministry ever again. I didn't want any of it. And I realized that I had built my whole identity on this idea of being a successful pastor. When that was removed from me, I had nothing. I didn't have a rich relationship with God.

God let me fall flat on my face and it broke me. By the grace of God and the prayers of my wife, I came back to him and started following him—not for any ministry position. I was out of ministry. My wife and I just committed. We were going to do some couples things. We were

going to try to develop a great, healthy marriage and love one another with everything we've got.

And we were just going to try to develop a rich relationship with God because that's what his word tells us leads to a good life and that's all we wanted—a good, simple life. So we started building bit by bit, putting our lives back together through God leading us and developing a rich relationship with him. And I can tell you, eight years later I'm still working on developing a rich relationship with God but it's richer than it has ever been. I can tell you that I'm still fighting for a healthy marriage but I tell you that it's stronger, and healthier than it's ever been. And yes, God restored me to ministry but that's not the important part.

See, what Seattle did for me is it drew me into the ring to fight my pride. It drew me into the ring—God drew me into the ring and said: Hey, come on. Put on the boxing gloves. It's time to get in the ring and start doing the thing that's going to be required of you for the rest of your life. Put your pride to death and fight it every day. Fight the urge to think that you've got what it takes. Fight the urge to think that you're good without God. Fight the urge to forget God and move on with your life as if he doesn't exist. You're going to have to fight that every single day.

That experience put me flat on my face. I was so desperate for him. I was so desperate for him. And I started fighting and I'm still fighting today. I'm telling you, pride is like a weed. It's like a weed that you pull out of your yard and all of a sudden you look two days later and it's popped up in another spot. Doggone it. You think you're good? You're like all in the back row, "Oh my gosh." It's a constant fight. It's a constant slaying of pride.

It's coming before God and getting real with him and saying, "God, I don't have what it takes. And God, yes, I'm arrogant enough to think that I do have what it takes. And God forgive me of that. And God, what is it within me that is so sick and so desperate for God. God why am I like this?"

You have to get real with God. You have to come for him in humility and say, "God, help me. Help me with my prideful, sinful, broken heart because I can't do it on my own. You have to come before God desperate and ready to fight your pride.

I'm just here to tell somebody at some campus that it doesn't take a dramatic, life crashing and burning down experience like I went through to draw you into the ring, to start fighting your pride. You can start that right here, right now—today. And I know what you're thinking right now if you are like Petie, "I could never do that. I could never get real about my sin. I could never get that real about my arrogance. I could never talk to God like that. I couldn't talk to anyone else like that. I could never get that real about who I am and who he is. I could never talk to God like that."

I hear you. But can I just tell you, if you're thinking about it that it's worth it? That it truly is the good life. That there is nothing richer, there is nothing sweeter, there is nothing better than a

rich relationship with God. There are people at this campus, at every campus, who can attest to that. I can attest to that. There is nothing better than life with God.

Now I wish I could put full words to it. But there is no way that I could ever come close to what the psalmist writes in Psalm 23. See, Psalm 23 is an interesting one because we always use Psalm 23 at funerals. If you've ever been to a funeral you've probably heard—I have said, as a pastor at a funeral as we've lowered the body into the ground, Psalm 23. And it's often what we use to picture what life is going to be like in heaven, that this is what our deceased loved ones are experiencing if they were followers of Jesus. And that's beautiful. It's a picture of—yeah; this is kind of what heaven will be like.

But that's not what Psalm 23 means. Psalm 23 is a picture of life with God now. It's a picture of what it is like to walk with God, a rich relationship with God in the here and now. See, the psalmist would put it like this in Psalm 23:

“The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.”

I mean is there anybody right now who doesn't feel content? You feel like your lacking something. When you have a rich relationship with God it doesn't matter what the world around you looks like, you have all that you need in him.

He says,

“He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.”

Is there somebody out there who needs peace in your life? You feel like everything is chaos, just swirling you. Well guess what? When you're doing life with God you're doing a rich relationship with him, even though it's all chaos around you it actually feels like you walking beside a peaceful stream because you know he's got you.

“He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.”

Who needs some guidance today? You've got a decision coming up that you don't know whether to turn left, right, or go straight. When you're doing life with God he says: Come and ask me for wisdom and I'll give it to you. I'll give it to you generously. I won't hold back. I'll give you guidance.

“Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,”

Lord, I know there are some people in this room at every campus who are walking through a dark valley right now. And they don't know how they are going to come out of it, they don't know if they are going to come out of it, and it feels like life couldn't get worse. Even when that happens, when you walk through the darkest valley, you can say:

"I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me."

Look at the next part. It says:

"You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies."

Literally, when everything is falling apart, it's like everybody is out to get you—when you're doing life with God it feels like you're sitting at the Thanksgiving dinner table with a full spread. You've got all you need. And God is going to take care of you. He's got your back and he loves you more than you could ever possibly imagine. And the valley will end. You'll come up out of it because God is going to lead you through it.

He says:

"You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings."

When you're doing life with God, you don't worry about what you don't have; you're focused on what you do have. It changes everything.

He says:

"Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever."

That's what it looks like to have a rich relationship with God. And the only thing standing between that—between you having a rich relationship with God is your own pride. You can put it to death but you've got to get real before him, you've got to talk to him, you've got to tell him how you're real with yourself and real with him. So I want to give you some space to do that, right here, right now at every campus.

Let's bow our heads and let's pray:

God, we love you. And God, I pray for our whole church right now that you would give us a spirit of humility that we would never forget, God, that we are nothing without you—all of the skills, abilities, and talents that you've given us God—they are gifts from you.

So, God, I pray for our church just to have a complete and total dependence upon you. God, I pray that there would never be a day that goes by that we forget you, that every minute of every day and every room that we're in, God, help us to realize that you are right there with us. God, I pray for those in the room right now who're struggling with their pride, struggling with the sin in their life. God, I pray right now that you would meet them right where they are. Confront their pride.

Search our hearts, O God, test our hearts and point out anything in our hearts that goes against you. We need you, God. Meet us in these moments. Give those who are struggling to have the courage to speak to you, the courage to do so. God, meet us in a powerful way and change us from the inside out. We ask this in Jesus' name and the church prays together: Amen.