Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice*, these sermon outlines use the same Scripture passage as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Introduction: This text contrasts the differences between Esther and Haman. They were brought together interestingly by Mordecai, the Jew. Haman wanted Mordecai dead; Esther wanted him to live, along with all her people. Esther and Haman were opposites. Their demeanor and character could not have been more different.

1. Esther, A Paragon of Humility

It is worth remembering the root of the word *humility* is *humus*, meaning dirt or soil. To humble ourselves does not mean we become dirt; instead, it means we get down on the earth, figuratively speaking. We recognize our place. Esther humbled herself.

- She took the initiative. She had prayed and fasted for the situation at hand: the imminent slaughter of the Jews. Now was the time to act. Though it was not her time to approach the king, she knew she had to take that gamble. In humility, she correctly dressed and stood at a distance where the king could see her.

- She waited for the invite. Though she was the queen, she understood the appropriate protocol and throne etiquette and her proper place. She did not barge into the king's presence. She waited for him to invite her in. It showed her respect for him and her understanding of Persian ways.

- She approached with caution. The king could have had her killed for it wasn't her time to enter his presence. She was cautious and careful. Would he lower the golden scepter for her to touch it? (A sign of his favor.) He did. She had won his approval.

- She asked for a meeting. Esther planned to change the setting, the environment, to gain a more favorable opportunity to make her request. She wanted to feed the two men—King Ahasuerus and Haman—who held in their hands the strings of the Jewish people. Haman proposed the killing; the king signed it into law. Once at the banquet, the king let Esther know that he would grant her request.

- She created greater curiosity by postponing her request. Esther did not make her appeal at this banquet; instead, she invited them both back the next day. It was a masterful ploy, heightening the suspense, appealing to their inquisitiveness.

Like Esther, we need to display the virtue of humility today. The message of humility is: if we want to be great, then we must go down, we must lower ourselves.

Humility is not self-hatred or lack of self-confidence. Neither does it imply that a person becomes the proverbial doormat, allowing everyone they encounter to walk all over
them. Nor does a humble person look down on themselves or their abilities. Furthermore, humility is not a call to mediocrity and a substandard quality of life. Humility, as evidenced by Esther, is thinking accurate and realistic thoughts about God and ourselves. While God is not mentioned in this book, one gets the sense that Esther knew who she was and she knew who God was. As she lowered herself, God was working in a way that would raise her up (and her people.)

2. Haman, A Bastion of Pride
Standing in sharp contrasts to Esther’s lowly posture was Haman, the prideful and arrogant second in command to the king. The Greeks called this arrogance hubris; the Bible calls it pride. It is exaggerating our worth and power, overrating our superiority, and possessing unreasonable conceit. Its synonyms are vanity, conceit, arrogance, egotism, boastfulness, and selfishness. It has been recognized since ancient times to be a root of cruelty and evil. It produces high-blown, stiff-necked, puffed-up, and stuck-up people. Haman was the poster child of pride.

- He was consumed with hate. He experienced momentary joy when leaving Esther’s banquet. But his happiness was short-lived when he saw Mordecai. His prejudice bubbled to the forefront, and it spewed over in wrath and anger. Anger is the quintessential personal emotion; nothing will reveal one’s heart quicker than one’s anger. For Haman, it was his hatred of the Jewish people, especially Mordecai who would not fall at his feet in pretentious worship.

- He bragged about his exploits. Haman called all of his friends over to have another party. While there all he boasted about was his wealth, his children (a sign of blessing), his promotion, and his advancement. Haman was intoxicated by his little world of me, myself, and mine.

- He was elated about his inclusion. Since the Queen had only invited him and the king to her banquet, he couldn’t keep quiet about it. He was the ultimate name dropper. Can’t you hear him say, “I’ve been to the queen’s house. I’ve had dinner with the king and the queen.” He rubbed it into his friend’s face. He thought he was special. He thought he was the queen’s favorite. And, not just one dinner; he was invited to return to the palace.

- He sought revenge. As elated as he was for his invitation and his presence with the king and queen, he couldn’t escape the fact that Mordecai was still alive. He wanted him dead! The sooner, the better. In fact, his wife suggested that he build gallows—a high one to match Haman’s ego—to impale Mordecai.

- He was presumptuous. We know the outcome of this story, Haman doesn’t. He overstepped his bounds; he got cocky; he took too much for granted; he became overconfident. His arrogance was his downfall. He didn’t know the proverb: Pride goes before the fall.

It happens all the time. Self-made men and women are determined to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but they land on their backsides. Proud men and women set themselves apart by setting themselves up for a great downfall. The prideful person gets too big for his britches and will be exposed in the end.

Pride, the antithesis of humility, is spiritual cancer that eats away at our spiritual eyes rendering us blind. Circularly, pride makes us blind to the sin of pride in our lives. In a demonic catch-22, pride causes us not to see our fatal flaw. We cannot see our pride because we are so full of pride. Pride is the spiritual veil blinding us to the truth about
ourselves; whereas, humility's greatest gift is that we can see ourselves as we are and see our need for God.

Pride is the cancerous root of most vices. Instead of contrition, pride leads to self-righteousness, the thinking that one doesn’t need anyone else. Humility, on the other hand, always morphs into something more beautiful; it’s the fountainhead of the other virtues. It is what we need.

Each day we are faced with a choice: Will I be humble (like Esther) or will I be humbled (like Haman)?

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