

“Tripped by an Ego-Trip”
Esther 7-10

Series: Rising from the Ruins Week 9

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Joe knows cats – big cats. Not Joe Exotic of Tiger King fame. I mean Joe Taft, founder of the Exotic Feline Rescue Center in Indiana. As our nation’s second largest big cat rescue center, Joe and his team care for 200 cats including lions, tigers, pumas and bobcats. Often these felines are rescued from pet owners who discover they’ve bit off more than they can chew – mainly because they’re about to be bit and chewed by their pets. In just a year or two that incredibly cuddly tiger cub can bulk up to several hundred pounds and rip to shreds the owner. That’s when they call in Joe. With his experience, the big cats can live out their days in his 100 acre sanctuary.

Yet all those years of herding cats went to Joe’s head. Twenty years ago he made the foolish mistake of raising a tiger cub in his own home. It was boisterous, wild and growing bigger by the day. Joe was capable of controlling his tiger until he suffered a heart attack and required quintuple bypass surgery. How did he heal in a house with a saber-toothed roommate? Joe built a steel fence around his couch. While the tiger roamed free through the house, Joe lived in a cage in his living room. Joe Taft let his ego – and his cat – trap him. The Big Game Warden became a prisoner of his own game. He was tripped up by his own ego trip.

It can happen to all of us. When your ego is in the driver seat it puts you at the center. One sign of our egocentric times is Selfies. Believe it or not: Selfies can be dangerous to your health and self. You’ve heard of tennis elbow? Now doctors are treating *Selfie Wrist*. Twenty-nine year old Tina started feeling a tingling in her fingers and wrist and then a sharp pain. This interferes with her work in digital media promotion. Dr. Levi Harrison says taking selfies causes a constant hyper-flexion of the wrist. The inflamed nerve leads to a form of carpal tunnel.

Let’s be clear: the Ego is not bad. The Ego is you, your core, your self. The word comes from the Greek word *ego* which means “I” The trouble begins when our Egos take over, take charge, take us for a ride. In truth, none of us needs Expedia to send us on an Ego trip. We create our own. Inside our heads we imagine the victories we’ll win, the achievements we’ll gather and the opponents we’ll beat. We criticize and put down our neighbors, friends and family while we lift ourselves up. We love it when people talk about us and worry what people are saying about us. We want to be admired, appreciated and adored. We try to build a resume, leave a legacy and erect a monument people will remember when we are gone. We can never get enough. That’s why it’s hard to get off the Ego trip. And the world is only too happy to take us for a ride. Once I received an envelope which said, “Rev. Doug Hogle, your curiosity not only deserves to be respected, it deserves to be rewarded!” My reward? 45 issues of the Christian Science Monitor for \$11.99.

Pride is the gas that fuels this ride. Of all the sins that attack us, pride is the worst. It persuades us to run the show. It places us above everyone else. Pride moves Adam and Eve to eat the fruit so they can be like God. Pride causes their son Cain to slay his brother Abel. Pride tempts King David to take another man’s wife and then kill him. C.S. Lewis once said, “It is pride which

has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.” Pride splits families, destroys companies, tears apart churches and sends nations to war.

Ego trips eventually trip us up. The New Living Translation says:

If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead. Proverbs 26:27

Haman is the Bible’s textbook case. His Ego trip in the book of Esther takes him to the heights. He is the second most powerful man from India to Ethiopia. Crowds part like the Red Sea to make a path for him. All the highest nobles kneel to the lowest levels in his presence. All, that is, except Mordecai. A leader of the Jewish community in the capital city of Susa, Mordecai is the lone standing figure in a sea of groveling. This infuriates Haman. Not satisfied to have 99.999% of the empire obey him, Haman must wipe out the single dissenter. Not satisfied to destroy Mordecai, Haman plots and pays for the annihilation of all Jews throughout the empire.

Now I know it’s easier to identify with heroic characters like Esther and Mordecai. Yet for a minute, it might be helpful to tease out that little bit of Haman in each one of us. We all take Ego trips. If we don’t look within and find out what is going on in our Egos we will likely get tripped up and wind up in our own traps.

We first learn **Ego Always Wants More**. It’s a bottomless pit, a thirst never quenched, a hunger never filled. Despite his position, power and prestige, despite his plot to wipe out the entire race of his enemy, Haman is not content.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. “And that’s not all,” Haman added. “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.” Esther 5:10-13

If he can’t have everything, Haman feels like nothing. With all his blessings, he is still miserable.

Many of us live with the myth of “More.” If some is good then more is better. If a little feels good, a lot more will feel great. Anything can be More: food, sex, liquor, weed, money, power, influence, affirmation, even knickknacks. Your Ego tells you if you have More you will be satisfied, full. It’s a myth. More never satisfies. Two reasons. The Law of Diminishing Returns states the More you get, the less good it will feel. So you need even More just to feel the same. The second is you can’t always get More. I call this the Law of Rolling Circumstances. Sometime the circumstances go well for you and you get a big bumper crop of More – for example money. Circumstances rise high and you feel great. Yet just as quickly, the circumstances plunge – like the stock market – and the More you hunger for drops or dries up. Up and down, up and down. If your Ego takes you for a ride on the Rollercoaster of Circumstances you will never be content. Your emotions will rise and fall with the circumstances. If your Ego is tied to the circumstances you will never be satisfied.

From the dank, dark, depths of a Roman jail, the lowest circumstance you can imagine, the Apostle Paul reveals to us a secret:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11-13

Only Christ can feed and fill the aching, empty Ego. Yet to find that – you have to get off the roller coaster of circumstances. You have to find and surrender your More.

So fellow Hamans: let's be honest with ourselves. What's your More? What earthly thing do you feed your Ego? What circumstances control your emotions, cause you excitement or depression, give you highs or lows? How can you get off the rolling circumstances and find strength in Christ alone?

Next we learn from Haman: **Ego Often Holds a Grudge**. There is one little piece of evidence which is often overlooked. When Haman walks on the stage of this story he is identified as "Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite" (Esther 3:1). Agag was the king of a people called the Amalekites. There was a long standing feud between the people of Israel and the people of Amalek. The children of Israel were attacked by the Amalekites on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land (Exodus 17:8-16) and during the time of the Judge Gideon (Judges 6-7). Later, King Saul, the son of Kish, is told to war against King Agag and the Amalekites. This ends in the destruction of the Amalekites including the death of King Agag (I Samuel 15). Now Haman the Agagite encounters Mordecai a Jew who refuses to bow to him – and not just any Jew. Mordecai is a descendant of Kish, the father of King Saul who defeated Haman's ancestor King Agag and his people. It's possible Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, not just because of his devotion to the Lord, but also because of his grudge against an Amalekite. Mordecai's stand ignites the old feud. This is certainly not to defend Haman's plot to annihilate the Jews who destroyed his people. Yet you can see how grudges, feuds and revenge feed the Ego and spark violence. The sad part of all this is the Israelites and Amalekites were both descended from Isaac thus Abraham. It was a family feud which lasted for centuries and cost countless lives.

I've been reading about World War I. Did you know three of the leaders of the major powers: King George V of Great Britain, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany were all first cousins? Queen Victoria of Great Britain was their grandmother. The German Kaiser is reported to have said if Grandma was alive she would never have allowed them to go to war with each other. Their family feud caused one of the deadliest conflicts in human history. When it was all over "over there" the total number of military and civilian casualties was 40 million which includes 15-22 million deaths.

Grudges drive the Ego to take harmful and destructive steps – both to others and yourself. When we let grudges out they burn bridges, destroy relationships, fuel feuds and even cause violence. When we keep grudges in they ruin our health, disturb our peace and drive us to self-medication. It was not enough for Haman to sign the death warrant for every Jew in the empire. His wife Zeresh goads him to go farther.

His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of 75 feet and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself.” This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up. Esther 5:14

Setting this trap for Mordecai makes Haman happy. He thinks this is the way to pull out the grudge which impales his soul.

What grudge impales your Ego fellow Hamans? I’m not suggesting you are wrong or to blame. Yet this grudge may be driving your Ego to think and act in ways which are destructive to you and others. Plotting to lay a trap for someone else, you may be the one who is tripped up.

Finally, **Ego Gets You in the End**. That’s what happens to Haman. First he is humiliated.

When Haman entered, the king asked him, “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?” Now Haman thought to himself, “Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?” Esther 6:6

Haman is so blinded by his Ego he assumes the King can only be referring to him. He suggests the honored one should wear the King’s robe, ride the King’s horse and be led by one of this highest officials. Xerxes says, “Wonderful. Go do exactly this...for Mordecai!” “Mordecai?” “Yes. And you are the one to lead him.” Gritting his teeth, Haman obeys and leads the robed Mordecai on a horse proclaiming, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!” When Haman returns home, feeling completely ashamed, his wife and friends rubs it in.

Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin! Esther 6:13

Her prophecy is soon fulfilled. Haman is rushed off to the banquet with Xerxes and Esther. Once again, Ego has blinded Haman into believing he will be honored at this exclusive feast. He couldn’t be more wrong. Xerxes asks Esther to reveal her request.

Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated...King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?” Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Esther 7:3-6

The King ordered Haman to be hanged on the pole he built for Mordecai and gave the order to reverse the annihilation order of Haman.

Ego will get you in the end. And if it doesn’t get you it will likely get those who love you, sometimes in the next generation. So it’s in your own best interest to stop the Ego Trip before you are tripped and trapped by it. How do you do that?

Search for where the Ego Trip begins. What is fueling your Ego to act this way? What causes you to hold a grudge? What makes you hungry for More? What drives you to ride on the rollercoaster of circumstances? The answer to this lies deep within you.

Joe Simpson was a thousand feet up the side of the Siula Grande Mountain in Peru when his safety line was cut. He ended up in a deep crevasse with a broken leg. After several desperate attempts to climb up and out of the crevasse, he realized his injury made this impossible. In opposition to every survival instinct, he made the excruciating decision to lower himself deeper into the crevasse in the hope there was an exit farther down. All the time he wondered,

Am I lowering myself to freedom or deeper into the belly of the earth? Does a ray of sunlight await me in the pit, showing me a way out into day or is there only darkness and slow death?

Every inch took him farther from life with no way back up. His decision to lower himself, to go deeper into the void saved his life.

There is something deep in the void of your soul which is driving your Ego. What is it? Anger, hurt, pain, grief, loss, abuse. Lower yourself. Go down. Dig deeper. Surrender yourself. You won't be trapped down there. Down there you will find what's wounding your soul, you will also discover the Savior of your soul. The One who heals your Ego: Jesus.

I (*ego*) have been crucified with Christ and I (*ego*) no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I (*ego*) now live in the body, I (*ego*) live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20