The POWER of a HUMBLE LIFE
ALSO BY RICHARD E. SIMMONS III

REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN GOD
The Search for Truth in the Modern World

SAFE PASSAGE
Thinking Clearly about Life & Death

THE TRUE MEASURE OF A MAN
How Perceptions of Success, Achievement & Recognition Fail Men in Difficult Times

A LIFE OF EXCELLENCE
Wisdom for Effective Living

RELIABLE TRUTH
The Validity of the Bible in an Age of Skepticism

SEX AT FIRST SIGHT
Understanding the Modern Hookup Culture

WISDOM: LIFE’S GREAT TREASURE
Timeless Essays on the Art of Intentional Living
The Power of a Humble Life

Quiet Strength in an Age of Arrogance

Richard E. Simmons III
To my wonderful wife Holly,  
my soulmate and very best friend.
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Back in 2009 I wrote the book *The True Measure of a Man*, which was based on a series of talks I had given to a large group of businessmen. These talks focused on how hard it generally was to face the financial challenges in our lives in light of the economic hardship that the entire world was then experiencing. Those were unprecedented times, and there was a great deal of uncertainty everywhere. Almost every man I knew was wondering what was going to happen next and how it would impact him and his family. What made it so difficult was that much of what was taking place in the economy was completely out of their control.

Here we are, almost nine years later, and everything has changed. The economy is good, the unemployment rate is low, and the Dow Industrial Average is at an all-time high. The fear has subsided, and for most people, life is good.

The book you are about to read, *The Power of a Humble Life*, is in many ways a sequel to *The True Measure of a Man*, although it is not targeting just men. This is a book for men, women, young and old, and the message has the potential to be life-changing.
I dig into an issue, which plagues us all, though most of us are completely unaware that it exists in our lives, and I share what I consider to be life’s greatest paradox. Many of God’s important truths are foreign to the world we live in because they are so counterintuitive. For this reason, biblical truth often comes across as utter foolishness to some people.

What we do not recognize is that very often the wisdom of God, the truth of God, is paradoxical. Paradox is defined in Webster’s as “a tenet that is contrary to received opinion. A statement or principle that is seemingly contradictory and opposed to common sense, but may in fact be true.”

In this book, the paradox that I discuss is essential to a life well-lived. It strikes right at the heart of who we are as human beings, and its ramifications are incredibly significant in all areas of our lives. It is of foundational importance if we want to live an exceptional life.

Life’s greatest paradox is found in the title of the book—our strength is found in humility. This interesting and challenging concept, certainly not taught at Harvard Business School, is clearly counterintuitive.

As we explore the underpinnings of this great paradox, we will begin with the thorny issue of pride and arrogance and continue on by exploring the power of humility. At the end, I believe that you will clearly see the power of a humble life.
~I~

OUR GREATEST DILEMMA

PRIDE HAS BEEN THE CHIEF CAUSE OF MISERY IN EVERY NATION AND EVERY FAMILY SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN.

— C. S. Lewis
I think at times it is very difficult for us to understand the human condition and the thoughts that go through our hearts and our minds. For instance, why do we feel so compelled to impress other people? What is that all about? And why are we always comparing ourselves with others? Why can’t we just be content with who we are and what we have? Then there is, of course, the big question. It is the one question we are always asking ourselves. It often seems to be the central question that must finally be answered before we will make certain decisions or take definitive courses of action. It is a question that I believe haunts many people’s lives:

What will people think about me?

This question operates in our lives in some form or fashion and can impact us emotionally, psychologically, and even spiritually. I am sure you recognize this to be true of your life, but what is this really all about? There is a simple answer: the pride of life.

C.S. Lewis is considered by many to be one of the greatest authors ever. More than 300 million copies of his books have been sold; and though he died in 1963, hundreds of thousands of his books are still purchased each year. One of his most well-known works is Mere Christianity, in which he intellectually lays out a defense of the Christian faith. In a section labeled “Christian Behavior,” he discusses topics such as cardinal virtues, social and sexual morality, forgiveness,
charity, and hope, followed by a chapter entitled, “The Great Sin.” Lewis opens this chapter with the following words:

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free, and which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else, and of which hardly any people, except maybe some Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls, or drink, or even that they are cowards, but I don’t think that I have ever heard anyone accuse himself of this vice. And, at the same time, I have very seldom met anyone, again, other than some Christians, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault of which we are more unconscious of than others, and the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I’m talking of is pride, or self-conceit.

People struggle with pride more than anything else. This sin is deadly because it is so insidious. Lewis describes pride as a spiritual cancer that destroys our ability to genuinely love others and prevents us from being content. As a spiritual cancer, pride slowly grows and develops in our lives, becoming well-established without our knowledge. Lewis says that pride is purely spiritual; it originates straight from hell and consequently is far more subtle and deadly than all other sins. We readily recognize it and hate it in others, but most of us believe that we are in no way afflicted by it.

We often misunderstand the word “pride.” Webster’s defines it in two ways: The first is a “justifiable self-respect”—the idea of taking pride in doing the best that you can do. The second definition is what Lewis is speaking of—“an arrogance, an unreasonable conceit

PRIDE GETS NO PLEASURE OUT OF HAVING SOMETHING, ONLY OUT OF HAVING MORE THAN THE NEXT MAN. (C.S. LEWIS)
and feeling of superiority.” The Greeks called it hubris, which means to have too high a view of oneself.

THE NATURE OF PRIDE

To get to the heart of this issue, we need to understand where pride originates. There is an interesting verse in the book of Ecclesiastes that provides some great insight.

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor . . . (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

Most of us are rarely satisfied and content in our own work and achievements. We constantly compare ourselves with other people and desire to be more successful than they are because we have a great desire to impress others. Despite our many achievements, we don’t feel we are successful unless other people are aware of them. In other words, we seek more than just success—we long for proper recognition of our achievements.

Why are we always comparing ourselves with others? Why do we hide our weaknesses and failures? Why are we constantly wondering if our lives measure up to others in our sphere of influence?

Again, from Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

Now, what you want to get clear is this, that pride is essentially competitive. It’s competitive by its very nature. While the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident, pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It’s the comparison that makes you proud. The pleasure of being above the rest.
Lewis is saying that we pride ourselves on being wealthier, better-looking, more successful, or more intelligent than those around us. However, when we find ourselves in the presence of those who are better in those areas than we are, we feel deflated. We lose all the pleasure we had when we felt superior. In reality, the pleasure stems from our arrogance. We have an exaggerated sense of our own importance or abilities and take pleasure in having more than the next person.

In his book, *Searching for God Knows What*, Donald Miller shares some great insight into the issue of pride. Using his imagination, he began to wonder, if an alien from another planet came to observe our lives here on earth, how he would describe us to his superiors once he returned to his planet. Miller reflected on this a great deal. Late one night, he woke up, got out of bed, and penned the following thoughts from an alien’s point of view:

Humans, as a species, are constantly, and in every way, comparing themselves to one another, which, given the brief nature of their existence, seems an oddity and, for that matter, a waste. Nevertheless, this is the driving influence behind every human’s social development, their emotional health and sense of joy, and, sadly, their greatest tragedies. It is as though something that helped them function and live well has gone missing, and they are pining for that missing thing in all sorts of odd methods, none of which are working. The greater tragedy is that very few people understand they have the disease. This seems strange as well because it is obvious. To be sure, it is killing them, and yet sustaining their social and economic systems. They are an entirely beautiful people with a terrible problem.

Miller says the alien would not understand our lives, particularly what we watch on television, because the plots on these shows are about desperately trying to find all the things missing from our souls. If the alien had the opportunity to speak to us, he would ask, “Why are you so obsessed?”

You have to wear a certain kind of clothes, drive a certain car, speak a certain way, live in a certain neighborhood, whatever, all
of it so you can be higher on an invisible hierarchy. It’s an obsession! You are trying to feel right by comparing yourself to others. It is ridiculous. Who told you there was anything wrong with you in the first place?

Without realizing it, the alien sees what pride does to our lives.

**OUR NEED FOR GLORY**

In his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker writes about our great need for what he calls “cosmic significance.” He says this need is so powerful that whatever we end up basing our identity on becomes our deity. This need for cosmic significance explains so much of our natural tendency to be full of pride.

Dr. Tim Keller provides profound insight into this need we have for significance and how we allow it to corrupt our lives. Keller addresses this in a commentary on Philippians 2:3, which says,

> Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit . . . The phrase “selfish ambition” actually means “vainglory.” It comes from the Greek word *kenodoxia*. The word *doxa* means “glory.” The word *kenodoxia* means a person is empty or starving for glory. Paul warns against selfish ambition, while acknowledging we are naturally hungry for glory.

In the Bible, the word “glory” means importance. It means “to matter.” Fundamentally we are haunted by a deep fear that our lives don’t really matter. Keller says the worst thing for a human being is really not being disliked or vilified but instead being ignored and considered insignificant. The human heart fears being so unimportant and worthless in the eyes of others that our lives don’t matter to the people around us. For this reason, though we may not be aware of it, every human heart in its deepest recesses is seeking extensive glory.

We are driven to win the approval of others because we are starved for glory. A real and fundamental instability resides in our
hearts because it is so easy to feel small and insignificant. As a result, we constantly look for ways to convince the world and ourselves that we matter and that our lives are important.

_Vanity Fair_ magazine featured an interesting interview with pop icon Madonna in which you can see this desire for cosmic significance. Madonna commented:

> I have an iron will, and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy . . . I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I’m mediocre and uninteresting. . . Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that’s always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I’ve become Somebody, I still have to prove that I’m Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.

From this interview, you can see Madonna’s fear of being mediocre and of losing her status as a music icon. The ultimate fear of all human beings is to be a nobody and not matter to anyone.

So how do we handle this dilemma? We take matters into our own hands and seek to glorify ourselves. We travel through life on an unending quest to prove to the world our lives matter and that we are important. What better way to do that than to prove we are better or superior to those around us? This striving lies at the heart of pride and arrogance. However, even if we do find the success and fame that make us feel significant, we still have to deal with the reality that these will eventually fade. They will not last because we are disintegrating. We yearn for a glory that is permanent, but our lives are slowly passing away.

We will never find peace and contentment in this life until we come to terms with this conundrum. The ultimate solution is humility. The humble are continually at peace with who they are in the eyes of others. They are content with their position in life and what they possess. The humble are the only ones who are delivered from this great drive to prove to the world that “I am important!”