What's Living in Your Crawl Space?

We loved our new home. To be sure, it was a fixer-upper, but we loved the possibilities. We loved that it sat at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac—a perfect place for our kids to play. We loved the large backyard and pool that would quickly become center court for umpteen parties. We loved our new neighbors—even the Ohio State alum next door (FYI: I'm a huge USC fan).

We were on a roll—until we discovered some unwanted house guests…

Evidently, during escrow when the home inspection took place, the inspector didn't secure the small screen door that covered the crawl space to get underneath the house. This meant for a couple weeks our home provided complimentary room and board to Mrs. Skunk and her three amigos.

As you can imagine, at the top of the to-do list was the task of expelling our furry friends—WITHOUT incident!

For this delicate assignment, the better part of wisdom was not to "corner and capture" (which would have yielded a regrettable endgame), but to patiently wait until they broke camp and set out on a midnight romp to forage for their next meal. So in the wee hours of the morning as the skunk family left the comforts of our crawl space, Pattie and I bolted outside in the pitch dark, armed with flashlights and duct tape, and decisively sealed off the grand entrance to their subterranean homestead. Mission accomplished. Disaster averted.

When I think about that story through the lens of leadership, I have to stop and ask the question: Are there any unwanted guests that have set up shop in the underground arena of my life and leadership?

Friends, let's shoot straight. The world of leadership is filled not only with demands, but with TEMPTATIONS—whose endgame can yield not only a world of stink, but an avalanche of hurt and heartache. And here's what I've noticed: beneath every one of these temptations runs the same quiet current—the subtle drift from dependence on God toward a confidence in self. Let me tee up a few of those temptations for your careful consideration.

- **There's the temptation of arrogance.** When you are planted in a position of leadership where people are looking to you to provide guidance, it is easy to lapse into a sense that you are bigger and better than you really are. At your own risk, you begin to over-estimate yourself and under-estimate those around you.

- **There's the temptation of entitlement.** The higher you climb on the ladder of leadership influence, the greater will be the number of perks tossed your way. The challenge is to receive what was once a blessing of leadership and not let it quietly become a right or an expectation. You begin to believe you are owed certain privileges—that you are a cut above the standard.

- **There's the temptation of control.** The moment you shift from seeing your leadership role as a

stewardship to seeing it as something you own, you rapidly move into a realm where you now need to manipulate people and outcomes. More and more time is spent maneuvering the chess pieces to ensure that you and your plans prevail.

• **And then there's the temptation of self-absorption.** Too often a leader's world becomes self-centric. There is little time or interest for the ideas and input of others. Try this: the next time you are in conversation with someone gripped by this temptation, take note of how restless you feel when the topic turns away from what matters to you—and how quickly you navigate the dialogue back in your direction. It's almost an art form. But it's not pretty.

The sobering reality is this: no matter how brilliant, charming, strategic, or commanding in presence a leader may be, the consequences of a failed character are extraordinarily disabling. They will bring down even the strongest among us.

So have you allowed access for any skunks to subtly slip into the crawl space of your life and leadership? If God were to don some overalls and show up today with clipboard in hand for a home inspection, what might He check as NEEDS REPAIR?

That's where I want to leave you. Re-read those four temptations slowly. **Ask God to put His finger on the one that needs to be called out—and surrendered to His redemptive grace.**

Because when it comes to your leadership, the crawl space matters.
What's living underneath has a way of surfacing.
Often at the most inopportune time.

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