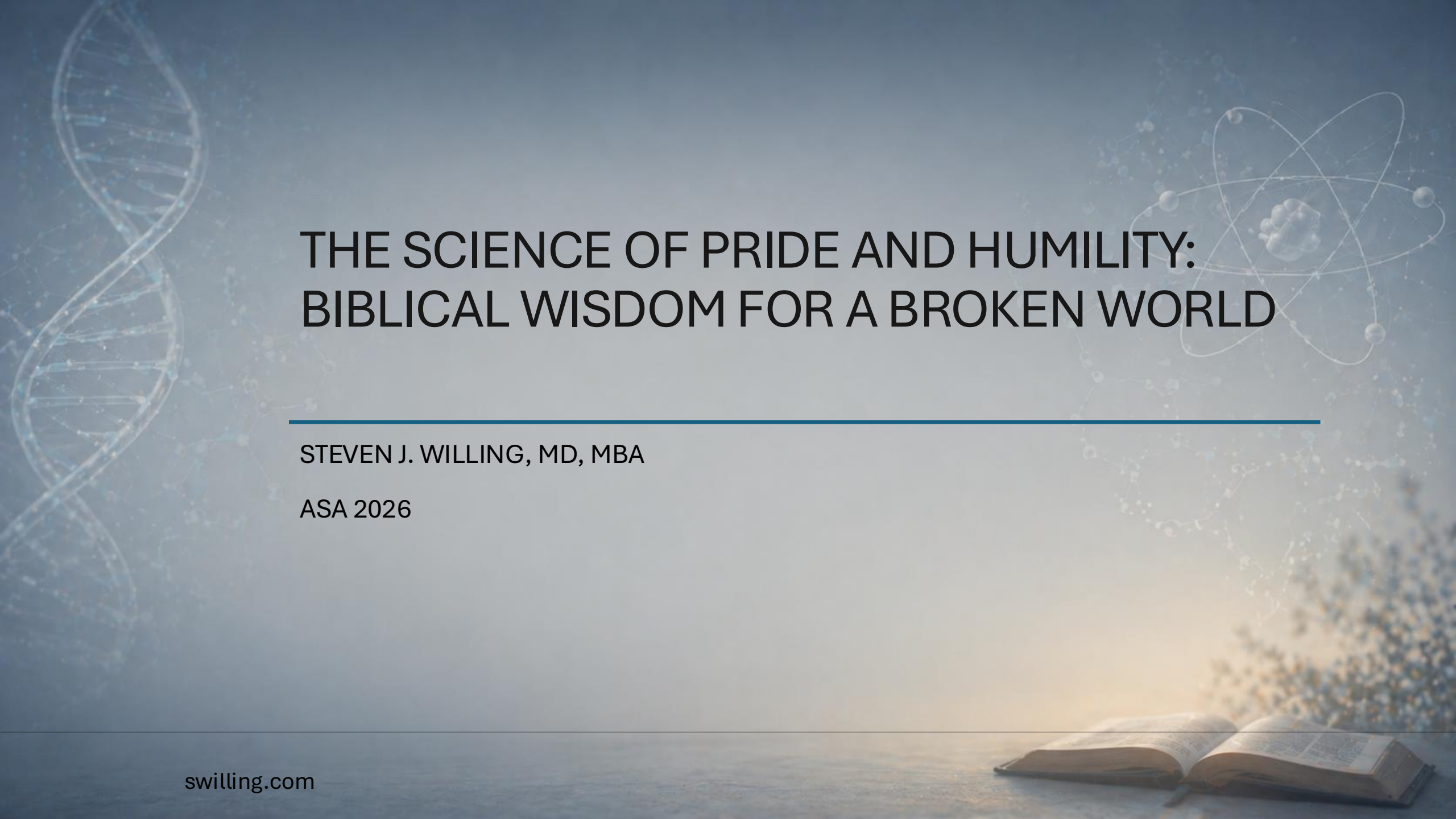




THE SCIENCE OF PRIDE AND HUMILITY: BIBLICAL WISDOM FOR A BROKEN WORLD

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DEFINITIONS

- **Pride:** Thinking of oneself too highly. The absence of **humility**.
- **Humility:** a proper understanding of oneself in relation to God and others.
 - Recognition of depravity
 - Personal worth based on God, not self
 - Mistrust of intuitions
 - Modesty of deportment
 - Delight in serving



ELEMENTS OF PRIDE IN SCRIPTURE

- Epistemic pride: “I’m smarter than you”
- Moral pride: “I’m better than you”
- Narcissistic pride: “I’m more important than you”
- Controlling pride: “I should be in charge.”

Taken together, these comprise a systematic and consistent description of human nature, based upon the enthronement of self. (Genesis 3)



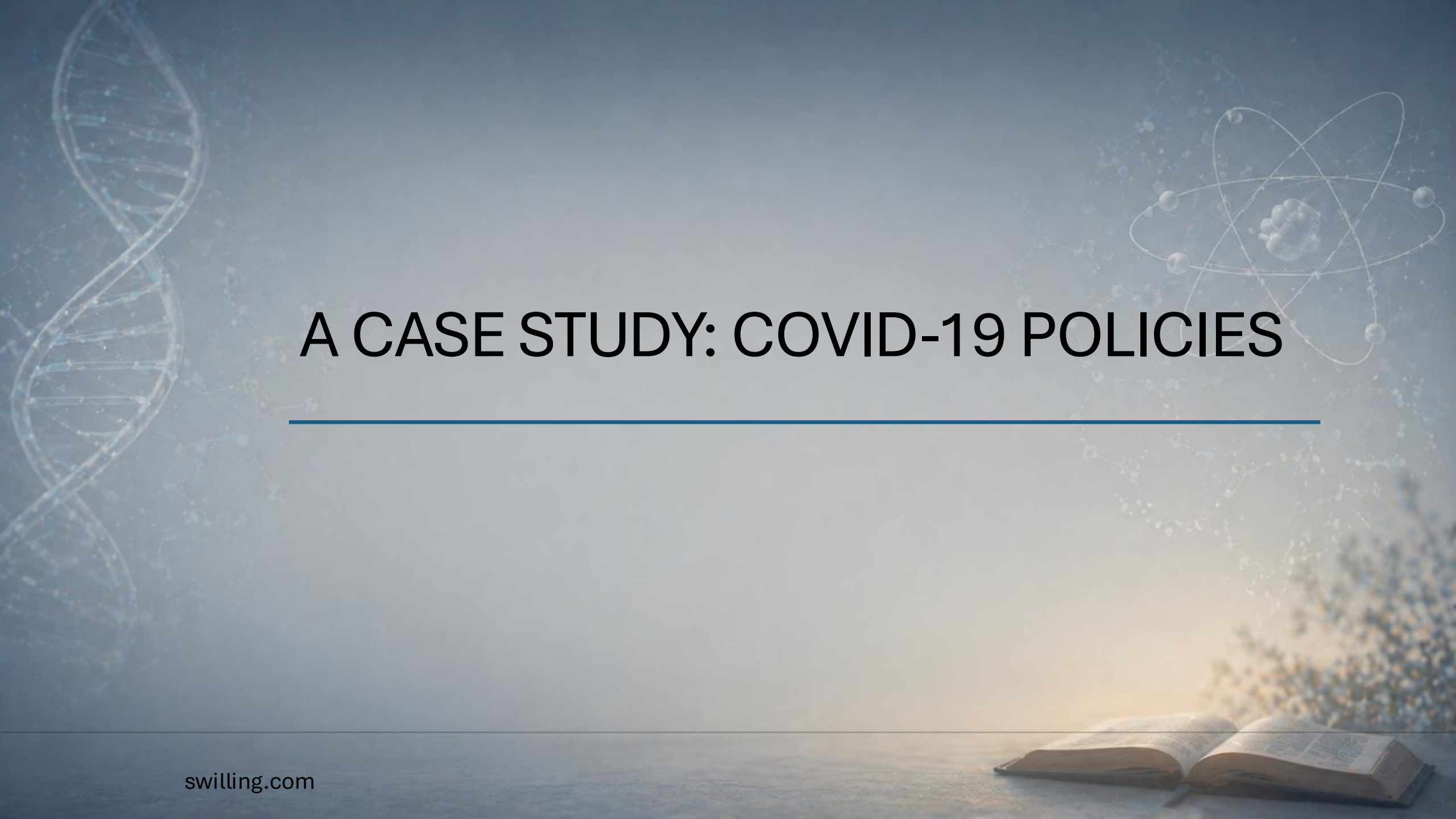
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SCRIPTURAL ADMONITIONS AGAINST PRIDE

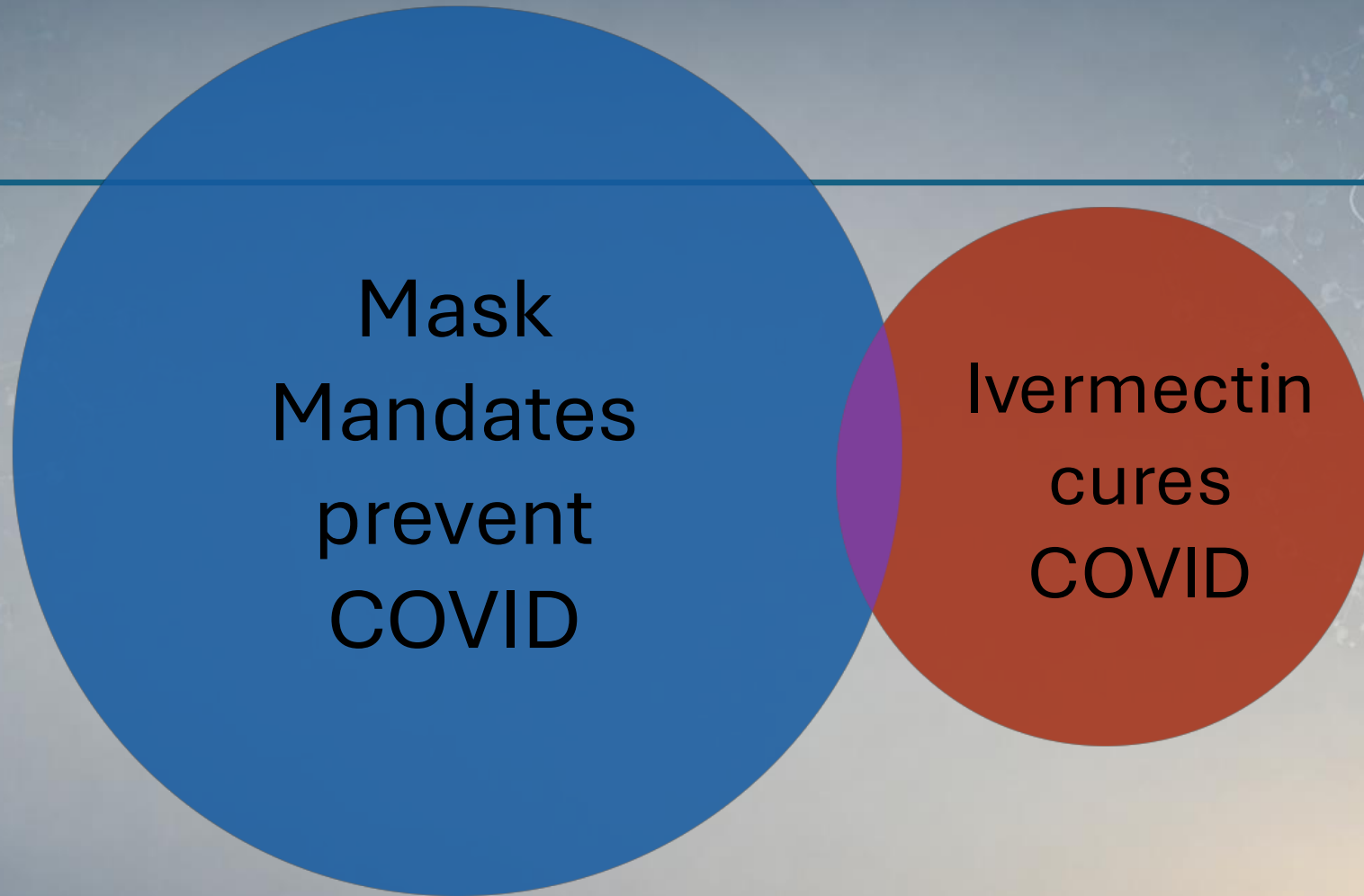
- Epistemic pride: Do not be overconfident in your opinions
 - Romans 12:16
- Moral pride: You are morally no better than anyone else
 - Jeremiah 17:9
- Narcissistic pride: Reject the pursuit of glory and honor
 - Philippians 2:3
- Controlling pride: Seek to serve, not to rule
 - Matthew 20:28



The background of the slide features a light blue gradient. On the left, a large, translucent DNA double helix is visible. On the right, there is a stylized atomic model with a central nucleus and three elliptical electron orbits. Scattered throughout the background are various molecular structures, including chains of hexagons and other geometric shapes, some appearing to glow.

A CASE STUDY: COVID-19 POLICIES





THE GREAT MASK WARS, 2020-2022

- ✓ Epistemic pride: “I’m right”
- ✓ Controlling pride: “You must do what I say”
- ✓ Moral pride: “I’m a better person for wearing (or not wearing)”
- ✓ Narcissistic pride: “My priorities are more important than yours.”



PRIDE IS NOT A MODERN PATHOLOGY

- COVID-19: a live experiment in epistemic overconfidence
- Experts, institutions, dissenters, and the public all overreached
- Nobody had clean hands — this is not a partisan argument
- Was it a lack of knowledge, misinformation, poor communication, or lack of humility?
 - What might humility have looked like?
- Scriptural position in vivid relief:
 - Pride is not a modern pathology. It is the human condition.



THE MODERN COUNTER-NARRATIVE

Philosophical

Scientific

Cultural



THREAD 1: PHILOSOPHICAL

- Locke — blank slate
 - Humans shaped entirely by environment
- Rousseau — noble savage
 - Human nature basically good
 - Society is the corrupting force
 - No original sin
 - No guilt
- Freud
 - Act out your desires
- Nietzsche — will to power
 - Whatever prevails is progress
- Taylor
 - Expressive individualism

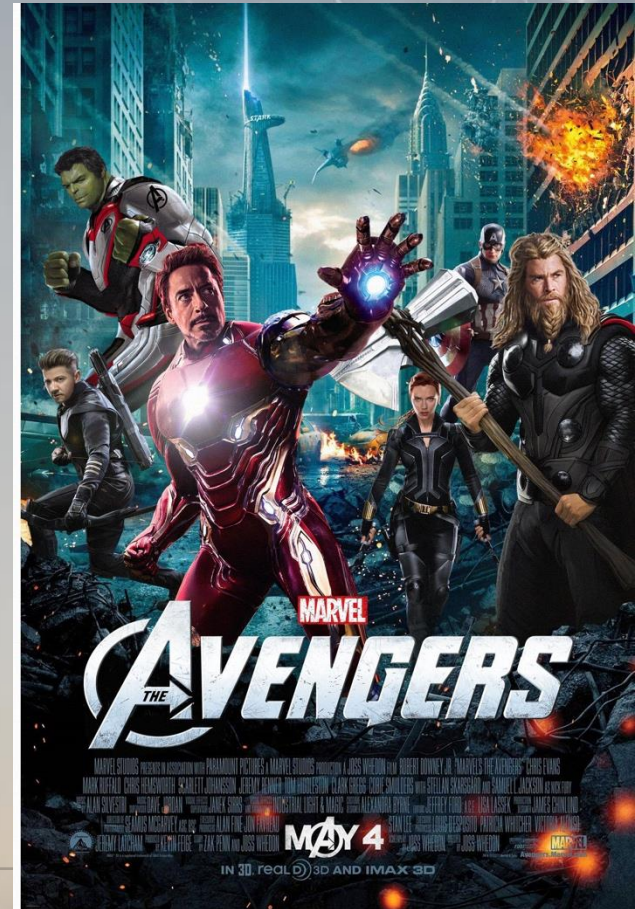


THREAD 2: "SCIENTIFIC"

- Nathaniel Branden (1969) — self-esteem as the master virtue
- John Vasconcellos — California Task Force (1986):
 - Low self-esteem diagnosed as root of violence, addiction, underachievement
 - Influenced by Rogers, Maslow, May
- The prescription: inflate self-image, especially in children
- Jean Twenge (Generation Me, 2006; The Narcissism Epidemic, 2010):
 - Claimed a rise in narcissism from 1970s — not random, but engineered

THREAD 3: CULTURAL

- Action movies, crime dramas, romance movies, newspapers, TV
 - The strong and mighty prevail
 - Good people are beautiful, and beautiful people are good
 - Smart people are usually right
 - It's important to be important
 - "Follow your heart"



SCRIPTURE VS. SECULAR NARRATIVE

CULTURAL

- Smart people more credible
- What's right for you
- High self-esteem
- Pursuit of power

SCRIPTURAL

- In humility is wisdom
- The heart is desperately wicked
- Consider others better than yourselves
- The first shall be last

WHICH DOES THE EVIDENCE SUPPORT?



Descriptive research

Is the Bible Correct in the Diagnosis?



EPISTEMIC PRIDE

- Confirmation bias
- Motivated reasoning
- Illusory superiority
 - People rate themselves superior to others in misinformation detection (Corbu, 2026)
- Bias blind spot
- Better-than-average effect:
 - 55–65% of Americans rate themselves above average in intelligence
 - 94% of professors rate themselves above average at their jobs
- Dunning-Kruger effect:
 - A lack of knowledge sometimes results in metacognitive failure

MORAL PRIDE

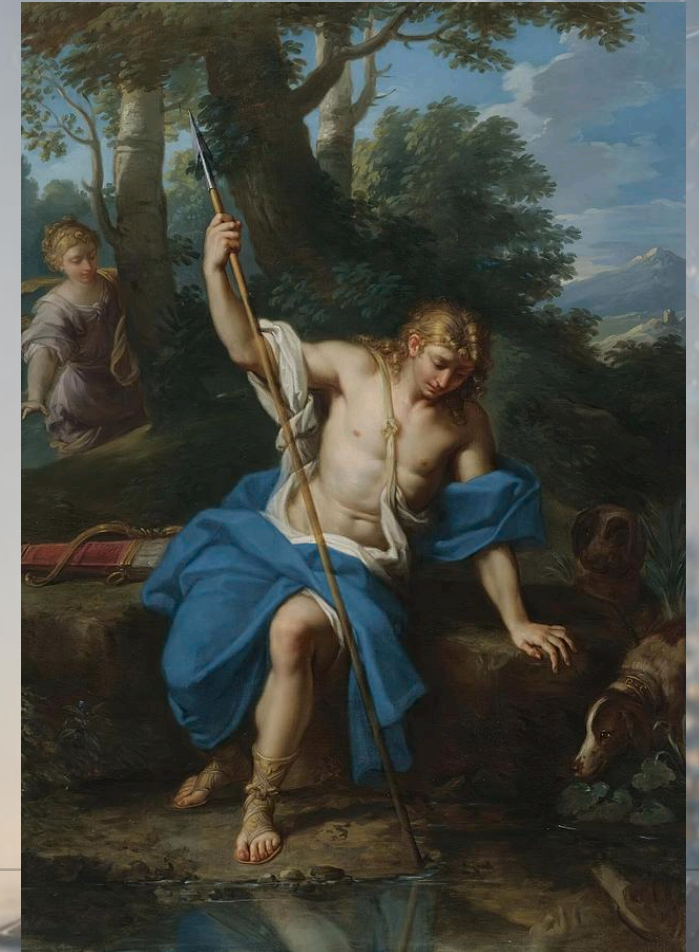
- “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
But the Lord weighs the hearts.” - Proverbs 21:2
- Exaggeration of virtue:
 - *“Most people consider themselves paragons of virtue, yet few individuals perceive this abundance of virtue in others.” Tappin & McKay, 2017*
- Underestimation of capacity for evil
 - Studies show virtually everyone lies within any given week
 - Homicidal fantasies
 - Tavris & Aronson – “Mistakes were made but not by me”



NARCISSISTIC PRIDE

Shame-honor cultures:

- The animating belief is self-importance, not mere reputation
- It is triggered by threatened egotism
- It scales to a cultural norm
- It produces population-wide harm
- It shows that the trait is latent and situational, not a rare aberration



CONTROLLING PRIDE

- The control illusion
 - “The illusion that one has understood the past feeds the further illusion that one can predict and control the future.” – *Daniel Kahnemann*
- Planning fallacy
- Optimism bias
- Narcissists pursue power — then underperform in it
 - Grijalva et al., 2015; Nevicka et al., 2011



THE "SELF-ESTEEM" HYPOTHESIS TESTED — RESULTS

- Baumeister, Smart & Boden (Psychological Review, 1996):
 - Violence NOT predicted by low self-esteem
 - Violence IS predicted by threatened high self-esteem
- Narcissism predicts aggression, in both grandiose and vulnerable subtypes
 - Kjærvik & Bushman (2021)
- Aggression is ego-threat triggered, not trait-driven



Prescriptive research

Is the Bible Correct in the Remedy?



INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

- Not general modesty or mere open-mindedness
- The metacognitive capacity to recognize the limits of one's knowledge
- Measured as both *state* (situational) and *trait* (dispositional)
- Assessed via self-report, behavioral tasks, and peer-report measures

INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY — EPISTEMIC BENEFITS

- Predicts **lower misinformation receptivity** and **greater evidence-based behavior**
 - Bowes & Fazio, Vanderbilt (2024) — meta-analysis, 27 studies, N=33,814
- Predicts superior evidence **discernment** AND higher **metacognitive accuracy**
 - Fischer et al. (2025)
- Predicts greater **motivation to learn**, larger **knowledge gains**
- Predicts more **productive responses to feedback**
 - Hendra, Dierdorff et al. (2026)



INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY — RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

- Predicts **greater empathic accuracy** toward outgroup members
 - Lehmann et al. (2026) — 3 preregistered studies, N=533
 - Causal relationship demonstrated
- Priming IH **reduces political hostility**
 - Smith (2023)
- Predicts **constructive conflict, less stonewalling, more perspective-taking**
 - Koetke et al. (2024)

INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY: CREDIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

- Decreases polarization, extremism, conspiracy belief
- Increases **learning** and **scientific credibility**
 - Porter et al., 2022
- Scientists' IH **improves communication** across ideological and identity-based divides
 - Rios et al., *PNAS*, 2025
- Confers **reputational benefit**:
 - Humble sources are judged more competent and more reliable (Karabegović & Mercier, 2024)

MORAL HUMILITY

- Better regarded by others
- Better psychological adjustment
- Ability to revise beliefs
- Apologizing behavior increases empathy, forgiveness, gratitude, and positive emotions.
Modulates stress response.
 - Witvliet et al. (2020)



BENEFITS OF SELF-DENIAL

- Better marriages, partner well-being
 - Van Tongeren et al (2014, 2017)
- Mental well-being
 - Crocker, 2008 and 2010
- Higher long-term trust
- “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matt. 16:25



INVERSELY CORRELATED WITH NARCISSISM

- ✓ Empathy and compassion

Urbonaviciute et al. 2020

- ✓ Forgiveness

Exline, 2024

- ✓ Agreeableness

Paulhus 2002

- ✓ Self-control

Vazire, 2006



SERVANTHOOD

- Servant leaders
 - Increased job satisfaction
 - Improved performance
 - Greater creativity
 - Higher trust
- Superior to transformational, authentic, ethical leadership styles
 - Lee et al., 2020 meta-analysis of 130 studies



ANCIENT TRUTHS. MODERN CONFIRMATION

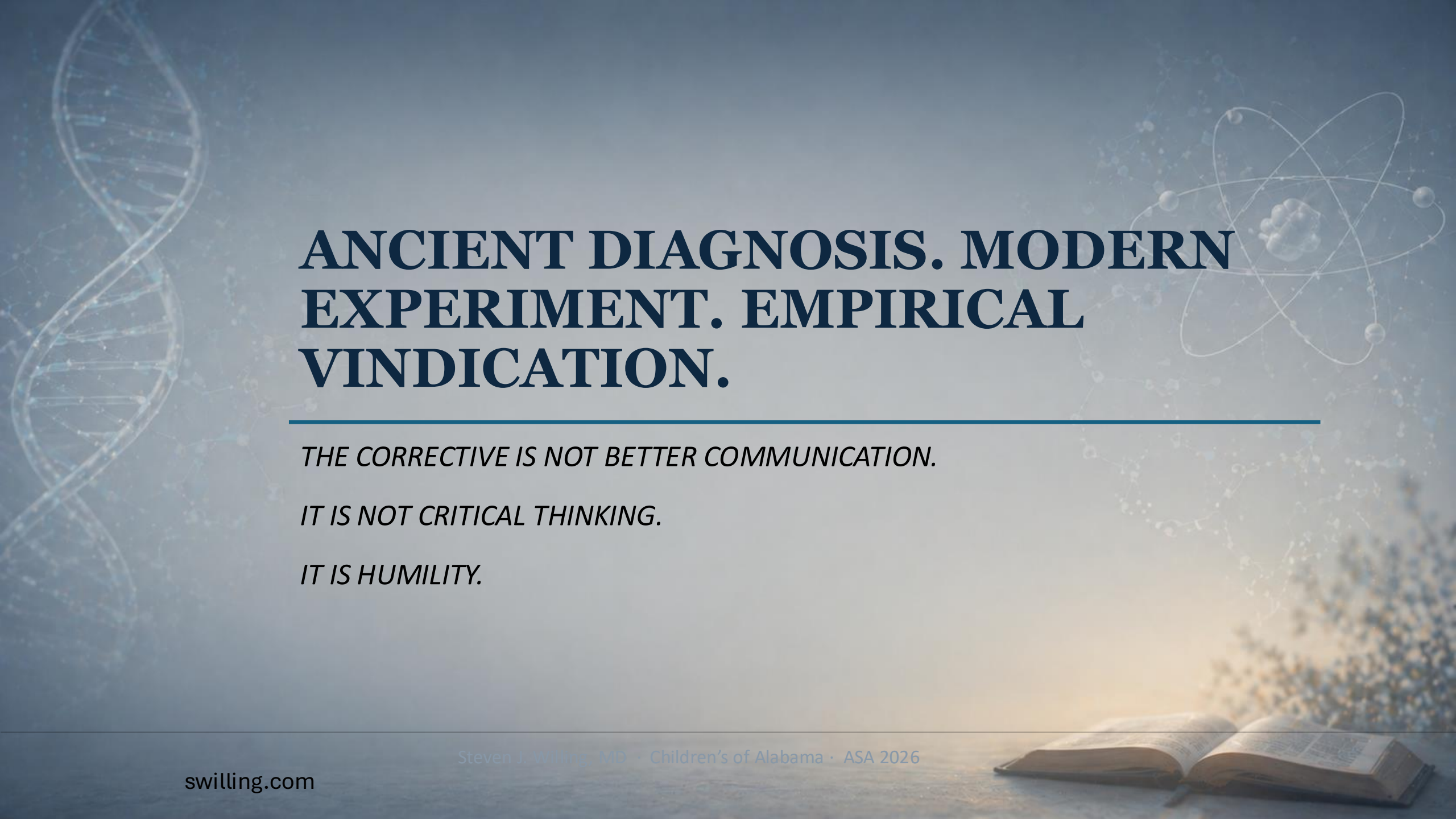
1. Epistemic humility
2. Moral humility
3. Self-denial
4. Servanthood



A CALL TO THE ASA COMMUNITY

- It begins with us, not them
- Science-faith scholars occupy a unique position:
 - Called to epistemic humility (the foundation of good science)
 - Called to theological humility (the foundation of Christian virtue)
- The world does not need more confident experts
 - It needs more people who admit the limits of what they know





ANCIENT DIAGNOSIS. MODERN EXPERIMENT. EMPIRICAL VINDICATION.

THE CORRECTIVE IS NOT BETTER COMMUNICATION.

IT IS NOT CRITICAL THINKING.

IT IS HUMILITY.



RESOURCES



The Science of Pride and Humility: Biblical Wisdom for a Broken World

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