



Fighting the Good Fight

April 14, 2024

Text: Romans 5:12, Romans 8:18-25, John 16:33

BIG IDEA

Scripture paints a much different picture of how God sees us than how we view ourselves. Shockingly, after humanity makes choice after choice that sins against God in scripture, God promises not to give up on us when Paul declares in Philippians 1:6, “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” This must mean that when God looks at us, He sees beyond our failures, feelings, limitations, and flaws. He sees something we can’t see. He sees the seed of what we are truly created to be planted deep within us because He created us in His image. There is great possibility for our lives no matter where we start because God is the only one who gets to finish our stories. He understands that we are “a work in progress.” This is grace, a cornerstone of the Christian faith. Often, this concept is hardest to apply to ourselves.

Conversation Starter

- When you look at yourself, do you tend to be kind and gracious or judgmental and condemning?
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COMMENTARY #1

(Verses 16-17) Sometimes we need to be in a posture of listening to God instead of speaking to Him to really experience transformation in our hearts. Many people understand the intellectual idea of grace. But abiding in it as a disciple of Christ is something we can only learn in the presence of God throughout our daily lives. As a group, listen to God as you read aloud several translations of these verses aloud to one another:

New Living Translation

16 So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! 17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

The Message

16-20 Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life emerges! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

God's Word

16 So from now on we don't think of anyone from a human point of view. If we did think of Christ from a human point of view, we don't anymore. 17 Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to “stop evaluating others from a human point of view?”
2. Do you find yourself spending more time evaluating others or evaluating yourself?
3. The Message version of these verses says, “Now we look inside...” What are we looking for as disciples of Christ when we look “inside” other people? Based on your answers, what, then, should we be looking for within ourselves?
4. How much grace have you been shown in your life?
5. If you have not received much grace, how can you look toward Jesus to learn what this is and how to practice it? (Allow your group members to help share what this process looks like as a disciple.)

GOING DEEPER

There are parts of the Bible that describe God as a mystery, and it often feels like a mystery that He would love us as much as He says He does. Parent/ child relationships are the best model He gives us to show what His relationship with us looks like.

1. How does our “Father” in heaven love us like His children?
2. How is that kind of love different than what many Christians believe of God’s character?
3. What do you think it means to be “created in the image of God” as described in Genesis 2?

Philip Yancy in his book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*: “Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self. You become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees?”

1. Who has been defining how you see yourself up to this point in your life?
 2. Have you surrendered this part of who you are to God to heal?
 3. How could your prayer life change today to reflect that you want God to show you? How to abide in how He sees you?
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Yancey, Philip. *What's so Amazing About Grace?* New York, Walker & Co, 2002.
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GROUP ACTIVITY

Ultimately, God wants to heal us from the version of ourselves that clouds our vision. He wants to completely define who we are. He will protect us even from ourselves because He loves us so deeply. Often, hard conversations need to happen in our prayer lives with

Him to allow room for healing to begin in our lives.

This week, keep a running list of questions that you want to ask Jesus about your life. Imagine looking into His eyes and knowing He is really listening to you as you find the courage to give voice to these questions. Be honest and record even the questions that reveal doubts, mystery, or pain in your story. Jesus is big enough to handle all of them. At the end of your week, surrender that list to Him. Ask Him to heal you and teach you what it means to be made in the image of God. Then, keep your eyes open for the healing to begin.

**If you feel led, use this time to repent as well. Is there anything that God brings to mind that you need to repent about concerning the way you look at others? Is there anything that God brings to mind that you need to repent about concerning the way you see yourself? Use this time as a starting point for recurring conversations about how God sees you.*



The Inner Battle

Supporting Passage

Text: Matthew 3:14-17

BIG IDEA

Who are you? So often when we get asked that question, we relate who we are to either what we do or who we belong to. “I’m (insert name) and I am an (insert career).” We instinctively associate our worth with what we do, what we have accomplished, or who we are related to. The problem is, this often leaves us feeling like we never do enough, we never achieve enough, and we are left constantly comparing ourselves to those around us. We always feel like we fall just short of the mark... have you ever been here? But what if we began to evaluate our worth how God calls us to; what if we recognized that our identity is not founded on what we do, but on what He has done. Because regardless of any brokenness you hold, secrets you carry, scars you have, or shame you feel- HE CALLS YOU LOVED.

Conversation Starter

- What does it mean to be fully loved?
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COMMENTARY #1

(Verses 13-15) John the Baptist is surrounded by people; some

eagerly rushing into the waters of baptism desperate to accept the truth that is being offered to them. Others, remain unsure, fearful and questioning if this could be for them. Finally, the religious leaders of that day remain in prideful opposition to what is occurring- “who are you to offer baptism?” they questioned John. In the midst of this shore of broken, confused people- Jesus steps out. Leaving behind all that He was, Jesus steps fully into His ministry to be WITH us. Not because He had to be baptized/cleansed (He was perfect) but because He was so compelled by His love for us that He longed to identify WITH the needs of humanity even as He was identified TO humanity.

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you most relate to from the crowds of people in this season of your life? Do you feel passionate and eager to walk in the new life He has given? Or shame filled and doubtful that He could still choose you?
2. What does it mean that Jesus identified WITH us in His baptism?.

COMMENTARY #2

(Verses 16-17) As Jesus is baptized the Heavens open and the voice of God proclaims, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus was approximately 30 years old at this time and had preached zero sermons, healed zero people, performed zero miracles. In human perception, it appeared as if He had done nothing to earn the approval or love of God- yet God called Him His beloved Son in whom He was already well pleased. Jesus’ ministry would operate from this divine truth: He lived and served from love, not for love.

Discussion Questions

1. How does it make you feel that God was proud of Jesus before He seemingly did anything?
 2. Do you tend to live from a place of being fully loved or from a place of feeling like you have to earn it? Explain.
 3. What are some steps you can take to begin to surrender to the identity God has spoken over you- “A beloved child in whom He is well pleased”- rather than the shame or striving we often fall prey to?
 4. How would Jesus’ ministry have been different if He only served in order to earn the love of God?
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GOING DEEPER

1. Is knowing we are loved truly that important?
 2. Consider the truth that “God is love.” What does it mean that love is who God is, not merely an expression He shows or takes away.
 3. If God is love, consider the truth from James 1 that God cannot change. How does this apply to being loved more or less by God. Can God love in “levels?”
 4. God was “well pleased” with Jesus before He did a tangible thing for the Kingdom. How does this correlate with commands to “bear fruit” and “be doers of the Word” in other passages?
 5. Consider healthy relationships in your life (romantic or friendships). How has the way they love you changed your perception of yourself?
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <https://harvestpca.org/sermons/the-baptism-of-the-beloved-son-matthew-313-17/> - Sermon
 - <https://godcenteredlife.org/devotional/matthew-313-17-with-whom-i-am-well-pleased/> - Devotion
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GROUP ACTIVITY

Words of affirmation has been identified as one of the five major love languages (coined by Gary Chapman). The Bible echoes the power of words in James 3 where it says, “Life and death is in the power of the tongue.” Let’s take time to speak life over each other. Everyone takes out a piece of paper and writes out the words, lies, or shame you believe about yourself. Then, everyone else cross those words out and write the truth over them.

Example:

~~I’m dirty~~ You are made new and washed by Jesus’ blood
~~I’m worthless~~ You are created for a purpose and so loved
~~I’m ugly~~ You are fearfully and wonderfully made.