

MBC - 3/17/2019 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“Looking in the Mirror - pt.2”
(What are the symptoms of ‘self’?)

Turn with me to—

- Mark 8:34-35 ³⁴And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.
- The world says, “find yourself.” Jesus said, “Lose yourself.”
- The world says “Live for self.” Jesus said, “Die to self.”
- The world says, “Indulge yourself, pamper yourself.” Jesus says, “Deny yourself, take up your *cross* and follow Me!”

Victoria Osteen wrote a book entitled: *Love Your Life: 100 Ways to Start Living the Life You Deserve*

- Jesus said in John 12:25 *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

We’ve got an obvious conflict here. There is no reconciling these two approaches to life. Jesus said that all who follow Him are to lose self, deny self, basically, be done with self, in order to follow Him. And He wasn’t describing the path to misery, He was describing the path to heaven, eternal life and abundant life! But we will never find it by worshiping the *creature*, we only find it by worshiping the *Creator*.

Review:

I want to pick up where we left off two weeks ago. We looked into God’s Word, to answer the question: “What is a Christian self-image? Who should I see when I look into the mirror, and how should I feel about the person I see?” We camped on two passages:

1.) 1 Cor.4:1-5 - Leave your “self” alone.

Look at what Paul says about how he regarded himself, and what he thought about how others regarded him—

- 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 ¹This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

This is an amazing passage of Scripture! The Apostle Paul is easily one of the greatest, most influential people in the history of the world - his words have been translated into hundreds of languages and dialects, and millions of people read them every single day. He is rock star

of rock stars, but he says “Think about me like the lowest level galley slave, and a pig farmer.” (that’s what the words servant and steward mean if you were here two Sundays ago).

- And then he says, “Better yet, don’t bother judging me at all, because I don’t even judge myself, and even if I do, I don’t trust my own evaluation. God will judge me - and because I trust in Jesus Christ, that verdict is already in!” (drop the mic)

Paul didn’t spend time primping in the mirror of self-image and self-esteem. He didn’t measure his worth by the number of his FB or Twitter followers. Why? Listen: “*I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who even live, but Christ lives in me, and the life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me!*” His entire identity was found in Jesus Christ. The old Saul of Tarsus was dead, Paul, a new creature in Christ, had taken his place - and Paul had much more important things think about than himself.

And when he did he said, “By the grace of God, I am what I am.” He only and always saw himself *in Christ*.

“Self” is just not to be a major concern for God’s children. Listen to what A. W. Tozer said almost 50 years ago:

- Tozer: “The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not, no longer concerns him. He believes that he has been crucified with Christ and he is not willing either to praise or deprecate such a man.”

Did you catch that? You don’t need to exalt or downgrade, praise or deprecate yourself: leave yourself alone! When you really grasp that you have been crucified with Jesus, then there is no more ‘self’ - just Jesus.

Tozer was saying what Paul said: If you want to be happy and full of Jesus, make it your goal is to lose your *self*-consciousness—now don’t lose consciousness! But seek to lose *self-awareness* and *self-concern*.

- I know the natural reaction is to say to yourself: “But who is going to be concerned about my needs if I don’t worry about me?” Answer? Your heavenly Father. That’s what Jesus said in the passage we heard earlier: He takes care of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. They aren’t having coronaries over their next meal or fretting over low self-esteem. Who meets their needs? *Your* heavenly Father. And aren’t you much more valuable to Him? Jesus said Yes! *The reason you can leave yourself alone is because your heavenly Father never leaves you alone.*

So mark 1Cor.4:1-5 in your Bible as a key passage on Christian self-image. The other passage we looked at was—

2.) Rom.12:1-3 - Strive to be low-minded.

And just look with me at v.3—

- Rom 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you *not to think of himself more highly* than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

We are commanded and warned here: “Beware. Beware of thinking too highly of yourself. Beware of vain self-importance. Rather, see yourself the way God sees you: as a recipient of the *mercies* of God. And that requires humility = lowliness of mind, because God’s mercy is undeserved. You didn’t earn it or achieve. You *needed* it, and God *gave* it. Remember what we said: “You will never sing of God’s amazing grace until you realize that it saved a wretch like you!”

- The Puritan William Perkins said: Remember that our father was Adam, our grandfather dust, our great-grandfather *nothing!*” *Ouch!*

If you see yourself as God sees you, you see *an undeserving nothing who has received everything in Christ.*

Robert Schuller—

*Some of you remember Robert Schuller and his Crystal Cathedral down in Orange County. Almost 40 years ago he published a book called “Self-Esteem - the New Reformation.” Apparently he wasn’t too fond of the old Reformation. But he said that preachers needed to stop preaching that we are sinners who need God’s mercy. We should build up people’s self-esteem—

- “Classical theology has erred in its insistence that theology be ‘God-centered,’ not ‘man-centered.’
- ‘Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem”

He really said these things! And listen to this—

- “. . . once a person believes he is an ‘unworthy sinner,’ it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Jesus Christ.”

The *opposite* is true: until you see yourself as an unworthy sinner, you won’t see your need for mercy or grace. This is why many of your friends aren’t interested in the Gospel: They are up for some self-help, maybe call on Jesus for some life-coaching, but they don’t need a Savior who had to be crucified for their sins, because quite frankly, they don’t think they are *sinners*.

But when you grasp your own sinful unworthiness before God, you will *treasure* the grace and mercy He has lavished on you! There will be nothing so sweet and precious. We sang that beautiful Getty song—

*Two wonders here that I confess
My worth and my unworthiness
My value fixed - my ransom paid
At the cross.*

Remember that story Jesus told - it’s really striking - of the unworthy servant who deserves no praise or thanks for doing his job - that’s us. But if you see yourself like that, you will be amazed that the Jesus invites you to His own banquet table and girds Himself to serve you!

- So here is a measure of your spiritual growth: A “Gospel self-image” is one that *declines* in self-esteem as it *grows* spiritually!

And I can give you an example from Scripture - Paul!—

- A.D. 54 - Paul writes 1Co 15:9: *I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.* Paul sees himself as the lowest of 13 apostles.
- A.D. 61 - Paul writes Eph 3:8: *I am the very least of all the saints,* Paul sees himself as the lowest of all Christians, about 100,000 at that point.
- A.D. 65 - Paul writes 1 Tim 1:15: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.* At the end of his life, he has never been more godly, more close to Christ, and now he sees himself as the lowest human being alive at that time, approx. 350,000,000.

As Paul grew in Christ, his self-esteem went through the basement, and he couldn't have been happier, because the smaller Paul got, the bigger Jesus got - and the more wonderful, and more all-sufficient to meet all his needs. The more Paul died to self, the more he lived to Christ, the more he replaced his will with Christ's will, the more he found unimaginable joy and peace.

When I was a young Jesus-freak, we used to sing an old Maranatha music song that said, "Let's forget about ourselves, magnify the Lord, and worship Him!" Isn't that great? Haven't heard that song in a long time. Tim Keller at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan wrote a little book called "*The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness.*" Let me read you just a little. This is so good—

- "C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* makes a brilliant observation about gospel-humility at the very end of his chapter on pride. If we were to meet a truly humble person, Lewis says, we would never come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would not be always telling us they were a nobody (because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person). The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because *the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.* Gospel-humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts such as, 'I'm in this room with these people, does that make me look good? Do I want to be here?' True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings."

So let me talk about a crucial implication of this whole principle—

I. Christians and teeter-totters.

When I was a fairly new Christian, I thought of an illustration of the Christian life that has stuck with me for almost 50 years. I believe it's an iron-clad spiritual principle that is as true and dependable as gravity.

- It's a teeter-totter. Simple man, simple illustration. A straight board on an axis, when you raise one side, the other side goes up proportionately, and vice-versa. That's you and God. You are on one end, God is on the other, and the higher God is, the lower you are; and if you become higher, God becomes just that much lower. It's always true, the board never bends!

So what does your teeter-totter look like right now? Who is higher - you or God? You see, the *more* highly you think of yourself, the *less* highly you will think of God. The more credit and

praise you give to yourself, the less you will give to God, and the more important you think you are, the less important you will think God is. The board stays straight, that's the way it is.

So if the greatest thing in the universe is for God to be exalted and glorified above every name that is named - then the greatest *virtue* for human beings is *humility*: to be low-minded. And the greatest evil for the human race is self-love, self-exaltation, and self-importance.

- Let me give you another teeter-totter while we're still on this playground: This is the teeter-totter of your happiness and your self-esteem—they are also at opposite ends of the board. If the glory of God is the greatest thing in the universe, then our greatest joy will come when we are low and God is high. Remember, Paul said, "I am well content with my weakness, insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak - Jesus is strong!!" He meant that. Can you say that? Jesus said, "Blessed - happy, are the poor in spirit."

*Why? Why? Because the bigger your God is, the happier you will be. I'll never forget years ago hearing Joni-Eareckson Tada tell about her trip to Ghana, Africa to minister to handicapped people there. She was met at the airport by her host pastor who greeted her with a big smile and said, "Joni, welcome to Ghana, where our God is bigger than your God!" They went to a street in the capital city that night where the homeless, crippled, and deformed people lived. She said they crawled out of their hiding places in the darkness to meet her, and they began to spontaneously worship and sing and dance on their deformed limbs. She had never seen people so happy. One of the worshipping women said to her, "*Joni, in Ghana, our God is so big because we need Him so much!*"

Self gets in the way of our worship. Self gets in the way of our happiness. And self gets in the way of our relationships. So let me give you 6 symptoms of self - 6 symptoms that your side of the teeter-totter needs to come down—

II. Symptoms of self.

1. Sin.

Sin is always a symptom of self because any time you sin, you are exalting your will over God's will. When you indulge in some sinful thought or allow yourself to gossip, or withhold forgiveness, you are saying, "*not Thy will, but my will be done!*" You are exalting yourself over God. I want you to try to recognize over this next week, how self is at the bottom of your sins—

- When you are angry: This week when you blow up and slug the wall, or kick the cat, think about why you are angry—some goal has been blocked, you were on your way to having your way and someone or something got in the way—BAM!—you're angry. And it's because you think more highly of yourself than you ought to think.
- Same with impatience: The world isn't on your timetable. Don't they realize how important you are? How valuable your time is? You need to get over the hill - move! Self.

We need to learn to recognize that when we give in to sin it's always because we are preferring *self* over our *Lord*. What right do you have to serve yourself instead of your Lord who rescued you from sin and death? You are thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think.

But humility and weakness are powerful sin-killers!

2. Boasting.

“I don’t do that!” But how much of your conversation is talk about yourself, your achievements, your plans, your opinions? Do people leave conversations with you thinking, “He is really full of himself - or herself?”

Honestly, I saw some of that at the Shepherd’s conference this last week. I overheard conversations where pastors were going on and on about their new programs, building projects, all that they had accomplished at their churches. And I have to say that it’s kinda typical when pastors get together to see how they compare with each other—

- One of my former students, a Ukranian man, who is a pastor, saw me and came up and said, “So pastor Doug, how are you doing? How is your church? Church is growing, people serving, coming to the Lord, discipleship?”

I said “Well, God is on the throne, but actually, we have lost several families, a lot of folks are struggling and hurting, and we’re working on some sin issues . . .” But he asked!

How is “Self” the topic of your conversations? Self loves to hear its name mentioned, loves to see its picture in the paper, is very concerned about its reputation around town. (# of FB followers - how many *likes* . . .) Self is like Diotrephes in 3 John, the man “*who loved the pre-eminence.*”

My mom used to say to me and my brothers, “If you really have something to boast about, you don’t need to boast because people will already know it.” And here is what God says—

- Jeremiah 9:23-24 ²³Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Pass all credit along to the Lord who deserves it. We should all say what John the Baptist said about Jesus: “*He must increase, I must decrease.*”

And if you are praised, let Proverbs 27:2 be true: ²*Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.*

3. Self-deprecation.

Reverse-boasting. This is the version of pride for more seasoned Christian: “Me? Oh, I’m just the chief of sinners--that’s why I don’t even watch TV or go to movies, never touched a drop of liquor, I’ve never seen one episode of “Friends.” Translation: If you want to see a true saint, just open your eyes and behold! “And I’m not one of those gifted Christians, all I can do is the lowly job of faithfully teaching precious little children about Jesus, week after week--and I haven’t missed a Sunday in 17 years!” [translation: Mother Teresa, move over!] Self-deprecation is just inverted pride, it’s just a little sneakier about it.

4. Inferiority.

This is the Moses syndrome, isn’t it? “Oh, but Lord, You can’t possibly use a weak, nobody like me.” And God said, “Excuse me, but who made you?” Inferiority is the pot criticizing the Potter. Now some people really do believe they are inferior--they have a bad self-image. But what is the topic of their conversations? What consumes their thoughts? Self.

- I knew a guy who had an M.Div degree and knew the Bible backwards and forwards. I asked him if he could help with the teaching at a Bible study I was leading, and he was horrified at the thought! "Oh, I couldn't, I'm not adequate--I'm just not up to it."

We are just unworthy servants, remember? Can you imagine a servant in Jesus' time telling his master, "Oh I'm sorry master, I can't do what you are asking, I'm just too inadequate. I have so many issues. Find someone else" No, just grab a towel and start washing feet!

5. Sensitivity to self.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

- "Jealousy, envy, spite, malice, hatred, are all products of the spirit of self. To the extent that we are governed by self we are sensitive, and as such we can be easily hurt, easily depressed, and discouraged. Self is always watching for insults and slights. It is always hypersensitive. It is delicate, it is sensitized to everything; the slightest speck troubles it and alarms it. Self is totalitarian; it demands everything, and it is irritated and hurt if it does not get everything. As a consequence it becomes a most fruitful cause of quarrels and divisions and unhappiness in the life of the church, in the life of the community, in the life of the state, and ultimately in the life of the whole world."

Self-centered people are never happy with you--you have always let them down somehow, you didn't return their text; you didn't notice their new haircut; you forgot their birthday—but did they remember yours?

- Years ago, a family left our church, and when one of them was asked why, they said, "Well I had problems, but so-and-so and their family was getting all the attention for *their* problems."

And sometimes that's you--sometimes it's me. But that was never Jesus Christ. Think of all the ways people slighted Him, and ignored Him—

- Isaiah 53:3 ³He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

But you never hear Jesus in the Gospels complaining, "What about Me and My needs?" No, because He didn't come to *be* served, but to *serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many.

6. Resistance to correction and counsel.

You resist godly help and counsel and correction when you think that you know better. Other people need to listen, but not you, you are wiser than most people. Other people need spiritual discipline, they need to read their Bibles, and go to Bible studies, things like that, but not you—you are above those things.

- PRO 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

If you are truly wise, you know you're weak and ignorant, and always needing correction, and you will say what the Psalmist said—

- Psa 141:5 Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.

Ask yourself: How do you accept correction? Does *self* get in the way of learning and growing?

- PRO 1:5 A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.

III. How to get low.

So those are just a few symptoms of self. How do change that? how do you get low-minded, and get ? How do you get your side of the teeter as low as you can?

Well, be careful *pursuing* humility. Humility is a paradox: the moment you've think you've found it - your side of the teeter-totter has just gone up again! Humility is something that happens when your mind is set on other things. So—

1.) Exalt God.

Remember, this is a teeter-totter! Exalt God, and you *will* be humbled. Study His greatness, and constantly praise Him and thank Him for His awesome deeds. God should always be getting bigger in your mind and in your heart. When you read the Word ask yourself, “What does this teach me about God?”

- Isaiah 40:9-14 say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” ¹⁰Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. ¹²Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

We hear these words, and God gets bigger, and we get smaller -

- Go to the mountains, the redwoods, the ocean, or look up at the stars on a clear, moonless night - God becomes massive, and you become smaller - and so do your problems, because your God is so much bigger than any problem you face.

Don't pursue humility, pursue exalting and magnifying God. I heard a great quote at the Shepherd's Conference: “*Humility creates the vacuum that divine grace fills.*”

2.) Consecrate yourself to God.

I mean: become more and more, the property of God; more and more, His possession; more and more, His servant. Remember how Paul begins the 12th chapter of Romans—

- Rom 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by *the mercies of God*, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

“You deserve death, but God chose to give you life. You deserve hell, but you get heaven. You are a nothing who has been given everything. So the only appropriate response is to offer up yourself - body and soul - as a living sacrifice to God!” God isn’t asking you to make a sacrifice for your sins, Jesus did that in your place—

- . . . that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Corinthians 5:15

Shouldn’t this have a *radical* effect on the person you see when you look in the mirror? “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.*” (1Co 6:20.)

- Tit 2:14 [Jesus Christ] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people *for His own possession*, zealous for good deeds.

You are taken. *You* are betrothed to another who paid the dowry price for *you*. Beloved, that is who you should see when you look in the mirror.

- Mark 8:34-35 ³⁴And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.

The message this morning is that more you die to self, the more you can live for Jesus Christ and the more He will live in and through you. I don’t know where I read this, but it speaks to my soul—

- When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely set at naught, and you sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ-that is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, or even defend yourself, but take all in patient loving silence-that is dying to self. When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, or any annoyance, when you can stand face to face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility, and endure it as Jesus endured it-that is dying to self. When you are content with any food, any offering, any raiment, any climate, any society, any attitude, any interruption by the will of God-that is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation, or to record your own good works, or itch after commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown-that is dying to self. When you see your brother prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy nor question God, while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances-that is dying to self. When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself, can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart-that is dying to self.

And that is happiness! When you can say and know it’s true, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”