

GateCity Church: Free In Heart - Session 4

Hazen Stevens - Wednesday, May 17, 2023

I. Overview: Healthy Self-acceptance and Comfort

A. Premise: We can only love what we know, we can only truly know ourselves by knowing God, and we can only love and accept ourselves and others when we understand how God has loved and accepted us.

1. Matthew 22:39 The second most important commandment is like this one. And it is, "Love others as much **as you love yourself.**" (Contemporary English Version)
2. John 13:37 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

B. Tonight's lesson will be broken into three parts:

1. Knowing ourselves as we grow in knowing God.
2. Accepting and loving ourselves as God has, fully in our weakness.
3. Receiving comfort from God in our broken or seemingly unacceptable places.

II. Knowing Ourselves

A. The possibility of knowing yourself is grounded in the fact that your self is already known to God. Similarly, the possibility of your knowing God is grounded in the fact that God already knows you. J. I. Packer correctly captures the priority in all this knowing: "What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—**the fact that he knows me.**"² We are graven on the palms of God's hands and never out of the Divine mind. All our knowledge of God depends on God's sustained initiative in knowing us. We know God, because God first knew us, and continues to know us. **Genuine self-knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us. Grounding our knowing of our self in God's knowing of us anchors us in reality. It also anchors us in God.** Benner, David G. *The Gift of Being Yourself* (p. 23). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

B. Consider the truth God knows you fully, and considers you wonderful from the womb. He knows all your mistakes, weaknesses, and he knew you from the womb and His opinion of you is that you are amazing!

1. Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven

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together in the depths of the earth.¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts,^[a] God! How vast is the sum of them!¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

2. Luke 12: 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

C. An identity grounded in God would mean that when we think of who we are, **the first thing that would come to mind is our status as someone who is deeply loved by God.** Benner, David G.. The Gift of Being Yourself (p. 24). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

III. Accepting ourselves as God has, fully in our weakness.

A. The more I have the courage to meet God in this place of weakness, the more I will know myself to be truly and deeply loved by God. And the more deeply I know this love, the easier it will be to trust it as Christ did—preferring God's will to my own. Benner, David G.. The Gift of Being Yourself (p. 24). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

1. 1 Peter 5:7 casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully]. (AMP)

B. KNOWING YOUR IGNORED PART-SELVES Genuinely transformational knowing of self always involves encountering and embracing previously unwelcomed parts of self. While we tend to think of ourselves as a single, unified self, what we call "I" is really a family of many part-selves. That in itself is not a particular problem. The problem lies in the fact that many of these part-selves are unknown to us. *Even though they are usually known to others, we remain blissfully oblivious of their existence.* To say that we are a family of many part-selves is not the same as saying that we play different roles. Most of us know what it is to be a friend, employee, church member, and possibly a parent or a spouse. Each of these roles is different, and most of us can move between them effortlessly. This is not the problem. The problem is that there are important aspects of our experience that we ignore...**They make us feel too vulnerable.** So we pretend they do not exist and hope they will go away. Or it may be our broken and wounded self that we try to deny. **When we do so, however, these unwanted parts of self do not go away.** They simply go into hiding. If, for example, I only know my strong, competent self and am never able to embrace my weak or insecure self, I am forced to live a lie. I must pretend that I am

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strong and competent, not simply that I have strong and competent parts or that under certain circumstances I can be strong and competent. Similarly, if I refuse to face my deceitful self I live an illusion regarding my own integrity. Or if I am unwilling to acknowledge my prideful self, I live an illusion of false modesty. There is enormous value in naming and coming to know these excluded parts of self. My playful self, my cautious self, my exhibitionistic self, my pleasing self, my competitive self and many other faces of my self all are parts of me, whether I acknowledge their presence or not. Powerful conditioning in childhood encourages us to acknowledge only the most acceptable parts of our self. **And parts of self that are not given a place at the family table become stronger, not weaker. Operating out of sight and beyond awareness, they have increasing influence on our behavior. Christian spirituality involves acknowledging all our part-selves, exposing them to God's love and letting him weave them into the new person he is making.** To do this, we must be willing to welcome these ignored parts as full members of the family of self, giving them space at the family table and slowly allowing them to be **softened and healed by love and integrated into the whole person we are becoming.** Benner, David G.. The Gift of Being Yourself (p. 25). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

- C. You have heard the expression, "Love the sinner, hate the sin." Many of us have applied this to ourselves in our thinking, assuming God loves parts of us but despises other parts. This way of thinking can cause us to believe God only loves the holy parts of us and He actually hates the parts of us that struggle. The truth is this phrase is an oversimplification. God loves you completely in every part of who you are as you are today in your imperfection and immaturity, even though those parts of you may be growing and changing more into his image they are not despised. You are no less loved in your weaknesses and immaturity, than you are in the seasons and moments of glorious strength.
1. Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 2. Song of Solomon 1:5 I am dark but beautiful, O women of Jerusalem— dark as the tents of Kedar, dark as the curtains of Solomon's tents.
- D. "KNOWING YOURSELF AS A SINNER Knowing ourselves as we really are inevitably brings us up against what the Bible calls sin. It doesn't take much self-awareness to recognize that there are some very basic things about us that are not as they should be. Let me speak for myself. I do things I do not want to do and seem incapable of doing other things that I wish to do. I seem to be programmed for selfishness and egocentricity, not love. If I am honest, I must admit that my motivation is never as pure or noble as I wish it to appear. My

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ability to realize my potential as a person made in God's image seems to be sabotaged by some inner agenda over which I have no control. This is an important part of what it means to be a sinner. Daily experience impresses upon me the painful fact that my heart has listened to the serpent instead of God. As James Finley says with brutal honesty, "There is something in me that puts on fig leaves of concealment, kills my brother, builds towers of confusion, and brings cosmic chaos upon the earth. There is something in me that loves darkness rather than light, that rejects God and thereby rejects my own deepest reality as a human person made in the image and likeness of God."² Some Christians base their identity on being a sinner. I think they have it wrong—or only half right. **You are not simply a sinner; you are a deeply loved sinner. And there is all the difference in the world between the two.** Benner, David G.. *The Gift of Being Yourself* (p. 29). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

- E. "Real knowing of ourselves can only occur after we are convinced that we are deeply loved precisely as we are. The fact that God loves and knows us as sinners makes it possible for us to know and love our self as sinner. It all starts with knowing God's love. For it to be meaningful, knowing ourselves as sinners must involve more than knowing that we commit certain sins. Sin is more basic than what we do. Sin is who we are. In this regard we could say that sin is fundamentally a matter of ontology (being), not simply morality. To be a human is to be a sinner. It is to be broken, damaged goods that carry within our deepest self a fundamental, fatal flaw—a flaw that masks our original creation goodness and infects our very being. If all we know about ourselves is the specific sins we commit, our self-understanding remains superficial. Focusing on sins leads to what Dallas Willard describes as the gospel of sin management³ —a resolve to avoid sin and strategies to deal with guilt when this inevitably proves unsuccessful. But Christian spiritual transformation is much more radical than sin avoidance. And the knowing of self that is required for such transformation is much deeper. Knowing our sinfulness becomes most helpful when we get behind sins to our core sin tendencies. Now we shift our focus from behavior to the heart. Benner, David G.. *The Gift of Being Yourself* (p. 29). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.
- F. Spiritual transformation does not result from fixing our problems. **It results from turning to God in the midst of them and meeting God just as we are. Turning to God is the core of prayer. Turning to God in our sin and shame is the heart of spiritual transformation.** Benner, David G.. *The Gift of Being Yourself* (p. 30). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.
- G. Spiritual transformation, not self-knowledge, is the goal of Christian spirituality. With God's help we need to break through our illusions and see ourselves as we truly are in relation to God. A complete knowing of our self in relation to God

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includes knowing three things: our self as deeply loved (dealt with in chapter three), our self as deeply sinful (the focus of this chapter), and our self as in a process of being redeemed and restored (which will be explored in chapter six). Facing these deep truths about ourselves makes it possible for us to accept and know ourselves as we are accepted and known by God. Benner, David G.. *The Gift of Being Yourself* (p. 32). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

IV. God who comforts all our broken places.

- A. In order to reject sinful and manage legitimate self-comforts, we must see God as our source of comfort.
- B. Though we have been broken and hurt by the world, and the enemies strategies to steal, kill, and destroy have caused deep pain and anguish, we have a Comforter that is as near as the secret dreams of our Heart, who knows us completely, who knows exactly what we need to soothe and bring peace to our most broken places.
- C. We first see the facet God's comforting, heart on display in his tender love for Israel as displayed through the prophets.
 1. Isaiah 66:12-13 "For thus says the Lord, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. 13 "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem."
 2. Isaiah 49:14-16 "But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me." 15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. 16 "Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me.
- C. Jesus expresses this same nurturing love for Israel during his earthly ministry
 1. Matthew 23: "37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."
- D. The New Testament reiterates this theme many times. One key verse is in 2 Corinthians:

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1. 2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.
 2. John 16:33 “33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”
- E. We can entrust ourselves safely to God, because the most merciful, comforting One of all is also the Most-powerful of all.
- B. One of the names of God, “El Shaddai” also suggests the All-sufficient nature of God who supplies, nourishes, and fills us. God our All-Sufficient Sustainer.
1. The Hebrew word “dai” (meaning “sheds forth,” “pours out,” or “to heap benefits”) suggests provision, sustenance, and blessing (Genesis 42:24-25).
 2. The Hebrew word “shad” or “shadayim” (meaning “breast” or “breasts”) occurs 24 times as “Shaddai” and signifies One who nourishes, supplies, and satisfies (Isaiah 60:16, Isaiah 66:12-13).
 3. The Hebrew word “shadad” suggests absolute power, and God’s triumph over every obstacle and opposition.
 4. Combined with “El” the names comes to mean the One mighty to nourish, satisfy, and supply.”
- C. God desires to supply us with comfort abundantly. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter.
1. 1 Corinthians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the **God of all comfort**, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.
 2. John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.