

“God is Bigger Than Your Shortcomings”
Greater Than
Downtown
March 28, 2021

Good morning family,

Did yall have reading groups in Elementary School. We did. Red group, Blue Group, and Yellow group. It's been 30+ years ago so who knows, but the way I remember it was I was in the blue group and when we were called up we sat around the teacher and practiced reading together. And I hated it. I hated to read out loud. It felt like everyone was hovering right over my shoulder just waiting for me to stumble on a word or miss pronounce something and then they would pounce with their laughter. I know we can all relate to that feeling. Maybe not about reading, maybe you're a wonderful public reader, congratulations. But that sense of not wanting to be exposed. That feeling that people are laughing at you. That is insecurity.

Insecurity: a lack of self-confidence and overall anxiety about oneself. What if I don't have what it takes? What if I am not good enough?

- It's the feeling you get as a newbie or a rookie. When you start something new and you are keenly aware of your ignorance.
- It's the monologue monster, that internal voice that keeps harping on your past failures, mistakes, and sin struggles. There is no way God could be pleased with me or use me after what I have done or what has been done to me.
- Our insecurities are compounded by comparison. If you are on social media - people only showing the good and their success, no portrait of their deficiencies. No matter how good your life is or how successful you are, there is always someone who is better or doing better.
- Why don't I have closer friends, deeper relationships? Am I the problem? What is wrong with me? It's the gnawing sensation that I am Insufficient and lacking
- Not good at work, easier for others, so much effort, so little fruit.
- Never Enough from Greatest Showman. Sing it all the time.

I would imagine most of us battle or have battled some kind of insecurities. And that means most of us are aware of the pain and difficulty they can cause in our mental state and lives.

Now that you know where we are going, let's jump into our text. Exodus chapter 3. Let's take a look at Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. God hears the cries of his people. He chose to reveal himself to Moses and send Moses to free his people from slavery and oppression.

Now let's peek into the encounter between God and Moses starting in verse 9:

Exodus 3:9-11

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the

children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

“Who am I ..?” Moses one of the great heroes and leaders of the Bible. Not perfect, deeply flawed, but a man who walked with God and whom God used immensely. At this moment, his first response is “me?” Why me? Who am I?

This is a very telling moment in his life. We see him before God wrestling with his insecurity.

Commentators say this reveals the deep amount of insecurity that Moses carries from his previous failure. In fact, they point out the statement “Who am I?” is an echo of the very question that the Israelites had thrown in Moses’s face the 1st time he tried to rescue them.

If you are not familiar let me tell you a quick summary of Moses’ life up to this point.

- Moses was born in Egypt during the enslavement of the Israelite people.
- In particular, He was born during the period in which the Pharaoh had ordered that all newborn male Hebrew children be killed and cast into the Nile River.
- Through an elaborate plan by his mother, Moses was rescued by the daughter of the Pharaoh, he was brought up in the splendor of the Egyptian court as her adopted son. From slave to prince.
- Grown to manhood, aware of his Hebraic origin, and with deep compassion for his enslaved brethren, he became enraged while witnessing an Egyptian taskmaster brutally beating a Hebrew slave. Impulsively he killed the Egyptian.
- Fearing the Pharaoh's wrath and punishment, he fled into the desert of Midian, becoming a shepherd for Jethro, a Midianite priest whose daughter Zipporah he later married.

Upon killing the Egyptian before he fled, Moses had an encounter with two Israelite men:

Exodus 2:14

“Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.”

Who are you? Why should we answer, follow, respond to you? So many years later and those words are still replaying in his mind. It’s like Moses is simply regurgitating exactly what has been said to him. The very same question the Israelites asked Moses so many years ago is still rattling around in his head, they had seeped down into the soul and identity of Moses. Who are you?

Reading the new Kristin Hannah Book called *The Four Winds*. No spoilers but some quick basics. The book takes place during the depression in the panhandle of Texas where the land was ravaged by drought and dust storms. The main character Elsa was rejected by her family of origin and their negative view of her cast a shadow on her whole life. Like the drought and dust storms in Texas, her identity formed by her family’s view of her, wreaked havoc on the whole of her life causing massive destruction and pain. In a conversation with a friend later in life, she says my family was a mirror reflecting how I was to view myself. She internalized everything they said to her.

This is the insecurity Moses brings into his conversation with God. Who am I? Don't you remember I already blew it, my sins, my failures, my rejection. Cause I do. I am not meant to be the savior of my people. In one moment, I lost the respect of my people and my position in the Egyptian hierarchy.

Does this resonate with you? Who are you? How has your view of yourself been shaped by the people around you? Parents? Friends? Bullies? Spouse? What words have been spoken over you that have now become a mirror for you to view yourself?

To be human is to be insecure. This is part of the human condition in a fallen world. We all are broken, we all have deficiencies, we all have weaknesses, we are all lacking in some way. How do we deal with our insecurities? I have been pastoring long enough to know even the most put-together of us all steal have our moments if not deep-seated insecurity.

Before we get to how God responded to Moses, let's take a look at some of the current trends for dealing with insecurity. Each of the three trends that I am going to mention are built on half-truths. There is good in them, but each one has proven insufficient to solve the real problem.

1. Boosting Self Esteem

Self-esteem is essentially your opinion about yourself. The idea behind the whole movement was high self-esteem will carry you to success. People with low self-esteem, or a low opinion of themselves tend to be unhappy or unsatisfied with who they are. The goal was to increase outward praise and recognition to help everyone have a positive view of who they are, to eradicate low self-esteem. The goal, especially for kids, is to boost happiness and ultimately to boost success outcomes. There are some wonderful half-truths in this thinking that make us want to believe and practice.

Psychology Today

“The self-esteem movement has done an entire generation a deep disservice. It started with the best intentions. In 1969, Nathaniel Brandon wrote a paper entitled "The Psychology of Self-Esteem" that suggested that "feelings of self-esteem were the key to success in life". Hearing this, many people started to find ways to confer confidence upon our children. This resulted in competitions where everyone gets a trophy and no one actually wins. "New games" attempted to engage children without any winners or losers.

The parents who embraced these efforts did so out of love and with the noblest of intentions. The only problem is that these efforts simply do not work. Self-esteem is not something conferred, we do not bestow it as a gift.”

Boosting self-esteem was an attempt to deal with insecurity, but it doesn't solve the problem. Telling me I am good enough when I know I am not doesn't solve the problem of my deficiencies. It can produce a false reality.

2. Finding your true self. There is a current trend focused on looking inward to find the true self. The underlining primus is you are not who you are supposed to be because of the trauma in your life. In order to be fully you, you must deal with your trauma. Then you can see clearly and realize your full potential.

Like the self-esteem movement, there are some dangerous half-truths in this thinking that resonate with us and can therefore become easy to believe.

We all experience various trials in a fallen and broken world. Many of us have even experienced trauma that is horrific and damaging. But this thinking goes back to what Jon talked about a few weeks ago tabula rasa. We are good and merely victims of our circumstances.

Actually, let me turn this positive, it is good to deal with past hurt, disappointment, and trauma. I think it is helpful and it can help us to move forward. But... When we do move past our trauma, you might be surprised at what you find. You will still find a broken, deficient, and guilty person.

To embrace victimhood is to deny the reality of who we are and to deny any responsibility for the outcome of your life. There are so many problems with this but for our sake today let me just say this, this isn't empowerment, it is slavery. To deny our own insufficiency and by blaming everything on our trauma and the ways we've been mistreated means we are a slave to others and our circumstances.

3. If you just believe then you will achieve. If you work hard it will happen.

If you pause to think about this for just a minute, you will see just how foolish it is. It is living in unreality. For those of you who remember, American Idol and Simon Cowell proved it to us over and over again. Just cause you believe you can sing does not mean you can become a superstar.

So let me clarify and summarize.

- Do we need a regular and steady dose of encouragement? Yes, just as it says in Hebrews 3, let us encourage one another daily.
- Do we need to find hope and healing from our past trauma? Yes, just like it says in Psalm 62, find refuge in God, pour out your hearts to him.
- Do we need to walk in confidence and work hard? Yes, just like it says in Eph 6, we are to work as unto the Lord.

All those things are good and affirmable. The problem is they don't solve the real problem. The problem is we are still not enough. We are still weak, deficient, and broken. Those good practices are helpful but they are not sufficient.

So how does God deal with Moses' insecurity? How does the almighty, all-powerful and all-knowing God respond to Moses' question? Who am I? In those moments, what does God think Moses and you and I need to hear?

Exodus 3:12

But God said, "I will be with you."

I will be with you.

Wow. So Moses says he isn't sure he can do it. He isn't sure he has what it takes. Just for a second can we reflect on what God doesn't say? God doesn't appeal to Moses' self-esteem, trying to convince him he is good enough. God doesn't try to help him find his true inner self. He doesn't tell him if you just believe,

or if you just try really hard. God doesn't say, you can do it. He doesn't correct Moses by telling him he is in fact competent.

God changes his focus! Moses, it's not about you.

Alright Fam, let me free you up real quick. God speaks the same truth to us.

Our insecurities draw our focus on ourselves. This entire encounter is meant to draw Moses' focus away from himself. God shows up in a burning bush. A burning bush... it's on fire, but not consumed and the very voice of God is speaking from it. And yet, Moses' eyes are still upon himself. His first response is who am I?

We get caught up looking in the mirror. Gazing at our own reflection and it cripples us.

We must put our focus on God and his strength ... and his power ... and his might. Who he is and what he has done. We draw our strength and confidence from him. Real confidence, genuine bravery, doesn't come from a better assessment of self, but a clearer view of God.

I'm pretty sure it wasn't on purpose, but Disney has given us a wonderful theological example of this exact thing. In the Lion King, there is a scene when young Simba and his friend Nala are trapped by hyenas. And they are probably going to die. So Simba decides he will try to roar to scare the hyenas away. But he's very little and his roar is pathetic. It's not scary at all and the hyenas mock him with laughter. Simba roars again. But this time the roar is big and deep and fierce and terrifying because as Simba was roaring his father Mufasa showed up and roared at the very same time. And now the hyenas are horrified because they know they are in trouble. Mufasa showed up. It was not about Simba. It was about who was with Simba.

Moses says to God "who am I?" and God doesn't even answer him. As if to almost say "that question is irrelevant. Moses, you're asking about the wrong person. It doesn't really matter so much who you are. **What matters is who I am and where I am.** I am the living God. And I will be with you. And that's what actually matters."

God attacks Moses's insecurity with his overwhelming presence. Continuing in verse 12,

Exodus 3:12-14

He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"

What's your name? Who are you? Who is sending me?

God's name is Yahweh or Jehovah and it means "I am."

God is making a proclamation not just about his name but about who he is. It is both a description and a title. "I am."

- I am. God is saying he is other. Not like anything you can comprehend or fully understand.
- I am. God is saying he is self-sufficient. He has no need, he is lacking in anything. He doesn't tire, and he doesn't sleep. He doesn't require help and he has no equal.
- I am. God is saying he is eternal. He has no limits. No beginning and no end. We only think in the linear timetable, start to finish. God is always. Always has and always will.

So, when Moses says, "But God, I am not... Eloquent enough. Smart. Successful." God responds, "I didn't choose you because you were any of those things. I have enough of all those things for both of us. You are not, but I am.

Moses says,

- "But God... I am not good enough." And God says, "I know, I am..."
- "God I am not skilled enough..." "I am."
- "God I am not confident enough." "I am..." (Find your confidence in me.)

We all bring in different weaknesses and deficiencies. As we have been talking this morning, I am sure some of your own insecurities have come to mind.

- Maybe your life hasn't quite turned out how you'd hoped. Maybe you're not as successful as you thought you'd be. You had all these dreams of what your career would be like, and instead, you have a job you aren't especially proud of.

I hold in front of you the Great I Am, who calls you into action. That we might focus more on God working through us than whatever it is we might have or have not accomplished on our own.

- Maybe you have physical or personality traits that embarrass you. Things about your body or personhood or manner of relating that you can't do anything about, and occupy a great deal of your thought life. You've tried every trick under the sun, but the gnawing sense that others are always noticing that about you haunts you.

I would point your gaze to the Great I Am, who is enough. Oh, that we might focus more on his sufficiencies rather than our own deficiencies.

- Maybe you long for an identity that you have not been blessed with: Husband. Wife. Mom. Dad. You don't know when or if these desires will ever be met, and the thought that they might not get you in a place that words can't get to.

I can't make any promises about your future, but I can call your attention to the Great I Am, who promises to be near to you. No matter what does or doesn't come your way, he will be ever-present.

- Maybe you feel excluded or rejected by people who are important to you. Like you are wandering in a desert.

I lift up to you the Great I Am, who meets people in lonely places. Who has never met a desert He can't hike or a mountain He can't climb. A God whose voice makes loneliness flee, who has promised to never forsake you.

- Maybe you are disgraced by what you've done. You hear that God has a purpose and a plan, that He wants to use you to spread His kingdom, and you think "There's no way that applies to me. Not after the things I've done. Not with my addiction, my history, my baggage."

I hold before you the Great I Am, who is much more concerned about who He is than what you've done. Who already knows, even better than you, the depths of your motives and actions. Who says He will be with you.

Conclusion

Moses didn't get the answer to the question he asked. Instead, what he got was a vision of God big enough to make his question inconsequential. And that's what we really need. We don't need half-truths to make us feel better about who we are. We need something powerful enough--captivating enough--that we release our preoccupation with self. Freed from having to even think about those questions anymore.

We tend to think our insecurities just hurt us? It's an internal battle and it only affects me.

But that is wildly inaccurate. Back a few years ago we did a series called Grassroots Kingdom and wrote a book to accompany the series. In this book, we identify six barriers to Family and Mission and as you might have guessed it, insecurity made the list.

As in, my insecurity is not just a "me problem." Your insecurity isn't just a "you problem." It affects the whole church. Unchecked insecurity will prevent you, me, us from accomplishing our vision to be a Jesus Centered Family on Mission.

Let me give you a practical example. My friend Ant, who pastors our Two Notch church, shared something really helpful recently. He said anytime he has a conversation with someone that is ready to quit LifeGroup, for whatever reason--too tired, too busy, it's too hard, whatever--he just stops them and asks them: "Tell me how has God been using you for the good of your group? Do you have an expectation for God to use you in your LifeGroup?"

The typical response is, "I'm sorry what?"

Ant keeps pushing, "The Holy Spirit of God lives inside of you, do you expect him to work in and through you for the good of your group?"

He goes on to explain, we often approach LifeGroup asking the question what can I get from this group, rather than what can I give. Our approach tends to be a consumer of Christian goods rather than an agent

of the Almighty. Sneaky insecurity, you have no vision for how God might use you in your LG because you have no confidence in God living in you and working through you for the benefit of the Group. You don't know the deep joy and sense of purpose that comes from knowing that your God is with you and working through you as you encourage your brothers and sisters in your LG."

Listen carefully, this is why people feel it's ok to leave and ghost out of relationships, out of groups, and out of our church. They forget what they have to bring to the table because they forget who God is, his promise to be with us.

A "Who am I?" person walks into a room and can hardly see the other people in the room, their focus is so bent on themselves. A "God is with me" person walks into any room anticipating the God of the Universe to move in power.

Moses was able to return to the people who rejected him and lead them out of bondage. He was able to confront Pharaoh and demand the freedom of his people. Moses led the people into battle, through the desert, and to the promised land. He walked as a "God is with me" person.

Can you imagine how this change of focus from a "Who am I" person to a "God is with" me person has the ability to transform the way you approach your job, your marriage, your relationships, your LifeGroup? Can you imagine the power this has to free you from that negative self-talk, fear, and doubt? **Knowing who God is and where God is, knowing the Great I am who will be with us** empowers us to walk confidently and faithfully in every situation.

The apathy at work, at home, or in relationships fades away when you remember who God is and where God is. As a "God is with me" person, you begin to anticipate the power of God to move in you and around you.

The fear to lovingly confront a friend disappears when you remember who God is and where God is. When you walk as a "God is with me" person you are able to boldly and graciously help your sister return back to Jesus.

Whatever fear or anxiety that traps you in place releases its hold on you when you remember who God is and where God is. Walking as a "God is with me" person, you are empowered to take the next step.

The disappointed or disgraced feeling about yourself melts away when you remember who God is and where God is. As a "God is with me" person your confidence and strength are found in the power and strength and ability of God. Your identity, how you define who you are rests in Christ.

I want us to be so captivated by God, so focused on who he is, so in tune with his presence and activity in our lives that we can walk into any and every room, unencumbered by insecurities, and instead of thinking "there is no telling what God might do here."