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# 1 . BEING AUTHENTIC

*From the desire of being esteemed,  
Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the fear of being wronged,  
Deliver me, Jesus.  
That I may become as holy as I should,  
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*

Three hours. That's how long I engaged in a conversation with a friend before he asked me anything about my life. We went a full three hours as he told me about work, taxes, his pets, and an online course he was taking. It was only as an afterthought that he asked, "So, what's new with you?"

But it was hopeless. After a few sentences my friend grew visibly anxious and used something I said as a springboard into some more details about his life. By the end of the night I was exhausted and practically pushed him out the door.

We all know people like this—the kind of people that we dread speaking with because we know the conversation is going to revolve around them and we are going to be left nodding our head without saying much of anything.

It is easy to get frustrated by these people. After all, we want to be known and to celebrate our accomplishments, share those things that make us happy, and talk about ourselves. In the midst of a friend's monologue of self-praise, we find ourselves asking, "What about me? Don't you care about my life?"

Interestingly, our frustration is perhaps as self-centered as the people that frustrate us. Shouldn't they at least ask about us? Our lives are amazing! We want to talk about our experiences.

Why do we do this? Why do we want to talk more about ourselves than about other people? Why do we wait for our turn to speak rather than really listening to the people we are having a conversation with? It comes down to something very simple—we want others to admire us. We want them to respect who we are. We want them to leave a conversation thinking better of us than they did before.

## NOT - SO - SECRET ADMIRER

There are lots of reasons that we think this way. In a work environment, we want other people to know what we do so that we will appear needed and our jobs will be secure. Our conversations therefore revolve around justifying our jobs. When I graduated from college, I began work in a parish and was surprised at how much our staff meetings were simply to-do lists from every person. We all talked about how busy we were and how important our work was. I don't think this is isolated to a church environment. When people feel insecure about their jobs, they utilize any opportunity to justify what they do. It isn't just the annoying people at work—you and I do it, too. We just might not do it at staff meetings.

There are a few ways we work to get the admiration of others. We want people to admire how busy we are, so we talk about how much we have to do. We want people to admire how we strive on in difficult circumstances, so we talk about how hard our lives are. We want people to compliment our accomplishments, so we make sure that we share them often. We want to be liked—so we present a version of ourselves that we think people will like. We amplify our quality features and downplay the tough ones.

People have been crafting their personality to please others forever, but modern technology allows us to (literally) place filters on our lives to help us manage what other people see. As social media use has risen, our ability to connect has dropped. If you are over the age of twenty-five, don't write this off as a teenage problem; older adults struggle with appropriate social media use just as much as teenagers. Thanks to social media, talking about ourselves has risen to a whole new level. Our entire platform is about us. Now social media has even moved away from the term *friends* for people we connect with, preferring *followers*. How disconnected and self-affirming is that language? People judge their worth on how many likes a post gets, evaluating everything from their appearance to their job based on the opinions of other people.

## FROM THE DESIRE OF BEING ESTEEMED

The desire to be liked is a basic human desire; being liked means that we stay with the in crowd versus being isolated. In the Litany of Humility, the expression we use for being liked is "being esteemed." Our desire for admiration and affirmation really boils down to a desire to win the esteem of other people. The petition we pray regarding that desire is, "*From the desire of being esteemed, deliver me, Jesus.*"

There is something very devastating about changing who we are, crafting a false personality, or hiding parts of ourselves so that people will think better of us. It is deceitful to the people we are in relationships with, and it also has a profound impact on our own mental health and our relationship with God. When we so deeply desire affirmation that we present a false self to the world, we risk losing ourselves and we experience cognitive dissonance. We act as though we are more put together than we know we are.

## PERSONALITY DISSONANCE

During my sophomore year of high school, I went through a chaotic period (who didn't?). It was a normal teenage experience; I was trying to find out who I was and determine my place in the world. The psychologist Erik Erikson called identity formation the key developmental task of adolescence. As teenagers, we spend most of our time trying to answer the question, "Who am I?" This questioning continues through our twenties, but by our thirties our identities are fairly well formed. We move on to other developmental tasks, such as intimacy and generativity.

This doesn't mean the question "Who am I?" goes away completely, though. We may still ask it, especially when our life changes—a job loss, a divorce, a disruption in a friendship, a shift in our health. When we answer this question from a firm foundation, our lives are more peaceful. But if we are crafting our identity based on what other people like or esteem, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. As a teenager, I found myself in that place. I crafted unique personas for different groups of people, all in the name of being liked. The result was a breakdown in epic teenage fashion. During that period I had a conversation with my dad, and the advice he gave I've not forgotten.

He said, "There are three parts to who we are. There is what we see and say about ourselves. There is how we want others to see us—the kind of person that we present to the world. And then there is who God says that I am. That is the most important part, because what God tells us is true. If those three areas don't line up, our life is in dissonance, and we won't know who we are and we won't be happy."

What my dad was talking about was authenticity. He was talking about being who we really are—and at that time in my life (and many times after that) I was just trying to be liked. When I find myself striving for the esteem of others rather than holding firm to my foundations, I return to those three questions to bring myself back to authenticity:

- Who does God say that I am?
- What do I say about myself?
- How do I want other people to see me?

When I ask those three questions, I quickly find areas of misalignment in my life. They stand out like red flags, and they all lead back to my desire to be esteemed and respected by others.

**Who Does God Say That I Am?** This is a set truth. God speaks promises to us, revealed in the pages of sacred scripture, and his Word is true. God says that you are known (see Psalm 139:1) and you are loved (see 1 John 4:19). God calls us his beloved sons and daughters (see Galatians 3:26 and 2 Corinthians 6:18). Nothing exists that can make God love you less or separate his love from you (see Romans 8:38–39). When God looks at you, he says that you are loved, accepted, and valued no matter what. God wants what is best for us, and calls us out of sin to live in freedom. We have to begin with this truth.

**What Do I Say about Myself?** If we are loved and valued by God, then what we say about ourselves should be positive, although we may struggle with flaws and imperfections. What we say about ourselves relates to how we've answered the question, "Who am I?" If we have a positive self-image, we are less likely to compromise our identity for the sake of being esteemed. If we have a low self-image, we may try to hide or change who we are in order to get people to affirm us.

**How Do I Want Other People to See Me?** This question should not be confused with the question, "How do other people see me?" though we can certainly use the perception of others as a way of testing how authentic we are. If one of our core values is to be always joyful, but the perception of other people is that we are pessimistic, melancholic, and frustrated, then we are failing at authenticity. However, this type of test isn't foolproof. We can't control what people think about us, and some people might have the wrong idea about who we are, despite our best efforts. Asking ourselves how we want others to see us has to do

with the persona we cultivate in real and digital life—often done in the name of getting people to like and appreciate us.

These three questions form a Venn diagram of authenticity. When all the areas come together, we are living in harmony. Unfortunately, our desire to be esteemed can easily throw these areas out of alignment and result in personality dissonance.

## VANITY AND EMPTINESS

When our answers to the questions “What do I say about myself?” and “How do I want other people to see me?” line up, but they don’t line up with who God says we are, then we experience vanity. Vanity is often associated with beauty, but the word comes from the Latin root *vanus*, which means “empty.” The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes remarked, “Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!” (1:2). Without God’s truth in our lives, we are ultimately empty. Even if what we say about ourselves is consistent with what we present to others, when it is out of alignment with who God says we are, we find ourselves empty. Many people have pursued a path in life that from the outside looked consistent, but in the end found themselves empty. Our desire to be liked can cause us to forget God’s truth and change our perception of our identity in order that others will hold us in high esteem.

## BROKEN AND ISOLATED

When our answers to the questions “Who does God say that I am?” and “How do I want other people to see me?” line up, but they don’t align with what we say about ourselves, we feel lost and broken. This often occurs when we experience a disorder such as anxiety or depression. We may know the truth that God speaks about us, and we may project that to others, but under the surface we are hurting. We don’t feel like ourselves. Knowing the truth and projecting the truth are one thing, but what we

believe about the truth is a different story. I've struggled in my life with depression and anxiety, and there are many times when I knew in my head what God thought about me. I projected that to other people and tried to live it publicly. But when I looked at myself in the mirror, I said very different things. The result was isolation. I needed to admit that I was hurting, but I didn't want other people to see that, so I wound up being isolated. I started to believe the lies I told myself and simply felt alone.

I worried that admitting the truth of my illness to others would cause them to lose respect for me. I worried that if I told people I struggled with how I viewed myself, they would judge me or think less of me. My desire to be esteemed kept me trapped in depression for many years until I received encouragement from good friends to find help.

## A DOUBLE LIFE

Sometimes our answers to the questions, "What do I say about myself?" and "Who does God say that I am?" line up, but don't align with how we want other people to see us. We know the truth, but are afraid of letting other people see it because we are worried they might not like it. So we start to live a double life. At the most innocent, a double life consists of simply not talking about our faith and compartmentalizing important parts of who we are. This is bigger than emphasizing different traits around different people—we all do that. My coworkers know me in a slightly different capacity than some of my friends outside of work. My wife knows me in a way that some of my friends don't. That simply represents healthy boundaries in relationships.

We get into trouble when we suppress or even change who we fundamentally are in the presence of other people. If our faith is important to us, but when we are out with people we stop praying before meals, lie about our involvement with a church, or even enter into harsh conversations about faith, then we are living a double life. At the worst, we act differently around other



people, betraying our core values in the interest of being liked. An easy way to root out this behavior is to ask your friends, coworkers, or even family members to identify your core values. If the person they describe to you doesn't match those values, then you may be living a double life.

Our misaligned behavior in these three areas stems from a desire to be esteemed, admired, and respected. In vanity, we think highly of ourselves and pride runs deep. We believe we are masters of our own fortune, self-made individuals that control our own lives. We talk about ourselves often as we seek the admiration of others.

When we are lost and broken, we hesitate to let anyone in because we don't want them to see us as vulnerable and messy. We worry that if we let them in, they will lose respect for us, think we are weak, or may even try to hurt us—using our weakness to their advantage. I spoke to a friend about the climate at the company she worked for. She said no person wanted to be vulnerable and speak about challenges they faced because management would question their fitness for the job. As a result, coworkers never discussed challenges or obstacles. Everyone presented a rose-colored version of work, but beneath the surface they were all struggling.

In our double lives, we put filters on—sometimes literally. Have you ever heard the word “catfishing”? In catfishing, an individual creates an entirely different persona online and interacts with others under that persona—even engaging in romantic online relationships. Most of us don't go to that extreme, but just because our profile bears our real name doesn't mean it accurately represents us. It represents a curated collection of our best moments, happiest news, or distressing incidents meant to prompt people to admire us.

We desire to be esteemed, but that desire can get out of control and lead to vanity, brokenness, and living a double life. Our desire comes from something deeper—we are afraid of being hurt.

## FROM THE FEAR OF BEING WRONGED

In the Litany of Humility, we pray against the desire to be esteemed, but we also pray against the fear of being wronged. We do this with the petition, *“From the fear of being wronged, deliver me, Jesus.”*

Living our lives authentically involves vulnerability. When we allow people to see us as we are without adding filters or curating our lives, we take a risk. Suddenly there are no walls to hide behind. We are exposed, and we start to fear, “What if I don’t measure up? What if someone tries to hurt me with what they know about me? What if people stop respecting me because of my beliefs or my past?” When we drop our desire to be esteemed in favor of authenticity, we risk being wronged.

You may have painful memories of letting someone in and being vulnerable with them, only to be hurt by that person. Maybe you just tried to be yourself but were shut down by a group of friends. When I finally got the courage to tell my college girlfriend how important my faith was to me—something I had hidden from her—she dumped me about a week later. She said that it was weird. That hurt. It made me afraid to let people into such an intimate part of my life after that.

Vulnerability and authenticity go hand in hand, but they aren’t forms of weakness. They actually provide strength and clarity. They help us to know who we are, where we stand with others, and where others stand with us. In a work setting, authentic leaders that aren’t afraid to be vulnerable are the most well respected. In relationships, authenticity and vulnerability lead to deeper intimacy. Authenticity is a foundational trait for the humble Christian and has a profound impact on how we work, engage in relationships, and live our faith. It begins with our relationship with God; if we want to become holy, we need to live authentically.

## THAT I MAY BECOME AS HOLY AS I SHOULD

You were created by God—and God loves you. God sees you for who you are, and God wants you to base what you think about yourself and how you present yourself to others on that truth.

Living that truth is called holiness. A lot of things may come to mind when we say the word “holy.” We may think of religious icons, of saints, or of someone we know who spends a lot of time at church or in the service of others. But being holy is simply living out who God made you to be. It is loving others and loving yourself. It is knowing Jesus Christ and following him.

We pray that we might become holy with the last petition of the Litany of Humility, “*That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should.*” The entirety of the litany leads up to this petition, so we are going to break it into two parts, one at the beginning of our journey and one at the end. For authenticity, we focus on the latter half of the petition, “*that I may become as holy as I should.*”

I’ve found that a lot of people have a distorted view of what it means to be holy—myself included. We think that when we start following Jesus, we need to change and become someone different. We think that we need to act another way or be a different person in order to impress Jesus. Jesus becomes one more person that we want to admire and respect us. When we think that way, we start to focus on what we might do for Jesus so that he will like us. We imagine Jesus sitting in heaven and looking at us and saying, “Wow, look at what she is doing! That’s amazing—I love and respect her way more, now.”

Nothing you do can make Jesus love you more or less. Many adults don’t grasp this reality. You can’t earn God’s love, and you can’t lose it. It is constant. God sees every aspect of your life—even the hairs on your head are counted (see Luke 12:7). God always has access to the innermost parts of our hearts.