

Aren't you worth much more than this?

When we sing “Consider the Lilies” in the congregation the verse: “*The birds of the air neither sow nor reap, yet our Good Father feeds them. Are you not of more worth? O ye of little faith?*” will stay in my spirit, sometimes for the entire week following the service. A picture of a deep feeling of self-worthlessness is illustrated in the following note: (written by a seven year-old boy to a psychotherapist who works with children in *Hide & Seek* by Dr. James Dobson):

Dear Doctor Gardner

What is bothering me is that long ago some big person, it was a boy about 13 years old. He called me turtle and I know he said that because of my plastic surgery. And I think God hates me because of my lip. And when I die he'll probably send me to bell. Love, Chris

If we could squeeze Chris’ note between our hands, we would probably extract the bitter juices of feelings we have had ourselves. Many of us harbor unhealthy feelings such as a deep sense of unworthiness, acute inadequacy, lack of confidence, and an inability to accept ourselves.

Inferiority is a parasite of sin that feeds off our separation from God. It first became attached to mankind through that act of rebellion in the Garden, and since then, it has gorged itself on the unstable substitutes for God that people rely on for worthiness. Rabbi *Sha’ul* said: “...for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.” (2 Corinthians 12:11)

In today's market, the commodities of beauty, intelligence, and wealth pay the highest dividends of conferred worth. Without them, we are made to feel we are something less than we should be. We are harangued daily by society’s built-in slant that rewards the haves and punishes the have-nots. In this brutal cultural milieu of the survival of the worthiest, the less gifted attempt to survive by trying to compensate through over achievement, superiority complexes, and sarcasm. Yet, despite our best efforts to clothe ourselves with worth, underneath it all the parasite of inferiority still feeds on our souls

And just because we are Believers does not mean that we're automatically excused from the self-mutilating feelings of inferiority. Too often we have also felt them cut into our thoughts and drain the life out of our spirits. Let us turn to the timeless counsel of the Bible and reach for God's help in dealing with the painful problem of inferiority.

Biblical Illustrations

Let us look at three men of the Bible: two who struggled greatly with inferiority, and one who should have—by the world's standards—but didn't.

Moshe

When we come across Moshe in Exodus 3, we see a man whose background is littered with failure. Having murdered a man (Exodus 2:11-14), been exiled from the opulence of Egypt to the sparseness of the Midian desert (v. 15), and lived in obscurity for the past forty years herding sheep, Moshe is probably besieged by feelings of inferiority brought on by guilt over these (colossal) failures. But despite Moshe's feelings of worthlessness, God still wants to use him. Getting his attention through a burning bush, the Lord speaks to Moshe and commissions him to free Israel.

“Yes, the cry of the people of Isra’el has come to me, and I have seen how terribly the Egyptians oppress them. Therefore, now, come; and I will send you to Pharaoh; so that you can lead my people, the descendants of Isra’el, out of Egypt.” (Ex. 3:9-10)

God has given him great news! But all Moshe hears is *“I will send you.”* And from this moment on, he has difficulty getting off the train of thought that travels only through his inadequacies – the flashes of past failures providing his only scenery.

Moshe said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the people of Isra’el out of Egypt?”(v. 11)

Sounds like a humble response, doesn't it? But it is not. Christian counselor Gary Collins asserts: “Humility involves a grateful dependence on God and a realistic appraisal of both our strengths and weaknesses.” From this and the rest of Moshe's responses, we can see that self-doubt has narrowed his vision to the point that he can focus only on himself and not on the One who speaks with him.

For example, let us examine his conversation with God: God promises His presence (v. 12)—but Moshe responds, *“What if they don't believe me?”* (Ex. 4:1). God promises His power (vv. 2-9)—but Moshe responds, *“But I'm not real good with words”* (v. 10). God assures him of His plan (v. 12)—but Moshe responds, *“Please Lord, get a substitute”* (v. 13).

Moshe vividly mirrors the truth that how we view ourselves will affect how we interpret everything around us. It explains how we may look straight into the brilliance of the morning sun and see only darkness. God's fiery presence was only inches away, yet all Moshe could see was the blackness of his own inadequacies.

Jeremiah

Now let's look over Jeremiah's shoulder in the first chapter of his book. Eight hundred years have passed since Moshe's day. Here God again wants to recruit a (seemingly weak) man into His service.

Here is the word of ADONAI that came to me: ‘before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I separated you for myself. I have appointed you to be a prophet to the nations.’ (Jer. 1:4-5)

But, like Moshe, Jeremiah responds with inferiority instead of humility:

I said, ‘Oh, Adonai my ELOHIM, I don't even know how to speak! I'm just a child!’ (v. 6)

Do Jeremiah's and Moshe's excuses remind you of your own? *“Love my enemies, Lord? Gee, I don't know-you see I'm not the best at...”* *“Pray, Lord? Well, I'm not any good at talking. If only I had... If it weren't for...”* These familiar refrains have eulogized low self-esteem for centuries.

Amos (A-Moose)

In Amos we have someone whose faith guarded him against inferiority's touch. If we were to measure his worth by the world's standards, the indicator would probably drop down below *needs improvement* to *loser*. He has had no formal education, and he is not attractive or eloquent. He is a simple fig picker by occupation – he harvests fruit from sycamore trees. And to top it all off, he has stained hands from mashing the fruit to make it soft for the buyer – some prophet of God! Nevertheless, he is the man God chooses to represent Him before *Amatzyah*, the priest of Bethel. When the socially polished, beautifully attired, and eloquent priest hears what Amos has to say, he tells him, in no uncertain terms, to get out.

Amatzyah also said to Amos, ‘Go away, seer! Go back to the land of Y'hudah! Earn your living there; and prophesy there’ (Amos 7:12)

However, Amos doesn't back away. He doesn't look down at his clothes or his stained hands and wonder what in the world he is doing there. Instead, he keeps his eyes focused on the Lord; he stands firm on the truths God has revealed to him and refuses to leave until *Amatzyah* hears them all.

Amos gave this answer to Amatzyah: 'I am not trained as a prophet, and I'm not one of the guild prophets – I own sheep and grow figs. But ADONAI took me away from following the flock, and ADONAI said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Isra'el.' (Vv. 14-15)

Amos demonstrates how the Lord can transform people who will keep their eyes focused on Him. It is possible for us to be freed from the bondage of measuring our worth by the fluctuating values of the world?

The Lord's Estimate of You

In Matthew 6 *Yeshua* shares a profound truth that can dissipate our dark clouds of self-doubt:

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" (v. 26)

Even though the subject of this verse is worry, the point made about our value cannot be missed. If God is concerned about little birds in the sky, will He not be all the more concerned about us (see also 10:29-31)? God loves you to the immeasurable extent of sacrificing His Son. Can any greater value be bestowed on your life?

Your Worth in the Body

The body of Messiah is the family of God on earth today. Every living soul, around the world, who is a born-again believer in Messiah, is a member of His body. *Yeshua* is the Head of this body and the rest of us, as Rabbi *Sha'ul* explains in 1 Corinthians 12, are fingers, arms, knees, toes, or even tiny organs that are rarely seen. However instead of being content to be the parts God has designed us to be, we invite inferiority to creep in as we compare ourselves to each other.

We don't dare class or compare ourselves with some of the people who advertise themselves. In measuring themselves against each other and comparing themselves with each other, they are simply stupid. (2 Cor. 10:12)

For indeed the body is not one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not a hand, so I'm not part of the body," that doesn't make it stop being part of the body. And if the ear says, "I'm not an eye, so I'm not part of the body," that doesn't make it stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If it were all hearing, how could it smell? (1 Cor 12:14-17)

When the eye wants to become an ear, when the foot decides that what it really wants to be a nose, when the thumb wants to become an elbow we put more value on who we think we should be and less on whom God wants us to be, so the body cannot function. But in verses 18-25, He tells us that He has placed each of us where He wants us—that all the parts of the body, seen or not, noticed or not, are essential and share an equal value.

Your Estimate of You

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (Rom. 12:3)

With pride as our teacher, we become arrogant and our sense of worth gets over inflated. Under inferiority's tutelage, we belittle ourselves into thinking we're insignificant to God and other people. But Paul exhorts us to have a sane sound estimate of ourselves. We can have such an estimate only as we accept God's view of us.

- **You were prescribed before birth**

God fashioned you. You are not a product of chance, but rather a work of art from the mind of God. He has placed His signature on you with the indelible ink of His image. Nothing about you or the days of your life—even before you had taken your first breath—has escaped the loving scrutiny of your heavenly Father (Ps. 139:13-16):

For you fashioned my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I thank you because I am awesomely made, wonderfully; your works are wonders – I know this very well. My bones were not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes could see me as an embryo, but in your book all my days were already written; my days had been shaped before any of them existed.

He's Still Working on Me!

Remember *that the growth process is still* going on. At times we become frustrated with our slow growth and open the door to self-defeat: “I'm no good... I keep making the same mistakes... God is probably sick of me.” But Rabbi Sha'ul tells us: *Hold on. Get your eyes off of yourself, and stay confident in the fact that God is at work in you-even when you don't see it. “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Messiah Yeshua.”* (Phil. 1:6)

I am to refuse to compare myself with others

Don't compare yourself to others! Scripture clearly states: “*We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Messiah.*” (2 Cor. 10:5) Our feelings of inferiority thrive on those renegade thoughts we allow to pass through our minds uncontested. They can run by so quickly sometimes that we are not even aware of thinking them. To get control of them, we must train ourselves to constantly stand guard at the door of our minds with the truth. Inferiority never rests. It will seize every opportunity we give it to continue brainwashing us with its doctrine of worthlessness. It boils down to this: Will you submit to the liberating truth of Messiah Yeshua, or will you submit to being held prisoner to the lies of inferiority?

Let us respond correctly to our shortcomings

We all have defects, scars, inadequacies or shortcomings that we must learn to deal with. Rabbi Sha'ul provides us with a personal glimpse in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 of how he handled one such problem.

Therefore, to keep me from becoming overly proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to pound away at me, so that I wouldn't grow conceited. Three times I begged the Lord to take this thing away from me; but he told me, my grace is enough for you, for my power is brought to perfection in weakness. Therefore, I am very happy to boast about my weaknesses, in order that the Messiah's power will rest upon me.

From the passage above we can discern these principles. First, we have the freedom to pray to have things corrected. Second, if the Lord chooses to leave them with us, we must learn to accept our shortcomings as a way for God to display His power in and through us. Third, the news of shortcomings is not all bad – it is often in our areas of weakness that we see most clearly the reality of the Savior's work in our lives.

Feelings of inferiority that have built up over the years are difficult to overcome. But it can be done! We must resist the pull to place our self-worth, and the worth of others, in the same values the world buys stock in. To do this, we must follow God's advice in Romans 12:2: “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*” We are to *renew* our minds in His truth. As members of the body of Messiah, we must help one another to sensitively and faithfully apply these God-provided truths about our own worth, to us and to Him. I trust we can indeed overcome all feelings of inferiority. Shabbat Shalom!