

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 4

"The Problem of Inferiority"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Unfortunately, we live in a society where beauty, intelligence and wealth receive the most honor, and are considered as having the most worth.
 - A. Advertisers constantly bombard us with the need to be more beautiful, more intelligent and more wealthy.
 1. If you're NOT beautiful, intelligent or wealthy, then you're made to feel something less than you should be.
 2. Our society rewards these attributes.
 - B. And just because we're a Christian does NOT mean that we are automatically immune from these feelings of inferiority.
 1. From time to time, we've all felt those feelings drain away our confidence.
 - a. Some won't lead singing because they don't feel they're as good as somebody else.
 - b. Others won't lead in prayer, or teach a Bible class, or give a talk – all because someone else can do it better.

- C. In this lesson, we want to turn to the Scriptures and seek God's counsel for dealing with these feelings of inferiority.
 - 1. First, we want to look into the lives of three men who wrestled with feelings of inferiority, and see how they dealt with it.
 - a. These three men are Moses, Jeremiah and the apostle Paul.
 - 2. Then we want to consider some principles for dealing with inferiority in our own lives.

BODY:

- I. First, let's take a look at Moses. **(Exodus 3 & 4)**
 - A. When we come to Moses, we see a man whose life is littered with failure.
 - 1. First, he murdered an Egyptian task-master in anger and in hopes of winning favor of his own people -- the whole thing backfired.
 - 2. Next, he was exiled from the opulence of Egypt and sent into the wasteland of the Midian desert.
 - 3. There he lived a life in total obscurity as a sheep herder for 40 years.

- B. No doubt, by the time we come to Exodus chapter three, we see a man who has been defeated by failure after failure.
1. We see a man who is probably overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority brought on by the guilt of all his failures.
- C. But, regardless of his feelings of worthlessness, God still wants to use him.
1. Appearing to Moses in a burning bush, God tells Moses that he has been chosen to be the deliverer of the Israelites.
 - a. **Exodus 3:9-10** – *9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.
10 Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.*
- D. Imagine! – God says, "I'LL SEND YOU!"
1. Instead of Moses feeling WORTHY because the God of heaven has chosen HIM, he immediately begins to plunge into the depths of inferiority feelings.
 - a. **Exodus 3:11** – *But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"*

- b. Some have interpreted this statement as a statement of humility – BUT IT'S NOT!
 - c. Gary Collins, in his book "Christian Counseling" says, "Humility involves a grateful dependence on God and a realistic appraisal of BOTH our strengths and weaknesses."
 - d. All Moses can see are his weaknesses!
2. So, he begins making excuse after excuse, because he is filled with self-doubt.
- a. His vision suddenly shifts from the power of Almighty Jehovah to poor, pitiless, inadequate Moses.
- E. Just look at his conversation with God.
- 1. God promises His presence.
 - a. **Exodus 3:12** – *So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."*
 - 2. But Moses responds, "What if they don't believe me?"
 - a. **Exodus 4:1** – *Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice;*

suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'"

3. So, God promises His power.

a. **Exodus 4:2-9** – *So the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." 3 And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), 5 "that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." 6 Furthermore the LORD said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. 7 And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. 8 "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. 9 And it shall be, if they do not believe even these*

two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land."

4. But Moses responds, "But I'm no good with words."
 - a. **Exodus 4:10** – *Then Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."*
 5. Therefore, God assures Moses of His plan.
 - a. **Exodus 4:12** – *Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."*
 6. But Moses responds, "Please Lord, get a substitute."
 - a. **Exodus 4:13** – *But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send."*
- F. Moses is a classic example of inferiority.
1. He stood inches away from a burning bush, filled with Jehovah's presence.
 2. He was personally told that God was choosing Him to do a great work -- and he STILL FELT INFERIOR!

3. In his book “Moses,” Charles Swindoll wrote; "Moses was looking into the fiery brilliance of Jehovah's presence, and yet could not see past the blackness of his own inadequacies."

II. Next, consider the prophet Jeremiah. (**Jeremiah 1**)

- A. When we turn to the first chapter of Jeremiah, it's been 800 years since the days of Moses, and once again, God wants to recruit a man for a great work.

1. **Jeremiah 1:4-5** – *Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."*

- B. But like Moses, Jeremiah also responds with feelings of inferiority rather than humility.

1. **Jeremiah 1:6** – *Then said I: "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth."*

- C. Jeremiah was struggling with the fear that his youth would somehow disqualify him from serving God.

1. You can almost hear him thinking:
 - a. "Surely, a great leader needs to be a man who's been around longer than me."

- b. "I'm too young to get anyone important to listen to me, let alone believe me."
 - c. "I don't have the experience that comes with years of going down the road."
- D. Jeremiah sounds a lot like some young men and women I've known – perhaps some who are part of this congregation.
- 1. Their excuses sound a lot like his:
 - a. "There's nothing GREAT I can do, I'm not old enough."
 - b. "Besides, whose going to listen to MY opinions, and pay any attention to what I have to say?"
 - c. "I'd rather sit around on the back row for a few years until I get a little older and get a little more experienced, because right now, I'm too young."
 - 2. Unfortunately, a lot of younger Christians feel alienated from taking an active part in the affairs of the Lord's church because they're never encouraged to do so.
 - a. ELDERS! – If there are young men and women in this congregation who are not taking an active part, it's time to involve them.
 - b. It's time to instill in them the confidence they need to become actively involved in the work of the Lord.

- c. They have talents and abilities you may not be aware of – and they definitely have the energy and the zeal that many older, experienced Christians have lost years ago.
- d. So, encourage them – give them the confidence they need -- OR LOSE THEM!

III. Third, let's see how the apostle Paul struggled with inferiority. (1

Corinthians 15)

A. When we come to the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians, we find a list of the "Disciples Hall of Fame."

1. The apostle Paul is talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His appearing to certain disciples after His resurrection.

- a. **1 Corinthians 15:3-7** – *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7*

After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

2. What a portrait – Peter, the Twelve, over 500 other Christians, James the Lord's brother!
 - a. These are the NOBILITY of the Christian faith – the ROYAL FAMILY of the first century!
 - b. They were the faithful disciples of the Lord who had been with Him all along the way, with the exception of James, who finally came around in the end.

B. But then notice what Paul says.

1. **1 Corinthians 15:8-9** – *Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*
 - a. "LAST OF ALL he appeared to me!"
 - b. "I am the LEAST of the apostles and DO NOT EVEN DESERVE TO BE CALLED an apostle – because I PERSECUTED THE CHURCH!"
2. Paul was overwhelmed with feelings of inferiority brought on by immense guilt for his past mistakes.

C. Does this sound familiar in your own life?

1. Are you still living in the backwash of some terrible mistake that keeps reminding you of how inadequate you are?
 2. Is there some ONE or some THING that keeps reminding you of all your mistakes?
 3. Because of your past failures, are you now reluctant to lift your head up, but feel compelled to hang your head in shame for the rest of your life?
- D. That's how Paul felt – in fact, the imagery he uses paints a horrible picture of how he viewed himself.
1. **1 Corinthians 15:8b** – *...as by one born out of due time.*
 - a. The phrase, "born out of due season" ("abnormally born" – NIV) is literally translated, "an abortion, a still-born embryo" (Vincent's Word Studies)
 - b. Paul graphically describes himself as a still-born fetus; undeserving of life.
 2. He was as a still-born fetus UNTIL – UNTIL Jesus Christ came and BREATHED INTO HIM THE BREATH OF LIFE!
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:10** – *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

3. Paul says, "*by the GRACE OF GOD I am now what I am.*"
 - a. By the grace of God I'm now one who has been entrusted with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - b. By the grace of God I'm now an apostle of Jesus Christ.
 - c. By the grace of God all my guilt and shame have been removed.
 - d. By the grace of God I no longer have any need to feel inferior.
 - e. Because, by the grace of God I've been forgiven for all my mistakes.
 4. Paul says he now works harder than all the rest.
 - a. But, so that no one thinks he is doing this all on his own strength, he adds "*yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*"
- E. Three men – Moses, Jeremiah, and the apostle Paul – all of whom wrestled with feelings of inferiority.
1. And yet, all three were used by God to accomplish great things.
 - a. Their great accomplishments would have been impossible for them to accomplish on their own – because none of them believed they were worthy enough to do anything great.

- b. Their greatness came by the grace of God -- the God who breathed life into their lifeless spirits, and brought hope to their hopeless hearts.

IV. Now that we've seen that even great people can suffer with inferiority, let's turn to the Scriptures and learn a few principles to help us overcome these same feelings.

A. First – Consider the Lord's estimate of you.

- 1. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus tells us something that should remove all doubts about our worth in God's eyes.
 - a. **Matthew 6:26** – *Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*
 - b. Although the subject is worry, the point is that if God is concerned about the birds of the sky, He will be EVEN MORE CONCERNED about US!
- 2. There is a parallel teaching of Jesus I want you to consider – it is found in two separate books of the New Testament.
 - a. **Matthew 10:29** – *Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground*

apart from your Father's will. (2 sparrows sold for 1 copper coin)

b. **Luke 12:6** – *"Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. (5 sparrows sold for 2 copper coins)*

c. Taken together Jesus teaches that with 1 coin you can purchase 2 sparrows, but with 2 coins you don't just get 4 sparrows, you get 5.

(1). Sparrows are so cheap, that an extra sparrow is thrown in for the bargain, like a baker's dozen – 13 sparrows.

d. Jesus says that NOT EVEN THE SPARROW THAT IS OF NO VALUE falls to the ground without God knowing about it.

e. Then Jesus concluded, "You are of more value than MANY SPARROWS!"

3. God's love for you is IMMEASURABLE!

a. He cares about you and loved you enough to send His Son, Jesus to the earth to DIE for you!

b. Can any greater value be bestowed on your life?

B. Second – Consider your worth in the body of Christ.

1. In 1st Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul explains just how important everyone is in the body.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 12:14-17** – *For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?*
2. Not everyone in the body is the same, or has the same talents or responsibilities.
 - a. BUT – If we're an eye, we need to be happy being an eye.
 - b. If we're a nose, we need to be happy being a nose.
 - c. If we're a ear or a hand, we need to be happy being what we are.
3. When the ear isn't happy with being an ear, and now wants to be an eye -- the ear is saying, "You must be more important than me because I want to be what you are."
 - a. NONSENSE!

- b. God wants you to be what He's made you to be – He has a purpose for you.
 - c. **1 Corinthians 12:18-25** – *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*
4. The problem ISN'T becoming something you're not, but rather, **BEING ALL THAT YOU CAN BE!**
- a. You eyes need to start looking.
 - b. You ears need to start hearing.

- c. You noses need to start smelling.
 - d. You hands need to start working.
5. The whole body needs to work together for the benefit of all.
- C. Third – Consider your own estimate of yourself.
- 1. If pride becomes our teacher, we become arrogant and develop an inflated concept of ourselves.
 - 2. On the other hand, if inferiority is our teacher, we begin to belittle ourselves and begin to think we're insignificant to God and to others.
 - 3. However, in Romans, the apostle Paul urges us to have a "sound" (reasonable, sensible) concept of ourselves.
 - a. **Romans 12:3** – *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*
 - b. The BIG QUESTION is, "How do we develop this kind of SOUND concept of ourselves?"
 - c. The ANSWER is, "See yourself as God sees you."
 - (1). Realize that God made you, and that you are not the product of chance. Rather, you're a work of art from the mind of God.

(2). He placed his signature on you before you were ever born.

(3). Nothing about you has escaped His personal and loving scrutiny.

D. Fourth – Consider God is still working on you.

1. I love the bumper sticker, "Be patient, God isn't finished with me yet."

2. Some people make light of that concept, but I believe it's very Biblical.

a. **Philippians 1:3-6** – *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

b. In essence, Paul is telling us to "Hold on. Get your eyes off yourself and stay confident that God is at work in you, even when YOU don't see it."

3. If you weren't important to God, do you think God would take time to work in your life -- especially with everything else He's got to deal with in the world?

- E. Finally – Consider the proper way to respond to your inadequacies.
1. In 2nd Corinthians, Paul allows us to see how he handled a serious personal problem.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 12:7-9** – *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
 2. From this, we can see three things:
 - a. First, we can pray for areas of our life where we need help – things that need to be corrected.
 - b. Second, if the Lord chooses to allow the problem to remain, we need to learn to accept it and view it as an opportunity for God to display His strength through us.
 - c. Third, shortcomings are not all bad, because it's often through these inadequacies that we are able to see the Lord really working in our lives.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Feelings of inferiority that may have been building up over the years are difficult to overcome.
 - A. But it can be done!
 1. Moses did it, Jeremiah did it, and by the grace of God, the apostle Paul did it.
 2. And by the grace of God, so can you.

- II. I realize that some of you may really be struggling to overcome feelings of inadequacy.
 - A. You've been wearing a mask for years – trying to come across as "having it all together."
 1. Isn't it time to turn the problem over to the Lord and let the grace of God breathe life back into you?
 - a. You can START by turning your life over to Him in complete obedience, if you're NOT a Christian.
 - b. Or you can RESUME by turning your life BACK over to Him in complete obedience, if you ARE a Christian.