

SE041308

AC3 Idol

### 3. Self Centeredness

This week, we'll been talking about breaking free from the Tyranny of Self Centeredness. So it's appropriate that this message would come from me... because I'm an expert! I hope you can listen to this message even though it's coming from someone still, often stuck in the quagmire.

A while back, I remember sitting down with my sons and the time came for them to go to bed. As they went off, a video tape of one of our AC3 services caught my eye. (Our upstairs TV room doubles as the video library archive for all the services AC3 has ever done.) So I pop in this tape while the boys get ready for bed. As my oldest son finishes with his teeth and jammies, he comes back to lie down by my side, while this image of myself is on the TV preaching away.

"Narcissus," he says. What? He's 12. "Narcissus." (He says this like "Duh, don't you know who Narcissus is?") For those who don't know: Narcissus is a figure from Greek Mythology who was so in love with himself that he could not tear himself away from his reflected image in a pool until he died staring at himself.

I said, I know who Narcissus is, why did you just say that?

You dad. You're like Narcissus, just sitting here looking at yourself.

Ouch. I mean, you can fool them for a while, maybe for 12 years they can think you're a god, you walk on water... but eventually they find out the truth don't they?

You're mortal and it's worse than that:

- you're also selfish.
- you're self centered.
- you look at yourself in the mirror quite a bit. We say nasty things to the mirror at times, but there's an obsession with the gazing.

Now, contrast that self obsession of Narcissus gazing into a mirror with this Bible verse that defines our purpose from God's point of view:

"And all of us have had that veil removed SO THAT we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. (**2 Cor 3:18**)

We were made to **BE** mirrors, not look in them. For what purpose? To reflect glory. There's that word GLORY again. It's been coming up all month. It's a bible word that means, "splendor". And it actually comes from a Hebrew root word meaning WEIGHT.

So GLORY refers to the significance of something. It's importance. It's necessity. Like they said in the sixties: "whoa, that's HEAVY man." God is HEAVY. He has importance, significance, necessity, he has GLORY. And we were meant to reflect his, not mull over ours.

We were made to make a name, not for ourselves, but for him. Have you ever heard of:

- Jack Tinker and Partners?
- BBDO?
- Foote, Cone and Belding?
- J. Walter Thompson?

No? If you've never heard of them, then the people on that list are pleased. Because Advertising Agencies don't exist to make a name for themselves. So while you've never heard their names before, how many of you have heard of these lines:

- "plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is." That's Tinker and Partners for Alka-Seltzer in 1976
- "Mm! Mm! Good!" That was BBDO who came up with Campbell soups catch phrase in use since 1935
- "When you care enough to send the very best!" – Foote, Cone and Belding came up with that slogan for Hallmark in 1934
- How many of you ever hum, J Walter Thomson's name? But we do hum the jingle his agency wrote: "Snap, Crackle, Pop, Rice Krispies!"
- One last one: "hot pocket"! (I don't actually know the advertaisting agency that came up with that one... I just like how Jim Gaffigan says it.)

Now, here's what happens with those advertising agencies. Big, heavy duty corporations give them a lot of money and resources. Now, what do they do with that, first thing?

- Do they send their people off to Tahiti?
- Do they build big shining new offices?
- Do they pad expense accounts?
- Do they ogle it in a suitcase someplace?

No, they use it to promote the Heavy Duty Corporation. They use it to make a name for someone **else**. And friends, that's exactly why God gives us things. Some of you in this room have amazing things, from God.

- **A special talent to sing.** That's a gift from God.
- A special talent to make money (business). That's a gift from God.
- A special talent with children.
- A special talent with cars.
- A special talent with computers, with sales, with plants.
- A special opportunity very few ever receive
- A special relationship
- A special possession.

Now, you've been given this by a HEAVY DUTY God... what are you supposed to do with that? Friend, all your success, your new office, your brains, your scholarship, your new raise... it was never meant for you to ogle, for you to spend on yourself alone. It was meant in some way, to be leveraged to shine the spotlight on God's significance, his importance, his necessity in your life.

One of the prophets while reviewing God's supernatural activity and gifts in the history of Israel puts this concept powerfully:

**Ezek 20:9-11** God says: But for the sake of my name I did what [I did... That is why] I led my people out of Egypt.

You've heard the story haven't you? Supernaturally God delivered the Jews from slavery. What a gift! NOW, what was that **for**? To make a name for themselves? Never. They knew from the beginning it was to make a name for God!

You see, God has lavished things on you so it will come back to him. The prophet said God gave two specific things to bless his people, that would make a name for himself:

- ONE was his supernatural salvation from slavery and
- TWO was his decrees and laws.

Did you know those are still the two most lavish gifts God bestows on us? HOW?

Well, imagine a hypothetical person. For years he's never lived according to God's ways. He's kind of a trouble maker, drinks pretty hard, has a string of broken relationships behind him. He's not much of an employee. Then, he hears the Message of Christianity.

He hears that God loves him yet sees his sin, and will hold him accountable for that some day. Yikes, he needs rescue! So he's convicted in his heart and he cries out to God for mercy. And he hears that God has made a way to forgive him, thru Jesus Christ. And then, this man accepts that free gift with gladness and joy and peace in his heart.

Now that's one gift. Following on the heels of that decision, he starts to change, because God is now his ever-present friend, he experiences God, God really and truly lives in him. And he wants to please God to say thank you for rescuing him from slavery to sin. And he dives into knowing God's ways, he opens the Scriptures for the first time – the second gift!

Now here's what happens. He starts to apply God's principles with God's help. And slowly but surely,

- no more frequent hangovers, padded expense accounts.
- No more sneaking out early on Friday afternoon,
- no more overdue bills because integrity demands he pay what he owe.
- No more bail bond debts.
- No more lies on the resume'

Now, he's on time, stops complaining, starts volunteering, and giving and everything at work improves. Attitude, productivity, cooperation. And guess who notices? His boss. And guess what happens? Promotions. Pay increases. The company truck. Success. See, it was God who gave him that.

But NOW friend. Success comes with a catch. WHY DID God GIVE HIM that? For his sake first? No, for his sake SECOND... for God's sake first! For him to make a name for God. Now how many people take God's gifts salvation, prosperity from living God's good way and then forget God?

The Bible gives this warning:

**Deut 8:11-14** Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out the land of slavery.

This happens all the time in the Bible:

- Saul received a kingship and forgot God.
- Sampson received great big muscles and forgot God.
- Eli was given great spiritual position and influence and forgot God.

And what about you? What did you receive? A great voice, like these idol contestants? Whatever it is, has it induced spiritual amnesia?

- Has it caused you to forget **WHO** gave it to you? No, you say, I thank God every day for all my blessings! Well then
- Has it caused you to forget **WHY** he gave it to you?

Ah, that's the crux of the matter isn't it? He gave it so you would use it to make a name for him. My wife and I struggled with this with a gift we received from God a while back. Years ago, we sold a home after 10 years of building decent equity. Actually we wanted to sell it but we felt God supernaturally orchestrated circumstances to force us to keep it, against our better judgment. 10 years later, it was a huge blessing!

So when we cashed out our equity would we forget God?

I remember my wife saying, "we just can't forget, Rick. We can't let our day in the financial sun cause us to focus only on our good fortune... we must use this for God somehow." All we could think of was to give a portion of it back to God. So we did, we gave 10% of that equity to God. We didn't feel obligated, it wasn't a tithe, we just felt it was our way of saying, God we didn't forget you.

It was a significant amount, and it hurt a bit, but God was worth it. Here's the footnote on the story: The fall after we gave that gift, we got \$2400 unexpected money, \$600 back on an insurance rebate, and I got a speaking gig that paid \$2000 dollars. If you do the math on that, it adds up to the dollar of what we gave to God. I'm telling you that story for one reason friends, and by now you know what it is:

SO GOD GETS.... GLORY. Not us. So that in this church at least, it is declared that there is a God in heaven who blesses by supernatural power. A God you can't out give. That's my story and God's given me a pulpit to tell it and so I will.

Friend, why did God bless you so much? For you? For you to take it easy? For you to show off? No disrespect here, friend, but I hope he blessed you for a bigger, better reason than that. And he did: **To make a name for himself**. David Robinson got this. This 7 footer dominated the NBA for years, MVP, Scoring titles, Olympic Golds.

Here's what the Washington Post wrote about him the day after his second NBA championship:

Robinson showed that a player did not have to be cheap and dirty to be effective. He did not have... to bring attention to himself as if to say, "Look at me. Aren't I something special?" The good guys won. Robinson won. Decency won. We all won.

We might add, and God WON! Because when Robinson leaned into the microphone the day he hoisted that NBA trophy he said this to a national audience:

"People in San Antonio know what I'm going to say... All the glory goes to God."

It reminds me of what another David, King David said in the Bible:

Riches and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and it is at your discretion that people are made great and given strength. (**1 Chron 29:12**)

Friend how will you leverage your strength for God? I don't know exactly how, because I don't know what your strength is, but maybe it's time you just started asking the question. Maybe this is the first time you even considered that your gifts, your strength, your talent, your money, was not just given to you to make you feel good, or fulfilled or be thought well of.

Maybe, it's not about you. Maybe it's about God...! And again, there's a little Ptolemy inside you and me that bristles at the very thought:

"No, you're the center, it IS about you... you are all that is, and ever will be, and by the way, why is God so awful concerned about his image and name? Seems selfish and insecure if you ask me."

Let me give two answers for that question and a story to illustrate each.

1. TO the question, why is God so awfully concerned about his image... first answer is, **BECAUSE IT WORKS FOR US**. Because us giving credit to God helps us and us taking the credit hurts us. Not because we don't have a hand in doing some great stuff, but because it's not in keeping with reality to not acknowledge God.

To illustrate let me tell you the story of a frog who had a real problem. He was stuck in a mud hole that was drying up. If he didn't find a watery swamp, he was as good as Cajun fried. The news finally got to him that a nice wet stream was flowing over the distant hill. If only he could get there, he'd be set – but how? Frogs aren't built for distance running.

Then he had an idea... he talked to two ducks by the shore and asked if they would each hold an end of a stick in their beaks, and he would bite down on the center and they could carry him to the distant stream. It worked brilliantly!

As they winged their way over the forest, a rabbit looked up and was amazed at the sight of the two birds and the frog dangling between them. The rabbit was so impressed he wondered aloud:

“who came up with that idea?”

When he heard that the frog swelled with pride and couldn't resist responding: “I diiiiiiiiiiii....”

The parable says, it hurts us to pretend we're self contained. It blesses us to give God credit – BECAUSE it's in keeping with reality. Humility isn't attractive because it's quaint. Humility is attractive because it's TRUE! And you will be blessed by living in the reality, that you are good at what you do... **because** God helped. Find a way to give him credit!

2. second answer to the question, why is God so all fired concerned about his image? BECAUSE IT WORKS FOR **OTHERS**. Max Lucado tells the following illustration: Imagine a big downtown skyscraper where everyone works for the CEO on the top floor. Most have not seen him, but they have seen his daughter.

And here's what she's about. She approaches Bert one day, the security guard and says, “I'm hungry, Bert, go get me a Danish and a Starbucks” Now, Bert doesn't know what to do... he's on the clock, but it's the boss's daughter... and she's insisting: Come on, Bert, go!

What option does he have...? So as he leaves his post, he's mumbling to himself, “if the daughter is so bossy, what does that say about her father?”

Then, sipping her latte', the daughter bumps into a secretary, carrying a ton of papers.

- “Where you going with all that?” She asks.
  - o “to have them bound for an afternoon meeting.”
- “Forget the meeting,” says the daughter, “I need to you vacuum my office carpet!”
  - o “But I was told...”
- “and I'm telling you something else...”

The woman has no choice... and as she drops her task, the secretary is left to question the wisdom of the boss, this is his daughter after all.

So the daughter goes through the day, never really says, “my dad said...” but she doesn't have to... She bears his name and so it's assumed she speaks for

the father. And in her wake, more than a few people are left questioning the wisdom of the man upstairs. Does he really know what he's doing?

And now, do you see the cost to others, if we are not focused on God's reputation? Others start to question God, they look at us, and they assume because of our association with a church, or maybe just because you're God's creature, or because we bear the name "Christian" you don't even have to mention God... it's assumed that you reflect God in some way.

And if that reflection is like this daughter's... do you see how it hurts? If it's all about you, you just might be piling disillusionment on the people around you... you might be causing them to question the wisdom of the Man upstairs, to undermine their faith and lose hope...

So... What kind of an ambassador are you? You say, I've not signed up to be God's ambassador. If that's true, then imagine, friend that you were.

- Imagine you were that boss's daughter... and instead of demanding a latte', you brought Bert one instead, saying "you arrive early, I didn't know if you have time to eat, so here..."
- Imagine you go up that paper-laden secretary and say, "you look overloaded, can I help?" and you carry the stacks down the hallway.
- And so you go throughout your day, all your influence, all your gifts, your name and your talent leveraged for others.

You do not even mention your father's name, you don't have to most of the time. You're a child of God... it's assumed. Do you not speak on God's behalf? Reflect his heart? And because they think highly of you, they think highly of your Father.

They've not seen him. They've not met him. But if they know his child, they know his heart.

You see why God wants us ALL off of self center? Because his reputation is on the line and when his reputation suffers, people suffer. When God's people don't leverage all their advantages for God, it hurts them, sure... but what about everyone else looking in? In the Bible, God says:

"When my people were scattered among the nations... they brought dishonor to my holy name... for the nations said, "**These** are the people of the Lord???"

May that never be said about us... yes, imperfect, yes strugglers, all of us! But I hope committed to leveraging every gift for God's glory. Gifts such as?

- his salvation (are you going to leave that gift on the shelf?)
- his ways (are you going to go your own way?)
- his assorted endowments (your looks, your boat, your salary, your special talent?)
  - o Think that through, God's rep on the line.