

“GET REAL! (#3): OVERCOMING INADEQUACY”

(1 John 3:19-22)

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[PROPS NEEDED: “Father’s Love Letter” Video]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 8-14-11

–I–

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: 1 John 3:19-22 and Pray.
2. See if any of the these sound familiar in your own life...¹
 - A–You often feel stress, anxiety, or frustration about life and other people.
 - B–You have a performance-oriented / “stay busy” attitude that causes you to be constantly tired, both physically and emotionally.²
 - C–You often put yourself down in front of others (or at least *mentally* to yourself).³
 - D–You tend to meet legitimate needs in illegitimate ways⁴ (like through alcohol, drugs, overeating, pornography, gambling, smoking).
 - E–You have a temper you can’t seem to control, and you don’t know why.⁵
 - F–You have a hard time trusting and having healthy relationships with others, or are so afraid of being alone that you’re *overly possessive* of the relationships that you *do* have.
 - G–You have a hard time giving or receiving “gifts”, or tend to procrastinate about everything.
 - H–Or perhaps you have a high need for control in life, needing things to be “just so” in order to be able to relax.
3. Now, probably all of us here have experienced at least *some* of these at various times in our lives. But, if you mentally checked off *more* than a few, then chances are (whether you recognize it or not) you struggle with feelings of **INADEQUACY**, because these are just a few of its characteristics.
 - A–It’s sometimes called... low self-esteem, negative self-image, self-hate, shame, or just “not liking ourselves.”
 - B–But by whatever name, it’s essentially a mindset that (#1) unreasonably lowers our sense of identity and worth,⁶ (#2) leaves us feeling incapable, alone, unwanted, and unloved, and (#3) is caused by us being unable to measure up to the conscious and unconscious expectations both of others *and* ourselves.⁷
 - C–And in my experience (and perhaps yours, as well), this one inner, *core* issue is the root cause of many of our *external* struggles and problems as human beings.⁸

4. So, you can see why I think it's so important that we address and deal with it.

A–Well, that's exactly what I want us to do today as we continue our sermon series “Get Real!”, in which we're learning how the Bible can teach us to be more authentic and genuine with ourselves, others and God.

B–If you'll follow along in today's *bulletin sermon notes*, you'll see that we're going to first identify some of the *unhealthy* ways we try to deal with this issue, and then show how today's scripture helps us identify *God's solution* to “*Overcoming Inadequacy*.”

–II–

5. Let's first turn, then, to the **several UNhealthy ways that you and I often try to deal with this issue**, whether consciously or not.⁹

A–One way we try to cope is by **COVERING UP** – feelings of inadequacy make us uncomfortable, so we often put on some of the “masks” we talked about two weeks ago that help us avoid having to deal with the “real” us.

1–The irony, of course, is that when we wear masks, we usually end up *feeling guilty for wearing them*, and that, in turn, leads to even *more* feelings of inadequacy – so it's a vicious cycle!

2–Now, looking back, I can see that some of my own feelings of inadequacy often caused me to become someone I didn't like: I'd have a short temper; or would become angry or easily frustrated with people and situations.

3–And the result was that the “masks” I used to “cover up” my insecurities actually became part of the problem *themselves* – and this is what a lot of us do!

B–But there's also a second unhealthy way we often deal with feelings of inadequacy – it's what's been called “**GETTING SMALL.**” That is: when confronted with adequacy-related situations, we UNDERachieve or “*give up*”.

1–For example, someone challenges us to become a better person, a more committed Christian, a more faithful spouse, and we decide that we *can't* do it, so we simply “give up” and don't try anymore!

2–When we experience something that makes us feel inadequate, we withdraw into a “turtle shell” – we get quiet; we quit what we're doing and leave the room; look away or down; maybe we start crying; or even try to be a people-pleaser.

3–Our inner strength just caves in to the situation or person who's making us feel inadequate, and we end up tired, burned out, disillusioned, and depressed, often turning to addictive outlets (like drugs, sex, porn, alcohol, food, smoking) to find relief and to numb our feelings.¹⁰

C—A third way we often try to cope with these feelings is the opposite of the second one: it's what's been called **“GETTING BIG”**... so that when confronted by adequacy-issues, we try to compensate by *OVER*achieving and “trying harder.”

1—Self-effort, “success,” achievement, and performance become the antidote to our feelings, so that when we experience something that makes us feel inadequate, we see it as a challenge (like someone who's thrown down a gauntlet),...

2—...and we start trying twice as hard, maybe even becoming passionate, loud, “itching for a fight,” and always trying to “win” at whatever the cost.

3—A person like this *appears* (at least on the outside) never to be tired – to always be an energetic, enthusiastic, charismatic “go-getter.”

4—But the problem is that by trying to “earn” worth and value through *performance* (which will *never* be “good enough”), we're again simply generating *more* feelings of inadequacy, again perpetuating that vicious cycle! ¹¹

6. Now there are, of course, variations on all three of these coping methods,¹² but I hope you see that while these are very popular, in the end they don't really work!

–III–

7. So, what's the answer, then? How can you and I truly overcome feelings of inadequacy? Well, let's turn to today's scripture from 1 John 3 and see how it actually gives us **God's Solution** to this issue. [Contemp. Service ONLY: Read MSG version of 1 John 3:19-22]

A—Let me remind us again of Vss. 20-21, which say that... (MSG) “*This is the only way we... shut down debilitating self-criticism... [by knowing that] God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves... [and that] once we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God!*” (NRSV) “*Whenever our hearts condemn us,... God is greater than our hearts, [for] he knows everything,... [and we therefore] have boldness before God.*”

1—What I think this is saying is that, Yes, our hearts might at times “accuse/condemn” us, and make us feel “inadequate,” taunting us to believe that we're no good, that we'll never measure up, or never be able to overcome our shortcomings.

2—But it's also telling us that despite what our hearts say, “*God is greater than our hearts*” – He “*knows all [the] things*” that we think might make us “unworthy,” or worthless, or inadequate... and He loves us *anyway!* ¹³

B—And what this verse helped remind me of in my own life is that my identity and value as a human being is *not* measured by *my* performance/success, but instead is the result of *God's* performance *on my behalf* – that my worth is *not* a product of *my* efforts, but of God's Grace!

1–These verses are saying, you see, that you & I can (MSG) “*be bold and free before God*” / (NRSV) *have boldness/confidence before God*” not because of what we do or don’t do to “measure up,” but because of what He has *already done* in Jesus!

2–It’s saying that we are valuable to God, ourselves, and others *not* because of what *we* or *others* think of us, but because of what *God* thinks of us. ¹⁴

C–What the Bible is showing us here is that the Christian life is *not* a set of rules and regulations to live up to and be measured by, but instead is “*a process of learning to live consistently with who we already are in Christ Jesus.*” ¹⁵

D–And that means that we no longer need to live in bondage to inadequacy, or to the demands and expectations of others or ourselves, but instead are free to live a life in which we *know* that we’re loved, accepted and valued by God Himself. ¹⁶

–IV–

8. Now, in case you missed it in today’s scripture, I want to close with an opportunity for us all to again hear – in God’s own words – exactly what He thinks of you and me,...

A–...And how *that* perspective can give us the grace and power to “*Overcome Inadequacy*” in our lives...

B–[CLOSE WITH VIDEO: “FATHER’S LOVE LETTER”...]

9. [PRAY: “*O God, too often in our lives we’ve listened to the spiritual taunts of the enemy, of ourselves, and of others who have (in various ways, consciously and unconsciously) told us that we are somehow less than we really are – that we are ‘inadequate’ in life. We’ve believed the lies in our minds, and acted accordingly in our behaviors. But today we’ve heard the truth that your grace loves and accepts us “as we are” – warts and all – NOT because of anything that WE do or don’t do, but simply BECAUSE we are your children. Today, we receive the power of your Holy Spirit to enable us to claim our identity and acceptance in you through your Son and our Savior Jesus. We claim today the freedom you give us to walk and live free from the bondage of inadequacy, insecurity, self-pity, and self-doubt. O God, enable us to love and accept ourselves the way you already love and accept us. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*”]

ENDNOTES:

1. Each of the following are often thought of as individual problems or issues that we need to “fix.” As I’ll explain, however, each of them are more properly merely *symptoms* or *manifestations* of the *one* deeper, inner / core issue of “*Inadequacy*.” These are taken generally from Christian psychologist and author Jeff VanVonderen in his book Tired Of Trying to Measure Up (Bethany House Publishers, 1989), pp. 19-28, 41-50. There, he says that behavioral traits like these are characteristics common in what he calls a “Shame-Based Identity” (which is what I’m referring to today as an identity shaped around feelings of “Inadequacy”).

2. The assumption here is that if we can just work hard and busy enough at problems, they can be overcome.

3. This is reflective of a lack of an accurate self-understanding – we have trouble understanding why we do, say, and feel as we *do* because we don’t really know who we *are*.

4. Something the Bible calls “idolatry.”

5. Or we have problems setting and defending emotional “boundaries” for ourselves (i.e., we frequently we allow people to walk all over us and we don’t do anything about it).

6. VanVonderen defines this issue as “...*the belief or mindset that something is wrong with [us].... the [conscious or unconscious] sense or belief [that we] are deficient, defective or worthless as a human being.*” [Jeff VanVonderen, p. 16]. Although he uses the term “Shame” and I use the term “Inadequacy,” it is my belief that these concepts/issues are one in the same (by whatever name they are given).

7. VanVonderen calls it a “*living death... spending life never measuring up, and always wondering when you’re going to start living and being happy*” (VanVonderen, p. 50). “*A person struggling with shame view [themselves] as defective, as someone who lacks love or acceptance... [or even] in importance, credibility, and in the support of those around [them] – in short, deficient in worth and ability. For a person like this, life is an endless struggle to earn love and acceptance to prove [their] worth, to acquire value, to gain importance, and to find meaning in [their] existence*” (VanVonderen, p. 98).

8. This is an issue that’s so deep and personal that this message may be one that is a very difficult for many people to hear and/or read. Like I have in my own past, we may deny that this is a problem for us. But our denials don’t lessen the impact of its reality.

9. The second and third of these unhealthy coping methods are described in VanVonderen, pp. 82-84, 164.

10. And, of course, the addictions we fall into themselves cause us to feel even more inadequate and more like a failure, so we plunge even deeper into them. “*Since the great majority of people with a sense of defectiveness don’t know that shame is their problem, they manipulate their outer circumstances or behaviors in order to find inner fulfillment*” (VanVonderen, p. 102). The consequence of “getting small” is that we go looking to meet our inner needs in outwardly unhealthy ways: “*The natural goal of the person who lacks life is to find it. Satan, the liar, offers a counterfeit to those who lack life, by promising them life from a source that can’t give it. If that doesn’t work, he obscures the seriousness of their condition*” (VanVonderen, p. 104). And as VanVonderen notes, “*The scriptures document case after case of how people tried to find life, value, and meaning from sex, power, conquest of kingdoms, money, false gods, and religion*” (VanVonderen, p. 100).

11. “*In shame-based relationships, value and acceptance are earned on the basis of performance. Performance, however, always seems to fall short of the, standard, giving us the message, “You are defective and inadequate. Eventually, we become ingrained with a need to measure up. What follows is more impotent performance, which generates even more shame. And so on”* (VanVonderen, p. 41). Strategies for change based on self-effort that will ultimately fail because it requires *performance* of SELF rather than *dependence* on GOD. In the scriptures we are told that spiritual maturity in GOD’S eyes require far more than simply the performance of certain activities or behaviors (Read Larry Crabb, Inside Out, pp. 47-48).

12. Actually there is also a third strategy, which roughly translates into living life on a roller-coaster between “getting smaller” and “getting bigger” – we live in and with a process that involves various degrees of “giving up” and “trying harder.”

13. Some New Testament scriptures that describe and affirm WHO we are (our identity) in Christ include: Romans 6:6; Romans 8:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:4.

14. VanVonderen put it this way: “*It’s GOD’S grace, not our striving, that makes us accepted and acceptable. It is HIS performance in Christ, not our trying hard to perform, that eradicates our shame....*”

[And] for people who feel defective and unwanted at the root of their soul, there is a new truth: God wants you. ...He loves you... He chose you. He went through a lot to get you. Now you are His child, [and] He is your dad, [and] He likes you a lot!" (VanVonderen, pp. 87, 119, 112-113). In fact, "Our heavenly Father is not just 'putting up with us.' He likes it when we come around (Read Hebr. 4:16)... We aren't bothering Him with our problems. He isn't going to shame us for not having it all together. He isn't going to give us some formula to perform so we can get back on His good side. He wants to embrace us with grace and mercy when we draw near" (VanVonderen, p. 113). "Our acceptance before God is complete and secure even when we are disappointed in ourselves" [Erwin W. Lutzer, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #9992)].

15. VanVonderen, p. 121. "Our identity is not based upon our performance. ...The Christian life is not an exercise in positive self-effort stemming from a negative self-concept.... It's learning to live by faith in a way that is consistent with who we already are and what we already have because of the performance of a God who is faithful" (VanVonderen, p. 126). Unfortunately, "many Christians spend their entire existence unsuccessfully trying to be someone other than who they really are – 'for God'." ...[But] the gospel's Good News is that, on the basis of God's grace and because of Christ's performance on the cross, we are brand new creations" (VanVonderen, p. 121).

"It's [not] a fight to produce better behavior, but... to decide to live in a manner consistent with [the] new messages [about ourselves] which say that we are... loved, accepted, lovable, and acceptable" (VanVonderen, p. 95). So then, when we follow God's strategy to overcoming shame, our "good behaviors" (as people and even as Christians) are not the result of self-effort, but are instead the result of us simply living into – being transformed by – our identity as God's children: "Healthy behaviors result from an identity that's healthy and fully based upon God's performance on our behalf. [We] can learn to perform out of the fullness that is [ours] in Christ." (VanVonderen, p. 12). Read Romans 12:2. This transformation includes more than just knowing or even believing the "right things" about God or Jesus. VanVonderen explains, that part of our problem is the "heart-brain barrier. It means knowing a lot of good stuff about God, but not being able to believe it.... [The goal is to have] the truth about God's love... flow from [one's] head to [one's] heart" (VanVonderen, p. 110). Furthermore, this "transformation" involves several other things: a PROCESS that never ends (there is no "quick fix") – "The Christian life is an ongoing process." (VanVonderen, p. 148).; the offering and receiving of *forgiveness* (be quick to forgive others – especially when they don't meet *your* expectations, and forgives yourself – self-forgiveness is one of the hardest battles to fight! Don't be so hard on yourself!); the learning of *boundaries* (setting and defending them for yourself and for others); the practice of spiritual *warfare* ("Don't make the mistake of blaming GOD for what people have done against you, or for the lies that Satan promotes." (VanVonderen, p. 153)); and the healing of *wounded emotions*.

16. Remember the key scripture for this sermon series is Ezekiel 36:26-27, where God says that He will "cause" us to walk in His statutes, and to see to it that we "will" be careful to observe His ordinances. Referring to this passage, VanVonderen notes God's methodology: "How is he going to do that? It isn't by putting us under a list of rules and shaming us for not following them. Rather, He has put His Spirit in us, gotten rid of our old stony hearts, and given us new, soft hearts" (VanVonderen, p. 160).