

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 18, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

YOU AND YOUR PROBLEMS “The Problem of Inferiority” *Selected Scripture*

JUST FOR REVIEW – Last week we looked at four clarify statements that set the stage for this study, “You and Your Problems.” I suggested that we review them intermittently (recurrently) throughout this study, so let’s take a second look at these statements in preparation for the first problem we will address.

4 Clarify Statements:

- 1. It is incorrect to think that because one is a Christian, all his problems will be solved –** Certainly the problem of inferiority fall under this statement. There are going to be times when we feel intimidated, inadequate, inept or inferior in this life in one way or another. Maybe it is with a task or job we are asked to do... to take on, maybe it’s a past failure or a recent failure we have experienced... a rejection or something just didn’t work out like it should have. It could be any number of things. This problem of feeling insure or inferior is sure to hit each of us where we live even as Christian... if we say we don’t relate to this one, we probably need to have reality check with ourselves and deal with some spiritual pride issues first.
- 2. It is incorrect to say that all problems are discussed in the Bible –** The problem of inferiority, as we will see, is certainly more implied that directly stated/addressed in the Bible. It really isn’t hard to find very human characters in the Bible who struggled with this problem. Though, certainly, the principles and standards for dealing this problem are readily prevalent in the Bible.
- 3. It is incorrect to believe that having a problem means one is unspiritual –** As we will see, there are some pretty “spiritual” individuals who struggled with the problem of inferiority. I’d even call them “Spiritual Giants.”
- 4. It is incorrect to assume that being exposed to Bible teaching automatically solves problems -**

It is unlikely there is a person alive who has not experienced feelings of inferiority of one type or another, and at one time or another. These feelings appear to be characteristic in human nature. In some, it has a minor effect; in others, it is a major problem. Success or failure in life is often determined by the ability to adjust to feelings of inferiority.

For the Christian, one of the most common and disturbing problems many Christians face today is inferiority, the opposite extreme of pride. Both are equally devastating. Inferiority represents

acute feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence, an exaggerated and unhealthy sense of unworthiness, and an inability to accept one's own self. Inferiority often leads to embarrassing timidity, various compensations (sarcasm, "superiority complex," unrealistic ambitions, etc.), and withdrawal from close contact with people. At the heart of this frustration is frequently a poor self-image. This has a damaging influence on one's attitude toward God, family and friends... even on one's faith and growth in the Lord. These feeling of inadequacy and inferiority are always stifling to our faith and growth in our walk.

What effects do feelings of inferiority and/or inadequacy in our life have on our Christian walk and our ability to grow?

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| 1. <u>Constant belittling of self (focus on self)</u> | 6. <u>Easily offended and defensive</u> |
| 2. <u>Be unduly sensitive (wear feeling on sleeve)</u> | 7. <u>Inhibits full potential</u> |
| 3. <u>Constantly seek praise and approval</u> | 8. <u>Paralyzes one's faith</u> |
| 4. <u>Overly critical/judgmental of others</u> | 9. <u>Stifles our spiritual growth</u> |
| 5. <u>Failure to develop latent talents or gifts</u> | 10. <u>Insults God who made us</u> |

I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before looking at the lives of several men who were faced with this problem of inferiority, we need to establish a perspective.

1. The feeling of inferiority is not necessarily related to intelligence –
2. The feeling of inferiority is not always noticeable on the surface –
3. The feeling of inferiority is not a problem unique to non-Christians -

II. SCRIPTURAL ILLUSTRATIONS

We do not have to look outside the biblical realm to find examples of men struggling with inferiority. Let's look at three men from three different time periods to see how they handled their struggles, and how the our God helped them and helps us to grow through it.

1. **Moses (Exodus 3-4) – (Read: Ex. 3:10-14, Ex. 4:1, 10-13)** At the age of 80, his bout with inferiority and lack of self-esteem was great. The reason he felt inferior was because he had failure in his background. Guilt frequently comes from failure, especially guilt stemming from something one feels can never be righted. Moses had murdered a man in Egypt and God sent him into obscurity in the Midian Desert. He was completely dejected and went from being on top of the world, second only to Pharaoh and soon to secede him to the throne... to being the lowest of low, a forgotten about and common shepherd. While pasturing his father-in-law's sheep there, the Lord appeared to him in the midst of a burning bush and called Moses' attention to Himself. Commissioning the shepherd, God said in Exodus 3:10, "*So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.*" From feeling of inferiority rather than humility, Moses reply to God is in verse 11, "*But Moses said to god, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'*" And in Exodus 4:1 we read more of the same from Moses, "*Moses answered, 'What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, [The Lord did not appear to you?]*" On down further in Exodus 4:10 and 13 Moses said, "*O Lord, I have never been eloquent,*

neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” And *“O Lord, please send someone else to do it.”* Do you see it? Moses eyes were on himself – on his own abilities – and he was destined for trouble. Moses had the occasion to watch God work on his behalf, but initially he couldn’t see that (4:11-12) **Practical Application: God is able to handle our inabilities and perceived inadequacies and turn what seem to be restraints into blessings.** This keeps us trusting Him from word to word... as it was with Moses. Sometimes this is one of our greatest points of growth in our Christian experience... when we realize that we can’t and are going to have to be dependent on God and we start actually depending on Him to do it.

2. **Gideon (Judges 6) – (Read: Judges 6:1-6, 11-16)** In Judges 6:1-6 we read (look at it), *“The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴ They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵ They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶ Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.”* A minute ago we were with Moses in the Midian Desert feeling inferior and now we are with Israel, being attacked by Midian and an entire nation feeling inferior, inadequate, and unable to handle life... and let’s face it, we would be feeling the same way if we were being so furiously attacked. So fearful were they that the entire nation is shrunk to hiding out in caves and mountain clefts... like a huddled mass in a darkened corner struggling from the problem of inferiority. You know that is what feelings of inferiority and inadequacy will reduce your life to... hiding out in a hole somewhere, afraid to make a move. It is in the midst of this scene that we meet our next character example of the problem of inferiority (by the way, he is representative of how all of the Israelites were feeling at this point). Down in **verse 11** we read, *“The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.”* Gideon is feeling so insecure and fearful that he is hiding out in a wine press, just trying to put together a little something to survive... a little food to eat. That is when God steps into this picture in **verse 12**, *“When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.’”* Notice Gideon’s response in **verse 13**, *“‘Pardon me, my lord,’ Gideon replied, ‘but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.’”* This is the passage I preached from a couple of week ago where in the King James, Gideon says, “Where be all the miracles?” Remember? “God, we are so beat down, we are so low, so inferior to these Midianites, so inadequate that we just give up! It can’t be done! It will never happen! I’m not even sure we can depend on you to do this!” In **verse 14** God says to Gideon, *“...Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending*

you?” Then notice Gideon’s words in verse 15, “*Pardon me, my lord,*” Gideon replied, “*but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.*” In other words, “I’m sorry God, but you are wrong! I can’t save Israel, I am from the weakest and least tribe of Israel and on top of that I am the smallest, weakest and most insignificant of my own family!” Talk about feeling a little insecure here! Inferiority deluxe! But notice God’s words of reminder to Gideon here in verse 16, “*The LORD answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.’*” You can’t but I can and I am literally going to wipe this insecurity things away for you! **Practical Application: God can and will defeat our insecurities and feeling of inadequacy and inferiority if we will let him, and we can step into life and usefully fulfill the tasks God gives us to do.**

3. **Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1)** – (Read: **Jeremiah 1:4-9**) God’s prophets were not immune to emotional battles. We often respect them for their victorious track records and overlook the struggles along the way. A little more than 800 years after Moses, God recruited another man into His service – this time a prophet. Look at verse 4-5 of Jeremiah 1, “*The word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’*” (vv.4-5). As with Moses, Jeremiah responded not with humility, but inferiority with these words in Jeremiah 1:6, “*‘Ah, Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’*” He realized God was commissioning him to a responsibility that would take him before the elders of his land. His inferiority resulted from fear of the older people. The story is encouraging – not because of Jeremiah’s response, but God’s. Look at verse 9, “*The then Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now, I have put my words in your mouth...’*” **Practical Application: Remember that at our point of greatest weakness and vulnerability God will touch us and strengthen us if we let Him. Our growth comes in trusting Him to do it.**

III. PERSONAL INSIGHTS

The illustrations of Moses, Gideon, and Jeremiah, are helpful, but if we look into the New Testament we will find statements that clearly articulate the principles to be learned from these men’s lives.

1. Regarding the Lord’s estimation of you...

3 Scriptural Truths about God’s Estimation of You:

- (1) **God considered you a person of great worth (Matthew 6:26-30)** – “*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*” What do you see there? According to these verses what is God’s estimation of you?

- (2) **God is at work within us, His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)** – *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* What does this verse tell you about your life in relationship to God? That He has a plan and a purpose for your life and that you are His work in progress. God looks not only to the mass of humanity, but He looks individually at we who have been *“... created in Christ Jesus to do good works...”* You are His handiwork. .
- (3) **God will not be through with us until we’re in His presence (Philippians 1:6)** – *“Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* What does this work tell you about your life? God is at work in us every day of our Christian life. You are a work in progress. Like the song says, *“He’s still working on me, to make me what I ought to be. It took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sky and the earth, and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patience He must be. He’s still working on me.”* You have not arrived. You are still a work in progress and He is not through with you yet. It is His objective to complete us... His way.

Appropriate Response: Since He is conforming you and me, since He is working on us as unique vessels, and since He’s not finished with us yet, how about considering yourself and the Lord as a team – rather than yourself in competition with someone you perceive to be better... more gifted. Think of it as a cooperative relationship – “God and I.”

2. Regarding the body’s estimation of you... (1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 21-22)

Paul informs us that even the unseen organs in Christ’s family are vital. Not only is each member... seen or hidden... needed, each is essential.

2 Truths Regarding You and the Body of Christ:

- (1) **God places each one of us in the body as He sees fit (v.18)** – God knows not only our need, but He know everything about us (warts and all) and He place us in the places He desires for us to be. Don’t ever think that you catch God off guard or that your insecurities and perceived inadequacies are in anyway limiting to God and His plans for your life.
- (2) **God places the need for each one of us in the body (vv.21-22)** – You are important to the body of Christ. You are needed. What you have to offer is not only needed, it is for the body’s health. You have something to contribute and who you uniquely are in Christ is important.

3. Regarding your estimation of you... (Romans 12:3) *“For by the grace give to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”* The Living Bible reads this way in Romans 12:3, *“... Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you.”*

How God want you to look at your self:

- (1) **With sincere humility** – What is the difference between genuine humility and feelings of inferiority or inadequacy? The key is grace... the undeserved,

unmerited favor of God. Recognizing that I am not worse nor better than anyone else, but rather we are all in the same boat... in need of the unmerited, undeserved favor of God, therefore I humble myself before Him.

- (2) **With sober judgment** – Don't get carried away with yourself. Don't get too high when you succeed (you didn't do it anyway... God did). Don't get too low when failure comes (it's not the end of the world, you can grow through it, and God's not through with you yet)... soberly... sober judgment. Be honest about yourself with yourself, but don't be self-defacing... you are defacing God's property.
- (3) **With faith** – As a child of God and a person of faith you know (by faith) that what is not possible with you is possible with God. That changes everything in your perception of yourself. You are limited by God's limits which are "none."

IV. PRESCRIBED SUGGESTIONS

Pulling all this together, we can reduce our thoughts to four relevant applications for our growth through feeling of inferiority.

A Prescription for Growing through Feeling of Inferiority:

1. **Realize that you were thought about and planned for before you were born (Psalm 139:13-16)** – Listen to the Psalmist in Psalm 139:13-16, *"¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* God knows you and He has a wonderful plan for your life, you are not insignificant, or unplanned, or a mistake. You didn't catch God off guard and your life doesn't take Him by surprise. Commit yourself to Him and rest in Him. He can work it out for you!
2. **Remember that the process of growth is still going on no matter how young or old you are (Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 1:6)** – Ephesians 2:10 says, *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* God has a plan and a purpose for your life. You are His work in progress. Again, God looks not only to the mass of humanity, but He looks individually at us who have been *"... created in Christ Jesus to do good works..."* You are His handiwork. Philippians 1:6 reminds us, *"Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*
3. **Refuse to compare yourself to others (Luke 15:11-20)** - Society puts pressure on people to conform to stereotypes, and we may feel something is wrong with us if we don't match those stereotypes even within the church and Christian circles... "I'm not as spiritual as him or her!" "He or she intimidates me with their Bible knowledge!" "They are such a better Christian than I am." If we accept those stereotypes, we will compare ourselves unfavorably with others who match those stereotypes better. Think about it, God really does love us simply for who we are. As the author Philip Yancey writes, *"There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and nothing we can do to make God love us less."* God loves us as a Father. We are His special, unique creation, whose purpose is to live in close fellowship with Him. You know the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-20, *Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two*

sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. 'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.'"

1. **Respond correctly to your shortcoming (2 Corinthians 12:9)** - We need to realize that only Jesus was perfect and sinless. We all fall short and have inadequacies from time to time, but by God's grace we can get up again. Paul realized that his weaknesses were actually opportunities for God to show His power. We should accept that we cannot overcome our weaknesses on our own, but instead wait on the Lord for His strength. As 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' " Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."