

Who Am I Anyway?



LORRAINE PETERSON

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About the Author

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Chapter 1.

ME, MYSELF, AND I – YOUR SELF-IMAGE

Who Am I Anyway?

You came to God as a dirty, rotten sinner whose righteousness is no better than filthy rags, unable to save yourself. Then how do you square that with the fact that God created you to be something special and that you should accept yourself? You really can thank God that you have knobby knees, red hair and freckles, and at the same time confess to Him that your motives are selfish and need to be changed by Him – if you're willing to accept God's definition of who you are.

My car is a good little car – it runs well, doesn't have any big dents, and requires very little repair. However, one Sunday morning there was an incredibly heavy rainfall that turned every low area in the city into a lake. When my car came to the waist-deep water under a railroad bridge, it was totally helpless, as were all the other cars. One driver thought his car should be able to double as a boat and went full speed into that deep water. Of course, his car stopped and nearly drowned!

What if that poor car, nearly covered by water, began thinking, "I'm a total failure because here I am in all this water and I can't do a thing. I'm awful."? We'd think it was pretty dumb for a car to be depressed because it couldn't function as a boat. Now the Bible teaches that Jesus has to enter our lives and change us from the inside out. When you get discouraged because you are not naturally good, you are like the car trying to be a boat. Just as the car could be thankful that it was a compact that saved on gas, that it was painted red, and that it had a vinyl interior, so you should be thankful for the way God made you – for the unique qualities you have and for the special ways you can be of service to God.

You are important to God and He loves you very much. That's why He sent Jesus to save you. But your natural "goodness" does not impress God, and you can't save yourself. Even after you become a Christian, you can't live the Christian life in your own strength.

"We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64: 6).

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jeremiah 31: 3).

"For I know that nothing good dwells within me" (Romans 7: 18).

"But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15: 10).

1. As God looks at you, what characteristics – good and bad – does He see?

2. If you were God, able to see into the corners of everyone's life, would you love you?
3. Describe the kind of love God has for you.

God Loves You – Pimples and All

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If you possessed the power to change anything about the way you look, would you use that power? Would you like to have a shorter nose, thinner legs, fewer freckles, or smaller feet? Most people would answer “yes” to this question, but in answering “yes” they are forgetting some important things. Why does almost every person wish to be cast in the beauty queen or the Mr. America mold? It’s only because right now that is the world’s definition of “beautiful” or “handsome.” However, popular standards of beauty change; a woman with a tan was once considered ugly, and the somewhat hefty Statue of Liberty was once considered the ideal feminine form!

God wants you to accept *His* definition of “beautiful,” and He wants to make you beautiful from the *inside* out. God made you just the way you are so you could best reflect His beauty. A problem with wanting to remake yourself is that you're actually telling God that He did a bad job when He created you. You don't like it when people tell you your painting or cake is the worst they've ever seen; the Master Designer of the Universe doesn't exactly appreciate nasty comments from you either.

You'll enjoy a great sense of relaxation and peace when you accept yourself the way God made you. After you have done this, ask God what things you can do to look your best. A diet, more exercise, or a change of hairstyle may be in God's plan for you. Accepting the way God made you, and thanking Him for it, will save you from one of two extremes; not caring about your appearance because you think you're so ugly it won't help, or spending too much time and money trying to look acceptable.

“For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works. Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139: 13-16).

“He has made everything beautiful” (Ecclesiastes 3: 11).

1. Each of us can say the things that David said in Psalm 139. What things did God plan for you before you were born?
2. Why did the Psalmist thank God for the way he was made?
3. Have you thanked God for making you just the way you are?

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Self-Image

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Do you ever feel worthless? Do zits, greasy hair, and a lack of poise get you down? Do you dwell on the fact that you are uncoordinated or a poor student, or are not particularly popular? You need this very old truth from the Bible; “For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16: 7).

Getting out of the low self-image syndrome involves deciding who is important to you and who is going to shape your image of yourself. If you let society do it, you will always come out a loser because no one can be good-looking, witty, successful, intelligent, athletic, musical, and well-informed, all at the same time. Every other TV commercial warns that you are lacking in some way. You could let your friends shape your self-image, but conforming to the crowd has its dangers. Besides, your friends could let you down.

You may think you would feel good about yourself if you fell in love and a special person would believe in you. However, married people usually seem just as insecure as those who are single, and lovers often turn into people who compete with each other and tear each other down. Some of you don't even look for acceptance in your family, though others can see that your family seems to love you most when you're simply doing what is expected of you.

If you decide that God is going to be so important in your life that nothing else matters, you'll sense God loving you and comforting you when no one else understands. That God who made the universe, controls the galaxies, and presides over history loves you – warts and all – with a constant love. In the light of this great fact, should what other people think of you be that important? If God is really first in your life, the opinions of others will never ruin your self-image.

“Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou dost hold my right hand. Thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my portion forever” (Psalm 73: 23-26).

1. On a scale of one to ten, how would the writer of this Psalm rate God?
2. How can God's nearness and His importance make the difference next time you make a fool of yourself in front of the most popular kids in school?
3. Do you spend more time being concerned about the inside of you that God sees, or the outside that others see?

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Self-Consciousness

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One definition of self-consciousness is “thinking about yourself.” How much time do you waste worrying about how you look, wondering if others have a good impression of you, or trying to analyze why your feelings are hurt. Self-consciousness can keep a talented pianist from ever performing in front of a group, prevent a guy from giving a word of encouragement or affection, or stop someone from learning to ski. Every time we start thinking only about ourselves we spend time in self-pity, which can only hurt us.

You may agree that self-consciousness is bad and that you'd love to forget about how you look to others; you really want to ignore ridicule, and you would like to try new things that you may not be able to do well. The question you have is, “How can I live above self-consciousness?”

There's a man in the Bible who had self-consciousness licked. Sure, some people made fun of him. After all, camel's hair T-shirts weren't high fashion, and the Roman emperor didn't eat locusts and wild honey for breakfast. Living in the desert wasn't the thing to do either. But John the Baptist had something, and his preaching was worth listening to – even worth going out to the desert to hear. The fact that he was losing all his disciples to Jesus didn't bother him either. He had learned to replace self-consciousness with Christ-consciousness.

It is possible to really concentrate on two things at once. If you are only aware of serving Christ and living for Him, self-consciousness will disappear. John the Baptist thought so much of Jesus that he described Him as One “the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

When self-consciousness comes to haunt you, always ask the question, “Whom am I living for anyway – God or myself?”

“Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a youth”; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you. ... But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them’” (Jeremiah 1: 6-8, 17).

“He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3: 30).

1. What does God say about Jeremiah's self-conscious attitude?
2. In light of God's advice to Jeremiah in verse 17, what would you tell a Christian friend of yours who is scared to death to give a report in tomorrow's English class?

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Lions, Losers, and Lessons

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Paul's situation in Rome was "the pits" – and then some. He was in prison and his only "crime" was preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. Almost all of his friends had deserted him, and at his trial no one defended him. Even though he had not been fed to the lions this time, a shortage of criminals to execute at the next Colosseum show could affect the outcome of a future court hearing. He didn't even have his coat and his books.

Most people in a situation like this would have written, "Everything I've ever lived for is gone. I'm a miserable failure and there is no one to cheer me up." Instead, Paul wrote that he had fought a good fight, he had kept the faith, and he was praising the Lord. Paul knew that success was obeying God, regardless of how things turn out.

A lot of frustration comes from your deciding you're a failure because you didn't measure up to your own goals or the expectations someone else made for you. How about learning a lesson from Paul? How about measuring success and failure by God's standards? If you are disobeying God, you may look very successful but you are still a failure. If you are wholeheartedly obeying God, you are a success – even if all your report card grades are below C level.

"For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4: 6-8).

"The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever" (2 Timothy 4: 18).

1. Why was Paul not discouraged?
2. List statements that prove that Paul was not worried about being a failure or being executed.
3. Paul viewed the Christian life as a "fight" and a "race." How do you view the Christian life?

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The Right Frame for the Picture

Once you decide to let Jesus be the Lord of your life, you can develop a strategy for coping with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. The most important consideration is what Jesus thinks and what He wants. That makes you like a picture frame; the beautiful and valuable painting is Jesus within you.

People don't go to art galleries to admire frames. However, it is important that the frame blends with the picture to complement its beauty. God had a plan for you before you were born. Your looks and your personality were especially designed to complement the life of Jesus within you. To the person who puts Jesus first, there is no higher purpose than displaying Jesus. If someone says of you, "If a person like that can be a Christian, I can follow Christ too," your whole life will be worthwhile.

But how does this relate to feeling like an idiot because you struck out again, or feeling self-conscious because everyone else dressed up and you didn't? If Jesus is first in your life, these other things will not be important enough to ruin your day. Constantly carry on a little conversation with Jesus, saying things like, "Well, Lord, if you think I look great, that's good enough for me"; or, "Lord, now that everyone is mad at me for causing the team to lose, I know more about the rejection you faced on earth"; or, "Lord, help me find a person who is hurting on the inside, so I can help that person rather than thinking about my wearing the wrong thing."

Of course, there's nothing especially spiritual about being a bad baseball player or dressing out of place; but how we look or perform is not terribly important. God's "picture frames" should certainly pray about their appearance and the impression they make, but should always remember; "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on" (Matthew 6: 25).

"All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord, and all thy saints shall bless thee! They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom and tell of thy power, to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of thy kingdom" (Psalm 145: 10-12).

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3: 17).

1. In the above verses, what is God commanding you to do?
2. How does doing everything for God's glory help to defeat feelings of inferiority?
3. If you play baseball to bring honor to Jesus, He will understand perfectly if you strike out – it's not a big deal. If you dress to please Jesus, the pressure to look better than everyone else will be gone and you can relax and be yourself. Are you strained and frustrated in some area of your life because you're too concerned about pleasing people?

You Make a Perfect You

Marching with the high school band in a big parade can be exciting and enjoyable – unless you're in the front row marching out of step and you're wearing the last available hat, which would have fit Humpty Dumpty, but which won't stay on your head even though it's stuffed with two newspapers. Well, it happened to me when I had moved to a new high school. After one practice, I was stuck in a parade. The tuba player kept retrieving my hat and I marched out of step for a mile-and-a-half. I cried all the way home because I thought I had ruined the whole parade. I never even suspected the glaring pride involved in my self-evaluation.

We don't recognize that it's pride that makes us so afraid of making fools out of ourselves. It's pride that wants everyone to think I'm graceful, smooth, and cool, and that's why I nearly die when I mess up on making an introduction. It's because of pride that you want everyone to recognize your great intelligence, and that's why you're crushed when you say something dumb and everyone laughs. It's pride that keeps you in front of the mirror for an hour a day, and makes your world cave in when you get a bad haircut.

Pride can easily become your jailer. Pride rattles his chains when you have to give an oral report in science, when you feel only the most expensive clothes would make you look acceptable, or when you don't want anyone to see you play tennis. Pride demands that you be Superman or Wonder Woman. Confess your pride as sin and come into the freedom Jesus wants to give you. The truth is, you make a perfect you.

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16: 18).

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is on high, who say in your heart, who will bring me down to the ground? Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from thence I will bring you down, says the Lord” (Obadiah 1: 3, 4).

“For by the grace given to me I bid everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him” (Romans 12: 3).

1. How does pride deceive us?
2. What strains and pressures come to those who decide they must get to the top and stay there?
3. What does God say about pride?
4. How does pride hurt our relationship with God, our dealings with other people, and our self-image?

Chapter 2.

TAKE A HARD LOOK AT YOURSELF

Who Tells You What to Do?

Someone once said, “Do what you like and pretty soon you won't like what you do.” The “let it all hang out” philosophy is likely to get you into a lot of trouble. Saying exactly what you think will not endear you to your sister, and may incur the anger of your mother and your teachers, not to mention your principal. Doing whatever you wish, whenever you wish to do it, may get you acquainted with policemen, probation officers, and judges.

Since the “inside you” seems to be such a monster, you’ve probably allowed others to dictate your behavior. You congratulate the homecoming queen and say you're glad she won – even if you think she’s the worst possible choice. You feel obligated to pretend you like eating vegetarian pizza and drinking sparkling water, because everyone else at the party is. When people ask how you are, you answer, “Fine,” even if you're on the verge of tears. The hypocrisy of it all is frightening, and the thought of being a “carbon copy teen” doesn’t give you any sense of individuality or importance.

What’s the way out? Only God who designed people in the first place can give you the correct standards to live by. And only by recognizing your sinfulness, giving God control of your life and receiving His free gift of salvation which means that His Spirit takes over your life and changes your “want tos”, can you really be yourself – and be a person others will enjoy being around. Only your Creator can transform the “inside you” into a totally authentic “new real you”. God put great thought and love into designing you; He’ll bring out your true personality transformed into an expression of his love and values. And if you ask Him to show you the reason you were out on this earth He will.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. We all ...are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord Who is the Spirit.” II Corinthians 3:17-18 (HCSB)

How about spending so much time with Jesus that His personality rubs off on you as He shows you how to speak and act?

1. How does the fact that Adam and Eve’s sin shows up in human spiritual DNA influence your life?
2. Why is it ineffective to merely make a New Year’s Resolution to change? Why is it necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to control your thoughts, words and actions in order to transform you?
3. Are you permitting the Holy Spirit to make positive changes in your life?

Are You Starring on Broadway or Being Yourself?

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Are you being yourself, or are you constantly trying to impress people? For many people, life is more like acting than living. Putting on a good front is something taught to us by our society. When some girl talks about all the exciting places her new boyfriend has taken her, and asks her friend where her dates have been taking her lately, an honest, "I haven't been on a date for a year" would be unthinkable. It's not easy to admit that you've never even seen the music video everyone is crazy about. Not exaggerating about your weekend is equally difficult. Saying, "I studied for the chemistry test and I failed it" takes a lot of guts.

Besides trying to make people think we've done great things, we try to impress people by what we wear and what we own. Probably most people don't enjoy all the time they spend putting on makeup, getting a suntan, or shopping for clothes, but feel they have to maintain a good image. Worse than this, Christians often want to appear more "spiritual" than they actually are. A guy once remarked, "I don't want to take my new Bible to church. The people will think I never read it." Others try to use the right phrase and to go to all the right meetings.

God sees and judges you exactly for what you are. He isn't impressed with a holiness act. Any pretense you make in any area of life blocks communication with God. Besides, acting is hard work. Jesus wants us to be completely honest and for us to be ourselves. As soon as you stop pretending to be what you are not, the strain goes away.

"Beware of practicing your piety (religious duties or practices) before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 6: 1).

"Thus, when you give alms (money to the poor), sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6: 2-4, 6, 7).

1. What problem do we encounter when we want others to see our good deeds?
2. Can you think of any way in which you've been trying to be your own "press agent"?
Talk it over with God.
3. How can praying, or witnessing, or giving a testimony be a stage show?

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Blinded by Thanklessness

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If you don't determine to thank God for the way you look, the abilities you have, and the things that happen to you, you're certain to have a blind spot in your vision that could keep you from seeing the good and the positive in your life causing you to envy others. Jealousy always comes from lack of trust in God – you don't trust that God has a reason for you not dating right now, so you're jealous of the person with a girlfriend or a boyfriend; you don't thank God for your curly blond hair, so you're jealous of some beautiful blond; you don't appreciate the clothes you have, so you're jealous of the doctor's daughter's wardrobe; you aren't thankful for the talents God has given you, so you're jealous of the best player on the team.

Every time jealousy raises its ugly head, confess it as sin and determine to be satisfied with what God has given you, and to thank Him for it. Why don't you start with these two practical suggestions? If you find you are jealous of someone right now, decide to pray for that person every day for the next month. This will give you a chance to experience one of God's miracles – a complete attitude change. Second, make a list of all the things you've never thanked God for; then tell God how much you appreciate Him and the things He has given you. Thanklessness is a sin that opens the door to jealousy. Look what happened when Saul wasn't thankful for what God had given him.

“As they were coming home, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with songs of joy, and with instruments of music. And the women sang to one another as they made merry, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him; he said, ‘They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; and what more can he have but the kingdom?’ And Saul eyed David from that day on” (1 Samuel 18: 6-9).

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (James 3: 16).

1. How should Saul have handled the situation?
2. What did jealousy do to Saul? (Read 1 Samuel 18-31)
3. Why is jealousy so dangerous?
4. If you thank God for the way He made you and trust Him for what happens to you, why does that cure jealousy?

You're Not Okay, and Neither Am I

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The school auditorium is packed with students, parents, relatives, and people from the neighborhood. The graduates march in. Except for the fact that you lost your cap on the way in, and your gown is shocking pink while everyone else's is navy blue. It is an exciting evening and a great way to end your illustrious high school career. Then the principal says in a booming voice, "We are pleased to present 'The Personality Minus Award' for this year's graduating class." He calls out your name and the band plays off-key. You wake up from your nightmare, wondering if that's what everyone thinks of you.

Although you should accept yourself as God made you, there are times that you should not feel good about yourself. You're *not* okay if you are not dependable – you can change that. Saying, "Well, I won't worry about my laziness because that's just the way I am," is just like stating, "I can ignore God's Word, and I don't believe God has the power to change me." You don't just accept the fact that you are always late – you *decide* to start being on time.

God has a lot to say about character development, especially in the book of Proverbs. Every teenager should read Proverbs several times, and follow the advice offered, allowing the Holy Spirit to show specific steps necessary to reach the goal. In tenth grade I read a book called *How to Improve Your Personality*. I remember thinking, "This book doesn't say one thing that a person who reads the Bible doesn't already know." Don't use accepting yourself as an excuse for the attitudes and actions that God would give you the power to change. You're not okay and neither am I. We're God's works in progress.

"A faithful person will be richly blessed, ... Proverbs 28:20

"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads to poverty." Proverbs 14:23

"Listen to advice and receive instruction ... and you will be wise." Proverbs 19:20

1. Why should you be thankful for the unchangeables in your life and work to improve the things you can change?
2. Why do you need the guidance of God's Word and the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit to be able to change for the better?
3. Do the changes come instantly or in degrees?

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Who Do You Look Like?

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You may be a rugged individualist, determined to be your own person and not be like anyone else. However, it can't really be done. It's a fact that most people are very much like their parents, and often they most resemble the parent they're determined not to copy. A husband and a wife often think very much alike. A teenager reflects the values of the friends he or she has.

In the final analysis there are only two molds; you can either be like Jesus or like the world. Jesus and the world are opposites, so it's an either-or proposition. Being like the world is easy. You absorb the latest trends in the media, such as the "new" morality, freedom to do your own "thing," and "Pleasure-at-any-price." Behind these is the overriding emphasis of the world – you are the center of the universe and everything should revolve around you.

The basic premise of the world, that mankind is the focal point of everything, always has and always will remain the same. However, the expressions of it will change so fast that in twenty years you'll be the "older" generation. You will have some choice as to what part of the world to follow, and which people will mold your thinking, but you will not be "yourself."

The alternative is to be conformed to the image of Jesus – to not only pattern yourself after Him but also to allow the living Holy Spirit to produce the attitudes and actions of Jesus in you. When that happens, you may not be the most popular person in school – but so what? Being God's friend has eternal rewards!

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12: 2).

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Corinthians 2: 12).

"Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4: 4).

1. What is the world like and what should be the Christian's attitude toward it?
2. What are the consequences of being "an enemy of God" and the benefits of being transformed by the Word of God?

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Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

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Do you resemble Jesus? Maybe answering that question with a “yes” seems impossible to you. Well, the Bible says that God planned long ago that each of us should be like Jesus. God isn’t like the people who make all kinds of plans and dreams that they can’t possibly fulfill. God has the means and the power to work out his plans.

The Holy Spirit has put within you the characteristics of Jesus, just as a child has within him the characteristics of his parents. However, if a two-week-old baby could leave his or her parents forever, it is extremely doubtful that much more than the physical resemblances would show up. Most little children spend hours imitating their parents, and are extremely successful. They spend so much time with their parents that they are bound to pick up character traits.

The traits of Jesus placed within you by the Holy Spirit at your conversion will never show through unless you strive to be like Jesus. This means willingness to deny the thinking of the world in order to follow the teachings of Jesus. It means spending time – a lot of time – with Jesus. The more time you spend with Him, the more you will think, act, and talk like Him – the perfect person.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher” (Luke 6: 40).

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8: 29).

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11: 1).

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you. Leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2: 21).

“He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2: 6).

1. Would God keep demanding of us to do something He would not give us the power to do if we totally depend on Him?
2. Where do we get the power to live more and more as Jesus lived?
3. Is being more like Jesus the most important aim in your life, or does that take second place to other goals?
4. How does the fact that in heaven Christians will totally be like Jesus encourage you?

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The Treasure Inside You

With only a dime in your pocket, you can be as careless and haphazard as you wish. However, if you were carrying a million dollars in cash to deposit in the bank, your whole attitude would be different. It would be one of great care and soberness because of the importance of your mission.

Do you fully realize who lives in you? In Solomon's time God's presence was in a beautiful temple made of stone, but today, God has made our hearts the place where He lives! If you have been born again of the Spirit of God, you carry God in your heart! This should instill in you a sense of awe and respect. *You are the temple of God.* When it dawns on you that you are indeed the house God lives in, you can do nothing but surrender yourself totally to Him.

Since your heart is Christ's home, He should have control over every part of His house. You no longer have the right to think anything you want to; Jesus has a right to dominate your thoughts. What God's temple looks like on the outside is no longer determined by your taste and your sense of style; what you wear must be acceptable to Jesus. God's temple can't be as lazy as it wants to be; God gets to reform the work habits of His temple.

In addition to moving you to submit totally to God, realizing that you are God's temple will give you a sense of value because you have a great God inside you. You don't have to feel worthless and ugly. Having God live within you is the greatest privilege in the world.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20).

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is jointed together and grows into a holy temple on the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2: 19-22).

1. What are the right reasons for you to have a feeling of importance and “belonging”? What are some wrong reasons?
2. Your body is a “little temple” of God, but it joins with all other Christians to make the “big temple” of God. Who must direct the way this living temple fits together and grows?
3. What responsibilities do you have to both the “big temple” and the “little temple” of God?
4. Which is more important, the inside or the outside of the temple?

Chapter 3.

THAT MOUTH OF YOURS

Does Your Tongue Need a Prison Sentence?

“Why did I say that?” Who hasn’t despairingly made that remark? All of us need discretion – the ability to say the right thing at the right time.

Living the Christian life is like operating in enemy territory – sin is everywhere and we must be on the lookout. For that reason the psalmist prayed, “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord.” (Psalm 141:3)

And it isn’t true that if a statement is accurate, a Christian automatically has the right to say it. The person who wants to be considerate and tactful relies on God for every word. This shouldn’t be a self-conscious fear of opening your mouth, but instead like the confidence a child has that he won’t get lost as long as he holds his mother’s hand. Like the child that wanders off, the Christian who decides to run his own show alone creates problems.

“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (Proverbs 10: 19).

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God, God is in heaven and you are on earth; so let your words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5: 2)

Watch your thoughts; they can easily become words. Guarding your speech starts with guarding your heart. Jealousy can quickly cause an unkind word. Trying to protect your selfish interests can cause you to lash out at someone else. Unwillingness to see your own faults can make you defensive.

Contrary to the popular notion that we’re all good at heart, God, who knows the human heart, says it is sinful. Because of this, prideful and cocky people often use words as bullets both in person and on social media. It’s pretty easy to fall into this trap. If you can humbly put yourself under God’s authority, He’ll give you the ability to avoid rash statements, to bless others with your words – and to remain silent when you have nothing positive or helpful to share. Your tongue doesn’t need to go to jail – it needs to belong to someone whose brain is informed daily by the word of God.

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141: 3).

1. What are the problems of talking too much?
2. How can realizing how great God is and how small you are (Ecclesiastes 5: 2) help

you not to say and do rash things?

3. Have you asked God to set a guard over your lips?

Please Erase the Remark I Just Made

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There's an old story about a woman who came to see her pastor. She said, "I've been guilty of spreading false rumors and now I want to undo all the damage."

The pastor told her to come with him. He bought some goose feathers and they climbed to the top of the church's bell tower. The pastor then asked the lady to drop the goose feathers. The wind quickly scattered them. "Now," the pastor ordered, "go down and gather the feathers."

"But, Pastor," protested the woman, "that would be impossible."

"I know," he replied; "just as impossible as taking back all the words you've spoken."

Words don't just disappear. You have an inner "replay button" that keeps playing back certain words someone has said to you. Maybe it's your exasperated father roaring, "If you don't like it here, leave – and don't bother to come back!" or a teacher, at their wit's end, exploding, "You're hopeless. You'll never learn algebra!"

Words like these sometimes affect us for a long time – even if the person who said them didn't really mean them. Talking is one of the most dangerous things any of us can do. Words can't be erased or obliterated, so you must think how your words will affect the other person before you say them.

People who recognize that they don't have the right to say whatever they want can get help from Jesus just by asking for it.

"I tell you, on the Day of Judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter" (Matthew 12: 36).

"But no human being can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so" (James 3: 8-10).

1. Who can tame the tongue?
2. What things shouldn't our tongues be sued for?
3. List some specific ways in which you could be more careful about the things you say.

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Your Mouth Needs a Lie Detector

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A little boy once described a lie as “a terrible sin, but a very present help in time of trouble.” One of the constant temptations faced by all Christians is the temptation to lie. It can be done in so many ways. “Well, it wasn’t my fault,” or, “I didn’t do anything wrong” slip out before we even think.

The truth, however, would sound like this; “ I overturned my drink and ruined your keyboard.”

Do you lie when you want to avoid punishment or unpleasant consequences?

Then there’s exaggeration – “All the other kids (all six of them) are going on the camping trip, and I’m the only one (along with four others) whose parents won’t let me go”; or, “I simply must have a new jacket because my old one is ragged and faded and has ink spots, glue splotches, and salsa stain on it.”

Then there are lies to make us look just a little better; “I knew the answer but I just didn’t say it”; “I thought the program started at 8:00 so I that’s why I’m late”; or, “Didn’t you say the theme was due on Monday instead of Friday?”

We tend to think that everybody stretches the truth a little, so it’s no big deal. God thinks that lying is so bad that He included it in the Ten Commandments. You must not excuse yourself for lying, but God will forgive you if you agree with Him that lying is a sin and confess it.

Take Jesus with you through every day as your own personal Lie Detector. He will teach you how to tell the truth in every situation.

“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Proverbs 12: 19).

“Lying lips are an abomination (something hateful) to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight” (Proverbs 12: 22).

“A righteous man hates falsehood, but a wicked man acts shamefully and disgracefully” (Proverbs 13: 5).

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will not escape” (Proverbs 19: 5).

1. How does God feel about lying?
2. What will happen to liars?
3. Do you tolerate lying and do you consider “stretching” the truth as normal?

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You Mean Complaining Is a Sin?

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Some parts of the Old Testament are rather difficult to understand, and as you read them you think that there's nothing there that applies to you. Yet, people who keep on reading the Old Testament find many verses that almost jump off the pages and tell them how to live. One such verse is Numbers 11: 1; "And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes; and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled."

God hates complaining! In fact, He sent a terrible fire to burn some of the tents of the Israelites as punishment for their complaints. Another time, He sent poisonous snakes. He had parted the Red Sea so they could safely escape slavery, and had drowned Pharaoh's army in the same sea. He was giving them bread from heaven to eat every day. Yet, they complained.

But, look what God has done for us. He has saved us from sin and given us the Bible. We have Christian friends who care about us, as well as families, so much food that most of us must watch our weight, and so many clothes that we can't decide what to wear.

Adults complain about high taxes, the cost of living, presidents they disagree with, and the weather. Teenagers complain about not being able to stay out later, parents who don't understand them, mean teachers, and the price of pizza.

I'll bet even you spend some time every day complaining! But complaining is sin, and God hates it. This is hard to face because most of us would have to admit, "If complaining is a sin, I'm a terrible sinner." Complaining is wrong and we must stop it. Complaining is lack of trust in God and a slap in our Heavenly Father's face who has done so much for us.

Complaining ruins your personality. Everyone tries to avoid a chronic complainer. Ask God to help you hate complaining and to treat complaining as sin, a terrible offense against God – and not as your right to vent your feelings.

"We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer" (1 Corinthians 10: 9, 10).

"Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2: 14, 15).

1. What things are we warned against in these verses?
2. Pray about it and then list the specific things God would have you stop complaining about.

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Snakes, Quails, and Grumblers

What we *think* affects us, but once we verbalize something, it becomes part of us in a much deeper way. People can say things so often that they end up believing them.

When I was in second grade, a boy at school started the day by saying, “I wish I could have a birthday party.” By morning recess he was saying, “I’m having a birthday party,” and by noon he had invited a whole group of classmates to the nonexistent party. We ran home to tell our mothers that we had been invited to a party. The boy’s mother was furious.

We think we are a lot smarter than that second grade boy – but we aren’t. The grownup Israelites in the wilderness talked so much about the “good old days” in Egypt that they forgot how cruel slavery in Egypt had been. Soon they were mad at Moses for bringing them into the terrible wilderness. It took snakebites to bring them to their senses.

Another time some Israelites started complaining that they didn’t have meat to eat, and kept saying that eating manna every day was beyond boring. Soon they all believed they were deprived, forsaken, and protein-starved. (They forgot that the Creator of the universe might also be a nutrition expert.) God then sent them so many quails that the greedy people got sick from eating too much.

If you keep saying something, pretty soon you’ll believe it and act upon it. That means you’d better be careful what you say. Also because saying and believing the wrong thing is so serious, God must sometimes take drastic measures to keep you on track. Next time you’re just about to say, “All the people at that church are hypocrites,” or, “My parents don’t care what I do,” let visions of snakes or quails keep you from disobeying God!”

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (Psalm 19: 14).

“An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous escapes from trouble” (Proverbs 12: 13).

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one” (Colossians 4: 6).

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thessalonians 2: 16, 17).

1. What are the results of saying wrong things? What happens when we say the right things?
2. God can take measures to deal with us if we speak wrongly. What will He do if we speak good things?

Did You Know That Your Mind Is on Parade?

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You know the type. They have names for their teachers, such as “Skinny Neck,” “Gestapo George,” and “Crazy Carlson”. They make nasty comments about the boy whose hair was cut too short and about the girl with the bad complexion. They constantly brag about themselves and put other people down. Their conversations are sprinkled with “I don’t care what anyone says,” and “Nobody is going to tell me what to do.”

Such people get into arguments or fights if anyone says anything even mildly offensive to them. Listening is an activity they avoid because it would deprive them of the opportunity of loudly proclaiming what they think. When a person in authority tries to correct them, to give advice, or to ask them to follow rules laid down for everyone, they interrupt with smart remarks.

The Bible calls people like these “fools” and “scoffers” – and says some very harsh things about them. By their words they show that they are unwilling to change, or to accept correction.

How much of that description of the scoffer fits you? Someone has said, “Every time you open your mouth, your mind goes on parade.” Start improving the parade by letting God deal with attitudes toward your peers, your authorities, and yourself.

“He who corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9: 7-10).

1. What kinds of things does your speech reveal about your character?
 2. How good are you at accepting correction and taking advice?
 3. Where does true wisdom come from?
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Oh, What a Beautiful Tongue You Have!

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People often comment on beautiful eyes, flawless complexion, and lovely smiles, but no one ever says, “Oh, what a beautiful tongue you have!” Yet, that would be the nicest compliment you could ever receive – what you say can do so much good. Words of encouragement can help someone through an especially hard day. Telling your mother you love her could brighten her whole month, and saying thank you to a teacher might make him think it’s been worth the effort.

Your tongue can say something cheerful when everyone else is complaining and it can say something nice about the person everyone else is putting down. The cruel things people say make living in this world extremely difficult. Your tongue can make a big difference in the atmosphere and make life easier for a lot of people.

Your tongue can also introduce people to Jesus and tell others that God loves them. Your tongue, more than any other part of your body, can make you a person worth knowing – one who brings comfort and cheerfulness wherever you go. Stop concentrating solely on getting the world’s best tan and getting your hair to go just right; start praying that God will teach you to say the right things. That’s the first step toward having a beautiful tongue.

“The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly” (Proverbs 15: 2).

“To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is” (Proverbs 15: 23).

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Proverbs 25: 11).

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught” (Isaiah 50: 4).

1. Do you speak before thinking, or do you carefully decide what to say?
2. When was the last time you gave encouragement to someone who needed it?
3. How do we learn to say the things that would really help people? (See Isaiah 50: 4).

