

Do you see yourself as God sees you?

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Oftentimes we need other people to reflect back to us what our abilities and strengths are. The “I can’t” attitude needs adjusting and it takes the skill of a Sunday school teacher, a baseball coach, a grandparent, or a close friend to encourage us to move beyond our station in life that we have hunkered down in. The Bible is the most wonderful source to turn to when questioning “What earthly good am I?”

When my grandson, Jeromy was around 4 years old, we tried to encourage him to do some new things. We took him to the 2 cent bridge with the intention of walking across it with him. He took a few steps and then shook his head and stood in place refusing to budge forward. The bridge swings as you walk and it is a bit unnerving, but I thought he would enjoy doing something different. Not that day! Next we took him to the golden arches and bought him a happy meal. There were children playing in the play room so we ate our lunch surrounded by lots of rambunctious children. Jeromy watched for a while and then hesitantly went over to the gym and watched the children climb up on the rungs and ladders to the top and once they got up there they would shout to the parents “Hey, look where I am! I am way up high! Look Mom! Look Dad! See where I am!”

Finally one little girl around Jeromy’s age noticed him watching the fun. She asked him what his name was and he answered “Jeromy”. She asked him to climb up to the top of the gym with her cause it was lots of fun. Jeromy didn’t answer. He just watched. She finally came over to him, took his arm and told him that she would go up after him. He was going to be okay because she was right behind him. Not wanting to have a little girl get the better of him, Jeromy took a step and got to the first level. She giggled and encouraged him to go the second level and when he got there, she smiled and told him that he was doing great. Before we realized it, Jeromy was at the very top sitting in the plane cockpit and waving to us. The little girl was chattering a mile a minute and pleased as could be that she had helped Jeromy get over the fear of climbing to the top. From then on, he looked forward to climbing, sliding, and riding in the plane at the top of the gym.

The story of Naaman is so typical of human nature. Naaman had plenty of medals earned by using his intelligence to win military battles. God had even allowed his military power to overcome the Israelites when they turned from worshipping him to offering sacrifices to false gods. You will find this story in 2 Kings 5. Naaman had captured a young maiden and took her to his home as a servant for his wife. This child, I imagine, was just as afraid as anyone who has to go to a new town, a new environment regardless of where it is or the circumstances of their journey. She was separated from her parents and she could have been bitter and angry and refused to speak to her master about God, but she didn’t respond to her situation that way. When she realized that her master was sad

because her husband had leprosy and that the disease was a death sentence, the child mentioned that there was a prophet in Israel that could heal Naaman's leprosy.

Word reached the king of Israel and he was upset that anyone would suggest that he could do anything about leprosy. It certainly was beyond him to heal anyone; only God is able to do that. Elisha heard about the matter and told the king to have Naaman come to him. Naaman arrived riding in a fancy chariot drawn by horses carrying lots of gold and silver, raiment and servants. He stopped in front of Elisha's door and a servant came out and gave him the message that he was to go to the Jordan River and dip 7 times and he would be healed. Naaman was furious for he wasn't even given an audience with the prophet. He expected him to come out looking towards heaven, waving his hand over his skin and praying to his God for healing. There were cleaner rivers in Syria than the Jordan River. What a waste of time this was! He turned his chariot around and headed back home. His servant asked him this question, "If the prophet had asked you to do some great thing, you would have done your best to obey so you could live. Why not do what he asked? What harm would it do to try?" Naaman finally consented and after 7 dips in the river, his skin was as clear and soft as a newborn baby. What if the servant hadn't intervened and reasoned with him? He would never have been healed and would have died from his disease. What if his "I can't bring myself to do this" had been his final decision? He would never have experienced the power of God in his life and came to respect Jehovah.

The Bible says that God uses the foolishness of the cross and preaching to convict people of their sinful ways and to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) Amazing!

I've heard people say that praying seems like talking to oneself. I assure you that God hears the cry of every heart that is sincere in asking for his help in their lives.

In Genesis 28:16, Jacob (deceiver) had a dream while resting his head on a rock. In his dream he saw a ladder that reached from earth to heaven, and God's angels were going up and down the ladder. The LORD was standing by the ladder and he spoke to Jacob telling him that he is the God of Abraham and Isaac. He promised to give him the land that had been promised to his family that he was now sleeping on. His family would be a blessing to all people. God promised never to leave Jacob and he would do everything that he had promised to do for Abraham's family lineage. Jacob woke up suddenly and thought, "The LORD is in this place and I didn't even know it." It frightened Jacob to realize that God was right there so he took the rock that he had used for a pillow and he stood it up for a place to worship. God changed his name to Israel. Genesis 32:28. It means one who wrestled with God and with men and prevailed. He would no longer be a deceiver for he now had experienced the holy God. Do you have a relationship with God? Many people have gone through tough times and after the storm passes by they realize that God was with them all the time.

In the book of Daniel, there were three Hebrew children who refused to bow down to the gold statue that the king had set up in the valley. He commanded all people to bow to it when music started. There was a threat of being thrown into a fiery furnace for anyone

who dared to defy the king. Reports reached the king that three foreigners would not bow to the gold statue. The king commanded them to be brought to him to stand before his throne. See Daniel 3. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were brought before the king and the king confronted them concerning their refusal to obey his commandment. He offered to give them one more chance to change their minds so when the music started they could bow before the statue and their lives would be spared. If they continued to refuse they would be thrown into the furnace immediately. He ended his threat with these words, "No god can save you from me." The three men replied, "Your Majesty, we don't need to defend ourselves. The God we worship can save us from you and your flaming furnace. But even if he doesn't, we still won't worship your gods and the gold statue that you have set up."

Nebuchadnezzar's face twisted with anger at the three men. He ordered the furnace to be cranked up seven times hotter than usual. Then he commanded some of his strongest soldiers to tie the men up and throw them into the flames. It was to be done immediately. The three men were thrown bound with cords wearing their clothes and even their turbans on into the flames. The fire was so hot that the flames leaped out and killed the soldiers that had thrown them into the fire. Suddenly the king jumped up and shouted, "Weren't there only three men tied up and thrown into the fire?" The people answered, "Yes, your majesty." "But", said the king, "I see four men walking around in the fire. None of them is tied up or harmed and the fourth one is like the Son of God." Nebuchadnezzar went closer and shouted, "You servants of the Most High God, come out at once." They came out and the king and his high officials gathered around them. The men were not burned, their hair wasn't scorched and their clothes didn't even smell of smoke. The king praised their God for sending an angel to rescue the men. They trusted in God and refused to disobey him and God honored their faith and revealed his power to the king. The king realized that there was a higher power than his that was to be honored. He gave glory and honor to the Almighty God of heaven. He also elevated the three Hebrew children to high positions in the Babylon Province.

While Jesus was dying on the cross, many people mocked him and shouted at him that if he was the Messiah to come down from the cross. Jesus asked his Father to forgive them for they didn't know what they were doing. As he hung between two thieves, they heard his words. One of them realized that Jesus was innocent and he rebuked the other criminal for his railings at Jesus. He insulted Jesus by saying, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and save us!" The other thief replied, "Don't you fear God? Aren't you getting the same punishment as this man? We had punishment coming to us because of our deeds, but this man did nothing wrong." Then he asked Jesus to remember him when he came into power. Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Two criminals; one recognized Jesus as the Messiah and was saved by faith and the other one just wanted to be spared punishment for his wrong doing. One entered heaven; the other one refused the only hope that was given to mankind, the blood of Jesus Christ.

In John 20, Mary Magdalene of whom Jesus cast out 7 devils went to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body and found the tomb empty. She stood outside the tomb weeping and a man approached her. It was Jesus but she didn't recognize him. He asked her why she was crying and who she was seeking. She, thinking that he was the gardener said, "Sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me so I can go and get him." Then Jesus said, "Mary". She turned to him and said, "Raboni" meaning "teacher." Jesus sent her to tell his disciples that he had risen from the dead and was going to his Father and his God as well as her Father and her God. He elevated her to minister to his disciples with the truth of his resurrection to give them hope, joy and direction.

We don't always recognize Jesus for often he stands in the shadows and guides us with his hand and only later, do we realize how he stepped into the midst of our circumstances and changed the outcome for our benefit. He raises us up higher than we ever thought possible, our faith is increased as we become vessels of honor for his glory.

My prayer is that each person who reads these words will realize that God is near to all of us. See Acts 17:27. Paul taught the people from Athens that they worshiped an unknown God and he was there to tell them about him. God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth and he doesn't dwell in temples made with human hands. He doesn't need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. From one person God made all nations who live on earth, and he decided when and where every nation should be. God has done all this, so that we will look for him and reach out and find him. He isn't far from any of us and he gives us the power to live, to move, and to be who we are. We are his children!

Philippians 4:13 says this: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Look at Isaiah 61. Jesus was chosen and sent by his heavenly Father to tell the oppressed the good news; to heal the brokenhearted, and to announce freedom for prisoners and captives. He was sent to comfort those who mourn, to give them flowers in place of their sorrow, olive oil in place of their tears and joyous praise in place of broken hearts.

Mary, a poor virgin girl, was chosen by the Father to bring forth the Son of God and to call his name, Jesus, for he would save his people from their sins. In Luke 1:46, Mary sang a song of praise. She praised the Lord with all her heart for she was glad because of God her Savior for he cared for her even as a humble servant. From that time on, people would say that God had blessed her. God All-Powerful had done great things for her and his name is holy. The LORD uses his powerful arm to scatter the proud and he drags strong leaders from their thrones and puts humble people in places of power. God gives the hungry good things to eat and sends the rich away with nothing. God helps his servant Israel and is always merciful to his people. The Lord made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his family forever! Are you a part of the family of God?

The Lord elevates those who are humble before him and who trust in his love and care!