

Do You Like the Person You've Become?

Episode 8 – Group Leader Podcast

Introduction

I was on a run a while back, and I was listening to an album by a band named Bastille. One of the reasons I like them is because their songs bring up interesting spiritual questions.

As I was running, one of those questions hit me like a ton of bricks.

I was listening to the song called “The Weight of Living, Pt. 2.” Here are the lyrics that caught my attention:

It all crept up on you, in the night it got you

And plagued your mind, it plagues your mind

Every day that passes, faster than the last did

And you'll be old soon, you'll be old

Do you like the person you've become?

Do you like the person you've become? That's a loaded question—so loaded that most of us don't want to think about it. But it's an important question, because when we stop to think about it, many of us *don't* like the person we've become.

We know we want to be better or different or happier or more like Jesus, but we don't feel like we're getting anywhere. We have really good intentions to stop gossiping or losing our temper or judging people, or start doing more nice things for people close to us. We know we want to change, so we just start trying stuff.

We read some books, do some Googling, and before we know it we've got these huge lists of stuff—these standards—we think we have to achieve in order to be the person we want to be. But then we take stock of our lives next to those standards, and we realize we fall pretty short.

When you think of the person you want to be and the person you are right now, there might be a pretty big difference. When we sense that difference our tendency is to be hard on ourselves, and that leads us to a place where we're shouldering the weight—the burden—of not living up to those standards.

That's a dangerous place to be because shouldering that weight will eventually suffocate you emotionally, spiritually, even physically.

I want to talk about how we move past living like that—how we move past living under the weight of our own standards of perfection—but first we need to talk about how we come to live under these different standards.

All of us are trying to live up to something

Whether you know it or not, you're trying to live up to some standard in life that you've either created for yourself or that has been created for you. Much of that has to do with your family or cultural background. For instance, there are really two main value structures in our culture, two main ways we form our identity—the traditional and the Western.

If you're in a traditional structure of identity formation then you draw your sense of self-worth from the community, or from your family. Your sense of value comes from what you contribute to that community and what your place is in it. This is more prevalent in other countries, but many families here in the U.S. still have a strong sense of this.

If you're in a Western structure of identity formation, then you draw your sense of self-worth from your individuality. You're not concerned with the needs of the community as much as you are with your own needs. Your sense of self-worth is tied to what job you can get, what kind of life you can make, and what's best for you. This is obviously the more predominant structure for identity formation for most of us.

I should point out that neither is better or worse than the other. This is simply a picture of how the two structures work. But it's important to know because it helps us understand what standards we're trying to live up to and why we're trying to do it.

For instance, you're a person in a Western setting here in America that might try to live up to several different standards. Some of those standards have to do with other people's perceptions of you, but the root of the standards lies in what you think about your own performance, relationships, wealth, or any number of things.

The tendency today is to set up some standard for yourself—maybe it's a certain car or possession, a particular relationship, or status—then judge your value and self-worth based on how well you think you're performing next to your standards.

Then there are the standards that come from a society that tells us to look a certain way, behave a certain way, and live a certain way. These differ depending on your family, where you were raised, or what kind of job you have.

What we do, then, is sort through our own standards and those of others and pick the standards we think will most fulfill us, or that will help us realize the version of ourselves we hope to achieve.

When you realize identities are formed like this, you realize you're not nearly as free as you like to think. The pressures from outside and inside yourself influence how you perceive your sense of value and worth.

What this adds up to is that we're all bound to something; we're all trying to live up to something.

Don't you feel that in your own life?

The weight of living is crushing

Here's the real problem with all of this. If all of us are trying to live up to something, then sooner or later the weight of living will be crushing.

And there is a weight to life itself, isn't there? All of us carry some kind of standard around that we're trying to live up to, and each one of them is just another burden weighing us down. Many of the standards we've talked about aren't even necessarily bad things, but when you make them your source of self-worth and value then you will always be crushed beneath the weight of them.

A guy that had been a struggling writer once wrote about this once in *The New York Times*. He was reflecting on this maddening season in his life where he couldn't write anything halfway decent, and he always had a sense of frustration about his life and his work. What he said about this time was really interesting. He wrote,

"When good writing was my only goal, I made the quality of my work the measure of my worth. For this reason, I wasn't able to read my own writing well. I couldn't tell whether something I had just written was good or bad, because I needed it to be good in order to feel sane."

For anyone that's ever made their work, their image, or their status *everything*, you know exactly what he's talking about. He made the *quality* of his work the *measure* of his worth. If he wasn't a good writer, he wasn't a good person, and he couldn't be happy. But of course that kind of thinking makes you so neurotic that you never think you're a good writer, so you'll never be happy.

The weight of living up to his own standard was crushing him.

What are you making the measure of your worth? Is it a relationship? How good of a parent you think you are? Your social status? Your reputation?

Maybe you're not making something the measure of your worth, but there's something else going on. Instead of making something the measure of your worth, you're telling yourself lies about how to make yourself happy.

A guy named Henrik Ibsen refers to these things as "life-lies"—these things we tell ourselves if we can *just get them*, then we'll be happy.

If I can just get that car, just get that girl, just get that job—*then* I'll be happy.

But that sets you up for a huge problem. Ibsen said if you "take the life-lie away from the average man you take away his happiness."

And isn't that how it works? You told yourself the iPhone 7 was going to change everything, but it didn't. Now you're looking forward to the iPhone 8, because that maybe that one really will.

You tell yourself if you can just get that house on the lake, just get your boss to notice you, or just get your children in to that school, then you'll be happy.

And even if you get one of those things, the feeling never lasts. Something else always comes along and you tell yourself another lie.

Here's why you need to know about this. Every one of our life-lies can and will be taken from us at some point because everything in this life is temporary. And when that happens, we will be crushed under the weight of it. All the self-worth, all the value we assign to ourselves because of our life-lies will disappear in an instant.

If all of us are under the weight of living and we'll eventually be crushed under it, then what can we do? If you don't like the person you've become, what can you do about it?

Jesus can bear the weight

Let's see what Jesus said about this in some familiar words of his. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says these words:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

The first thing to understand here is the word “yoke,” because we don't really use that term. A yoke was basically a harness that connected an animal, like a donkey or an ox, to a tool of some kind. It might have been a till or a wagon or something like that.

Regardless of what an animal was yoked to, it was a burden to that animal. It was something that weighed them down and made their life harder. People would yoke animals to these tools because it was something they couldn't do themselves. It was too heavy or straining for them to do alone.

Jesus is using that imagery to talk about the burdens and standards we're trying to live up to that we discussed earlier. He's saying, “I know you're tired of trying to live up. I know you're weary from the weight of living. Come to me, and I'll show you how to take a real rest.”

He's pointing out again that we're all burdened by something—that the weight of living is on us all. We're all yoked to *something*.

But what he doesn't say about burdens is that we don't have to have any. Did you notice that?

Jesus didn't promise for us not to be yoked to anything—he promised to give us rest, relief, from the weight of living, if we yoke ourselves to *him* instead. We're always going to be yoked to something, after all, so Jesus is telling us to yoke ourselves to him so we can learn from him and be with him; so we can see how to live our lives unburdened by the expectations and standards of ourselves and others, because those things aren't going away.

What Jesus is really offering us is a way out of making all these standards our sense of self-worth and our sense of value. He's saying, “If you don't like the person you've become, maybe it's because you've got

yourself yoked to the wrong thing. You're trying to become the wrong person. Yoke yourself to me—watch me, learn from me—and I'll show you how to find rest and be the person I created you to be.”

The longer I follow Jesus the more I realize that he alone can bear the weight of living. He alone can give you a sense of meaning outside yourself, outside of others. He's the only place you can go to find an identity that'll last; the only place you can go where the weight of living won't crush you.

And that's because of the gospel.

The gospel that tells us that God *does* have a standard—and that standard is absolute perfection, across the board. That's a standard none of us can ever meet.

But that's the beauty of God sending Jesus, because Jesus met every one of God's standards. He lived the perfect life we could never live, and died the death we should have died. He did that willingly, even though none of us deserved it.

And when Jesus died in our place, he made a way for us to meet God's standard of perfection. That way is putting our faith in him—believing that his sacrifice on the cross was for you, and then coming under his lordship for your life.

And when we do that, we immediately meet God's perfect standard. We measure up.

But pay attention to how it works. Jesus saved us on his own and made that salvation available to us by faith alone. That means nothing we can do will ever earn us salvation in God's eyes—no amount of good deeds or anything else. In Christianity, salvation isn't earned—it's accepted.

That's grace.

God made a way for us to be saved when we didn't deserve to be. And when we make that truth, that reality, the sense of our identity and self worth and value, we're able to come out from under all those burdens and standards we're living with right now.

Because the only standard that matters has already been met by Jesus.

And finding your identity in him is the only way you'll ever be able to look back on your life at any point and be able to say you truly like the person you've become.

Take care.