

Are You on Cruise Control?

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Identity, Purpose, Belonging / Luke 2:41–52; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

Jesus wasn't scared as a child to answer question adults asked Him because he knew that God was with Him. Jesus lives in you.

Notes

Pg. 137-139 in Who Am I Lord? How we define ourselves changes what we consider success or failure.

1 Corinthians 2 (not our wisdom)

Struggled to do Hebrew because I didn't think I was going to be good at it

August 5, 2024 Bible in a Year

pg. 169-170 who am I Lord?

August 6, 2024 Bible in a Year

Pg 8-9 Practicing the Way (Jewish school)

Apprentice, pg. Practicing the Way

pg. 97 hidden faces

You is Kind, You is Smart, You is Important from the movie The Help

After teaching in the public school system for 17 years there are some phrases, particularly with teaching math, that I have heard often, “I can’t do this,” or “I’m not smart enough to do this.” This is something I would start the first of the school year working on right away with students, their mindset and what they, or other people have told them, about themselves. But if we can all be perfectly honest in this room, we’ve also probably said this about ourselves or continue to. Think back, have you ever felt not

smart enough? I sure have. I've actually been afraid to not feel smart enough in a room, so I'll remain pretty quiet.

The following is not to boast about my achievements, but hopefully the exact opposite, to develop an understanding of the journey I've been on with God and his power and wisdom, not my own.

From a very early age teachers discovered I was gifted in math. They would usually have to find extra things for me to do in class as I would finish work quickly. I remember my grade 4 math teacher giving me the math textbook at one point and saying something along the lines of I could work my way through it on my own. So I did. I remember taking my textbook with me as I would walk with my siblings to the river down the road, they would go fishing and I would sit on the side of the river bank working away through the math textbook. This continued throughout elementary school and once I got to junior high there was a small group of us that they realized needed more of a challenge, so they skipped us up a grade for math and we formed our own little class of about 5 students, teaching ourselves with the support of a teacher. Math was completely natural to me. I took this natural gift from God and decided I wanted to become a math teacher. I completed a math undergraduate degree with a thesis, received a full scholarship to continue on my research in a masters level program anywhere in Canada, but decided I still wanted to

be a teacher, despite the urgings from so many of my professors to not waste my talent on just teaching (yes, that seemed to be the general consensus, why was I throwing away a free ride to continue on my math education to become a teacher), but I had always wanted to be a teacher. I didn't want the acknowledgement of my abilities, but I would often be labelled as "the smart one." And so my label, my identity, got wrapped around being the smart one. Who was I if I wasn't the smart one? I finished my undergraduate degree, an education degree, and three masters degrees with young children at home, there was nothing left to achieve academically in the teaching world. I was exactly where I thought I was supposed to be. Teaching math at the school where my kids would eventually end up. I set life on cruise control. Cruise control is one of those funny inventions when you think about it.

It was invented in the 1940s by a man named Ralph Teetor, a talented mechanical engineer. When he was five years old, he injured his eye and ultimately became blind. Teetor was inspired to invent cruise control when, as a passenger in his lawyer's car, he became irritated by the constant jerking of the car speeding up and slowing down. The rocking motion annoyed him to the point that he began tinkering with the concept of a speed control device. I, like Ralph, just wanted to cruise along, no jolting.

I was waking up, going to work, doing what I needed to do, coming home, raising a family, repeat. Then things changed. God asked me to do something I didn't think I could do, I didn't think I was smart enough for. If I did it and it didn't turn out perfectly, what would people think of me, what would I think of myself? I had to let go of the label, step into some discomfort, and rely on his power and wisdom.

I signed up for school, but nothing like I had ever done before. My first class was going well, I relatively knew what I was doing and then the middle of the semester hit and the syllabus said I had to write a theological paper, on a certain topic....I remember thinking...how do I write a theological paper.....what was a theological paper, what did it look like? One day I was talking to a friend after another class and saying, I have no idea what they are talking...there are so many names I've never heard of. I don't feel like I can even ask a question because I don't know where or how to enter the conversation and by the time I figure things out slightly, the conversation has moved on. I didn't know who I was, if I wasn't the smart one.

The passage for today comes from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

If you can go back in your mind to the passage as it was read this morning, there's one verse I want to focus on for a minute, the last verse, so that your faith might rest NOT on

human wisdom but on the power of God.

When was the last time you relied on the power of God, instead of your own wisdom? Do you allow God to fully take the wheel and let him power your life? Yet, in this day and age, isn't so much emphasize put on human wisdom?

We've even created a system to measure intelligence, the IQ test, which stands for "intelligence quotient" and is a standard of measurement used to assess a person's mental aptitude compared to a group of their peers. Scores above a certain number are labeled as above average or "very superior," while scores under a certain number are considered below average or labeled as "borderline impaired." Some use IQ tests to rate students. You can't get into certain universities, particularly in other countries, without a certain rating on the IQ test.

How much more does the world acknowledge those with the top marks, those who have made it to the top of the corporate ladder? Not to say that those are not potentially talents God has given those individuals, but I find as a society, we rely too much on praising those just because of a high status, than recognizing the power and wisdom of God in people's lives.

Understanding yourself as a son or daughter of God revolutionizes your gauge for success or failure. If your identity is overly rooted in your job, if that's how you define

who you are, you'll find it hard to retire. If things turn south at work, if the projects you're working on don't go as well as you'd like, that becomes a devastating tragedy. It's not just that you've failed at work or that the business that you're working for is failing. You, as you've defined yourself, are a failure. And when you've put yourself in that position it's a hard blow to yourself.

Or if you're wrapped your identity around the raising of your children or grandchildren, that the sins and mistakes of your kids, even the failings common to particular stages of their growth, become unacceptable. If "who you are" is the mother or father of this child, then that child's successes and failures become your successes and failures to an unhealthy degree.

Paul writes before this passage in the letter:

| 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 (NRSV)

| For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

| For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

| "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

| and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

| Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For

Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

We need to rely on God's wisdom, not ours. God's strength, not ours.

The world is looking for solutions. Solutions to this virus? Solutions for re-opening the economy? Solutions to help small businesses? Our world has been turned upside down. We have panic, protests, massive problems. There is no escaping it. Don't get me wrong, I value our God-given intellect and capacity to create and provide solutions, but it can't replace seeking the counsel of the Lord. Much of human wisdom, outside of God's counsel, falls short of the fullness of divine blessing and power. Pride always has an end, and arrogance leads us away from the courts of the Lord.

Paul then challenges the value system of misplaced shame and honor by human standards that the Corinthians were reappropriating from the world.

In first-century Corinth, people placed great value on rhetorical skills. But this isn't just a past problem. The inclination to place a high value on power, wealth, and privilege continues today. People who have accumulated these attributes receive honor. We often attach importance

to these measures of success and aspire to them. This adds incentive to maintain the image of success.

As Paul continues in the letter:

1 Corinthians 2:6–10 NRSV

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,

nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him”—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Paul's words to the Corinthian believers continue to challenge followers of Jesus to question the values of our cultures and our preoccupation with self-image. Hays suggests that “whenever we find Christian faith presented in slick, high-tech, high-gloss images, ... we should ask ourselves immediately whether the gospel that is being proclaimed here is the word of the cross or whether it is some form of human boasting through image manipulation.”

The Corinthians are thinking in categories that belong to that age, and they have come under the influence of the

rulers of their time. Here the rulers of this age are not the cosmic powers but human rulers—probably those who are wise, strong, and wellborn, and in particular those who were responsible for crucifying Jesus.

Paul writes that God declared the mystery before the ages for our glory. Paul is contrasting the glory that God grants to all believers over against the individual glory that some of the Corinthian Christians were claiming for themselves in comparison with other Christians (including Paul) based on their presumed spiritual maturity and wisdom

As Joe Heschmeyer writes, “If your identity is rooted in Christ, and in being a child of God alongside Christ, the question of success and failure takes on a completely different light. Jesus promises us that “in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He already achieved success on the cross and in his rising from the tomb. He defeated sin and death, the two most fearsome foes of humanity. And he offers us the opportunity to join his team - a team that’s not just winning but has already won. As Saint John says, “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). This perspective changes everything. It’s the difference between, “I’m a failure, because my work

performance is lagging,” and “My work performance is lagging, but that’s a small cross on my road to eternal life.” The number of likes and tweets you get simply won’t matter as much, and you’ll feel less obliged to keep up with the Joneses or to “outparent” the parents next door. You’ll be able to breath a little easier, for finding your identity in Christ is liberating. The victory has already been won.

At the beginning of every week when I sit down to start writing the message for the week I am often reminded of how much I need to rely on God’s power and not my own again, which I didn’t really do in my past career. I’ve come to realize the importance of what Paul says, “so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”

I enjoy listening to Rick Warren and credit God talking a lot to me through his messages when I struggled to read during my concussions as I would listen to his messages a lot when lying in bed with headaches. I remember one time Rick said, “I’m not that smart, but I do know one thing: It is always too soon to quit. You are never a failure until you quit, and it’s always too soon to quit. God uses tough times to test our persistence. When we started Saddleback, I preached the first sermon to one person: my wife. She thought it was too long. Thirty-one years later, she’s still saying my sermons are too long!

I thought when we started a church we’d get a building

quickly. We went 15 years without a building. In the first 13 years of Saddleback Church, we used 79 different facilities. You know how many times I wanted to resign from Saddleback Church? Nearly every Monday morning, when I think, “God, surely somebody could have done a better job than I did yesterday.”

But so many years later he continued on because he relied on the power of God, God’s wisdom, not his own.

I don’t say this because I want to quit every Monday morning, far from it, I love where God has placed me, but there are times that I wonder if I’m smart enough for it, I could relate to what Rick Warren was saying. Then I remember, the last thing God said to me before I applied for this position, I told him I wasn’t strong enough for this, and he said, I know you’re not but I am. God called me, I need to rely on His power and wisdom, not my own. For so much of my life I relied on myself, my own abilities and when I didn’t think I was smart enough, I either didn’t do it or became very anxious, but this time I feel the difference.

As Paul says, the focus needs to be on Jesus. Rely on the Spirit. God’s power and God will take care of the rest. You are capable of anything God calls you to do, if you let God lead the way.

Psalm 32:8-9, The Passion Translation, God says ‘I will stay close to you, instructing and guiding you along the

pathway for your life. I will advise you along the way and lead you forth with my eyes as your guide. So don't make it difficult; don't be stubborn when I take you where you've not been before. Don't make me tug you and pull you along. Just come with me!"

And so as you make decisions for your life, today and in the future and as we will inevitably make decisions for the church today and in the future, rest not on your own wisdom but the power of God. Seek his counsel. Give it all over to God and say, lead me/us, show us your will, not our own. God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. Remember Paul's words, "So that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God." Don't remain on cruise control and just let life pass you by, if so you may never know the full extent of the wonderful adventure of hope, joy, and love that God has in store for you.