

Not Perfect, Yet

Job 42:1-6

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What was your life like as a kid?

Were you involved in sports, music, gymnastics, school?

When we started out, how good were we really?

Were we Sydney Crosby, or Mozart, or Einstein on day one?

Could we:

- Play all the pieces
- Make all the shots or passes
- Know all the rules
- Have the same knowledge as our teachers, coaches

Did we give up at the first sign of failure?

What were your coaches, teachers, parents like – patient, understanding, demanding, frustrating, rude, mean, loving, forgiving?

We all had different experiences, but few if any of us were naturals at what we did and therefore perfect.

How about our work life –

Were any of us the CEO on day one?

Did we know everything, or make all the right decisions?

Did you make mistakes, fail at things?

Do you still make mistakes? Need help? Have perfect information to make decisions?

When you are in tough do you struggle to get better? Strive to get your work done? Spend hours toiling to get results?

What about your Christian life:

- Were you perfect when you committed your life to Christ?
- Did you have all the answers?
- Did you overcome your sin immediately? Have you become sinless?
- Did you have, do you have good role models – people who encourage, guide, challenge, support you; or
- Do you have people around you who pull at you – tell you that you can't make it; that you are failing; saying I told you so?
- Do you get frustrated with yourself when you fail? Do you feel you should be better? That your struggle with sin – whatever it may be – anger, pride, lust, coveting, gossip, bitterness...just doesn't seem to end.
- Do you long for the day when you will overcome these struggles.
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Let's be honest with ourselves – none of us is perfect, none of us has it all together.

Let me start with myself, I am Dave James and I am a sinner and someone who fails – someone who struggles with pride and other sins.

I struggle with the need to have it all together – or appear to have it all together. I am a strong ex-military guy who was once told by my boss that I walk like I am marching, dress like I am supposed to, never show any signs of imperfection. He suggested I needed to have a quirk, something that is uniquely but authentically me, something that is not outwardly perfect, something memorable.

More recently I have come to realize the toll that trying to appear to have it all together has on you – the stress and strain it puts on us.

I will come back to that in a little while, but before I do I want to look at what the bible tells us:

Let's take a few people from the bible and do a brief dive into them:

Let's start with Job. Pastor Tom has spoken a lot about Job over the fall and he will finish next week. In Job 1 we find God telling Satan how there is no one like Job on all the earth. In the end in Job 42 we see Job repenting for his lack of knowledge – he had heard about God, but in encountering God he realized his imperfection – not all knowledgeable or all powerful.

How about David – A man after God's own heart

- He didn't raise his kids particularly well. For example Absalom, his oldest, tried to take over the kingdom and kill David;
- David coveted Bathsheba, had an affair with her, and committed murder to cover up his sin;
- He sinned and ordered that the fighting men be counted resulting in God's wrath against Jerusalem

Consider Abraham – the father of many nations lied to others, pretending his wife was his sister

Then there is Peter – after spending three years with Christ, Peter denied him three times within hours of his arrest;

Paul – He was persecuting Christians, having them killed or put in jail. He calls himself the worst of all sinners; and yet Christ changed his path on the road to Damascus. He wrote much of the New Testament from which we learn how to live for Christ.

Why do we sometimes think we are better, or will have greater success than these individuals?

Why do we sometimes keep from admitting our struggles to others around us? Why do we sometimes hide behind masks?

Some of you may be thinking, I don't hide behind a mask, and maybe you don't. So let me focus on myself –

I have hidden behind masks. By way of a very simple example, when asked "how are you doing?" I have answered with the typical Sunday morning response – "Really good thanks, how about you."

Even though leaving the house that very morning I may have yelled at my kids, cursed under my breath at the guy who was going slow and making me late for church; and that week I struggled at work and home, tired, overworked, and frustrated but I wouldn't share that.

Perhaps I didn't want to burden others, perhaps I didn't want to appear less than adequate, or not having it all together.

Why wouldn't I share those feelings and thoughts? Do I think I shouldn't have them, that I am somehow beyond them? Do I think I need to somehow be perfect and can't share those struggles with others? Do I think I am the only one struggling?

Do I believe or think that others can't possibly feel that way, or that I need to be seen to have it all together, because others seem to have it together – why can't I do as much as others seem to be able to do? Why can't I seem to be as with it as they are?

Sometimes I struggle with parts of the bible that call me to be perfect, or perhaps more accurately, I think that because the passages are there I need to be seen to be perfect, even when I know I am not.

For example, Matthew 5:48, where Jesus says during the speech on the mount:

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”

Or, in 1 Peter 1:15-16:

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.””

Or how about the greatest commandment:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength”

Or how about this passage from Paul to the Colossians:

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... but you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth” Colossians 3: 5-8

How many of us live up to this? How many of us feel like the Christian life is sometimes too hard – we can't meet God's standard? How many of us from time to time give up or give in?

How many of us sit in the church on Sunday and hear a call to discipleship, and think that's easy for Pastor Tom to say – he has it all together, he is a pastor. We normal people can't achieve this, I have all these other pressures in my life he doesn't have.

How many of you look at other Christians and think I can't be like him, he is so put together. How many of you think that about me, or the other elders? Thinking - They wouldn't be elders unless they had it all together.

How many of you think – this is as good as I can get / be?

Let me encourage you – you are not alone, we all struggle with our faith, with trials and temptations, with doubt or frustration. I do, the elders do, the pastors do – everyone does and so did the disciples.

Paul in particular struggled. He talks about it several times in his letters, at the same time that he is encouraging and exhorting people to strive to live a life worthy of Christ.

James tells us that “we all stumble in many ways”. And Paul who calls us to strive for a life worthy of Christ, recognizes that we are only human – we aren't God. Paul himself struggled and found grace in God:

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 – Paul's thorn

He also shares in his letter to the Romans:

Read Romans 7:15-23

Paul, like us struggled with sin and pride, and conceit, and he did what he didn't want to do. Here is this man who God used to reach the Gentiles and to raise up churches and Christians across Asia and parts of what is now Europe, yet he struggled. We can find encouragement in this – we will not be perfected this side of heaven:

Read Philippians 3: 7-17

Paul set an example for us. He encourages us to look to him, and others who walk according to his example.

He exhorts us to find those around us who humbly recognize their sinfulness, and their struggle, and yet by God's grace they strive to live a life worthy of Christ, to press on toward the goal.

Those who live authentically not perfectly.

Those who strive to follow what the bible teaches – about what a godly life looks like, a life characterized by being set apart for God.

Those who in their struggle rest on God's grace and find strength in him during times of weakness.

Do you know people like that? Have you met them? Are you one of those people? People that are honest about their struggles and challenges yet rejoice in the Lord with a peace that surpasses understanding. They aren't perfect yet they desire to know God more and more and to see him revealed through their life.

If that is you, please continue to be an example for others; reach out to them and care for them, for us.

If you aren't that person, but long to be, find encouragement from their example. Strive to follow their example as Paul calls us to.

Let me perhaps add one more thought from this:

Paul didn't call us to strive for a life worthy of Christ, so that Christ would find us worthy. Quite the opposite, Christ has found us worthy and loves us, and desires for us to be united with him and the Father, and because of this Paul toiled and struggled to live for Christ – to live in honor of God because of what he did for us, not so we can someday be found worthy.

Now let me bring this back to a more personal point.

During this past year I was invited by a couple of imperfect men who strive to live for Christ to join them in accountability. They have met together to encourage and support each other for many years, and they do this because we aren't called to do life alone – we are not meant to be islands in this life. We are all of us part of the body and throughout the bible we are called into community to support and encourage one another.

The opportunity to share my life with these men – my joys, struggles, triumphs, failures, sin and growth has been encouraging. Am I perfect as a result – no.

Do I still struggle – yes.

Am I growing in my walk – yes.

Am I more open about my imperfections, sins, struggles – yes.

Just over 6 weeks ago I met with a young man in this church to start on a mentoring journey with him and another young man. Together I hope to encourage and support these men in their journey, but more importantly to demonstrate authenticity in my relationships and my walk.

At the same time, I have recently come to recognize a struggle in my life that I was ignoring. I am exhausted.

About three weeks ago I came face to face with something I had been ignoring – my personal pride. It was driving me, forcing me down a path of saying "they need me"; "if not me, who else could do it"; "I have to do this."

None of that is true. Lots of people with some minor training or experience could do almost everything I do.

I am not perfect – I don't have it all together – I can't do it all. I have been avoiding critical conversations at work, missing deadlines, escaping from responsibilities by watching movies or playing video games, or eating too much.

I have been sitting at my desk wringing my hands or putting my face in my hands wondering why I can't get a grip. Sometimes the simple things overwhelmed me –

On my way home from work one day I planned to put air in one of my tires. I was headed to the airport the next morning and didn't want to be on the highway with a low tire. I forgot and the next morning in my rush to get to the airport I got really frustrated and angry at myself over a very minor thing.

I have been underperforming at work and my boss has been incredibly gracious because he saw my fatigue and I didn't. Alana has pointed out my stress and strain for months,

But I kept saying I can handle it. I can do it all – I don't have that much on the go – not as much as so and so who has it all together and has way more than I do.

Here I stand, seemingly all put together in my military uniform. A guy who excelled in the military, who was a go to guy, who had it all together to the point that one of my friend / peers once said in a meeting "Well, we can't all be Dave James."

I know in my heart that I find my worth in Christ. That he sees me as worthy not because of what I am doing, but because of who he made me to be.

Yet, my pride was driving me to find worth or rather demonstrate my worth to others. To do things so well that I was held up as a great leader, that go to guy. And people kept coming to me and I kept saying yes, because I truly felt they needed me.

Part of me did this because God calls us to do everything as if on to the Lord, so I did the best I could for "God" but part of my internal motivation was doing it because I felt needed, and I liked feeling needed. I liked being seen to be doing it. To be seen to be that good, and to have others ascribe worth to me.

So over the past few weeks I have learned a very valuable lesson, I need to take the mask off. I need to be more authentic. I need to recognize and forgive my own humanity – I am not perfect, I can't do it all.

So where am I today, I am at the front end of a journey to grow and be refreshed. To realize that I am not all powerful, I can't do it all in my own strength – none of us can.

I need to stop and recover from my fatigue and my exhaustion. I need to spend time looking into God's word, to be in prayer with him. I need to learn to say no to some of the things people ask of me but God isn't calling me too.

I also need to spend time investing in myself – another thing I was neglecting; I kept doing for others instead of taking care of myself.

So how about you? Are you being honest with yourself and with others? Are you being honest with God?

Perhaps you are and that is fantastic – I encourage you to be that authentic example of someone striving to live for Christ, encourage others, be an example, love them and share life with them.

Some of you may not even know God, or Jesus Christ. You have been holding back from committing to trusting Jesus because you don't think you are like these "perfect" Christians, these people who have it all together and don't seem to struggle with anything.

Again, we all struggle, we all need Jesus. The journey begins with taking a step of faith and trusting Jesus as your savior, then it is about striving together to grow,

... and, in all of our imperfections and messiness, to authentically do life together in a way that is worthy of Christ.

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate what Christ has done for us on the cross. As we approach the table we are called to examine ourselves so we approach in a worthy manner.

Take some time now to do that – ask yourself: Where am I at? Do I need to make a step of faith and trust Jesus as my Lord and Saviour? Do I need to seek help for a burden I have been trying to carry alone? Do I need to be more authentic in my life? Do I have unconfessed sin that is hindering me from drawing close to God – he longs for us to draw close to Him, and he is drawing close to you even now.

As you do that, let me encourage you with Paul's words to the Philippians:

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.”

One day we will be perfect, when we join Christ in eternity. For the time being let's be the most authentic, caring, forgiving, messy, imperfect sinners saved by grace we can be.

Let's strive to live a life worthy of Christ, to grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ.

And let's do it together, as a community, the body, the church.