

Your Secret Life Matters Most

By Bobby Schuller

This morning I want to talk about the importance of being at peace with your imperfections, with not having to prove yourself to others, and what it means to walk humbly before the Lord. That is to truly desire to live a life that pleases God and not pleasing people in the sense of constantly pleasing others. Christians should serve others, should love others, we should allow God to do all the sorting. You don't have to sort anything. But people pleasing is death, especially for religious people. That it's easy for us when, we've been Christians for a while, to feel like we have to keep our reputation managed. And today the word from the Lord is that you can let that go. That you're maybe spending way too much energy and worry trying to manage what people think about you. And today, I want to encourage you to be at peace with your imperfections, to be vulnerable, to show those imperfections, not to the whole world but to people who love you, and watch as people show you how terrific a person you are.

A lot of times when we're leaving these secret lives or have things about us that are very hidden, we hide them because we think we'll lose respect from people. And although that might be true for some, for most, most people are going to do the opposite. They're actually going to feel free to show their heart.

And so today we're going to talk about the incredible power that comes from living from a place of humility. Humility is strong. And humility and shame are opposites. Very often we think to be a humble person means to be self-deprecating, it means to say bad things about yourself, to never talk, to not be ambitious, that's not what humble means. Humble means you lift other people up. Humble means you're vulnerable. Shame does not mean that. Shame means your life is hidden. Shame means you're hiding.

I like to think about it this way – little dogs bark the most. Isn't it true? Little dogs.. I almost barked like a little dog and I held back. I'm so proud of myself. I'm growing. Little dogs bark the most. Hannah grew up with this little shiatsu. I'm allowed to say that in church, right? The shiatsu, it's a Chinese word. This little dog's name was Mozart, the cutest little thing ever. And it would always bark at people like little dogs do. So someone's walking towards the door, it's barking at the door, but as soon as somebody would come in the door, this little dog would run over to her dad, Richard, and he'd pick up the dog, and then once he was picked up by Richard, it'd start barking again now that it's a big guy holding him. But once Richard put this dog down, it would tuck tail and run.

So barking, in the doggie world, is not a symbol of strength and bigness; barking is a symbol of smallness. So I love Great Dane's. Great is the word. They are big dogs. And I don't think I've ever even seen a

Great Dane bark and I want to tell you I don't want to. That would be scary. And they bark, but you get this sense that a Great Dane barks when it counts. And little dogs yap from a place of weakness, right? I love little dogs, so not dissing on them, just to say that there's maybe a lesson to learn there. There is a strength in quiet humility, and there is a weakness in the self-aggrandizing, narcissistic, egotistical or angry type of person.

It's so important; we as Christians often link humility and shame together. Talking bad things about yourself is not humility, that's shame. Hiding - that's not humility, that's shame. Humility and shame are opposites. Humility - a godly kind of humility is the kind that lifts people up. A humble strong person lifts others up. It doesn't have to lift one's self up he can lift up others because he or she is secure in who they are in Christ Jesus. A humble person is a vulnerable person. They're willing to allow their close friends and family to see their imperfections, their struggles, their sins, their worries, their anxieties. And so vulnerability, although it feels like weakness, is strength. And in that way, humbleness means that you're vulnerable. And that comes across as very bold, strong and courageous. And let's just be honest. The truly humble person is the strong person. They don't find a need to constantly defend themselves, to always bite back and get angry and yelp like a little dog. They have the quiet dignity of a Great Dane.

And that is the model of the humble strong person that I want to paint today, and that's who you are. You are strong, and you're humble. And it doesn't mean you're not ambitious. You're going to do great things, but you don't need to brag about it. You are going to brag about other people. You're going to lift other people up. You're going to serve other people and help other people, and in that way God's going to pour out so much blessing on your life, there won't be enough room to contain it.

Shame is very different than humility in this way because shame is all about hidden. Guilt is a good thing because guilt says I did something wrong and that's not me, I shouldn't have done that. So guilt makes us better people. But shame is I am someone wrong. Of course I did that. I need to hide this about myself.

So shame is rooted in fear; the fear that people will see me just as I am and I will be embarrassed. Shame is hiding. Shame is defensive. Shame is you always have to defend yourself. Some troll online says something on your Facebook page and you write a whole paragraph. That's coming from a place of shame, not a place of strength. People who struggle with shame are easily offended, and I see a lot of that in our society. Psychology teaches that's all rooted in shame. People who are very easily offended are struggling with a place of self-worth. If you're rooted in God's dignity and what God says about you, and you live a life

to please God, who cares what people say about you. And that's who you are. You're not easily offended. You let it go.

Actually one of the biggest characteristics for people who struggle with shame is strictness. It's so funny people who really struggle with shame tend to be really, really strict. There's a line in the sand. There's black and white all the time. And although the bible teaches us to love what is good and hate what is evil, try and picture in your mind this sort of preacher that's incredibly strict but behind the scenes maybe is not doing what he tells everybody to do.

So strictness and being offended all the time, and being defensive, and being angry and hiding stuff, this is not humility, that's shame and it is ruining your relationship with God and ruining your relationship with the people that matter most in your life. And the way that we get rid of shame is to be humble and humble means you allow others to see your imperfections. Humble says you listen to critique. Humble says you work hard, you're ambitious, but you want to see other people succeed, too. Humility, in a Christian way, looks to lift others up, and see others succeed, and cheer others on. And as you do that, God's going to cheer you on and make you succeed. It doesn't mean you shouldn't do great things. You should do great things. That's faith. We live and walk by faith, and we aspire. Listen I do this all the time. Big dreams and big visions, and you can be bold and you can be loud and funny and still be

humble because humility is about being truly you. I'm going to allow God to be my defender, and I don't need to do it myself.

One of the best ways to think in terms of shame versus humility and to walk in this boldness, the strength that comes with humility is actually to look at the sort of bad example of the Pharisees. My heart often goes out to the Pharisees. In the bible, they were the kind of pastors of the day, and there are two groups of religious leaders you see a lot: the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they hated each other, hated each other. Both of them sort of emerged out of the season where the Greeks were Hellenizing and occupying Israel. And the Greeks wanted the Jews to be more Greek; to take on Greek Philosophy; to be more about youth and beauty and the body, and arts and culture. And Jews were very much more about purity and cleanliness and the Torah.

So you had these two groups that sort of emerged from two very different ethnic cultures, and both of them are sort of reaching to define what it means to be Jewish. The Sadducees were responsible for overseeing the temple. They oversaw all the sacrifices and all these things. But the Pharisees were kind of, not poor, I mean actually many of them were wealthy, but they weren't born wealthy. They were sort of blue collar, you know? They were the people who taught in the synagogues and visited people's homes. Think of them as small town pastors. They were leaders in the community, but they weren't aristocrats.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, in the temple, lots of rumors about them being very sinful, very hedonistic, and it was all about politics and money so they're always buddying up with the Roman Empire, and they're keeping up all of these rituals. So these two groups hate each other. The Sadducees don't even believe in an afterlife, the Pharisees do. And Jesus doesn't spend a lot of time with the Sadducees. He's almost always with the Pharisees. But here's the catch – he's always angry at the Pharisees. You know why? It's because they don't practice what they preach because they're actors. And this is a temptation for all religious people. I think in the church in general, there is this need to find a balance between going too far one way, which is the Sadducee, and too far the other way, which is a Pharisee. To be Christian means to hold grace and truth at the same time; to hold justice and mercy at the same time.

And so I think about the Pharisees a lot, and I think that they were like pastors, and I think that when they came on the scene, like when they came they just wanted people to be good, and do to good, and to teach morality. And that desire evolved into strictness, shame, rejection, in and out, and that's what Jesus hated. And then I think the Pharisees, as they got older, had so many people taking them out to dinner, and clapping them on the back, and saying how great they were that they started to pay more attention to that than to the loving voice of God, and

that public voice became so important. And that all leads to Luke chapter 12.

In Luke 12, the bible says “meanwhile when a crowd of many thousands had gathered” a lot of people “so that they were trampling on one another” so that’s not only a lot of people, that’s a lot of people seeing Elvis, right? I mean that is like the Beatles are in town. People excited to get to the person, right? “Jesus began to speak” to whom, the crowd? No, first to his disciples. And this is so important because I imagine what was going on with the disciples: all these people are so excited and Jesus is like now kind of a religious celebrity, and you can see these young men who are following Jesus being like this is cool. Wow, this is so cool. I’ve been there. I mean this sense of like all these people are here, wow. We’ve got to wow this crowd. We’ve got to get some miracles going on. Let’s get this show on the road, right? There’s this like sense of like, okay all these people have come, there’s all this energy. Let’s deliver! And you see people, thousands, and they’re crawling over each other to get close to who - Jesus and his disciples.

And who does Jesus talk to? The crowd? No, his disciples, and he says watch it, careful, hey, right here, right here, careful. He says “be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.” By the way, the word hypocrisy was not a negative term back then. Hypocrisy means acting as you would in a drama. Like actors in a theater. I think I said this before, but like George Clooney is a terrific hypocrite. So is Brad

Pitt. A hypocrite means an actor and it wasn't a negative thing back then. He says "there is" and then listen to these words: "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs." That's not comforting, is it.

The one comfort you should get from that is that it's better to be vulnerable now than to be made vulnerable later because what Jesus is teaching us that there are all these people and these disciples are being tempted to perform like actors; to put on an amazing show. And Jesus says don't do that. That is a yeast of the Pharisees. That will poison all the good that God is doing in your life. The people are here because you're offering something better than a fake show so be you just as you are. Don't pretend, don't wear a mask, don't hide because anything you hide and everything you pretend to please this crowd will be shown later. So show it now. Be you just as you are.

Jesus loved the Pharisees, by the way. He did. Jesus almost was a Pharisee himself because a Pharisee was a rabbi. They taught the Torah. You see how Jesus treated Nicodemus sitting with this old man who really is asking 'how can I be saved.' Paul the Apostle is a Pharisee when he's knocked off of his horse. So when Jesus criticizes them after the Pharisees, he's doing it because he loves them. Stop pretending! Stop hiding! I believe that the secret life of the individual, whether you're

religious or not, is the real life. Whatever is secret is what's real in all cases! Think about it this way: if I say something to your face that's really nice, and then I say something in secret about you that's different than what I said to your face, Rich, you're an attorney, which one's the truth? Right? The things that are said in secret. If somebody says something nasty about you in secret but something good about you in public, what's said in secret is what's true. What's done in secret is what's true. What you hide is the very thing that matters most to you, very often.

So I believe this. When Jesus is preaching on the Sermon on the Mount, he tells everybody whether it's your good works, whether it's your fasting, whether it's your prayer, do it in secret as much as possible. Does that mean that every good thing you have to do is in secret? No, but what Jesus said is that there's a reward in it. That when we do things in a way, like not to please men or people, when we just live a life to please God and stop people pleasing, man that is where the reward is. I believe that when we do things in secret, it's a bit like planting a seed whether it's good or evil. If you do something bad but then you do it secretly, it's worse. If you do something good but you do it secretly and people find out later, they go wow, what a terrific guy. So it takes humility to be the kind of person that doesn't live a life of people pleasing, but lives a life to please God and that's what you do. That's what you do. And there's a power in that.

So let go of all your hiding. You don't have anything to be ashamed of. I find that when we as people of God are always hiding our imperfections and our sins, we sort of are creating a stage and it makes it harder for others to talk about their imperfections and all of their sins. I think it's a bit like this: imagine you are in kind of a bad car accident, and the ambulance took you to the hospital, and you got to choose. You either have a terrible injury on the outside of your body, or a terrible injury on the inside of your body. What would you choose? Everybody's like neither, please! I know. Just choose one. The answer is you'd want it on the outside. Even though it's a mess, even though you're getting blood on people's clothes, even though your clothes are ruined, its way less dangerous than the guy who comes in and on the outside nothing's wrong, but on the inside his organs or something is bleeding.

And that's how many religious people have become. You get these vulnerable people who kind of almost show their stuff too much and yet they're the ones that are so easy to treat, to heal. It's the people who hide, who pretend like nothing's wrong. On the outside, they may look a little pale, but that's it. But on the inside, they're dying. And the way to heal that is to take those wounds, take your fears, take your anxieties, take your burdens, take your sins, take all your regrets and with a close friend and with God, just say this is me and watch as you're healed.

One of the biggest problems is that with our imperfections we try and fix them but fixing is for machines. People need to be healed. And

healing comes with vulnerability and humility. So you don't have to let go of hiding, you're a terrific person. You don't have to maintain your reputation with your friends and family. If by being vulnerable you lose your friends, they're not your friends. You will draw closer to people as you become more vulnerable about your struggles and people will trust you more. In this age of being tricked by bankers, by religious people, there is a new love for anti-heroes and to leaders with a limp. I think there's a reason for that. It is so important if you want to get to this place of humility to start paying attention to your self-talk.

When we are in a bad place, if you're going through an illness, or maybe you lost your job, or maybe you're coming today and you're struggling with your faith, we get in these places where we just start saying the worst stuff to ourselves when we're alone. I'm not hireable. I'm never going to get well. I'm going to be sick forever. I'm always going to be poor. I'm never going to succeed. My relationships are never going to go well. I mean listen to that self-talk. That is not good. And Christians have been trained to say over themselves I am a sinner, I'm a wretch, I'm a horrible person.

You want to know something? Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, never at any point says to confess your sins. So I want to be careful here because confessing your sins is important. James tells us to do it and John tells us to do it, but most of the framing of the gospel as we preach it as evangelicals is based on the writings of Paul. And Paul,

although he says we are sinners, he never says to confess we're sinners. He tells us instead to confess we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. And that is very different. Some of us have had our most unique Christian experiences when we beat ourselves up and we reinforce shame. We say oh I'm so terrible, I'm so bad, I'm so this, I'm so that. That's where the enemy wants you! He is called the accuser of the brethren for a reason. When you accuse yourself and put yourself down, you are aligning yourself with the voice of hell. But when you say I am the righteousness of Christ, which is what the bible says, when you say I am chosen, which is what the bible says, when you say I am highly favored, the head and not the tail, you are aligning yourself with what heaven says about you. You are aligning yourself with the citizenship of God's city which says you are the victor and not the loser.

And so we all sin and we should repent of our sin, but when we do, we look in the mirror and say I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Amen? And watch as you begin to speak that over your life as your heart begins to change so that when you repent of your sins, you're like this isn't me, I'm the righteousness of Christ and I made this mistake and I'm going to move on. Amen?

So we got to be at peace with our imperfections. You have to be at peace with it because you can't fix it. You can't do this yourself. The only way to grow and to get better is to recognize that you can't be the one that does the growing, God does it through you, so by being vulnerable

and being honest the Holy Spirit is able to come alongside with the word of God and your friends, and train you into Christ' likeness and that's how it happens.

When that happens, we take on the mantle of the Great Dane, you know what I mean? Like we take on that thing where people will say stuff about us, maybe people remind you of your past, and you just let it roll off your back. You're going to stop calling yourself fat. You're going to stop calling yourself un-loveable. You're going to stop calling yourself ugly. You're going to stop calling yourself old. You're going to stop calling yourself a sinner. You're going to stop calling yourself unlucky. You can let go of those things. That's not what God says over you.

You're going to proclaim the promises and the covenants of the bible over yourself and let go of your shame, and when you have that confidence and that strength, you're going to have a humility that's going to give you the ability to lift people up and to say the same over others. Instead of saying you sinner, you can say you are the righteousness of Christ. Your future is bright. I'm on your side. I'm praying for you. I believe in you. You're going to move forward. You're going to get through this. That's what people need.

Encouragement is rooted in the French. It means to give heart to someone. To give heart. You know life is hard. It doesn't get easier. People need heart and people need encouragement, and that's what you do for others. You don't have to puff yourself up, you don't have to defend

yourself, and you don't have to get offended, let it go. People are going to disrespect you. It's all right. They don't know who you are. They don't know that you're a chosen, loved, adored, favored daughter or son of God and that's okay. They just don't know.

And so when that happens, we can go sit at the foot of the table, as Jesus tells us so that the master can bring us to the head. And that's the truth. Jesus, in his wisdom, he says if you go into a room and there's a seat at the foot of the table, and there's a seat at the head of the table, don't sit at the head of the table because then you're going to be embarrassed when the head of the house says oh no, this seat is saved for someone special. Go sit at the foot. But if you come in and you sit at the foot of the table and then the master says no, honored guest, come sit at my right hand, then you'll be honored in front of everybody.

In that same way, if you don't try to prop yourself up and talk about how great you are but instead lift up other people, encourage others, you yourself will first of all be very encouraged, but second God will lift you up. I don't know about you, but I'd rather be lifted up by God than lifted up by people, amen? Because God is faithful and people are not. I believe that if you lift up people, God's going to lift you up. If you encourage people, God's going to encourage you.

As a pastor, I get together with other pastors a lot, and there will be different groups from different traditions, and I'm a weird mutt because I went to Fuller, but then I'm also Reformed, but then I'm also

Charismatic, so I always get invited to all sorts of groups. And very often when I'll get with other pastors in our own insecurity, everybody will brag about their numbers: this is how many people I have in my church; this is how my offering was. And every time a pastor tells me their numbers, I'm pretty sure it's their Easter numbers. I don't know. They're definitely, you know what I mean. They're not giving me their like Memorial Day weekend numbers. They're giving me like.. it's Easter with a little bit extra. And it's funny because as we insecure are sort of pastors who are struggling for purpose and meaning gather together, it's easy to leave and feel like oh that guys doing so well, and that guys doing so well, so everybody leaves feeling empty and discouraged.

But last week, Hannah and I were visiting at Lakewood, and Joel gathered a handful of pastors from around the country, and some of these guys have some of the biggest churches in the world, and some of them have very small churches. But you know what happened? Nobody talked about all the great stuff they were doing. They talked about all the great stuff everybody else was doing. So these pastors would be like 'have you heard about what Joe is doing?' 'Have you heard about what Jamie is doing?' 'Have you heard about what this person is doing or that person is doing?' Joel called it a culture of honor that from the very bottom to the very top, the key piece is to give honor to everyone. And then what happens is you've got all these pastors from the world telling you how great you're doing, and you're talking about great they're doing, and

everybody's talking about how great everybody is doing, and what happens? Instead of everybody leaving empty and feeling like they're not doing a good job, everybody goes home feeling encouraged and full.

And see that's God's recipe, that's God's design. God wants you to be lifted up by people. Right? But not out of a need for it. He wants you to be encouraged but he wants you to first be encouraged by him.

And so I want to say to you that I'm so proud of you; that as people wound you and hurt you and say things about you, don't feel shame, don't beat yourself up and don't be your bully. Believe that God has something really great for you and learn to walk in humility where you lift other people up so all of heaven will just open. I just believe if you work to bless other people, heaven's going to open up and pour so much blessing on your life. Napoleon Hill, one of the biggest business writers of all time said literally the quickest and easiest way to succeed in business is to help others succeed. And I think that's so true. Give and it'll be given to you. I think that's absolutely true.

So I'm so proud of you, and I want you to know that shame has no place in your life. No matter what you've done or who you are, let go of that shame and proclaim the promises of God over your life, and lift people up. Amen?

So Father, we thank you that you love us; that you've called us, and we believe in your promises to us. We pray, Father, in Jesus' name, we ask that you'd forgive us of our sins, but even more, give us the

courage to be honest about our weaknesses and our struggles with you and with the people who love us. Lord, thank you that you love us and help us to find that quiet dignity and strength in what you say over us. And you say we're loved, we're called, we're favored and we're blessed, and we receive that in Jesus' name, amen.