

The Rabbit and The Mountain

—Week 3, Day 1—

I praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalms 139:14

Back in the day, my 7th grade English teacher taught a lesson on prepositions by drawing a rabbit and a mountain on the blackboard. Turning toward the class, she asked, “Now, tell me, how can this rabbit relate to the mountain?” Boy howdy! We had some answers. “He can go around it, over it, through it, be beside it, with it, for it, against it, etc. etc.”

That English lesson—and all of the bunny’s ways of relating to the mountain—paints a good picture of codependency. What if someone removed the mountain? Our poor little bunny is lost. Without the mountain, he doesn't know who he is or what to do with himself. In his mind, life without the mountain is inconceivable.

This week we're digging into the unhealthy reliance we have on each other. I need you to tell me who I am, by what you say and do or don't say and don't do. And it goes both ways.

Tell me I'm good/bad, needed/needy, helpful/ helpless, wanted/unwanted, brilliant/mediocre. Without your input, I'm not sure who I am or how I'm supposed to feel about myself. It goes without saying, this is not a healthy arrangement. If everybody is as codependent as I am, we're a collection of parasites leeching the life out of each other. Common sense...a bucket full of parasites will ultimately self-destruct.

This is why we dig into codependency. Mr. Rabbit can't have a healthy relationship with the mountain until he *first* knows and accepts who he is *without* the mountain.

Something to consider:

Name the one person or thing you can't imagine your life without, and then explain why.

(wcvv)

Aside from Achievements...

—Week 3, Day 2—

But the LORD said to Samuel, "...For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

I am that special combination of over-achiever, people-pleaser, and female. I grew up in a branch of conservative Christianity that explicitly taught traditional gender roles and the importance of self-sacrifice while implicitly telling me that my emotions were untrustworthy, and my anger was unacceptable.

As Wendell and I began to collaborate on these materials, I kept pushing for a more robust definition of codependency. I wanted to know: Is it about control, or about wanting to please people? Could it be about *thinking* it's within my control to please people? I'm not sure if I wanted to find myself in Wendell's definition or if I wanted to be able to say "nope, not me."

When I read about the bunny and the mountain, I see myself and the many ways I construct my identity based on who I am to others and what I do for them. I am codependent, and I would venture to say that—without an intentional movement away from it—most of us have the same tendency. It's so easy to define ourselves in relationship to the constellation of important things and people.

For years my sense of self came from being a good student and eventually a professor. To my students, I was Dr. Attanasi. I was respectfully and gainfully employed. Then one day that job went away, and I found myself staying home with a toddler and a newborn. I went from feeling proud of myself to insisting to a telemarketer that my status as "homemaker" *not* be listed in my college alumni directory.

Who was I without a career, students, or colleagues? How could I feel affirmed or validated without the regular feedback loops of course evaluations, compliments, and publications? What would it take for me to feel good about myself again?

Something to consider:

Write about how you typically measure your success.

What would happen if that measurement of success was no longer relevant or available to you?

(kab)

The Pecking Order
—Week 3, Day 3—

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James 2:1-4

Sometimes how I feel about myself depends on who I'm around and where I fit into their social hierarchy. I feel good when I compare myself to people whose accomplishments or wealth I think I have surpassed. I feel insecure when I measure myself against people whose accomplishments or wealth I envy.

Chickens create hierarchies so they can allocate the best resources to the most powerful. Humans create pecking orders, too.

There are many problems with human attempts to create social hierarchies—starting with their artificial and hurtful nature. Who of us is equipped to judge better/worse, worthy/unworthy? This isn't to say that there shouldn't be leaders or that someone's accomplishments shouldn't be honored or appreciated, but it does mean that *our human efforts to assign people worth—and to derive our own worth from how we rank—are seriously harmful.*

Any ordering system that we construct based on externalities denies the basic human dignity and worth that God assigns us. Such earthly hierarchies render God's love and grace unintelligible. In truth, we are loved and beloved of God, and we are called to share that reality with others. But we can't communicate others' worth to them at the same time we deploy these human-made hierarchies that sort

people based on skin color, socio-economic status, educational level, or sexual orientation.

Our call is to understand our infinite worth to God as individuals and to see others as beloved of God, too, and not to create our own hierarchies.

Something to think about:

Write about how you see yourself in relationship to other groups of people. Who do you tend to think you're "better" or "worse" than, and why?

(kab)

Intrusions

—Week 3, Day 4—

Beloved, let us love one another. 1 John 4:7

If life was pie-charted, the slice marked “work” would likely dominate the graph. For most of us, to live is to be busy.

You have lawns to mow, meals to prepare, kids to raise, paychecks to earn, careers to pursue, taxes to pay, etc. Not a lot of wiggle room.

Motivational phrases keep us hopping. – “Make hay while the sun shines.” – “Git 'er done.” – “Got a bad job, don't nurse it.” – “That job's not gonna' complete itself.”

In the midst of all this, what do we do with folks who mean well, but stay too long? Those who call obsessively? Offer to help after the job is done? Are a “tad” needy? Ones who dominate every conversation or ask inappropriate questions?

Intrusions. Let's just say it. That's what they feel like. How am I supposed to get on with my life and all its weightiness with them eating away at my time?

There are no easy solutions here. Just know, these “intrusions” are God's beloved children. He adores them. This is the best place to start.

Jesus encountered many people in his ministry who misunderstood his purpose. Jesus stimulated healthy conversation by asking questions.

Let's go there:

“(Fill in blank) is really important to you, isn't it?” – “Why are you so interested in (fill in blank)?” ... “I'm curious, what made you come to me with this?”

Something to consider:

Describe your most frequent “intruder.”

What questions might you ask of them?

(wcvv)

The Space Between

—Week 3, Day 5—

Each one should test their own actions. Galatians 6:4

If life is a highway, as the song goes, then what are the rumble strips? How do we know when we hit those grooves that alert inattentive drivers to danger and startle them (or perhaps us) awake?

The following questions are designed to help us think through how we can steer that middle pathway of interdependence that tries to avoid *both* codependence and a radical individualism.

*How do we find a balance between doing a good job and being a perfectionist? What are the warning signs that we have gotten out of balance?

*How do you know you've gone too far into either independence (I do it myself!) or (co-)dependence (there's no "me" without "you")?

*In what ways are you preparing for the eventual reality of changes to your family (kids growing up, leaving home) and career (retirement) and other "mountains" to which you relate?

*Where is the healthy balance between exploring someone's strengths and weaknesses so you can work well with them and judging them so you can feel superior?

*What about God? Can we be codependent with him? Does God's posture toward us change based on our behavior?

*When does simply wanting to be helpful cross the line and turn into a rabid need to be needed?

Something to consider:

What are the signs that your life is out of balance, and your identity is coming from externalities?

(kab & wcvv)