

## Me Too | I Care Too Much What Other People Think

Aaron Brockett | 1 Samuel

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Alright, how is everyone? Good. It's good to see you. I want to welcome you if this is your first time to be with us and I want to say hello to all of our friends at North. They are tuning in live right now with us. We love you guys. Let's give them a hand. We appreciate you guys. I want to welcome anybody that may be tuning in online as well.

If you've been around, or maybe this is your first time to be with us, we've been in a series of messages now for a few weeks and we're going to finish it up next weekend. The name of the series is just these two powerful, potent little words that all of us need to hear from time to time: *Me Too*—because all of us find ourselves in a series or a set of challenges or maybe some obstacles or some things we are facing.

I even faced this even last week where I really could have just used a friend or somebody to come around me who would just say, "Me too. I understand what you are going through. I get it. I've been there. I've been down that path before."

Because all of us can begin to believe some false things about who we are and maybe where we are headed, maybe we begin to wonder. Have any of you ever felt this way? I just wonder if anybody else understands what I am going through. I wonder if anybody else has been through this.

And we can find ourselves in a place where we don't exactly know where to take our next steps. The room kind of seems or the path kind of seems darkened in front of us. But there are these two little words that can serve as rays of light to sort of illuminate our path because oftentimes when I come to somebody and I'm sharing some struggles, I may not necessarily want them to fix it. And maybe I do want them to suggest some things that could fix it. But the first thing I really want to hear is *me too*, that they understand, that they get it, and that they've been there.

I don't know about you but I've sort of had to train myself to do that. My natural inclination when anyone comes to me with a problem or a struggle, and I'm not even talking as a pastor, I'm talking as a friend, I'm talking as a husband, I'm talking as a father, a family member. When somebody comes to me with a problem my natural inclination is not to say, "Me too." My natural inclination is to say, "You should."

I don't know if any of you can relate to that. In all three services I've seen spouses elbow each other and kind of give each other that look because maybe one of you is a fixer and one of you isn't. It's taken me about 16-and-a-half years of marriage to begin to figure this out: when Lindsay comes to me with an issue she doesn't necessarily want me to fix it.

In fact, she just wants me to kind of be there for her, and to listen to her, and to be there so she can lean on me. But my natural inclination is to say, "You know, you should say this," or "You should do that," or "You should really stop doing this," instead of saying, "Me too." Me too is really powerful.

But that's not solely what this series is about. It isn't just about being a friend who can empathize, although that's part of it. But this series is primarily about the fact that we serve a God of *me too*. God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ so that He could look at you and me and everyone else and say, "Me too."

This is how the author of Hebrews puts it. He says this, "Therefore He," referring to Jesus, "had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation," and that word just means payment, "for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted."

So this is who Jesus is. Jesus is, so to speak, God with a human suit on who came to live among us who can relate to us in every way. He is tempted in every way we are, yet He is without sin so that He can be our faithful high priest. Maybe that doesn't necessarily connect with us because we don't have a high priestly kind of system today, but we do have attorneys. We do have lawyers.

What the passage is essentially saying is that Jesus is sort of our representation in heaven, which is an amazing thought. That Jesus is our mediator. Jesus is our hope, the go-between between us and God. Jesus can look at you and me and say, "Me too."

But He's even better than that. My confidence would not be in a God who was tempted in every way and then stumbled. But my confidence is in Jesus who was tempted in every way I am, yet He did not sin. Yet He made payment for my sin. And that's primarily what *me too* is about. So God's people together, this community of faith, should be a people of *me too*. If we aren't then somehow we've just totally missed the gospel message. We've missed what it means to be saved by grace.

So here is where we are going today. And I would imagine that most of us here in this room at Northwest and those of you at North could say honestly, "Me too." Sometimes I have a habit of putting too much emphasis or too much value on what other people think of me and what other people say of me rather than what God thinks of me and what God says of me.

I think all of us could say, "Me too." We've all been in a relationship or a work environment where maybe we just walk into a room like this one. And we immediately think, "What do people think of me? How do people view me? How do people feel about me?" And it's not necessarily a bad thing, and we'll get to that in a minute. But we put greater stock in that than in what God has already said of us.

I want to look at the life of a guy by the name of Saul whose story is found in 1 Samuel. So if you've got a Bible or maybe a device with a Bible on it, would you go ahead and meet me in 1 Samuel. We'll begin in chapter 8.

We're going to do kind of an overview of Saul's life, really from chapter 8 all the way through the end of that book. I would encourage you to go home and maybe later today or tomorrow read through the book of 1 Samuel, especially if you haven't ever or haven't in a long time.

But really what is going on in Saul's life, and this is kind of what I want you to see, is that Saul started off with a great deal of promise. He had a lot going for him. And his life is going to slowly self-destruct, so that by the time we see what happens to him in chapter 31, Saul ends up walking away from God altogether, Saul is consumed with jealousy over this younger guy by the name of David. Saul pursues

him, tries to kill him. Saul ends up dabbling in the occult and eventually commits suicide. It's a tragic ending to a life that has so much promise.

But to begin to see what happened we've got to go back to chapter 8. In chapter 8 we see that up to this point in Israel's history they had no government in the conventional sense of that word. God was their King. God served as their King. So God would periodically provide prophets and judges to carry out the tasks of leadership, but the central focus of how people would live and conduct their lives was not based upon a political system, it was based upon a theocracy. It was based upon God as their leader, their guide, and their King.

But then things began to change for Israel and they began to observe their neighbors to the ancient near-east and how they had a political system setup with kings. So they [Israel] decided that's what they would like to have. So they go to their current leader, this guy by the name of Samuel who was serving as judge and they make this request which actually comes across more as a demand.

This is what they say to Samuel in chapter 8, "'Look,' they told him, 'you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.'" So I think we could all admit that this was not a very kind way of making their request. They come to Samuel and they are like, "Samuel, you're getting up there in years and it's about time for you to retire."

Normally under this system they would look at the sons of the leader to assume the leadership, but there's something about Samuel's sons so they are like, "Yeah, we don't see these guys leading us very effectively. So Samuel, would you please give us a king, like all the other nations have?"

As you can imagine, if you were in Samuel's sandals you would be offended by this, at least you should be. They are not very appreciative of all the years of leadership he's provided. Now they are saying, "Would you please sort of exit off us and give us a king?"

So Samuel goes to God and he basically says, "God, this is what the Israelites are demanding." And this is how God replies to Samuel in verse 7. He says, "'Do everything they say to you,' the Lord replied, 'for they are rejecting Me, not you.'" That's kind of a lesson in and of itself.

"'They don't want Me to be their King any longer. Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned Me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them.'"

Now it might sound a little bit surprising that God would be this willing to go along with this. Understand this: The desire to have a king lead them was not necessarily a bad thing in and of itself. In fact in Deuteronomy 17 God even suggested this as a possibility. It wasn't a bad thing to have a king lead them. They had prophets and they had judges who were leading them at this point.

The problem was they thought a king would solve all their problems, and it wouldn't. So God said, "If this is what you want, you can go ahead and have it. But warn them that this is not going to give them what they ultimately desire." These words would prove to be true. During the next 500 years in Israel's history all of the kings would do a less than ideal job. Actually they would do a crummy job. And it would just remind them, hopefully, that God was the only one designed to be their King.

And the very first king in Israel's history was this guy named Saul. When we first meet him in chapter 9 of 1 Samuel, Saul seems like a pretty well qualified candidate for this position. Look at this description of him in the first couple of verses of chapter 9. "There was a wealthy, influential man named Kish," this would be Saul's father, "from the tribe of Benjamin. He was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, of the tribe of Benjamin. His son Saul," listen to this description, "was the most handsome man in Israel—head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land."

What a great description. He's tall, he's handsome, and he's rich. This is a trifecta. This is like the first century version of the most interesting man in the world, that Dos Equis commercial. That is what I thought about. I'm sorry. But this is just what I thought about when I saw this description of Saul. He's got all this stuff going for him.

And immediately I don't like him. Most of the men in the room can kind of resonate with that. The ladies are like, "Well I kind of like him." The guys are like, "I don't like him. I don't like this guy," and primarily it's because all of us guys went to school with that guy. He was tall, he was handsome, he was wealthy, and all the girls swooned over him. And usually those guys are kind of full of themselves. Usually those guys think they are God's gift to humanity.

And so you would expect this would be the way Saul would kind of conduct himself. Interestingly enough, it's not. When Samuel approaches Saul and says, "You know what Saul? You have been chosen by God to be the first King of Israel." Saul does not say, "Well, yes of course. Of course God would choose me. I'm tall, and I'm handsome, and I'm rich." That's not what he says. In fact Saul's response is really quite startling.

Look what he says in verse 21, "Saul replied, 'But I'm only from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe! Why are you talking like this to me?'" In other words he is saying, "Why did God choose me? Why are you even talking to me about this, I don't even think I am qualified for the position?"

Now, you can read this at first and say, "That's refreshingly humble. This isn't what we were expecting from a guy who had all this going for him." But actually this is more than humility. Humility does not mean you twist information about yourself. And that's what Saul is doing.

I don't know if anybody picked up on what was wrong with what Saul just said here. But this is more than humility. This is a falsehood. This isn't true. Because we just read the description that he actually came from a really wealthy family. He came from—this is the word—an *influential* family.

So what Saul just said here is not just humility, this is a falsehood. This is all based on fear. He is fearful of the way other people view him. This is an early indicator that Saul is more concerned about what other people would think of him, and what other people would say of him, rather than what God had said of him. So it motivated him to kind of guide the perception that other people had of him.

Now I don't want to be too hard on Saul because if I were in his position I think I would have been tempted to do the same thing. Because Samuel comes to him a little bit later and he says, "Saul, you and your family, you are the hope of Israel." I don't know about you, that's a lot of pressure.

And maybe somebody has come up to you before and they've tried to hand you something or give you responsibility for something that is an awful lot of pressure. So maybe it worked. Your boss put you in

charge of a project, and maybe he said, “You know what? This project—everything is riding on you,” and maybe some of you would like to step up to that challenge, and maybe others of you would say, “Could you please hand this to someone else? That’s too much pressure.”

Maybe when you were in high school and you were playing football or basketball the coach drew up a plan just for you, “You take the ball and you win the game.” And you were like, “That’s too much pressure.”

Maybe as a brand new mother you’ve got this baby and you are like, “I’ve got to take care of this child and all this pressure,” and you wonder if you’re going to be a good mom. And all of it is riding on you.

Sometimes we can sort of shrink back. Instead of believing what it is God has said about us we can shrink back and we can begin to try to lower the expectations of everyone around us. And that’s exactly what Saul is doing in this passage.

I might be willing to give him the benefit of the doubt here but it just continues. We just get more and more indicators that he is more concerned about the thoughts of others than he is about what the Lord said of him.

In chapter 10, the day he is inaugurated as king, he is nowhere to be found. Look at what the passage says in chapter 10. The day of his inauguration comes and everybody expects him to make a big speech. “So they asked the Lord, ‘Where is he?’ And the Lord replied, ‘He is hiding among the baggage.’”

It sounds like a really classy leadership move. Can you just imagine? We’re going to have a new president elect this next year and on the day of the inauguration imagine the president elect is nowhere to be found. He is just hiding in a closet in the Whitehouse. And depending upon who that individual is, maybe you’d want them to stay there. I don’t know. I didn’t say who so you can’t cheer.

If you could just imagine that you can’t find him anywhere, this is what happens on the day of Saul’s inauguration speech as king. Where is he? God is like, “He is in baggage claim. He’s not at baggage claim, he’s in baggage claim.”

What may be even more peculiar than Saul’s behavior is the people’s response. It shows how badly they wanted a king rather than continuing to follow God. Look at their response. They act like nothing every happened. They act like this is not unusual behavior for their leader.

“So they found him and brought him out,” and I don’t know why you have to keep reminding us of this, “and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else.” Thank you. We get it. He’s dreamy. “Then Samuel said to all the people, ‘This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king.’” And I can’t help but wonder if he says this a little bit facetiously, “Yeah, you wanted a king. Here’s your king in baggage claim.” “No one in all Israel is like him!” And here is the peculiar part. “And all the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’” It kind of shows how far their hearts had drifted.

So Saul in verse 25 is sort of given this manual on how to be king. He goes back to his hometown of Gibeah and it says that there is a group of men who come around, and actually the Bible gives this description of this group of men. I love this title. They were “Men of Valor.” These were guys who were Saul’s me too guys. They came around him, they had his back, and they were with him. Interestingly

enough, by the end of 1 Samuel these men were nowhere to be found. I can't help but wonder if Saul had pushed them all away due to his own insecurities. Saul had gone back to his home town of Gibeah.

But there is another group of men and these are not fans of Saul. I don't know if Indianapolis would be your home town for many of you but wherever your home town is, wherever you grew up, do you have a group of people or maybe just one or two people who anytime you go back home, wherever home is, you end up meeting those individuals? Maybe you went to high school with them, and it doesn't matter how old you are now, when you meet up with them you feel like you are in high school. And they are not impressed with you at all. And you just kind of go right back and maybe the insecurities come out and the jealousies come out.

Maybe all of us can relate to this to a certain extent. I think Saul had this group of people as well. There was a group of men in his home town who were just not impressed with Saul and they said these very hurtful things to him and about him in verse 27, "... 'How can this man save us?'" In other words, Saul's going to be our king? There's no way he is going to provide the answers for us, "And they scorned him and refused to bring him gifts." This is disrespect, "We're not going to acknowledge you as king." Listen, it says, "But Saul ignored them." I think he might have ignored him. I think he might have just let it brush off but I don't think he wasn't impacted by their words.

That little phrase *sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me* is not true. Words hurt and they cut deep. You might dismiss them, you might ignore them, but they still deeply impact you because it may have begun to kind of shape the way you see yourself.

Maybe, I don't know, maybe back during adolescence somebody made some comment about your body. Maybe they talked about the size of your ears, or they talked about your weight, or whatever. And those words just kind of stuck with you. If you were to be honest, they kind of impact your self-esteem even today.

Maybe you had a teacher who implied you were dumb and you were just never going to get it. Maybe it was just out of the teacher's own frustrations and insecurities as a teacher. Maybe you had a father who wounded you deeply because he was just never impressed with you. No matter what you did, no matter what you accomplished, no matter what you brought home he would look at it and just sort of dismiss it and say, "Well, you could do better." Maybe you had a mom who was just overly critical of your behavior and your flaws. Maybe you had a boyfriend whose words just cut through you like a knife.

Those words stay with us and they can shape the way we see ourselves. What's even more damaging than that is, if we aren't careful, if we don't rehearse, or if we're not familiar with what it is God says of us then what other people say about us can end up imposing upon the way we think God sees us. It leaks upon us and all of the sudden we're looking through this really jaded lens.

Sometimes I talk to people and they speak about God in such foreign terms and I am like, "Who are you talking about exactly? Are you talking about your dad, or are you talking about God. You've taken what your dad said or didn't say and you've imposed it upon God."

Words mean a lot, don't they? They stay with us for a really long time. I remember when I was in the third grade my mom took me and my younger sister (she is two years younger than me) to piano lessons two days a week. I remember after school for the first 30 minutes one of us would sit in her living-room and do homework while the other did a 30 minute lesson, and then we would switch.

In case you were wondering, the only thing I can play today is *Chopsticks*. I didn't really learn a whole lot and it was my fault and not hers. So I remember going over to my piano teacher's house two days a week. She had a son who was in the sixth grade, so he was about three or four years older than me at the time. I just thought he was the coolest guy ever. I just wanted to be friends with a sixth grader.

I remember one day we went over to their house for lessons. It was the week of Halloween. Their front yard was decked out in Halloween stuff. Her son was underneath the front porch with a remote control connected to some sort of like zombie or something in the front yard. Anytime someone would walk by he would hit a button and the thing would move and he would scare people. As a third grader, I remember I just thought this was the most amazing thing ever. I still kind of do.

So anyway, I went over and went in the house, we did the lesson. Afterward my teacher said, "If you want to go outside and play with my son, feel free." I was like, "This is awesome." So I go out and I crawl underneath the front porch with my new best friend, this big sixth grader I thought was so cool.

We were sitting there underneath the porch and my enthusiasm got the best of me to where I did not pay attention to the volume of my voice. So we see a couple people walking down the sidewalk. He's trying to be all stealth. So I lean over and I was like, "Look, there're some people coming. Let's scare them." [In a loud voice] And he turns to me and I'll never forget what came out of his mouth. He said, "Shut up little kid," and I remember at the time those words cut through me like a knife.

I'd just blown it with my new best friend. This guy wasn't going to want to hang out with me anymore. And you know what? I can honestly look at all of you and I can say that today, as a grown man, those words don't impact me and I really don't lose any sleep over them because he said that a long time ago.

Here's the thing. A lot of things happened to me in the third grade that I don't remember. But I remember that. It somehow lodged itself into my memory because words can be really powerful things. And I don't think Saul was ever able to fully shake what it was that he heard that group of men from Gibeah say about him questioning his leadership.

We see, as we continue to read through the book of 1 Samuel, that Saul's leadership, and his influence, and his credibility slowly began to unravel. Because other people were his primary audience and because he was so fearful of them, it caused him to make rash decisions. It caused him to be impatient. I'd just encourage you to read through 1 Samuel. It's really, really good stuff. It's just a slow motion train wreck, one chapter after another, to the point where God commands Saul to do something specific and Saul disobeys Him.

So God sends Samuel to confront him on it. Listen to Saul's excuse in chapter 15:24. Samuel goes to confront him. "Then Saul admitted to Samuel, 'Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded.'"

And this is it right here. You might take a picture of the screen or you might write this down: Saul cared *more* what other people thought of him than what God had *said* of him. And you know what? Me too. There are more times than I care to admit publically that I maybe kind of operate, or maybe kind of live my life in such a way that I care more about what other people may think about me or what other people say of me than what God has already said of me.



So maybe the natural question would be: What did God say of Saul? So you just go back to Samuel approaching Saul and telling him he was going to be King of Israel. And Samuel says three really significant things to Saul. He says number one, "God has chosen you Saul." That right there is huge. Did you know God says the same thing of you? That God has sent His Spirit and that the only way for you to even respond to the call of God is when the Spirit of God begins to woo you toward Him.

So it says that He chose Saul for this position. The second thing it says is that "God gave Saul a brand new heart." It says, "The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul," which I don't think was necessarily a salvation thing but more of an ordination thing. God was saying, "Saul, I've ordained you to this task that I don't think you applied for. Welcome to the club." That's how God always works.

And yet tragically by chapter 16 and by chapter 18, it says these two things. It says, "The Spirit of the Lord had left Saul," not because God didn't care for Saul but because Saul had already separated himself from the Lord. He cared more about what others thought of him than what God said of him.

So I'm just kind of curious today, both here in this room as well as those of you at North. Just raise your hand if this is true of you. How many of you like to be liked? Just go ahead and raise your hand, you don't need to feel ashamed of that. It looks like most of the room.

Now how about this question? How many of you would admit that you are a people pleaser? A few less hands in the room. How many of you raised your hand because you wanted to please me? You are just like, "Aaron, do you want me to raise my hand?"

So here's what's true about the majority of us in the room: All of us like to be liked. You don't like to be disliked. If you did, there'd be a significant issue or there'd be a significant wound in your life. A few less of us would openly admit that we are a people pleaser. Some of us didn't raise our hands at all, and that's totally fine.

But even if you didn't raise your hand, and maybe some of you would honestly be sitting there saying, "This is a nice sermon but it's for someone else because I don't really struggle with this. I really honestly don't care what other people think, I am my own man," or "I'm my own woman and I sleep well at night. I'm really not all that concerned about the thoughts of other people."

That might be true. But there is still a little bit of a people pleaser in all of us. It comes out and it manifests itself in different ways. You may not sit at home and wring your fingers. And you're not all that worried about what other people say about you but it still comes out in different ways.

So my wife, for those of you in the room that know her, my wife is like one of the most likeable people I've ever met. Everybody that we meet, they love my wife and they tolerate me. That's just sort of like the story of our marriage. Even eight-and-a-half years ago when the elders interviewed the two of us to come up here they said to me, "Well, honestly you're okay but we love her." That has just not changed over the last eight-and-a-half years.

There are a couple of different reasons for this, but the primary reason is that my wife has kind of like this sixth sense about her. When she sits down with somebody, when she has a conversation, she can feel what they feel. She just intuitively picks up on it. She knows if somebody is hurting even if they don't say anything. She's just tuned in much more emotionally to the needs of others, much more than dummy here is.



Oftentimes we'll go out to dinner with somebody or we'll spend time with somebody. We'll be going home and she will be like, "How did you think that went?" I would be like, "I think that went great. I think they're our new best friends." And she's like, "No, no it didn't go well. You need to apologize. You said some dumb things. It all went over your head but trust me." She's just much more in tune with all of that.

But the people pleaser in me comes out in different ways. About two years ago I was scrolling through Instagram and a buddy of mine—he's a pastor in another state and there was a picture on his Instagram. It was him and a mutual friend of ours that we both know, another pastor from a different state. This other guy, he's got kind of an interesting personality. He's got some quirks about him. We give him a hard time and we kid him a lot.

So I see this picture and I just can't help it. I make what I think is a clever and witty comment that may have been at the expense of this other guy. But you know it's my love language. It's actually a spiritual gift. I'm just trying to steward it well. But I did not in this instance. So I make the comment.

Now what's going on inside my heart? In my heart, honestly, I wanted my friend to get a laugh. I wanted all of our other mutual friends who know this guy and see this to be reminded of how clever and witty and what a great sense of humor Aaron Brockett has. That's why I posted what I posted. That's why I did it.

And my wife was like, "We need to take this down," and I'm learning to listen to the Holy Spirit through her. But I was like, "Trust me honey. They're going to love it. It's going to be great. And honestly they're all going to be reminded of how clever I am." I put it in there and I was like, "It's going to be awesome."

About 30 minutes or an hour later I checked back just to see how many likes it got and to see what other people had said about it but I couldn't find my comment. My friend had deleted it. Now I don't know if you've ever had anybody delete a comment you've made on social media, when you meant well but it came off wrong? So he deleted it and immediately I felt embarrassed and I was like, "Oh no, he deleted it. I wonder what he is thinking."

In that moment instead of being truly humble and reaching out without any excuse, without any qualification just reaching out to my friend to apologize, here's what I did. I texted my friend, trying to save some face, and I said, "Hey, sorry about that post. I don't know if you saw it or not but sorry about that. My sense of humor just kind of gets me into trouble every now and then. Haha, and then I posted this emoji [wide-eyed stunned emoji] after it, which is my favorite emoji ever. I use this way too much because it doesn't matter what you say in a text message, as long as you put this in everything is great.

So I put that at the end of it. He ended up getting back in touch with me. We were all good and he was very, very gracious with me. But what was I trying to do in that moment? I was trying to manage his perception of me. Honestly, I wasn't concerned about seeking his forgiveness. I was more concerned with him not having disrespect for me. I wanted to regain a little bit of lost dignity through self-effacing humor. That is what I was trying to do.

For some of you in this room, or maybe at North, you would say, "I don't know that I need the approval of others as much as other people I know or maybe the person I am married to." And that may be true. But listen, deep down inside it may come out in a variety of different ways. Just think of the ways you

responded to people even this week. Were you trying to manage the way they see you or were you genuinely trying to connect with other people?

You see all of us want others to acknowledge our worth and our value. All of us want to be loved. All of us, I don't care what you say, we want to be admired and respected by others deep down inside. And maybe you've never received all those things, going all the way back to your family of origin, maybe you didn't get it from your dad, maybe you didn't get it from your mom, or a coach, or a teacher, or maybe a pastor the defense mechanism for that, I always know it. These are the words that trigger it for me: When I hear someone say, "I don't care what anybody else thinks," I always know, "Yeah you do, yeah you do."

"Hey man, that's their problem. They need to get over it." Well maybe they do but you don't really believe it. You see all of us desire to be valued in the eyes of other people. That's a legitimate need. But many times we seek to fulfill it in an illegitimate way. And that's what got Saul into trouble. Whenever you say those words, those are wounding words and they're a defense mechanism for a heart that's been hurt.

So this is what I know. It's not much, but this is what I know: We all like to be liked.

And this is not a bad thing. In fact I could even argue that the desire to be liked is what makes you likeable, that you have social intelligence. You realize you are not the only person in the room and you are in tune to the needs of others. This is not a bad thing at all.

Here is what gets us into trouble: We like to be liked *too much*.

When we like to be liked too much it will get us to maybe focus upon the thoughts, and opinions, and ideas, and principles of others that may be in direct contradiction to the truth of God or even what God has already said about us.

Here is another way of saying that: The voice of God should be louder than the thoughts of others.

Here's the thing. Would you even recognize the voice of God if you heard it? And sometimes we're like, "God, where are You and are You speaking?" God is speaking all the time. The primary way He is speaking is through His Word but many times we don't know it.

It's kind of like long before the days of caller-id you would have this phone that had no digital face upon it. Try to imagine this with me if you are under the age of 30. It was a phone that was attached to a cord, attached to another cord that went into a wall. You would get a phone call and when the phone would ring you had no idea who it was. And you would just answer it.

You would answer it and you wouldn't know who you were talking to. But if it were someone you had spent a long time talking to you would immediately pick up on their voice and you would know who it was. Why? Because you'd spent a long time talking to them. But if it was somebody who you didn't know you would have to ask, "Who is this? I don't know who you are."

God may be speaking to you but if you haven't spent enough time with Him His voice is foreign to your ears. This is why the Word of God is so important. This is why I would urge you and encourage you all the time to get into some sort of daily Bible reading plan.

And it's not because God is up in heaven with a flip chart keeping track of how many days of the week that you're reading the Bible. It has nothing to do with your salvation. It has nothing to do with the way God views you. It really doesn't have anything to do with your knowledge of the Scriptures, that's just a byproduct.

Your time in God's Word is you rehearsing and spending time with the voice of God so that when the thoughts and opinions of others begin to creep in you can discern and you can spit out the bones and consume the fish. You go, "You know what? I realize right away that is of God or that is not of God." That's why you get into the Scriptures.

David would say it this way in Psalms 119. "How sweet Your words taste to me; they are sweeter than honey." And if they don't taste sweet like honey, you need to be into them more. You need to develop a taste for them, "Your commandments give me understanding; no wonder I hate every false way of life. Your Word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path."

And what God's Word does is it is a filter that catches all of the untrue, condemning, deceitful things that come into our lives that affect the way we see ourselves, and affect the way we see this world, and even affect the way that we see God.

You see Jesus would describe Satan this way in John 8. Jesus would describe Satan as the *Father of lies*, which is a pretty startling way to kind of talk about him. He doesn't say that Satan lies every now and then. He doesn't say that he fibs or withholds the truth occasionally. He says he is the granddaddy of all lying. What that practically means is that your logic and your reasoning is no match for his deception.

The primary thing that Satan lies about: He lies about the nature of God and he lies about who you are.

So Satan's religion is not Satanism, it's humanism. And we begin to look inside and we begin to look at ourselves and we say, "My own logic and my own reasoning are good enough for me." And your own logic and your own reasoning has gotten distorted and twisted up. It doesn't mean God doesn't love you, it means that He does. So what He wants to do is give you an accurate perception of who He is and He wants to give you an accurate perception of who you are.

The truth about me is I want to be a loving husband and father but oftentimes that isn't enough. I want the approval of others. I want them to see that I'm a loving husband and father. So it gets me to maybe cut some ungodly corners to get there when I try to manage that perception.

I want to be a leader that operates with integrity. I want to be a leader who operates with courage, and boldness, and does the right thing, and learns from the perceptions of other people. But oftentimes that isn't enough. Oftentimes I want the approval of others to say, "You're that kind of a leader," and that, at times, may cause me to cut some ungodly corners to get there.

What about you? What is it that motivates you? Speaking of social media when you post something, why did you post it? Were you trying to maybe manage the perception that other people have of you? Do you go back and check it every ten minutes to see how many likes you get? And if you didn't get as many likes as what you thought you would get it somehow determines or influences your self-esteem.

What is it within us that when we fail at something we feel lousy about ourselves for days and never want to try it again? Why is it that when somebody doesn't approve of you, you have a really hard time

getting over it? That you've earned the reputation that nobody can speak constructive criticism in your life because you're just undone by it? What is that within you? Why do you feel the need to exaggerate a story or leave out a detail that leaves you just a little bit better than what you are?

If you can relate to any of those things, can I just say to you as your pastor, "Me too." I can relate to every single one of those things. You see, all of us are walking through life with these two questions bouncing around in our heads, in our brains:

*Do you like me?*

*Am I acceptable?*

And whether you want to admit it or not, all of those questions... It doesn't matter how old you are and it doesn't matter how mature you get, you're looking for the answer to those questions. Are you looking in the right places? You see, what undid Saul was not that he was an evil guy and it wasn't that he was a selfish guy. You could arguably even say that he had some humility in him. What undid Saul was that he cared too much about the thoughts and opinions of others, rather than what God had already said about him.

So what has God said about you? As it turns out God has said a number of objective things about you. These are not up for debate. These are not ifs. They are absolutes. God said:

You are His child. (John 1:12)

This means He is your heavenly Father. For any of you who have had children you get this because your kids are messy, and your kids are inconsistent, and sometimes your kids don't listen to you. Or, if they are teenagers, they don't listen to you like ever. But you would still die for them, and God did.

You are a branch. (John 15:1, 5)

This sounds really, really weird. But the context of this is that Jesus was saying some things about God as a gardener, Jesus as a vine, and you and I as branches. It's an analogy to describe how we are connected to Him. And He says, "When you remain in Jesus, and only when you remain in Him, will we bear fruit." So practically speaking, when Jesus says, "You are a branch," that means you've been grafted in by God's grace and now you are a conduit of God's love.

You are a friend of Jesus. (John 15:15)

This is absolutely astounding. There is not any other world religion and there is no other lower case god or deity in the universe that says that about its followers. But God says to us because of Jesus you are now My friend. And all I have to say to that is, "Wow, I'm speechless."

You are not condemned. (Romans 8:1)

You have rebelled against what God has said is good, and right, and true and we deserve to be condemned but amazingly we aren't. Yet some of us live as if we still are. And if you believe there is no hope, you begin to live as if there isn't any hope.

You are an heir with Christ. (Romans 8:17)

You're part of the family of God now. If you've trusted Jesus and made the decision to follow Him in every area of your life you are accepted, and you are valued, and you are loved. You have a crew now, the crew called the church, this community of faith that will claim you, receive you, and look at you with compassion and love and say, "Me too."

You are a saint. (1 Corinthians 1:2)

That may sound weirder than the whole branch thing because I thought for years that saints were dead people in paintings who lived a long time ago. As it turns out, saints live today. To those who call upon the name of Jesus and trust Him, God says you are a saint. Not because of anything you've done, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

You have wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

It may not feel like it. Maybe you've made some really foolish decisions, even as recently as yesterday, in your life. You know what? You're going to continue to in the future. But Jesus not only came to be our righteousness when we are not righteous, He died on a cross, but He also came to be our wisdom when we are very foolish. So, just as you cannot save yourself you also cannot fabricate the wisdom that you need that can only come from God. But in Jesus, listen, you are wise.

Your body is a temple. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

The Spirit of God resides within you now. You don't need to go to a church building, a basilica, or a cathedral to get close to God because His Spirit resides within you. This should impact not only the way you see yourself, but impact that way you treat yourself. It impacts how you dress, and how you carry yourself, who you let trust you, what you put into it, and how you treat it.

You can be confident. (Ephesians 3:12)

You don't need to walk around any longer with your face down to the ground, sheepishly putting up walls so other people don't hurt you anymore. Because of Jesus' faithfulness, you have access to God and you can be confident in that.

You are a citizen of heaven. (Philippians 3:20)

This world is not your home. Every time we turn on the news we are reminded of that. Terrorist attacks, stock market drops, snow in the middle of spring, crazy presidential campaigns, and cancer will not have the final say on anything. What this life is at best is summer camp and we're going home.

You are forgiven. (Isaiah 43:25)

And I know some of you've heard that a jillion times and you've become numb to those words. Listen to me. You're forgiven. He dealt with your junk on a cross and that weight that you've been carrying around for longer than you can remember is absolutely unnecessary. Jesus bore the punishment for it, whatever it is, on the cross. So give it to Him. If you must think about it, allow those memories to keep you humble, and pliable, and grateful to a gracious God.

You are free. (Romans 6:18)

Because of Jesus you are free from old habits, and addictions, and behaviors, and mistakes. Putting your trust in Jesus means you lean into Him when you're weak. It doesn't mean you're not going to struggle anymore, it means precisely that you will. So when you fall, and when you fail, and when you struggle—sin is another opportunity to fall into and to experience His grace. Not to run from God. Repentance does not mean you are a disgrace, it means you are a recipient of His grace. So you should never be ashamed of repentance, it's an opportunity.

You are loved. (Romans 8:35-39)

And nothing can separate you from God's love. Plenty of things can separate you from the love of another person, but not God's love. Not the seemingly finality of death, not the trials of everyday life, not the emotions that can betray you, not your fears, your worries, your concerns, not even the powers of hell itself. And if we forgot anything else, let me just quote a little bit of Scripture. "Nothing in all of creation will be able to separate you from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God has said some objective things about you that are not up for debate. They are not iffy. They are solid, so you lean into them. That's what it means to put your trust in Jesus. That is ultimately what it means to be a Christian, to be a Christ follower; to simply believe what God has said about you even if your feelings and logic betray that. That's what you've got to have faith in.

It's even more than just believing God exists or if you can trust the Bible—it is believing what God has said about you when you feel so unworthy. So you just fall into His arms and you say, "Jesus, I trust you as my Lord and my Savior and I'm going to walk with You through this."

I have a friend I hadn't talked to in years contact me just a week ago. I grew up with this person, hadn't seen him in a really long time. He just reached out to me and he's really struggling right now. There's just a whole bunch of pressures and depression and some things he's facing. Honestly, he just said this to me over the phone last Saturday. He just said, "I think I'm hopeless."

Well what's worse is that he already knows the Bible. Anything I could say about Jesus and the cross, it was just sort of like a rubber wall. It just kept bouncing off him. He just didn't want to claim it and receive it for himself. Why? Because he didn't feel it. He felt like he had taken too many steps beyond it.

I don't know where you're at but today some of you need to take off some of the heavy baggage that you've been carrying around that's really unnecessary—or maybe the words or the thoughts of others, real or perceived, that are just simply not true and recognize that God has said some really clear things about who you are.

Becoming a Christ follower means that you trust your full identity to Jesus Christ and you begin that journey. I want to invite you to do that today. It's a real simple thing. You just say, "God I'm not strong enough to face this life on my own so I trust that Jesus is Your Son and I want to receive the forgiveness, and the grace, and the new life that can only come from Your Son Jesus. Help me begin this new walk with You."

Some of you, you need to actually walk away from being religious, or just being a church attendee, or just being a Christian in theory only and you need to give your full heart to the Lord. And it is just simple trust.

I'm going to pray for you and I want you to consider doing that in the next few moments together. Then we're going to take communion and the team is going to lead us in another song of worship.

Right now, these next few moments together are the most important time of our gathering. You've sung some songs, and you've heard from the Lord. Now what will you do with it? I pray that you would receive it in some fashion.

*God, we come to You right now and I thank You for the truth of Your word. And sometimes it makes us uncomfortable. Sometimes it can work as a salve to cover over a wounded heart. Sometimes it wounds us but only for our own good.*

*So I pray that Your Word would work as a surgeon's scalpel to begin to separate maybe some of the deceptions we've sort of swallowed and bought into and that we would begin to rehearse and to know that when You speak we would be able to discern that it is Your voice because You've said to us that what You speak will always be true. We may not initially like it, we may not necessarily understand it, but we know that it's true, and it's right, and it's good.*

*God help us to find our sense of worth and identity more in what You've said about us and what You have done for us through Your Son Jesus than in what others think of us. So God I come, not as an individual who's got all this figured out, I come as somebody who can honestly say, "Me too." And so would Your Spirit do this transforming work in my heart. Keep me reminded of it, keep me humble, and keep me on my knees before You. And we ask this in Jesus' name as the church says, "Amen."*