

Me, You, God

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My dad is the originator of a locally famous quote I use a lot. His quote is the epitome of the levels of Christian growth I want to share today. He said this: "When I was a child I worried about what everyone thought of me. When I became a man, I didn't care what anyone thought of me. Now that I am old I have realized, they weren't thinking about me at all." This is a sad commentary about life from a lonely old man, but nevertheless it shows how we wonder what everyone thinks about us at different stages in our maturity. Taking the different age levels from this quote, I can see in my life a similar pattern in my Christian growth. It's not necessarily a bad pattern, but it reveals a lot about our self-consciousness.

From the get-go a child is kind of stuck on himself. His attitude revolves around what he thinks of himself. Immaturity causes us to think about ourselves a lot. Yet, I see this attitude in many adults who only think of themselves. In a high-minded way they will say, "I don't care what you think of me." Psychologically, we call this being self-centered. Yet, it is important to not be down on ourselves, while not thinking too highly of ourselves either. The Bible concurs when it says, "*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*" (Romans 12:3, NIV.) In other words, we ought to have a positive attitude about ourselves and recognize our God-given abilities and gifts, but not get drunk on ourselves.

However, we can spend way too much time thinking about ourselves. We can irrationally think we are better than everyone else, we can overrate our talent and abilities, and we can overestimate our ability to handle some of the sorrows life throws our way. All of this limits our ability to receive help from others when we do need it. Regardless of who you are, there will be times in life you will need help from others.

That brings me to the next stage. There are people who constantly think about what you think of them. Their life is constantly maneuvering around other people's opinions. They are constantly remaking themselves in an effort to win acceptance. In actuality, they are controlled by the supposed thoughts of others. I'm not talking about what others actually think, because these kinds of people won't ask. They will make up in their own heads what they feel others are thinking about them. They will try to do things in response to these suspicions to change a person's attitude towards them.

It is one thing to be controlled by your own delusions of grandeur, but it is totally something else to be controlled by what you feel other people are thinking. Here's an example of how bad this can be: You are checking out and the cashier is scowling and almost throws your money at you. One person would think, what is their problem. Another person, however, wonders what did I do to them for them to treat me like this.

Before I introduce the third part of my thoughts today, let's review. There are those who think only of themselves. They can develop this thought life in one of two ways. They can think too highly of themselves and become deluded. On the other hand, they can think too lowly of themselves and become self-condemned. Then there are those who are always worrying about what others think. This can also manifest itself in one of two ways. They are always be readjusting themselves to gain acceptance or they will reject people because they falsely feel those people are condemning them. Also, many times the things they feel people are thinking about them are not real, or they are simply lies the devil has told them.

These are two real problems in the way people think, and I propose that there is only one way to truly overcome the ME/YOU thinking patterns. We must discover the truth about what God thinks about us. In this we

will find the essence of identity we need to be whole. Both of the thinking patterns that I have shared come from a void within us. We are not sure about who we are and our relationship to those around us. We tetter back and forth between being self-centered and a people-pleaser. It seems, for most people, this instability is based on a good heart that actually wants to be a good person. So they are often afraid to settle on just one aspect of their thought-life for fear of becoming hardened about the other. As a result, they continue in the ME/YOU thought patterns for years trying to develop a consistent attitude towards themselves.

I have learned the only way out of this cycle is to become well developed in who you are in Christ. What God thinks about you supersedes everything you are anyone else thinks. He is the only one who knows you completely. He is the only one who understands and has true compassion for all your fears and regrets. He is also the only one who can lead you through to victory.

"¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. ¹² Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. ¹³ And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Jeremiah 29:11-13, KJV.

It's a real challenge to move beyond self-exaltation and self-loathing. Sometimes I find both in the same person. It's a battle to fight off all the supposed thoughts of others. Rarely do we think that others ever think well of us. More often we feel they are putting us down or condemning us. It's amazing how often we fail to ask someone what they think, but would rather cast suspicions on them and make up for ourselves what we feel they are thinking. We base this more on how we feel about ourselves than actually what the other person is thinking. Remember this: The only way to truly know what a person is thinking is to ask them. You may be surprised, as my dad was, that they weren't thinking about you at all.

Again, as you battle the ME/YOU thinking patterns and try to establish a wholesome and helpful consistent attitude about yourself, add GOD into the equation. Remember to ask him what he thinks about you. It will probably change how you feel about yourself and diminish the affects of worrying about what others think. Self-confidence is proper for God's people. It comes from having settled your questions of identity. When you know who you are in Christ, it belays all the self-condemnation and resolves all your false notions of things you are not. Looking into the Word of God is like peering deep within your own soul. You find out more about yourself than anything else.

One more thing. When we begin to more beyond self-introspection and the fear of man, we will find ourselves thinking less and less about anything other than what God thinks. Our lives become focused on pleasing him in all things. This is a maturity that solves the issue of who is thinking what about who.

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