

“Pronoun--You”

A couple of months ago I took a stress test. Have you ever taken one of those before? The doctor and the technician led me into this room and he showed me this demonic device called the treadmill. They shaved these little spots in my fur coat and hooked up all these electrodes and a blood pressure cuff. The technician said, “Mr. Brown, step on the treadmill, please.” I said, “Okay.” She pushed the start button. I’m like, “Man, this is no problem. I mean we’re barely going.” I said, “This is it? Come on, come on. I’m runner. I can do this all day.”

She said, “Just wait. I want you to walk, Mr. Brown, just keep up with the treadmill.” I said, “Okay. No problem.” Well, after a few minutes the tech said, “Every few minutes the intensity will increase,” and suddenly it did. I’m like, “Whoa, this is a pretty good workout, you know.” And then the speed and incline increased! Whoa! I go from a walk, to a fast walk, to a jog. To an uphill run. To I’m gasping for air! And minutes burn off the clock and I’m burning up calories and energy and finally she says, “Mr. Brown, are you moderately tired or very tired?” I said, “Very tired! Stop the machine!” She pushed the stop button and there was great relief to get off the treadmill. Whoa!

Treadmills are interesting. You go to a health club and there’s a sea of treadmills. And people are on the treadmills. Some with the slow jog, some with the power walk, others running real fast. We burn all this energy up on treadmills. We burn all these calories, but we’re not going anywhere. You don’t go anywhere. “Hey, man, I ran ten miles.” “Really? Where did you go?” “Nowhere. I was on the treadmill.”

We’re in this series we started last week called “Pronoun”. We’re looking at some powerful pronouns that shape us. Pronouns that God has something to say about. Last week we looked at the pronoun “they”. We asked the question: What did they influence you to do that you would not have done if they hadn’t been around? Well, today we’re going to change things a bit and talk about the pronoun “you”. We’re going to look at how you define you; how you determine your worth. We’re going to be looking at some self-esteem issues.

Why the treadmill? Because when it comes to our self-esteem, when it comes to your view of you, a lot of us here, I believe, are on a treadmill. We’re just running and we’re competing and we’re comparing and contrasting our lives with others. “Man, look at my treadmill. My treadmill is nicer than yours and I’m going faster than you are.” And we think, “Okay, the next deal, the next \$100,000, the next degree, the next bed I sleep in, the next person I date, the next car, the next, the next, the next....” And then we get tired of that, we just change treadmills. But we’re still not going anywhere.

The moment we’re born we embark on a lifelong search for significance. It’s a quest for purpose, and meaning, and dignity. But all too often, instead of going on a journey we end up on a treadmill.

We have this hunger inside of us to know if we matter in life. We have this passion for props. There’s a question each of us desperately wants to answer, Do I matter to anyone? And instead of going in the right direction to find the answer, way, way too often we end up on a treadmill going nowhere and not really getting an answer. Do I matter to anyone?

Instead of going on the journey with God to discover answers about, “If we matter and if so, how?” we end up on treadmills. Let me name a few of them. There’s the treadmill of style. “Ways to go no where: The treadmill of style” Instead of finding real meaning we go round and round hoping that finding the right lifestyle, the right look will bring meaning. We think, “If I focus on my style and dedicate energy to my appearance, I’ll gain the dignity, value and affirmation I crave.” But it’s just a treadmill. Proverbs 31:30 say it so well, “Charm can be deceptive and beauty doesn’t last” (Proverbs 31:30, TLB).

It’s like that worn out old joke about the two men playing golf. They’re getting ready to tee off when an elderly woman streaks across the fairway, nothing on. One golfer turns to his friend and says, “What was she wearing?” The other golfer says, “I don’t know. But whatever it was, it sure needed ironing!”

Some of us put so much value in outward appearance, thinking that will bring us meaning and self-worth, but that erodes. The Bible sheds light on this when it says, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). In our culture we can become so obsessed with outward appearances that we end up trading eternal rewards for the treadmill of style.

Yes, we need to take care of our bodies, you know I’m a big advocate of health. But there’s a difference between healthy living and obsession with outward appearances. How freeing would it be if you spent half as much time and energy on your appearance? What could happen in your life if you spent that time on your relationship with the God who made you?

Maybe you’ve already come to realize that the style treadmill isn’t going anywhere. But maybe you’ve just gotten on a different treadmill. The status treadmill is another tempting one. “The treadmill of status” Ed Young points out that the word

“status” says a lot because people who are into status keep stats on us. They go through life with a big tally board saying, “I’m going to keep score of what everyone has so I can stay one step ahead.” If you’re on this treadmill you’re convinced that status will answer the question, “Do I matter?”

The problem with making status a goal and a defining element in life is that the target is always moving. You can never really get your crosshairs on it. “If I can just make a little more money, have that car, wear those clothes, live in that house, in that neighborhood...I will have arrived.” But what’s hot today, is not going to be tomorrow, or the next day. Many of our American Idols are morally, spiritually, and emotionally bankrupt. Proverbs 11:7 says, “Confidence placed in riches comes to nothing” (Proverbs 11:7, GNT). Status is always elusive. It’s the treadmill. It doesn’t matter to God.

Some of us hop on the treadmill of success. We think, “OK. Style didn’t do it; status didn’t do work; surely the success track will lead to self-worth.” “The treadmill of success.” Look at what God says in scripture: “The Lord says, ‘The wise should not boast of their wisdom, nor the strong of their strength, nor the rich of their wealth. If any want to boast, they should boast that they know and understand me’” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, GNT).

We’re not to boast about the big three in American success values: wisdom, strength, and wealth. Yet we’re taught to compete and compare in all three of these! We’re raised to brag about academic achievement, athletic prowess, and financial gain. But just like the other two treadmills, this one only leads to frustration. It doesn’t go anywhere. I’ve talked to a lot of people who thought success in business, academics, sports would give their lives meaning. It just doesn’t do it.

So, are you tread-militant? Do you have a white-knuckle grip on the bars of the treadmill and you say, “I’m not getting off this thing? I’ll just jump from treadmill to treadmill; from treadmill to treadmill.” Maybe you’re playing treadmill hopscotch, just going from one to the next. Incessant treadmill hopping won’t lead to the answer we’re looking for. When it comes to your view of you, there are no answers there on any treadmill.

So what is your view of you? And what do you do if you find yourself on a treadmill looking for meaning for your life? The first thing is often the hardest. It’s simple, but it takes humility. You yell! You yell, “Stop!” “Getting off the treadmills: Yell “stop!” “Jane, get me off this crazy thing!” You cry out to the God who made you and say, “Stop this thing! Turn off the machine! I’m ready to get off. Lord, I want you to lead me on the search for meaning. I want you to be my source of self-understanding.” Maybe you’ve been on a few treadmills trying to get a view of you, and you are exhausted. Maybe you’re down on one knee and it’s time to get down on both knees and just pray out in humility and honesty, “I need you Lord. I need to see the world, to see reality, to see me, through your eyes.”

Over the years I’ve talked to lots of people in crisis of spiritual proportions. And I know they’re on the right path when finally, they just can’t stay on the treadmill anymore and they cry out. They realize the illusion of the treadmill. And they get honest with God and say, “I’m ready for a real journey of meaning, not the treadmills.”

Once we do that we’re ready to find out that having great self-esteem simply means seeing ourselves the way God sees us—nothing more and nothing less.

When you cry out, “Stop!” When you see you through God’s eye’s you see the truth. What is that truth? First, you are a masterpiece of infinite value. “Realize that you are a masterpiece” That’s God’s view of you. You are priceless. No matter what you tell yourself. No matter what others have told you, you are priceless, you are a masterpiece. But don’t take my word for it. Psalm 8 says this, “What are human beings that you [God] are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:4-5, NRSV). That needs to be the starting point of your view of you. You are a masterpiece. Not because of your style, or status you’ve created, or success you’ve achieved. Simply because God created you to be a masterpiece.

And not only that, but you were bought with a price. “Realize you were bought with a price.” Not only were you created as a masterpiece, but you were bought with the highest price. Jesus Christ was willing to give it all for you. He was willing to be tortured for you, to be humiliated for you, to be crucified for you and me. He took all the guilt, all the pain, all the remorse when he hung there suspended between heaven and earth, taking the licks for our moral foul-ups. He did it so that we would know we matter to him. How does that affect your view of you? He did it so humanity would have a proper view of “you”.

Far too often Christians look at the cross and see a tragedy. All we see is a sacrifice. But let’s not miss the point. For God so loved the world, for God so loved you, that he gave his only son. Jesus willingly made the sacrifice for you. It’s kind of interesting, Rick Warren starts his book *The Purpose Driven Life* with the words, “It’s not about you.” It’s a great book. I’ve read

it three times now. But when it comes to the sacrifice Jesus made, it's all about you. His sacrifice is for your sins, and mine. It's about God's deep desire to restore the broken communion with you and me. It's about his sheer, awesome, powerful love of you and me. If we could get our brains around that, it would change everything. You are a priceless masterpiece, bought with a priceless sacrifice.

How else do we stop being treadmillant? Do what we talked about last week. Let's revisit for a second. Surround yourself with the right "they". When I get my primary props from God, my primary affirmation, my primary view of me, I'm on my way. But it is also important to surround myself with the right "they." Because the right "they" give me the secondary props. God gives me the primary props. The right "they" gives me the secondary props. And the right "they" reflect Jesus back to me and they encourage me and support me to look vertically to Jesus.

Who are "they" in your life? You reflect they; they reflect you. If you've got the wrong "they" in your life you don't know who you are. You have no clue about your identity. If you've got the right "they" in your life, I'll bet cash money that you know who you are because they're pointing you to Jesus Christ.

Another way to stop being treadmillant is to know your purpose. This takes some time, but working at, striving, pushing to know what God put you here to do, that is huge. When you know your purpose it clarifies your life, your choices, your desires.

My purpose in God's plan shapes my life and yours can too. My goals are pretty simple, yet, I believe, profound because they're from God. My number one goal is to introduce people into a relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm not talking about religion. I'm against religion. So is Jesus. I'm talking about a relationship. Religion is just man made systems of dos and don'ts. It's a manmade system of "I've got to do this," or "I can't do that," and "If I do that, I'm better than them and so I'm religious."

No, a personal relationship is what I try to communicate. And also, I try to communicate the implications of that, of following Jesus. Following Christ is like marriage. You say, "I do," and you don't realize the implications of that decision until later on. I've been married for almost 14 years, and I'm still discovering the implications of that decision. The same is true with Jesus Christ. You receive Christ and you realize the implications of that as you walk and talk and live in sync with him.

The second goal in my life is to show people that they matter. You matter to God. You're not an afterthought. You're not an accident—no matter what your parents told you. You're a one of a kind. You have unique gifts and abilities and aptitudes and talents that no one else has. You have something to bring to the table that I can't bring to the table. I have something to bring to the table that you can't bring to the table. Getting off the treadmill allows you to find your purpose, and discovering that purpose, changing as it changes, growing as it grows, keeps you off the treadmills.

There's a reality in all of this that I have to state. It may be obvious, it might not be, but so much of getting off the treadmills happens when we really pursue our faith. It's hard to stay off meaningless treadmills when your faith in Christ is just an add-on to your life. If your faith is just a hobby, you'll be on and off treadmills, going no where often. So I've got to say it, take your faith journey seriously. Take regular intervals throughout the week to pray, to open yourself to God. Feed yourself on God's word every day, even if it's just a small portion, make it a habit. Get connected into a small group and a study. Make plans now for the Fall when we'll have all kinds of classes, courses and groups. Be a person of committed worship, that than of convenient worship. Actively pursue servant ministries, even when you don't feel like it, that's when it's most important to do.

All these things connect us to the God who made; all these things give you a real view of you.

I'm not much of a poetry kind of guy, but as I was getting ready for today, one poem kept popping into my mind. I think it speaks to this view of you. It's called The Touch of the Master's Hand by Myra Welch.

Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar," then, two! Only two?
"Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;

Going for three . . ." But no,
 From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
 Came forward and picked up the bow;
 Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
 And tightening the loose strings,
 He played a melody pure and sweet
 As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
 With a voice that was quiet and low,
 Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
 And he held it up with the bow.
 "A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
 "Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
 "Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice;
 And going and gone." said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
 "We do not quite understand
 What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
 "The touch of a master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
 And battered and scarred with sin,
 Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
 Much like the old violin.
 A 'mess of potage,' a glass of wine;
 A game - and he travels on.
 He is 'going' once, and 'going' twice,
 He's 'going' and almost 'gone'.
 But the Master comes and the foolish crowd
 Never can quite understand
 The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
 By the touch of the Master's Hand.

Myra B Welch

I sense that there's some truth in their about the real view of you. Stop trying to find your meaning on one of the many treadmills of life. Get off the treadmill! Stop. They don't go anywhere. The real journey awaits. Get the real view of you. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Ed Young for his book [You! The Journey to the Center of Your Worth](#), for being a wonderful resource for this series.