

***“Confessions of a Pastor—I Feel Completely Inadequate.”***

Today we're starting a series of messages called Confessions of a Pastor. I saw a book by Craig Groeschel with that title and I thought, whoa! That sounds pretty bold, pretty up front, pretty scary. I'd never do that! But as I perused that book and listened to him talk. I realized, that there's some real value in this. Of course I always try to be open and fairly transparent when I teach, but there are some things I stop short of telling you. Mostly because I'm afraid of what you might think, and there's a part of me that's worried that if you knew of what goes on in my mind, you'd bail.

I'm going to ease into this series with a confession that's pretty mild. They'll get grittier in the weeks ahead. But my first confession is that I feel completely inadequate to be your pastor. As I look at my own life, my own limitations, I do not feel like I have what it takes to be your pastor. I look at my lack of ability, my insecurities, my vulnerabilities and I feel overwhelmed.

Sometimes it's hardest on Sunday afternoons. Like last Sunday when we had three services here, then I grabbed lunch with my family, then ran home, changed clothes and got down to Shoal Creek for the river baptism, and then headed home about 4, I look back on the day, and what I did, and what I said, and how I interacted, and I thought, "God, I feel so insecure in doing all this." I feel like I never get it right. I was talking to one of you in the lobby last Sunday and you were sharing your heart with me and someone else walked up and we didn't get the chance to finish and you walked away. I had to run back in here and that's been on my heart.

Then when we were doing the baptism, we worked it out so that I would say a few words then Ben would say a few words and then we'd celebrate the baptisms. I say a few words and turn it over to Ben and he says, "You said what I was going to say!" Then I think about what I said there and I think, "Aaron, you fumbled your words, you used a stupid illustration, on one of the most important days in the life of lots of people." I beat myself up for days. I'm new to the whole river baptism thing anyway! In seminary, we practiced sprinkling! Like you need to practice sprinkling water!

I know some of you are thinking, "Aaron, you went to seminary? Couldn't tell." Yes, I went, I learned a lot, but there's a lot I didn't learn. I have attention deficit disorder! And anyway they prepared me to lead a little country church that wanted a sermon on Sundays and visit from the pastor when they were sick. They really didn't teach me how to lead a growing, thriving, complex body of believers on a mission! If they did, I slept through that part!

I feel like I always have so many eyes on me and when I goof something up, there are usually a bunch of people there to see it. I did a funeral years ago I'll never forget. It was a real celebration of the person life and they were really faithful. We did the service at the funeral home and then went to the graveside and I said a few closing words. It must have been because it was such a celebration of a life well-lived. Because after everything was said and done, I passed by the family to shake their hands, and the first words out of my mouth were, "Congratulations." No kidding! That's what I said. Please just dig another hole right there and throw me in it!

So many Sundays I go home after church with the feeling of, "OK God, thanks for using me in some way today, but that's all I got. I don't have anything else left to say!" I often feel like I'm not very smart. I know that I'm not very creative. Spiritually I don't feel like I'm good enough to do what God calls me to do. I feel completely inadequate to be your pastor.

You know, when you sense God' calling you to do something, it's easy to whip out your resume of failure. Mine says, "You got the wrong number, God. I'm not good enough, I've made too many mistakes. I don't know enough. I've got a temper. I'm not holy."

Whenever God calls us to do something it's easier to list all the reason why we think we can't do it. It's our resume of failure. But think about this: When Jesus picked his 12 followers, guess who he did NOT pick. He did not pick those most likely to succeed in their high school class. He did not pick the best looking, the best educated, or the most talented. He picked people just like you and me, ordinary people who were ready to make a difference.

Here's what I want you to hear today: God wants to make a difference through your life and when he calls you, you will probably feel like I do about getting the job done. There are three biblical thoughts that I want to talk about that Groeschel points to. He says, you are a candidate for God to work through if any of these three things apply to your life.

First, **You're a candidate for God to work through you if you have messed up big.** If you've ever blown it big time, fallen into sin, disobeyed God, you are still a candidate for God to work through. The prophet Isaiah had a vision where he was taken to heaven, to God's presence. As he approaches God he realizes how impure his is, he says, **"Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...' (Isaiah 6:5, NIV).**

What he's saying is that in the presence of God he became frighteningly aware of his own sin and shortcomings. And he says, "I don't even deserve to be in the presence of the Living God, much less to be used by God. Woe to me! I've messed up way to big." If you've ever felt like that, then you're in good company.

Abraham was a liar, Jacob was a cheater...if you've blown it big, you're in good company! Now, be clear, these were all sins that were painful and had consequences. We don't glorify sin, we don't glorify or accept lying, or infidelity, or murder, or cheating. We don't glorify sin, but we glorify God; we see how God forgives and God works through us even if we've messed up big. God can use you in powerful ways even if you've messed up big.

Growing up, I lied and lied and lied. I lied so much I forgot what the truth was. I stole things, I vandalized property. I cheated in school. I got drunk. And God still forgave my sin and has used me to do some things. What about you? You may present your resume for failure to God and say, "You can't use me to do anything good. I've got a failed marriage. I failed in so many ways. I've done people dirty." You may look at the state you're in right now and think, "If the people sitting next to me only knew what's going on in my life right now...they'd jump up and run out of here. No way God would use me to do anything good."

That's exactly the way Isaiah felt. "Woe to me!" "I am ruined! I'm dirty." Then the Bible says that an angel, a holy being, came up to Isaiah with a burning coal, touched that burning coal to Isaiah's lips, his point of sin in his life, and said, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for." Then watch this, Isaiah says, **"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' (Isaiah 6:8, NIV).** Forgiveness is some powerful stuff! Isaiah goes from, "Woe is me. I am ruined. I'm no good to anybody, I'm impure." He goes from that to, "You need something done God! I'll go. I can do it! Pick me! Pick me!"

And listen, the same will be true for you! You may feel ruined because of your sin, but because of the cleansing power of God, to forgive you, God says, "Now I've got a task, a calling, a purpose, an assignment for you." And you can with confidence say, "Send me!"

In fact, it might be that the bigger you've messed up, the bigger way God will use you. God's calling you and if you feel like you are not righteous enough, that makes you a great candidate for God's plans and purposes. It's just how he works.

And **You are a candidate for God to work through you if you are unsure of yourself.** If you are insecure, if you're not sure of your abilities. "I'm too young, I don't know enough, I'm too old, I can't really do anything. I've got this handicap, I'm not very smart." I've been getting up here and talking Sunday, after Sunday for years and years. But I still get nervous every Sunday. I still have a hard time sleeping every Saturday night because I'm nervous. Why? Because I feel inadequate.

I can relate to Moses in the Old Testament. When God called Moses in Exodus 4:10 to help set the Hebrew slaves free, here's what Moses said: **"O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10, NIV).** In other words, "Lord, there are people out there way better than me. I don't think I can do it!" I relate to that because I'm so unsure of my abilities. When I went to seminary I kept looking for some kind of ministry where I didn't have to get up in front of people and talk—I felt called to some kind of ministry but I was sure that I was not supposed to talk in front of people. Part of seminary for me was working in rural church in North Carolina as a summer intern. When I arrived I met with the pastor and he started talking about the preaching schedule for

the summer. My eyes got big, and I told him that I was not going to preach and he couldn't make me. I told him I'd do anything, anything, but that. And now what's God using me to do, more than anything else? Talk in front of people! For you, the thing that you are most insecure about, weakest in, could be the greatest place of ministry for you—the place where God does the most amazing things.

Here's a key thought. **God is not as concerned about your ability as he is about your availability.** When God calls you to do something, if you make yourself available, he will make you able. God calls Moses; Moses says, "God, I'm not good enough." God says back to him, "**Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say**" (Exodus 4:11-12, NIV).

"Moses, you're not sure of yourself, you're not all confident in your abilities, then you are a perfect candidate for this job I have for you. Why? Because you're not going to be trusting in your own abilities, there's going to be more room for you to trust in me." God said to Moses and it's true for you and me, "I will help you, and I will teach you."

God is calling you to make a difference and the tempter steps in, your own inner babbling starts jawing, "You? You don't have what it takes? You're not talented enough for that!" But God says, "Go! I will help you and I will teach you."

Remember, you're a candidate for God to use even if you've messed up big. And you're a candidate for God to work through if you're unsure of yourself. **AND You are a candidate for God to work through especially if others think you are not.** If other people don't think you have the ability or the talent, that makes you even more likely for God to use.

There's this awesome story in the Old Testament about a little boy who's a shepherd. His name was David. The prophet Samuel was told by God to go find the next king of Israel. He's led to the home of a man named Jesse and says to him, "I've been given the job of find the next king of Israel, bring me your son that's most likely to be king material. So he goes and brings out his oldest son--tallest, strongest, best looking, confident. Surely that's the son who will be king! God says, "Nope, not that one." Everybody's like, "That's a shocker!" Jesse brings out his next oldest son. Nope not that one either. Then the next one. Jesse goes through all of his 7 sons and none of them fit the bill. Samuel says, "Well, it's none of them, got any more?" Everybody kind of chuckles and says, "Well, the littlest one, but he's out watching the sheep." Like, he's the runt, he's just a kid, we don't know what he got in him yet. Samuel says, "I'll wait, go get him."

Here's what God says about the whole thing, cutting right through the junk, "**The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart**" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). The Bible makes it clear that God is not looking at what everybody else sees. God sees what nobody else can see. People get it wrong all the time! When Fred Astaire first tried out in Hollywood somebody wrote, "Can't sing, can't act, can dance a little..." When I was in seminary in North Carolina I would occasionally visit my great aunt Edith who lived a couple of hours away. I'm a leg-shaker, always have been, probably always will be. I loved Aunt Edith but she told one night at her dinner table. Aaron, you'll never be a pastor if you keep shaking your leg. You better stop or you'll go nowhere." As I kid, it was communicated to me over and over that I was never really going to make anything out of my life. I spent big parts of grade school with a partition around me. I was in constant trouble. I was sent to the hall. I was spanked by the principle. It was clearly communicated to me that I was a problem child that wouldn't amount to much. I internalized that, and still struggle with it.

Some of us in the room have heard phrases like, "You're not going to make the cut. You don't measure up. You don't have what it takes. You're not good enough, you're not smart enough, you're too hyper, you've burned your bridges. You're ugly, you're overweight, you're not in the top 3% of your class. You are not a candidate for anything significant."

Internalize this: You are not what other people think about you. You are not what other people say about you. God looks beyond what people see and looks at your heart. And God would say to some of you today, "I see something in your heart that others do not see. I can see what I placed inside of you. When the world looks at your outside and puts you over here. I look inside at what I put in you and I have plans. Plans for you to change this world."

I am completely inadequate to be your pastor. I'm not smart enough. I'm not creative enough. I'm not spiritually mature enough. I'm not good enough. I have a very strange sense of humor. I don't really fit the mold of a typical preacher. I expend a huge amount of energy trying to be a good boy and I fake confidence in a lot of situations because I feel insecure.

But at the same time, even though I feel inadequate, I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that God's hand is on me. And the more inadequate I feel, the more room it makes for the power of God to work in me and through me. And the same thing is true for you.

Here's the key. A couple of men were changing the world and the Bible says this, **“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV)**

The key phrase in that verse is there at the end. Peter and John had been following Jesus. They had been rubbing elbows with Jesus. They'd been listening to Jesus. Watching him. Witnessing how he walked, talked, interacted, reacted.

I'm not the most likely candidate and I will probably always feel completely inadequate. But I want you to understand that I have been with Jesus. And that makes me more than adequate to do what he calls me to do. I have been with Jesus and I've been forgiven of so much junk, and I've experienced his power, and his miracles and I believe with everything in me that I am what I am today because he lives inside of me, and he wants to live in you. He wants to move in and bring forgiveness, and hope, and future, and power, and plan.

The question for you today: What's God calling you to do? What is God calling you to do? If you listen you'll hear his voice. He might call you to serve somewhere here at church. Visiting the elderly, or teaching a class, or working with kids or any one of a hundred other things. Or he could be calling you to make a difference with Homebound Services, or Watered Gardens, or Big Brothers/Big Sisters, or LifeChoices. Maybe God's calling you to start a new ministry to help people. Or maybe God's calling you to start a Bible Study at work, or in your neighborhood, or to get some friends together and somehow start one in one of the poorest parts of our city. If you listen God will speak to you. What's God calling you to do? God is not looking at the things man looks at; he sees what he created you to be.

I'm not kidding when I say it. I'm completely inadequate to be your pastor. So what! Jesus used dirt and spit to perform miracles. He can use me, and if he can use me, he can definitely use you. So tear up your resume of failure. Stop making excuses, listen for God's call, experience God's forgiveness, say, “Here I am, send me.” .And for today, that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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