

When You Believe the Gospel According to Barbie

Shame speaks. Some of us have heard it all our lives. If you pay attention, you will hear a common thread. Enough. It is just never enough. You are not good enough. You are not pretty enough. You are not thin enough. You are not successful enough. You are not rich enough. It never stops. There is no end to the “ENOUGH” voices.

When I was in middle school, I remember a particular test coming up. It was difficult. I studied hard. I mean, I really studied. The day arrived. The studying paid off! I made a 99%! No one else even came close. I was excited and exhilarated! Though sometimes hard to admit, what the adults in my world said, was true! Hard work pays off. I ran into my house and announced, “I made a 99 on the test!”

Silence.

More silence.

Finally I heard, “What happened to the other point?” I wanted to scream and probably should have!

“WHAT??!!” “Don’t you understand what it took to GET that 99?” “Don’t you know that no one in my class even came close?” “Do you know that I worked my tail off, studied on my own until I could not see straight, and sacrificed time with my friends to get that 99?” No, apparently they did not. There was never any discussion other than, “What happened to the other point?”

To be fair, my Granddaddy smiled when he said it. Of course I realize now that he meant no harm. However, he had no way of knowing that there were inner voices that were going off inside my head already. “It is not enough.” “It is not good enough.” “You could have done more.” “You could have done

better." Translated, you could BE better.

Shame has a mantra. Over and over it recites, "You are not enough," particularly in the arena of appearance. Weight, height, shape. They are completely scrutinized by shame. Too fat. Too thin. Too tall. Too short. Too round, square, too big on top, too big on bottom, and too big in the middle. Too, too, too, (fill in the blank.) It is just not enough.

How did this happen? When did someone or something decide for us that we were not enough in some shape or fashion? The more important questions might be, "Why did we listen, and why did we let them?"

I call this the Gospel of Barbie. You must be thin, be perfect, and smile all the time. No one must know the real you. Remember the nagging question in our soul? "If someone knew the truth about me, would they still be my friend? Would they like me? Would they let me belong to their group?" "Would I be able to sit at the 'cool' table with the pretty girls?" Or, will my weight, height, size or shape in some way prevent or eliminate me from belonging? That, of course is the ultimate question. That is what drives many of us. We spend money, time, energy, and relationships to answer these questions.

The truth from the Word is that frankly, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Every part of us is a treasured piece of artistry of our Creator God. In the beginning, God said it was good. It was, in fact, very good. Perhaps because there was no shame.

Shame changed everything. To that, I say, "ENOUGH." That is what we need to say. Back at you. Enough Shame! I will not take you on anymore. I will not wear your garments. I will not wear your mask and cover myself from being vulnerable and real with others.

It is difficult to do. God can help.

On March 24, 1996 I was part of a powerful and sovereign move of God that literally changed hundreds of thousands of lives. The pastors were personally and dramatically changed in a precise moment on a certain night. They would go on to influence congregations all over the world, as well as entire denominations and individuals.

But something else happened that night that was equally as dramatic and life changing. God restored the very good. He stripped me down to my barest, most vulnerable self. Suddenly, I looked at people I had attended church with for at least a year, and it hit me. I had no idea who these people were. I did not KNOW them.

We had sat together, worked on projects together, worshiped together, ate together, watched and taught children together, but yet, I did not know them, and they did not know me. This night, however, changed everything. I suddenly wanted to know them. I needed to.

It was my first "ENOUGH" moment. Enough hiding. Enough covering my flaws and failures. Enough fear that I could not be liked, accepted and embraced for my differences and imperfections.

Thankfully there would be many more "enough" moments. But on this night, I looked into the eyes of a few, and I knew the plastic Barbie type mantra was going: the smiling with gritted teeth, the constant pretending that everything was wonderful when exhaustion was taking its toll, the 'I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in the pan' ... etc. etc. It was exhausting.

Now, other things mattered. People mattered. I wanted to know who these people were. I wanted them to see me as I was and love me anyway. I wondered if it would even be possible. It is indeed risky business!

Could I be transparent, thereby making myself vulnerable to hurt and rejection? Yes. Yes I could. Well, it was certainly

worth a try, because that night, I found courage. I found courage and hope.

Courage is not being a hero. It is not necessarily one particular act of bravery. Real courage is being who you are and behaving that way in every situation. It is not hiding behind a mask of pretense. It is being real. What might be the ultimate act of courage? How about weighing what your driver's license says you weigh! Barbie would be appalled.

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