

# Self Image script - Threats to Wholeness #2

Last week as we started this started this series...

... called Threats to Wholeness

- Counsellor Eric Hodgkinson gave what I thought was a really good message on Unforgiveness
- In it he mentioned a book called The Shack
  - How many have read it? Or seen the movie?

For those who don't know it...

... God is referred to as Papa in the story and appears initially in the form of an African American woman

- When asked about a specific person Papa will say:
  - 'Oh yeah - I'm especially fond of that one'
- Then someone else would be mentioned and Papa would say: 'I'm especially fond of that one too'
- And this is a theme through the story
  - Papa seems to be especially fond of everyone

I'll bet all you who read or watched it...

... thought the same thing I did

- How could God be especially fond of everyone?
- It seems nonsense
  - Does He have 7.5 billion best friends!

And like me you will have seen many depictions of God

... in many different movies and books

... but none quite match this

- Could God really be quite so wonderful as Papa is in The Shack?
  - So immensely forgiving and understanding,
    - ◆ and saying of every single one of us
      - 'I'm especially fond of that one', 'and of that one', 'and that one'
- Or is that just what the author hopes God is like?
  - It's only a novel after all

Let's pray as we come to today's topic

PRAYER

Since I last preached - just a fortnight back...

... I've been looking in the papers for any stories that connect with the theme of Self Image

- There was **so** much that I can't mention it all
  - Some of it was predictable

## Like the articles about whether all models need to be skinny

... or whether slightly less skinny women should go on catwalks too

- And this is written about as if it's a revolutionary new thought that no one has ever considered before!

## Much more interesting was the...

... stellar rise of Jacinda Adern

... who seems to have the image stuff completely under control

- She's got the looks, personality, relatability, and she's nailing the speeches and TV soundbites
  - At just age 37 she's the Leader of the Opposition!
- Yet what really jumped out was when she described her younger self, as a **nerd**

## Similarly, projecting a fabulous image last week

... was the wunderkind CEO of Tesla Motors, Elon Musk

- He's changing the way the world view Electric Cars with his release of Tesla Model 3
  - He has plans for futuristic underground roadway systems
  - ◆ He runs a space rocket company in his spare time
    - He even has a plan for colonising Mars!
  - ... and his net worth has just hit 21.3 billion dollars!
- Wow! How must it be to be Elon Musk?

## Clues to his inner world surfaced in the last fortnight

... as he talked about his incredible highs and terrible lows,

... his failed marriages, his unrelenting stress

... and fears of being bipolar

## The inner world of NZers came in to focus in the last fortnight...

... with Herald articles like this one on suicide:

NEW ZEALAND

### Break The Silence: One in 20 NZ high school students attempts suicide each year - survey

25 Jul 2017 5:00am

⌚ 5 minutes to read



- One in twenty - every year!
  - That's an astounding figure.
    - ◆ I wanted to know who did that survey and where and when
    - ◆ It signals a massive crisis of our inner world

In case these examples all seem like one way traffic however...

... there was also, in the last fortnight,

... the most astonishing statement yet from that one man walking headline Donald Trump  
... who said in the phone call transcript to Malcolm Turnbull:

***'I am the world's greatest person'***

- I had to pinch myself and go back to it several times!
  - Did he really say that?
- Donald Trump doesn't appear to have too much problem with self esteem!
  - Then again, what would cause someone to make a statement like that?
    - I'll leave that one to the psychologists!

But let me tell you about the headline that got me most

- The biggest game in World Rugby is the World Cup Final
  - For such a game the best referee in the world is the one that gets picked

So when the Allblacks played Australia in that final in 2015

... a Welshman called Nigel Owens was the referee

- The greatest rugby ref in the world - no one was arguing
  - You can't go any higher than a World Cup Final
    - ◆ He'd reached the pinnacle
    - ◆ What a thing to tell your grandchildren!

But in this last fortnight, Nigel Owens told the world...

... that when he was reffing that very world cup match - the height of his career

... he was suffering from an eating disorder

- Really? A male? In his 40's? Who's super successful? Why? How come?

When you ask those questions you also discover...

... that he lived for years in fear of someone discovering he was gay, which he only announced when he was 33

... that he once walked into a doctor's surgery to ask if he could be chemically castrated

... that he got hooked on liquid self-injected steroids, trying to develop a physique which could somehow allow him to feel some sense of self-worth

... that he decided 21 years ago to end his life, slipping out of his parents' home with two boxes of Paracetamol, a bottle of whisky and a loaded shotgun.

- He only survived because he fell into a coma after washing down the pills with the whisky
  - ... so the gun was left untouched when a police helicopter found him
- He talks with desperate envy about his wider family - wives and kids
  - How he will never have a son to take to a rugby practice

At the end of it all he concludes:

***'I would swap everything I have achieved for a normal life'***

As a younger pastor speaking on this kind of topic...

... I would find helpful books

... and then tell people what the books say

- That was probably a good option given how huge the topic is
- So I don't know if my approach today is better or worse than that
- But today I'd rather put the books aside
- ... and just speak from the heart

◆ I suppose because the journey through issues of self image is a journey of the heart

## For today I made a list of my top ten personal discoveries about Self Image

- You will have made plenty also
  - In fact I asked people this question on Facebook this week
    - So if this encourages you to unpack your own discoveries and even share them with others
- ... then that's a great outcome

### I realised also that all ten of my discoveries...

... are influenced somehow by my Christian faith

- It's as if Christian truth has slowly been working its way through me
  - Which is something I really thank God for

### The first discovery for me came in my early twenties:

#### 1. Everyone has the same problem!

- I was a warden in a hostel
- ... and some students shared with me how poorly they thought of themselves
- ... and how depressed and useless it made them feel
- I was amazed how widespread it seemed to be among students

### And I clearly remember thinking - like a lightbulb going on:

... the inadequacy and uselessness and insignificance that I've felt

... it looks like everyone else feels that too!

### Do I mean that everyone has poor self esteem?

... or that we all feel depressed and useless all the time?

- No of course not
- But there is a self image problem that affects us all

### It's the simple fact...

... that all of us are incomplete and inadequate in some way

- It's as if we were all given **some** of the tools we need to make it through life
  - But we were deliberately not given all of them
    - ◆ And that is just so annoying and frustrating and frightening
- It forces us to choose:
  - ... to either live with the pain of incompleteness
  - ... or admit it to somebody in the hope that they can help us

## This incompleteness is a concept also found in the Bible

- At the end of the miserable story of Job, God roars into life  
“Who do you think you are Job, speaking words without knowledge  
Brace yourself like a man;  
I will question you,  
and you shall answer me.  
4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?  
Tell me, if you understand.  
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!  
Who stretched a measuring line across it?  
6 On what were its footings set,  
or who laid its cornerstone—
- In other words - “I didn’t create you with everything”
  - “I purposefully put limits on you”
    - “I know you want to be like me, and sometimes imagine that you are”
    - “But I limited you - I’m the Creator, you’re the creation”

## And then Paul in the New Testament

... tells the church in Corinth

- You’re all like bits of a body
  - ◆ You all need each other because there are so many things that on your own you can’t do
- By definition we are all inadequate in some way, and we remain so throughout our lives
  - The Self Image problem is our struggle to accept that in the many facets of life

## What facets of life?

- Well many people immediately think about ‘looks’ when we mention self image
  - That’s part of it
    - ◆ I’ve certainly struggled with that
- As a teenager my skin was so bad that I would go for months without attending any social engagement  
... because I was so embarrassed about how I looked
- Some new acne cure would come out and I would be so full of hope that I could look okay again  
... but that wouldn’t work  
... and the next one wouldn’t work either
- Those were awful, painful months

## But worse than that for me...

... was my fear a few years later of social situations

- I’d be out with friends and for no reason at all an incredible anxiety would come over me
  - The fear would be all over my face  
... so I’d abruptly turn away or go to the bathroom  
... anything so people wouldn’t see me so completely out of control

## I auditioned for the Young Musician of the Year TV programme on

## piano

- I played really well - I thought I was in
- Then they said, 'Now we'll take a photo'
  - And that fear struck me like lightning
- I failed the audition
  - They sent me a copy of the most awkward publicity photo in history
- Jo asked me yesterday if I kept the photo
  - I said you've got to be kidding
    - That was an excruciating memory

## When I'd find myself in a new group of people...

... I hated that moment where you go round the circle introducing yourself

- Such a simple thing to do
  - Yet I was totally convinced people would sum my entire life up based on the stammering words that would come out of my mouth

## I hated Quiz Nights...

... because I'd get found out for not knowing something that everyone should know

## I've often felt inadequate as a male...

... because I lack any trace of handyman skills

- When your wife phones Hire a Hubby, it doesn't feel great when you are the actual husband

## But I did use this to my advantage in my last church...

- When no one put their hand up for the Property Team
- I got immediate action when I said:
  - "My goodness you guys are hard up! The best you could come up with is me for the Property Team!"

## But more seriously, even as a Pastor self esteem has been a problem

- Sitting in a group of pastors we'd go round the circle and say: 'So how's your church going?'
  - One particular group felt like it was full of world beating extraverts - they'd say things like:
    - 'Oh my church is awesome - we had 50 baptisms last Sunday!'
    - Then the next person would say: 'And we've just finished our third building project and it's looking sweet'
    - And another would say: 'We had 220 people come to last weekend's soup kitchen'
- And then they'd say: "So Steve - how's your church going?"
- I'd feel like a complete failure, like I was letting the side down
- I'd say something like:
  - Well ... we had a pretty good Bake Sale last Sunday...
    - I'd feel like the Vicar of Dibley
- It wasn't often that I could be honest, and say, actually I'm really struggling

## What about you?

- Does any of this ring true for you?

## Things have certainly got easier for me as I got older...

- But if you're one who feels that self image problems are now under control ... then consider these questions:
  - *Do you find it really easy to take a complement?*
  - *Do you find it really easy to take criticism?*
  - *Do you always feel capable in every area of your life?*
  - *Do you feel perfectly at ease in every social environment?*
  - *Do you find it really easy to believe you can be completely forgiven for any wrongs you've done?*

## I'm imagining if we put our hands up to answer yes

- How many hands do you think would go up for all those questions?

## Second discovery:

## 2. Not talking about the problem gives it all its power

- There's a story in 1 Corinthians 5 where a problem grows and grows ... simply because nobody is talking about it
- It's the elephant in the room
  - ... and the more you ignore the elephant in the room,
    - ... the more it tramples on all the things *in the room* that matter to us
- Talking about self image issues is embarrassing because it shows us at our most pathetic
  - Not talking about them guarantees us a life of emotional pain

## I wonder what your relationship has been with the bathroom scales?

- Over the years I would sometimes push myself hard with exercise
  - ... when I thought I was putting on weight
- Other times I'd diet manically
- Yet through all those years my weight has scarcely changed regardless of those different phases
  - I wish I could have told that to my younger self
    - ... who was so wound up and anxious about it
      - I could've just enjoyed who I was

## But a more important thing I learned...

- ... is that even if I had put on more and more weight
  - ... I am completely certain that none of my friends would have said:
    - I ... think I might stop being your friend now because you're putting on weight
    - That's just so ridiculous

## I'm not bothered about weight these days...

... but if I'm honest I really hate that my hair has gone so grey...

... and I totally blame my churches for it

- But not one of my friends has ever said to me:
  - Steve, I'm really concerned about your grey hair
  - ... it just seems to be getting greyer and greyer
  - ... and you know Steve, I just don't think our friendship can survive it

## If we're busting a few myths here...

... here's another one:

- That social situation that you fear the most
  - Afraid you'll say or do or wear the wrong thing
  - And it feels like every eye in the room is on you
- Honestly, no one in the room cares because they are all so wound up with themselves!
  - All eyes aren't looking at you
  - They aren't all talking about you and your failures when they go home
    - ◆ Because they're all struggling with their own failures

## The next thing I discovered is:

### 3. The Playing Field is Not Level

- Some people have loads more self esteem than others
- You'd have to ask someone like Eric or Jenny Hodgkinson why that is
  - ... but I know it has something to do with whether as a child we received focused attention, through:

- ◆ Eye contact
- ◆ Time
- ◆ Listening
- ◆ Touch &
- ◆ Praise

- If you don't get those things as a child the journey is much harder and it seems so unfair that this is the case

## That little girl in the movie...

... gets physically and verbally abused

- Just as well she had that African American maid in her life:
- You is kind; you is smart; you is important
  - Who would ever think that words like that could be so powerful to shape us?

## God understands that the playing field is not level

- Jesus said, 'I didn't come here for the healthy ones, I came for the sick'
- And in Luke 4 he describes the groups of people who have it so much harder
  - ... and how those are his key target

## I discovered also that:



## 4. I should stand with dignity because I'm made in the Image of God

- Two young African men lived in the language hostel I worked at in London
  - They walked very slowly and stood so straight
  - They projected dignity
  - In a positive way, they seemed proud of who they were

### By contrast I would walk like a kiwi male

- With hunched shoulders, often staring at the ground as I walked

### The Bible says...

... we're made in the image of God

- ***There's so much I'd like to tell you about that***

... and that it says God specially furnished this planet with everything we needed on it  
... then finally when everything else is done, his crowning glory - he makes man and woman

◆ And he pronounces that we are very good

### But what you probably don't know

... and actually the best thing you could know about the Creation story  
... is that all the other Creation stories from the ancient near east, aside from the biblical one  
... say that mankind was bad, or was a mistake  
... or that we were only created in order to keep the gods happy

### ***But for now let me just ask:***

### Do you walk through each day ...

... like someone who's made in the image of God?  
... like someone who is a child of God?  
... like a person with dignity?

This fifth one is probably my biggest learning of all:

## 5. There is no normal!

- Do you agree with me on that?

### Nigel Owens said he would've ...

... given up all his achievements in order to be normal

- I understand what he's saying with regard to his sexuality
  - But what do we actually mean by normal?

### When it comes to struggles like Owens had with eating disorders

- It's the people who are closest to what society calls a 'normal' body shape that so often get

eating disorders

- I don't think there's any such thing as normal
  - I think 'normal' is an idea without a basis in reality
  - Normal is a tyranny - a way we all think we have to be

## I imagine God up there in heaven

... delighting in all the different kinds of people he made  
... all the cultures  
... all the physical variations hand crafted by God

## Only to find that down here on earth...

... dark skinned people want to bleach their skin to look more white  
● And white skinned people are lying under sun lamps to look more brown

## And God's thinking:

- I made you all gloriously different; why are you trying to be the same?
- People are getting nose jobs and chin jobs and every kind of plastic surgery to conform to some imagined pattern  
... when God gave us each the gift of originality!

## The idea that women need to get in shape before summer...

... is not found anywhere in the Bible  
■ And there is no Bible chapter on how men can get abs

## 'Normal' only exists in our minds

- Uniformity is not how God created us
- The more I look into my Christian faith, the more I realise that God wants me to find complete freedom in being me
  - Mimicking others or striving for society's currently promoted concept of normality is missing God's best for us

## Similar to that I discovered...

## **6. There's a huge temptation to try and be more than God intended us to be**

- To be the best piano student at university I would set my alarm super early and do three hours practice before the other students had got out of bed
  - But after a while I got tired and I couldn't get up that early  
... so then I'd skip breakfast so I could still make it in time
- And I'd be so frustrated to be late  
... that I'd even sometimes run the last bit so I could still get there on time  
... to do my 3 hours before other students had even got out of bed

## Looking back I realise that I was trying to get more out of me...

... than God actually intended

- I wasn't happy with the piano player God was making me to be
  - I wanted to be better than that
    - ◆ So I was trying to cheat my body to achieve it

## As ridiculous as that sounds...

- ... I think many of us are not happy with who God made us to be
  - ◆ And trying to find ways to go beyond that and be something better

## Like the tower of Babel

- ... where people tried to reach higher than they were created to reach
- Are you happy with the way God made you?
  - Completely happy?
  - Or are you trying to be something more?

## The next three are self explanatory:

### **7. I can't let others determine how I feel about me (Eccl 7:21)**

- Someone who was relentlessly critical about me as a pastor
  - ... had me hurtling towards depression
- Then one day I thought: Why am I letting that guy decide how I feel about me?

### **8. It's my responsibility to monitor unrealistic & accusatory self talk (Jn 9:1-3)**

- If your inner critic is killing you then you are the only person in the world who can do anything about it
- It's like you inside your head you make a room for yourself to live in
  - If that room is like being in hell then you need to do the work to tidy it up
  - A counsellor can help, but only you can tidy the room

### **9. Whatever we let in can guide how we think about ourselves (Ps 1:1-2)**

- If you spend 15 hours a week watching TV programmes where all the women are slim and gorgeous
  - ... and where their sole purpose is to be desirable to the opposite sex
    - And you spend no time reading your Bible or reflecting in any way on biblical truth
      - ... then how would we expect to grow more like Christ?

## And finally on my top ten:

### **10. A timely comment can change someone's future (Matt 16:18)**

- Jesus picks the biggest doofus in the New Testament
  - ... and changes the course of his life with a single comment:

***You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.***

## So also during my mid life depression back in Petone

... when I felt I'd let the entire world down and particularly my church elders

- The elder I'd admired most came to me one day and said:
  - Steve, what if, through all this, you could one day end up becoming an extraordinary leader?

## I don't know what would make her use language like that

- Extraordinary was the opposite of what she'd seen from me
  - I didn't believe I even was a leader in the ways that mattered
  - Yet somehow, like Jesus with Peter, she managed to look deep in to who I am ... and call out something invisible to everyone else including me

## And I've hung on to those two preposterous words ever since

- Because if Jesus could call out a doofus like Peter then I fit the bill really well

## So to return to the opening question:

- Could God possibly be as good, as understanding and as wonderful as Papa is in The Shack?
  - Could he really look at you, and say, "I especially love that one"?
  - There is no question at all in my mind - the answer is yes

## The way Jesus built Peter's self esteem

... did you know he builds up someone's self esteem on every page of the gospel?

- It's the way he hugs those annoying kids, after saying, "Let the children come to me"
- It's the way he complements the woman who'd bled for twelve years: "Daughter, *your* faith has healed you"
- It's making special the guy everyone hates: 'Zaccheus come down out of the tree; I'm staying at your place tonight'
- It's how he stands next to the adulterous woman and stares down the angry men with rocks in their hands
- It's the embrace of of the Prodigal Son by his father

## To say "God loves us", doesn't make the point strongly enough

- It's like saying Granddad loves us
  - Of course Granddad loves us - he has to, he's our Granddad!

## God's love in these stories from Scripture is far more radical than that

- I'd say The Shack has got it right.
  - Papa looks you in the eye, and he says: 'I especially love that one'

PRAYER

## **Verses**

Hebrews 2:6-7

- 6 For in one place the Scriptures say,  
“What are mere mortals that you should think about them,  
or a son of man[a] that you should care for him?  
7 Yet for a little while you made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honor.[b]

Psalms 139:13-14

- 13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body  
and knit me together in my mother's womb.  
14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!  
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

Ephesians 2:10a

- 10 For we are God's masterpiece.

1 John 3:1

- 3 See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!

Matthew 11:28-30

- 28 Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Isaiah 49:15-16

- 15 “Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?  
Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?  
But even if that were possible,  
I would not forget you!  
16 See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.

Romans 5:8

- 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Genesis 1:27

- 27 So God created human beings in his own image.  
In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.