

When we listen to the voice of shame, we begin believing the lie that our wickedness, weakness, and woundedness disqualify us from God's love.

But the opposite is true. Jesus proclaimed that God passionately desires to bind up the brokenhearted and set the captives free (Luke 4:18–19). But how can He transform our brokenness into wholeness when we insist on concealing it? When we hide, we limit God's ability to reveal and heal those parts of us that desperately need the touch of the Great Physician, the Wonderful Counselor, and the Comforter. When we desperately try to maintain our appearance, we end up delaying our rescue.

Since that fateful day in the garden of Eden, all of us have followed Adam and Eve's example by attempting to earn love. We believe that in order to be loved, we must perform. All of us develop a strategy or way of relating to our inner worlds that convinces us to feel that we are okay, that we are loved, that we are desired. To satisfy our thirst for love, we run toward broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

This performance approach, however, presents us with three problems. First, performance is a treadmill that never stops running. How can we know when at last we are good enough? How can we know that we are performing well enough? The man who derives his identity and seeks out love through performance, achievement, or trying to be

good enough sets himself up to live with enormous pressure. Such an approach is wearisome. It exhausts the soul and prevents him from receiving all of the good things that God offers.

Second, the performance approach is rooted in pride—which is another word for self-sufficiency. The few who somehow meet their own performance standards see no need for the gospel. The rich young ruler in Mark 10:17 was such a man. He had followed God's commands. He performed well and looked good. His suit of performance cloaked his raincoat of shame. But despite all this, his question to Jesus revealed that he was still missing something. "Teacher, what [else] must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The man's question didn't concern just going to heaven when he died. He was asking about entering the kingdom of God and joining Jesus in building His kingdom. But Jesus knew his heart. When this man offered proof of his righteousness—keeping the Ten Commandments—Jesus revealed to him something that his self-sufficiency could not produce. He asked the man to go and sell everything he had and give it to the poor. The story tells us the man was very wealthy. He hung his head and walked away. Though he looked good on the outside, something inside wouldn't allow him to let go of his wealth. Perhaps he allowed his earthly treasure to define him and delude him into believing his value was based on his riches.

Finally, the performance approach leads to the development of a false self. Each of us creates a

persona in hopes of convincing others that this is who we really are. It's our game face. Our best foot forward. Who we want to be in others' eyes.

In his novel *Too Late the Phalarope*, Alan Paton described a man with a dark sexual secret, whose false self led to public disgrace and imprisonment: "He was always two men. The one was the soldier of the war, with all the English ribbons that his father hated: the lieutenant in the police, second only to the captain: the great rugby player, hero of thousands of boys and men. The other was the dark and silent man, hiding from all men secret knowledge of himself, with that hardness and coldness that made men afraid of him, afraid even to speak to him."<sup>3</sup>

But, of course, all this hiding and performing and pretending prevents us from receiving what our hearts long for. A false self cannot be loved. A fake self does not exist: it is only illusion. You and I can only be loved for our true selves, as unlovable as we think we might be.