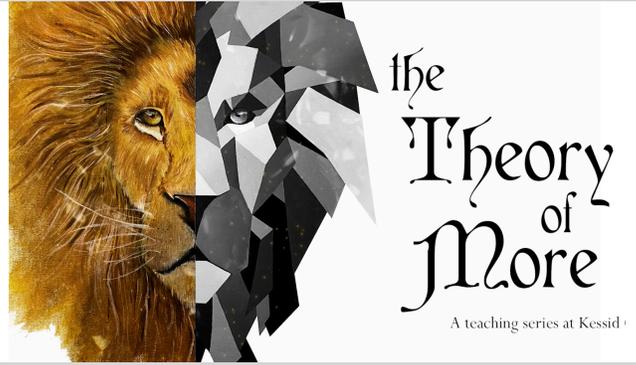


“LESS IS MORE”
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I recently heard about King Frederick’s Lion of Gripsholm’s Castle. The story goes that in 1731, a gift was given to King Frederick I. The gift was a real-life lion. The king fell in love with his pet.

Then... his lion died. He loved the lion so much that he wanted to have the animal stuffed. So he sent the lion to a taxidermist, who incidentally had never seen a lion before. So he stuffed the lion without ever knowing what a real lion is supposed to look like!

See what happened was this guy tried to recreate what the lion looked like, and in doing so he created a hilariously mutilated version of a lion.

This to me became such a perfect metaphor of what the people outside of the community of the church see when they look at a lot of us who are on the inside.

They see a group of people called to reflect and imitate the true lion, and when they see us, they see pale imitations that they try to imitate, and next thing you know the whole thing seems fake and people walk away from the whole thing seeing no power in it.

To give you a more clear picture, I began following Jesus 15 years ago. I had this powerful encounter with Jesus that radically changed my life, and I made the decision to follow Jesus not quite understanding what that meant.

As I started diving into the church as a whole, and I started to learn the Christian subculture, this cancerous idea began to surface. After I had this powerful encounter with Jesus I was given a series of checkboxes to “grow” in my faith, but over time it all started to feel like a checklist to perform in order to belong to the community called the church.

SO... I did it. I was good at it for a while. But in the background I was suppressing and being dishonest about my brokenness, I was getting burned out, and ignoring my trauma. There seemed to be this pressure that I needed to be this sterile and plastic Christian that wasn’t really me... It was inauthentic. Hear me on this, I am not saying reading the Bible, praying, or spiritual habits are a bad thing, but I think there’s a culture that says if we do those things alone that we should look and act like everything is good and perfect, and when life’s not perfect, we end up with just a to-do list without any intimacy, experience, or relationship with Jesus that drove many of us into his arms to begin with.

It all came to a head when I was dumped in college. I was at Rocky Butte, and I had a screaming match with God. I swore at Him, I was honest. I subtly felt this freedom that, for once I was actually me with God, and felt intimacy with Him that was so soothing for that dry soul of mine. I learned He never wanted my checklist, He didn't want me to perform more.

He didn't want MORE of me, He wanted ALL of me

That began to translate, that if I was gonna stick around in this whole thing we call church, I was going to be honest and display my brokenness.

The crazy thing is, that's when I began to see God most clearly use me in the life of others, was when I was the broken, messed up version of me that was honest. Not the plastic produced sterile version of me that the church at large has a tendency to produce. Not the *fake* ugly dead lion, but the *real* one.

This put me on the path to actually studying the Bible and learning the story of a guy who had an experience learning a similar lesson, and over time became a clear picture of the true lion.

He was a highly educated, high-status guy in the religious establishment of his day. He looked on the surface that he had it all together. He seemed like the prim, proper, sterile, plastic, religious people of his day.

This is the story of the Apostle Paul. A guy who wrote 2/3 of the New Testament, but had a powerful story of transformation.

He was a highly educated, high-status guy in the religious establishment of his day. He looked on the surface that he had it all together. He seemed like the prim, proper, sterile, plastic, religious people of his day.

But in reality, he was a bully who was violent, broken, and caused the first murder in the history of Jesus' church.

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 11:17-18 – "What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. 18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast..."

Paul is writing the letter of 2 Corinthians after a bunch of conflict arose out of the community in Corinth - a very wealthy and high-status city in the Roman empire - were wanting leaders that looked *more* like the big leaders of their day. This caused a lot of attacks on Paul who's poor, not a great speaker, whose name literally means "small". So he is defending himself, and begins by using this natural subculture to boast, to self-elevate, to show this prim proper all of the rough edges sanded off image of himself to them.

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 11:22 – “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.”

Basically, he has all the qualifications of the religious establishment of his day. He can trace his lineage to the people of the promise. He continues:

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 – “Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hand.”

Now he is demonstrating how many things he has done “for” God. Paul does this a few times in his writings.

In Acts 22 He name drops that he trained under Gamaliel, which would be like someone saying they studied under Einstein.

In Galatians, Paul’s first ever letter, he writes that he was advancing in Judaism beyond anyone his own age.

(Vs) Galatians 1:14 – “And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.”

In Philippians, which was written a couple years after 2 Corinthians, Paul writes out his resume stating: “I have a reason for confidence in the flesh”,

(Vs) Philippians 3:4-6 – “though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”

Paul discusses in each of these instances the temptation to boast in our clean image that we want to create as Jesus followers.

But Paul is learning throughout each of these instances the difference between the false lion and the true lion, the lion who is real, authentic, and realizes that Jesus.

In each instance of sharing his story, Paul increasingly lessens the religious image that we're all tempted to use, and he begins to highlight what actually demonstrates the POWER OF GOD. Not this identity of perfection we want to promote, but one of brokenness.

In Galatians, Paul highlights his mistakes first. In Philippians Paul calls his "resume" Garbage!

Even in 2 Corinthians Paul shifts from wanting to elevate his status and image to this idea of brokenness. In 2 Corinthians 12

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 12:1 – "I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord."

He gets the veil pulled back, and sees a reality far more real than our reality, and it puts things in its proper perspective. He continues:

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 12:2-5 – "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— 6 though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me."

Paul sees what ACTUALLY matters in the grand scheme of eternity. He doesn't boast in what he gets to see, he boasts in something far greater.

(Vs) 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 – "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

This just reminds us that it's not our perfection, it's not having our lives tidy, it's not having it all together that demonstrates the power of God! It's our brokenness, it's those places in us that when we're real and authentic about where we do not have it all together that's when God begins to work.

It's there that people outside of this place start to see real people who aren't above anyone else, but rather people who have encountered the real lion, and have seen HIS power in our lives.

I mentioned that Paul shares his faith story a half dozen times in the NT, and most of the time, he shares about this plastic image that the world says it wants, the fake lion.

But 15 years after Paul writes 2 Corinthians, he writes his faith story for the last time, while in prison a couple of years from being executed. He writes to a young pastor he's mentoring, and he doesn't share one aspect of *his* qualifications. Instead, while on death's doorstep, he shares this in 1 Timothy 1

(Vs) 1 Timothy 1:15 NIV – "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst."

No mention of his status, just an honest reflection of his brokenness, but it's through this that Paul gets a glimpse into the actual secret sauce of ministry.

(Vs) 1 Timothy 1:16-17 – "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Notice the last time Paul doesn't share anything but his brokenness. Not a mention of his qualifications, not a mention of how much he has it all together, at the end of his life the only thing that matters is his honesty with how messed up he is, and how THAT is what Jesus uses.

Jesus never wanted more of a performance, Jesus wanted all of Paul, all his gifts, all his personality, and even all his brokenness and it's through his brokenness that people actually get to see the power of God at work in their lives.

GOD DOESN'T WANT MORE FROM YOU, GOD WANTS ALL OF YOU

Even the parts you are scared to let anyone see. But when we are honest, we get true intimacy which is what we long for anyway. Apart from intimacy all of our relationships are transactional, and we spend time checking boxes.

In intimacy, we get to show our true selves, and find a being who loves seeing every little part of us.

Paul's story reminds me of the story of John Newton

- Slave Trader
- Killed 20,000
- Found Jesus, became a minister, etc.

Near the end of his life he said,

“Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”

I believe at the end of it all, this is what all of us are going to say. We will see how messed up we really are... (I mean I am not fooling anyone!), but my life will show other's the power of the REAL Lion.

I'm broken, but God is doing something in me.

To conclude, I want to show you one more picture. I do not know if you have heard of the Japanese art form, Kintsugi.

The whole point of Kintsugi is to find the beauty in brokenness. When a ceramic dish is broken, the artist does not discard it, instead he or she repairs it using a lacquer mixed with gold. It shows the beauty of mended brokenness.

Each different and unique, each broken, but in the brokenness shows the work of the artist. The world wants more of a performance, but if we're honest, we're these bowls. Broken, messed up by the lies we believe and the stories imparted to us, but when we are honest with a God who embraces us still.

We become beautiful pieces of art demonstrating God's power.

MESSAGE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

PONDER

1. What about the message did I feel...
 - Inspired about?
 - Convicted by?
 - Sadness, grief, or loss about?
 - Curious about?
 - Hopeful for?

EXPERIENCE

2. Did anyone have a "Wow!" moment during the message that resonated in you? If so, what was it? (Could be a new scripture/Bible story you've never heard, a profound concept, etc.)

LEARN

3. What new/fresh thing did I learn about God? What new/fresh thing did I learn about myself?

APPLY

4. How can I challenge myself this week with what I've learned? What might responding well look like?