

Connection 2 - Connecting to your true self

- I. Advanced organizer.
 - A. As a young adult in my teens and twenties, I was a **bit of chameleon**. Struggled to feel comfortable in my own skin
 - B. I was type of person who'd enter a room and **try to figure out why would be considered interesting, funny, attractive** in the room and then try to be that.
 - C. Moving across the country to **college** was a chance or me to be a new person: **Leah 2.0**
 - D. As a performer: **I was much more comfortable singing in character** than performing a solo as Leah Galyean - that made me so nervous when I had no mask to hide behind
 - E. coming to faith in Jesus was **a process of understanding myself as loved**, as worthy of love and acceptance, just where I am, without performing
 - F. As I began to accept that and live into it, and let it affect me, **hiding behind a mask became less appealing**. Writing and performing my own music was an evolution, but even as I did that, I had to watch the temptation to be present to what was really going on in me, and **not just adopt a new set of external expectations to fulfill** - not to just take on the character of "Leah the Rock Star".
 - G. Eventually, the process of moving from theater major performer to musician helped me access what was really going on on some core level. That ultimately, I felt like I was an outsider who didn't belong and was only included by grace; I wanted to speak to other outsiders who didn't belong and be a part of including them. Getting in touch with that was I think the entrance to identifying and embracing what I was meant to do in the world. Who my true self was.
- H. **All About Connection series**
 - 1. Why connection is so fundamentally important to a positive experience of life: connection to others, connection to God, connection to ourselves
 - 2. How faith can play an important role in that
 - 3. today's focus: **connecting to our true selves**; what's really going on inside and how we can translate that into a life lived with meaning and purpose and joy (and connection)
- II. Story of Gideon: Judges 6
 - A. Now Gideon is one of the people that God uses in this dark period in Israel's history called the Judges. God's established his own people, he's led them out of slavery, he's brought them to a promised land, but they struggle to live in a way that includes Him. They keep rebelling against him, worshipping other Gods, and so he lets them separate. He lets them disconnect from him, and then they suffer, and turn back, and they cry out him, and he raises up a leader to help lead them out of danger, back to freedom, and he does miraculous things on their behalf. And then eventually, the same thing happens again. Gideon was one of those leaders. He led a crazy impressive maneuver where God overtook armies of Israel's enemies, with just a meager force of Israelites. But we're not gonna focus on the heroic part of Gideon's story, where he's the legendary general that God uses to push back the Midianites. We're gonna look today on where he starts.
 - B. First the setup for this story:
The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. 2 The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, 4 camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. 5 These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as

locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. 6 So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.

1. this is setup. Israelites have been worshipping other Gods, turning away from God, choosing isolation, choosing sin, the Midian's come in and dominate the Israelites, and eventually, they're so desperate, that they begin to turn back to God and ask him for help.
2. Important first step in changing their circumstances. But meaningful that things have had to get this bad for them to do it. Why is it that we often wait till things are really desperate to ask for help?
3. They finally do get to the place where they're ready to ask for help. And here's what God does.

C. Meet Gideon:

11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

13 "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The Lord brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."

14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

15 "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"

16 The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."

D. Observation 1 from story: **Gideon's background and environment influences his perspective, and impacts what he needs in order to thrive.**

1. So we meet Gideon. Where do we meet him?

a) Threshing wheat in a winepress.

(1) not how this is intended to work - show images of threshing floors, wine presses (quickly)

(2) shows how desperate his situation is

(3) he is dealing with real limitations

(4) probably feels trapped and dispirited -no other options available to him, can't risk being out in open

2. When God comes to him through angel, says "the Lord is with you!"

- a) "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?"

(1) I'm sorry, I have reason to doubt that God is on our side here. Look at where we are. If God cared, why did he let this happen to us?

- b) "And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about?"

(1) This is a guy who has none of his own experience with God. He's only heard about it from old stories. Faith is the thing of old stories. No experience of his own. None of his own stories with God.

(2) How many of us have been there? Faith is something others have talked about, but we haven't really experienced good stuff from God; connection with God, meaningful faith. Our faith can only be so significant when it's just based on stories we heard from someone else.

- c) **This guy is gonna need a lot of convincing.** It's not gonna be a fast process to get him out of that wine press. And God graciously gives it to him. Gideon's gonna throw out these crazy tests, three of them, and God meets every one.

E. Observation 2: **God sees more than the limitations of Gideon's environment and present circumstances. He sees what's possible. He sees what Gideon is made for, even though he can't get in touch with it himself.**

1. God addresses Gideon as "Mighty Hero"
 - a) How can God call him a "Mighty hero?" He is opposite of hero. He's stuck in a wine press. Hiding out. Is God being ironic? Is it a joke?
 - b) Actually, this is **the first time Gideon's true potential is named.** God sees past his real limitations and calls out who he intends him to become. God has a pattern of doing this.
 - (1) **Tells Abraham he's gonna make him into a great nation,** gonna be a father of a multitude, long before he has any children, his wife has been barren for years
 - (2) **Calls a poor, betrothed, pregnant peasant girl, "Highly favored by God."**
 - (3) **Calls Simon, "Peter" or "Rock"** when he's just a humble fisherman making all kinds of mistakes and before he's led anything.
 - c) God doesn't need to wait until all the exams have been passed to say whether or not you can get the job. **He sees past our limitations into the place of calling out our true selves.**
 - d) Gideon's journey out of the wine press includes identifying that he is more than his limiting circumstances at the moment
 1. more than someone buffeted by what life has done to him
 2. God calling him to be a person with agency

F. Observation 3: **God invites Gideon into his own experience of partnership with God.**

1. God says: **"Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"**
 - 15 **"But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"**
2. **Gideon is in touch with where he currently is;** with his own weakness. That's good.
3. God doesn't try to convince Gideon he's strong or has more to offer than he does. **God essentially agrees with Gideon that he's wimpy.** Doesn't have a lot to offer. But that's not what God is asking for.
4. **God is promising his presence.** "I will be with you."
 - a) Similar to Moses, God says "tell them "I AM" sent you"
 - b) Not about Gideon's skillfulness; about his participation with God.
5. **This is Gideon's version of the Hero's Journey.**
 - a) We talk about the Hero's Journey fairly regularly in the Blue Ocean conversation
 - b) universal story told again and again - weakling who receives an invitation from an unexpected source, gets called into another world; invited to take a high-risk, high-stakes journey to save the world - Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Lego Movie (quickly)
 - c) for Gideon, it's an angel inviting him to imagine being not a puny thresher in a wine press, but a mighty hero who is leading his people in battle to save them from oppression

III. Personal Story: **Enneagram and what it tells us about ourselves and how we can grow**

- A. **Retreat** - people feeling weighed down after Enneagram session. Understandable. Can be painful facing the parts of yourself that struggle, that are challenged. Can feel like we're stuck

in winepress. But this self-awareness is first step to growth. We also become aware of what is possible.

- B. For me: **I'm a 3. "The Performer"**. Richard Rohr would say my core sin is deceit. I struggle with being fully authentic. I want people to praise me, to admire me, to think I'm doing well. But with that is a temptation not to be fully real. To say whatever will garner the most admiration, respect, sympathy from whoever my audience is. Learn when I am most under stress and responding unhealthfully, I can become like an unhealthy 9. Just cave. No agency.
- C. But I also learn **what I have the potential to be**. For me growth is to be a healthy 6. To be a loyalist. To stand up to pressure. To commit to things not because they gain me praise, but because I believe in them. To endure come what may.
- D. This was a vital insight **when I was going through one of my most trying times living into my calling** - the challenge to my commitment to start LGBT inclusive church. I was in conflict with an 8 - a challenger - who intimidated me. I was tempted to cave. But felt the encouragement from Jesus to stand up for what I believed in even if it made me unpopular. To be a 6.

IV. Practical Suggestions:

A. **Spend time getting in touch with where you're at and acknowledging it: your limitations, your environmental factors, your life experiences.**

- 1. Tools like the enneagram can be helpful for this.
- 2. Drawing timeline of your life, marking significant events
- 3. Can be very helpful to do this with other people that you trust that know you well. People who care about you and within acceptance and friendship, can offer insight you might miss.

B. **Invite God to give you a vision that moves beyond that picture. What is your hero's journey?**

- 1. You might try asking the question many have found helpful: **"If I had no limits, like constraints of time, energy, or money, what would I do with my life?" "If I was told I had only 40 days to live, what would I do with those 40 days?"**
- 2. Get in touch with your passions and for each insight you receive, ask Jesus to help you go deeper with it. Ask what's behind it?
 - a) I want to play music in bars and clubs - I want to make space for folks to be included who've been excluded

C. **Look for ways to partner with Jesus in beginning that journey.**

- 1. The reason it's called a hero's journey is it is a journey. Gideon doesn't get there over night. Neither does Moses. Frodo doesn't either. But Jesus is the one extending his own presence to stand with you, "I will be with you". Doesn't expect us to do it on our own. What are the things Jesus putting in front of you in this season that might be the next bend in the road?

V. **Bryan Stevenson, Equal Justice Initiative Video**

- A. Bryan Stevenson - attorney; went to law school; hoping to address issues of racial inequality, how poverty impacts injustice; got discouraged once he actually started law school and was studying esoteric course work; had opportunity to do a few month internship at a program in the deep south helping inmates on death row get representation, changed him. Was the beginning of his hero's journey. Founder and Executive Director of Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery Alabama; which has helped dozens of condemned prisoners, argued before Supreme Court 5 times, written bestselling book, speaks across the world. We saw him last week at Cal. In all the places he speaks, he invites people to engage and get close to injustice, to remain hopeful that things can change, and to have the courage to endure the discomfort of the journey; watch him talk about that **(22:50 - 28:57)**

B. Bryan Stevenson doesn't do what he does because he's brilliant. He doesn't do it because of a grand call, or because of his commitment to America. He does it because he recognizes in his core, his true self is broken, just like the people he works with and the system he fights to transform. But his brokenness is not the thing that disqualifies him, or allows him to despair. His brokenness is an invitation to lean into Jesus; to experience his power made perfect, and to stand in brokenness even when it's uncomfortable. And in those uncomfortable places to share the same mercy he's received. To see people who are more than thieves, more than liars, more than murderers. Like Jesus, Bryan is living a life that not only walks into his true self, but invites others to do the same. May we all find our own heroic journeys in the same way, and may they too be blessing, transformation, and healing not only to ourselves but to the world around us. Amen.