



SECURITY

Have you ever noticed how insecurity takes some of its most common, innocent, and pervasive components of our life and transforms them into relational weapons or instruments of emotional self-mutilation? Questions, silence, clarifications, pauses, and other pieces of the fabric of interpersonal relationships get filtered through the lens of suspicion and self-doubt – “What did they mean by that? Are they upset? Why did they choose that word? Why did they say nothing? Did I say too much?”

Nothing can just be what it is. Everything has a deeper meaning. Do you ever think like that? Does an unreturned phone call or e-mail get you spinning with scenarios of relational turmoil? Do innocent questions sometimes hit you with the force of an insult? How many times do you replay and consider the possible reactions to a joke with friends? For what kind of events, challenges, opportunities, or roles do you write yourself off out of fear?

Hopefully we all can see that insecurity (or the fear of man) is something we all struggle with to some degree. The goal of this article is to talk you through this monster that influences the heart.

Defining Biblical Security

Biblical Security is a disposition of stability that allows for a patient and increasingly accurate interpretation of personal performance, interpersonal interactions, and circumstances in the midst of situations that are as yet uncertain, incomplete, challenging, or negative. Biblical security defines “good (the righteousness of Christ) enough (the sufficient cross of Christ) for who (life for the glory of God)” in biblical terms and rests in that reality personally and socially.

Three Big Questions of Security

There are three key questions that insecurity distorts:

- (1) What does it mean to be good?
- (2) How good is good enough?
- (3) In whose eyes must we be good?

What does it mean to be good?

For the moment let's forgo the theological answers (we will get to those later). For now, we will examine the question emotionally. Ask yourself, "What is the particular 'good' that if I feel inadequate in that area I become insecure?"

- *Appearance
- *Popularity
- *Wealth
- *Power/Influence
- *Acceptance by a key person or group
- *Humor
- *Intelligence
- *Family History
- *Bible Knowledge
- *Clear, Firm Convictions

These are common ways by which we measure "good." If one of these items is very important to me and I cannot have/know/do it, I consider myself to be inadequate. One problem with this line of logic is that it is "single variable." If I say that because a lemon, a rock, and a scalpel are not sweet like an apple that they are not good, I am using a "single variable" of "sweetness" to determine "goodness."

Here is where we must return to theology. Is it up to us to define goodness or God? Further, introspection will always produce paralysis. For the moment, draw a distinction between introspection and fruit-inspection. Introspection will refer to the process of self-examination by which we are looking for those attributes that make us acceptable to someone else. Fruit-inspection will refer to the process of self-examination by which we are seeking to find evidences of God's grace active in our lives (2 Corinthians 13:5).

How good is enough?

Good is just a commodity to be measured. That is why we have the words better and best. Insecurity does not necessarily say I am not good, more specifically it says I am not good "enough." Have you ever noticed that celebrities are not happier than common folk? The rates of divorce, addiction, self-destructive behaviors, are higher among the elite. When you have an outstanding talent in one area, the rest of life cannot measure up.

This is where some people begin to despair. They begin to think, "I knew it. I'm not special." It is as if "bad" is the opposite of "special." In order to help us grow in Christ honoring security, it is helpful to identify some of the common ways we emotionally say, "I am not O.K. with that."

Competing. This is insecurity that is aggravated by the success of others. It is also called jealousy or coveting. Competition that is rooted in a motivation to validate self in order to overcome insecurity is bad. An evidence of security is the ability to rejoice in the success of another person.

Perfectionism. This is insecurity that is unable to respond with God's heart to our failures. For perfectionists their identity is rooted in their performance. Success is expected. Failure challenges their sense of identity. That challenge creates an emotional instability.

Perpetual Flaw Finding (self-Degradation) - This is insecurity that defiantly resists encouragement in order to protect itself from disappointment, embarrassment, or hurt. Sometimes insecurity is where we are most comfortable. To be less than insecure would be to hope for something "good" and that runs the risk of disappointment. For the perpetual "flaw-finder" goodness is a myth. The question of "good-enough" is crazy.

Fatalism: This is insecurity rooted in an overt belief that I am bad to a degree that redemption cannot penetrate. Fatalists give the "silent treatment" anytime the conversation turns to security. It takes great belief to think something exists if you have not experienced it. That is the struggle of many with insecurity.

In Whose Eyes Must I Be Good?

Whose applause, approval, or affirmation makes it worth it? This returns us to the nagging desire to be special. The problem is that by definition the vast majority of people are ordinary, common, and average. If they were not, then the word special would have no meaning.

As we seek to examine this aspect of insecurity let's examine four audiences our insecurity can live for.

One Special Person

This could be a husband, wife, mother, father, boyfriend, girlfriend, best friend, teacher, coach, or other significant person. Once you identify this person, you can begin to ask yourself some important questions.

- *What does this person represent to me?
- *What would their approval do for me?
- *What form would I most like for their approval to take?
- *When did their approval become so important (time and date)?
- *Is there anyone similar to them (role) whose approval I value significantly less?
- *What has been my response when I have gotten approval from this person?
- *Have I discounted or rejected anyone's love and/or encouragement in pursuit of this person's

approval?

*How have I organized my life or certain social situations to gain this person's approval?

The desired outcome is to chart a path to freedom. When we realize that we are "looking for security in all the wrong places" we can begin to identify all the right places. Insecurity from seeking validation from one individual is a condition of asking more from an individual than they can do.

C.S. Lewis said: *When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. Insofar as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving toward the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.*

A Group/Class of People: When the source of our identity becomes plural the measure the pursuit often becomes more fluid. It is a Catch-22 that is really better to stay away from. The rules of the game are apt to change and the standards of measurable success are usually in flux. You cannot win when you play the game of seeking security through a group. If you do not become part of the "elite group" you face failure and shame. When you hear your heart says: "If only I could....then I would feel secure" and the blank is filled with being part of a certain organization or achieving a certain status, know you are hearing a lie.

A Social Ideal: Women have to be thin. Men have to be tall. Everyone should be smart. It is always good to be funny. Men hunt and fish. Women talk on the phone using lots of words. We have rooted security in expectations and not wisdom. Expectation changes by social setting, person, geographic region, and generation. Biblical security emerges when we prayerfully assess our top priorities and season of life, and then wisely do what we realistically can.

The question is not "Am I measuring up to a social ideal?" The question is "am I living wisely given my current circumstances?" It may be that my sin or the sin of those around me means that I am dissatisfied with my current circumstances.

My Own: Sometimes it just boils down to the fact that I am not satisfied with me. If the issue is confusion or personal dislike, then read the articles on identity and purpose. This discussion draws us back to the question: "What does it mean to be good?"

God's: I do not understand why God would tolerate me. I read Scripture, hear the commands, agree with the truth, and fear because I come up short. God loves me because He has to love me. God made promises and cannot go against His Word, but does He really like me? Is He really for me?

Again, this aspect of insecurity draws us back to the question: “What is good enough?”

CONCLUSION

Feel better yet? Probably not. Hopefully you do have some insights that help you see how you could try so hard for so long without seeing much consistent progress. The goal now is to make application of what you have learned without growing impatient.

Checklist for A Portrait of Christ-Honoring Society

- I rarely distort compliments to imply something negative about myself
- I rarely assume something is wrong when there is a silence or a pause
- I evaluate my life with balance instead of according only one variable
- I am able to see others succeed without feeling threatened or insecure
- I am willing to engage in tasks outside my areas of strengths without fear
- I know how God made me and am happy to serve Him as I am
- I am able to do well at something without creating a mounting sense of expectation
- I am able to enjoy life without having to be special or stand out
- I am aware and rest in my daily need for the grace of God
- I like the person God created me to be
- I rely on one person for my sense of well-being and joy
- I resist the urge to limit my peer group in order to be less well known
- I resist to replay a sin or mistake multiple times in my mind
- I am reasonable in my expectations of myself