

“How Do I See Myself Dishonestly?” (Growth in Grace II)
(Study 4 of “Getting Personal with God: Sonship A” Series)

Opening Questions (10 Minutes)

1. Who is someone in your life you find yourself wanting to impress?
2. Why do you think you want this person’s respect or attention so much?

Let’s look at how Jesus engages people who want to impress others or him...

Scripture Study (10-15 Minutes)

Read Luke, Chapter 18, verses 15-25 (first in the ESV, then the NLT)

1. Be quiet for 30 seconds. Think or write. Now what are your first impressions?
 - What’s your emotional, gut-reaction?
 - Ask a question you have (or can think of).
 - Volunteer a thought or comment- about a verse or the whole passage.
2. How does Jesus address the harm of trying to impress him or others?
 - What are the disciples doing? What is the rich young ruler fronting with?
 - Describe a time recently when you spun the truth or fudged a standard to impress someone else or God. (If you’re having trouble, how do you sometimes relate to the person you mentioned earlier- or someone like him or her?)
3. Put yourself in either passage. How does Jesus move towards you with healing?
 - How does Jesus favor the “underperforming” infant versus the “overperforming” rich young ruler?
 - What has it looked like in your life to come to Jesus in your need versus your self-sufficiency?

Scripture Passages (The Book of Luke 18:15-27)

Luke, Chapter 18- English Standard Version Translation (ESV) 15 Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 17 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

18 And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 19 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” 21 And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 23 But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. 24 Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” 27 But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Luke, Chapter 18- New Living Translation (NLT) 15 One day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him. 16 Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like

these children. 17 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

18 Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: "Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "Only God is truly good. 20 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.' " 21 The man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." 22 When Jesus heard his answer, he said, "There is still one thing you haven't done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 23 But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich. 24 When Jesus saw this, he said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! 25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" 26 Those who heard this said, "Then who in the world can be saved?" 27 He replied, "What is impossible for people is possible with God."

Group Discussion (25 minutes)

Can I get one or more volunteers to read the below quote out loud?

Diagram: The Cross Chart (Part 2)

Each of us tends to 'shrink the cross,' which is to say that we underestimate, under-appreciate, or under-apply Jesus' action on the cross. This typically manifests itself in two main ways: pretending and performing.

Faced with a growing awareness of our sinfulness and the depths of our very human, sometimes faulty condition, we pretend. Pretending is making ourselves out to be something we are not (someone far too perfect). This translates into a life filled with impossible pressures. We make so many rules to live by. We don't get to get hurt (we have to be bullet-proof); and we do not get to hurt others by our mistakes (we have to walk psychological and social tightropes).

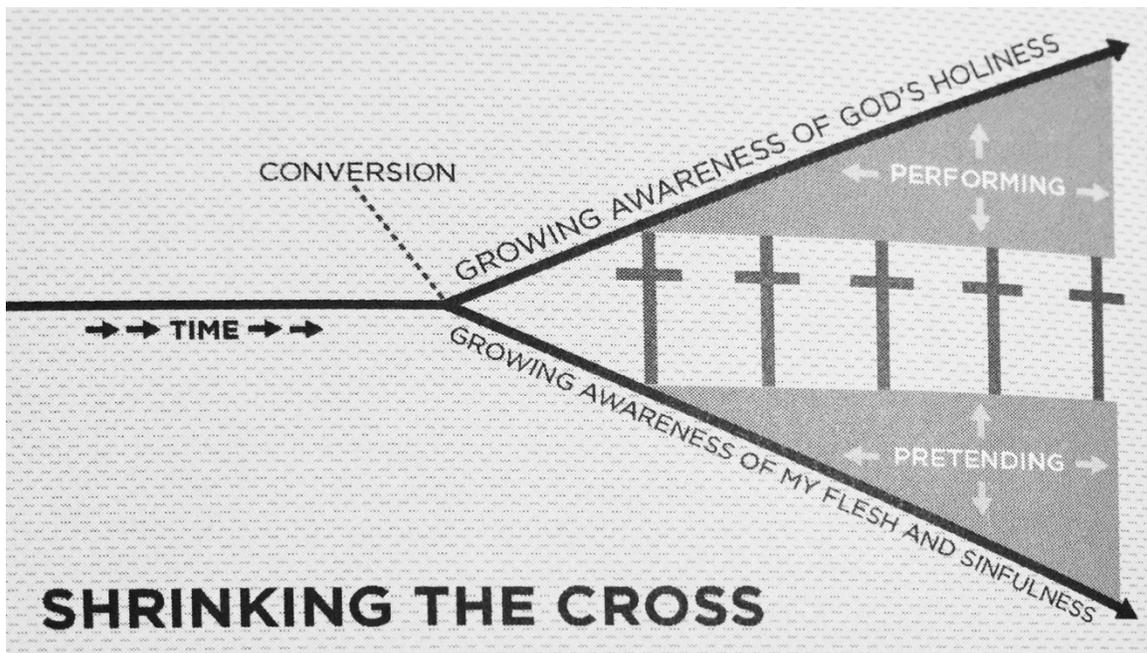
Faced with a growing awareness of God's holiness and the heights of His calling for us, we perform. Performing minimizes God's holiness by reducing His standards to something we can meet on our own (God is someone far too imperfect). This translates into a life full of pleasing others (sometimes including God). We are constantly "on call" (performing a resume-long list of good things, to impress the next influencer and make the next future opportunity available). But at the same time this audience (sometimes just God, but also friends, parents, a spouse or roommate, or "Charlotte") is too easily fooled. We expect God or "them" to evaluate us on the last great thing we did, or to compare us to someone else, or to take us on appearances alone. God becomes small- shirt pocket-sized, close to our hearts but unable to see over the lip of the pocket, and unable to "be on the move" ahead, around, and after us.

Pretending and Performing are both rooted in an underwhelming view of God and an overwhelming view of ourselves." (Adapted from Thune and Walker's The Gospel-Centered Life)

1. Think for a moment about we just read. Now study "The Cross Chart (Part 2)" below. What are your initial questions or comments about this version of the Cross Chart [p. 3]?
2. Do you most often find yourself *pretending* (minimizing your smallness) or performing (minimizing God's bigness)?
 - Why do you think that is?
3. What's one way you find yourself *pretending*?
 - Describe a time when you caught yourself people-pleasing.
4. What's one way you find yourself *performing*?
 - Describe a time when you felt like a big deal (self-righteous).

5. Why does Jesus dying on a cross make us able to approach him unimpressively (without pretending or performing)?

- Ask for a volunteer to read the following slowly and two times:
Here's how one writer describes God's grace in action: "*We love those who see the worst of us and don't turn their face away.*" (Walker Percy)
- Thought experiment #1: What is the expression on Jesus' face when you pretend or perform...again?
- Thought experiment #2: If Jesus were to say something to you in that moment of pretending or performing, what would he say to you?
- [If this is difficult, it might help for the leader to ask a more gracious member of the group, to share how he or she thinks Jesus would be to others in that moment.]



*Glossary: God's Holiness can be thought of as God's perfect transcendence or bigness
My Flesh can be thought of as all my strategies of self-effort to live self-sufficiently
My Sinfulness can be thought of as my being selfishly curved-in-on-myself or smallness

Group Prayer (15 Minutes)

Ideas for communal and personal prayer

- "Share for yourself, and pray for the person sitting at 9 o'clock from you"
1. What's one *burden* you need prayer for- for relief or healing?
 2. What's one *sin* you'd like to (re-)confess to God?
 3. What's one *deed* in your life or community you'd like to praise God for?

4. What's one *desire* stirred by this time together with God that you can pray for?