

Can you learn to see yourself as God sees you?

Patrick Regan 22 May 2015

Last year Desmond Tutu, the Nobel prize-winning, world-renowned social rights activist, came to visit XLP. We took the bus that we use for outreach to one of the local estates we visit each week and it was packed full. I thought Tutu would sock it to the young people about the real nature of poverty and being oppressed but instead he made it clear he was there to listen. The young people began to open up, telling him how having a certain postcode ruined their chances of getting a job, how hard it was to see your dad beat your mum up and not be able to stop him, what it's like looking after your younger siblings when you're just a teenager yourself, how it feels to see your best friend get stabbed and killed.

Tutu listened intently and then he said, "What you need to realise, more than anything else, is that your past doesn't have to define your future." He grabbed the hand of one of the boys whose mate had been killed a year earlier and said, "I'll tell you what you are: a VSP – a Very Special Person. You're made in the image of God and you have the potential to change the world."



Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited XLP last year

Before he left at the end of the day Tutu turned to me and said, "You make God smile." Wow. Those simple phrases wouldn't leave me afterwards. I have a tendency to beat myself up and focus on the things I think I'm doing badly, yet God was telling me I was a VSP in his eyes and that I made him smile.

It's amazing how many of us find it easier to believe the negative things about ourselves. Sometimes they are lies other people have spoken over us, mistakes we've made in the past, or areas where we're just too self-critical. I'm too easily impacted by other people's opinions and listen too much to my inner critic rather than to what God is saying about me. Letting go of the judgements of others involves trusting God at a deeper level. We choose to tune in to his voice, allowing his to be the loudest in our lives. It's a long journey for many of us to let go of the ways we're judged by the world and learn to feel loved and valued just as we are.

It can be even harder to believe that you are loved when you're going through periods of suffering and pain. It's easy to feel that you're not as valuable when you're not able to give as much, or to believe that God is blessing those he loves and you've somehow fallen short. I remember hearing Rob Parsons talking about how when we were young we used to pick petals from a daisy to try and decide if the boy or girl we like loves us back. Rob suggested we often treat God the same way: "I got a promotion at work – God he loves me; I had a car accident – he loves me not." "I got the opportunity I've been longing for to lead at church – he loves me; I am really sick – he loves me not." Our belief in God's love for us sways with the wind of circumstance. Instead we have to fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2) and remember the cross. It is there, in the face of the saviour who died for us, that we hear all we need to know about God's love.

Imagine what life might be like if we really knew how much God loves us. Imagine being free from the need to impress anyone. Imagine not having to achieve anything to feel valued. Imagine your self-esteem not being changed depending on how funny, intelligent, successful and attractive others deem you to be. Imagine being able to love even those who disapprove of you. Imagine being able to fully love others because you know you are fully loved. Doesn't that sound like the way we should be living?

Patrick Regan is the chief executive of youth charity XLP. His book, When Faith Gets Shaken (Lion Hudson), is out now. whenfaithgetsshaken.com

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/how.to.see.yourself.as.god.sees.you/52221.htm>