



Running Rabid

Balancing the passion to pursue with the pressure to produce.

The Pressure from Ourselves to be Worthy

Being a critical thinker versus thinking critically

How many times have you heard the phrase – *we are our own worst critic*? Taken another way, one might argue we are our own worst *enemy*. Like a lot of men I struggle with measuring up. I never feel like I am doing as well as I could and constantly push myself to be better; not sure what “better” is but I am going for it! The funny thing is we look around at everyone else and they are thinking the same thing about themselves. The irony in it all is someone in the world is looking at you (perhaps this very minute) and thinking (about you), “Man, I wish I had what he has – he’s got it made.”

The problem we have is we are seeking things from our vantage point and not God’s. Now, I am not going to sugar coat it. We all make mistakes and if we are living in sin we need to fix that. I am not talking about that. I am talking about how even when you are doing the right things God has called you to do, you feel this sense that you *need to do more*. In his book, *The Pressure’s Off*, Larry Crabb describes the pattern that develops in the lives of many Christians. He calls it the “Law of Linearity”. The Law of Linearity starts when we first come to know Christ. We think by placing our trust in Him that we have earned God’s favor because of something we have done. Throughout our Christian lives we continue this process over and over again, like panting dogs seeking the favor of our master. We study our Bibles, go to church, love our families, give financially, and maybe even teach Sunday School; all in the hopes that God will take notice and bestow us with some “goodies”.

Unfortunately, our Christian culture encourages this mindset and lifestyle. Many churches place tremendous pressure in its members to be involved in multiple groups within the church and those families that are the most engaged and active are viewed as the “holy ones”. We measure our worth not by the depth of our walk with God, but with the magnitude of our activities. The busier we are “for the Kingdom” the greater sense of worth we feel. Taken to extremes two things happen. First, we wonder how God and the church could survive without us. The second, and equally damaging, is that at some point we actually begin to think that God “owes us” (I shudder even typing the words).

Consider Larry Crabb’s words taken from *The Pressure Off* (pages 59-60)

My background experiences have taught me the lie that life can be found in the demonstration of personal competence and in participation in a larger story. That, for me, is the good life, the Better Life I desire. I’m a Christian. God has gifted me to do a few things well and to join Him in telling His story. If I pray and keep my nose clean, staying within my range of competence, I can live the Christian life well enough to receive the blessings I believe I need. So I go to work. I try to get it right, to pray enough, to not sin too much, to seize every opportunity for ministry. The pressure’s on. I must gain the blessings I need. I must think well, teach well, write well. Any evidence that I’m falling short unnerves me to the core. I read a friend’s article and I am forced to admit I could do so much better if only I had the time to read more. I know so little. I’m so weary of trying to get it right. **Performance is such a treadmill.** The blessings I now enjoy may not continue, and the ones I still long to enjoy may never come. *I must do better!* But I’m so tired. And then I come to a point where an internal switch is flipped. All I want is relief. I can perform no more. I need a break. Less pressure. Even if for just a moment. Mindless entertainment helps. I turn on the television. I understand out addition epidemic. Deep passions stir within each of us. We’re passionate people. But we’re foolish. With single-minded energy we live the Old Way, consumed by our felt need to feel alive, to escape boredom, to find ourselves in a passionate experience. We tire of the effort, we live for relief.

Do Larry’s words resonate with you? The words that caught me are highlighted in red above – **Performance is such a treadmill**. See, that means something to me for several reasons. First, I am a runner and I actually *love* running on treadmills. When on a treadmill I can run for extended periods of time, be by myself (oxygen to an introvert), think,

strategize, pray, sweat, push myself, and try to beat yesterday's distance and time. The only problem is treadmills don't go anywhere! Unless you are trying to burn calories, treadmills are pretty much useless. I would imagine in most homes where treadmills reside they are more likely used to hang laundry than burn calories. But here's the point, it is possible to get on a treadmill and never get off; having the sensation you are actually going somewhere when you are not. Worse yet, getting on a treadmill can be addictive and gives us the false sensation that we are actually going somewhere when we are not.

I want you to imagine this. You have exhausted yourself. You have done everything possible as a man. You are a good father, you love your wife, you pay your taxes, you are active at church, you are a good employee and even better boss, you are a loyal friend, and you have been good with money and saved enough for retirement and enough to help people in need. But the point is this: you are tired and in many regards have never felt you really measured up. One night you fall asleep and find yourself in a conversation with God. You cry out to Him for relief and tell him you are tired and weary of life. You don't understand why you have not achieved more, but admit to Him you are grateful for what you have. You have a healthy family and good health yourself. After you have said all you can muster, we wait for God's response. After a long pause He breaks the silence and shares the following with you,

“Remember the words of my Son, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Much of what you have sought in life has been good. You have been a faithful servant and have loved people, and most importantly, loved your family. But you are weary not because of your pursuit of Me, but your pursuit of things. Like many humans, you are under the false notion that things bring happiness. When you seek Me I will give you what you need, not necessarily what you want. What you need is a change of heart, not a change of circumstances. Love me and love others, everything else is secondary. When you really want something and are confident it will be used to build My Kingdom, ask Me. I want success for you more than you do, but I love you enough to protect you from things that will do you more harm than good. Decide for yourself today that you will change. Stop the rat race and get off the treadmill. Seek Me, My Son, and My Kingdom – then I will give you rest.”

As you wake from your slumber you realize God has called you to a higher level of living. One measured by His yard stick, not yours and certainly not the one held by the world. You commit a life of service to God. You continue in the same activities as before, but your purpose is different. Now, you are living for God.

In Colossians 3:15 we read, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Galatians 6:9 tells us, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” In both of these passages Paul exhorts us to push on and press on, but do so in a manner where Christ rules in our heart. **For those who have sought after God and done their best, they are more likely to hear from Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema) that they *should have done less with a committed heart rather than more with an empty heart for the Lord.***

Questions for the Week

1. In you and God were to have a conversation, in what ways would He encourage you to do more and where would He encourage you to do less?
2. Have you experienced the *Law of Linearity* in your own life; feeling the need to do more to gain God's approval? If so, why and in what ways?
3. As men why do we put pressure on ourselves? For you is it related more towards internal drive or external pressures?
4. **Food for Further Thought** – explore Matthew 11:27-30.
 - a. Why is it important for you and me to understand that all things have been committed to Jesus by the Father?
 - b. Read verses 28-30. Make a list of things Jesus asks of us and a list of blessings He bestows upon us.

REQUESTS FROM JESUS

BLESSINGS FROM JESUS