

Acting Like Yourself

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We find relief and enjoy peace when we act like ourselves. This means we stay relational throughout hardship and trials. Staying relational helps us recover from distress and avoid regret, disappointment and guilt. We can be flexible and recuperate from hardship rather than deteriorate and stay stuck. Staying relational means we continue to interact with other people and we remember who we are in the midst of distress. Whether we are cut off on the highway, stuck in long lines at the grocery store or trapped in an elevator we can remain ourselves rather than crumble by saying or doing things we normally would not pronounce. We bless others who curse us, walk an extra mile and even turn the other cheek when we remain ourselves.

Often, especially during distress we forget who we are and how it is like us to act. Some people become angry then curse, swear, throw temper tantrums and even hurt other people. Others turn to coping mechanisms such as drinking alcohol, using drugs, engaging in destructive and immoral behavior among other harmful activities when they feel hopeless or ashamed. We end up with regret, remorse and disappointment when we do and say things that do not portray our heart. We become ensnared when we forget who we are and fail to act like ourselves.

We have an infinite number of coping mechanisms when we fail to handle distress. Thankfully, there are only six basic emotions to conquer in order to return to joy. We thrive when we stay relational in each of the two sympathetic emotions (rage and terror) and the four parasympathetic emotions (disgust, shame, hopeless despair and sadness). When we have no people or past experience to draw on, these emotions jolt us into a tailspin.

Good Works

We act like ourselves when we stay relational, suffer well, perform good works and synchronize with God and the people around us. Because we are created for good works in Jesus Christ, we fail when we lack performing the good works that result from who God made us to be. For, Ephesians 2:10 declares,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” NKJV

These good works stem from who God made us to be. They result from knowing Him. Good works are not hoops to jump through or formulas to perform in order to be close to

God. Good works are the by-product of salvation, not the other way around. “Good works” can have several implications, based on one’s perceptions, experience or culture. Rather than speculate what “good” means in our own understanding, let’s start with the basic Biblical meaning in its context. In Ephesians 2:10, **good** in Greek is *agathos*, a primary word for good, which means ‘benefit’, or ‘well’. *Agathos* derives its meaning from another Greek word, *kalos*. *Kalos* can mean properly, beautiful, but chiefly good, valuable, or virtuous, honest, and worthy. **Works** derives its name from the Greek word *ergon*, which means toil, deed, doing and labour.¹ In other words, we are new creations in Christ Jesus for honest, worthy, virtuous and valuable deeds. The result of our actions, behavior, thoughts, words and lives should reflect these qualities, because this is what we are fashioned to do. When we fail to accomplish this, we are not acting like ourselves. *Kalos* is the same Greek word Jesus uses in Matthew 5:16 to describe the kind of works we will do as good witnesses for Him. He explains as we let our light shine before others, people can see our good (*kalos*) works then glorify God. (Paraphrase mine) Also, Jesus used this term when rebuking the disciples for judging the woman who poured a flask of expensive oil on his head. Jesus said her action for Him was *kalos*. We can rest knowing good works flow from us when we stay connected to God and act like ourselves, the way He made us.

Sin and Acting Like Ourselves

We learn in the book of Proverbs a deceitful heart keeps people from finding and doing good. (17:20) Someone who is not synchronized with God becomes vulnerable for perversion, deceit and distortedness. All of these characteristics obviously are unhealthy and do not promote life. Paul helps us understand more on keeping an open connection to God and acting the way we are designed. Writing to a group of believers, he says sin impedes our ability to act like ourselves. He explains in Romans chapter 3, verse 23 we are all capable of sinning, or in other words failing to act like ourselves. He informs us we all sin and fall short of God’s glory. Paul clarifies we are not justified by our works or through our deeds. Rather, we receive justification from a holy God through faith alone in the atonement of Jesus Christ. We require and need atonement to pay for our sins. However, a struggle still rages as we discover how to act like ourselves and stay synchronized with God. Several chapters later we learn about Paul’s struggle with not acting like himself. (Chapter 7) He shares his discontentment and frustration how sin caused him to do things he did not desire to do. Sin, the deadly gene passed down from Adam and Eve caused Paul to fail at acting like himself. Paul concludes the problem is sin and the flesh. Who Paul really is desires to please and serve God. As Christians we are no different than Paul. A battle still rages in our members as we wrestle with sin (death) and acting like ourselves, which is life.

Because we draw on right hemispheric experience when upset, all left hemispheric activity (words, explanations and information) will do little to help us when we undergo

¹ (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

intense distress. Our well-intentioned and prearranged strategies are not enough to enable us to act like ourselves. We require practice from experienced people to be examples and models for us. This means we need people who remember who they are when upset and act like it. When we remember who we are when upset we are motivated by love rather than fear. Love and desire are motivations that result from the frontal centers of our brain. We know who we are and what we like from our frontal lobes. Fear and problem solving activities result from the back of our brain. Desire enables while fear disables our ability to act like ourselves amidst distress. The disciples learned the difference of operating from desire and from fear during their time with Jesus. All of them endured hands-on training and gained experience, especially during the distress of having their Teacher taken away. For example, Peter experienced enough distress to interfere with his well-intentioned (desire driven) plans. In Mark 14:27a, Jesus prepares and informs His disciples about His impending death, *Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night..."* Peter speaks up and professes his utmost devotion, desire and loyalty to follow his Lord – even if the others leave Him. After Jesus prophesies his denial, Peter speaks up again, recorded in verse 31, *But he (Peter) spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.* (Added mine) We all know what happens, and can speculate Peter's fear overran his plans, desires and hopes to be able to stand firm next to his Savior to the very end. Had Peter acted like himself while feeling terrified, he would have fulfilled his hope to not deny his Lord and possibly died. Thankfully, God had a plan full of redemption and reconciliation for Peter. After Jesus rose from the grave, He not only restored Peter but replaced Peter's three denials with three commands - to feed His lambs, tend and feed His sheep. All of these activities are desire driven functions that Peter would do throughout his ministry. However, the Lord informs Peter He would ultimately fulfill Peter's pledge to join his Lord and prophesies about the type of death Peter will undergo. Church tradition holds a remarkable account that says Peter acted like himself all the way to his death. Supposedly, Peter went to his death still motivated by desire rather than fear. Peter, finding himself unworthy to die the same death as his Lord, asked to be crucified upside down.

Whether we feel shame, terror, hopeless despair, rage, sadness or disgust, we fare well when we remember who we are and act like it. We stay flexible and our ability to recover improves when we act like ourselves.

Acting Like Myself – A term used to describe what we will do during distress and in life when we stay relational, avoid sin and stay synchronized with God

Desire Driven Motivations – The activity and behavior we utilize when we operate from the front of our brain. This means during distress we remember who we are and what it is like us to do. We continue to use our personal preference and live from our identity.

Fear Driven Motivations – The activity and behavior we utilize when we function from the back of our brain, the areas concerned only with results and problem solving. We no

longer remember who we are and what we like to do. We are concerned with solving problems alone.

Good Works – Good works result when we act like ourselves. This is the outcome of salvation, not a means to an end itself.

Sin – Any behavior which produces death as defined in the Bible. We know this as “missing the mark” and not hitting our desired goal. Though humans inherently sin we avoid this deadly behavior when we stay connected and synchronized to God, our Source of Life. This means we perform the good works as defined by Paul speaking to the church in Ephesians 2:10.

*Chris Coursey speaks nationally and internationally on redemptive community and Life Model concepts that enable growth and recovery. Chris combines his teachings with practical training and exercises in a conference format known as **THRIVE**. These conferences are designed to help churches, ministries, counseling organizations, couples and singles to live productive, meaningful lives. For further information, feel free to contact him at his phone (309) 699-0171 or email thrivingtoday@yahoo.com. You may find information on the **THRIVE** Conferences at www.thrivetoday.org.*