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I'll never forget the witness of a friend of mine, an Episcopal priest named Tom Miery. He's just assigned to a church in Seattle, Washington, anyway on the first Sunday, there he preaches all the services then he stands in the lobby to greet people as they come out. He notices at last in the service, there is a young couple in their early thirties sitting in the last row IN the last pew of the church with their one year old son Andrew. And their custom is the moment the service ends, they bolt out the door and they greet no one. Why? Because they are so ashamed of what they said, called the defective child. To this day, the husband Robin is the most famous cardiac surgeon in the Pacific Northwest, his wife is a paediatric surgeon and they asked, how could God give such a brilliant, devoted, committed Christian couple, such a defective child, and the child had Down syndrome. Well, as was their custom at the end of the service, they started to bolt out the door, Tom intercept them, and he didn't ask.

He said, come into my office right now, he said, he invited them into his office. Tom closes the door and reaches out and takes little Andrew in his arms and begins to rock him back and forth and then tears started streaming down Tom's face, and then the sobbing and the low sobbing that grew louder and louder and louder and louder. We all stood there mesmerized, finally, when he stopped, Tom said to the husband, Robin, do you have any idea of the gift that God has given to you in this child?

He said, two years ago, my three -year -old daughter Sylvia, died of Down syndrome, my wife and I have four other children. We are absolutely convinced that the greatest gift we ever received from God was little Sylvia in her uninhibited expression of affection, she was a window into the heart of Jesus. He said, did you know that three Native American tribes, the Sioux, the Iroquois and the Navajo, attributed divinity to Down syndrome children and gave them an honored place in the tribe and treated them as gods because in their utter simplicity, they were a transparent window into the great spirit, in our context, into the heart of Jesus Christ. Tom handed the little boy back to his dad and he said, Robin, you'll treasure this child because he is going to lead you more directly into the love of Christ than anybody you'll ever meet in your life.

And the next Sunday, there's Robin and his wife Ali sitting up in the front row holding up little Andrew, suggesting that they had been specifically chosen by God to bear a Down syndrome child. My point is this, uncompromising trust in the love of God enables us to thank him for the spiritual darkness that envelops us, to thank him for the loss of income, for unemployment, for the nagging arthritis that is so painful, it empowers us to pray from the heart.

“Abba, into your hands I commend my spirit this whole day morning, noon, evening, night, whatever you want from me, I want of me falling into You, trusting You in the midst of my life. Abba into Your heart, I commend my spirit, feeble, distracted, insecure and to You, I commend myself through Jesus, Your son, My Lord.” Amen.

Allow me to become personal here for a moment, the biggest obstacle in my own journey of trust has been a sense of low self -esteem, feelings of insecurity, inadequacy and inferiority. Since her childhood, my mother was an orphan and she was in an orphanage for 10 years never received any love as a child, never ever gave any as a parent. My father was born during the Depression, had an eighth grade education, he would add that he couldn't find work. He came home every night depressed and would speak a word of correction and administer physical discipline, take me into

my bedroom, made me drop my pants, beat me across my back and my buttocks with his leather belt. My most vivid memory is when I was six years old, and this was December 21st of 1940, four days before Christmas, it was a snowy night, my father came home without finding a job, and he said to my mother, how are the boys today. My mother turned to my brother, Rob, who was a year and three months older than I, and said he is evil, he is utterly obnoxious, he is the most selfish, disobedient child in the entire world. She said, take him down to the police station right now, tell the cops to lock him up and leave him there.

So my father did, marching down to the police station and here I am, six years old, crawling up at the window sill, my nose pressed against the glass hoping against hope that my brother is going to return a half hour later. Then I see my father walking up on a snowy night by himself and if I live to be two hundred years old, I'll never ever be able to describe the terror, the absolute sheer terror that gripped my heart now I knew there was nobody there to protect me, there was nobody there for me. The next time I acted out, I was going down to the jail to spend the rest of my life there and then through the tears, I see my brother about 30 yards behind my dad making a snowball and the inner panic temporarily subsided but I was still scarred and shaken. I wiped the tears from my eyes, I climbed down from the window sill and I assumed the macho position of a little six-year-old boy who doesn't cry and I pretended disinterest in a traumatic event that haunted me until I was 44 years old.

There's one more scene to the story, and this was years back in an hour of prayer in the morning, out of nowhere, I had an image of my mother flashing across my mind. And here, my mother was six years old and she was in the orphanage in Montreal, Canada where she was born. It was a wicked wicked mean spirited place and my mother was in tears rolling down her face and she was begging God to send her a mommy and daddy who will take her out of that awful place. The prayer was not answered for seven years but suddenly, as I looked at that image, all the anger, all the resentment that had been simmering over the years because my mother was never there for me, it disappeared like last night's dream. And then my mother said to me, after I had asked her forgiveness, she said, I messed up a lot when you were a kid, I didn't know how to love anybody but she said, you turned out okay. And then my mother who had never once held me or hugged or embraced me, kissed me, who constantly told me I was a pest, a nuisance, basically sit down in the corner and shut up and die. First time ever my mother kissed me, embraced me, and at that moment the greatest enemy of trust in my life was disarmed. My point is this, when we wallow in shame, remorse, self-hatred and guilt over real or imagined failings in the past, we are betraying our distrust in the love of God that we have not accepted the acceptance of Jesus, the total sufficiency of his redeeming power.

Preoccupation with our past sin, our present weaknesses, our character defects gets our emotions in self-destructive ways, it closes us in the mighty citadel of self and completely pre-empt the presence of a compassionate God. I can speak here out of personal experience, the language of low self-esteem is a language that is harsh, demanding, it is abusive, accusing, criticizing, rejecting, blaming, constantly condemning, reproaching, and scolding in a constant monologue of impatience with myself and chastisement of self. Rather than being surprised I've ever done anything good, I'm shocked and horrified that I failed and I never judge any of God's other children with the savage condemnation with which I crushed myself and of course, it's understandable with this image of that, we hide our true selves from God.

In prayer we simply don't trust that he can handle all that goes on in our own minds and our hearts, I mean, can Jesus handle my hateful thoughts, my cruel fantasies, my bizarre dreams? Can Jesus cope with

my primitive sexual urges? I'm 70 years old and three, at least three or four times a day, I'm having lustful images, lustful desires. I mean 30 years ago and I was 30 or 40 and here I am at 70, ordained, a priest for 42 years, I'm wondering how Jesus can cope with all those primitive, lustful desires? How can I cope with my exalted image of myself because I start to believe my own press, my own press clippings, what a wonderful man I am? Can He cope with that exalted image I'm always building? In Spain, I conclude that He can't and thus I withhold from Jesus what is most in need of his healing touch.

I'll never forget this. It's back in 1999, I'm invited to give a lecture at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. Well, the lecture was at seven at night, I'm walking at night at 6 .30, now I'm walking down a path, and a student passes me by a 20 -year -old sophomore.

He looks at me and he says, hey man, you're cool, he said, I like your voluminous jeans.

Now, I'm wearing these jeans and on any other campus, they would have said, I like your baggies. I like your baggy jeans but this is Stanford.

I like your voluminous, voluminous jeans, he says, for an old goat, you're cool. You're cool, man, really cool.

To this day I don't know what got into me, but I turned around right in his face and with mock indignation I say, if you ain't cool, what is the point of going on? You give me one good reason why I should go slogging through the molasses of this dark dreary dismal world that you ain't cool. Do you know what it's like to be 65 years old and be uncool in a cool world?

He backs off and says, geez man, it ain't that bad then he says, why don't I go talk to the chaplain?

I invited him to the lecture. We both laughed. I invite him to the lecture, and he comes. I walk him back to his dormitory that night, and he tells me how distant he feels from God these days.

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