

July 26, 2020 – Harvest Valley Worship Center

Today I want to share with you what was one of the most difficult and painful lessons for me to grasp as Mika and I shifted focus from doing things, to just being.

I want to start today with a passage that I believe frames some of my process well and we will start in John 3:1-8

John 3: 1- 8 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again^[b] he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c] ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You^[d] must be born again.’ ⁸The wind^[e] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Title: Performance Deception!

Discovering where we have independent ways of solving life’s problems. Discerning the works of the flesh when they are compulsive and deceptive.

How many are seeking God for physical healing, for financial provision, relational healing, deliverance from fear, pain or addiction?

Most of us would say that we pursue God, but we also want some benefits with it. He promises some of those benefits, and yet it can go sideways.

All of us have a deep desire to please God, to honor Him with our lives, our words, our actions, our relationships. Many of us, myself included, come to God and we give him everything.

Personally, somewhere along the way the places in my life that went unhealed, and undealt with manifested in great deception in painful ways.

I can say with certainty that until the last 6 months, I had been deceived about my need for approval, my fear of rejection and my deep need to prove that I was valuable enough to be accepted and loved. Now, the thing that stinks about deception is it is deceiving.

I became independent in my heart and hidden pride formed my drive to succeed, and it also framed how I did relationships. Through my own failures, bad habits and mistakes God graciously and suddenly interrupted my course in order to set me free and reveal the truth of His love, acceptance, approval, and perfect timing.

My deceptions would manifest in a few ways.

1. I was obsessed with finding the approval of man and performing for it.
2. I would try to perform in my walk with God to receive His blessing.

In short, I have been addicted to performance and deceived.

I believed that my good works, right words, good counsel, powerful ministry, godly parenting, selfless service, etc. would open the doors for heavens blessing on my life and not only would I be blessed spiritually, but especially in all the ways I felt needed to be measured to feel better about my life.

I was missing the core truth of the kingdom, God wants to be with us more than He desires to bless us. I understood and taught this truth, knowing all the right things to say. I deeply believed I was not operating in performance. I was deceived.

Today I want to help us find some ways to spot where we have been deceived and to begin the journey of walking in the higher and greater blessings God has for us.

[5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” \[c\]](#)

I want to say again, all of us have a deep desire to please God and at the same time, we might not abandon our hunger for the comforts of this world (I was hungry for success and approval). We believe that if we can figure out our walk with God well enough, we can have the answers we seek, the relief from conflict, and a remedy for the pain of life.

We find ourselves stuck seeking God **for the blessings** of God (which we believe will alleviate our strained state). We start looking for the keys, the insights, and the tools we need to make life work better for us, right here, right now.

When we are denied the satisfaction of getting what we want, it is easy either to react with discouragement or to strengthen our resolve to solve whatever problem has arisen. Perhaps we bargain with God or try to persuade God to provide us with the comfort and blessings we so earnestly believe that we deserve. Perhaps we are confused because we did everything right, and we know our position in Christ.

Whether we believe we are entitled sons of God or believe we have proven ourselves worthy to carry these manifest blessings, we are deceived. The truth is that the purpose of sonship is relationship, not what you get out of it. The great things we do should be a direct result of our walk with God, not so we can make our life work out better.

Here are 3 common tells – ways to spot if you are experiencing performance deception when it comes to pursuing God’s blessing.

1. **We feel confusion** about why things happen the way they do.

We find ourselves in situations asking questions like: Wasn't I a good enough parent? I thought I treated my spouse well and they still left me! God, why won't you tell me what to do to make this situation work out?

We end up confused why our efforts with God are not paying off.

Let me give you an example from early in ministry.

I remember being at a low point with the Lord and was struggling with shame and my value as a minister. The next Sunday, God shows up and for the first time in my life, I prayed for someone and they just fell back and hit the floor. I was on cloud 9 and so happy God would use me that way, but so confused. When I felt normal, holy, or powerful, God didn't move like that but when I was down, God would move powerfully. I concluded that for God to use me powerfully, I had to feel bad about myself.

I spent 3 weeks trying to figure out what **I did** that made me open enough for God to flow through me like that. I thought I was a key to that exchange, and the funny thing was that during that season we saw a lot of people dropping, and we even had to train some catchers.

Thankfully, God dealt with my deception quickly, but it is a pattern for many of us to be confused why some things happen and other things don't based on our behaviors

2. We feel pressure to do more to make things work out, or to achieve the blessings we are looking for.

When trials come, do we begin performing rituals (worship, fasting and prayer) **to get God to** move things for us? Do we engage in spiritual warfare by aligning with Godly principles (and in turn doing a lot of things in His name, like declarations), instead of abandoning our desired outcomes to Him who is our defender, provider, protector, and **healer**?

Maybe if I spend more time in prayer or fasting, things will change. If I give more money, maybe I'll get that debt paid off. If only I could use my gifts, then I will be valued and accepted. All of these are born from the flesh. **(Godly activity on it's own is not fruit of the Spirit...)**

3. We use spiritual techniques to get what we want. This is a common side-effect of living in the deception of performance. We become experts at wielding biblical principles and God-techniques to get what we want. We pray, study, fellowship, worship, declare, prophecy, and even evangelize for the sake of those blessings.

Sometimes humility, worship, ministry, prayer, etc. can be utilized for the sake of gaining what we want from God. Often, we draw near to God so He will draw near to us, and (we Hope) brings his blessings in hand. Our posture becomes a maneuver.

We cannot derive our value or have our problems solved through spiritual techniques. When God moves to accomplish His will, it is not for the sake of us getting the lesser desires of this life (those things that pale in comparison to His Presence) it is for us to be closer to Him.

Personally, I had been deceived about my need for approval, my fear of rejection and my deep need to prove that I was valuable enough to be accepted and loved. My deceptions were rooted in deep rejections, fears, and childhood traumas, along with all the reinforcing conditions of life. I am acutely aware of these things after many hours of counsel, prayer, and very difficult conversations.

So where does all this deception come from? Usually deception is rooted in something good, a truth that is beneficial. God wants to bless His kids. God wants to heal you.

Somehow, amid our fervor to encounter God, we shift to God's blessing and we begin sowing to the flesh!

Paul states in Romans 8:5-8 ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh (*the blessings of comfort, peace and approval in this life*), but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh **is death**, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is **hostile to God**, for it **does not submit to God's law**; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh **cannot please God**.

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will **of the flesh reap corruption**, but he who sows to the Spirit will **of the Spirit reap everlasting life**.

Listen Carefully: The flesh always values something more than **Christ**.

When it comes to God, no blessings on earth are guaranteed except for one... Himself. The Holy Spirit within us is the blessing we have guaranteed to us in this **life**. The greatest treasure and blessing is His presence.

John 14:15-18; Matthew 28:20

God's love is unrelenting and at some point, his love for us shines light on the deceptions that come with our trauma, our brokenness, and our failures if we are going to go deeper with Him. That process can be painful, but He is so gentle.

We cannot do enough, perform well enough, get healed enough to gain the blessings of God in our lives. The goal to ultimately get what we want will fail, and our best intentions will not manifest our desires because we are deceived.

Let me be clear. Blessings are available in Christ. IN CHRIST. Just be with HIM! When we pursue God alone, we know that whatever comes of the discomfort, the trial, the suffering we encounter that we want relieved, it will take us into a deeper encounter with God.

So how can we tell if we are living in the deception of independence and performance addiction in our lives? We check the fruit... we look at what we are reaping. We must do this honestly and take time to let God unravel our deceptions.

We all have areas to work out where we have approached God primarily for what He can do for us, more than just the prize of an encounter with Him.

John 3: ³ Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again^[b] he cannot see the kingdom of God.**” ... “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c]”

Some of us have been following Jesus for the hope of a more comfortable, successful, and blessed life and we may be deceived on why we follow Jesus. In Christ, we are reborn to live in a kingdom not of this world. I want to encourage each of us to come to Christ as if for the first time. To allow him to heal any areas of independence and performance and receive forgiveness and grace so that we might abide with Him above all else.

Introduce TRBAL – Take Me Back with Dante Bowen. <https://youtu.be/33yIPTvURfk>

Honestly, we all need to seek the Lord, and some of us are realizing that for the first time, we have been following Jesus, but not encountering Him.

We have been seeking God’s blessings and thought we could figure it out, but confusion and pressure have mounted in your life.

I want to invite everyone to listen, to seek the Lord and to ask God to remove any deceptions that have locked you into performance

Invite to the Altar – Pray then play the song.