

Week 13 Practice

As soon as you begin hearing the voice of grace, the voice of shame gets louder, like a child denied candy in the checkout line at the supermarket, throwing a temper tantrum. And one of its most common revolts against the voice of grace goes like this:

“Yeah, but...”

Yeah, but what about your flabby love handles and your crooked teeth, but what about the way people look at you when you talk passionately about the things that matter to you, but what about your religious doubts and quirky worldview, but what about your anger and your fear and the way you tear up at Super Bowl halftime commercials, but what about all those things you’ve done that you regret, but what about your obsession with armadillos? Your shame will try to convince you to hide everything that makes you unique. It will tell you to blend in, to be embarrassed of that which makes you most distinctly you. Especially the armadillos.

When I’m confronting this shame within a therapy client, I ask them to go to my office window and to watch the cars that pass by on the busy street running by the building. I ask them to count how many of the first ten cars that pass are some shade of grey or black. The number is almost always seven or eight out of ten. In our effort to compete—to keep up with the Joneses—we wind up indistinguishable, homogenous, and uninteresting. This week, we are going to confront the shameful lies we’ve swallowed about the ways we are different—indeed, unique—and we are going to start embracing our differences instead of hiding them.

Begin by making a list of your personal characteristics that you minimize or hide for fear of standing out. Sit for fifteen minutes on the first day making your list. Then, continue to attend to this throughout the week, as you go through your normal routine. Each time you notice yourself minimizing or hiding something about yourself, write it down. As the end of the week approaches, set aside an hour or two to be still with your list and to listen for the voice of grace. Wait until, within you, you hear a voice whispering, “This is what makes you uncommon, this is what make you rare, this is what makes you unique, this is what makes you worthy, this is what makes you *you*.”

Later, you will have time to act on this new acceptance of yourself. But first, just spend this week listening to the truth of baseball cards, whispered on the tongue of grace. Perfection is overrated. Competition makes us common. The game is over. You are here to be unique. You are here to be you. Enjoy the freedom of that.