

A little boy excitedly told his mom that he had just measured himself and he was six feet tall. Mom was a little skeptical, so she asked him to measure himself again while she watched.

She noticed that her little boy was using a 6-inch ruler, not a 12 inch ruler. Using the wrong ruler led to a wrong conclusion.

We can fall into the same problem ourselves. We might judge ourselves by a standard that is not the one God wants us to use. Using the wrong standard can lead to heartaches and heartbreaks.

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### *Standards by Which We Judge Ourselves*

How do I look? It is one of the standards we use to judge ourselves. Ears too big? Hair cowlick too unruly? Freckles too noticeable? Our looks are one of the big ways that we judge our worth. God has another standard.

What do I do? As I look at my life, what have I accomplished? Do I move mountains, or do mountains flatten me out? What we achieve is another significant way that we judge our worth. There is nothing wrong with looking at our accomplishments at times. But ultimately, God has another standard on our worth.

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What do I have? I have far more tv's and vehicles and time saving devices than my grandfather's had. But I cannot say that because I have these things I am a better person than my forebears. Accumulations are not the best way to judge worth.

Who likes me? How many of you like me? How many of you don't... We will not go there! There was, I believe, a Seinfeld episode where one person did not like Jerry. It bothered Jerry so much that he almost lost his other friends because he wanted this one other person just to like him. It is important to be liked. But...

On Palm Sunday it seemed like every wanted to be near to Jesus; on Good Friday Jesus had few friends. Just because someone likes you does not mean you are OK. Just because someone rejects you does not mean you are a failure.

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## *Standards by Which God Affirms - Believing*

We are going to spend three Sundays looking at three things that God looks for in us. These are the three things that make life valuable. They are three “B’s”: Believing, Belonging, Becoming.

God does not ultimately measure us by how we look, or by what we do, by what we have, or by who our friends are. But God does care deeply about what we believe in, who we belong to, and what we are becoming.

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So, what do you believe?

- **Question 1: Do you believe that creation has a Creator, or that creation “happened.”**

A few years ago my wife let us replace our rooftop antennae with cable television. I thought I would be so excited with that. In many ways I have been highly disappointed. But the stations that I have appreciated more than any others are Discovery and History.

And one of the byproducts for me of watching the Discovery Channel and the History Channel is that my faith in God as a Creator is affirmed time and time again.

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Most recently the History Channel has been running a series on the Universe. Did you know that the sun burns 600 million metric tons of hydrogen every second. That is what it takes to keep us warm; and to continue all of the processes on earth that sustain life.

When fact after fact like that comes at me from the Discovery and History Channels I cannot fathom how Creation could just happen.

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Sometimes in the morning I suck in my stomach and look down at my shoes and hope that my shoelaces would just happen to tie themselves together. It has never happened yet.

The odds of my shoelaces just happening to tie themselves together by wind and gravity and other natural forces is far, far less likely than any number of miracles that are happening right now in order for you to have life.

So I believe in God as the Creator of all things.

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▪ **Question 2: Do you believe that God is engaged with the world or removed from the world.**

A Baylor Religion Survey quoted in Time Magazine found that 40% of Americans believe that God is distant from the world. Do you believe God is distant from your everyday life?

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School started in MHD this week. It is fun to watch the little ones truck off to school with backpacks ½ their size on their backs. It looks like such a burden to carry...

One morning this week, looking out my kitchen window, I saw a child walking to school with the typical heavy first grade burden.

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Maybe it was an even heavier than normal burden. The first day of school with pencils and markers and papers and notebooks and a lunch...

- You could tell the pack was heavy because the hands were cupped inside the straps – like this.
- And the body was bent forward – like this.
- And you could tell the burden was very heavy because every once in a while the child would stop and do this...

I watched and thought: what type of wretched, uncaring, self-centered parent would send their child off like that? With such a heavy burden and all alone? Where was this absentee parent?

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Then I saw what was obviously Mom following this child. She was staying out of sight of the child, but kept her sight always on her child.

And it dawned on me that she was not a wretch, but an engaged Mom. She was letting her child carry his own load.

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You know that children want to try and do what? How many of you have heard this phrase from a child: *"I want to do it myself!"*

I am sure that is what the child said to Mom that morning at the door. *"Mom, I can walk myself to school, I can carry my backpack. I can do it myself!"* If I had a quarter for every time I have heard words to that effect!

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But Mom obviously would not allow herself to be removed from her child's life. So **Stealth Mom** was following her child. And as I watched Stealth Mom I thought of these things:

- She had given birth to this child. You do not easily let go of that which you have birthed.
- She had made all things possible for this child to grow up. She had provided meals, bath-time, safe play spaces, a place to lay me down so now I sleep, stories to be read... Everything the child needed had been provided.
- Even what the child carried in his new found freedom was probably from Mom. The back pack? The markers and notebooks? The lunch?

And now she followed to make sure the burden was not too great, and that her son could make it to his destination. And if he stumbled along the way, I could see **Stealth Mom** turning in an instant into **Rescue Mom!**

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40% of people believe that God is removed from the world; distant. Do you believe that? I do not. I think that Stealth Mom and Rescue Mom are models based on our God; an engaged God

Often in this world I have seen Stealth God become Rescue God. Prayers are answered, hopes are restored, lives are rebuilt, and doors are unlocked and opened.

Next Sunday Rob Bye is going to bring a message for us on the parable of the lost sheep. He is going to tell us about that rescue mission of the shepherd who leaves 99 to find 1. What kind of God does that? An engaged God! Bring a friend next week to hear Rob tell the story.

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So I believe in a God who creates all things and a God who is engaged. One more question for this morning...

▪ **Question 3: Do you believe that God loves you or puts up with you?**

You know, the people in MPLS believed that the 35W Bridge would hold them as they crossed the river. Then one day it no longer held...

The people in my hometown of Rushford believed that the dikes would hold back the flood. For 40 years the dikes had held back the rushing waters. Then one day the waters simply went over the top of the dikes...

The people in Northwood were enjoying a good day. Then the sky became angry and out of the sky came an violent tornado that destroyed in seconds what it had taken years to make...

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How do we know that God will one day no longer support us, will not one day simply overwhelm us, will not one day show us his angry face, and hide his face of compassion?

How do we know that God loves us, and does not just for now put up with us for now?

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The Baylor Religion Study looked for words that Americans use to describe the God they believe in. 75% of Americans describe God as being authoritarian, or distant, or critical.

Only 25% of Americans believe that God is benevolent.<sup>1</sup> Which to me means a lot of people might be wondering if God actually loves them.

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One of the great Psalms we read when going through tough times is Psalm 27. Some of the verses you may recognize...

- *The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear?*
  - *The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?*
  - *Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident.*
  - *Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Wait for the Lord.*
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My favorite verse of all in that Psalm is verse 10, which says, *“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.”* [Psalm 27:10]

Now, I had the privilege of having great parents, and I never worried about them abandoning me. But when my Mom died, there were days when it felt like I had been abandoned.

There are some things that we cannot do for one another. But the God who creates, and the God who engages us and rescues us, will never ever abandon us. God is indeed benevolent: God loves us.

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These are some of the things God encourages us to believe:

- God creates. If you do not believe that, look at a child’s hand this week.
- God rescues. If you do not believe that, ask someone who has had a prayer answered.
- God loves. If you do not believe that, come and listen to Rob Bye’s story next Sunday.

*Glory be to the Father...*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.baylor.edu/pr/news.php?action=story&story=41678>