

A Disposable Identity

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Day One

During one of our recent Walking Worthy podcast conversations with a fellow ministry leader and friend, we talked about the sensitive feeling of being disposable. This word sums up being cast away or used up and can summon thoughts of some of our deepest hurts whether at work or in other aspects of our lives. But being disposable is not part of our God-given identity.

As an adjective, the word disposable is defined as intended to be used once, or until no longer useful, and then thrown away; or to be able to be dispensed with or easily dismissed. As a noun, disposable is defined as readily available for use as required, or an article to be thrown away after use.

When we focus our identity on what the world says of us, this definition can truly impact how we feel. I would argue this is one of the roots of imposter syndrome in our work culture today.

Feeling like our talent is no longer useful or valued can play on repeat in our professional mind, leading us to feel like we're no longer qualified for the work we set forth to accomplish. In fact, I see this repeatedly with executive level women. The worst part is women in leadership roles are contributing to this feeling in other women! Intentional or not, our actions and words and our inaction or lack of words can leave those around us feeling disposable.

Let's explore this worldly "disposable" identity through a biblical lens. There are truly remarkable heroes in the Bible the world disposed of, but God used for his glory! Perhaps in our reading of them, we may not have stopped to consider their feelings. I have learned throughout the years that we often focus on the glory without pausing to see ourselves in the feelings of those God has truly used for his purposes.

Do you have a hidden or other disability which has caused you to feel disposed? Maybe you have a vision of greatness of which has been disposed. Have you ever felt less than or not good enough? Perhaps you were the perfect expert for a job but simply were rejected.

All these situations exist in God's Word! They play out in the lives of real people who had a greater identity to God than they did to their fellow man or woman!

I will not stop reminding you of Ephesians 2:10, but today I want to phrase it for you simply. You are created perfectly as you are by God in Christ Jesus to do just what you are doing right now. God prepared your path before you were even born. All you need to do is walk forward. You are not disposable.

Day Two

The last several years of praying with women has opened my eyes to how physical and mental health can impact people at work. A physical disability (seen or unseen) or mental health challenges like anxiety or depression can lead to feelings of being no longer useful or dismissed—disposable.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, we find the story of the bleeding woman. Mark 5:25-34 tells us this woman has suffered from a discharge of blood for 12 years. She has suffered, seen many physicians, spent all she had, and was no better for it. Culturally, this woman would have been unclean. While this is not written, let's pause to think of her. First, she is in physical discomfort. Perhaps she is constantly tired because she is constantly bleeding. Because she was unclean, she was socially isolated and could not work—even if she wanted to. This isolation likely created even more loneliness and despair. The financial burden would have only compounded this.

If we were to transport her to today perhaps, she would be unable to work due to this condition. Her mental and financial state likely would be similar. If she needed to work, imagine the stress of managing this bleeding every day.

While this woman was disposable to society, she was not disposable to Jesus. Her desperation and faith in knowing that Jesus was healing people led her into the crowds to simply touch the hem of his garment. This woman was instantly healed.

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering (Mark 5:34).

Throughout Scripture, we see Jesus healing people who were outcasts. He gladly touched and healed the lepers, the blind, the disabled. It was his mercy and their faith in his healing power that was on display. None of them were disposable to Jesus!

Are you invertedly causing some employees to feel disposable? One of the women I am blessed to be in community with has lived with a hidden disability for many years. It can cause her severe physical pain, migraines, and gastrointestinal issues. One look at this executive leader and you would never know how much she endures to get through her days. Recently she has become an advocate for herself and for others at work who cannot participate in physical activities planned during a retreat. Golf, pickleball, and horseback riding are not possible for her. She advocated for an alternative and helped her CEO see how these activities made her feel “dispensed with” while others were having fun.

As followers of Jesus Christ, how can we see others as Jesus saw the bleeding woman, the lepers, the blind, and disabled? We are called to love them like Jesus did. To him, they were perfect.

Day Three

Have your dreams and ideas ever impacted you at work? Or maybe how much positive attention you receive from a boss? Either way, big ideas and favor from up top can often intimidate others, and it can sometimes leave you feeling easily dismissed, disposable by your peers.

One of the greatest leaders in all of Israel's history had dreams of his greatness. His name was Joseph. One could argue he should have had a little more emotional intelligence than to share such a bold dream with his jealous brothers, but it was all part of God's plan to have Joseph save Israel. In Genesis 37 we learn Joseph was loved by Jacob more than any of his other brothers.

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him (Genesis 37:4).

On top of the favoritism shown to Joseph by his father, he shared his dreams which indicated that his brothers, mother, and father would one day bow down to him. In Genesis 37:11, we learn his brothers are *jealous of him*.

Following these dreams, we learn Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers and bring back information on their well-being. This is when the jealousy gets the best of his brothers. First, they

contemplate killing Joseph. Then, they find more benefit in selling him into slavery. Moreover, they faked his death and told poor Jacob he had died by an animal attack.

The story of what happens to Joseph continues in Genesis 38-46. Being disposed of by his jealous brothers wasn't the end of his hardship. However, we see God had great plans for him. When the famine was bad, his brothers set out to Egypt for food. Joseph, now overseeing all of Pharaoh's kingdom, saved his brothers and father from starvation.

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance (Genesis 45:7).

Clearly, God chose Joseph to be a leader. He placed dreams in Joseph's mind that perhaps gave him hope during some of the worst trials we could ever imagine. To his brothers, he was disposable. For God's plans, he was not.

Being in leadership as a trusted advisor is a coveted position that can often lead to isolation and attack from peers and even subordinates. Jealousy and covetousness creep in and peers at work soon can work against you. This can lead to feelings of being thrown away or disposed of.

In these times, trust that the Lord may be bringing you closer to him, and into a new position for his glory.

Day Four

You are not enough. You feel second to everyone else, and you just can't seem to find your place at work. Feelings of being inadequate or left out are more common at work than we talk about. An AI overview of this, highlights that these feelings can negatively impact well-being and productivity, leading to loneliness, anger, shame, and even disengagement or turnover. This isn't good for you as an employee, and it isn't good for you if you are an employer either. What can we do when we or our employees feel disposed of?

Let's consider Leah, the older sister of Rachel who was sought after by Jacob. We have already explored the jealousy of Joseph's brothers. It started here—with their mothers!

Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful (Genesis 29:17).

Jacob sought to marry Rachel and worked for seven years to earn her hand in marriage. What's worse, after serving the seven years, he was duped into marrying Leah—not Rachel! You can read the entire story in Genesis 29, but Jacob works another seven years for Rachel. Leah bears many sons and a daughter for Jacob, and Rachel only two children—Joseph and Benjamin.

As we did for the bleeding woman, let's place ourselves in Leah's shoes. Culturally she would be the first to marry. The description of her isn't much and her sister is described as beautiful. She likely grew up knowing she was not pretty like Rachel and then faced knowing a potential husband did not really want her. She was forced into the marriage by her father, Laban. Jacob was angry at her father's deception but accepted her. However, she was never favored. She was easily dismissed—disposable. Her children were not as loved as the children of Rachel.

The sons of Jacob would become the 12 tribes of Israel. And ultimately a descendant of Leah—the easily dismissed wife—would come our savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. The opinions of man didn't matter; God had a great plan for Leah.

Today our professional experience and expertise are always on display. From LinkedIn to TedX, to being a member of a coveted organization, if you aren't on display, it can feel like you aren't qualified

for what is next professionally. Maybe it is a title or the way someone dresses at work. Perhaps you hope to attend meetings or a company offsite but weren't selected.

Remember, like Leah, God has a plan just for you!

Day Five

Are you an expert at something? Perhaps you have gone to school for an advanced degree in a specific subject. Your deep knowledge uniquely qualifies you among your peers and shows people just how qualified you are, but suddenly your expertise is no longer welcomed. People don't seem to appreciate what you have to say or care about your accomplishments and accolades.

We have considered different people in the Bible who seemed disposable. Let's explore an ultimate expert who was easily dismissed or disposed of—Jesus.

In Scripture, we learn of Jesus' innate knowledge of the Word. In Luke 2:42-47, Jesus is only 12 years old when his parents take him to Jerusalem for the customary Passover. When the feast ends, they leave, but Jesus stays. Frantically searching as parents would, they go back and find him.

After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers (Luke 2:46-47).

Surely, we know Jesus is the Son of God, which is ultimately why he knows the Word, but here Jesus establishes this at the young age of 12.

After his baptism by John, we know Jesus is led into the wilderness for 40 days and tempted by Satan. When Satan tempts him in his hunger, *Jesus answered, "It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone"* (Luke 4:4).

Again, he establishes for us a deep knowledge and reliance on the Word of God.

As he began his ministry, Jesus taught in the synagogues of Galilee and was glorified by all (Luke 4:15). But then he went home to Nazareth. Going to the synagogue he read from Isaiah, and while they spoke well of him and marveled, someone asks, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" You can read more about this interaction in Luke 4, but it ends with them driving Jesus to the edge of town, attempting to throw him off a cliff. Why? Because he quotes Scripture about himself, and no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

Throughout the Gospels, we read about Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders for their actions and, well, inactions. Using Scripture the leaders of the day knew richly, he showed their hypocrisy repeatedly, ultimately leading to such great jealousy that they called for his crucifixion.

Those of us who have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior know all of this was part of God's plan to redeem his people and the world. Jesus lived as an expert to the ultimate sacrifice of being disposed on the cross, but he rose on the third day and has eternal life at the right hand of the Father! God's plans are always greater.

When you feel dismissed for your expertise and deep knowledge, rather than leaning in to discouragement, pray to the Lord! How will he use your unique talents and gifts for his glory?