

I Am God's Masterpiece, Not a Mistake! **Psalms 139 / John 20:11-18**

The Identity Crisis at Gate 17

I once came across a story that made me smile. A ticket agent at an airport was having a rough day. A flight had been canceled, and a long line of tired and frustrated passengers was waiting to rebook their flights. Then, out of nowhere, a man stormed up to the counter, pushing past everyone in line. He slammed his ticket down and said, "Listen, I have to be on the NEXT flight, and it must be FIRST class!" The agent stayed calm and said kindly, "I'm sorry, sir. There are a lot of people waiting. I'll be glad to help you when it's your turn. Please wait just a moment." The man got even angrier and leaned over the counter and yelled, "Do you have any idea who I am!?"

Without missing a beat, the agent picked up the airport microphone and said, "Attention please, everyone. We have a passenger at Gate 17 who doesn't know who he is. If anyone can help identify him, please come to the gate." Everyone in line burst out laughing.

It's a funny story—but that man's question—"*Do you know who I am?*"—isn't just his. It's a question every one of us asks in some way. Deep down, we all wrestle with it. *Who am I, really? What makes me valuable?* And that question—though it may show up in moments of pride or insecurity—is at the heart of our search for identity, meaning, and belonging.

BE U!

As many of you know, I studied at Boston University. The abbreviation for Boston University is *B.U.*, and in the campus bookstore, you can find all sorts of things that play on those two letters. One that caught my eye said simply: "Be U!" — *Be you!* "Be you" — we hear that phrase all the time these days. It means, "Don't live by other people's expectations or pressures. Be true to yourself. Live according to your own values and convictions." Our culture celebrates this idea of finding your *authentic self*.

If you scroll through social media, watch commercials, or flip through a self-help book, you'll see it everywhere: "Be yourself." "Be the real you." And of course, there's truth in that. It's important not to live for other people's approval. It's good to live honestly and with integrity. But the philosopher Charles Taylor says that our modern search for the authentic self has changed over time. It used to be about *discovering* who we are — now it's about *inventing* who we are. In the past, people found their identity in relationships or through the communities and traditions they belonged to. But today, many people define themselves only by their own feelings and desires, as if truth comes only from within. So the "authentic self" has come to mean "the self that follows its emotions and desires." Taylor calls this kind of identity the "enclosed self." He says that when we live this way, we can easily become trapped — trapped inside our own emotions, our own wants, our own little world — disconnected from others and even from God.

And we know how changeable our emotions are, right? We can feel one way in the morning and completely different by the afternoon. Our desires shift, our moods swing. When we try to find our true self only by chasing those shifting feelings — apart from community, apart from God — we end up feeling anxious and unsteady.

Mary Magdalene

In the Bible, we meet someone who deeply understood what it feels like to live with inner chaos and emotional struggle — *Mary Magdalene*. Scripture says she was “possessed by seven demons” (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9). That doesn’t just mean she was taken over by evil spirits. It can also mean her heart was pulled in many directions — that she was overwhelmed by the voices inside her and had lost her sense of who she truly was.

Mary was probably a person who *felt everything deeply*. Maybe some of you can relate to that. Have you ever felt like you absorb everything around you — the pain, the joy, even the smallest changes in life? As many of you know, I’m more of a thinker. I analyze things. But my wife, Juhee is a feeler — she experiences life through emotion. If I’m like a calm lake, she’s like a lively, sparkling stream. I often tell her, “The world must look so much more colorful through your eyes than through mine.” She feels deeply, cries easily, rejoices easily, and lives with her heart wide open. And I find that beautiful.

I think Mary Magdalene was like that — maybe even more so. She was someone who felt the world in her bones, who loved deeply, and because of that, was easily wounded. Her emotions went up and down like the tides — sometimes the world seemed radiant and full of hope, and other times, unbearable sadness washed over her. At times, the depth of what she felt might have been too heavy to carry.

But did people around her understand her? Probably not. People might have said she was “too emotional,” “unstable,” or “dramatic.” The more misunderstood she felt, the more she probably withdrew into herself, feeling like no one could truly understand or love her. Eventually, people labeled her — not just as “troubled,” but as “possessed.”

And yet, deep down, Mary longed for something every human heart longs for — to be seen, to be understood, to be loved just as she was. And that’s when she met Jesus. The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly *how* Jesus healed her. But one thing is clear: that encounter changed everything. Her healing wasn’t just about demons leaving her body — it was about *being seen, being restored, being made whole again*. Jesus didn’t look at her and see a broken person who needed fixing. He saw her as if to say, “You’re not a mistake. You’re not broken. You are God’s masterpiece — just as you are.” When Mary met the One who truly saw her — who looked at her not with judgment but with love — the voices that once tormented her lost their power. And she was finally free. When Mary Magdalene met Jesus, that moment might have felt like something we all long for — the moment when someone *truly understands us*.

Have you ever seen the movie *Good Will Hunting*? It’s about a young man named Will — a genius, but one who carries deep wounds from his childhood. Because of that pain, he keeps sabotaging his own life, getting into trouble, and pushing people away. One day, instead of going to jail, he’s ordered to see a therapist named Sean.

Near the end of the film, there’s a powerful scene where Sean looks at Will and says, over and over again, “It’s not your fault. It’s not your fault.” At first, Will laughs it off. He rolls his eyes, makes jokes — but Sean keeps repeating those words gently: “It’s not your fault.” And finally, Will breaks down in tears. For the first time, he meets someone who truly *sees* him, who understands the pain behind his anger. And that one sentence — “It’s not your fault” — sets him free from years of guilt, shame, and self-hatred.

I imagine that when Mary Magdalene met Jesus, she experienced something like that. Through the loving gaze of Christ, she might have heard a voice in her heart saying: “Mary... it’s not your fault. You’re not broken. You are not a mistake. You are God’s beloved masterpiece.” That look of love, that deep understanding, quieted the voices that had tormented her and set her free. From that moment on, she followed Jesus with all her heart.

When Jesus was crucified, most of His male disciples ran away in fear. But Mary stayed. Out of deep love, she stood near the cross. And on the first day after the Sabbath, she came to the tomb, still weeping from her loss. Then she heard that familiar voice again — “Mary!” Just one word — her name — spoken with love. And that one word changed her again. The same Mary who once wept in confusion and pain now ran to the others, declaring with joy, “I have seen the Lord!” She became the first witness of the resurrection — the one the early church would later call “*the apostle to the apostles*.”

God’s Fearfully and Wonderfully Made Masterpiece

Mary’s story is really our story too. We, too, sometimes hear those same false voices that tell us, “*You’re flawed. You’re not enough. You can’t be loved the way you are.*” But the truth is — God still calls us by name. In Psalm 139, David prays these beautiful words: “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me... for you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Yes. You are fearfully and wonderfully made by God! That’s who we are — fearfully and wonderfully made by God. You are not a mistake. You are not an accident. You are God’s masterpiece — lovingly shaped from the very beginning.

To live as God’s masterpiece doesn’t mean living a perfect or unbroken life. It means recognizing our cracks and weaknesses — and allowing God’s golden grace to flow through them. Think of **Kintsugi**, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold. The cracks are not hidden; they are highlighted. What was once broken becomes even more beautiful because of the gold that fills it. That’s how God works with our lives. The cracks, the scars, the pain — when touched by God’s grace — become the very places where divine beauty shines through. Our wounds become windows of glory.

So I invite you to place your hand over your heart for a moment. And repeat after me: “**I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I am God’s masterpiece.**” Whenever you hear the voice of those “seven demons” whispering, “You’re not good enough. You’re a failure,” speak this truth again: “**I am God’s masterpiece. God does not make mistakes.**” God takes every part of your story — even the broken and painful parts — and shapes them into something beautiful, making you whole in God’s hands.

So walk in that truth. Live as God’s masterpiece — not perfect, but redeemed; not flawless, but full of grace. And wherever you go, let your life proclaim the same good news Mary proclaimed: “I have seen the Lord.” Amen.