

Crumbs from our Master's Table

A Devotional Primer

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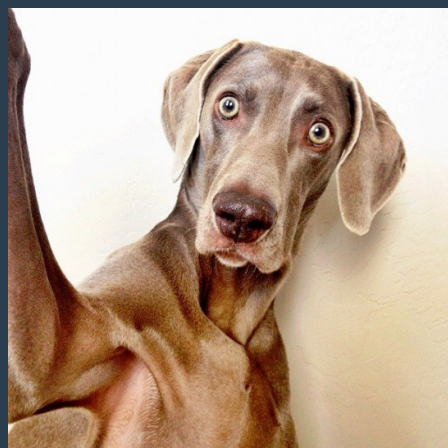
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A Gospel Selfie

With the invention of the smartphone and social media like Instagram and Facebook, the “selfie” has become somewhat of a social phenomenon. You’ve probably even snapped a few of your own. If you’re a pro, you might even have a “selfie” stick. So what’s up with this “selfie” phenomenon, anyway? According to [Dr Mariann Hardey](#), a lecturer in marketing at Durham University, it’s all about the obsession we have with “presenting [ourselves] in the best way...”

This shouldn’t surprise us. Presenting ourselves in the best possible light is innate to the human condition. It’s one of the reasons we lie. It’s why there are such things as Botox, face lifts, and breast augmentations. It is why photographers touch-up wedding photos and school pictures. It’s why we practice or memorize scripts before speaking in front of an audience. It’s why we take that one last look in the mirror before opening the door for our guests.

We give a lot of attention to how we present ourselves to the world around us, often with very little thought to the fact that it is such a natural part of our social behavior. Of course, in many cases such preparation is normal. We are expected to prepare for the big job interview. It is appropriate to dress up nice to go on a date. It’s responsible to put our best foot forward when we present a business plan to a group of investors. These are just a few examples where it serves the greater good to present our best selves.



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There are other occasions where it would be considered inappropriate and vain to present ourselves in the best way, if by “best way” we mean our most aesthetically pleasing self. For example, it would be appalling to see emergency response personnel checking their hair in the mirror before performing CPR when someone’s life is hanging in the balance. It would be vain for someone to wear designer clothes to a job that requires coveralls or protective gear. It would be dangerous for a soldier to be concerned with the polish on his boots in a combat situation where bullets are flying over his head. In these latter cases, presenting ourselves in the best way means presenting our best gifts and abilities to the situation at hand, and not worrying how well we align with popular aesthetic conventions.

More importantly, there is a condition in which “presenting ourselves in the best way” would be eternally damning. God knows the true and particular condition of each and every person’s soul, so it’s foolish to attempt to present oneself to Him in the best way possible. The author of Proverbs reminds us “*Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: But a faithful man who can find?*” (Proverbs 20:6). It’s not unusual for us to present ourselves to our peers as good and faithful, but like so many social media profiles, people are usually a lot better in presentation than they are in person. It seems natural and normal to minimize our vices and exalt our virtues, but that’s the problem. We’ve normalized self-deception, and the result is self-damnation. A natural man looks in the spiritual mirror, sees his flaws, and hurries past them, quickly forgetting what he really looks like (James 1:23-24).

This is not true of everyone, however. When a Canaanite woman came out to meet Jesus as he made his way through the district of Tyre and Sidon, the idea of “presenting herself in the best way” completely escaped her. Had she been living in modernity, we might imagine her with a smartphone trying get a selfie with Jesus so she could put it up on Facebook and Instagram. No doubt, uploading a picture with Jesus would have received a lot of “likes.” Who knows, her selfie may have gone viral, and A&E would have hooked her up with her own reality TV show.

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Instead, this Gentile woman took a different kind of selfie, one entirely different than the “natural man” takes. Looking back at her in the proverbial camera was a dog. Matthew records the strange account in his gospel:

“And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”

– Matthew 15:21–28, ESV

Typically, the dogs of Jesus’ day were not the cute house-hold pets we think of. They didn't have vaccinations, grooming, and special doggy treats in those days. Dogs were mostly mangy scavengers fit for the garbage dumps, and destined to die in the streets. That’s why the Jews used the term dog as a pejorative idiom to describe the Gentiles who were the pagan enemies of God. Like the four-legged scavengers of the streets and dumps, the Gentiles were appallingly unclean (Ezra 9:1-3).

Speaking metaphorically, Jesus drew a word picture of a family sitting at the table for a meal enjoying the blessings of God. The children at the table were the Israelites. He explained that it would be inappropriate to give the children’s food to the Canaanite woman and her daughter, the dogs. To our modern sentiments, the candid assertion of gentle Jesus seems rude and politically incorrect. This is no way to treat a desperate and hurting woman is it? What is the meaning of his condescending words? Is Jesus not so loving after all? Or, is there something else going on here--something deeper and more profound?

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The Fairest One of All

In the 1937 Disney classic, *Snow White*, the evil Queen looks into a magic mirror and asks, “Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?” Narcissistic and vain, she seeks the affirmation of the magic mirror to tell her what she needs to hear—that she is the fairest one of all. Her value and self-worth depend on a good report from the magic mirror. But when she learns Snow White is the fairest one of all, she makes three brash attempts to kill her. The Queen’s value and identity are completely wrapped up in a favorable report of herself. Her obsession with this “best” view of herself drives the plot of the fairy tale.

According to Tolkien, famed author of *The Lord of the Rings*, fairy tales are effective in helping us regain “a clear view” of real life. Fairy tales, like *Snow White*, take us out of the familiar and place us in a realm where we are arrested by the unfamiliar, a place where we see reality more clearly. This is similarly what Jesus does by employing parables and metaphors. These also work to arrest our attention, not with the unfamiliar, but with the overly familiar.

The magic mirror reveals the Queen is evil because the question is at the root of her heart. Not the other way around. Asking the question doesn’t turn her into an evil witch; asking the question reveals that she is an evil witch already. Both her question and her response to the answer reveal this about her heart. She doesn’t ask who is the fairest to give honor where honor is due. She asks to make sure she still maintains the status of “fairest of all.” Otherwise, she would not have been horrified by the answer when she learns Snow White had taken her place. This same experience is true of us. What we see when we look in the mirror of truth and reality reveals the true condition of our hearts. And how we respond to what we see only serves to affirm what has already been revealed. According to Jesus, the one who sees herself as “fair” is blind still. He told the self-righteous of his day, “ *If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains*” (John 9:41, ESV).

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The Canaanite woman in Matthew's gospel was not blind; she could see clearly. She could see that she did not belong at the table of the Master. She could see that, spiritually speaking, she was not a child, but a dog. She was nothing more than a mangy scavenger whose destiny was to scrounge garbage in the dumps until she finally died in the streets of this damned world. But being desperate, she laid aside any vanity she might hope to gain, and begged for scraps, even a crumb of mercy:

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”

– Matthew 15:22, ESV

Her daughter was oppressed by a demon, and not mildly or occasionally. It would have been bad enough if the Canaanite woman had been oppressed herself, but her oppression came vicariously through watching her daughter suffer so severely. Assuming she was like most mothers, she would have readily traded places with her daughter, but reality would not allow it. Her child was in the throws of evil, and she was helpless to change the matter. Instead of growing bitter or resentful, she humbly accepted her reality, and pled for mercy. Hers was not the kind of desperation that prompted a mother to suffer some minor inconvenience to cure the situation. Hers was the kind of desperation that moved a Canaanite to kneel before a Jew and ask his help--the kind that moved an enemy of God to cry to Him for mercy.



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Mercy is not what the spiritually blind ask for. The blind, when they suffer hardship or evil, demand justice--or at least a version of it they believe they deserve. The blind become distraught—and enraged—when they cannot see the reality they envision should be theirs. The blind blame the darlings for their pain and trick them into eating poisoned apples—and send hunter's to pierce the heart of the “fairest of all.” Filled with this bitterness, the blind spend eternity gnashing their teeth and summoning the powers of hell to give them their way. But they will never get it. They will never, ever, see reality. The blind go on in their blindness, blindly pretending, blindly believing they are getting closer to justice, but wandering deeper and deeper in the blackness of their dark blindness.

It's the helpless and undeserving, the dogs, who see, and by seeing, cry desperately for mercy, for the crumbs that fall from the Master's table.

Lowering the Steaks

In a funny magazine article, a pet-owning couple rushed home from work to prepare for guests they had invited to dinner, only to discover their dog had gotten sick and left his stomach contents—and its putrid odor—throughout the entire house. The article recounted the rollicking antics of the couple's unfortunate discoveries and hilarious attempts to rectify the situation. Eventually it was determined one of them had left packages of thawing steaks, intended for their guests, low enough for the dog to get a hold of them. The moral of the story was captured in the title of the article: “Raise the Steaks!”

One of the great things about the gospel is its accessibility. Jesus didn't “raise the steaks.” He put the gospel down on the bottom shelf where everyone—including the dogs—could get to it (Galatians 3:28-29, ESV). The Canaanite woman's desperate situation opened her eyes to the severity and hopelessness of her spiritual condition. When she humbled herself and acknowledged that Jesus's assessment of her condition was true, the gospel, having always been well within reach, was now visible to her once blind eyes.

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During this time, the Gentiles of the Tyre region were constantly robbing the poor Jews of earthly bread. So by acknowledging Jesus as *Lord, Son of David* (vs. 22), the Jews as the children of the Lord (cf. Mark 7:27-28), and herself as a dog, the Canaanite woman was doing more than acknowledging her humble station as a sinner and alien to the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12). She was making a spiritual observation about this ongoing conflict between the Jews and the Canaanites of the region. In a word, she was acknowledging the *priority* of Israel in God's plan to provide spiritual bread to the Gentiles through the Jews; and in an expression of faith, she thought it not stealing to eat the crumbs that fell from the Master's table. Again, Matthew's gospel is helpful here. Jesus said to her,

"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly."

– Matthew 15:27-28

"O woman, great is your faith!" Jesus testified of her. By resisting her initial request, but without heeding his disciples' plea to send her away, Jesus proved her faith, revealing a mere crumb of the great wisdom of God.

"Be it done for you as you desire," Jesus said. By answering her petition, he gave her a mere crumb of mercy, a foretaste of the healing all his elect would experience when the fullness of his kingdom was realized (Revelation 21:4).

"And her daughter was healed instantly." By healing the woman's daughter, Jesus revealed a mere crumb of the power of God. Not many days later, He would unleash the full power of the triune God by dying on a cross and then raising to life again (Romans 1:16 cf. 2 Corinthians 13:4).

This same wisdom, mercy, and power of God is available to every dog who desires the crumbs that fall from our Master's table (John 6:37).

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Cinnamon Roll Snob

When I was a kid, my mom would make these over-sized, sweet rolls, with thick rich cinnamon-sugar and plump raisins smeared between every layer. The outer layers were sweet and flaky, slightly crunchy, and perfect for dipping into milk or coffee. My favorite part, though, was the center, where all the sweet, buttery goodness absorbed and kept the bread moist and gooey. When there wasn't milk to dip the crunchy outer layers in, sometimes, when my mom wasn't looking, I would give these "crumbs" to the dog so I could have more of the rich gooey center. I was a cinnamon roll snob.

Crumbs are mere morsels, beggar's food. They are not what the deserving eat; they are niblets for the desperate and humble. Snobs abhor crumbs. They do not suffer paupers' vittles. Their palates, craving the richer, moist cuisine, will not tolerate the crumbs. But those who are hungry happily find satisfaction in the crumbs Jesus drops for us. When the Canaanite woman said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table," she wasn't asking for the center of the cinnamon roll. She was content with the discarded crusty edges because they were more than she deserved, more than enough to meet her needs, and more delicious and satisfying than any of the delicacies this world had to offer. Like the loaves and fishes fed the multitudes abundantly, mere crumbs fed the Canaanite woman and her daughter abundantly, all because they were from the Master's table... Come, taste for yourself, and see how good the Lord is (Ps 34:8).

Crumbs from our Master's Table is a FREE daily devotional reading you can consume in a minute, and chew on all day long. Of course, these devotions are not a substitute for the nourishment of the Word and Sacraments served on the Lord's Day, but they are good with milk or coffee.

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Scott Postma is a writer and teacher with more than twenty years of pastoral and teaching experience. He is passionate about helping people discover their significance, create meaningful art, and making a difference that actually matters. He blogs at scottpostma.net where he shares valuable tips on writing and teaching, rich insights into the arts and humanities, and meaningful perspective on Christian theology. Follow on [Twitter](#), connect on [Facebook](#), or [subscribe to the tribe](#).

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