

WHAT DRIVES YOU? (INTRODUCTION)

There's a way to tell a story in the world of fiction and film that's called "unreliable narrator"

- It's where we're taken through a story from a narrator's perspective
- But then, in a plot twist, we learn that this narrator, the one whose eyes and mind we've been seeing through, has been unreliable the whole time
- And then we, the readers or viewers, have this "whaa?!" (mind-blown) experience and have to go back and re-examine the whole story

A very popular example of this is the novel and then movie Fight Club

- Spoiler alert if you don't know Fight Club... but the movie came out in 1999, so c'mon people you've had plenty of time =)
- The story follows Edward Norton's character, who is repressive and disenchanted with life, and the way he is changed by his relationship with Brad Pitt's character, who is eccentric and confident and radical
- BUT, as the story comes to its climax, we learn that Brad Pitt is actually just Edward Norton's alter ego... that Norton's character suffers from insomnia and dissociative personality disorder
- Our mind is blown and we go back and re-interpret everything that's happened
- Because the eyes and mind we've been viewing this story through have not given us the whole story
- They couldn't - our narrator was unreliable, and not even aware of it

(PAUSE)

I wonder sometimes if we're all unreliable narrators

- Everyone one of us is, in some ways, an unreliable narrators of our selves and our lives
- We often don't really know what is driving us and our decisions.
- We aren't giving people the whole story when we narrate our lives to others
- Because our "whole story" is really too complex for us to grasp
- There's so much going on with us that our brain can't contain it all!
- Whether we realize it or not, we're out of touch with some of our selves

Think about it...

- Why am I so drawn to certain people or things?
- Why does this or that issue or principle matter so much to me?
- Why did I buy this or that thing? Or why did I feel such a need to buy it?
- Why does this thing that my friend or family member or partner does get under my skin so much?
- Why do I consistently find myself in conflict over this same thing?
- Why do I seem to persist in this unhealthy habit that I am well aware of and dislike?

I narrate for those around me a degree of knowledge about things like these

- BUT DO I REALLY KNOW?
- Do I really know what is driving me and my decision-making?
- Often, I think, I'm an unreliable narrator
- I'm like insomniac Edward Norton from Fight Club, sometimes living out an alter ego I'm not even in touch with

Well, we're beginning a new series of talks today -- I'm excited (for a couple reasons)

- First, we're going to be learning how to invite God to help us ask ourselves: "what drives me?"
 - Like REALLY drives me?
 - Not just what I narrate for others

- Let's get to the plot twist - let me acknowledge that I'm unreliable to some degree
- And then let me start re-examining my story
- I'm excited about this because of the potential benefit!
 - What valuable insight might you and I gain about our selves?
 - Wow, I've always thought I'm driven to help other people because I want to be helpful...
 - But maybe that's about me... that I "need to be needed"
 - Or how might this help each of us live more as we're truly meant to?
 - Wow, I've always held this or that trait or descriptor (as a loyal person or as a leader or as a good person) as core to my identity
 - But am I just compulsively posturing and performing for others?
 - Wow, I had no idea I'm so driven to appear certain ways for certain people
 - That that gives me an illusion of feeling valuable
 - But how tiring and life-stealing it actually is!
 - Can we feel a release from needing to meet the standards or opinions of others or from society?
 - Can we discover a more life-giving driving force for our lives?
 - Those sound like great benefits!
- And the second reason I'm excited is that during this series and in a number of series over the spring and summer here at BLV...
 - We're going to get the privilege of hearing some guest voices for our Sunday talks
 - Many of you know, my co-pastor Kyle and his wife Michelle just welcomed their first child, so we thought:
 - Why not leverage the fact that this is a great time for Kyle to get some "paternity time" and invite some voices up here that we think you all will really love and benefit hearing from
 - A great lineup is shaping up
 - Next Sunday, our first guest voice: BLV's own Nader Sahyouni
 - one of the elder statesmen among us in this community
 - a man with a powerful story of immigrating to America as a refugee of war
 - who, in his working life, has a hand in both spiritual direction AND corporate America - which I just love about him
 - I think you're going to appreciate his balance of depth and down-to-earth

Today, however (unfortunately, perhaps), you get me

(PAUSE)

Well this thought that "maybe we're all unreliable narrators" reminds me of something we see in the Old Testament of the Bible

- The OT, you may know, is a collection of writings from the Ancient Jewish culture
- One immensely valuable book we have in it is the Psalms
 - The prayer and song book of this ancient people
 - Its primary value is that over the course of its 150 poems it seems to capture every feeling on the emotional spectrum (from anger to shame to sheer joy)
 - For many thousands of years, actually, the primary way people were taught to pray and learn to interact with God in their everyday lives was to pray the psalms
 - Pray through these 150 poetic expressions of every human emotion, making each one your own
 - There is some research to suggest this was how Jesus himself was taught to pray... that, in his day, praying the psalms was still the dominant way to teach people to pray
- The Psalms seem to have behind them something like this thought that "we're all unreliable narrators"

Take Psalm 42 for instance...

1 As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

2 *My soul* thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

3 My tears have been my food
day and night,

while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

4 These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:

how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

5 **Why, my soul, are you downcast?**
Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

6 **My soul is downcast within me;**
therefore I will remember you

from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

7 Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers

← The Psalmist refers to his soul in the third person... like its a part of him, but it is of its own accord, to some degree... as if he’s just discovered this about his soul

← Very interesting this bit - he’s speaking to his own soul... encouraging it, challenging it

← Remembering specific experiences of God helping in the past helps him to experience God again right now

have swept over me.

8 By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

9 **I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”**

← Having just called God “the God of my life”, still he finds himself asking something like this... as if he can't fully control his despairing soul

10 My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

11 **Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,**
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

← Again, speaking to his own soul

Prayers like Psalm 42 reflect an acknowledgement that:

- *My mind can't grasp my whole soul*
- I am not in total control
- I need to embark on an inner journey sometimes
 - To discover what's really going on with my soul
 - I am longing (parched even) for connection with God
 - I am feeling unexplainably full of despair
 - To encourage and challenge my soul
 - To reach out to God for help
 - To remember things God's done in the past to help me with that

I wonder what you think of this Ancient Jewish view of the soul?

- It's not very American or Western - that's for sure
- In America and the West, we are sure of ourselves... we are the masters of our own domain
- The mind of the Individual is King... it is irreverent to consider it limited!

But, the more I think about it, this view behind the Psalms makes a lot of sense to me

I've expressed to a number of you, I'm sure (or perhaps you've observed this about me... I wouldn't be surprised) but I can sometimes spiral into workaholism

- Like, for me, a pastor, Sundays are a workday - Friday is usually my day-off instead of Sunday
 - Like any job that involves event planning or supervising people or project management or delivering presentations or manual labor, I work hard
 - And I like to - that means something to me
 - I feel fulfilled - and I recognize that not everyone feels that way about their jobs
- But sometimes when I get home after service on a Sunday, my thought life hasn't come home with me
 - It's still here at the Davis
 - I'm going over notes I've mentally taken
 - I'm replaying something in my mind that I think "that could have gone better"
 - I'm rehearsing the conflict Kyle and I are going to have to have about something
 - I've come up with a better way to do or say something and I need to write it down so I don't forget
- It really can sometimes have all the looks of addiction
 - I sit down prep lunch for my son (or even to try to relax and watch the Cubs game) and I feel my laptop calling me
 - "Work! Vince! Come work for a bit! My keyboard is so nice! You upgraded my memory last week and I move through applications so quickly now... come work!"
 - It's like I need a hit of "getting work done"

It's been hugely helpful for me to recognize:

- You know what, on Sundays, I have a hard time settling down and relaxing from my work
 - I have a hard time prying my thought life away from it
 - I feel as though I don't have total control of myself
 - If I'm honest, I'm using that feeling of "getting work done" to try to make myself feel valuable
- This is stealing life from me
 - I'm not present to my son, my wife, the people and world around me
 - It's keeping me at a heightened state of anxiety
 - I'm so wound up, I -- a sports fan -- can't even enjoy sports
 - Those celebrity athletes making millions of dollars need me!...
 - If I'm not watching them... who will?!... just kidding!...

In all seriousness though, I wonder if what I'm describing from my life sounds surprisingly familiar to you?

- Without even realizing it, being driven by something because you think it brings you value
- And getting so wound up in that driving force, you're not really functioning, you're not really present
 - To the point that it feels like you're not in control of your whole self
- It could be work, like it is often for me
- Or maybe it's a long-standing conflict you're in
 - With family or a co-worker, perhaps?
 - It's on-again/off-again, but when it's on, your life becomes consumed by it
 - It feels like you don't have the control to stop it from doing so
- Or maybe it's a thought pattern
 - Some question or heaviness (or maybe some guilt or shame) that just berates you constantly
 - You don't understand how or why it persists in you

So the wisdom of the Psalms would tell you and me: when we're in these places...

- We're experiencing what it means to be human... what it means to be, like everyone else, unreliable narrators: *Our minds can't grasp our whole souls*

- We need to embark on an inner journey to discover what's driving us, what's going on in our souls
- We need to speak to our souls: "Soul! Reach out to God for help!"

Well I was taught a spiritual exercise recently that has really helped me live this out, and I wonder if it will help any of you... I've asked in your program: *How might I embark on an inner journey to discover what drives me?*

It's called "**Presenting yourself to God**"... it takes about 4 to 5 minutes

- It begins with: **get comfortable**
 - Sitting, laying down, whatever... just comfortable... so I can be relatively still for 4-5 minutes
 - And I close my eyes
- Then I **become aware of my physical body**
 - I move my awareness in sort of a spiral downward, from head, to torso, to toes
 - I note anything I find, like:
 - I have some tension in my neck
 - My feet are tired
 - That cut on my arm no longer hurts
- Then I **become aware of what I've been thinking lately**
 - What's occupied my thought life most in the last day or two?
 - I don't analyze this, I just note it
 - I've been thinking about X... or about X, Y, and Z
- Then I **become aware of what I've been feeling lately**
 - What are the emotions I've been feeling in the last day or two
 - This is the hardest one for me because my life experience and personality type has made me someone who tends to repress emotions
 - But a friend has helped me by passing on something he learned... it's my second practical suggestion for you:
 - **Consider that there may only be six basic emotions**
 - mad
 - glad
 - sad
 - fear
 - shame
 - joy
 - This helps me! It forces me to identify the waves of emotion I detect in myself as one of these
 - The other week I did this and I realized I was feeling a little bit of mad, a little bit of glad, and a lot of fear
 - Last week I did this and realized I was feeling just a whole lot of joy
- Then, **in my mind's eye, I imagine presenting what I've learned** (about my body, my thought life, and my emotions) **to God**
- Finally, **I imagine God accepting with open arms every detail**
 - Whether I'm proud of it or not

I am loving the benefits of doing this exercise on a regular basis

- This, I feel, breaks me out of the problems that come with being an "unreliable narrator"
- After doing this, I have a far better idea about what is really driving me and my decision making
 - And because it culminates in God ACCEPTING all that is really driving me (whether I'm proud of it or not), my anxiety is always lowered as a result
 - I feel okay
 - If I don't need to perform or posture for God, I don't need to perform or posture for anyone

- And, when I discover that what's driving me is something I'm not proud of or is something that's stealing life from me...
 - That's knowledge I'm glad to have!
 - I try to get work done because it make me feel valuable
 - THAT is what is driving me
 - That knowledge is key if I want something better & more fulfilling to drive me

What I've realized: if we really are never fully understanding of or in control of ourselves, *every discovery is an opportunity for growth*

- An opportunity for Jesus to show us a better & more fulfilling driving force
- On that note, I have one last practical suggestion for you all, and then I'll give us a chance to try out this "presenting yourself to God" together

Reach out to Kyle or Vince to plan a growth meeting

- Everyone wants to grow
- But if we're wanting to pursue that, a lot of the help out there can feel a bit one-size-fits-all
 - Whether from the world of church or religion
 - From the world of leadership development in the workplace
 - From self-help books
- Individualized discussions of personal growth are something we've decided to make core to BLV
 - You, together with someone trained to coach you through thinking about growth, get together over coffee for an hour and ask:
 - What is God doing in me right now?
 - How is God's Holy Spirit looking to help me grow in this season of my life?
 - This is one of the most exciting things about our community, we think:
 - What if BLV could offer *anyone* in our neighborhoods who would like it an *individualized* space to talk about growth
- We've designed these to make them something you can return to many times as the seasons of your lives change
 - For example, last fall, many of you did growth meetings and walked through a structure for personal growth we adapted for BLV...
 - For people who are helped by structure, that's one way these growth meetings can go
 - But, other times, growth meetings will be less structured...
 - Some of the most beneficial growth meetings I've done with people here at BLV have been me mostly listening to someone pour out a number of thoughts and feelings that have been stirring unexamined for a long time
 - And then together identifying some patterns to help bring focus and to see God at work in the midst of what seems overwhelming
- So take us up on a growth meeting!
 - Write your name, contact info if we don't have it, and growth on your orange connect card
 - We'll collect those later
 - Or you can always email me or Kyle (our emails are on your program) and say "get me set up with a growth meeting!"

Alright, if you're game, we're going to be quiet for a bit and I'll lead us in "presenting ourselves to God"

(LEAD THE EXERCISE)

- Take a moment here to take note of yourself right now
 - What did you learn about yourself?
 - How's your anxiety level?