

## E TU TANGATA # 1 – YOU HAVE VALUE

Susan Boyle is a Scottish singer who became famous after appearing on the TV show "Britain's Got Talent" in 2009. However, she faced many obstacles in her life and had low self-esteem.

Boyle grew up in a small town in Scotland, where she was often bullied and teased because of her appearance and her learning disability. She struggled to fit in and often felt like she didn't belong.

In 2009, Boyle decided to audition for "Britain's Got Talent." When she walked onto the stage, the judges and the audience were skeptical of her abilities. Boyle was not considered conventionally attractive and did not fit the typical image of a pop star.

However, as soon as Boyle began to sing "I Dreamed a Dream" from the musical "Les Misérables," the audience and judges were stunned. Her voice was powerful, clear, and beautiful. The judges and audience gave her a standing ovation, and her performance quickly went viral.

Boyle's story shows us that it is never too late to follow our dreams and that we should not let our insecurities or doubts hold us back. She believed in herself and her abilities, even when others did not, and her talent and hard work paid off.

I not sure any of us would have a story to top Susan Boyles – but I think we've all been underestimated at times, where we've allowed our circumstances, or even other people's opinions to stop us from achieving the things we've dreamed about doing – in fact, this is probably

Let's do a little test here & see if we could prove a small point - if I had to ask you now – out of 10 'how would you rate yourself? 1 being the worst & 10 being the best – what would you say? Before you tell me – let me guess! Most NZers (and I've asked quite a few) would put themselves as a 6 or a 7... never higher never lower. Where did you put yourself? - Why cos that's the right answer – don't be too amazing, don't stink too stink – stick yourself somewhere in the middle and it'll be right!

One the biggest struggles we have culturally in NZ is what we call 'Tall Poppy Syndrome' - I'm sure you've all heard this term, and even understand some of the implications of it – Nzers are known as: friendly, hardworking, and laid back. But live here for a while and you'll also discover we have a bad habit of criticizing one another. Put downs and good-natured ribbing are a bit apart of that culture – which from the outside looks harmless but has some sinister implications.

Tall Poppy Syndrome is the idea that people who stand above the crowd should be cut down to size. Tall Poppy culture tells us that your success is a threat to mine. It influences the way we put others and ourselves down. This culture of criticism discourages us from standing up and being proud of our successes and accomplishments.

This culture of criticism undermines self-worth and resilience, leaving us feeling diminished. Tall Poppy Syndrome does severe damage to our wellbeing. And that holds us, our church and our nation back.

This morning we're starting a 3-week series looking to address this cultural issue that we face -

Read: Mark 5:24b-34 - Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

This story illustrates the negative impact that societal pressures and stigma can have on an individual's sense of self-worth and well-being. The woman in the story had been suffering from a bleeding condition for 12 years and had spent all her resources seeking medical treatment yet had not been healed.

In the culture of the time, such an affliction would have made her ritually impure and socially isolated. She would have been shamed and ostracized by her community and viewed as an outcast. Yet, despite these challenges, the woman had the courage to reach out to Jesus and touch his cloak, believing that she could be healed.

By acknowledging her – Jesus affirms her value and self-worth – the world around her was telling her that



she held little value – a world that said if she couldn't have babies, she was valuable, where chronic illness was seen as some sort of Godly judgment upon her for some imaginary sin – for 12 long years she'd struggled with this – half hidden in the shadows of a society that saw her as less than, as not enough, as valueless

You can imagine the incredible embarrassment of feeling the spotlight fall upon her – she thought she'd got away with it, it was just a touch, how would he know in a crowd of hundreds swirling around him

We don't have to have a chronic illness like this woman to know the same feeling.

That God finds us valuable is well established biblically:

Matthew 10:29-31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." This passage speaks to God's intimate knowledge and care for each individual and emphasizes that even the smallest and insignificant creatures are under his watchful eye.

Ephesians 2:10: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This passage highlights that each person is God's handiwork, created with a specific purpose and mission in mind.

1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." This passage emphasizes that each person is chosen and valued by God and has been brought out of darkness into his wonderful light.

You are created and shaped in God's image and likeness Gen 1:27, profoundly loved by God, not because you're handsome or beautiful, not because you're talented or because of anything you've done - but because it's in God's nature as a loving and gracious God – if anything our value is measured not by what we have received – but rather by what we're willing to give to others and build God's kingdom here on earth!

But can you see that?

Tall poppy syndrome can rob us of the incredible value that God sees in us:

First, it can create an environment where we feel ashamed or embarrassed to acknowledge our talents and successes. This can lead to feelings of low self-worth and a lack of confidence in our abilities, which can hinder our ability to fulfil our potential and use our gifts to serve others. - For instance, someone who is a gifted musician but doesn't want to perform in public for fear of being seen as showing off or bragging about their skills. Or someone who has a talent for public speaking but feels nervous about speaking up in a group or taking on a leadership role because they don't want to be seen as bossy or attention-seeking.

Second, tall poppy syndrome can create a culture of comparison and competition, where we are constantly measuring ourselves against others and trying to keep up with their achievements. This can lead to envy, jealousy, and a focus on external validation, rather than on the unique qualities and strengths that God has given us. - An example of a culture of comparison and competition can be seen in the context of social media, where people often curate their lives and present only the best aspects of themselves, leading to comparisons and competition with others who are doing the same. For instance, people may post pictures of their vacations, achievements, or possessions, which can trigger envy, jealousy, or feelings of inadequacy in those who view them.

Third, tall poppy syndrome can lead us to prioritize conformity over authenticity. We may feel pressure to blend in with the crowd and avoid standing out, even if it means sacrificing our true selves and the contributions that we are uniquely equipped to make to the world. - example of a situation that prioritizes conformity over authenticity could be societal expectations or norms that dictate how people should look, act, or behave based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, or other social identities. For instance, women may feel pressure to conform to certain beauty standards or roles, such as being a caregiver or homemaker, while men may feel pressure to conform to certain behaviors or attitudes, such as being competitive or aggressive.



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These factors can prevent us from fully embracing the incredible value that God sees in us, and from using our gifts and talents to serve Him and others. Instead, we may be held back by fear and self-doubt, and miss the opportunities that God gives us. By recognizing the damaging effects of tall poppy syndrome and embracing the truth of our inherent value and worth in God's eyes, we can overcome these barriers and live fully into the purpose and calling that He has for us.

The real question here to day is – if you understand how valuable and important you are to God – can you see your own gifts and talents?

In practical terms the cost of this toxic culture is huge – and plays an enormous role in our mental wellbeing, how we feel about ourselves, and even how we present ourselves to others.

The research indicates that:

It can harm mental health: it can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. It can also lead to decreased self-esteem and confidence.

It can discourage ambition and achievement: may be hesitant to pursue their goals and ambitions if they fear being criticized for their success.

It can lead to conformity: Tall poppy syndrome can create pressure to conform to societal norms and expectations, rather than embracing individuality and diversity.

It can create a culture of negativity: A culture of tall poppy syndrome can foster negativity, competition, and jealousy, rather than positivity, cooperation, and support.

Overall, research suggests that tall poppy syndrome can have a significant negative impact on individuals and society, and that fostering a culture of support, encouragement, and celebration of individuality can have positive effects on mental health, innovation, and progress.

Tall poppy syndrome can rob us of the incredible value that God sees in us -

If we know something is destructive – surely, we need to do something about it?

So how do we as a church fight against this culture?

**Celebrate diversity and individuality:** Encourage and celebrate the unique gifts and talents of each member of the congregation.

**Create a culture of gratitude:** Emphasize the importance of gratitude and contentment, rather than comparison and competition.

**Practice humility:** Encourage people to serve others, rather than seeking recognition or awards.

**Create a safe and supportive environment:** Create a safe and supportive environment where people feel free to be vulnerable and share their struggles and successes.

**Teach the value of each person:** Teach and remind the congregation of the inherent value and worth that each person has in God's eyes.

This morning I want to remind you of your value to God – created for his pleasure, with gifts and skills He's given you dreams and passions – don't let negativity stop you from achieving them. Lets be a church that actively fights this culture.

## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How do you think the woman felt about herself before and after her encounter with Jesus? How might her experience relate to our own struggles with self-worth and value?
2. How does the culture of tall poppy syndrome affect the way we view ourselves and others? What are some examples of how we might unintentionally perpetuate this culture in our personal or professional lives?
3. What are some practical ways we can combat tall poppy syndrome in our own lives and in our faith community? How can we celebrate the achievements and talents of others without feeling threatened or jealous?
4. How can we cultivate a culture of authenticity and vulnerability in our relationships and faith communities, where people feel safe to share their



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struggles and failures as well as their strengths and successes?

5. How does our understanding of God's unconditional love and value for us as his children shape the way we view ourselves and others? How can we reflect this love and value in our interactions with others?

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