

I am...my Father's Son

I am sure many of you have seen the interesting and inspiring project that swept across campus in conjunction with mental health week. If you are not aware of Steve Rosenfeld's "What I Be" project, I strongly suggest you look into it. The brave accounts of the participants open a dialogue that challenges the expectation of perfection and achievement at this University. It was precisely this expectation that attracted me to Princeton during preview weekend. I still remember the song "Nothing Ever Happens in Princeton" as performed by the Triangle Club. I definitely left with the impression that there was some truth to the image of a perfect Princeton. This is not in any way to disparage the aspirations and talents that make this place special. However, I think that by embracing perfection, we can gloss over other real and serious aspects of life at Princeton. This is the genius of the "What I Be" initiative. By shedding light onto situations that might otherwise go untouched, Steve Rosenfeld has created an alternative environment, one focused on "building security through insecurity."

As a freshman, I was immediately hit with the realization that literally everybody here is brilliant. At first I thought this was great, as I could meet people of various interests who were talented in their respective departments. Unfortunately, as the reality of grade deflation set in I realized that the same great people I learned alongside were also competing for that elusive top 35%. The glamour of Princeton was now a sort of contest in which only the winners received A's. As I saw the culture of achievement around me, I came to a realization: at Princeton it seems almost taboo to discuss grade struggles, or struggles of any kind, with real sincerity. Yet the "What I Be" project opens a dialogue in which we can acknowledge parts of our lives that may not align with the quintessential Princetonian image. "What I Be" defiantly says "No" to the things Princeton tells us to say "Yes" to. We are not our social standing, our adequacy, or our personality.

Then again, this creates the obvious question: what exactly are we? One of the most powerful lessons of my childhood came from my father during instances of both success and failure. For example, after I pitched a no hitter in little league baseball, I remember my father picking me up and asking, "Why do I love you?" I thought: It's pretty obvious, right? I had played a great game, plus I was doing well in school and obeying my parents. Wrong. Every time, my father would say, "I love you because you are mine, you are my son." This was the answer time and time again, whether he was pleased or displeased with my actions. This little phrase became increasingly powerful as I grew up. In fact it was not until I realized that that is exactly the relationship I have with God that I understood the full meaning of the phrase. I have come to see that I am not my orgo struggs, I am not my shortcomings, and in the same vein neither am I my successes. I am my Father's son.

The father-child imagery beautifully and concisely describes the relationship God desires with all of humanity. Regardless of the examples we have on earth, God embodies everything we could need from a father. Even though we may choose to ignore or reject him, he will never leave us. Paul states, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26). God always intended to remain in connection with his people and walk with them as he did in the Garden of Eden. However, in the iconic fall of man, we – God's children – defied him and thus ran away from his presence. The beauty of it all is that God is merciful and has been waiting with open arms for us to come back to him. The death and resurrection of his son Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of every single person.

The reality of a heavenly father who joyously welcomes each and every one of us back into his grace is precisely what defines my identity. God does not withhold his love when I am less than perfect. Neither does his love for me increase if I go to church or pray every morning. The truth is that when we acknowledge and accept Jesus' sacrifice, God picks us up regardless of our shortcomings or successes. He loves us in spite of our past. He loves us because we are his; we are his children. This is the God I love and follow. It is through his son Jesus that I am welcomed back into a relationship with my Father in heaven.

I am not my GPA. I am not my degree. I am not my failures or my accomplishments. I am my Father's son.

-Karlso Bledsoe '15