

### *In Pursuit of Identity*

Each one stops to ponder about the meaning of life. “Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Is there anything worth living for?” Questions like these come up from the very depth of the human heart, and even if one tries to ignore them, he hardly succeeds. The human existence itself compels each person to search for his own identity. Carl Rogers vividly describes this pursuit, “Becoming a Person means that the individual moves toward being, knowingly and acceptingly, the process which he inwardly and actually is. He moves away from being what he is not, from being a facade. He is not trying to be more than he is, with the attendant feelings of insecurity or bombastic defensiveness. He is not trying to be less than he is, with the attendant feelings of guilt or self-depreciation. He is increasingly listening to the deepest recesses of his psychological and emotional being, and finds himself increasingly willing to be, with greater accuracy and depth, that self which he most truly is.”<sup>1</sup> A faceless person suffers as much as a double-faced person. Blessed is he who manages to find himself.

In this paper, I would like to propose a few hints that might be helpful for those Christians who are in the midst of their vocational considerations. I will also point out some misleading notions about the calling of God. My main thesis is that the knowledge of God enhances the knowledge of self and the knowledge of one’s self helps to fulfill the will of God.

*A believer in Christ has more chances of finding his identity and the true calling in life than his unbelieving counterpart.*

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 176.

We find a very good illustration of this principle in Matthew 16. Jesus asked his disciples two questions: first, "What people think of Me?" and second, "Whodoyousaythat Iam?" Jesus made a difference between those who were following him, and those who would not. He also expected these two types of people to have different answers to his questions about himself and his mission. Some considered Jesus to be a prophet; others thought he was a teacher. Still others identified him with the risen John the Baptist. Neither of these answers was right. Neither of the people who formulated them had been living according to the will of God. However, Peter's answer was correct, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16:16)

Now, let us pay close attention to the words of Jesus in response to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matt 16:17-18) After having found Christ, Peter found himself as well. The right answer to the question who Christ is, gives the right answer to the question who man is. Peter's purpose in life was not to catch fish, but men. His destiny was not to go fishing in the lake of Genezareth, but to go preaching the Gospel "in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Ac 1:8) I suggest that this paradigm is universal. The revelation of Jesus Christ reveals the identity of human being. It might not happen overnight, it might take years for some of us to get the kind of answer from the Lord as Peter did; however, Christians are in much better position to find out the calling of God in their lives because they know who Christ is. Christians can fully trust in providential plans of God, which he has for every single person. David brilliantly describes that, "[God], you eye saw

my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Ps 139:16)

Therefore, vocational considerations must not be exasperating for Christians. We have the One, who has created us. He knows exactly what type of personality each one of us is because it was his idea in the first place to have us the way we are. Most importantly, he created human beings for a purpose, and believers in Christ have every reason to find it out and to fulfill it. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph 2:10)

This knowledge might be threatening, but it need not be. Instead of focusing on the fact that we may fail God by not doing what he expects from us, we might as well be focusing on the fact that before he called us he had completely known us—all our weaknesses, all our inadequacy and sin. Nonetheless, he called us to be entrusted with the purposes of his kingdom. He sent his Spirit to die for ours in and through his Spirit to make us holy. This knowledge may be the most liberating discovery in life, even if one has not yet found the calling of God. As Christians, we should be confident that there is a vocation prepared by God for us; and just as Jesus revealed it to Peter, so he will make known it to us too.

*Try to understand yourself.*

People are different in their needs, desires, interests and personalities. The understanding of these differences increases the possibility of finding the right vocation. Therefore, the books such as *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types* by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, or *Do What You Are* by Paul and Barbara Tieger may be very helpful in trying to find out your own peculiarities and character. I do not agree with the “against” positions some Christians hold toward sciences. It is wrong to assert that faith

issues have no place in psychology and that most of what is done in the behavioral sciences is anti-Christian.<sup>2</sup> For sure, there are bad trends in science. Just as theology is prone to error, so also science can be distorted by sin and human limitations.<sup>3</sup> However, the existence of anti-Christian motives and ungodly values should not lead us to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I absolutely agree with Perry G. Downs that “fearing that ‘secular’ approaches will supersede the proper ‘biblical’ approach... is rooted in a worldview that fails to understand the unity of truth.”<sup>4</sup> By unity of truth, he means the truth found in Scripture as well as the truth found in the creation of God. Just as theology is the systematic inquiry into Scripture, so also science is the systematic inquiry into creation. Both are dealing with God’s revelation to humankind. The latter investigates God’s general revelation, and the former studies God’s supernatural revelation. A worldview that integrates both theology and science helps to get a more complete picture of reality. Thus, psychology, as a discipline of social sciences, can aid us in understanding human beings better.

Hence, the research on “psychological types” defined by Karl Jung and later developed by Kathryn Briggs, Isabel Myers and others might be a helpful tool. Sixteen personality types defined by them can aid not only in understanding our own temperament, but also in understanding those around us. Unfortunately, many times we try to mold others according to our own image, and not the image of Christ. We tend to see others through the lenses of our own preferences, and by doing so we fail to appreciate God’s gifts in others. Variety seen in creation is the expression of God’s immensity. Diversity of gifts seen in

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<sup>2</sup>Bryan N. Maier, *Views of Integration in Introduction to Counseling Ministries* (Trinity Courseworks, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>Perry G. Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth: And Introduction to Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 14.

humans is an expression of Christ's fullness. There are many implications to this truth. Having in mind vocational considerations, I would like to pay special attention to the fact that our diverse personalities as well as different abilities must play a vital part in choosing our occupation.

### *Do what you are*

In the words of Tieger's, "the secret of career satisfaction lies in doing what you enjoy the most."<sup>5</sup> Successful career is doing what you are. That is good news. We do not have to copy others in order to achieve success. Likewise, we do not have to feel guilty because we are different or have fewer faculties than others do. We simply need to figure out how God created us, and employ everything we have received from him in our vocational careers.

I am convinced that there is no dichotomy between fulfilling the will of God and doing what we enjoy the most. In fact, the latter is the good indicator of the former. Although there is a price to pay in order to walk in the will of God, and I will point out that later, we should not conclude that the things God wants us to do in which will be unpleasant and contrary to our desires. In fact, an apostle Paul seems to be stating just the opposite in his letter to the Philippians, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Phi 2:13) God's will is something we want deep in our hearts and enjoy doing. Jesus compared the doing of God's will with eating of food. Just as men enjoy eating, though the purpose of it is the sustenance of life, not the enjoyment in itself, so also doing the will of God brings great joy, though the purpose of it is the fulfillment of providential plans of God.

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<sup>5</sup>Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger, *Do What You Are* (Boston, New York, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 5.

The notion that human enjoyment is not compatible with God's will might hold us back from doing what we are. C.S. Lewis discusses this issue in *The Weight of Glory* :

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.<sup>6</sup>

Truly, it seems that Church tend to forget what the wisdom of Scripture has to say concerning the way God wants us to go about our business, "Am I not doing something better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" (Ecc 12:24-25) Apostle Paul seems to have the same in mind saying, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands..." (1Th4:11)

*Be not afraid of sufferings, shun not from sacrifice*

Although doing what one has been called by God for brings much satisfaction, it would be wrong to conclude that finding your place in life is all about joy. Disappointments, failures and troubles are part of being human. Moreover, it will take sacrifice in order to be obedient to God. I think this is the missing chapter in books, such as *Do What You Are* and *Please Understand Me*. I am concerned that some readers might draw a conclusion that the only thing for a successful career is to determine one's personality type. Once that is done, a person will surely be able to find a perfect job, which in turn will bring satisfaction. It is not that simple in reality, though. Let me share one testimony, which I found among reviewson

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<sup>6</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 113.

*Please Understand Me.* After trying to implement the theory found in the book, this person's life, he sounds rather disappointed:

As an NT, I am particularly irritated by this because I am not happy in the hard sciences, which I tried and found I did not like. According to this theory, I "should" thrive there, but I'm not interested. I'm tired of NT's being described as though we all were engineers, scientists, or "techies." And that's just the example of non-application of the theory I'm familiar with from my own life. I found that in this book, lip service is given to individual differences, but actually each type is portrayed in relatively simplistic, cookie-cutter fashion. People are more complicated than this and there are many traits that are not adequately explained by this theory. Compassion is one, and a sense of humor is another.<sup>7</sup>

Myself being NT type and a pastor, I agree with the above comment. Each person is an authentic creation of God, endowed by unique gifts. The depth of human personality should not be forgotten or made too simplistic. However, even more is at stake. Believers, as followers of Christ, must never presume that the examples set by their Master, namely his death on the cross, has no application in their lives. We must not forget the exhortation of Peter, and we must not try to theologize it away, "But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (1Pe 2:20-21) The calling of God includes some type of suffering. Christ had to bear his cross, and so do we. Just as he suffered in order to fulfill God's will, so also we must be prepared to face different kinds of sufferings.

I would like to suggest considering yet another biblical character, namely John the Baptist. His life-story is a great example of how the calling of God may require personal sacrifice.

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<sup>7</sup>Acitation taken from *All Customer Reviews on Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types*, at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’ and they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.’” (John 1:19-23).

The identity issue for John the Baptist must have been a matter of great importance. He must have gone through a deep agony when choosing his future career. John was born in the family of Zacharias, a priest of the temple in Jerusalem. According to the law, it meant that John’s destiny had already been planned: he was to serve God in the temple just as his father, grandfather and all males in his ancestral line had been doing. Not every Israelite could become a priest in those days. Only Aaron’s descendants had the privileged position to serve in the presence of God. The people respected the priests who were members of the spiritual, social and political elite in Israel. We get a glimpse on the kind of reverence surrounding priests in Israel from the passage in Acts. Paul makes an apology before the Sanhedrin for his harsh words, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” (Acts 23:5) Since the priests had a high position and strong influence in the society of Israel, a young man, such as John, from a priestly family did not have to worry about his future. It held a great career in store. Moreover, the birth of John was supernatural. He was born after the appearance of an angel, who had revealed great things about his future. At the time of his birth more than one prophesy had confirmed that the boy was going to be not just an ordinary priest, but also the

one who “will be great in the sight of the Lord... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15).

God had different plans for John, though. The Lord was calling John to serve in the temple built not by the human hands. John was to prepare a different kind of sacrifice also—not that of oxen, goats, or rams but the Lamb of God, Christ himself. God called John to be his messenger, his voice “in the desert”. The plan of God implied not only the change of the type of ministry, but also the change of his status in society. If John was to be obedient to the will of God, he had to refuse all usual rights and privileges of a priest. I assume that at that point in life, John must have experienced a deep identity crisis. “Who am I? Am I a priest of the temple or a prophet? A guardian of ancestral traditions or a trailblazer for a New Covenant? What to choose? The noise of Jerusalem or the silence of the desert? The honor of people or the honor of God?”

Questions like that must have torn John’s soul to pieces after “the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias in the wilderness... while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests” (Luke 3:2). Luke does not mention exact words that John was given in the wilderness, however, his answer to the one sent by the Pharisees provides us enough information, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said” (John 1:23). John had fully identified himself with the Word of the Lord. To him the truth was not what others had been telling of him, not what he had been thinking of himself but what the Lord had spoken of him. The Word of God revealed to John God’s will, the very things written about him in the heavenly books. His mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah himself by baptizing those who would repent. The calling was worth of sacrifice. John had fully identified himself with the calling of God. His new

ministry gave him new name. None of the writers of the New Testament call him John the Priest, but John the Baptist. Preaching the kingdom of God and baptizing repentant souls was more than vocation for John. That was his whole life.

However, in order to become the Baptist, John had to sacrifice many things. He never enjoyed the cool shadow of the Temple in Jerusalem and never tasted the best part of the sacrificial meat, provided for the priests of the Temple. Instead, he had to suffer the heat of the wilderness; and wild honey with locusts was his daily bread. Finally, he died as a martyr, thus following completely in his Master's steps. It is now a wonder that Jesus named John as the greatest man ever born of a woman. (Lk 7:28)

The life-story of John the Baptist is a great example of how the pursuit of personal identity finds answers in God and in his calling. It teaches us to accept the calling of God in spite of the price. Those who are on the crossroads of their vocational considerations may be deeply encouraged by it to trust God for his guidance as well as for his grace.

### *Conclusion*

Solomon in his wisdom said, *“Like a bird that wanders from its nest is a man who wanders from his place”* (Pro 27:8; NKJ). There is no better place than that appointed by God. There is no happier man than the one who has found it. In pursuit of our identity, let us keep on building personal relationships with our Creator. His knowledge will reveal our place and function in the plans of God. In him we find our identity, and in doing his will the greatest satisfaction. Sufferings cannot thwart the plans of God; they can only increase the reward.

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