

After reading the book called “The Gift of Being Yourself,” by David G. Benner, I have gained much more insight into my spirituality as a Christian believer. In particular, three primary points in the book have had a profound impact upon myself. The first one which altered my theology and praxis of soul care was that “Knowing God and knowing self are therefore interdependent. Neither can proceed very far without the other.” (Benner 27). This involves the concept of a transformational knowing of self and God. This essentially entails that simply knowing God or simply knowing yourself is insufficient spiritually, and only when the two types of knowledge are conjoined together will a transformational knowing of self and God occur. I had believed that knowing God was the equivalent of knowing yourself since one is made in his image, however, that particular belief of mine was a misconception. After all, even the Pharisees knew God and yet had helped crucify Jesus Christ on the cross as was discussed in class.

Moreover, knowing yourself by going on a personal retreat by yourself or taking personality tests may have advantages, however, such earthly knowledge will not lead a believer into the spiritual advancement of the Christian faith which is the only true faith. This affects me on a personal level as I have always held this particular misconception. I am now going to attempt to know God as well as myself. I can only accomplish this if I can keep on looking at the Lord and then at myself and then looking back at the Lord in a repetitive cycle. Although believers in Christ can never be God, they can become more and more like him gradually. The second primary point is the concept of needing to eradicate our false selves to further our intimacy with the Godhead. David Benner contends that “Our false self is built on an inordinate attachment to an image of our self that we think makes us special. The problem is the attachment, not having qualities that makes us unique.” (Benner 70). In other words, while it is good for one to be unique in terms of our personality, we are too attached to our social and

personal image which we want to be perfect or flawless. “In short, we learn how to present our self in the best possible light- a light designed to create a favorable impression and maintain our self-esteem.” (Benner 72).

False selves also involve unhealthy compulsive desires that sustain it. Examples can be fame, respect, reputation, etc. (Benner 77). It was also mentioned in class how our false selves stem from a childhood trauma in which we shield ourselves from as we grow up physically and mentally. We form protective walls around our true self when interacting with others to avoid that particular negative experience we had when we were little children who had little to no defenses. “The things that bothers us the most about others also point toward falsity in our own self.” (Benner 77).

As the author phrases it, “The only hope for unmasking the falsity that resides at the core of our being is a radical encounter with truth. Nothing other than truth is strong enough to dispel illusion. And only the Spirit of Truth can save us from the consequences of having listened to the serpent rather than God.” (Benner 72). Thus, the only way to gain our true selves back is to dispel our false selves and place our trust in Christ and secure our identities onto Him.

This affects me personally because now I am remembering my traumatic or unpleasant memories as a child or preteen in which led to my past false self. I became defensive in my high school and college years because I was tired of being harassed by a small number of people. However, although it was only a select number of individuals, I grew to be distrustful of the vast majority of people I met and only interpreted their comments towards me in the worst possible way. This led to unnecessary conflicts and uncomfortable moments which could have all been avoided if I was not defensive and took on their constructive criticism positively in a mature manner. This interrelates with my theology and concept of soul care because I believe that the eradication of

the false self is necessary for myself to not only gain spiritual wisdom such as theology but also spiritual experiences which would strengthen my soul as a believer in Christ as well.

The third and final primary point of the book is that by becoming your true self, you not only become happy and fulfilled with your life, you will also retain your true uniqueness as an individual believer in Christ. (Benner 94-95). "Happiness and fulfillment are blessings that come from surrender to the loving will of God. Both are idolatrous if pursued directly. Both are easily a distraction from our true destiny, our calling in Christ. (Benner 95). Thus, we must not forget that true joy and satisfaction originate from the Lord and not from materialistic possessions or earthly obsessions. This point impacted me personally and theologically with an emphasis on my praxis for soul care. Many times, we think that we know what we need to lead a fulfilling life such as the need for more income, glory, fame, the maintenance of our false selves, yet the spiritual key has all along been residing within us, pointing us to our true selves in Christ. (Benner 56). I learned that by taking care of my priorities in my life, I am taking care of my soul.

In finality, this reading is relevant to my current ministry as a children's pastor because the concept of knowing ourselves and the Lord, as well as the notions of our false and true selves is something I can implement into my ministry. Although my students are only in elementary school and middle school, I can see their false selves once in a while, such as when they act or speak in a certain way when they do not want to or mean to. I do not think that it is too early to teach them once I completely discover my true self in Christ.

With integrity, I have read this book

Thoroughly and Entirely— 100%

Quickly but Completely— ___%

Thoroughly but NOT Entirely—___%

Quickly and NOT Completely—___%

Not at all—___%