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SF770: Soul Care

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The Gift of Being Yourself

In *The Gift of Being Yourself*, David Benner addresses the complexities of the soul and identifies the redeemed life and freedom the Lord has for us. Benner states that often, people are not operating from their true selves. The true self is the self that God divinely wired us to be. Whether from childhood wounding, re-enforced sin patterns, or defense mechanisms that were positively received, we often grow up adapting a false self. This is the version of ourselves powered by pride and ego that we perceive we are. This is the self that needs to die. This death or “transformation of the self that occurs only when God and self are both deeply known” is the essence of Christian spirituality (Benner 17). Three main points that impacted me from Benner’s writings were that we need to develop habits to know God, we need to face the reality of ourselves, and we are called to grow in to our true self.

Developing habits to know God go beyond reading four chapters of your Bible daily and saying quick daily prayers. Benner describes spending time with God like spending time with friends. Sometimes friends simply “waste time with each other, simply being together is enough without expecting to get something from the interaction” (39). Often we approach God like He is a genie to answer our deepest desires, or a therapist when we have a major issue and need to cry out with deep fervency. But sometimes, sitting in His presence is what we really need, no strings attached. Benner further expands on simply spending time through the habit of meditation. He gives a practical example of immersing our mind and imagination in to the text, visualizing what

is going on in the Gospel narrative being read. He called this “Spirit-guided meditation on the Gospels” (37). It’s often in these moments where we begin to encounter and hear God, see Him for who He truly is, and surrender to His majesty and grace.

Benner states that we need to face the reality of ourselves. He says that “genuine self-knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us. Grounding our knowing of our self in God’s knowing of us anchors us in reality. It also anchors us in God” (46). We see ourself clearly when we see God. Often people do not want to face the reality of who they truly are. We bolster up our false self who is strong, confident, efficient, capable, and not in need of anyone’s help. The false self lies saying that alone, we have it all together. Benner even says that “the problem with the false self is that it works”. However, it leaves us with an underlying vulnerability, escaping us from the reality that we are in desperate need of God. God calls us to turn to Him in honesty and vulnerability and ask Him to meet us where we truly are. Ironically, it’s only from this place of accepting the reality of our false selves that we can begin to put it to death.

Growth in to our true self follows the death of our false self. As we follow the way of “humility and love, it allows us to live from the truth of our being” (90). Benner explains it well that it is the balance of both knowing God and knowing our self that we begin to encounter Him in His fullness and grow in to the true self that walks in freedom. And it’s only in His “presence that we experience this deeper knowing” (104).

The reading challenges the way that I wish to do ministry now and going forward. The book emphasizes self-awareness, humility, and earnest seeking of the Lord as individuals and as a community. I do not want to be a community where we can’t honestly speak in to each other’s lives or need to put up a false ego. I also do not want to be religious in my seeking of the Lord.

My current community has been moving in the right direction regarding these practices and as we get to know each other more, I know that the Lord will call us in to deeper vulnerability, earnestness, and deeper transformation, together.

This book has impacted my theology and praxis of soul care by pushing me to be more inquisitive of the root of the issue as opposed to the symptoms. Deeper repentance and self-awareness asks “why”? Why did you slip in to this sexual sin? Why did you yell at your husband? Why did you get defensive over this simple matter being addressed? From this place of honesty with the self, perhaps guided by the wise counsel of a close friend, the root issue can be uncovered and the person can surrender it before the Lord. Personally, I’m deeply encouraged to practice meditating on the word. I loved that Benner walked us through the practice of visualizing us being in the Gospel narrative, watching the scene happening. I felt that I got a deeper understanding of Jesus’s heart and intention in these moments. I also felt like He was looking right at me as He would turn His head to keep walking (I imagined myself as part of the crowd watching Him from an outside perspective like Benner recommended). This was a powerful practice that I intend to apply to my life on the daily.

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— ____%

Bibliography

Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*. Downers Grove, IL: Intersivity Press, 2015.