

SF770 Soul Care
Spring 2023
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Book Report #1 - The Gift of Being Yourself (The Spiritual Journey)

How This Book Helped Form My Theology

I feel called to be a pastor, and just preached for the first time in public, I feel like God is confirming my call as he reveals it to me while I take each step forward. As I was thinking about how to preach God's word to transform the hearts of his people at church, I was challenged to rethink about the approach how traditional evangelical churches like mine preach about transformation. We teach God's commands and how we as Christians should obey them. We often times preach these commands like strict orders that we should just follow, and as long as we change our outward behaviors, we are considered good and meet God's standards. We don't really look deep inside the hearts and find out why we do what we do. The author has laid out a good structure how to take care of our souls. Changing behaviors is only behavior management, but God wants to have a deep relationship with us, so our lives can be changed from the inside out.

Main Ideas

There are many good points from this book, the three main ideas that stir my heart the most are as follows: 1) it is important to know both yourself and God; 2) accept ourselves as God accepts us; 3) focus on sins would only lead to sin management.

It is important to know both yourself and God. The author pointed out that focusing on God while failing to know ourselves deeply may lead to external piety, it is dangerous for the soul of the spiritual leaders and that of those they lead.¹ We have to constantly look at ourselves, then look at God, and repeat the process in order for true transformation to take place. I come from a Chinese evangelical background where we emphasize heavily on learning and maturing in God's word. We tend to expect those who 'love' God to show these characteristics: we love to study God's word, serve a whole lot at church even to a point of being drained, and live a life that's holy and blameless. We have been taught to follow this church culture otherwise we might be considered worldly and don't love God. Everyone strives to look like that if they want to fit in. And we adhere to a conservative style when it comes to worshipping God, other 'funkier' styles are generally not accepted and considered not so godly. There is a lot of religiosity going on where I came from, especially among the older generation. And people live powerlessly when they just know about who God is and don't realize what their reality is, and what God can do in their lives. Knowing God's laws only would only lead to legalism, a lot of commands for people to follow, a lot of striving but no breakthrough in lives and people still fail to live a true holy life. Many people put on a false self to look good. But deep down, people still live in darkness and do not want others to know about it. Digging deeper inside allows us to see our reality and not just focus on deceitful outward behaviors.

The author then pointed out that we need to look at ourselves as God sees us. Sin is our nature but we are deeply loved by God when we were still sinners. God's love for us

¹Brenner, David G.. *The Gift of Being Yourself (The Spiritual Journey)*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 22.

has nothing to do with our behavior.² Learning that our identity is grounded in God is a lifelong process. God accepts me just as I am and self-transformation is always preceded by self-acceptance. As I prepared for my sermon and thought about how to lead people to choose God to live an abundant life instead of choosing to submit to our old sinful self, I was reminded again that it is God's love that propels us to choose him and follow him. We have to be reminded again and again who we are in God's eyes, that we are deeply loved sinners and God accepts us just as we are. We are easily distracted and forget how God sees us, we fall back to use the world's broken values to define who we are.

Thirdly, the author talked that sin is fundamentally a matter of being, not simply morality.³ If all we know about is the specific sins we commit, we are focusing on our behavior but not our sinful nature. Often times, we get stuck in our 'old' selves because we are trying to 'nail' our behaviors or sins to the cross without knowing what leads to our sinful behaviors. Just like the example the author gave where the pastor needed help with his sexual addiction. Without knowing what drove his addiction, he might not be able to set free from it. I am reminded again when I minister to people with any type of sin patterns, I have to lead people to dig deeper to go behind what drive the specific sins and not just simply nail the specific sin to the cross.

Bibliography

²Brenner, David G.. *The Gift*, 46.

³Brenner, David G.. *The Gift*, 60.

Brenner, David G.. *The Gift of Being Yourself (The Spiritual Journey)*. Downers Grove, IL:
InterVarsity Press, 2015.

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___%