

Running Head: READING REPORT: BENNER

Reading Report: Benner, David. The Gift of Being Yourself

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Three main points Benner makes that impacted me:

1. Growth in Christ does not reduce my uniqueness. Christlikeness does not mean I have the same gifts, talents, or ways of interacting with God as other Christians. He has made me unique and does not want me to be like everyone else or conform to some standard or mold of Christianity and ministry.
2. Information about God is not nearly the same as experience of God. As we grow in knowledge, we should also grow in personal experience. Many people know the Bible inside out, but they have not experienced Jesus in a relational way.
3. In order to fully know God, I must know myself. As I know my true self and all its parts—those I love and those I need to learn to love more—I know God more. It is not the prettied up ideal self that God loves, but the mess that I am and struggle to love. As I learn to identify who I am in my mess, and accept and love that person, I also know more about God and his love and plan.

I was recently in Egypt with a group teaching Soul Care principles to Egyptian disciples—believers from the Coptic tradition. In the Coptic church, it is believed only the pastor can hear from God. Every believer we spent time with struggled with the idea that God would speak to them or want to know them personally, that they could know God personally, and were allowed an identity of their own. For them, belief in Jesus is about obedience, and they are only just learning what personal relationship looks like. Longing to be seen by God, to believe that He knew and cared about their personal stories, secrets, and burdens, they wondered if what they thought, heard, or envisioned in those days could be from God or just their own imaginings. Over and over, during ministry time, I would be given a word or a picture that I would share with someone and

they would burst into tears because it matched what they had seen or heard. To think that God not only revealed himself to them, but in different ways relating to their interests or personalities, was something entirely new to them.

The idea that all believers should look the same is not strictly an Egyptian hurdle, though. Rather, it is quite universal to believe that there is one right way to be a follower of Jesus. When we do not naturally line up with what those around us say a Christ-follower should look like—how to read the Bible and pray; if, when, or how to fast; activities to participate in or avoid, etc—we end up doing these things out of obligation, in a legalistic manner, rather than out of joy and fellowship. Legalism does not leave room for relationship and individuality.

Living authentically begins with seeing ourselves the way the Father sees us; as his precious creation. Coming to the understanding that I was created to be who I am as He created me, not some false idealized version of me that meets some unrealistic expectation or mold, has been the hardest lesson of my life, and again, one that I will not have fully learned until I am in His presence. Helping others to realize this about themselves and to go deeper into relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is something that I am passionate about. Replacing the lies we believe that have been applied by others and ourselves is the first step toward a deeper relationship with God. How freeing it is to truly know and believe that I do not have to be anything but myself! The more I know God, the more I know myself, and the more I know my true self, the more I know God! If only I could remember that 100% of the time.

I found the section on using the Enneagram to identify major temptations or core sins very intriguing. Behaviour modification does not work to overcome sinful patterns.

Knowing why we keep falling into the same sin—the unmet need behind the behaviour—is essential. I did the Enneagram test to learn about my relationship and leadership styles. Now, reading the core temptations/sins associated with the core need of each type, I can see the accuracy of my test results in a new way; the greatest temptations/sins I have wrestled with my whole life are the ones associated with my highest scoring Enneagram types. In addition, we all have times when the core needs of other Enneagram types take priority. I found it interesting that when I reflect on some of these times, the temptations and sins that came out correspond exactly with the unmet need. I will definitely be referring to this in counseling others, even if we have not identified their Enneagram profile.

Personally, I found this book encouraging. Benner's story of his false self could have been written about me. I have been going hard after my identity in Christ over the last five years. While I know this will not reach fulfillment until I am in the presence of Jesus, I can see how far I have come through the pages of this book, and that I am on the path toward healing and wholeness. One paragraph sums up the primary lesson of this book for me:

My compulsive pursuit of accomplishments and respect of people who are important to me suffocates the life of my true self. It blinds and inhibits my growth and restricts my freedom. It is important for me to remember that I am a human being, not a human doing. My worth lies in who I am, not what I can do or how I am seen by others. This is the truth of my existence. (p.79)

Benner, David. The Gift of Being Yourself. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

With integrity, I have read this book thoroughly and entirely—100%