

## 1/5/20 Self-Stewardship 1 – Who Am I Really?

The instant we start thinking about being a good steward of ourselves, we run into a major problem – so who are we, really? How well do I know myself, how accurately do I perceive myself, and, maybe most poignantly, am I who I tell myself that I am? Self-stewardship begins with a commitment to finding what spiritual masters like Merton and Rohr would call your “true self” ...and, word of warning, it’s hard work that will take you a lifetime.

1. God Tells You Who You Are: Knowing ourselves must begin with knowing the self that is known by God. Thus, as David Benner writes, any true self-knowledge is a gift: we can’t achieve it on our own, we have to partner with God in the endeavor, and ask Him to help us see ourselves as He sees us. Our very existence is wrapped tightly to His, so argues St. Paul in Athens (Acts 17.28). In the phrasing of St. Augustine’s famous dictum, “Novem te, novem me” (or, “May I know You, may I know myself”). So without real interaction with and dependence on God, an honest sense of self, let alone self-stewardship, proves impossible.

2. God Frees You to Embrace Your Whole Self: Citing Benner again, “Every time I dare to meet God and His love in the vulnerability of my sin and shame, I am strengthened. Every time I fall back into a self-improvement mode and try to bring God my best self, I am weakened.” It’s all too common for human beings to deny or ignore those parts of themselves that they don’t like, and when they do, those weak, hurt, vulnerable, and broken places don’t go away, they just go into hiding. The things about ourselves that we refuse to acknowledge are given increased power by our failure to accept them; that which we avoid will be that which most tyrannizes us. Our only shot at wholeness is accept God’s love for our ugliness as much as we do for our aptitudes and successes. (For this paragraph, see Ephesians 5.12-14 and John 3.19-21.)

3. God Frees You From Your Mask: At the core of what’s called the “false self” is a desire to present an image of ourselves to the world. Typically the part of us that we prize and put forward is a real part of us, but it is only one among many. Our masks start as the way we want others to see us, they are the safe parts of ourselves that we think others will accept and value. In time, they become the way we want to see ourselves. And by that point, we have thoroughly confused our mask and actual experience; or, if you will, we have become slaves to our own lies, so Richard Rohr contends. In the language of the New Testament, we are all inherently dishonest, struggling to tell the truth to ourselves, not to mention God (Romans 1.25 and 3.4, 1<sup>st</sup> John 1.6 and 2.21).

### A Book Suggestion:

If this week’s subject intrigues you, try this book – “The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery” (David Benner, 2015). By the way, it’s not a tough read, nor is it overly long.

### A Journaling Suggestion:

If you want to do some work on discovering your “true self” and exposing your “false self,” try the following questions, as provided in the book, “What Does Your Soul Love?,” by Geno/Allan Falding (2019). Questions like these have the power to pull our whole selves out into the open.

Do these as a part of your own personal spiritual life; ask God to join you in thinking through them, ask Him to open your eyes to what you can’t – don’t want to – see on your own. These would even make for a great conversation starter with a trusted friend or your spouse.

1. What do you really love? (*Deep in your bones? It won’t go away no matter how much you forget or ignore it? You suffer when you’re without it?*)
2. What’s getting in your way? (*What are the hurdles that get in the way of you being the you that you yearn to be? Focus especially on the potholes you put in your own way, e.g. ways of thinking, reacting, or behaving.*)
3. What are you hiding? (*From yourself, other, or even God right now? What can you scarcely look at, before turning away in shame?*)
4. How are you suffering? (*Where do you hurt in your life right now? What pain do you not vocalize to anyone?*)
5. What do you fear? (*About what are you worrying right now? What’s causing anxiety? What can’t you control about the future that’s eating at you?*)
6. What are you clinging to that you need to let go of? (*These may not be bad things, but perhaps just things that have served their purpose and are now obsolete. What false sense of security are you trying to get, and from what?*)