



Peninsula City Church

Better Reading

Who Are You?

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14th February 2016 the AM Service

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Who are You?

Introduction

Q. Who are you, who is the real you?

When you look into the mirror and you see an image looking back, do you ever ask, “Who are you?” It can be a scary thing looking into the mirror and seeing you looking back at you. Do you like what you see? Maybe there are a few more kilos, some more grey hairs, or wrinkles. Maybe your ears are too low or your eyes too close together, maybe your chin sticks out or you don’t like the colour of your eyes. I could go on here, but you know what I mean, we can all tend to do it. So, let me ask you again, “Who are you, who is the real you?” In fact, let me get more specific here,

Q. Who are you when no one is looking, or when no one can hear your thoughts or words?

Or if I were to put it another way,

“Who you are when you are around people means nothing, but it is character that determines your real person.”¹

This idea of your character has been defined as being,

“The mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual.”²

So, let me ask you now, “Who are you, who is the real you? That is, when no one is looking, or when no one can hear your thoughts or words.

As I did a number of weeks ago in light of what I have said in this introduction, I would like to share with you the results of a Bible study that I did for this message. Whether this helps you to reengage in your Bible reading or not is your choice, but it is something that I found in my reading. This is by no means an exhaustive study, but something that any Christ-follower could do. You may not need to go to the extent that I have here in this study. All you need to do this kind of study is a Bible and access to the internet, to search queries that you might have as you read and study. This might be one of the following sites like:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/>

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

1. What’s on the inside?

Q. What does it mean that, whatever is in your heart determines what you say?

First, let me share a story with you regarding something that happened to me. When I was working at the Bible College, we would have a time of prayer to start the day. One morning when we got together and each of us had a turn praying then in closing one of the team began to pray. The problem was I did not know what he was praying about, as he had a French Mauritian accent and kept asking God to deal with and change our kah-racter. I was not praying, but was standing there trying to work out what a kah-racter was that needed dealing with and needed changing. I was lost and I did not have a clue what he was praying for, but he just kept praying for our kah-racter. As a result, I asked him what he was talking about, and he kept saying, “kah-racter, kah-racter you know your kah-racter.” We all looked dumbfounded as to what he meant. Then one of the faculty cottoned on to what he meant and said, “You mean character.” Then he said, “Yes, that is what I’m saying kah-racter.” We all laughed and said “Amen” to his prayer.

¹ “Character.” <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=character> (4th February 2016).

² “Character.” <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/character> (4th February 2016).

Our English word character comes from the Greek *kharaktér* meaning a stamping tool, or an engraved mark, and developed into the idea of a symbol or imprint on the soul. This came from the root word *kharássein* meaning to scratch or etch.³ Consequently, in time it has come to mean the sum of a person's mental and moral qualities.⁴ It has been said that,

“Character is what defines you. It's what people see in you. It's what people will say about you after you pass away. The character is one of the most important things you have. How are you investing in yours? Do people see your faith in what you do? Is your character reflected in how you serve the Kingdom? Remember that when you pass away, Jesus will either say, “welcome brother/sister; job well done” or “I never knew you; be gone!” You have right now to decide where your future is.”⁵

Therefore, your character is part of your Kingdom life and not merely an earthly burden. It is who you are. It is an internal matter and not an external one. It is what you are like when only the Holy Spirit is looking at the inner you. In fact, it is the internal you, which determines your external you. Have you ever heard someone say about another person when he or she have said or done something, “Wow that's out of character for that person?” Well, maybe it is not out of character for that person, as that is who they are inside and it has slipped out.

Jesus Christ had something to say on this matter of character. That is, He reviewed the issue of what has been scratched or etched on to a person's heart. That is He was the summing up a person's innermost qualities. He would look deep into a person to determine if they were from His Kingdom or another's kingdom. An example of this is in Matthew's gospel; this was in response to the religious leaders asking Jesus about His disciples,

“Why do Your disciples disobey our age-old tradition?’ they demanded. ‘They ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat’ (Matt 15:2 NLT)

However, Jesus skipped over the religious smokescreen and came straight to the core of the matter. He did this from a Kingdom perspective and in doing so offended the religious leaders in the process. He said that,

“It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth” (Matt 15:11 NLT).

This was not the first time that Jesus Christ had dealt with this heart matter. He had picked up this theme when addressing the religious leaders at an earlier time.

“You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say” (Matt 12:34 NLT).

However, the disciples still did not get what Jesus implied, and Peter asked Him to explain what He meant. Jesus was surprised that they still did not get it, but went on to explain it to them.

¹⁶ “Don't you understand yet?’ Jesus asked. ¹⁷ ‘Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. ¹⁸ But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what is continually defiling you. ¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. ²⁰ These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you” (Matt 15:16-17 NLT).

³ “Character.” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=character> (7th January 2016).

⁴ Hoad, T.F. (ed.). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 71.

⁵ “10 Bible Verses On Character With Commentary.” <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/10-bible-verses-on-character-with-commentary/> (7th January 2016).

The word defile used here by Jesus means to make ceremonially common, unclean or unhallowed by means of its use. Actually, this whole aspect of cleansing what had been become ceremonially common, unclean or unhallowed was illustrated on the Day of Atonement in the life of Israel. In the book of Leviticus chapter 16 it was stated that,

² “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Warn your brother, Aaron, not to enter the Most Holy Place behind the inner curtain whenever he chooses; if he does, he will die. For the Ark’s cover-- the place of atonement-- is there, and I Myself am present in the cloud above the atonement cover” (Lev 16:2 NLT)

Aaron was to make a sacrifice to atone for his sin, before he could do this for the nation of Israel, Lev 16:1-14. As part of this ceremonial process, he was told to kill certain animals for his and his family’s atonement. He was to offer the smoke of the incense, bring, and sprinkle the blood of a bull on the mercy seat.

¹¹ “Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the LORD. After he has slaughtered the bull as a sin offering ¹² he will fill an incense burner with burning coals from the altar that stands before the Lord. Then he will take two handfuls of fragrant powdered incense and will carry the burner and the incense behind the inner curtain. ¹³ There in the Lord’s presence he will put the incense on the burning coals so that a cloud of incense will rise over the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—that rests on the Ark of the Covenant. If he follows these instructions, he will not die. ¹⁴ Then he must take some of the blood of the bull, dip his finger in it, and sprinkle it on the east side of the atonement cover (mercy seat). He must sprinkle blood seven times with his finger in front of the atonement cover” (Lev 16:11-14 NLT).

It was then and only then, that Aaron (as the high priest) could make atonement for the sins of the nation of Israel.

“Through this process, he will purify the Most Holy Place, and he will do the same for the entire Tabernacle, because of the defiling sin and rebellion of the Israelites” (Lev 16:16 NLT).

So, how does this all relate to what Jesus spoke about in Matt 15:16-17? Well, remember that Jesus was dealing with the matter of being ceremonially clean, unclean, or being defiled. Remember that the religious leaders asked Jesus,

“‘Why do Your disciples disobey our age-old tradition?’ they demanded. ‘They ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat’ (Matt 15:2 NLT).

The cleansing from this kind of uncleanness or being defiled cannot clean a person once and for all, it had to be repeated. Recall that the Day of Atonement was an annual ceremonial cleaning for the high priest and the nation of Israel.

“On the tenth day of the appointed month in early autumn, you must deny yourselves. Neither native-born Israelites nor foreigners living among you may do any kind of work. This is a permanent Law for you” (Lev 16:29 NLT).

It was a permanent Law for the nation of Israel, but it was limited in what it could actually do. How do we know this is the case? The writer to the Hebrew Christ-followers helped answer this when they said in, Heb 9:11-15.

¹¹ “So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. ¹² With His own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—He entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

¹³ Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. ¹⁴ Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered Himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. ¹⁵ That is why He is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant" (Heb 9:11-15 NLT).

The word used here in the letter to the Hebrews in verse 13 "ceremonial impurity," is the same word used by Jesus Christ in Matthew 15:16-17 i.e. defiled or ceremonially impurity. That is to say, the writer to the Hebrews stated that, "the blood of Jesus Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds," v14. Therefore, it is the things that come from the heart that continually defile a person. Namely, it is our innermost thoughts and desires that are the issue here.

2. So, who are you in the community?

Q. What innermost thoughts and desires effect how you live in community?

Let us ramp things up a bit. That is, in asking "Who are you, who is the real you?" I would like to be little a more practical. Let's attempt with the help of the Holy Spirit to reveal (to yourself) who are you when no one is looking, or when no one can hear your thoughts or words. I would like to thank and acknowledge Pastor Carey Nieuwhof for the basis of what I have called the 'Heart or innermost thoughts and desires measurement'.⁶ As you reflect on the following heart measurement, it is important to do four things:

- i. Sit quietly and still your thoughts before the Holy Spirit. Do this right now.
- ii. Read each point carefully and prayerfully. Don't rush through them.
- iii. Be very honest with all your answers in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. Listen to what He reveals about your innermost thoughts and desires you. Then ask Him what He wants you to do to become more like Jesus Christ and in partnership with Him do it.

"Sometimes progress in life can be tough to measure. You might feel stuck right now, or just the opposite, you might feel like you're making incredible progress. But are you? How would you know? Of all the areas in which you want to make progress in this life, character or inner life (which is inherently tied to spiritual growth) is the greatest. How do you know how your character is doing... really?

It's important, because in the scheme of life, it littered with gifted people whose character (or lack of it) caused their downfall. Your competency will take you only as far as your character will sustain you. Surprisingly, your character isn't just revealed in your best moments. The truth often breaks out in the little moments. If you want to know how your character is really doing, check yourself in these nine everyday moments we all encounter."

⁶ Nieuwhof, Carey. "9 Little Character Tests That Tell You Way Too Much About Yourself."

<http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/269150-9-little-character-tests-that-tell-you-way-too-much-about-yourself.html> (4th February 2016).

Nine Everyday Things That Reveal Way Too Much About Your Character:

Before I jump into the list, just know I have failed every one of these tests at some point in my life. OK, at times I still fail some of them, badly. However, you need to have something to work toward, don't you? So, let's go, just answer these questions quietly and honestly within your heart listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Firstly, some thoughts on character when you are alone:

- i. What you think when someone takes 'your' parking spot?

You know that moment your alone in the car and you get to the shopping center parking lot and see the empty space, only to have someone else dart in to it. Yes, right at that moment. Alternatively, the parking space you always park in at work that someone else had the audacity to use yesterday. No, it did not have a reserved sign or anything, but the planet should know that is your space. What happens inside you at that moment that no one else sees? That is your character speaking.

- ii. How do you react to slow Internet?

This is a major constant challenge for me. If the state of my character could be entirely summed up by my reaction to slow Internet, I should probably be locked up from society. My heart measurement here is, ouch! I might only throw things on the inside, but inside my little mind, there is not much left standing at times believe me.

Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in our life. Apparently, the Holy Spirit and I have some work to do around Internet connection speeds. What about you?

Secondly, some thoughts about your character when you are with others:

- iii. The gap between what you think and what you say when someone compliments you in front of others

Christ-followers are famous for false humility. "Thanks, that was not me, it was the Lord," sounds good, but has several problems with it.

First, the Lord probably doesn't sing or preach as poorly as you do. How many nobody's-told-me-how-bad-I-really-am Christian singers or preachers have ascribed their gift to God?

Second, let's say you really are gifted. Even if you are decent at what you do (or great at it), there can be a gap between what you say publicly and what you think privately. For example,

What you say: "Thanks. It really wasn't much."

What you think: "Yes, I kind of rocked it, didn't I?"

What you say: "Oh, I'm not sure I deserve that."

What you think: "Yes I do. Finally someone noticed."

So, what do you say when someone compliments you? How about simply saying, "Thank you. I'm grateful it helped"? Then privately thank God for the way he might have used you in that situation? I think that's a decent start, don't you? Why don't you try it and attempt to make it a lifestyle? On the matter of true humility As C.S. Lewis said,

"He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all."⁷

⁷ Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. (New York, NK: HarperCollins e-books, 2009), 128.

iv. How you respond to public critics

Haters are going to hate, critics are going to criticise you privately and publically, but do you hate or criticise in revenge? Or do you start listing off the many reasons why they're wrong? Alternatively, maybe you try to subtly undermine their reputation to others. At times critics can trigger defensiveness in me that is primal. But, well for the most part ... I am OK, not as bad as I used to be, whoa.

What if when someone criticised you, you said thank you instead (silently or aloud it is up to you)? There is usually something you can learn from them, besides often there is a kernel of truth ... even if it's very small. Even if you have to throw away most of what a critic says, you do not have to throw away the learning.

On the wall in my office, I have a quote on this matter to check my innermost thoughts and desires measurement. It says,

"I was never more hated than when I tried to be honest. Or when, even as just now I've tried to articulate exactly what I felt to be the truth. No one was satisfied."⁸

v. What you tell yourself when points out one of your mistakes in public

So what self-talk loop plays when you make a mistake? For too many of us, it is unhealthy. It can range from "You're so stupid to; you never make mistakes ... other people do". Neither is good. In other words, do you hear what you are thinking? Do you catch those thoughts that are not glorifying to God or helpful to yourself?

Again, although we do not like them, mistakes are tremendous learning opportunities. They are rarely fatal. Besides one of the keys to success in life is not how many times you get knocked down. It is how many times you get up. To be successful, you only need to get up one more time than you got knocked down.

vi. How you react when someone overfills the rubbish bin, and doesn't take it out

This one's all about the expectations you have about other people. Yes, there is an unwritten rule that person who overfilled the rubbish should take it out. Isn't there? Isn't there? Also, isn't there a rule about the person who opened the clean dishwasher being the one who has to empty it, because otherwise the little 'clean' light goes off and you can mix dirty and clean dishes together ... an unspeakable evil.

However, there is also an unwritten rule about not being a jerk about it either when the rule gets broken.

vii. Your social media and email voice

So, you're complex. You have moods, nuances and fascinating parts of your personality that are oh-so diverse. But chances are your friends could sum up your personality with a single word. If you are not sure that is true, flip the equation. You can probably sum up your friends' social media or email voice in a single word. As in, he is angry, or she is so insecure etc. If your friend summed up your social media or email voice in a single word, what word would they use? That you are: sarcastic, patient, bitter, braggy, kind, cynical, hopeful, petty, helpful or jealous.

Yes, whether you like it or not if you are on social media or use email, you have a voice. What is it? Your voice may be who you really are or maybe even, who you pretend to be. But is it who you are called to be?

⁸ Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. (Toronto, Canada: Vintage International, 1995), 432.

viii. How you react to other people's social media or email voice

So, of course, you do a much better job than other people on social media or email do, don't you? Because your voice—my voice—is so beautifully appropriate.

Own it if it is you, (and admit it, I'm so arrogant.) Sigh.

Lastly, an interesting character test:

ix. How you return the shopping cart

Now this is an interesting one. Did you know that you are able to tell a lot about a person's character by how they return the shopping cart? Yeap, that right, this is spiritual. So you might be thinking (do you hear your thoughts right now as you react to this point), what has my shopping cart got to do with my character? Well, more than you think. Do you bring your faith into these everyday moments? Why not ask the Holy Spirit what He thinks about your innermost thoughts and desires at times like, just leaving your shopping cart in the middle of the carpark? This kind of Spirit led thinking can change more than you realise.

In fact, your reaction in moments like any of these (and others) could possibly say a lot more about your real spiritual maturity, than how many times your go to church or how much Bible you know. Satan can go to church and he knows the Bible. You need a different kind of spiritual maturity, one that restores your inner thoughts and desires to be constantly transformed to become more Christlike. Frequently the things we think are signs of spiritual maturity are not. What are you learning about faith displaying your innermost thoughts and desires in the little moments of external display for better or for worse?

So much more could be said here on this matter. However, I think that you get the idea. So, how did you go? If you were like me, then there were some ouch moments, and it activated some further inner thought and desire as the Holy Spirit measured the internal you. Who are you within your community and how do your innermost thoughts and desires effect how you live and act or react within your community?

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. "Who are you, who is the real you?"

Do you know what to do to be able to become a more Christ like you? This is so that your innermost thoughts and desires have a wholesome and Kingdom of God effect no how you live and act or react within your community. What you think and desire will have outward consequences on how you live in community. You are part of a family, workplace, uni, school, local church, street, and club etc., what do you think about or desire for them?

Although, any number of Scriptural passages could be drawn on here to help bring things to some practical outcome, two have been chosen. These two are to help you yield more and allow the Holy Spirit to continue to transform you into a more Christlike you. The first of these passages is, set with in the context of resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ and letting His life overflow from within you to the community around you.

¹¹ "So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall."¹² For the Word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before His eyes, and He is the one to whom we are accountable.

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testings we do, yet He did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most” (Heb 4:11-16 NLT)

So, let the alive, powerful and sharp Word of God, expose your innermost thoughts and desires. The second Passage is the practical outworking of the inward transforming power of the Word of God. James pointed out that this needs to have a communal effect on those around you.

¹⁹ “Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. ²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the Word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

²² But don’t just listen to God’s Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ²³ For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. ²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. ²⁵ But if you look carefully into the perfect Law of liberty that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

²⁶ If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you. ^{2:8} Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’... ¹² So, whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the Law of liberty that sets you free. ¹³ There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when He judges you.” (James 1:19-27; 2:12-13 NLT).

So, let the Word of God reflect your inner thoughts and desires. This is so that the Holy Spirit is able to transform you into a son or daughter that displays mercy and love, because that is what need to be on the inside. How is your heart, do you want to see God in a way that you never have before? Jesus helps you here when He said,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8 NASB)

Look into the mirror of His Word and let the Word, the Law of Liberty set you free to be who He has created you to be within your community. Do you feel competent in this matter of character? Well if that is the case, as it has been said,

“Your competency will take you only as far as your character will sustain you.”⁹

⁹ Nieuwhof, Carey. “9 Little Character Tests That Tell You Way Too Much About Yourself.” <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/269150-9-little-character-tests-that-tell-you-way-too-much-about-yourself.html> (4th February 2016).