

Sustain  
**Know Thyself**  
October 16/17, 2010

Let's pray together.

God, I am thankful that, regardless of what we may have heard all of our lives, your answer is “yes ... yes, I will let you be yourself.” And we know this is true because your Word tells us that you make beautiful things and we are one of those beautiful things. You made us – each of us – as a unique reflection of who you are in all of your glory.

But many of us have never understood that uniqueness. We've never really considered how you've wired us up. Or we've understood it and we've forgotten it. We've turned away from it. And, now, we're living the life of an impostor – trying to be something or someone we're not. And we're weary of it and worn out from it.

So, God, this morning, I ask that you would turn the light on and lead us on a journey of finding who we are. Amen.

I've told you several times about the pastors and spouses retreat that Jetta and I attended last summer in the mountains of Colorado. Obviously, what happened during that week had a great impact on me much to my surprise. As I pointed out in the Detox series, I didn't realize I was such a mess underneath the surface.

However, that wasn't the only thing that surprised me during the week. I was also surprised by what turned out to be the foundation of everything we learned in that week.

I mean, if you're going to a retreat designed to encourage and renew pastors, you would expect that the foundation might be something like prayer or Bible study or just spending time alone with God, wouldn't you? But, none of them were. That's not to say that they were not emphasized as being important in developing an emotionally sustainable life. They were. But they were not the foundation.

Instead, the foundation was a well-known psychological tool called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Raise your hand if you've heard of it. How many of you have taken either the official test or an online version of it?

For those of you who are unfamiliar with it, Myers-Briggs is a tool that assesses how you look at life, how you process life, how you want to relate to the world, how you want the world to relate to you. In short, it helps you understand how you are “wired up” so to speak. It helps you understand who you are.

Again, as I said, I was pretty surprised that this would be the foundation of a pastor's retreat. But it made sense based on how they were using it because the premise was this:

**If you are not living according to how you are “wired” then you are living an unsustainable life.**

Let me say that again. If you are not living according to how you are “wired” then you are living an

unsustainable life. In other words, you can do it for a while. Sometimes you need to do it for a while because the situation demands it. But, eventually, it will catch up to you and cause all kinds of stress emotionally and intellectually.

“It will lead you to burn out not only as a pastor, but also as a person,” Bob – our retreat leader – said. “And that would be disastrous for you, for your church and for God’s Kingdom.”

So we spent a whole lot of time that week working on “finding out who we are”: discovering who God made us to be – and discerning not only where the life we’re living doesn’t line up, but how we got that way and what we need to do to address it ... so that we can begin moving towards emotional sustainability.

And that’s what I want to talk to you about today because it’s not just pastors who get out of whack in this. Almost everyone does. And that’s because we’re under constant pressure to be who we are not.

### **Being Who We’re Not**

And to illustrate what some of that pressure looks like, I want us to focus for a few moments on a story from the Old Testament – the story of David and Goliath. It’s found in 1 Samuel chapter 17. Even if you’re not a church person, I’m sure you’ve heard it at some point. But I doubt you’ve heard the story behind the story.

The story you’ve heard is that the nation of Israel was besieged by an old nemesis, the Philistines, and the Philistine army had surrounded the Israelite army. But instead of going for the kill, one of the Philistine soldiers challenged the Israelites to send out their best man to go one-on-one with him..

Of course, the soldier who issued the challenge was Goliath; a man who the Bible said was 9 feet tall ... with a coat of armor that weighed 125 pounds and a spear so big that its tip weighed 15 pounds. This guy was a monster. And no one in the Israelite army had any interest in accepting his challenge so, day after day, morning and evening:

- Goliath came out in front of their whole army..
- Taunted them.
- Ridiculed their God and their faith.

And because of that, the Bible says, Saul, the king, and all the Israelites were “dismayed and terrified.”<sup>i</sup>

But then, a young shepherd by the name of David (who was not in the army) heard Goliath raging and decided to take on the challenge. And you know how the story goes – David goes to the river, pulls out five smooth stones, puts one of them in a slingshot, shoots it and nails Goliath right between the eyes, killing him. The Israelite army then routs the Philistines and everyone in Israel lives happily ever after, at least for a little while.

But the story behind the story isn’t so simple. The reason David was at the battlefield was because his father had sent him to deliver food to his brothers who were in the army. And when he delivered it, here’s what his oldest brother says to him:

"Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the

desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.” 1 Samuel 17:28 (NIV)

**And David responded:**

“Now what have I done?” said David. “Can't I even speak?” 1 Samuel 17:29 (NIV)

And that speaks volumes about what life was like for David as the youngest son of Jesse and the environment to which he had become accustomed. “OK, so what am I doing wrong this time?”

And when you live in that kind of an environment it puts a lot of pressure on you, which brings us to the first reason that a lot of us become “who we are not:”

### **1. We sometimes become “who we are not” because of criticism.**

When you constantly hear that there is something wrong with you or what you're doing, you feel pressure to change. You feel pressure to become something different than what you are.

Now, just to be clear, sometimes criticism and pressure is good because sometimes we are wrong and sometimes we do need to change. For example, I'm wired up as the kind of person who has a lot of ideas about how things can be done better or differently and I'm pretty comfortable with just throwing those out whenever I get inspired. And whenever I get inspired, I get pretty passionate.

But over the years, my wife has told me that I need to tone it down some. “Rick,” she has said, “when you get an idea, you speak so confidently about it – as if whatever you're seeing is going to happen no matter what. And, I know that you're just thinking out loud, that's how you process, but that can be intimidating for others. You need to leave room for people to disagree with you. You need to remember that people need to be led to where you are.”

Now, as you might imagine, it stings a little bit to hear that kind of feedback. But, it's ok because that criticism is designed to help me be better at who I am, not attacking who I am. That's very different from her saying, “Rick, you're just conceited. You think you know it all. You just want attention. You just like putting your nose where it doesn't belong” ... kind of like David's brother said to him.

That kind of criticism can strike at the heart of who we are; can cause us to shy away from who we are and, eventually, to become someone who we are not.

Well, anyway, after listening to Goliath, David is offended. “Who is this guy and why are we letting him mock us and our God?” And he concludes that, with God's help, he can fight and win.

**So, he goes to Saul, the king of Israel, and says to him:**

“Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant (referring to himself) will go and fight him.” 1 Samuel 17:32 (NIV)

**And Saul replies:**

“You are not able to go up against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and

he has been a fighting man from his youth.” 1 Samuel 17:33 (NIV)

Now, Saul wasn't insulting David like David's brother. David was probably only 17 or 18 at the time and Saul was right to be concerned about his welfare and safety.

But David didn't give up. He says, "With God's help, I have done many things and I can do this." And so Saul relents but under one condition: "you have to gear up for battle, literally."

### **The Bible says that ...**

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around ... 1 Samuel 17:38-39 (NIV)

... but he couldn't do it because he wasn't used to them. They didn't fit him.

And that brings us to the second reason that we live in ways that are out of whack with how we're wired up.

### **2. Sometimes we become "who we are not" because of expectations to fit into a mold.**

David was expected to fit into Saul's mold. And we saw an example of another mold in the drama. And a lot of us have lived it. We grew up with expectations of our parents or other authority figures who loved us, but sometimes it felt like they loved us not for who we were but for who they wanted us to be.

And we got the message "you're loveable and acceptable if you get married, if you go to college, if you become a professional or get a certain job or career or fulfill this particular plan for your life, if you make a lot of money or ..." And when you hear "you're loveable, if" enough times, eventually you start aiming for the "if." You become – or try to become – the kind of person who can fulfill whatever expectation is out there.

Now, again, this isn't to say that all expectations of us are bad. As I said, I'm wired up to be a leader and it's not a bad thing for me to accommodate the expectation of others that they be given time and room to process whatever it is I want to lead them to. In fact, that's a good thing. But if the expectation is that I'm going to be a leader or a pastor or a speaker or a husband or a father just like so-and-so, then that's not so good.

Many years ago, I heard a great Christian leader and pastor by the name of John Maxwell talk about how he always finished writing his sermons by Wednesday. And I had a great pastor in New Jersey by the name of John Meek who publicly pledged to the congregation that he would never reuse a sermon that he had given, no matter how many years ago it was. And since both of those guys were so great, for many years I had their words ringing in my ears, and I thought that I ought to emulate them; I ought to fit into their mold. And I felt guilty because I don't always have my sermon done by Wednesday. I never have my sermon done by Wednesday. I'm not wired that way. And then I realized, you know, I don't need to feel guilty about that because I'm not them, and I'm also not in the situations that allowed them to do those things. It's emotionally unsustainable for me to try and be them.

... just like wearing Saul's armor for more than a few steps was unsustainable for David so, the Bible says, he took them off.

“I cannot go to battle in these,” he said, “because I’m not used to them.” And he went to the stream to get those five smooth stones and then marched onto the battlefield to meet Goliath.

### **The Bible says that when Goliath saw David ...**

He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” [referring to the slingshot David was preparing to use] 1 Samuel 17:43 (NLT)

“Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” 1 Samuel 17:45 (NLT)

Now, it’s pretty obvious to this point that David was very confident in how God had wired him up. So, it was fairly easy, I think, for him to ignore his brother’s criticism; fairly easy to tell Saul, “Hey, your stuff is cool but it just doesn’t fit me.”

But now ... with this raging giant threatening to turn him into dog food ... I don’t know about you, but in that moment I might have said, “Maybe I should try that armor on one more time. Maybe I should listen to my brother and go back to the desert where I really belong, with those sheep.” Fear will do that to you.

And that’s the third kind of pressure that can cause us to live in ways other than how God wired us up.

### **3. Sometimes we become “who we are not” because of fear.**

We become afraid of what people will say or think; afraid of failure; afraid that we’re making the wrong decision, even though we once were very confident. And the list could go on and on.

One of the things I realized at the retreat is that I used to be a very outgoing person. I used to be very personable, very engaging with people, but over the years, because I haven’t handled criticism well (my bad) and because I’ve not been able to say no to some unreasonable expectations of others (again, my fault), I’ve become fearful of people. And instead of engaging with people, I tend to shy away.

And maybe you can see how fear works in your life to change you.

Now, at this point, you might be thinking “OK, I think I understand what you’re saying. Fear, expectations of others and criticism can cause us to become someone we’re not and it makes my life a little more difficult. So what’s the big deal about that?”

The big deal is that you and I are uniquely made by God to reflect his image. That’s what it says in the very first pages of the Bible.

And God has told us (you, me, the whole human race), “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth but not just population-wise. Fill it with beauty and productivity. Take what I’ve created and make it even better. Transform the raw materials I’ve put here into something that makes life good and fulfilling for everyone.”

And when God gave humans that commission, He knew that it would take all kinds of people with all kinds of talents and gifts and abilities and skills and personalities to make that happen. And so He has wired each of us

up in our mother's womb so that we are able to contribute to that grand commission in some way. That's the big deal.

**So, in the immortal words of one southern preacher ...**

“Be who you is, because if you ain't who you is, then you is who you ain't.”

**To which I would add ...**

“And being who you ain't just ain't sustainable over the long haul.”

## **Who We Are**

So, let's talk about “who you is” ... who are you, really? And how can you know who you are?

Well, there are lots of ways to find out.

- You can just sit down sometime and make a list of what you like and don't like; what you do well and don't do well. See the patterns that begin to emerge out of that.
- You can ask people who know you; people you live with or work with, “What do you see in me?” What are my strengths? What am I good at? What are my weaknesses? What do I struggle with?”
- And you can also take advantage of years and years of psychological and behavioral research and take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test for yourself. The official test will cost you, but there are many free versions floating around that approximate the result fairly well.

**In fact, in mid-August, our entire ministry staff took the one at this website:**

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp>

And then we spent a whole day going through it and talking about it in an effort to better understand each other and work together more effectively.

I'll post a link to it on The City on later this afternoon so that, if you're on The City, if you've signed up for The City (getting my point?) ... you can take it, too, if you want.

Of course, there are many others you can take. Just Google “Myers-Briggs” and you'll see what I mean.

Now, before I get into this, I need to tell you that I am not trained to teach or administer the Myers-Briggs and, quite frankly, some of the things it measures are beyond me. But that's OK, because all I want to give you is an overview of the big picture ... a behavior which, by the way, is perfectly in line with my particular type! According to Myers-Briggs, I am wired up as an E-N-T-P (I'll explain those letters shortly) ... I am an E-N-T-P which is often described as “the visionary.” I love connecting the individual dots so that people can see the big picture.

In fact, I'm really, really good at that. In fact, I am at my best when I am acting as a visionary. In fact, when I

get bogged down in details for a long period of time, it's almost always a sign that something is wrong; a sign that I have let criticism or expectations or fear – sidetrack me from who I really am. Unfortunately, as this retreat revealed, that's where I've been living.

But, in recent days, as more and more of the emotional sludge has been cleaned out of my life, I've remembered a vision that God gave for this church that I had almost forgotten. Wanna know what it is? (Please say yes – or I'll melt! Just kidding - I'm going to tell you anyway).

When we bought this building in 2002, our intention at the time (and we thought God told us to do this) was to grow this congregation to about 1000 to 1200 people and then, every couple of years, start a new church, locally, with a couple hundred of those people. Why? Because new churches are more effective at reaching people who don't go to church than existing churches. And, there are all kinds of statistics on this.

That was our vision. But we've been – I've been – so focused on survival lately, so fear-driven, so expectation-driven, that I've forgotten that and worse, I've allowed all of us to forget it.

Now, I'm telling you this for two reasons:

1. One, it's a good illustration of what happens when you lose sight of how God wired you up.
2. Two, because, I'm your pastor and you're going to be hearing more about this vision in the coming days.

Friends, if we're going to fulfill the vision God gave us years ago, we are going to have to get serious about growing beyond the 725-735 people who show up here on an average weekend. We'll have to take some risks. We'll have to make some bold moves. And I've said it several times: I think we need to push that wall out and double the size of this room for many reasons that we don't have time to talk about right now.

But I promise that we will. I promise that we'll talk about it and pray about it and work through it before we do anything, but I'm pretty certain that's what we're supposed to do next.

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Of course, that's not the issue today. The issue is “how are you wired up? When are you best reflecting God's glory? When are you best adding value to the people and the world around you?”

Myers-Briggs can help you see that. So, let's talk about it for a little bit, so you can get an overview and maybe would be inspired or encouraged to take this test.

**Myers-Briggs uses four dichotomies to measure your preferences which then reveal your type.**

And a “dichotomy” is two distinct choices where there is not a continuum ... for example, fruits and vegetables. Some people prefer fruit, some prefer vegetables. You can't prefer a “fruitg'table” because there is no such thing. There's no continuum between fruits and vegetables.

A “preference” describes your most natural and comfortable way of behaving; what do you do with the most interest and energy; what do you do when you are not under the pressure of a time limit or an external reward or coercion. It's not that you can't operate outside of your preferences; you just can't do it well for very long.

You can't sustain it.

**Ok, here are the four dichotomies and what they measure (leave up while I explain):**

- Where do you prefer to focus your attention and get your energy? Internally or externally? Are you introverted or extraverted?
- How do you prefer to take in information from the outside world? Do you use your senses or your intuition?
- How do you prefer to make decisions? Do you tend to go by what you think or what you feel?
- How do you prefer to deal with the outer world? Are you judging or perceiving? (And I'll tip you off right now that those two words don't have the same meaning in Myers-Briggs as they do in everyday conversation. But we'll get to that).

OK, let's take a brief look at each dichotomy. And let's start with introversion and extraversion.

**People who prefer extraversion get energy from the environment—the outer world of activity and spoken words.**

They ...

- Are attuned to external environments
- Enjoy working in groups
- Prefer to communicate by talking
- Learn best by doing
- Are sociable and expressive

**People who prefer introversion get their energy from within, from the inner world of thoughts and reflections.**

They ...

- Are attuned to inner world
- Enjoy working alone or in pairs
- Prefer to communicate in writing
- Learn best through mental practice and reflection
- Are private and contained

Ok, let's move on to the next dichotomy which measures how we prefer to take in information.

**People who prefer sensing tend to absorb information directly.**

They ...

- Like to learn facts
- Emphasize the pragmatic
- Are oriented to present realities
- Value realism



- Trust experience
- Observe and remember specifics through their five senses

**On the other hand, people who prefer to take in information by intuition tend to be less direct.**

They ...

- Like to imagine possibilities of the world they see
- Emphasize the theoretical
- Are oriented to future possibilities
- Value imagination
- Trust inspiration
- See trends and patterns in specific data

BTW, this preference is labeled as “N” because “I” is already taken by introversion.

Now, let me show you an example of how Ns and Ss perceive a day at the beach.

“Joe, let's pretend we're explorers running from hot lava!”

“Nah.”

“I know, I'll be the wife and you be the husband and we come home to see our house flooded!”

“Nah.”

“Let's pretend we're puppies and a giant fire hydrant explodes!”

“Nah.”

“How about, I am boy and you're a girl and we're playing in the ocean.”

“I don't get it.”

And that's what a lot of Ns say about Ss ... and vice versa.

Let's move to the next one, the Thinking/Feeling dichotomy, which measures how we prefer to make decisions.

**Thinkers tend to make decisions based on objective data.**

They ...

- Search for flaws in argument.
- Use cause-and-effect reasoning.
- Are analytical.

- Come to a decision using logic.

**And here's how those who prefer feeling do it.**

They make decisions based on subjective data. They tend ...

- To search for points of agreement in an argument
- To use personal values to reason
- To be empathetic
- To make decisions considering the people involved

And, BTW, 70% of men are wired up as Ts, and 70% of women are wired up as Fs, which explains a lot, I think.

OK, one more ... the J/P dichotomy which measure how we prefer to deal with the outside world.

**People who prefer “judging” seek to regulate and manage their lives.**

Their lives tend to be structured and organized. Sticking to a plan and schedule is very important to them, and they are energized by getting things done. They want to make decisions, come to closure, and move on.

BTW, that's why this choice is called “judging.” It doesn't mean “judgmental.” It means you like to come to a decision as quickly as possible, i.e. “you like to make a judgment call as soon as you can.”

**People who prefer perceiving, on the other hand, want to experience and understand life, rather than control it.**

They ...

- Like to be flexible
- Are curious
- See routines as limiting
- Energized by last-minute pressure (often seen as procrastinators)
- Take in as much information as possible before making a decision

In fact, here is classic “perceiver” in action.

The tree is bought, paid for and on the car, and the “P” is still looking for a better option: “Wait, what about this one!”

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Now, those are the four dichotomies.

**And what you do when you determine your preference is to put your letters together (E-N-T-P or I-S-F-J or whatever) and that's your type.**

As you can see there are 16 basic types. And those four letters together describe a great deal of who you are and

how you are wired up. And you can spend hours and hours reading about your type and understanding it. It's fascinating and it can be extremely helpful to you.

## Conclusion

But that's not really the point, at least not for today. The point is ... are you living according to how you are wired up? If you're an ISFJ, are you living like an ISFJ? If you're an ESTP, are you rejoicing in the fact that God chose to make you an ESTP and bless the world through that?

By the way, sometimes the letters that come out when you take the test are wrong. That's because sometimes we've gotten so good at being what we are not that we actually test out that way.

For instance, because I have lived with four women – a wife and three daughters – for 25 plus years, I've felt a lot of pressure to be feeling-oriented in my decision-making instead of thinking-oriented, which is my nature. I've felt the same pressure from being a pastor. So, when I took the Myers-Briggs last June, I actually came out as an F instead of T! It shocked me.

And then it hit me. This is part of why I feel so stressed: I'm trying to be something I'm not. I'm living in a way that just isn't sustainable for me.

That's not saying that I don't need to be more compassionate, more tender, and give more time in my decision-making (I do; it's part of growing and maturing), but I don't need to reject the fact that my decision-making preference is logic and not feeling. I need to accept that it's a good thing because my family needs that from me. This church needs that from me. That's why God made me this way.

Now, if you want to find out if your letters are telling you the truth go back and take the test again. You take it once, and you go "okay, what is true to me right now?" But then you go back, and you answer the questions the second time as you would have at the most peaceful and happiest time of your childhood or adolescent years ... before all the sludge began to build up and change you.

Then, ask yourself ... if there is a change, why have I changed? Is it growth – the need to bend and flex and not be rigid? Or is your change because of fear or criticism or so many years of conforming to the expectations of others?

And if that's why you have changed, then you need to do what Jesus says: to repent and believe. Repent (stop thinking that it's acceptable to live the life of an impostor) and believe (trust that God knew what He was doing when he decided you should be an INFP or an ESTJ or whatever you are).

### **The Apostle Paul wrote:**

Do not let the world squeeze you into its mold, but instead let yourself be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2 (JBP)

In other words, be the person God wants you to be, the person God made you to be, the person God is making you to be because of your faith in Christ and what he has done for you. The world needs you to be that person.

**And a few verses later, Paul wrote:**

God in his kindness gave each of us different gifts. Rom 12:6 (GW)

And then he went on to encourage people to use those gifts:

- If your gift is speaking God's word, then speak
- If you're wired up to serve, then serve.
- If you're wired up for teaching, then teach.
- If you're wired up for encouraging others, then give encouragement.
- If your gift is sharing, be generous.
- If it's leadership, lead enthusiastically.
- If it's helping people in need, help them cheerfully.

And I know that he's talking about spiritual gifts but the point is the same: take whatever God has given you and use it. Honor him with it, honor yourself with it – and thank him for it.

As that shepherd boy from long ago, David, who eventually became king, once put it:

I will give thanks to you because I have been so amazingly and miraculously made. Your works are miraculous, and my soul is fully aware of this. Psalm 139:14 (GW)

Listen, friends, you are loved by God for who you are and you do not need to become someone else to prove anything or to measure up. That's already been done for you in Christ. So you are free because you are loved for who you are.

Let's pray.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Samuel 17:11

<sup>ii</sup> <http://kevinmartineau.blogspot.com/2008/10/sermon-synopsis-1026-know-yourself-that.html>