

A REFLECTION ON FINDING MY TRUE SELF

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ABSTRACT

Every human being is created in the image of God, and thus should live accordingly to His plan. However, the world and people around us somehow created in us a false self, that sometimes protects and preserves our true self. Over the years experts have tried to understand the self. They studied how people perceive their true selves and how it influenced their self-concept and their psychology in everyday life. This writing aims to explore the true and false self, using personal experiences to demonstrate how I found my true self, how it has influenced my ministry as a nursing educator and how it will continue to influence my future ministry in counselling.

INTRODUCTION

When God created human beings, he created them in his image and breathed the breath of life (Genesis 1:27, ESV). He made us his masterpiece (Ortberg, 2010), thus each human is a unique creation (Wilbourne, 2016). True self is defined as who a person really is, regardless of his or her outward behaviour (Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011), and it is the self that is loved by God (Wilbourne, 2016). It is both a perfected version of our identity and a spiritual experience of ourselves and God (Hynes, 2016).

Markos (2010) stated that people should live according to the self that was made in the image of God. Unfortunately, even though God loves us unconditionally (Wilbourne, 2016), many of us still try to find our true self by pretending to be someone we are not, describing ourselves

as being authentic and have our autonomy over our lives (Kuyper, 1979; Ortberg, 2010). This is particularly evident when Lind (1973) wrote a case study about her patient. She illustrated how the patient was anxious and eventually got depressed because he cannot trust and accept himself. Over the years experts have tried to understand the self (Levin, 1992). They studied how people perceive their true selves and how it influenced their self-concept and their psychology in everyday life (Newman, Bloom, & Knobe, 2013).

True Self/False Self

According to God's original plan, He wants us to be like him, to display his glory, to enjoy him forever, as well as to grow in an intimate relationship with Him (Boa, 2001; Markos, 2010). As God's creation, we ought to view life and the world from God's perspective (Kirwan,

1984) and find our identity in the divine image (Pennington, 2000; Wilbourne, 2016), because knowing God deeply means that we know who we truly are (Kuyper, 1979; Benner, 2015). Alas, our sinful nature leads us away from what is righteous and it has ruined the divine image (Markos, 2010), creating sadness and guilt (Goodman, 2007). Boa (2001) mentioned that, without a relationship with God, people are desperate for love and happiness, and they seek a meaningful life. On the contrary, our relationships with God enable us to know who we truly are (Kirwan, 1984).

Our false self can begin in the womb. We were born with a void in our heart causing us to obsess over our possessions, actions, and others' perceptions of us (Pennington, 2000; Haase, 2008). It becomes an illusory person that protects and preserves the true self (Winnicott, 1965). The false self is constructed when children are abandoned, rejected, and not loved well (Manning, 2015). Even though false self enables the person to survive, there is always a sense of "not good enough" (Wilkin, 2006) or feeling unreal (Winnicott, 1965; Parker & Davis, 2009). As I grew up in an Eastern culture where I was taught to not easily proud of what I

am doing or achieve, I became hard on myself and often think that I am not good enough and I cannot get any compliment or praises that people are giving because of something that I did good. I perform what my parents or people expect me to do, to not proud of myself, while deep inside, I have a hidden pride.

God desires to restore us into his image and the destiny is set for each one of us (Wilbourne, 2016). He calls us to believe and act upon the promises of forgiveness, restoration, wisdom, strength, deliverance, and power (Lane & Tripp, 2008). Manning (2015) stated that nothing will really satisfy us, apart from fulfilling the original purpose of our lives: to be in a relationship with him, to see him more clearly and to follow him more closely. The assurance of God's unconditional love empowers us to be bold and to be who we really are with "unveiled faces" (Ortberg, 2003).

I was raised in a traditional Christian family that required me to attend church on Sundays, and live in a way that was morally good. However, Christianity is not about becoming a moral person (Eldredge, 2000). For 16 years, I tried so hard to be spiritual or genuine in my

actions (Ortberg, 2010) in order to be loved or accepted by God. I joined a bible study during my high school year, I fasted, I prayed, and I did a lot of activities to earn God's love. I did not understand that my salvation was not based on my own work. It is a gift of God and that I was saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8, ESV). On the day when God touched my heart, I accepted Him as my saviour. Since then on, He has transformed my life as I have learned to trust in Him (Goodman, 2007). I believe that I am his precious daughter (Isaiah 43:4, ESV). In my journey of following Him, He has shown me his faithfulness and has continued to love me, even in my brokenness. The feeling of being accepted and loved by the One who created me has enabled me to live transparently and without guilt (Ortberg, 2003). I was able to have a genuine relationship with God and I chose to be a nurse when I felt that God is calling me to serve Him through nursing. The relationship I have with God enables me to have a genuine relationship with my patients as well as with my co-workers or other health care professionals. Even though the relationship might not be as smooth as I was expected, but I was and am still able to forgive myself, as I accept God's forgiveness over my life.

After wandering around without any spiritual community for more than 10 years, I realised that a spiritual community is important for my spiritual growth. While being in the true self fosters relationships between God, others, and self (Haase, 2008), I have lived in my false self for so long with only me and God. Parker & Davis (2009) stated that spiritual community can promote vulnerable sharing, through mentoring and accountability partnership, thus supporting adaptive ego repair and development. Parker and Davis (2009) stated that church can nurture true self by allowing people to explore their spiritual gifts, talents, and calling. For the past 3 years I have been committed to a church community, where I have been discipled by some people at church. They became my mentors, my spiritual leaders or even my accountability partner and they nurture and promote my true self. I was challenged to be vulnerable, honest, and open in sharing my day-to-day life as Christ's disciple. They have challenged and continue to challenge me to endure in my word ministry as well as my prayer ministry, and in that way become obedient to God. Not only challenged me to grow internally, but they also encourage me to apply all the things that I have learned so

that I can grow and bear fruit. They have showed me how to be vulnerable and their humility has taught me to live by example as they exemplify Christ. For me, they are the good enough people that God put in my life to repair my ego, that even when they fail, their lives continue to reflect a God who is steadfast in both good or bad times (Parker & Davis, 2009).

Being in a church that values spirit-led ministry, I was also taught how to abide in Christ through daily scriptural reading. Pennington (2000) acknowledged that being immersed in the Word of God helps to uncover the deception of the false self, that it cannot remain in control. Similarly, Boa (2001) and Parker & Davis (2009) asserted that scriptural passages encourage authentic living, thus transpire true self. Through the Word, I can have an in-depth knowledge of God and of self, resulting in a transformation of self – I become a new self, my true self (Benner, 2015; Haynes, 2016). Consequently, I have a clearer picture of who I am in God, which humbles me and leaves me with nothing but awe for Him (Pennington, 2000).

Pennington (2000) stated that when we find our true selves in God, we also find

everyone else in God. I believe that security in my identity in Christ shapes the way I respond to any life situation (Boa, 2001). One morning, during my shift as a nurse, I met with a new admitted patient who after a short introduction, told me that he felt that God was so angry at him because of the things he did in the past, and never thought that God can forgive him. Having experienced God's love and forgiveness over my life, I looked at his desperate eyes, and started to share what God has done for me, loving, and accepting my brokenness. I believe that unless I am secured in his love and forgiveness, I would not able to respond the way I did to my patient. My short conversation with him helped him to see God's love that by God's grace, it led him to accept God's love and forgiveness courageously. In this case, I believe God used me to heal my patient (Ortberg, 2003)

As years went by, one-day God called me to another job, which I meet with more people that I can ever imagine. Since I started my work as a faculty in one private school of nursing, God is giving me more opportunities to influence my students, to share what He has done in my life, and how I find my true self in Him and in

nursing. The passion that God is giving me now is to serve the young nurses, and I felt the conviction to go for further study majoring in Counselling, so that I will be equip in serving the young nurses. Kirwan (1984) asserted that a counsellor must show his or her true self, and become genuine with others. This statement amplifies my lesson on therapeutic communication skills which encourage nurses to use self as a mean of therapeutic relationship between nurse-patient. As a nurse educator in a Christian nursing school, I am required to care for my students, so I ought to have a self-awareness that enables me to be transparent and real in front of my students. In this way, as Rogers (1961) stated, I would be able to value my students, accepting them for who they are. It would also enable me to empathise with them as I see their struggles through their eyes. This condition allows me to accompany my students when they encountered difficult life situations and help them discover themselves, thus help them to grow.

For the past 8 years of working as an educator, I encountered students who were struggling to find their identity and asked me to counsel them. If Jesus had

not found me, it would have been hard to talk about identity issues and how it feels to be secure in Him. As those who are rooted in the true self are relational (Rogers, 1961; Haase, 2008), my meaningful life experiences that brought about my true self, have given me courage to relate with my students. Moreover, Edwards & Murdock (1994) claimed that disclosure of life experiences similar to that of the client, would enhance attractiveness. In this way, I thoughtfully disclose myself as I guide my students to go through their struggles. In the same way, as Hoskins & Leseho (1996) said that professional counsellors need to clarify their positions when giving counsel, the way I perceive myself as someone whose identity was broken yet precious in God's sight as well as the understanding of being clearly secure in Christ, gave me confidence to be with them in their journey finding their true identity.

Nevertheless, Parker and Davis (2009) asserted that in order for true self to become known, there is a need to have a relational space that is safe, responsive and consistent. While I want to support students in finding their true self, in order for them to become genuine and loving

health care providers, this kind of environment is somewhat challenging in the context of my work place. The educational system that I am part of does not really facilitate students to share openly, as students are bound with a scholarship program that compels them to obey the rules and to behave well. However, as I have been on that journey of finding my true self, I can continue to be the “good-enough” person that supports adaptive ego repair and development for my students. Just as Rogers (1961) asserted that a relationship which accepts other people for who they are, along with empathetic understanding of his or her life that is seen through his or her life, will help other people to grow, in the same way I believe that when I achieve these conditions, I can guide my students to find their true self, which is the aim of Christian counselling (Kirwan, 1984).

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CONCLUSION

God created us in his own image, thus we ought to live according to the image that He has created us to be. Our true self can only be found through the relationship that we have in Him. Through different life events and by His grace alone, I can find my true self, and the journey of finding who I truly am, involved courage and a decision to take a step of faith to fully trust his plan in my life. When Christ found me, I find my true self that enables me to boldly approach God’s throne, to feel blameless and to be secure in his arms.

Living in my true self empowers me to help other people that I minister to, being a “good enough” person for my students, hopeful that through the relationship that I have with them, they can see my life as a reflection of God’s steadfast love thus glorifying Him.

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