

Who Am I—Now?

In Order to Know

What Am I to Do—Next?

*“So take a new grip with your tired hands,
stand firm on your shaky legs,
and mark out a straight, smooth path for your feet
so that those who follow you, though weak and lame,
will not fall and hurt themselves,
but become strong.”*

(Hebrews 12:12; Living Bible)

Making Plans For the Next Chapter of Life

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“Will the real Marvin Martin please stand up?”

It was a sobering question and it shocked me. It came in my mid-forties shortly after I had made an eternity changing decision.

For years I had attempted to play out the role of what I should be to satisfy myself and the different people in my life. Gradually I had become a compartmentalized, fractured person. I wanted to be what God had intended but I also wanted to be accepted and respected in the world around me. Deep down I knew that the person I was trying to build was not adequate, nor complete

Finally, in true labor lawyer style, I negotiated a settlement with Him. I couldn't bring myself to surrender my will in one step, but I agreed in the early summer of 1969 that I would surrender on August 10, 1969, my 44th birthday. As each day passed, it seemed a part of the countdown to my own execution, which it was. As a friend explained later, “Don't you see; you have to die (to yourself) before you can be born again!”

My birthday finally arrived. Following a celebration with my family, and without advising anyone of my intentions, I walked up the stairway, down the hallway, into our bedroom. There I knelt alone and confessed something like this:

*“Lord, I commit all of myself to you that I am able;
and I accept Jesus as your divine Son.”*

Without realizing it, I had been born again spiritually on the anniversary of the day I was born physically. My physical and spiritual birthdays were the same—but 44 years apart! For me

there were no flashing lights or emotional outbursts at that time. But that birthday did mark the death of my old life and the beginning of a new life in Christ.

Many things have happened since that time. Some of them have been pleasant and some have been unpleasant. I know now that when I surrendered my will to God to direct and control, I had to expect some changes to happen both to myself and to those around me. Sometimes those changes were painful. Yet, they were like a surgeon's scalpel, which hurt temporarily to correct a problem, but that ultimately allowed me to live.

But now it was a short time later and a person very dear to me was asking "*Will the real Marvin Martin please stand up!*" Now I had to ask, and try and answer, "Who am I—Now?"

That same question has followed me for the past forty six years. And with it has been the companion question, "What am I to do—Next?"

As the years have gone by, I have become increasingly convinced that we often reverse the order. We start by asking ourselves "What am I to *do* in life?" when the more important and underlying question is, "*Who* am I?" "What I am to do" will flow naturally from "Who I am." I can't stop it. As the apostle Paul said, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16b).

We all have inward purposes waiting to become activated. God has a plan for each of us and He has made us exactly right to carry out His purpose for each of our lives. When we don't know who we *are*, we often try to *do* what He has gifted and charged others to do. When that happens, we never look or feel completely at ease. Or totally productive. We know it, and so do others.

When we discover who we really are, we perform well, we are at ease, we are attractive, and we are fulfilled.

Charles Swindoll places the issues in proper order, in his excellent book, *“Saying It Well”* as he urges his readers to *“Know who you are; Accept who you are; Be who you are.”*

There are many ways we could, and often do, try to learn who we are. The following is just a brief look at some of these avenues, but I hope it is helpful. Keep in mind this is merely from my experiences and observations. We all err, so hold on to what is good (of God), and discard the rest.

According to Whom?

We are really a collage of different people, according to whom we ask. It begins before we are born with a name given us by our parents, which speaks of their memories or hopes or dreams for us.

Later, we give our own version, perhaps through a resume’ when we apply for admittance to a school or a job. And sometime during our lives (often when we grow older and want to pass on our memoirs to those who are following) we may write an autobiography giving others our personal version. As one very practical man put it, “If you want to look good in history, write it!”

As life unfolds we may even be the subject of a biography which will be based on a writer’s view of who we are. If there were multiple biographies, there would be multiple versions, each somewhat different, but read together they may have significant validity.

And after we die, we are usually the subject of a eulogy or obituary which, hopefully, tells what we hope they will remember well of us.

But the question remains, “Who am I?” in reality, and even more pertinent, “Who am I—Now?”

Aptitudes and Abilities

We can begin to answer at least a part of “Who Am I?” by identifying the mental and physical aptitudes and abilities God has given us to hone and use. Sometimes these become clearer through psychological, aptitude or I.Q. tests.

Many years ago when I was an Aviation Cadets, they tested us to determine whether we should be a Pilot, Navigator or Bombardier. My highest score was as a Navigator, who thinks and plans. My lowest passing score was as a Pilot, who is more interested in action and reaching the objective. I wanted to be a Pilot since that was the glory seat. They said, “You are a Navigator.” I thought they were wrong.

But as the years rolled by, I came to the realization they were right. I learned I could fly an airplane, but I will never be a Pilot. Instead I have been a Navigator all my life, and functioned as a Navigator does, by determining where we are, where we want to go, and how we get there.

This all showed me that others often know us (at least in part) better than we know ourselves.

Relationships

When we are “born again” into God’s Family and become citizens of His Kingdom, we receive a myriad of relationships that help define “Who I am” at different times of life. These relationships change as we occupy different roles during our journey. Life works well when we accept “Who I am” at each stage and in each role, but it can become very difficult when we fail to do so.

It has helped me to begin with the broad relationship all believers have with Him and with others. It is repeatedly voiced throughout the Scriptures and might be briefly summarized as, “Love God,

and love others.” However, we occupy many different roles as we make our journey, so I am grateful He also provides more detailed instructions many places in the Bible.

The Book of Ephesians has been one of my favorites. First, it speaks of the way I am to love Him as His Child. Then He gives me directions when “Who I am” is a Brother or Sister in Christ; a Husband or Wife; a Parent or Child; an Employer or Employee. In the final chapter He spells out my role as a Warrior as I fight against Satan in the Spiritual War that goes on until Jesus comes again.

It humbles me to see the ever changing faces of “Who I am”, and makes me eternally grateful that God is in charge!

Spiritual Gifts

As members of God’s Family and citizens of His Kingdom, we also receive gifts from the Holy Spirit to enable us to function as members of the Body of Christ. Once we see where we and others fit, it completely changes our lives. An exciting new world of opportunities and responsibilities opens up as experience and various tests reveal whether we are primarily gifted in words or works, or as givers, or servers, or a host of other unique ways God endows us as we surrender our lives to Jesus and become members of His Family and citizens of His Kingdom.

As we begin to see who we are, it also opens our eyes to the identities of those around us. Including our own spouse! Traits which formerly irritated or frustrated us now become exciting opportunities to experience life through their eyes. We find they weren’t wrong, but simply seeing life in other ways.

When that happens we begin to *Complete—Not Compete* with each other, as we discussed in Volume III entitled, *Marriage*, in the *From Grandpa With Love* series of books.

Actions, Attitudes and Companions

What we do and *how* we do it, as well as with *whom* we do it, also form a part of “Who I am.” Unlike the *Givens* in our life, such as ancestry, age, and place of birth, we do have much control over our actions, attitudes and companions. I make the decisions whether I do good or evil and whether I am contented or angry.

And, I largely decide with whom I will keep company. Much of the Bible relates to these issues. It admonishes us not to be yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). It also warns us “Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

The harsh truth is, we usually become like those around us, or they become like us, or we probably will part company. We may need to be with others as we help them move closer to God’s Kingdom, but we have to be careful some don’t end up corrupting us! It reminds me of a story Charles Coulson related to a group of us one evening about a man preaching at the gate of Sodom and Gomorrah. When a bystander admonished him the people would not change, he responded, “Oh! I’m not trying to change them—I’m trying to keep them from changing me!”

God’s Word gives us outward codes of conduct that Jesus completes in the hearts and actions of those who surrender their individual wills to Him. When we ask Him to live in and through us, we begin to act right, and we do it with the right attitude. As the Apostle Paul says, “...I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

Unfortunately, many of us who call ourselves Christians or followers of Jesus (including me) look back and see we gave Him only half (or less) of our life. Ultimately, we find that we are changed into the person we could be (and probably want to be) only to the degree we give up our old nature and bring Him into our lives.

Institutions and Credentials

It is common to identify ourselves by institutions that represent our family, faith, nationality, or work. I suggest we be careful to be our own person and not be falsely proud or ashamed of these institutions nor confuse their persona with our own.

At times we are also tempted to confuse our titles and type of work with who we really are. When that happens we may simply brandish *credentials* granted by Universities or other institutions to define us and assure others who we are. Many years ago an older mentor showed me a newspaper clipping to make the point. I have forgotten the names and titles, but the article went something like this: “Jay Thrakenberry, PhD, M.D., J.D., D.Min., will speak tonight. His subject is Humility!”

We live in a world where credentials are often necessary to open doors and allow us best to do the work God has called us to do. However, I have found it is not wise to allow them to define us. As one man put it, “If who I am is what I do, then when I don’t, I’m not!” These marks of achievement are terribly important for some of us (including me) at times in our lives. But as I grew older, the description I enjoyed the most was from one client who told me candidly, “You always were more of a person than a lawyer!”

Time

One final issue we need to consider as we seek to know *who we are—now* and *what we are to do—next*, is *Time*. Recently I showed some of our great grandchildren a 70 year old World War II picture of our flight crew and asked if they could pick me out in the picture. I looked like *me to me*, but not to them. And they were right. The present *me*, sure didn’t resemble any of the youthful guys in the photo. And I wasn’t the same, because we all change continually throughout life.

A friend of mine often quotes an old proverb reminding us, “We never cross the same river twice. The river has changed, and so have we.” Both our lives and our environment change as we proceed through life. Second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, week by week, month by month, year by year and finally generation by generation, we are inexorably changing: emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Or, as the Bible might phrase it: heart, mind, body and spirit.

It has become increasingly apparent and important to me, to realize one of the largest factors in determining “Who am I?” is to be aware of the chapters in life we discussed at length in Volume I of the *From Grandpa With Love* series, entitled “*Four Generations: A Journey Through Life.*”

In Generation I, roughly Age 0-25, I am a *Child*. These are the *Learning* years during which we seek our own *Identity*, and ask, “*Who do I say I am?*”

Generation II runs from about Age 25 to 50. These are the *Action* years. During these years we often seek *Success* and look around and ask, “*Who do Others say I am?*”

As we reach Generation III, Age 50-75 we enter the *Grandparent* stage: some of us literally, and all of us, figuratively. Now many of us will seek *Significance*, and ask, “*Who will History say I was?*”

Finally, Generation IV Age 75-Onward brings us to the *Great Grandparent* stage of life. As we prepare to leave this earth we realize we have become invisible to much of the world, and we are not the focal point of life or history. It is good simply to seek *Selflessness* and trust God because “*He knows who I truly am!*”

Conclusion

I hope our discussion has been helpful to you and given you some tools as you seek to know *who you are—now; and what you are to do—next*. It has certainly been good for me.

Let me close with one final observation:

It is not only important for each of us to know who we are but also to let the real *me* be visible to *you*. Authenticity is essential if we are to be what God made us to be—and do.

Too often we try to paint the picture of the person we would like others to see. But, we look phony when we are phony. No matter how hard we try to make ourselves into something we aren't, it never feels right to us and it never feels right to others. No amount of makeup or gloss can change what is really inside us. We are what we are and it shows. Not always visibly, but the vibrations can clearly be felt.

Hypocrisy is the hall-mark of make believe. It deceives and leaves empty promises. By contrast, reality, with all its warts and seeming imperfections has a strange kind of beauty. It allows us to do what God had planned for us to do, and that, too, is beautiful! We are never more attractive than when we do what we were born to do, whether it is, singing a song, running a race, giving a speech, painting a sunset, building a home or a business, researching a critical problem or caring for a child.

I have spent many years since I surrendered my life to Jesus, trying to be His witness. Not as an expert, but simply telling my story. I would prefer not to use myself in these writings, but that's what a witness does.

In telling you my story, I begin to see the *real* me in a whole new way. Writing it down is a mirror that requires me to take a deeper

look at the *real* me. And as we see reality, it becomes exciting to let go of one more piece of our old nature and exchange it for His.

When we are younger we sometimes believe we will get it all figured out and we can stop searching because we will know just “Who I am”, and “What I am to do”, when we are older.

Don’t you believe it! I *am* old! And I began placing the foregoing questions and my answers on paper, to answer once more the question I posed at the beginning of our time together: “*Will the real Marvin Martin please stand up?*” In other words, “*Who am I—Now?*” and “*What am I to Do—Next?*” in the decade of my 90’s?

I know now, only God knows *the real Marvin Martin*, as well as the *real you and every other person who inhabits this world!*

And that is O.K. My job is just to keep asking and following His directions until I am Home with Him and all the saints. Then, I can follow the pattern of an old friend of mine who used to say his first words in Heaven were going to be:

“Oh! Now I see!”

I pray He will do the same for you as you search, and ask, and pray for His help and guidance. And I thank Him that He will!

***May God Bless You Richly
As You Walk On Through Life and Into Eternity
With Him!***

From Grandpa With Love

A Ten Point Check List

(If you want it)

1. Become a child of God and citizen of His Kingdom by submitting totally to Him and accepting Jesus as His Son.
2. Ask some I trust to tell me “*Who I Am*”, as they view me.
3. Review the “Strengths Finder” list on the Internet, and consider taking their test and/or other good professional tests.
4. Write down “*Who I Am*” in relation to my parents, siblings, spouse, descendants and other relatives.
5. Study Spiritual Gifts in Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12 and I Peter 4; take some Spiritual Gifts tests; and then describe the Spiritual Gift(s) God has given me.
6. Compare my Actions, Attitude and Companions with the Bible, particularly the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.
7. List my credentials from Educational and other Institutions and write down how much they define me.
8. Study my Chapter of Life (0-25; 25-50; 50-75; 75-Onward) in the attached Summary (from *Four Generations: A Journey Through Life*)—and other chapters, if helpful.
9. Write down my answers to the following questions:
 - What do I **want** to do?
 - What bears **fruit** when I do it?
 - What do others **repeatedly** ask me to do?
 - What “**bugs**” me that is not getting done?
10. Write a short paragraph describing “*Who I Am—Now*” and “*What I Am Going to Do—Next*”.