

Know Who You Are
Romans 8:1-17
July 12, 2020

A teacher in New York decided to honor each of her seniors in high school by telling them the difference they each made. She called each student to the front of the class, one at a time. First, she told each of them how they had made a difference to her and the class.

Then, she presented each of them with a blue ribbon imprinted with gold letters, which read, “Who I Am Makes a Difference.” Afterwards, the teacher decided to do a class project to see what kind of impact recognition would have on a community. She gave each of the students three more ribbons and instructed them to go out and spread this acknowledgment ceremony. Then, they were to follow up on the results, see who honored whom, and report back to the class in about a week.

One of the boys in the class went to a junior executive in a nearby company and honored him for helping him with his career planning. He gave him a blue ribbon and put it on his shirt. Then, he gave him two extra ribbons and said, “We’re doing a class project on recognition, and we’d like you to go out find somebody to honor, give them a blue ribbon, then give them the extra blue ribbon so that they can acknowledge a third person to keep this acknowledgment ceremony going. Then, please report back to me and tell me what happened.”

Later that day, the junior executive went in to see his boss, who had been noted, by the way, as being kind of a grouchy fellow. He sat his boss down, and he told him that he deeply admired him for being a creative genius. The boss seemed very surprised. The junior executive asked him if he would accept the gift of the blue ribbon and give him permission to put it on him. His surprised boss said, “Well, sure.” The junior executive took the blue ribbon and placed it right on his boss's jacket above his heart.

As he gave him the last extra ribbon, he said, “Would you do me a favor? Would you take this extra ribbon and pass it on by honoring somebody else? The young boy who first gave me the ribbons is doing a project in school, and we want to keep this recognition ceremony going and find out how it affects people.”

That night, the boss came home to his 14-year-old son and sat him down. He said, “The most incredible thing happened to me today. I was in my office, and one of the junior executives came in and told me he admired me and gave me a

blue ribbon for being a creative genius. Can you imagine? He thinks I'm a creative genius. Then, he put this blue ribbon that says: 'Who I Am Makes a Difference' on my jacket above my heart. He gave me an extra ribbon and asked me to find somebody else to honor. As I was driving home tonight, I started thinking about whom I would honor with this ribbon, and I thought about you.

"I want to honor you. My days are really hectic, and when I come home, I don't pay a lot of attention to you. Sometimes, I scream at you for not getting good grades in school and for your bedroom being a mess, but somehow tonight, I just wanted to sit here and, well, just let you know that you do make a difference to me. Besides your mother, you are the most important person in my life. You're a great kid, and I love you!"

The startled boy started to sob and sob, and he couldn't stop crying. His whole body shook. He looked up at his father and said through his tears, "Dad, earlier tonight I sat in my room and wrote a letter to you and Mom explaining why I had killed myself and asking you to forgive me. I was going to commit suicide tonight after you were asleep. I just didn't think that you cared for me at all. The letter is upstairs but now, I don't need it anymore."

His father walked upstairs and found the letter. It was a heartfelt letter full of anguish and pain. The envelope was addressed, "Mom and Dad."

The boss went back to work next day, a completely changed man. He was no longer a nitpicker. He made sure to let all his employees know that they made a difference. The atmosphere of the company changed completely. The junior executive helped several other young people with career planning and never forgot to let them know that they made a difference in his life. And one of them was the boss's son.

Through this project the entire class learned a very valuable lesson. Who you are DOES make a difference!¹

So, do you know who you are? You are a child of God. Or at least God wants you to be his child.

When you realize that you are a child of God, when you comprehend that, when you internalize that, you become courageous. You become patient. You become an honorable person.

¹ <https://www.varietyreading.com/inspirational-stories/whoyouare.php>

You may know who George Washington Carver (1860-1943) was. He was an outstanding scientist and an inventor. Carver was best known for his work with peanuts.

In January 1921, Carver was brought to Washington, D.C., to describe his work to the Congressional Ways and Means Committee. When he got there, though, some of the congressmen look down on him because of his skin color.

In 1921, attitudes toward the people of color were not very positive and the people openly showed their prejudice and racism against them. It was so obviously disrespectful that George Washington Carver almost turned around and went back home. But Dr. Carver had something that many people today don't have. He had a deep faith in God. As he wrote in his autobiography, "Whatever they said of me, I knew that I was a child of God, and so I said to myself inwardly, 'Almighty God, let me carry out your will.'"

When Carver finally got a chance to speak, he got to the podium and was told that he had twenty minutes to speak. Carver opened up his display case and began to explain his project. His presentation was so engaging that twenty minutes went by quickly. The chairman rose and asked for an extension so Mr. Carver could continue with his presentation. He received not just one extension but four of those extensions. He ended up speaking for an hour and forty-five minutes. At the end of his talk, they all stood up and gave him a long standing-ovation. All because he knew who he was and because he refused to be defined and identified by the labels of society of his time.²

George Washington Carver knew who he was. He was a child of God. It is a powerful thing when a person discovers that he or she is a child of God.

I wish the majority of young people have such identity regardless of their race. Especially the ones who feel that they are the victims of circumstances, and the victims of injustice. I wish they would see themselves as the children of God. I am not saying our society does not need to work on racial relations, or continue to improve on how we do things. We need to do that. Our society also needs to work on our own family relations and our own family responsibilities. Fatherlessness is one of the major problems we face in our society today. We need to work on that. We need to work on taking responsibility seriously.

² William J. Bausch, *More Telling Stories Compelling Stories* (Mystic, CT: Twenty third Publications, 1993), pp. 58-59.

However, what I hope and pray for our young people today is that they have the self-respect that George Washington Carver had. I wish all our young people to belong to the Lord. I wish they would have their identity as the children of God. In order to have that identity, they need to have a relationship with the Lord. They need faith in Christ. They need to walk with the Lord. It is not just the black people who need such identity but we all do, regardless of our racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; regardless of our age.

Some say “Black Lives Matter.” Of course, they do. Not only their lives matter, but all human lives matter. Likewise, all our lives matter, every one of us.

But, do you know what is more important? Our lives matter not just because we are human beings. That is important enough, no doubt but there is more. Our lives matter because we belong to God. To whom we belong determines the true value of our lives. Paul, in Romans 8, declares, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

We need to realize that our lives matter not just because we are a human being, but also because we belong to God.

Watchman Nee (1903-1972) was a great Chinese Christian teacher. He led countless amounts of people to Christ. He also started many churches in China.

Nee once told about a new convert who came to him and shared his own struggle. He said, “Brother Nee, no matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I find myself unfaithful to my Lord. I am sinful and I still do things that I am not proud of. I think I’m losing my salvation.”

Nee pointed to the family dog which was sitting nearby and said, “Do you see this dog? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby boy. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes and he is a total mess but who is going to inherit all that I have? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are God’s heir because it is for you that Christ died.”³ Your life may be a

³ Bruce Larson, *The Communicator’s Commentary (Luke)* (Waco: Word, Inc. 1983), p. 127.

mess, you may be unfaithful at times, but you are a child of God. You belong to him.

I am convinced that the biggest problem in many peoples' lives today is that they do not know who they are. Their true identity is a mystery to them.

Have you watched the Disney movie, *Toy Story*? Two of the characters are Woody, a toy cowboy and Buzz Lightyear, a "space ranger" action figure. Early in the movie, Woody confronts Buzz Lightyear with the fact that he is not really a space hero. Woody shouts, "You're not a space ranger! You're an action figure, a child's plaything."

After failing in an attempt to fly, Buzz realizes the truth of Woody's statement. Grief-stricken and disillusioned, Buzz hangs his head low in resignation, declaring, "I'm just a stupid, little, insignificant toy."

Later in the movie, Woody realizes what he had done. He demoralized his friend. So, he tries to undo the damage he has done. He tries to comfort Buzz by reminding him that the boy, who owns them, loves them. He says to disheartened Buzz, "You are not thinking clearly. Look, over in that house, there's a kid who thinks you're the greatest, and it's not because you're a space ranger; it's because you're his."

As Buzz lifts his foot, he sees a label affixed to the bottom of his little shoe. There in black permanent ink is the name of the little boy to whom he belongs. Seeing the image of his owner, Buzz breaks into a smile and takes on a new determination and confidence. He knows the little boy who owns him treasures him deeply.⁴

That is what we need. That is what everyone needs, including the people who think they are the victims of circumstances and the victims of injustice. As we leave this place today, let us remember that we belong to God. And because you belong to God, your life truly matters.

⁴ Craig Brian Larson and Andrew Zahn, *Movie-Based Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).