

DISCOVERING THE PERSONAL NAME GOD HAS GIVEN YOU AND THE CALL/MISSION THAT GOES WITH IT

One of the great passages in the Bible is found in The Book of Revelation, chapter 2:17. It reads as follows: “To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna; I shall also give him a white stone upon which is inscribed a new name, which no one knows except the one who receives it.”

There is nothing that brings unity and integration to our person, a sense of ultimate meaning to our life, more than knowing who we are and the way in which we are unique. Many people receive this beautiful gift through being loved over the years by another human being, especially when this love grows to be more and more unconditional. Love of this kind is so powerful that it opens us to a previously unimagined fullness, to a great sense of purpose and a deep sense of the mystery of who we are (of our God-given name.) Such love reflects the very nature and beauty of God’s love. It makes the love God has for us so much more believable and real. It also impresses on us how real God is and how present God is in and around us.

This great blessing can also come to us directly from God, for instance, while we are pondering a passage in the Bible. God can speak directly to us through very touching words of love and care while telling us who we are, how unique and very special we are to Him, created and redeemed for a purpose that makes our life and person unique to Him. Examples of such biblical passages that numerous people have heard God say such transforming “words” to them are: Psalm 139:1-18; Isaiah 43:4a; Deuteronomy 7:7-8; John 3:16; II Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 2:20b; Revelation 3:20.

This, then, is the first level of coming to know and understand our personal, God-given name, the meaning of our life. We are opened up to great depth, our own depth and God’s depths as well. Knowing this unique name helps us mature, simplifies our wants and desires, and energizes us to do what we do with greater awareness and selflessness, with greater love and self-donation (like Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus who sat at the feet of Jesus, “choosing the One Thing necessary” (Luke 10:38-42). Knowing our God-given name brings us to our center, our deepest center, where we live in union with the Spirit of God and reflect to others who we are and who God is.

Here are examples of the name God has given to some: (Note that they are always rather general; but to the individual who carries the name it is unique and bring great meaning and joy to him or her.)

“I am with you.”

“Unconditional Acceptance”

“Here I am, Lord.”

“Patient Love”

“Remain in my Love”

“My Jesus, my one Love”

“Abba” (Jesus’ vocational name) Self Surrender, Self-Gift

Such names give a person his or her special mission or purpose in life. Their God-given name specifies what they are to proclaim to the world, that aspect of God to which their life witnesses.

It is worth noting that finding what our name is and its meaning is both psychologically helpful and spiritually convincing: psychological in that it satisfies our need for coming to terms with personality limitations, hurts and wounds of the past, challenges with my own self and with other people. What have been problems in my personal history need to be integrated into my overall life and “make sense”. Doing this does not remove them from my history but helps me to see them in the context of a meaning that bring acceptance, acceptance of the problem or chapter from my past as well as deeper self-acceptance. But since spirituality is the deepest dimension of psychology (the two must never be separated) there is an even deeper meaning to be discovered, and with respect to this topic of our God-given name and meaning of life, it opens us to the unique meaning of our life and all the strengths and weaknesses that are part of it.

There is an even further level for us to explore regarding this topic. We can call it the theological level, since it looks at this God-given name through the lens of Jesus Christ.

The person of Jesus is so rich in God’s life that He encompasses in Himself all calls. Every human being and every call is reflected in Him. There is, then, a facet of His person that is mine and not yours. There is a facet of His person that is yours and not mine. And so too for every human being . . . each of us is a unique reflection/facet of His divine splendor. This deepest reality of our person is established when we are baptized, and activated especially when we experience deep love for our own person . . . whether through a very special friend or in marriage or . . . directly in prayer or at some other moment when God’s affirmation pierces to the center of our being, as it did for Jesus when He was baptized at the Jordan river by John the Baptist. Jesus heard the Father say to Him: “You are my beloved. In you I find my delight, my good pleasure.” (See Matthew 3:13-17) For us to experience being so loved and treasured will bring forth that facet of Jesus’ splendor which in us is unique. God’s name for us and our call that comes with it will then become clear. This is what delights God—to see the face of His Son reflected in our own person and for us to awaken to and rejoice in who we are.

So what facet of Jesus do we show? It is not some generic Jesus. No, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:29: “God’s plan is that we should be shaped and moulded to the image of His Son.” But this does not mean we are clones, boring copies of some mould. Rather, we are individualized images of Christ, reflecting uniquely in our own way an aspect or facet of Him who is the fullness of God. As Ephesians, chapter 4:13 says, we are to come to a certain perfection, growing to the perfect stature of Jesus, the Christ.

Each of us, then, is a unique expression of Jesus. Our life is meant to **BE** Jesus, in our own way. This is who each of us is and where we will find the meaning of our life. Each of us has a unique, unrepeatable way of living this exhilarating truth. To discover this is to find our deepest peace and joy. God has given no meaning to the universe except in His Son Jesus, the Christ. All that happens in the world finds its meaning in relation to the one great unfolding of the

Christ, a becoming of this one Christ which all who believe and hope in constitute with Jesus. Jesus is the first born of this new creation, which we all are being taken into and becoming part of. My own ultimate meaning is found in this cosmic, Christic reality, and I am to bring to it my unique self and expression of this all encompassing reality: Jesus Christ.

So what we have been talking about—the name God gives to me and my call/mission to reflect Jesus—is deeper than my ecclesial or hierarchical vocation (priest, woman religious, married person, single person). It is the foundation of my life and helps me keep psychological and spiritual balance, to be faithful to commitments when any crisis or dark night with loneliness and temptations fall upon me. I can be put at just about any level of doing and find God's meaning and purpose there.

WAYS OF DISCOVERING YOUR OWN GOD-GIVEN NAME AND WITH IT YOUR CALL/MISSION

First, pray and ask God to reveal to you your name and calling contained in it.

Then, look over all of these methods and use the ones you find most helpful.

1. Identify what appeals most to you in life; what almost spontaneously gives you consolation? (Note that if you come up with, e.g., three things, one often is more fundamental than the other two. This allows you to summarize or simplify your answer. Or, the three things are expressions of something more fundamental that you need yet to recognize.)
2. A second way: identify what are your favorite Scripture texts, the ones you go back to almost spontaneously. When you do not know what to pray on, what are the texts you go to immediately? Pare down multiple texts to the one text that for you is the most preferred.
3. A third way: When you have faced difficulties, hardships, trials, challenges, maybe crises, what motivation helped you get through the difficulties or crises? Identify whatever is the deep value that keeps you anchored. (The answer to this question is to have a very good sense of the direction of your call and, therefore, what is your God-given name. What will confirm its being right is your being able to trace it in your history and the inner dynamism or flow of your life. It is the core of your identity, yet it keeps growing and getting richer, deepening with the changing circumstances of your life.)
4. When you recall the times in your life when you have felt close to God, who is the Lord for you in those moments? When you are peacefully present to God, who is He for you?
5. What facet of Jesus' person or of Jesus' life holds your attention most frequently and accounts for the deepest meaning in your life?

6. Imagine that God walks in the door, comes right up to you, looks you squarely in the eye and calls you by one word or phrase. What is that word or phrase? What is this “word” that God knows you by, that is the entire sum of God’s knowledge of you and relation to you? It will be an intimate word or phrase. It will define your whole being and the meaning of your life.

7. Imagine the person who loves you and knows you better than anyone else in the world does the same thing (as in #6). This person is known to you for the constancy of their relation to you. Through thick and thin, this person has stuck by you. You know of their faithfulness, which has been often tested. When that person says the word by which he or she knows you, what is it? Is it the same word by which God knows you?

The growth in our humanity and our spirit depends upon the progressive discovery of this mystical name by which God knows us. It is the name written on the white stone, the name that only God knows. We have all heard that name during our lives, especially from those with whom we have been close and intimate. We are not truly ourselves or truly whole until we have heard that word from another human being or from God or both.

Deaf and full of preconceptions about ourselves, this word must be spoken repeatedly before we finally hear it. It penetrates only when we are absolutely convinced that it is being said by someone who knows us thoroughly. Only then does the word get through to the place where we define our self. Then we know something of the incredible gift God has given us, that we should know and be known, love and be loved by God and all who are in union with God.

God has given us His own name so that we will know Him as well. Jesus has revealed the name of God to be Abba, Father, a father whose paternity extends to all who believe in His Son. “To them I have revealed your name, and I will continue to reveal it so that your love for me may live in them.” (John 17:26) This statement is the ultimate comment on human and divine intimacy, on living in one another and revealing our names to one another.

--these notes were prepared by Bernie Owens, S.J., in June 2014

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