

Only You

Dear Beth,

We live in an era of church growth experts, pastor's conferences, consultants, teaching churches, resource Web sites, and pastoral ministry helps. New voices and role models arise each year, and ministry advice abounds. But just when you're ready to clone the preaching style of one mega church pastor and the leadership style of another, George Barna comes along with a research report that says both styles will be obsolete in five years. So what's a pastor to do?

Perhaps, the best advice I've ever heard is: *First, always remain a student of the scriptures, and second, always be a student of the culture.* But let me add one more area of focus—*always be a student of yourself!* In other words, you'll make the most impact with your congregation if you operate out of the unique composite of what God has woven together in your life. Let me pass on three thoughts along this line. I believe they can ease the pressure you may place upon yourself.

First, *recognize your uniqueness.* Look at any group of people and you will realize that you are *physically unique.* Even identical twins have their subtle differences. No one else has your fingerprints; no one else has your DNA. That should tell you something.

You are also *psychologically unique*. Millions of people may be extroverts, or creative, or reflective. Nevertheless, if you were to take the TJTA, CPI, 16PF, MMPI, or the Meyers-Briggs, no one would match your personality across those instruments. Again, Beth, that should tell you something.

And *experientially you are unique*. The family that you entered was a different family than the one your brother or sister entered. While many people have had similar experiences, you have had a series of experiences that have imprinted your interaction with life. Some of those were great; some difficult; and some painful. And Paul assured us that, no matter what the experience, God uses it in our lives (Romans 8:28). Again, that should tell you something.

If nobody else looks like you, no one else is psychologically wired like you, and no one else has had the same life experiences as you, I think it's safe to give up the pastoral cloning game and just be yourself.

So let me offer the following suggestions: First, *recognize your uniqueness*. Become a student of yourself. Benefit from a personality inventory such as *ProScan* by Professional DynaMetric Programs (PDP) to understand your basic natural self, your priority environment, and your outward self (how you come across to others). Also use an instrument like *Leadership Effectiveness & Adaptability Description* by the Center for Leadership Studies, Inc. to help you understand your primary leadership style, and know how you can adapt that style to fit particular situations. And work through a book like *Creating You & Company: Learn to Think Like the CEO of Your Own Career* to get a wholistic

picture of ministry/career direction and possibilities. Take advantage of the good resources out there to help you get a more complete picture of yourself.

Second, *respond to your giftedness*. God has blessed you with many gifts and abilities. Some of your colleagues are musical, others great with their hands, some are coordinated, and others funny. You have been given many natural abilities, you have acquired some skills, and God has endowed you with spiritual gifts. It matters little how or when a particular *talent* was added to your gift mix. The bottom line is that whatever we do, we're to do it *all for the glory of God* (1Corinthians 10:31). So look for ways to maximize not only the personality and background that God has provided, but also the many talents that He has woven into your life.

Professional headhunters tell us that if we can find a job that is at least sixty percent who we are, then we ought to jump at it. Yes, every job has some dimensions to it that we don't enjoy. But as you grow in your understanding of how God has endowed you, it will be easier for you to discern where to give your primary attention and where to delegate.

Third, *refuse comparison*. A woman came up to me after one of our services and said, *John, you know that I'm in this church because of your preaching, but you're not my favorite preacher . . . Charles Stanley is*. I responded, *Eleanor, that's okay. If God wanted me to be Charles Stanley, He would have had me born to Mama Stanley. Instead, He had me born to Mama Cionca. And that's just fine*.

When I hear the poor preaching of some pastors, I wish their congregations could have me instead. However, when I hear the preaching of communicators like Chuck Swindoll, I think, *My poor people*, and I want to mail back my ordination certificate! The comparison game can kill us.

Do you remember when Peter asked Jesus: *What about him, Lord?* (John 21:21) Jesus responded, *What's that to you, you follow me.* It really doesn't matter how many talents you have—ten? five? two?—but how faithful you are in utilizing what God has given to you. Yes, some pastors have comfortable salaries, while some receive meager support. Some preach to thousands, while some to just a handful. God is responsible for how he has gifted our colleagues. So let's just focus on He's wired and leads us.

So there you have it, Beth! What an incredible privilege we have—pastoring the flock of God. Just let the sovereign God who designed you and brought you this far, continue to work through your unique personhood. Enjoy the adventure, dear friend!

God's best!

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*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2:10