

## A case of “Mistaken Identity” ... or the issue of leaders’ inner security

(Part of these insights were originally developed by St Thomas Crookes leadership under Mike Breen in the early 90’s. Paddy Mallon being a prime originator. We have since significantly adapted and extended them)

In our papers on ‘Authority Structures for releasing Missional Church’ and on ‘Team Dynamics’, we identified the crucial role in both cases of... **inner security** of the leader.

### **Inner Security of the Overall Leader.**

Without this fundamental quality, both teams and church default to the unredeemed human tendency to CONTROL rather than RELEASE. And control does not deliver a missional movement of the sort initiated by Jesus. In our experience of working with many church leaders and in leadership teams, so often our leadership is hampered by an unhelpful level of inner insecurity.

Jesus throughout his recorded ministry in the Gospels can be seen to base his discipleship and his multiplication of discipleship teams on releasing principles, these are particularly illustrated by sequential patterns of Apprenticeships (e.g. Luke 5-8) and Coaching (e.g. Luke 9-10). Perhaps Jesus’ ultimate releasing model is expressed in the ‘great commission’ when after just three years of apprenticeship and coaching, he departs to heaven leaving an ongoing pattern of releasing and multiplying disciples...to reach all people groups on earth (Matt 28:18-20). We also illustrate how this was continued with our exploration of the missional teams described in the Acts account (paper....)

A releasing culture involves appointing and sending to new contexts and cultures which the leader themselves, may never reach. It imagines and hopes for others to go further than the leader ever could. And it is a pre-condition of enabling the ‘greater works’ that Jesus promised his disciples (John 14:12). Such releasing of others requires... in fact, is dependent upon... the one releasing being free from any competitive or comparative spirit... and of a deep inner security which liberates from experiencing any ‘threat’ from the capacity, competence or fruitfulness of others.

Where do we need to look to understand the source of such deep and profound Inner Security? Such security is spiritual and not natural!

To set the background for this ‘way of being’ I want to pose a question. It arises from a little expounded parable of Jesus recorded only in Luke 17:7-10. This story of a servant ends with the exhortation....

“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’”

The question we are posing here relates to our IDENTITY as Christians. And our experience leads us to believe that there is a widespread tendency of “mistaken identity”. Is our foundational identity, as these words of Jesus seem to suggest – “**unworthy Servants**”? Or as John in his prologue says... to all who believe...and receive Him...God gave the right to become “**Children of God**” (John 1:12)? And further, in John’s first epistle he asserts... “through the Fathers love, lavished upon us, we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

So, maybe the most important question we ever have to answer is... “are we Unworthy Servants or Beloved Children of God?”

It is our sense that many of us Christians have not resolved this apparent contradiction and live in a sort of schizophrenia of confused identity...switching according to context, or mood, or? And this is the source of our prevailing Inner Insecurity predisposing us to form Controlling Cultures.

To try to plumb the source of a true, unshakable and profound Inner Security, I find the following diagrams helpful. Helpful as it contrasts a natural and innate human way of operating with a spiritually transformed way. As should be expected, it is just one way of peering into the ‘unsearchable riches’ of the Gospel of Jesus.

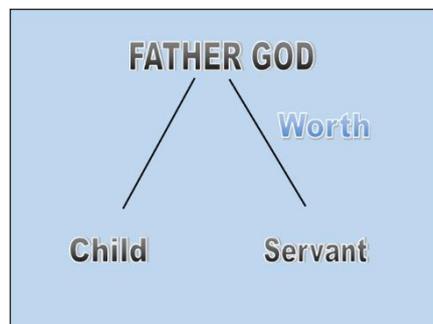


Figure 1

We start to build this diagram with two sides of a triangle and Father God at the top. And below either side of the triangle are the two apparent identities of Child of God and Servant. Now Jesus links in the parable in Luke 17, the words Servant and Unworthy. But the words of the master (as well as Hebrew thought patterns) make it quite clear that the meaning of ‘unworthy’ is not a negative label but an emphatic assertion that servanthood is NOT where your WORTH comes from... ‘you have only done your duty’.

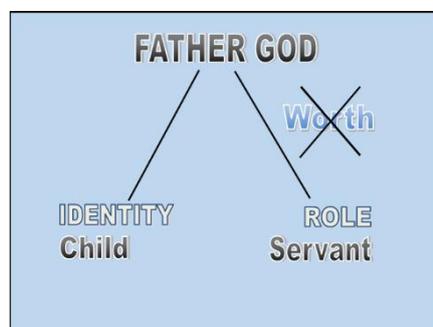


Figure 2

So in this next version of the diagram as we build it up, we have firmly crossed out ‘worth’ on the right. We have to resist our human tendency to gain our worth from our performance. And here we get to the heart of the matter, it’s the resolution of our confusion and our first step to Inner Security. Yes, titles of Child and Servant can in fact, BOTH be applied to us... BUT they relate to us in two quite different and completely distinct senses! For only Child of God is our IDENTITY. Servant is merely our ROLE. Freedom only comes from recognising and living in this crucial difference.

And of course, as we might expect, we can see exactly this dual principle in Jesus himself... into whom we are now incorporated. Philippians 2 explains that Jesus... “though in very nature (IDENTITY) God....humbled himself...taking on the ROLE of a servant.

This crucial passage shows us that servanthood is in fact the ‘Family Business’ to which we are all called. It’s not our identity as family members but it’s our shared calling.

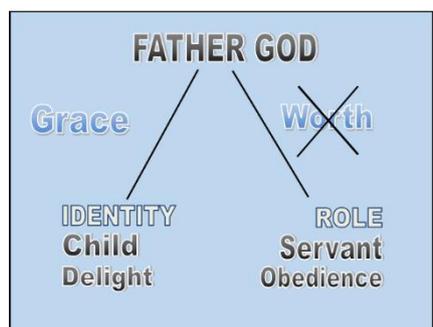


Figure 3

Our parable in Luke 17 further adds the important quality that is demonstrated by servants being that of OBEDIENCE. And again Philippians 2 clarifies that Jesus taking the ROLE of servant also demonstrated this quality .... “even obedience to death”.

Jesus’ relationship of Child to his heavenly FATHER also shows us the contrasting quality of childhood.... DELIGHT, as he hears his Father’s affirmation... “this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). We too should know this being delighted in.

And here is the second step to inner security. Our identity and status as daughters and sons... is sheer gift ...all of GRACE. And GRACE owes nothing to ourselves, hence it is inalienable. A fully secure position from which nothing can remove us. And from the inner security of this given identity we are intended to be set free from striving to obtain identity from any performance of our servant role. The arrow in the next diagram in Figure 4, indicating the spiritual principle – the ‘way of being’ when we operate out of a grace gifted identity... and lay down our lives in servanthood.

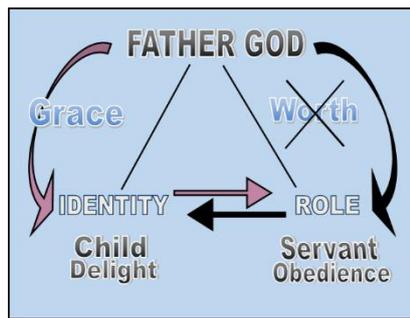


Figure 4

We take up this secure position by allowing God's Spirit to seal in us our identity as children. The direction of travel in our diagram represented by the red arrow from left to right. And recognising that humanity without the Spirit of God instinctively is trapped in navigating the opposite way. Seeking to gain a meaningful IDENTITY through our performance of our ROLE. Illustrated by the black arrow from right to left. Once this foundation of daughter/sonship is firmly established through "the riches of His GRACE", it releases for us an infinite source of worth, value and significance.

It should not surprise us that in everyone's favourite parable of Jesus, he absolutely 'nails' the heart of these gospel principles. We prefer the title that some give it, of the 'Prodigal Father'. In this well known and loved parable, both sons are described in a crystal-clear way as following the innate 'black arrow' path in our diagram, from right to left. The younger son in the far country isolated and destitute in the pig sty, yearns for a way back home. We hear his rehearsed line to his father "make me as a hired **servant**"! That was his instinctive discernment of his way home. But he's not alone, the narrative confirms that the elder brother's thinking is formed in exactly the same way. We see it in the reply of the older brother as the Father entreats him to come home... "all these years I've **slaved** for you and you never **gave** me anything!".

The only way both sons knew to find a place in the family was through fulfilling or performing a role as Servant. And the older brother's response further illustrates how hard we find it to let go of *earning* a place through serving and to receive it through grace... We see this when he incorrectly expresses his feeling that he had never received anything. The father had in fact already given by grace half of everything to each son!

And it's in fact in the detail of a key omission that Jesus leaves, which underlines the truths of these gospel principles. Many have suggested that the foundational step of Repentance of the youngster son happened in the pig sty. But it's been rightly pointed out that this prodigal's reverie in the pig sty of "I'd rather be better off... I'll arise and return" was in fact a rationalisation and not repentance at all. True repentance happened where it does best, when enfolded in his Father's loving embrace as he received the gift of grace. When, in Jesus' account of his actual words to his father, he crucially omitted his prepared line about servanthood as his way back home. Having accepted the offer of grace which we still await from the elder, the younger brother has taken the only journey to a secure place in the family, from left to right! Starting with his received identity as a child.

Postscripts:

As a first postscript, we would point to Jesus' proclamation in Matt 7: 13-14 in which he affirms that there are only two roads, two paths, two doorways. One leading to life and the other to death. Often we may think one is downhill of self-indulgence and the other uphill of self-denial. But Jesus' words do not say that. Rather we believe the consistent with his other teachings, they refer to the two pathways that we have explored here. The wide path/gate of natural human nature that always seeks identity through our performance... a pathway that never satisfies. The narrow path/gate in contrast, that human nature finds so hard... to accept identity as divine gift in creation and salvation.

Or again as Jesus says in Matthew 18:2-3 "...unless you change and become as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. What is so natural for babies and little children...to receive everything as GIFT Becomes for us adults the hardest thing in the world! Babes can do nothing for themselves... they contribute nothing to their worth or identity Yet we

count each baby as of infinity worth. It's done nothing. It's identity is a 'given'... nothing it has worked for!

We find it so hard to receive our identity as GIFT... we are so wired to work at it!

As a second postscript, we would comment on authors who add another confusion about our identity, saying that it is as 'ambassadors'. True the bible states "we are ambassadors of Christ" (2 Cor 5:20). But just as it says that we are servants; this is a ROLE not our IDENTITY. Ambassadorship is just a particular aspect of our servant role; a role of representing the ruler/kingdom, it is absolutely NOT our identity. And again, ambassadorship is not a sure source of security, it depends on our performance of the role. Only daughter/sonship establishes inner security. And only inner security in leaders enables a culture of release that sets others free!

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