

The Dark Side of Discovery

Distraction

It has been quite some time now since I (Mary) read C.S Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* for the first time. For those who have not read it, *The Screwtape Letters* is a collection of letters written from the perspective of an experienced demon to his younger, less experienced nephew in order to give him advice on effective strategies to tempt the demon's "patient". In my own recollection of this brilliantly chilling work, I do remember that it is this very strategy of distraction that Screwtape recommends Wormwood use on his "patient". To be sure of this, I dusted off my copy and began reading. My search went no farther than the first letter to confirm that my memory served me right. When the patient's mind began to stumble toward truth, Wormwood distracted his mind and set his attention on something our bodies take our minds to nearly every day: our next meal. It was something so subtle yet so effective in taking the patient's attention off a revelatory truth. The whole intent of Lewis' work here is meant to be a warning of what types of attacks the Christian must guard against. This very first one, along with many other strategies employed by the up-and-coming demon, Wormwood, would utilize distraction to steal the patient's focus away from God.

Since the beginning of time, man's self-destruction unfolds when their focus is taken off of God and is placed on themselves. In the garden, the serpent placed Eve's focus on the desires of her flesh, stealing it away from the command and promises of God. In the Old Testament, King David committed adultery and murder because he had allowed the focus of his eyes to wander from where they were supposed to be and onto a woman that was married to another man. On the night of Jesus's crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times because he allowed his attention to succumb to his own fear rather than Jesus's power. **When our focus is misplaced is when we are most likely to stumble into sin, struggle, and destruction.**

This is one of the dark sides of the discovery process that you must guard against. When introspection brings your focus on the self, it can serve as a strategy of the enemy to steal your attention away from God. Distraction seems to be a very popular tool of our adversary, the devil. You may be familiar with one of his infamous titles: the father of lies. His lies serve as a tool to distract us and steal our attention away from the truths and promises of God. The lies and distractions you may encounter along the introspective journey of discovery will be catered specifically to you based on your personality. For example, if you are a D personality you may tend to be so focused on accomplishing tasks and goals that your distraction comes by focusing on what others are not doing to help accomplish your tasks and goals. If you are an I personality you may become distracted by so much focus on how you are perceived that you aren't even aware of your weaknesses and character flaws. An S personality may be so distracted on pleasing others that they lose focus on pleasing the One (God) who really matters. The C personality may be so distracted on every detail being perfect that they lose their joy in what they are working on even if it is for Kingdom purposes. These lies and distractions are intended to dead end your attention inward and keep you from turning upward to God.

Your journey does not [must not] stop with the discovery of how your personality works and operates. You will find there are two types of people that resurface from the journey after failing to look upward after looking inward. For some, they will uncover their strengths, be able to ignore their weaknesses, and begin to rely on the abilities their personality tells them they possess. Others will leave feeling shackled by their weakness, only being able to focus on all that they are not. Both people's attention has been redirected from the Creator and refocused on the created. Their minds have become set on the flesh, and Paul warns us in Romans that the mind set on the flesh will only lead to death and destruction (Romans 8:6).

Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Your journey of discovery can be a lot like Peter stepping out of the boat when Jesus called him from the Sea of Galilee on which he was walking across (Matthew 14:22-33). Peter stepped out of the boat in faith to get closer to Jesus. Learning about how the Lord has intricately designed you ought to lead you closer to Him.

Awe of the design should point one to worship of the Designer.

Investigation of the creation should lead to the inquiry of the Creator.

Looking inward should point your eyes upward.

When Peter saw Jesus walking across the water, he was empowered to step out towards Him. When we look to Jesus, it should empower us to step out into the plans He has established for us. But our eyes must remain fixed on Him in order to be able to walk in the steps of the path He has established for us. If we lose sight of Him, we are sure to stumble. When Peter's eyes were focused on Jesus, his feet were stable because his focus was on the power of Jesus rather than his own fear or insufficiency. Peter was able to walk and not stumble not because of his own strength, but because his focus remained on Jesus. As soon as he took his attention off Jesus, he stumbled and found himself falling into the darkness of the waters around him. His attention fell from Jesus's sufficiency and onto his own insufficiency and fear.

A danger in learning about your own design is to learn so much that the knowledge of yourself crowds out the space in your mind that is intended to be occupied by the knowledge of the One that created you in the first place.

Selfishness and self-centeredness can be disguised in so many ways and often can take the form of arrogance (D personality), narcissism (I personality), insecurity (S personality) and self-pity (C personality). Different results, all of which take our minds and our eyes off the intention of their focus. This self-absorption not only takes our thoughts and concerns away from others, but it also distracts and more important it steals our attention from the God who deserves it all.

This is a warning that I myself, (Mary) must be aware of because of my personality (C personality) and even my passion, but most plainly because of my flesh, must guard against. Whether you are the D personality that has a tendency towards arrogance and self-confidence, the I personality that can be attention seeking and self-indulgent, the S personality that tends to be fearful and sensitive, or the C personality that is self-deprecating and thin-skinned, every personality can find themselves far too often looking inward rather than upward. It may transpire differently based on your specific personality, but the result is that your focus has been taken off the Creator and zoomed in on the creation.

This type of book, along with countless other resources would be just a tool of distraction if there was no place for introspection in life. To be frank, if in the process of self-reflection you neglected to look past yourself with real, honest, and deep introspection it would be a depressing matter. While we cannot say the same for everything written and spoken out there, this particular book is meant to take you one step further.

Looking at yourself requires you to look to your Creator. Looking to your Designer gives your design purpose. Looking to the Author of your story can help you understand why He wrote your personality the way He did.

If we are to not only uncover who we are, but understand why we are, we must look to Him who has the answer to both. Charles Spurgeon once said, “God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.” Use this process of discovering more about how He knitted you together to trace His hand. Remember that introspection is not a dead end. It is a starting point along the path that should point you to your Creator and His heart for you.

So What Value Are Assessments?

Shortly after Mary wrote this chapter of the dark side of distraction as it relates to personality, I asked her to share the chapter at a leadership training we were doing for a camp staff that was made up mostly of college students. I asked the **camp staff how many of them had ever taken a personality assessment. Every person in the room raised their hand.** I told them that most of them would take many more types of assessments as they desired to know more about themselves and pursued jobs beyond their college days.

Personality and spiritual gift assessments are useful and helpful provided they are used properly and in their proper place (no pun intended). Let’s look at some examples of how they are helpful when properly used.

- The Bible encourages us to know how God created us (Ephesians 2:10).
- The Bible tells us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10-11).
- Paul commands us to not be uninformed regarding our spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1).
- The Psalmist tells us we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

Personality and spiritual gifts assessments are useful in helping us examine ourselves, be informed regarding our spiritual gifts and see how God has wonderfully made us.

So, how are personality and spiritual gift assessments helpful and useful? They are helpful and useful when used to discover how God created you SO THAT you can BE and DO what God created you for in life and ministry.

Jesus says in Matthew 16:25,

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

You find your life as you give it away!

But how?

Assessments help us discover the how by knowing the way God has created us.

Paul says in Ephesians 2:10,

“For we are His workmanship, CREATED in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Now, let's summarize this chapter on The Dark Side of Discovery – Distraction.

Tools like personality and spiritual gift assessments can be a distraction and harmful when we worship the creation (us) and not the Creator (God)! They can be helpful when we use them to point us to the Creator and His purposes for our lives based on how He created us