

Making a Difference - The Power of Honesty

Job said, ***“I will maintain my honesty and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live. (Job 27:6)***

We often think of honesty in terms of not lying to others. But being honest before God; being honest with yourself, and with God (and others) concerning yourself, is far more important. Self-awareness is a very valuable asset when dealing with the ever-changing challenges confronting you. Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of all your strengths, weaknesses, emotions, physical needs, motives and motivations. People with strong self-awareness are neither overtly critical nor unrealistically optimistic. Rather, they are always honest and transparent about themselves.

When you have developed a high degree of self-awareness you will be able to recognise exactly how your feelings affect you and other people. Consequently, when decisions need to be made, they are made with the full understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. If you can keep your emotions in check, they will cease to hinder your progress. People who assess themselves honestly – that is, self-aware people – are well suited to making a real difference.

Psalm 77:6 *“...I call to remembrance my song; my heart meditates and my spirit searches diligently.”*

The psalmist was searching to become more self-aware - more honest before God. But how can we recognise self-awareness? First, it shows itself as an ability to assess oneself realistically. People with high self-awareness are able to speak openly and accurately about their emotions and the impact they are having on their lives. Self-aware people have a firm grasp of their capabilities and are less likely to set themselves up to fail. They also know, and have no problem with asking for help (and especially from God). Self-awareness is understanding your own limitations but at the same time acknowledging God's unlimited resources and power.

Self awareness extends also to your understanding of your values and deep beliefs. Someone who is highly self-aware knows where he is headed and why, so he will be able to avoid temptations that do not agree with his value system or beliefs. In other words, he walks the walk! On the other hand, a person who lacks self-awareness is apt to make decisions that bring on inner turmoil and confusion. The decisions and choices of self-aware people are fully integrated with their beliefs, and as a result, they find life more enjoyable.

Key Areas for Self-Awareness

We are all complex and quite diverse. So to become more self-aware, we should develop an understanding of ourselves in many key areas. Key areas for self-awareness include our beliefs (our faith), motives, personality traits, personal values, habits, emotions, and the psychological needs that drive our behaviours.

Personality. We don't normally change our personalities, values and needs based on what we learn about ourselves. But, an understanding of our personalities can help us find situations in which we will thrive, and help us avoid situations in which we will experience too much stress. For instance, if you are a highly introverted person, you are likely to experience more stress in a public or communal environment than a highly extroverted person would. So, if you are highly introverted, you should find situations and activities that are more compatible with your personality. Awareness of your personality helps you analyse such a decision.

Values and beliefs. It's important that we each know and focus on our personal values. Of course, these values should all be founded and grounded on God's word, because it's His word that we must measure ourselves against. However, we still need to learn to stay focused. For instance, if your first priority is "being there for your children" or "your relationship with God," it's very easy to lose sight of those priorities on a day-to-day, moment-by-moment basis. During any workday, so many problems and opportunities may arise, and our lists of "things to do" can easily exceed the time we have to do them. Since few (if any) of those things pertain to what we value most, it's easy to spend too much time on lower priority activities. When we focus on our core values, we are more likely to accomplish what we consider most important. And, find enjoyment in what we are doing.

Habits. Our habits are the behaviours that we repeat routinely and often automatically. Ultimately, we don't really decide our future, we decide our habits – and then our habits decide our future. Although we would like to possess the habits that help us interact effectively with others, we can probably all identify at least one of our habits that decreases our effectiveness. To many of us, the bad habit of not listening or talking across other people's opinions hinders meaningful interaction and must be dealt with. All bad habits will eventually destroy relationships.

Needs. Many scholars have identified a variety of psychological needs that drive our behaviours such as needs for power, esteem, affection, belongingness, achievement, self-actualisation and control. One of the advantages of knowing which needs exert the strongest influence on our own behaviours is the ability to understand how they affect our interpersonal relationships. For instance, most of us have probably known people who have a high need for status. They're attracted to high status occupations, and they seek high status positions within their organisations. Such people also want the things that symbolise and authenticate their status. Your personal needs, the desires of your heart, cause motivation; and when these needs aren't satisfied, they can cause frustration, conflict and stress. A sure and safe alternative is to allow God to identify and then satisfy your most important needs. You may know what you want, but He knows exactly what you need. So why not let Him put something in your heart – so that He may satisfy it!

Emotions. Understanding your own feelings, what activates them, and how they impact on your thoughts and actions is emotional self-awareness. If you were once excited about your job but are not excited now, can you get excited again? To answer that question, it helps to understand the internal processes associated with getting excited (in the first place). A person with high emotional self-awareness understands the internal process associated with emotional experiences and, therefore, has greater control over them. The best way to start is by looking on inside - at the world that triggers your emotions. The real you is the person on the inside. The person that has been created in the likeness of God. However, this world can be clouded and crowded with emotions. So once you've become familiar with this world and know how to control it, you gain ascendancy over all the negative feelings that cause you pain.

This emotional awareness is related to your emotional intelligence, and it is your emotional intelligence which gives you the ability to accurately identify your feelings. Emotional intelligence may also give you the ability to decide when it is in your best interest to be emotionally honest by sharing your deep feelings with others. But be careful, there are times however, when it is not healthy or safe for you to be emotionally honest.

How Self-Awareness Makes You More Effective

Self-awareness in three vital areas will make you far more effective and help you to make a difference:

(1) **Knowing your strengths and weaknesses.** Self-awareness helps you exploit your strengths and cope with your weaknesses. For instance, if you are someone who is good at “seeing the big picture” but not as good at focusing on the details, you might want to consult friends, colleagues or loved ones that are more detail-oriented before making major decisions. Co-operation between big-picture-oriented decision makers and detail-oriented decision makers can produce high quality decisions.

(2) **Stress.** Situations that don't suit your own personality tend to give you more stress than situations that are more compatible. This is not to say that you should never be in an environment that conflicts with your personality. However, be aware that you will need to work extra hard to develop the skills to enjoy that particular situation, and at the same time accept that there are circumstances which would be less stressful for you.

(3) **Motivation.** It's very difficult to cope with poor results when you don't understand what causes them. When you don't know what to change to improve your performance, you feel helpless. Self-awareness is empowering because it can reveal where the problems are and indicate what can be done to improve your performance. In addition, awareness of your spiritual, material or psychological needs can increase your motivation by helping you understand and seek out the rewards that you really desire. Things like; a sense of personal accomplishment or greater earning potential.

Self-awareness means knowing your values, motives, personality, needs, habits, emotions, strengths, weaknesses, etc. With a sense of who you are and a vision of the person you want to become, a plan for professional or personal development can be created. But it must all start with who you are IN CHRIST!

“Our lives improve only when we take chances - and the first and most difficult risk we can take is to be honest with ourselves.” (Walter Anderson - American Author)