

MONDAY MANNA

17 June 2019

BE THE BEST 'YOU' THAT YOU CAN BE

By Jim Mathis

At the monthly meeting last week of a local writers' group, one member said that when she was a pre-schooler, her mother subscribed to a children's book club. Those monthly books led her to a love of reading, a passion for books, and eventually a career as a writer. She believes that there really is life BEFORE death, in living it in such a way that God will hit His "Like" at the end of your life.

As a self-declared wordsmith, she said she loves the engaging, cleverly worded books by children's book author Dr. Seuss. In one of them he wrote, "Today you are you! That is truer than true! There is no one alive who is you-er than you!" That reminds me of one of my favourite Bob Dylan songs. In declaring his independence from the folk music scene called "Maggie's Farm," Dylan sang, "I try my best to be just like I am, but everybody wants me to be like them."

Do you sometimes find that even if you can succeed at being the best YOU there is, it seems everybody wants you to be somebody else, mainly like them? I recently heard somebody say that the two most important days of our lives are the day we were born – and the day we figure out why. Sadly, most of us spend so much time trying to be what everybody else wants us to be that we seldom figure out who we are – or why we are like that.

The Bible speaks to our uniqueness, the way God has designed each one of us: *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.... All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be"* (Psalm 139:13-16).

This suggests God has a special plan for everyone individually, not only our physical makeup but also the talents, interests, abilities and spiritual gifts He provides for each of His children. Living in an environment – at work as well as in our homes and communities – where people try to force us to fit their expectations, the Scriptures admonish us, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will"* (Romans 12:2).

He wants us to be and to become what He intended for us to be, not what people and circumstances around us might try to influence us to be. Writing to his young protégé, the apostle Paul encouraged him, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). While most of us are not called to vocational ministry, we are still instructed to know the Word of God and apply it in every area of our lives.

We were put here to make a difference in our world; it is hard to make a difference when we are all the same, conforming to what others say we should be or what we should be doing. For this reason, I would suggest that you be you – be the person God has intended for you to be from the moment you were born. It might not be something that the world considers great. You may not receive recognition or praise. Few people do. But we all have a God-given purpose, whether it is large or small; the impact we can have should not be underestimated. At the very least, your purpose is to become the best you that you can be!

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

Thinking of the words quoted from acclaimed author Dr. Seuss, "Today you are you. That is truer than true." If someone were to ask, "Who are you?" how would you respond?

Now look at the other quote, from one of Bob Dylan's songs. In it he said, "I try my best to be just like I am, but everybody wants me to be like them." Have you ever felt that way, that instead of appreciating your uniqueness, other people are trying to make you conform into what they want you to be? If so, what has been your reaction? Is that still happening in your life?

What are your thoughts about the Bible's declaration that we each are "fearfully and wonderfully made" by God? In your mind, what does that mean?

When you read that we should each try to make a difference in the world around us, what comes to your mind? Is that something we should aim to accomplish intentionally, or do you think it is something that should occur naturally as we go about the process of everyday life? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

1 Corinthians 3:9, 16-17

Philippians 3:7-14

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

2 Peter 1:3-8