

# Where are you going - and do you really want to get there?

A sermon about self-awareness

Ola Wingbrant

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## **Introduction**

Welcome! It feels really exciting, and a bit extra solemn to be given the opportunity to preach today. It gives me the chance to both begin and end this spring's series of sermons. Today is our last service before the summer break with vacations etc.

For those of you who are not familiar with me, my name is Ola Wingbrant, and I have had the joy and privilege to share the task to preach and teach in this church during the last couple of years.

As many of you know, my wife Helena and I have moved to Södertälje. This will therefore be my last "regular" sermon, although I hope that we will see each other again soon. I would therefore like to take the opportunity to thank you all. Especially I would like to thank PM and Jeanette for all confidence, space, and opportunity you have given me throughout our years together. If I ever have a similar function as a leader I truly hope that I am able, and dare to pay the tradition forward.

## **Self-awareness**

How many of you have seen today's subject? Dare I ask how many of you find it interesting? I have chosen the title "Where are you going - and do you really want to get there?". This question has to do with self-awareness.

Self-awareness is a wide concept. I have to admit that I had some trouble when I began to work on this sermon. Not because the Bible is missing material about self-awareness, but rather because there are bits and pieces of it spread all over

the place. This will make us read several, some would say many, different texts. I therefore would like to ask you to try keep up with me, and not get distracted by the many leaps. Whenever we look at a new bible verse, ask yourself "what does this have to do with self-awareness"?

Where am I going, and do I really want to get there? Other questions touching on self-awareness are, who am I? Why am I here? What do I value?

When Helena and I visited Aberdeen Vineyard a few years ago the pastor spoke about

*"Live intentionally, not accidentally."*

An answer to the questions related to self-awareness helps us to do just that. It helps us to live with an intention, not drifting aimlessly. Intention gives us a direction, a compass. It enables us to *act* in our environment, instead of just *reacting* to it.

We have talked about the questions "who am I", and "why am I here" earlier, in our series of sermons regarding identity (November 2015). So, today I will focus on "where am I going".

Where are you going - and do you really want to get there?

Some of you may be thinking "I believe in Jesus, I am on my way to heaven". Now, that is true.

When John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, at different occasions was asked who he was, he is said to have answered

"I'm just a fat man on my way to heaven."

We are on our way to the kingdom of heaven, to God's kingdom. However, *the way we get there* is also important! We begin our lives together with God and Jesus here and now. If you believe in Jesus, you have already begun your life and your journey together with him.

## **Jesus knew**

Speaking of Jesus, he knew where he wanted to go. In the beginning of Luke's gospel, when Jesus is in the synagogue of Nazareth on a sabbath, he is given the opportunity to read in the scroll of Isaiah, it says (Luke 4:17-21)

Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news(W) to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat  
down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.  
21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in  
your hearing."

This is Jesus mission statement. This is the reason why he has come. As any  
good leader he repeated this at different occasions and in slightly different ways.  
In Mark 1:38 it says

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so  
I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

and in Mark 10:45

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,  
and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus knew where he was going and what he wanted. He also knew what he  
valued. In Matthew 22:36-38 it says

36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and  
with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and  
greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your  
neighbor as yourself.'

## **The goal**

Jesus was self-aware. But why is self-awareness important to us? We have al-  
ready touched upon the answer. Self-awareness enables us to live intentionally,  
not accidentally.

*It enables us to ask the question "do I get any closer to what I want?"*

What you want specifically, and if you are getting any closer, is a question that  
only God, and maybe you yourself can answer. But we can read about one of the  
general goals for us as Christians in John 17:20-23. This is right before Jesus gets  
arrested, and later crucified. He first prays for his disciples, and then continues

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them(AS) even as you have loved me.

I know this is a quite complicated text, and we will not plunge any deeper in it. We did that when we discussed identity and the question "who are you"? What we can ascertain is that Jesus wants to live together with us in an intimate twoness.

Paul expresses similar thoughts in several of his letters, e.g. in Colossians 3:9-11 he writes

[S]ince you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

God’s longing for, and goal with us, is that we are to become Christlike. This does not mean that we all become copies of each other. Likeness does not mean uniformity.

## **Hard work**

But what does this have to do with self-awareness? Sometimes one can get the impression that this is something that happens in an instant. You get "zapped" by God and then you are Christlike. If we read our Bible we soon realize that this is not so. It is a process, e.g. Paul writes in Philippians (3:12-15)

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

He has already exhorted the congregation some verses earlier to "continue to work out your salvation" (Phil 2:12-13)

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Do you notice the difference between verses 12 and 13? Is it God or us who is doing the work? The answer is YES! It is both and. We cooperate with God by discovering, admit and actively work with our shortcomings. But also by a longing, a will, and a desire to actually get rid of them, in order to give God something to work with.

So it is a process. By learning to know ourselves, and by acquiring a greater self-awareness, we can begin to cooperate with God in a more intentional way in order to reach the goal. We can begin to live intentionally, not accidentally. We can act, instead of just react.

## **A personal story**

This process can be painful from time to time. I lived through a period which I think can best be described in an image of a forge. In a forge a blacksmith heats a piece of iron, then he holds it against an anvil, and he pounds it with a sledgehammer. This pounding has two purposes, first to remove impurities from the material, and then to shape it into the desired form. During this particular period I felt like a piece of iron on God's anvil.

My faith has been very intellectual. Don't misunderstand me, there is nothing wrong with using your intellect. As we read earlier God wants us to love him with all our heart, soul, and *mind*. He has used my mind, and continues to use this aspect of me. However, God has worked pretty hard in order to, so to speak, bring in heart and soul as well, in order to balance the pretty one-sided and in a way meager faith, with a much more relational aspect.

I will not forget an evening in Strängnäs some years ago. It was just at the end of my first semester in Vineyard Institute, and our small study group had gathered in order to pray for each other. One of the women prophesied over me. I don't remember the exact words, but God basically said "you know a lot about me, but I want you to learn to know me". And I cried, because those words were so true. I also think that this was God's way of preparing me for the journey that he was to take me on, and that still continues.

The interesting and exciting thing is that by learning to know Jesus more and more, we discover similarities and differences between him and ourselves. We learn to know ourselves more and more.

## In what spirit

Are you following? God wants to shape us into Christlikeness, and live together with us in an intimate twoness. By learning to know Jesus more and more we get greater self-awareness. Self-awareness enables us to discern if we are getting closer to the goal or not.

So, how can we intentionally learn to know Jesus more?

One way is to give time and engage in spiritual exercises. If you think the concept sounds modern, or like some flimsy thing grasped from New Age, and wonder if it is biblical or not, it is probably because of terminology. In e.g. Matthew 6 Jesus is speaking about "practicing righteousness", when he is speaking about generosity, prayer, and fasting. All of which are classical examples of spiritual exercises. We can read

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So, e.g. when he speaks about prayer he says

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.  
6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Thus, it is not only about *what* we do, but also in what spirit we do it. Jesus says that under certain circumstances we should not expect any reward. I think one reason for this, is that an action, executed in the right spirit, is in part its own reward. If your intention with your prayer is to meet with God, not to show off in front of others, your prayer will bring you closer to him. But if your intention is to display your piety, you have already accomplished your goal, you have already "received your reward". Jesus point is not that we should avoid praying in public, he does that himself. His point is to help us keep our intention clear, by removing elements that might tempt us to think differently.

## An example

As I said, prayer, fasting, and generosity are all classical examples of spiritual exercises. Bible reading is another. If we read the New Testament it is easy to find a basis for others. Matthew 5:43-48 may e.g. be a basis for an exercise in love.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 *that you may be children of your Father in heaven*. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

If we cultivate, or exercise, this kind of love, then the text tells us that we will be formed into "children of our father in heaven". In other words, if our intention is the right one, we will be formed more into the likeness of Christ.

## **Summer challenge**

As I said in the beginning, self-awareness is a wide concept. Self-awareness gives us the answer to the question where we are going, and if we really want to get there. Self-awareness helps us to live intentionally and not accidentally. Self-awareness enables us discern if we are getting any closer to our goal.

To give time and engage in spiritual exercises is a way to cooperate with God and achieve his goal with our lives. It is like giving the Holy Spirit a tool to form us into the likeness of Christ. Spiritual exercises give an opportunity to more intentionally let God form us.

I would like to invite you to an exciting summer. I would like to invite you to practice a spiritual exercise during the summer. I have already mentioned a couple of examples, but I would like to propose one more. It was developed almost 500 years ago by Ignatius of Loyola, one of the founders of the Jesuit Order. It has spread fairly wide in the different parts of the church and is quite common during retreats. It is an exercise to increase your self-awareness on a daily basis in the presence of God.

If you think it sounds interesting there are some fliers with an introduction. My suggestion is that you read it, and then follow the web address and read some more about the exercise. [ignatianspirituality.com](http://ignatianspirituality.com) is part of Loyola Press which is operated by the Jesuits, so the resource should be safe ground.