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## Gleanings

### Billy's Conundrum



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In last month's *Gleanings*, I began sharing Billy's story. I presented some key principles that Billy employed to find and fulfill his life purpose. This month, I want to continue Billy's story by sharing more about Billy's conundrum.

After Billy came to Christ, he was faced with a career conundrum. As a genuine Christian could he continue his career as a public servant in a pseudo-Christian culture?

Prior to becoming a genuine Christian, Billy was a young public official and a pseudo-Christian, who lived at a place and during a time when Christianity was largely defined by the culture. In contrast to cultural Christianity, genuine Christianity is defined by Christ and the most complete revelation of Christ is found in the Scripture. Those who embraced genuine Christianity were considered fanatics and generally outcasts of society.

There were many differences between cultural Christianity and genuine Christianity of that time. The table below provides a few examples.

Issues	Cultural Christianity	Genuine Christianity
Nature of man	Not depraved	Depraved
Basis for man's acceptance by God	Man's good works	Christ's work on the cross
Ethics	Defined by each person	Defined by Christ
Purpose of life	Man's will performed according to man's ways	God's will performed according to God's ways

The difference between the two views could be summarized quite simply: cultural Christianity was man-centric and genuine Christianity was Christ-centric.

Billy was exposed to genuine Christianity as a young boy, but his mother, a cultural Christian, worked hard to eradicate any such influence that Billy received. Her goal was for Billy to be socially accepted and therefore cultural Christianity was a requirement. Because of the reality of human depravity, her efforts were efficacious.

During Billy's college career, his grandfather and uncle died leaving Billy a large inheritance, making him independently wealthy. Consequently he lost interest in his studies and turned to a life of hedonistic pleasure, which was consistent with cultural Christianity.

Though Billy indulged in hedonist pleasures, he was also intrigued by public life. He was so enamored with public life that he ran for office and was elected before completing college.



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The first four years of Billy's public service were spent pursuing hedonistic pleasures. He gambled, drank, and womanized. In addition to his engaging personality, he entertained people with his singing and oration prowess. His popularity was undeniable and his influence grew with alacrity.

At age twenty-five, Billy took an extended vacation. Since he was not yet married, he found a suitable companion in Isaac Milner—the brother of the headmaster of Billy's childhood private school. Isaac was older than Billy and an accomplished scholar. Billy was delighted that Isaac agreed to travel with him and looked forward to much stimulating conversation. Very early in the trip, Isaac introduced theology as a conversation topic. Though surprised, Billy engaged. He presented all his objections to Christ, the Bible, and Christianity. Surprisingly, Isaac was able to deftly handle each one. By the end of the trip, Billy knew that he had no basis for denying the reality of Christ, the Bible, and Christianity. Deep in his heart, Billy knew that he had become a genuine Christian. Consequently his philosophy, values, principles, and practices would have to change; but what about his political career? Could Billy serve God and remain a public official? After all, he had been elected to public office, in part, because he was a cultural Christian.

Tormented by the question of his calling, Billy sought help. He contacted an old childhood friend named John. As a young lad, Billy had been exposed to genuine Christianity when he met John—a wise, mature man in the Lord. John had taken an interest in Billy, which Billy remembered.

Billy contacted John and set up an appointment. When they met, Billy presented his conundrum—could he serve God as a public official and was this his calling? John responded with wisdom. He noted that God called people to all kinds of vocations. Certainly one would expect God to call some people to public service. Given all that John knew of Billy, he believed that Billy was called to public service.

While this was comforting, Billy still did not know exactly what he was called to do. So he began a search more specifically to discern his calling. Over time he began to see that he was called to champion two causes, both of which were intended to change the culture of his day.

His first call was to apologetics. Cultural Christianity so distorted the truth about Christ that the common views of professing Christians of his time were no more than simply man-centered popular cultural opinions. He felt called to write a book, which articulated a well-developed biblical understanding of genuine Christianity.

In this book, Billy expressed a profound biblical understanding of reality—God, man, sin, depravity, grace, salvation, Christ, sanctification, etc. He wrote with the skill and clarity of a seasoned Bible scholar, yet when he wrote the book, he had been a Christian for less than fifteen years. How could a young man produce such a clear, compelling, cogent presentation of biblical truth? My conjecture is that Billy was under the intentional and intense tutelage of godly spiritual fathers.

His second call was to align public policy with Scripture. Billy believed that a biblical worldview was required to make wise public policy. In particular, Billy was drawn to fight a business practice that was both ubiquitous and economically profitable, but one that was not aligned with a biblical worldview. Given the popularity and profitability of the practice, however, the task of legally changing public policy to prohibit it was daunting. Why would anyone challenge this practice? Anyone who dared oppose this practice would most certainly put his life and his family's life at risk. The reason that Billy chose to crusade for the abolition of this practice was because, after receiving counsel from godly spiritual fathers, he felt called to the assignment.

Hopefully, you can see the commonality between his two assignments or callings. In addition to mandates to change the culture of his day, both assignments required godly spiritual fathers in his life. These godly men were the key to direct and embolden Billy to do what he was called to do and to do it well.

May I suggest that this is a picture of reality, that is, how God designed the universe to work. For anyone to find and fulfill his or her life purpose, that person needs guidance and encouragement from godly spiritual fathers.

In addition, one needs patience. Both of Billy's callings took long periods of time. His first call, to write the book, took perhaps ten to fifteen years to accomplish and his second calling took nearly fifty years. And coupled to patience, one needs endurance. Billy's second call required the rest of his life and beyond. He did live to see the calling fulfilled, but, due to health issues during the last decade of his life, the assignment was completed by his spiritual sons. This is a picture of living multi-generationally, that is, receiving vision from spiritual fathers living obedient to the vision and passing the vision on to spiritual sons. Multi-generational living is a key perspective for all us who want to do the will of God according to the ways of God.

Finding your calling is a lifelong process with many phases and challenges. And like Billy, expect to face conundrums. To overcome the conundrums requires multi-generational living, patience, perseverance, endurance, provision, guidance, direction, and discipleship. All these are available if you are willing to die to self and singularly serve the will of God. May he give you the grace to live accordingly.

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