

## **APPENDIX B**

### **WHO I AM/WHAT I DO**

My personal experience in missions, as I have pursued the call of God with a whole heart, has included many times of sudden transition from home to mission field and mission field back home. I once rated myself on a stress indication test. You add up certain numbers of “stress-points” for changes of location, changes in diet, death in the family, and so on. A score of over three hundred is supposed to put you in the high-risk (90%) category for getting sick. My score that year, based on the changes I had experienced in moving from a country to home again, was around eight hundred! The fact that I’m still sane and going strong for God is an indication of His grace, but it is also the result of a very important lesson I have learned and applied about the issue of my identity in relation to my calling.

Now it is very important to measure what we accomplish for God and to make sure that our lives and choices result in lasting fruit for the Kingdom of God.

However, our calling and our identity are not the same thing. Paul makes a beautiful and liberating distinction when he introduces himself to the church in Rome: “*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle...*” (Romans 1:1). He makes a distinction between his identity—a servant of Jesus, and his calling—to be a missionary.

Paul never suffered from an identity crisis. Preaching to crowds, healing the sick, rebuking high priests, getting shoved around like a pawn by politicians, ship-wrecked, rescued, on trial, in jail, out of jail—if there was ever a missionary who experienced traumatic and unplanned change, it was this man. But we don’t hear him complaining of reentry stress on his release from prison! I believe that part of the reason for this is that Paul knew who he was and what his calling was, and didn’t mix the two issues.

When we get these two things confused, we set ourselves up for some major insecurity. When we derive our sense of who we are from what we do, we set a trap for our own sense of identity by linking it to something that is temporary—what we do. When we return from the mission field, what we do changes. And if my sense of identity of who I am lies in the fact that I’m a missionary, then who am I when I’m not a missionary any more? In my observation, this error is at the root of a large portion of the negativity of the experience we call reentry stress. Overcoming this deception will free us from much of the pain of significant life changes.

What is the answer? God is our reference point. He is the only unchanging thing in the universe. My identity is this: I am His kid. Even if I were to lose both arms and both legs and be unable to feed myself or do anything else for the rest of my life, I would still be His kid, and He would still be my Daddy. My inability to do anything would not change who I am for one second.

On the other hand, if my ministry is my identity, when God wants to bring change to my ministry, or when it’s time for me to move on to make room for other people to grow in that ministry, or when I go home from the mission field, I will find myself, consciously or unconsciously, having to deal with a crisis in my sense of identity.

When I have travelled overseas, I have always gone for purposes relating to the Kingdom and to missions, and usually it has been for periods of at least three months. When I buckle up on the plane ready to take off, it hits me. I’m going to a new place. Sometimes I don’t know anybody there. I have no idea what the environment or the accommodations or the people or my co-workers are going to be like. Everything in my universe is going to change. Except for one thing—my Daddy. Because of this, I can rest secure.

When I get on the plane to come home, I’m in exactly the same situation. I don’t know if anybody in my church is going to understand or even care about what I have done for God, what I have seen, the precious people I was with who are now so dear to my heart, or even whether they will notice that I was gone. But my Daddy knows. He’s coming home with me, and because of that, I am in no danger. There is no threat to my emotional life or my sense of worth or of who I am. Even though I go from employed to unemployed, from working for God to “looking for work,” I know who I am.

With this truth in my heart, I can honestly say that reentry stress has never been a problem to me. Confusion, disorientation, not knowing where to buy things or how to get to places, sure. Misunderstanding or indifference from friends and spiritual leaders, yes. It’s par for the course. But as long as I know who my Daddy is, as long as my sense of identity and worth come from the security of that relationship and not from what I do (or don’t do or can’t do), reentry becomes a new adventure. It becomes part of my calling. That, I have the grace to handle.

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From the book, *The Reentry Team: Caring for Your Returning Missionaries*. ([www.eri.org](http://www.eri.org))