

rB Who Are You? | Rod Brace

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"Who are you?" the old man prodded Jim as he stood in the foyer of his office building.

"My name is Jim," he replied respectfully.

"No not your name," the old man snapped. "I don't care what you are called. I want to know who you are!"

A bit taken aback by this elderly inquirer, this time Jim replied, "I am Jim, and I am the Vice President of Marketing for this company. Can I help you?"

"No. Stop! You are not listening to me," yelled the man. "I don't care about your job, your title or your position. You are someone. Now who is it?"

Thinking perhaps he was being secretly taped for a reality TV show, Jim smiled with a calmness that belied his irritation and (he hoped) communicated a dash of respect for the "over the top" acting of this feisty old crank. Inviting the gentleman to his office and away from the view of the small crowd who had gathered to watch, Jim tried to manage what could potentially be a rather embarrassing situation. That's when it turned.

The little old man, with more energy and passion than before, began to rap his walking stick on the granite receptionist desk. "Hear me now people of this office building!" he loudly proclaimed. "This man, who calls himself Jim, is not listening to me. I have asked him a simple question -- Who are you? But in a manner unbecoming to his important position, Jim has answered my who question with a what statement. Poor form Jim, very poor form."

Now pacing the office lobby like a circus promoter, the old man worked the crowd with growing fervor. "Who is not what you do, what you own, or what you drive. You are more than those things. You Jim, and all these gathered to behold your plight, have defined yourselves by what you do when instead you should be defined by what you are!" As the old man spoke, Jim attempted to position himself just out of sight and range from him.

"Not so fast, Jim," the man shouted, whirling around to the precise place in which Jim had attempted to hide. "Step forth now, front and center. Come forward and I will tell the people of this suffocating place exactly who, my son -- you are."

Jim's heart pounded with the thought that this cruel (and televised?) joke had gone on too long. Was his wife behind it, or perhaps some of his cold-hearted co-workers? His only thought was to step toward the old man and end this ordeal.

"Yes, very good Jim. Come stand beside me," said the old man, his tone turning sympathetic. "You are something more than what you do, Jim. You have just not realized it. The time has come for you to learn precisely who you are. You have a purpose that far

exceeds the pitiful role assigned to you by your company and accepted without reservation. You have an unfulfilled purpose, Jim. You are allowing others to believe something about you that is not completely true." The old man glanced at the lobby crowd who had now grown quite large, encircling Jim and this old man who had captured their curiosity.

Pointing to individuals in the crowd, the old man widened his focus "You there Bob, you are no different." Bob gasped at having been called by name by this unfamiliar man.

"And you Carla you are your job. Frank, your aspirations are hollow and without joy. Allen, I see you back there. When is the last time you thought about purpose rather than wealth? Tom, Cindy and Tim -- the three of you came so close once to discovering a new meaning in life, but you succumbed to the vortex of peer pressure, fame and fortune. Are you any happier for it?"

The crowd was shaken at the sight of this old man and by his ability to know what was buried so deeply in their hearts. They grew unsettled, fearful of hearing their name called out like the others.

"But Jim," he returned, "we are here for you today. Today will be a turning point for you if you accept my proposition. I know that you have believed some promises that will never be true. You believe that your value to society is found in your position and your wealth. I know that you aspire to have friends in high places. You worry about not being accepted. In fact Jim, you are deeply afraid of losing your job, because in doing so, you fear losing yourself." The old man touched Jim's arm. For the first time since this odd show had begun, Jim noticed a strange clarity in the old man's eyes. No matter how he tried, he could not remove his eyes from the old man's gaze. Forgetting the crowd, he sensed that perhaps this old coot was more than a TV prank. He sensed there was a deeper purpose in this seemingly chance meeting.

"Jim. Jim," the old man whispered. "Are you listening to me Jim? You are far more than your job, Jim. You are a valued soul -- a child of your Creator. You were made to love and be loved in a way that is free of pretense and shame. Live freely Jim. Choose to find purpose in your relationships. Discover a sense of connection with others on your journey. Experience a hope that is far different than what the world offers. Jim, my son, be who you are."

Jim became acutely aware of a deep silence and stillness he had never felt before. Looking around he realized that the crowd was still there, yet they seemed motionless. All eyes were fixed on him as if waiting for his decision.

Jim turned once again to the old man. "So what do I do?" he asked the old man. "Jim," the old man smiled, "your answer is not found in doing anything more. Simply return to what you have been doing, but this time -- be who you are."

With a mingled sense of confusion and clarity, Jim woke from his dream to find that he still had an hour before his alarm would ring for another day of work. The memories of his

encounter with the old man of his dream were vividly fresh and somehow appealing. This much, he decided, was real: today he would be something deeper than he had been the day before.

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