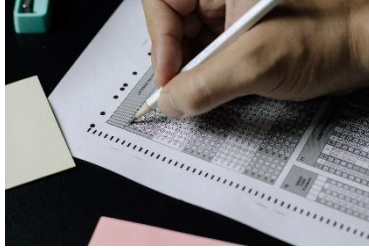


Don't Write Off the Non-Christian

I've taken my share of personality assessments over the years, and I'll venture you have too.

Perhaps the most well-known is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). You can tell someone who puts a lot of stock in MBTI; they'll tell you. *"I'm an INFP!" "I am an ESTJ."* (If I remember mine correctly, I am an EIEIO.)



Then there's DISC, the Enneagram, the Typefinder, the MMPI, and on and on. Some are based on animals. My wife and I took one of those at a marriage retreat. She is a Competent Camel; I am a Much-Loved Monkey. (And just so you know, when a Much-Loved Monkey marries a Competent Camel, he's still expected to keep his side of the bathroom clean and tidy.)

Thanks to the wonders of the Internet and Facebook, you can now take tests to find out which Disney princess you are or what type of potato you are. I'm sure these are based on solid science.

One "warning" frequently given with these tests is to use them to evaluate yourself *only*. Don't use it to assess or judge another person. (Common sense tells me to never tell my wife what kind of potato she is.) But despite the warnings, we still label others. *"You know Leroy? He's definitely an INTP."* *"Really? He strikes me as a Tranquil Turtle."*

Let's apply that principle to the original personality quiz. In Matthew 13, Jesus told a parable commonly referred to as the Parable of the Sower (or the Parable of the Soils). The sower casts seed which lands on four different soils:

- The packed soil
- The rocky soil
- The thorny soil
- The good soil

As Jesus unpacked the meaning ...

- ... the packed soil represents those who hear the gospel or the Word of God, and it has no impact on their lives whatsoever.
- ... the rocky soil represents those who initially accept what they hear, but because the soil is shallow, the word never takes root in their lives.

- ... the thorny soil represents those so caught up in wealth, worries, and their own pursuits that these other things choke out the word.
- ... the good soil represents those who fully accept, embrace, and live according to God's Word.

The point of Jesus' parable is to show us that we can all hear the same gospel and word from God, but we don't all respond the same way. Unfortunately, too often we treat this parable as a personality quiz by which we label others. For example, we might see how someone responds to the gospel and think, "Hoo, boy, he is rocky soil." And we leave it at that. We assume that if a person is rocky soil, he has always been—and always will be—rocky soil. Therefore, we make no further attempts to reach him for Christ.

Let me change that faulty perception with another one of Jesus' parables:

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree that was planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He told the vineyard worker, 'Listen, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it even waste the soil?'

"But he replied to him, 'Sir, leave it this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. Perhaps it will produce fruit next year, but if not, you can cut it down'" (Luke 13:6-9).

Here's an unfruitful tree, but it's significant what the vineyard worker did: HE WORKED ON THE SOIL!



We don't look at our own yards in the Spring and say with a sigh of resignation: "I've got weeds in the flower bed and a dead spot in the grass. I'll just learn to live with it." No, we fertilize and water. We dig and soften the soil. And amazingly, hard soil is softened and grass grows. Weeds are pulled and flowers flourish.

Let's apply the same principle to those in our lives. Water their soil and soften their hearts with gracious words and loving actions. Have ongoing conversations in which you can be a faithful witness to the power of Christ over worries and His abundance over worldly things. When you stay connected, investing in their lives, God uses you to change the soil. Just as the soil in your yard can be changed, the soul of a person can be changed.

So keep sharing Christ. And keep fertilizing.