

Destiny: Carrot or Stick?

May 18, 2104

Nothing made me crazier when I was a kid than my mother invading my privacy. I'm not talking about walking into my room without knocking, which she did and which I hated. I'm talking about how she regularly invaded the privacy of my own thoughts and feelings. She'd say, "I know what you're thinking," or "You don't feel that way," or "I'm sure *that* didn't happen," when I was telling a story. It would make me crazy because I know I didn't know much, but I *did* know how I was feeling; I *did* know the thoughts in my own mind, and I *did* know what happened to me during the day. That she so cavalierly trespassed my sovereign mind and planted herself there made me crazy because it made me invisible.

I know she was doing what a lot of mothers do, and I'm sure it's all part of the natural development of children when they begin to separate psychologically from a parent, to feel angry about comments like that. But when your own thoughts are regularly trumped by an intimidating authority figure who assures you she knows what you're *really* thinking, it is crazy-making. Over time, it became difficult to distinguish what I *was* thinking, what I really wanted, and what my feelings actually were.

By the time I was old enough to think for myself, I was rebellious to the core. Not because I wanted to stick it to The Man (my mother or any other authority figure), but because I was desperate to define myself. I was on the verge of disappearing. As a little kid, I was actually afraid that I was going to die. Disappear and die. I had no reliable sense of myself, nor trust in myself.

I felt invisible. When a person is so dismissive of another's thoughts, opinions or feelings, when a person constantly interrupts with comments that don't relate at all to what you're saying, you begin to feel like you're not really even there. And that's how I felt for a long time.

One of my therapists once asked me, "Why do you think you talk so fast?" I didn't know the answer, so she pointed out that I was programmed to feel that what I had to say had so little value, that I would be dismissed anyway, that I stammered out my opinion, question, justification, whatever it was, as fast as I could.

I used to eat this way, too.

So I moved into my young adulthood in a pretty defensive position, guarding whatever was rattling around in my nearly invisible core. My own ideas, thoughts, feelings... I tried hard to give them some weight, but I'd learned long before not to trust them. That some authority figure would come along and correct me. They must be wrong after all, if in all the years I'd been alive my thoughts and feelings were essentially ignored and replaced by someone else's.

And at this time I was on the threshold of a spiritual coming-of-age, too. Confirmation in the Catholic church, attendance at a Jesuit college. I wanted to love God, I wanted to practice in a spiritual community, and I faked it for a long time.

But you know what really blocked my total surrender? The idea of Destiny. That God knew what I was thinking. God knew where I was headed (probably the road to Perdition), God knew in my heart I didn't have a thought worth repeating.

So I was defensive before God. I learned that prayer was just explaining myself to God. Really fast. My prayers took about 30 seconds. I defended, rationalized, analyzed, explained why I was praying, why I was asking for what I was asking for, explaining that I knew I really didn't deserve it, but maybe You could see Your way to giving me a little relief?

I had a push/pull relationship with God. And Psalms that were supposed to comfort me, like, "I knew you before you were formed in your mother's womb," were frankly just upsetting.

I had no sense of self, and the idea of destiny, that God knew what I was made of, what choices I would make, felt more distressing than comforting. Because I thought, why bother? Why bother having a self?

As you can imagine, this made for some challenging romantic relationships. Intimacy had always been very difficult for me, in part because I was so defensive about what little I knew to be authentic about myself, but also because I didn't want anyone else to invade my privacy the way my mother had.

Any time a sweetheart interrupted me, refused to believe what I was saying, challenged me to explain a decision, or said something like, "I know what you really mean when you say that," had me firing on all pistons. And I would withdraw. It felt invasive to be known. I couldn't distinguish between being known by a loved one, and being invisible.

And in looking to God for resolution or guidance, I kept coming up against assurances in the Holy Books that God knew everything about me! It was just confirmation from the Big Guy Upstairs that I was, actually, invisible and insignificant.

It took a lot of therapy and study and prayer before I realized that God knowing me was a blessing and not something to fear. The more I got to know God and recognize the divine messages, the more comfortable I became. My prayers changed from explaining myself, and why I was asking, to just expressions of love and gratitude. And still, some asking.

Believing that God knew me, and knew my destiny, allowed me to hear my intuitive guidance more clearly. I wasn't so busy defending and explaining myself, so I could actually listen. And what I heard gave me hope.

In Psalm 139: 13-16 is written:

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

What a comfort this gives me now! Now, I can relax and be myself. God knows me! I'm forgiven! I'll never be invisible if God has seen every single day that was formed for me. My destiny isn't an invasion of my privacy, or a fight for control of the wheel. It's a calling inside of me, a message that feels like my own. A desire to head in a certain direction, follow a career path or inspiration. And when I finally learned to listen to myself, and not worry so much about whether other people knew me too intimately or not, I recognized that not only do I exist, but that my voice is important and significant.

Last week I did a phone reading for a client in Utah. She struggles with depression and some anxiety, circular thinking, and feelings of insignificance. Her father-in-law came through to help her (and me) with this example.

He said, "If you've ever been out in nature at night, under the stars, and had one of those metaphysical moments where you understand the vastness of the universe, you may have felt small. Or standing by the ocean, getting into that trance-like state as the waves rhythmically surge against the sand, you feel small. Or hearing Carl Sagan talk about the 'billions and billions of stars,' you have a moment where you get that you are just a small part of something incomprehensibly huge. The healthy spirit says, 'I'm small, but I'm part of everything here!' But the poor in spirit says, 'I'm so small, so insignificant, I could disappear and it wouldn't matter at all.'"

My client's father-in-law told us to distinguish between those two types of smallness, because *everyone* is significant. We are all significant. It's our destiny as God's children.

Amen.