Something to Remember: 
The Journey of Being Human

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Dedicated to the memory of Alphy Benincasa, who lovingly Shaped the lives of so many people
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“[Man] never remains in the same state. His life on earth flows like waters that float and undulate in a perpetual diversity of movement. Not one of his days, not even one of his hours is completely like one another.”

- Saint Francis de Sales

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Introduction

The human person is a mystery. For centuries, scholars have reflected on the issue of personhood and the role of persons in the world, only to create more questions. What makes the study of man compelling is that no two human beings are alike. Even identical twins in sharing similar physical features have distinct character traits. People can also tend to act in surprising ways that are contrary to what is expected of them. These instances contribute to the enigma that is man. As a result, the question arises, “How is a person’s character shaped throughout his life?” Is one merely the victim of his surroundings or does he have an active role in fashioning whom he becomes? Furthermore, how does an individual’s character dictate the actions he takes and what is God’s role in the entire process? Much like the philosophers of the past, when one ponders these questions, several more arise.

In essence, a person’s character is the sum total of the choices he makes, the relationships he establishes and the experiences he encounters throughout life. Utilizing this idea as a foundation, five “critical core life competencies” have been identified and expanded upon as a means of answering the many questions concerning the human character (Refer to Section 3 of the Catholic Hero’s Journey by the Salesian Leadership Institute for four of the five competencies). These competencies include learning to learn, learning to choose, learning to relate, learning to love and learning to create. Each of these aspects of life influence one another and as a whole, help to form man’s unique character. All of the competencies pose difficulties to life, but once they are understood, an individual can use what he has learned to reach his fullest potential.
In learning to learn, an individual realizes that in order to grow and progress through life, one must be able to view his experiences as learning opportunities. Once a person realizes that he will not be a success in all aspects of life, he will then be able to accept himself and be content with his accomplishments. When someone learns through his experiences, he is able to use them in the choices he makes. In learning to choose, an individual finds that the ability to choose is perhaps the greatest blessing and curse bestowed upon man. It supplies one with the opportunity to shape his future as his own, but also instills an anxiety to always make the right choice.

The tasks of learning and choosing are often difficult, but they are not accomplished alone. When learning to relate, one finds that the people present in one’s life have a considerable impact on the formation of character. Friends, family and spouses serve as influential figures on the paths of life. An integral aspect in these interactions between people is the love that is shared between them. In learning to love, love is the driving force that provides depth to a relationship and motivation to life.

When all of these aspects to life, learning, choosing, relating, and loving, are taken together, a person is able to create his distinct self and move toward the person he wishes to become. Together with the help of God, when an individual learns to create, he contributes to society by continuing the creative works of God. In the end, the many facets of life can be difficult to bear at times, but ultimately they produce an individual with unique gifts to affect the world around him.
Whether people realize it or not, they are constantly learning various lessons as they travel through life. From the time when a toddler touches a hot stove to the moment when a senior citizen first plays a DVD, individuals of all ages continually learn from what life has to offer. Of course, these lessons also extend deeper to times when a person learns things that help shape how he relates to others as well as how he views himself. Much of what is to be learned in life begins with evaluating how to actually learn from those things one encounters. For instance, how does one react when he fails a test? The reaction can be one in which a person becomes depressed and no longer wishes to try to succeed or the person can realize what it was that went wrong and resolve not to do it again. In essence, how an individual reacts to a situation and the attitudes he has toward his experiences will determine how something is learned. Until a person can begin to hold a positive attitude to his failings and realize that life’s lessons never cease, he will be living life with little benefit from his experiences.

Arguably, one of the most positive views of sin in Catholic theology comes from Saint Francis de Sales and his numerous writing to others. For example, DeSales writes, “Sin can be salutary for us because it is only shameful when we commit it, but once it is converted by confession and repentance, it is honorable and salutary.” In DeSales’ view, the otherwise negative experience known as sin transforms into something that is beneficial. However, as the saint notes, it is only through the active participation of the individual (“by confession and repentance”) that the sin becomes a true learning experience. DeSales further shines with optimism when he discusses the event that is central to Catholicism: the crucifixion of Jesus
Christ. He conveys the idea that the saving grace that resulted in the death of Christ did more for humanity than the original man, Adam, could have if he had never committed the first sin in eating the forbidden fruit.\(^4\) Once again, the idea of sin is presented in a positive manner and utilized as a means by which man can better his life.

When further reading the works of Saint Francis de Sales, the reader is offered several additional rays of hope concerning sin. First, one learns that they are not alone in their sin. All people, despite their place in society, suffer the original sin of man.\(^5\) No one person is exempt from sin and a person can take comfort in realizing that everyone is attempting to learn from his faults. In addition, by man’s creation in the image and likeness of God, he has a natural inclination to good.\(^5\) If a person happens to stray from that path, salvation will be offered to him because of his faith. Perhaps the best story to illustrate this point is the parable of the prodigal son in Saint Luke’s Gospel.\(^6\) In the story, the younger of two sons selfishly requests his inheritance early only to spend it all and return to his father as a poor man. Rather than reprimanding the son, the father welcomes him back with open arms and celebrates his return. The tale supports DeSales’ notion that no matter how much we sin there will always be an opportunity to repent. This idea supplies comfort for those who are constantly apprehensive about sinning and believe there is no good to come from it.

Once one realizes that something positive can come from his shortcomings, he can then begin to examine how it is that he comes to fail and how he can respond in a way that will benefit him in the future. By a person simply taking a step back and reflecting on what it is that leads him to falter, he can identify ways to avoid making similar mistakes and in the process better himself as a whole. With regard to the temptations that one constantly faces, a person needs to realize that it is impossible to be completely free of the temptations.\(^7\) Rather, the best
defense against temptations is not to become worried over their presence. As long as an individual remains firm in maintaining his personal goals and staying true to his convictions then the temptations that arise become merely a nuisance instead of a personal threat. Unfortunately, the work that is accomplished in battling temptations can be threatened when a person has negative emotions, such as becoming angry at someone or feeling depressed. When the negative emotion begins to plague the individual’s current state of mind, he will do whatever it takes to get rid of that feeling and return to his prior state of being. As a result, if a temptation presents itself as a means by which a person can relieve himself of his current emotional state, then the person will most likely succumb. Thus, he will commit the sin and begin the process of learning from what he did wrong. Essentially, the process by which one stumbles through life and commits sin can be viewed as follows. The temptation is presented to a person, the person is either pleased or displeased with it and finally, he will give consent or refuse to commit the sin. If a person is able to identify this process than he will be able to avoid the temptation before it occurs or stay strong when it does present itself.

While it would be nice to consider a world in which all people avoided temptation and rarely sinned, it is impractical to believe that it could ever occur. After all, man was born with the tendency to sin and fights a lifelong battle over that tendency. So what should one do when he does sin? First, as stated above, a person can consider the failure a learning experience and use it as a tool to better himself for the future. The individual must then resolve to move forward with that sin on his mind. Saint Francis de Sales notes that a person can be sorry for his faults, but in a calmed, settled and firm way. This is why the moments following the time in which a person sins are often critical in determining how the event will influence the person. Think of the time when an employee gets fired from a job for poor work results. If the employee gets angry
and attempts to sabotage the company before he leaves, then he learns nothing from his behavior and only serves to undermine his integrity. Instead, a person can still express his emotions in response to the news, but rather than having the emotions dictate the actions the individual can utilize reason in response. In the example of the fired worker, that person could certainly be upset from hearing the news, but he could leave his job with a good relation with his employer and use that experience to better his future endeavors. DeSales echoes this notion by advising that an individual do nothing that his desires insist on until he has regained his composure. In this manner, the mind can take control of the emotions and moderate them accordingly.

Once the initial reaction following a personal failure has passed, a person is left with the experience as a basis for future events that are similar. Much of the actions that a person takes depend on the way in which he views the events that have occurred in the past. This point is highlighted through the quote at the beginning of the section: “The dead hand of the past weighs heavily upon the present.” As the line suggests, those things that have occurred in the past greatly influence how a person behaves in the present. In this way, the past can become a crippling entity for one to face when attempting to live his life. Often, it is anxiety to not repeat the mistakes of the past that hinder a person. However, rather than anxiety aiding in prohibiting the event from reoccurring, it only serves to prevent any future good from happening. For instance, parents who traumatically lose a child may succumb to anxiety and become overprotective of the other children in their family. In their view, they are preventing a similar loss from happening again, but in reality they are limiting the life their child has yet to live.

Concerning the issue of facing one’s past, DeSales conveys his opinion of the past by stating, “Nothing I assure you; for how could you expect my thoughts to dwell upon that which no longer exists in the sight of God.” In DeSales’ view, the past has occurred and cannot be
changed. For him, if God has forgotten about an individual’s past action than there should be no reason that the person should allow the past to hinder his future. The idea that one becomes so enmeshed in the past that present time activities suffer is highlighted in the field of psychology by the notion of “counterfactual thinking.” This term refers to the times when a person begins to imagine what could have happened in a situation had he done something differently.\(^{11}\) This often happens to students when they receive their lower than expected final grades. The student will reflect on all the times in which he could have studied rather than lounged around. Utilizing this kind of thinking, a person will begin to be filled with regret and is ultimately inhibited in any progress in life. The regret will consume him so much that the person may become depressed and unwilling to try anymore. Taken in a positive way, the person may momentarily dwell on what could have been and then take that image and resolve to learn from the mistakes and improve in the future. In the end, the past is not something that should be forgotten, but at the same time, it should not become something so powerful that it inhibits man from living life to his fullest potential.

Much of the learning process throughout life involves the attitudes that a person holds toward his less than perfect character. Success is not always the basis for learning; one can also learn a great deal from his failures. DeSales offers optimistic advice to those struggling with their imperfections by remarking that one should love the imperfections he holds because they reveal the areas for which God can enter into his life and extend his love.\(^{12}\) Furthermore, DeSales notes that it is through man’s imperfections that man is torn away from God and at the same time the means by which He brings man closer to Him.\(^{12}\) Through his optimism, DeSales takes something that is otherwise embarrassing or difficult for a person and changes it into something that is positive. Rather than have one concentrate on his failings, DeSales focuses his attention on how
they can become a means of getting closer to God. In his view, for every imperfection which a person considers, he should also consider God’s many gifts (“As we reflect on our sins one by one let us also consider His graces one by one”\textsuperscript{13}). Once again, the learning process comes down to how a person utilizes the events in life, the actions he takes and the attitude held during the entire process.

Family therapist Dr. J Zink has once stated, “We may be admired and respected for our achievements, but we are loved for our failings.”\textsuperscript{14} Dr. Zink’s thoughts reveal the idea that while people may experience failures in their life, there are individuals around them that continue to love them despite these shortcomings. In fact, it is through the times that a person falters and attempts to pick himself back up that he reveals his true character to others. How an individual responds to stress in life as well as to those instances in which he fails can convey a willingness to succeed. Once again, take the student who fails a particular course and makes a resolve to learn from his mistakes and try harder the next semester. In this instance, another person can observe the students reaction to the failure as something commendable and inspiring. Viewed in another way, it is through the common shortcomings that each person has that one is able to empathize with others and in turn help them learn from their failings.

Another important component of learning from the times that one fails is the ability to allow others to help when it is difficult to bounce back. The line, “Let the Simons in your life”\textsuperscript{15} has particular significance with this idea. Simon of Cyrene was the man who helped Jesus Christ carry His cross. Even Jesus, as a perfect being, was able to place aside his pride during His time of need and accept help. Through Christ’s example, man should also be able to place aside his pride and accept the help of others. However, it is common to find that many people have a difficult time asking for help when they fail. Unfortunately, individuals believe that asking for
help can be a sign of weakness in the eyes of another and a means by which they can lose superiority over others. This response can often be viewed in those people who are particularly smart and those who have a high ranking position in a company. In each of their times of need, these particular individuals often believe they can achieve their goals alone or recover from a failure with little help. Galileo furthers this idea of helping another by noting, “You can’t teach a person anything, only help them discover it themselves.” In his view, a person is still important in helping others identify the lesson to be learned in a given situation, but the way in which he does it can change. By strictly remarking what a person should do when he fails or suggesting that he view others to determine the correct way to act will do little in preparing one to face similar situations. Rather, an individual must experience what it is like to overcome a transgression in his own way, but still with the support of another. For example, a parent who constantly relieves his children of responsibility when they do something wrong is not teaching the children anything about learning from their mistakes. Instead, the parent should simply guide the children in recovering from a failure, while having them achieve it on their own.

Once a child has been able to recover from a particular hardship he will be able to build what is known as resilience. Psychologists define the term resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity. Studies show that those children who appear to be resilient also have a tendency to attract others who are in need of help. This supports the notion that a person can have an affect on those desiring guidance after failing. In addition, studies have found that certain traits are common in those people that are able to recover from particularly difficult events. These resilient children were found to be particularly easygoing and intelligent, traits that become important in searching for another person when in need of support. Furthermore, those individuals that have a particular belief in something beyond themselves, whether it be religion
or a future, were found to be better prepared when troubled times occurred. In a sense, a person who is able to trust in something outside of himself is able to take the pressure off himself and have faith that things will turn out for the better.

There is a natural tendency for people to not accept responsibility for their own actions and blame their faults on external events. It is common to observe how quickly a person will announce that he has been the victim of a sin but it is much rarer to find a person who is equally willing to announce that he has sinned against someone else. Constantly viewing society as the sole source of a person’s troubles dangerously shapes a person to become one who takes little responsibility for his own actions. As a result of this line of thinking, people tend to believe that the bad things they do are not their fault, but rather, they are the result of the bad things that have been done to them. This argument can often be seen in the justice system as a means by which criminals attempt to be found innocent on the basis that they have been mistreated during prior life events. In a way, the criminals have concluded that all of their evil actions are the sum total of how they have been mistreated by the world rather than the result of their own actions.

Unfortunately, once a person denies all responsibility for his actions, then he is no longer willing to learn from his experiences. After all, the experiences, so this person believes, were not the result of his choices but the sum of the actions of society. Much like the lack of responsibility in this “victim” philosophy, there are those people that reach a point in their lives in which they believe they are too set in their ways to attempt to change. These people have lived such a rich life with a multitude of experiences that have so shaped their character that altering their persona seems futile. Sadly, at this point in their lives, individuals begin to ignore lessons that may be learned at the present time. It is these people that make up the group that Socrates had in mind in his famous line, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” In a sense, those that believe they
have nothing left to learn from life have already begun to enter their graves. George Eliot, in his work *Middlemarch*, echoes this idea when he writes, “Character is not cut in marble; it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing.”19 This idea of never ceasing to learn at any age can be positively viewed in that the mistakes a person commits never marks the end. Rather, an individual always has the opportunity to learn from the events he has encountered and better himself because of it. Essentially, man is not meant to just simply know the good that is available in life but also to exercise that good as well.20

While the process of learning is no easy task, once it is understood it serves as a beneficial tool in the journey of life. Once a person realizes how he sins and stands firm to respond in a positive way when the sin occurs, he can then begin to learn from his experiences. It is also important to remember that one’s imperfections are the means by which one can become closer toward God and are thus beneficial. At the heart of learning throughout life is the idea that a person will always have the opportunity to better himself through his failings. It is how man uses the events and chooses to respond to them that makes all the difference.

-Learning To Choose-

“Our choices show what we really are”
- Professor Dumbledore, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* 21

The ability to learn from one’s mistakes is just the first step in the journey of life. Once an individual has failed in something, he is then faced with the daunting task of using what he has learned in making future choices. In turn, there are several aspects of choosing that make many people cringe at just the thought. For some, having to make an important choice involves careful, analytical thinking and a well-thought out plan. In contrast, others may decide to choose things
quickly and based on their emotions. No matter the amount of time taken when faced with a
decision, every individual has his God-given human will and the freedom that comes with it.
Associated with the freedom to make a choice is the fear and risk that result with the
consequences of that choice. Fear can affect a person to such an extent that it can hinder his
ability to even make the choice. There also exists a battle within a person when faced with
decision-making. This struggle involves differentiating between what is morally right and what
feels right when choosing. All these aspects aside, the ability to choose is perhaps one of the
greatest gifts given to man. Because of this ability, man has the opportunity of determining and
shaping his future. Overall, the task in learning to choose is to properly use the freedom that has
been given to man in order to shape a life that is pleasing to not only the person but God as well.

The basis for making choices in life is the human will. The human will has control over most
movements of the body and determines how the faculties of the body will be used. God has given
man free will so that he may seek the good and pursue it. Thus, the will is moved by that which
the intellect thinks is good. Once the intellect perceives something as good, the will experiences
a movement toward the perceived good and utilizes all of its faculties to attain it. It is a
fundamental conviction of Saint Francis de Sales that, “sin has much more weakened the will
than darkened the intellect.” DeSales expresses the idea that when people are tempted by sin,
they commonly know what is morally correct and evil. Unfortunately, they are unable to fight
their “urges” and this results in the will being overcome by the urges and succumbing to sin. The
downfall of the will occurs when a person gives consent to his evil desires and consequently
becomes their slave. The enslavement of the will is prevented, however, when a person makes a
good choice. Each time an individual makes a good choice the will is strengthened and is able to
maintain control over one’s desires.
In the process of making a good choice, a person not only strengthens the will but also becomes more free. However, what does it mean to be free? The idea of freedom is not something that is easily defined and as a result is considered by many to be nonexistent. Those skeptical of freedom believe that all people are determined by natural and social forces and thus have little personal control over their life. In contrast, freedom can be considered an inner freedom that is somewhat affected by external factors as well as a personal freedom that is distinguishable from nature. As a result, utilizing the notion of the human will and intellect mentioned above, people have the means by which they are pleased by something and in turn move toward that object. The individual, having not been forced by anything external, utilizes a sense of inner and personal freedom to achieve what is desired.

The more a person exercises freedom in his life the more he will come to know its true depth, which can become overwhelming and fearful. In a way, the setting for which human freedom exists is both limited and predetermined. People are constantly shaped by past and present situations. Ironically, people become bound by their past choices: the freedom to make the choices of the past becomes what limits future choices. An individual’s past choices provide the circumstances for making a future decision. Sartre further summarizes the downside of freedom when he says, “To be free is to be condemned to be free.” In other words, to be free is to acquire the responsibility and the anxiety that accompanies decision-making. It is common to find that once someone experiences freedom, he may tend to retreat and willingly give up freedom. Many people would much rather live life without freedom than to have to deal with the anxiety associated with it. The anxiety results from the burden of choosing among several possibilities and a fear of making the wrong choice. Throughout history, there have been several dictators that have thrived because of this fear. For example, Russians spent years under a
A common misconception in defining freedom as a loving relationship with God is that it becomes limiting and is not “true freedom.” People must realize that freedom is not meant to be understood as “freedom from” something, but rather it is “freedom for” something. In this sense, freedom can be viewed as an active entity rather than something that someone can hold and yet do nothing with. It further reflects one’s responsibility to utilize freedom for a love toward God and others. An individual who is perfectly free is not saddened by the call to love God, for his heart is also truly free. If someone rightly exercises his freedom, then he should be satisfied in knowing that all that he does is not only pleasing to himself but to God as well.
Freedom in one respect can be empowering because it leads one to God, but at the same time it can be destructive due to the anxiety it causes. Without freedom, a person comes to lose his humanity and is reduced to an inferior form of life. Until an individual can accept both the negative and positive aspects of freedom, he will be unable to fully experience it. Once man comes to realize that freedom is not a demand and is something that he is entitled to, he can then fully share in its benefits.

Beyond the call to love and the anxiety that is associated with freedom, there is also one’s freedom to choose whom he wishes to become in the future. Often a person can encounter a small child asking a parent what he can be when he grows up. The parent smiles back and remarks, “Anything you want.” This simple advice has a resounding truth: people are the final determinants of their future. Man has the power to choose who he is to become beyond his genetic make-up. In essence, despite how much a person may blame others or situations for his faults, it is his decisions and actions that make him who he is. Of course, other people and events do have effects, but these aspects merely serve as a basis for the actions a person decides to take. No matter what people may believe, no one can have their will forced to do something that it does not want to do. The pressures associated with the feelings of “I have to” are realistically “I choose to.” Unless a person is physically forced to do something, the person alone chooses all of his actions.

Author Stephen C. Paul once wrote, “You don’t get to control any outcome, only every choice you make along the way.” The idea put forth by Paul is an empowering reminder that man is in ultimate control of his life. Once people begin to let others make choices for them or allow the opinions of others to overly influence them, they begin to lose their own identity. In essence, when a person allows another to control the way in which he lives, he is in effect
permitting that person to live his life for him. In psychology, an idea known as the minority slowness effect arises that is associated with this concept. The minority slowness effect occurs when people tend to refrain from expressing a view that is in the minority. This occurrence is often typical in children as they grow up. For instance, a child may like a particular song or movie that is not typically accepted as the “cool” thing to like at that age. As a result, the child will be reluctant to reveal his true likes to others in order to remain in the majority. Unfortunately, there is little room for uniqueness in a majority. Once a person can be comfortable with himself and the things he enjoys, he will be able to make choices that reflect a control over his own life.

As a person continues to grow into a unique aspect of the world and becomes more comfortable with his character, the choices he makes will begin to reflect his distinct self. Aristotle conveyed this sentiment when he said, “We are what we repeatedly do.” The decisions a person makes gradually shape his personality and aids in determining how he will act in future situations. For instance, an individual who constantly chooses negative actions will most likely perform negative actions arising from a negative character. Consider those that choose a life of crime. These people may begin to commit criminal acts and ultimately their entire character becomes negatively altered because of the crimes. This effect highlights the importance of one’s surroundings in helping to shape his character. Psychologists use the two-factor theory of emotion to describe the ambiguity of a person’s emotions. The theory suggests that because a person does not directly know his feelings and emotions, he will use the events in which these emotions are elicited in order to help understand the feelings. For example, an individual who witnesses a violent crime can identify the emotions he encounters as negative
because the action he is witnessing is negative. As a result, the situation in which a person experiences a particular emotion becomes important when it comes to making a choice.

While the surrounding events to a decision become important in determining emotions, they also become influential in their potential to elicit fear. The issues of fear and anxiety become a critical component in whether a person will even make a choice in a given circumstance. Whether it be going away to college or asking someone on a date, the presence of fear becomes a crippling factor in the decision-making process. Saint Francis de Sales notes that fear only exists when a person believes the evil he is encountering is unavoidable. He further comments that “fear is a greater evil than the evil itself.” If people realized that it is not the particular evil that inhibits them from what they want, but rather the fear that encompasses them, they would be more willing to face the evil. One need only look toward Jesus Christ for inspiration on dealing with fear. While in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion, Christ prayed to God for the possibility of having His death pass Him. Christ, being fully man, faced His imminent death with an anxiety that is to be expected. However, rather than having fear and anxiety overtake him, Christ offered his troubles to God and was thus able to face his death. For this reason, DeSales recommends, “If you trust in God, he will take care of you and everything necessary for your perfection.”

Although the writers of the Bible tell their readers 366 times not to fear, many people continue to battle fear in their daily lives. In fact, psychotherapist Fritz Kunkel identified four fatal fears that many people hold: being wrong, failure, rejection, and emotional conflict. Behind each of these fears is a specific “need” that a person conceives. It is through these false needs that the brain begins to view them as a necessity for survival. If they do not occur, anxiety will eventually set in. Unfortunately, the four fatal fears become the reason why many people do
not attempt things in their life. An individual would rather be content with his current lifestyle than attempt an act in which he could potentially fail. A person can begin to view the idea of being right and succeeding as something that is needed for survival. In this situation, one must once again remember that it is nothing beyond himself that creates how he feels. In other words, it is not the choices that produce the fear and anxiety in an individual, but rather, it is his emotions in response to those choices. Preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon summarized this point well when he stated, “It is said that our anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but only empties today of its strengths.”35 While many may believe that yielding to their fear prevents them from experiencing pain, in reality, it only weakens them from further accomplishing their goals.

Closely associated with the fear and anxiety when confronted with making a choice is certain fallacies that can also hinder a person from making a choice. The human mind is a precious gift, but it is also the source of many troubles a person encounters when faced with a decision. Mark Twain highlights this idea when he says, “I’ve experienced many terrible things in my life and most of them never happened.”37 Much of the worries that occur when making a choice stems from dwelling excessively on a situation and believing the “what if” scenarios become “it will” scenarios.38 Many individuals believe that because they think something can happen it will happen. Psychologists use the term magical thinking to describe the event in which the assumptions a person considers do not rationally make sense.39 In other words, the scenarios that a person believes cannot realistically happen. Unfortunately, the various thoughts that run through a person’s mind become such a strain that he will become discouraged and opt to not make a choice at all.
In addition to the irrational thinking that takes place, there is a battle between the survival and creative parts of the brain. The dual aspects of the brain contribute to the struggles that a person endures when making choices. The creative side of the mind wants one to change as he proceeds through life, while the survival side clings to survival skills. In a sense, the survival part experiences change as something that is a threat to a person and will in turn attempt to slow the changing. It is through this part of the mind that the magical thinking and fears originate. Meanwhile, the creative aspect of the brain stirs within man the continued desire to change and to seek more in life. Saint Matthew’s Gospel highlights this battle in the story of the rich man who is afraid of change. Jesus responds when asked by the man how he may receive eternal life by saying, “If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor.” When hearing this, the man became sad due to the fact that he was wealthy and owned many possessions. In the end, the man did not respond to Christ’s call because the survival part of his mind essentially influenced him to keep his possessions, for they were a pivotal part of his existence.

Much like how the battle between the survival and creative parts of the mind influences a person making a decision, there is also a struggle between what feels good and what one knows is good. It is often very difficult to subdue a person’s passions and use the intellect to decide what is morally right in a situation. As stated before, once man allows his passions to become dominant, the will becomes its slave and he will begin to choose based on his desires. When a person begins to behave according to his passions, he will often make decisions that are selfish in nature, for those choices are what are pleasing to him on a sentient level. Ultimately, one has to learn a balance between what feels good and what the intellect knows is good. For instance, consider how many healthcare workers smoke in their daily lives. The professionals have learned
the deadly effects of smoking and may have even have watched others die from its effects. In this situation, the satisfying feelings given by the tobacco and nicotine become more important than what the intellect knows. In addition, a person will find it difficult to subdue his passions because yielding to the passions will provide instant gratification. Behaving in ways that feel pleasant becomes easier because it immediately gratifies the passions, allowing one to be released from the struggle. To choose on the basis of what is morally good involves the difficult task of overcoming one’s passions and using the intellect to choose. The process can become easier if an individual continuously keeps his passions in order and does not let them dominate the will.

Based on the various struggles and irrational thinking that exists when attempting to make a choice, it is no wonder that many people have a difficult time of letting go and actually making a decision. Often the task of choosing becomes a problem for people because they must face the idea of risk. The idea of the unknown becomes an unsettling feeling that deters many people from making choices in their life. Individuals will worry about the possibility of something occurring without considering the probability that it may even happen. The way in which the mind works is that the information that is easier to recall is the information that people will often remember. As a result, dramatic events that are unlikely to happen, such as getting struck by lightning, are brought to mind and cause worry. In order to feel more secure about the potential for risks that a person faces, he must believe he has some control over the situation. For example, this reason causes many people to choose to drive on their annual vacations rather than fly because they are the one in the driver’s seat. The individual believes he has control over the vehicle and thus has the ability to determine its outcome.

Through the various fallacies that arise in one’s mind, a person can become his own worst enemy when making a choice. When a response to a given action does not occur rapidly, the
mind is given ample time to dwell unnecessarily on the situation. Thus, anxiety builds and one becomes paranoid with the “what ifs” that can possibly occur. Consider the high school senior who reflects on several alternatives to his future while awaiting a response from his college applications. In addition, with enough time and persuasion, a person can convince himself that the consequences to his decisions will differ from those who make similar choices. This idea can pertain to the positive or the negative choices an individual makes. For example, attending a particular school can prove more beneficial when compared to another, but the choice of going to that institution would be a greater risk. As a result, the individual may convince himself that the inferior choice is better. Similarly, a person may be persuaded to take drugs by convincing himself that the drugs will be entertaining and the long term effects only apply to other people.

In his book, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*, Scott Peck writes, “A full life will be full of pain.” Peck expresses that to fully live one’s life and make choices, one must be willing to face the risks associated with love, trust, and dependence. With these risks come the painful consequences of rejection, betrayal and disappointment; however, the only alternative is barely living at all. Taken as a whole, life in general can be viewed as one big risk and perhaps the greatest of those risks is growing up. A major component of growing up involves letting go of the familiar and embracing the unknown. In this respect, many adults are still growing up and clinging to the comfortable and familiar. A person cannot mature in character unless he experiences new things and learns from them. If one were to live in the same situations and respond in the same ways, then they would rarely grow as a person. Instead, it takes an act of self-love to such an extent that one is willing to leave that which is familiar and potentially become happier with something different. For instance, a couple could be in a relationship for many years and decide to breakup. It takes both
courage and a self-love for them to end an otherwise happy relationship with the belief that something better is waiting.

Despite the several risks and anxieties associated with making a choice, a person cannot move forward in the world without choosing. From deciding what school to attend to whether to marry another, making choices is essential to everyday life. More important are the benefits one receives from the choices made. Once a person can acknowledge that the fear of choosing will always exist they can then move past it and grow stronger in character. Whether it be past choices that affect the future or taking a leap into the unknown, people must realize that the kind of person they become is determined by the choices they make, for the choices shape one’s life.

- Learning To Relate -

“Relationship, surely, is the mirror in which you discover yourself. That mirror can be either distorted, or it can be reflecting that which is.”

- Jiddu Krishnamurti

While the ability to choose allows men to become the final determinant of their future, it does not mean that they have to forego it alone. Among those many blessings that God has bestowed on a person is the creation of his fellow man with whom one can interact. The relationships that a person establishes with others aid in shaping his character and ultimately his affect on the world. An individual’s interactions with others form the foundation on which one can learn from his experiences and be guided to make a decision. Thus, it is through a person’s experiences with others that he can learn from life as well as become influenced to choose in a particular manner. These choices in turn serve to reveal a person’s character to others in the relationships he has. The person’s character then enables a person to relate to others and form
influential relationships in life. Without these interactions, an individual would be inhibited in growing into the kind of person he was meant to be.

The process of growth and its effect on one’s desire to be with others has a basis in theology. The basic idea that God creates all people provides the inherent connection one has toward another. Saint Francis de Sales writes on this matter by saying, “We are all made in the image and likeness of God and hence we are all made in the image of one another.” Because of the sharing in the image of God, people have a natural inclination to be with others. In addition, DeSales notes that all people are made in the image of the Trinitarian God, which is the perfect example of friendship and mutual self-giving. Each aspect of the Trinity is distinct, and yet at the same time it remains a single unit. Part of the satisfaction that comes in life is finding others to share in its moments and living for that other person. Serving others and establishing a relationship with them helps to fulfill the void that can tend to accompany life. It becomes pleasing to the person and because man is made in the image of God, He is pleased as well.

From the moment of birth, babies are born in a state in which they cannot survive on their own. As a result, the baby has a need to be loved and provided for by a parent or someone in order to survive. The strong bond that is made between a parent and child is the first of many relationships made in a person’s life. It is through this relationship that a person will base all his other relationships that he encounters. Whether it be the values that are instilled or the way in which a person learns to communicate, the skills learned in this first relationship become central to all others in life. The success is vital because an individual needs others in order to help define himself. For instance, when a person is asked the question, “describe yourself in three words,” he will most likely respond with a particular adjective or role in society. Each of the responses (i.e. kind, caring, patient) will have some context in relation to others. In other words, a person could
not exemplify the particular trait or role without the presence of others. Thus, for an individual to truly view the type of person he is, he must enter a relationship and display his character to others.

One of the strongest relationships a person can create is that of friendship. From the time a child can walk and talk to others, he begins to form friendships and grow because of them. As he continues through schooling, a child tends to increase the number of friends he has. However, it is typical to see that the type of friends a person has can change throughout life. As one continues to mature and his personality changes, so will the type of person he chooses to associate with. For instance, a particularly rebellious high school student may find himself in a group that tends to break the law. As that student matures and enters college, he may reject that group and choose new friends that fit his maturing character. This may be the reason why so many people have life-long relationships that originated in college. While a person never stops growing, the years spent in college are a good transition into adulthood and a new level of maturity. Thus, those close friends made during college tend to accompany an individual throughout adulthood. Overall, in each of the stages of growth, a person’s friends are a reflection of his character. For this reason, some friends last for short periods while those that mature alongside an individual last a lifetime.

With regard to friendship, Saint Francis de Sales notes that a “true friendship” is one in which individuals who are similar in virtue are brought together and their souls are united as one. DeSales believes that the three necessary elements of friendships are that those involved must love one another, know that the love exists and communicate it, and have intimacy and familiarity with one another. Each of the elements needs to exist for a relationship between friends to occur. Communication becomes essential because it is the means by which one can
express both his character and thoughts to another. Often people will refrain from confronting a friend when a problem arises. In turn, anger and resentment builds within the person and the relationship only suffers because of it. Once an individual realizes that nothing can be resolved until he communicates what is bothering him, a friendship can be that much stronger.

Aristotle summarizes the idea of friendship nicely when he expressed that friends help one another be better people in thought and action. A person is able to set his personal desires aside and help his fellow man grow in life. A friend’s contribution can be as simple as listening after a particularly rough day, but it can help a person overcome his difficulties and learn from them. In addition, the union of two people in marriage can be considered the culmination of a particular friendship. Marriage is intended to be a true friendship since it shares the same goals: expressing love for another while helping that person continue to grow. Many people who marry begin their relationship as friends. They establish a strong bond and reach a level of comfort in which they can reveal their true self and not be ashamed of it. The friendship grows to a point in which the love that is shared between the two is so strong that they wish to spend the rest of their lives with one another. Thus, the foundation of any loving and successful marriage begins with a strong friendship.

With all marriages and relationships in general, a person must be willing to give of himself as an active part of the relationship. Strong bonds that people have with one another are not created by giving little of the self to the other person. Instead, relationships exist among people expressing who they truly are and have another accept him for that. As a result, an individual needs self-confidence to engage in a truly meaningful relationship with others. In order to fully share oneself with another one must have self-acceptance. Consequently, to understand others requires a person to make room for them in himself. Instead of judging others, a true friend
respects that other person as a unique individual and does not attempt to criticize him for it. Author John Macmurray successfully captures these idea when is writes, “To be a friend is to be yourself for another person.”

Much of what causes a person to withhold his true self to others are the powerful influences that people can have on him. Whether it is the opinions of society or the thoughts of people in school and work, individuals are constantly pressured to alter their unique self in return for a more “accepting” self. It is important to remember that an individual is constantly influencing all those around him even if he does not realize it. Something as small as saying “hello” to a stranger on the street may serve to lift his spirits and change his attitude for the day. Furthermore, the way a person acts toward others may not be in response to their actions but may in fact be a reflection of how that person feels about himself. Those who have a negative self-image typically lash out at others and attempt to make them feel just as bad as they do. This type of person has little for which to be positive about that he attempts to make others to feel the same.

While many people tend to be great critics of others, they rarely view their own faults or even recognize that they exist. Saint Francis de Sales once wrote, “Everyman has enough on which he ought to judge himself without taking it upon himself to judge his neighbor.” It is much easier to analyze and criticize the character of other people than to reflect on one’s own shortcomings. Some people feel if they were to acknowledge that something is wrong with them, then they would be somehow inferior to others. Because of this concern, these people refrain from admitting their faults. On the other hand, the ability to recognize one’s faults becomes that first step on the challenging journey of changing one’s character. As a result, many people opt to ignore their own faults and concentrate on the failures of others. Although it may be easier to
disregard one’s own shortcomings, it can seriously inhibit any chances of improving one’s character.

While constantly criticizing others is not beneficial to a person’s growth, occasional acknowledgement of another’s faults may be necessary. When a person attempts to confront others about their mistakes, it is best not to assume what their motives are. An individual may have a particular reason for his actions that are unknown to others. Thus, a relationship between two people can be better served by not making assumptions as to how the other feels and simply expressing one’s point of view. Essentially, as hard as they may be, confrontations in relationships are important for those involved. Being honest with another person and relaying how one feels conveys a deep care for another. An unwillingness or inability to criticize another prevents any deepening of a relationship and leaves the bond between two people to remain superficial. Those that boast that their relationship is perfect because they never argue miss the point of acknowledging what bothers a person. Those who are honest with one another, including the things that are negative, aid in strengthening the relationship.

When a person criticizes others, he often fails to realize that their actions may not be a reflection of their character, but rather the effects of the surroundings. An individual can tend to underestimate the influence of external factors in particular circumstances and immediately blame the individual. A 1974 Stanford University experiment by psychologist Philip Zimbardo presents an extreme example of how a person’s surroundings and circumstances can affect his character. In the study, twenty-four college students were randomly assigned to one of two groups: prison guards or prisoners. All the students entered an empty prison, where the guards were told to keep order and prevent escape without using violence. On the second day of testing, the guards began to abuse the prisoners by beating them and putting them in closets. After six
days, the experiment was terminated due to the mental stress placed on the students. Even though the students who portrayed guards were shown through psychological tests as being an “all American boy,” the students still became violent when given the power to do so. As the experiment reveals, while a person is the final determinant in the actions he performs, his surroundings can be a powerful influence on how he acts toward others.

In order to prevent external factors from influencing a person’s actions, he should remember that the outside world does not control him. Rather, a person is the one who controls how he feels and interacts with others in a given situation. Many times, an individual will act poorly toward others and blame it on having a bad day. In reality, the behavior is not the result of the events that occurred during the day, but the person’s emotional response to those events. Much of how something is perceived as good or bad is ultimately up to those that encounter it. The way in which a person responds to the outside world aids in developing his unique interpersonal style. Each individual’s interpersonal style is made up of the way in which he behaves toward others and in specific situations. The behaviors that make a person comfortable are the ones that will be reinforced. As a result, if one continuously responds to the world in a negative manner, he will often adopt an interpersonal style that is overall negative. In addition, a person’s interpersonal style frequently becomes the way in which others will identify one’s personality and overall character. How a person interprets the things that happen to him thus has an effect not only on his personality but also on the way people choose to interact with him.

The philosophers, Democritus and Epictetus agreed that a person’s happiness depends not on what occurs to him but rather how he interprets the events. Because the attitude an individual has when relating to others is an important basis for character, the role of positive emotions becomes a significant idea to consider. In fact, a new branch of psychology has emerged that
studies the role of positive emotions in relation to how a person interacts and functions in the world. Developed by former president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman, positive psychology aims to identify the traits and conditions that help the human person flourish.\textsuperscript{58} Throughout history, psychology has often concerned itself with mental diseases and conditions that affected men. It focused on an individual as a passive object that simply responded to the world around him.\textsuperscript{57} Positive psychology views individuals as active members of their own lives, making choices based on preferences and character traits.\textsuperscript{57} Commonly, people will identify the bad things in their life, but rarely mention the good that occurs. Those aspects of life such as love and hope are often taken for granted.\textsuperscript{57} In a new trend, positive psychology aims to highlight those commonly ignored attributes of life.

Concerning positive emotions, psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihayi observes “almost every person feels happier when they are with other people.”\textsuperscript{58} In support of this observation, a study at the University of Illinois found that the most common characteristic among those with the highest levels of happiness were strong ties to family and friends.\textsuperscript{58} In a way, the effects of positive emotions are cyclical. Those with a “glass half full” view of the world are often willing to convey personal information to others and engage in social interactions. Once involved in a close relationship with another person, the individual can maintain his positive emotions through the support of the other person. Furthermore, holding positive emotions may also broaden the way in which one views the world around him.\textsuperscript{59} Acting in a positive way, a person is able to better identify those aspects in the world that have the potential to aid in the development of his character. In other words, having positive emotions can help one to view opportunities to meet others and take risks as the means to grow and leave a “comfort zone.” This type of thinking also aids in finding positive meaning in the events a person encounters throughout life.\textsuperscript{60} Rather than
focusing on the downside to a bad event, those with positive attitudes are able to find some good
to make it beneficial. Overall, those with a positive outlook are more willing to become an active
part in their own life and engage in meaningful relationships.

The many benefits that accompany positive emotions aid in building strong bonds with
others. The ability to find the good in an otherwise negative society allows a person to not only
proceed through tough times but also support others through their difficult moments. Whether it
be a friend or a spouse, those with whom a person interacts provide depth and meaning to life.
Through these people, a person is able to be his true self and share his thoughts. Made in the
image of God, man lives his life creating relationships along the way. In the end, the
relationships help to shape who he becomes in the world as well as offer a reflection of his
overall character.

-Learning To Love-
“It is to those who have the most need of us that we ought to
show our love more especially.”
- Saint Francis de Sales

The relationships people form with others throughout their lives act as a critical component
in the formation of their character. The foundation of these relationships is the love that one has
for another. True love gives meaning to an individual’s life and gives him the desire to live for
another without concern for himself. Central to the love that is expressed for others, is an
inclination to love God above all things. To love God and to center one’s life on that love, a
person can extend himself to others and achieve the true good in life. Unfortunately, despite the
many benefits that are associated with love, there are also several risks. Giving of oneself
completely to another through love is an act that requires trust and faith. As a result, many
people get hurt when attempting to love others and ultimately close themselves off to the world. The disappointments that are associated with love can be minimized when an individual is motivated primarily by an unselfish or disinterested love. To love with only a regard for another allows a person to help others achieve their calling while at the same time fulfilling God’s call to love.

The importance and influence of love shines forth in the writings of Saint Francis de Sales. “Love is the life of the heart,” DeSales writes as he emphasizes how integral love is to man. The presence of love within a person is what gives him purpose and directs his actions. DeSales further conveys his ideas by comparing love to a fountain that pours charity over the whole person and a garden where virtuous seeds grow. Each of these symbolic representations reveals love as a significant component of one’s actions. According to DeSales, it is love that ultimately determines the quality and character of man’s actions. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.” Only when one loves Jesus does He reveal and make Himself known to man. The same interaction can be applied to human love in relationships: to love is to open oneself to another and have that person do the same in return. Thus, in order to know another person, it is necessary to love him and have that love reciprocated.

The idea of love as essential to the human person can be further seen in man’s creation. The breath of life utilized by God to form man can also be considered the breath of love. As a result, love enters into the very make-up of man and into the innermost structure of his being. To live life and to express one’s human nature is at the same time to express love. As far as the nature of man is concerned, living and loving are inseparable and inconceivable without each
other. In essence, the heart and, ultimately, love is the spot where a person integrates all of his other experiences. The love that is bestowed upon God at this “summit” is then spread to all man’s other works.

According to St. Francis de Sales, the love of God can be experienced in two principal ways. It can be an affective love or an effective love. An affective love makes a person take pleasure in God’s goodness or as the saint says, it “makes [one] pleased in God.” Effective love makes an individual act in order to please God. The saint explains that when the good is perceived by the intellect, it results in a stirring of the will towards the good. This initial arousal toward the good, he calls complacency or delight, is not love but merely the beginning of love. This stirring of the will then results in a movement of the will toward the good. This movement of the will toward the good is for him the essence of love in general. Once the will is united to the good, it then experiences what he calls the love of complacency. In other words, it takes pleasure and delight when united to the good it seeks and pursues.

People may also experience additional forms of love, including the love of cupidity and the love of benevolence. The love of cupidity occurs when a person loves something solely for the profit he receives from it. The love of benevolence is love that is expressed toward something for its own good. The important distinction between the two is the aim of the person. With respect to the love of cupidity, a person is only concerned with himself and the benefits associated with love. However, one who conveys a love of benevolence loves unconditionally based on the object’s nature. Consider the early stages of a romance between two people. In the beginning of the relationship, everything is new and those involved are drawn to one another based on the physical pleasures they give (love of cupidity). As the relationship progresses, the original pleasures may begin to fade and the individuals may love one another for different
reasons (progresses to a love of benevolence). It is this kind of unselfish love that can be considered “genuine.” In his book, The Road Less Traveled, Scott Peck proposes that genuine love is the only path to true happiness. For it is through genuine love that a person can extend himself and continue to grow.

When man expresses selfless love for others, he is in essence following the universal call to holiness. DeSales describes the universal call to holiness as the idea that people are constantly on a journey to return to God and perform good works along the way. The benevolence that is expressed to others brings a person to fulfill his calling to love God. As an individual progresses through life and follows his inclination to love God above all things, he becomes more human. When man loves God, he also loves all of his creation and becomes closer to becoming what God has intended. Still, through the impact of original sin, man in unable to constantly extend an unconditional love to everything and needs God’s help to fulfill his calling. The aid comes in the form of God’s grace as well as those with whom a person interacts. Those relationships serve as a constant reminder of God’s loving grace poured into his creation and inspire one to persevere in love. DeSales illustrates this idea using a palm tree, which makes some imperfect fruit, but has the ability to bear ripe fruit in hotter climate. So too with men, do they have a natural inclination to love God and others, but need heavenly grace to fully love Him. Sin may hinder a person’s ability to love God, but with the help of grace, one is never hopeless to love again.

The important function of the heart is to convey not only a love that is receptive and draws God’s love into itself but also a love that is active and pours out praise and love of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas and his assertion that all love is rooted in a passion for God supports this idea. Unfortunately, the passions serve to pull a person toward several different objects, which can be good or bad. Aquinas notes that the passions only become bad when the love from which
it springs is bad. When an individual loves something that is not fitting to his character, he can become disintegrative and reject opportunities for growth. For example, many people remain in an abusive relationship with a hope that the one they are with will change. They express a love for something that does nothing to make them a better person, but instead only demeans themselves. The love that exists is this situation goes in a single direction and ultimately proves no benefit to the lover. On the other hand, when an individual loves something that is truly good it becomes a love that improves that person. This love enhances all that is good in a person and instills a desire to achieve only the best in the world. As a result, a person’s character is most perfected by a love for God, for He is the prime motivation for achieving his full potential. It is also important to recall the balance needed for nurturing one’s feelings and keeping them in line. The power of love and the many benefits that can result are great; however, to love without reason can result in loving those things that are destructive to a person’s character. Thus, one should remember that he has control over his feelings and they do not control him.

When love is controlled and directed toward those things that will benefit a person’s life, he can begin to experience the true nature of love. One who genuinely loves another will view the beloved as an individual and a separated entity. Often, this view of the beloved is difficult to achieve in a parent-child relationship. Parents sometimes have difficulty viewing their children as unique individuals. Instead, they continuously compare the child to themselves and push for similar outcomes in life, such as when they pressure the child to pursue the same profession. Once those in a relationship view one another as unique individuals and establish a commitment to each other, they can then go from falling in love to experiencing genuine love. When two people marry, they achieve this genuine love and view one another as dimidium animae meae, or “the complementary half of the soul.” Both have created such a bond that they are able to live
for one another and share a common outlook on life. Yet, at the same time, a successful marriage will find that both partners continue to cultivate their union while at the same time pursuing their own goals in life.\textsuperscript{44} Marriage is the perfect balance between “becoming one flesh” while still maintaining independent personalities.\textsuperscript{70}

For the many joys that come with a loving relationship, there is also much heartache. When a person enters into a loving relationship, he extends himself to unfamiliar ground and encounters something new. He takes the risk of becoming emotionally attached to another and relies on that person for support. This new change requires one to overcome the fear that is associated with vulnerability and enter into a relationship. Unfortunately, the fear of being hurt by others can become so overwhelming that a person will find reasons not to form a loving relationship.\textsuperscript{44} Eventually, the fear can begin to control the individual, and he will become emotionally reserved when interacting with others. This raises the question, “Is it better to have loved and lost, than to have never loved at all?” Since much benefit is to be had with loving another, there is little reason not to engage in loving relationships. A person has the opportunity to experience the joys associated with loving another while at the same time becoming a better person for it. The sting of a breakup can be difficult, but it is another chance to learn from life and improve in the future. With a positive outlook, one can treasure the times spent in the relationship and use those times as motivation to love again in the future.

The difficulties associated with love only add to the complexity that is life. Nevertheless, love is another gift bestowed on man by God that requires him to use it in the proper manner. Once an individual expresses love toward something good, he in turn receives the benefits associated with it. He not only becomes better for loving but also takes a step closer to accepting
his universal call to holiness. Upon entering a loving relationship, man expresses himself and in turn is shaped by that relationship. To love another is a privilege and enrichment to life.

**-Learning To Create-**

“You were created perfectly by God for the purpose for which you were created.”
- Tim Flanagan

By loving others, a person continues the work of creation, for God creates out of love. Whether it is love between couples to create children or love poured into a project at work, much of the love expressed in life has an integral part in the creative process. God has created each individual with the purpose of working with all his creation and helping to achieve its full potential. In order to accomplish this work, all people are equipped with unique God-given talents for which they are meant to cultivate throughout life. Once a person recognizes the talents he has been given, he can use those skills to not only improve himself but those around him. The idea of creation requires an individual to take an active role in society and form it in a way that is in keeping with God’s plan. Once a person is able to leave his “comfort zone” and utilizes his unique talents according to the will of God, he will be able to create the life that he is called to live.

The idea that man is made in the image and likeness of God suggests that he is also called to share in creation. As a result, a person is meant to be a collaborator with God while he spends time on earth. Becoming a co-creator with God implies a responsibility to nurture God’s creation and not exercise dominance over it. Each person is called to care for the world around him with a love of benevolence while expecting nothing in return. The call to protect God’s creation is never more relevant than with the current issue of global warming. The consequences of human
lifestyles has finally caught up with the world and brought forth many environmental concerns. Many citizens across the globe have responded to these growing concerns and have begun to take action in slowing the effects of global warming. These people have accepted their responsibility to care for the place they live and have taken the step to ensure its survival.

The task of nurturing the world that God has given to man is not easy, but approached in a positive manner, the required work can be beneficial. One only has to turn to the Sacred Scriptures to find that work is not a negative part to life. The work described in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis can be described as a blessing and not a curse. God is portrayed as being generous and caring in all that He creates. All of the animals and trees are presented as gifts from God through his loving nature. God then created mankind in order to cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden. This cultivation can be viewed as the first kind of work to be done by man. Because God gave the task of caring for the Garden to man, one should feel honored rather than obligated to care for His creation. Chapter 1 of Genesis states that God looked at everything He had made and found it very good. 73 This scriptural chapter conveys the idea that work can produce wonderful things and as a result is a blessing.

By performing the work one is called to do, he is not only reflecting the actions of God but also realizing the unique calling for each person. Not matter who the person is, everyone has been bestowed with the gift of making an impact on others. For instance, an individual may be skilled with computers while another has the patience to teach children. Each of these people has been given a particular gift to be used to become whom they are meant to be. Furthermore, it is ironic to find that the people in a particular profession share similar character traits. Most healthcare workers tend to be outgoing and compassionate and use these qualities to serve others. These people have recognized their talents and knowledge and have used them to serve others.
For an individual to understand God working within him, he must understand God’s plan at work. A person must remember that if he has trust in God, then God will guide all his works and all that occurs in his life, good or bad. 

Once a person realizes and appreciates the gifts he has been given, he must then decide how he will use them. Unfortunately, many people will waste their talents because it may take work to use them. A person may be very smart, but does not receive good grades because he is too lazy to study and apply himself. Then there are those individuals who become too proud of their talents and develop an ego because of them. Singer and songwriter, Bobby McFerrin once said, “We get so full of ourselves with the more we know that we forget that the talents we have are gifts.” Several people who become successful believe they reached their achievements based on their own merits. While the individual is important in developing his success, it is also the talents given by God and the support of the people around him that help the success be realized. A humble person who realizes that he can do nothing without the help of others takes the first step to achieving his goals in life.

When interacting with the world and all of God’s creation, man is faced with the opportunity to affect his surroundings. Much of what determines whether a person is able to leave his mark on the world is how the person thinks. The ability to think “outside the box” is important in growing and creating new experiences for oneself. Inventor, Buckminster Fuller has said, “Children are born geniuses and society de-geniiuses them.” When children are young, they are willing to try new things and approach people they do not know. Eventually, the child grows into an adult who is shaped by society and has reservations about trying new things or meeting new people. The only way a person can find what is right for him is if he follows his own desires and listens to his own thoughts without the pressure of what is acceptable by the majority.
Psychologist, Edward De Bono supports this claim saying, “Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.” In other words, to be creative incorporates how a person thought when he was a kid. In a child’s view, he can do anything he wants in life and is willing to make the effort to obtain it. Creativity enables a person to make the first move into uncertainty and begin the process of becoming whom he is called to be.

**-Conclusion-**

There are many uncertainties that lie before a person in life. What one will become when he grows up, what the next day will bring, and more constantly plague a person’s mind. Once a person is able to become satisfied with who he is, much of that worry can be extinguished. When an individual is able to be comfortable with himself, a sense of satisfaction is created within him. When he fails or makes a wrong choice, he is not upset, for he knows that tomorrow is another day. The opportunities that he has faced one day become the lessons he has learned for use in another. In relating to others, an individual can freely express himself and not be ashamed of his character. Those that accept him on the basis of his unique traits are those that are worth interacting with. Most of all, a person realizes he is never truly finished growing into what God has called him to be. In fact, until one’s death, an individual is continuously being shaped by the people and events around him, while still in control of his choices. If after all the lessons learned, choices made, relationships established, love conveyed and objects created, a person can look himself in the mirror and be happy with what he sees, then one has become what God has destined.
-Endnotes-

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