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Our Names

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Our Names

When I was a child, I did not like my first name, because no one else at school, or any others I knew, had the same name. But when my mother found a small children's book about a boy with the name Randall, I was satisfied. Many years later, someone showed me a meaning for my name, "confident counselor," that seemed a surprisingly appropriate description. Perhaps there is more to our names than merely a handy means of differentiating one person from another.

Whether or not our personal name has a specific meaning that might describe one or other of our qualities at present or in the past, each of our names has a meaning that is unique in the entire world, past, present and to come. Even if someone in our family or among our closest associates or friends has the identical name, no one else has the same qualities and experiences as we do. When others, or even we ourselves, refer to us by our name, there is no confusion about our unique individual identity.

While parents often choose names for children before they are born, and while some people change their names or receive nicknames from others, God calls us into being, chooses us to become this person before even our conception, loving us as we are with our name. No matter how favored or deprived our earliest years might have been, God wanted us, and that is why we exist.

Though we are often identified by our name, we know ourselves and are known by many others as far more than merely an individual with this or that name. In our own inner dialog, we do not often use our names, just as we do not always mentally use a name for God when we pray, and as we do not speak their names every time we address others. But none of us are "no-name" persons to ourselves, to God, or to all those who know us in any way.

We all have experience of people using our names to refer to us with respect or care, and also those who speak our names disdainfully or without care. Some use our names to convey different meanings, such as to express approval or disapproval, or to command or to invite. And, just as people can take God's name "in vain," they can certainly misuse or abuse our names. But so can they, and we, attach praise or affection to a name.

God calls us by our name, but not from having learned it from our parents or other name-givers. In addressing us in our everyday experience, God does not often speak our name, and we do not usually hear a voice in our minds, much less our ears. But we have no doubt about who is receiving the

personal contact, and we do not ever have the experience of being addressed with the equivalent of "hey, you," which would evoke the opposite of the peace, healing or joy that is normally evoked in our hearts.

God calls us by name, but is no more limited in communicating with us than are our family and friends who use a variety of names and nicknames in addition to our given or legally recognized name. There could be a million persons with the same external name, but God knows and loves as we are, a forever person, with our name or names, and not merely as one member of a species. In our likeness to God, there is and can be no other "us" nor will there ever be.

Our names bear with us some of our eternal destiny.