

The Integration of Faith and Vocation

By Arthur J Miller Jr.

The tragic failure of psychology over the last century to discover a rudimentary science of persons for understanding human nature and predicting individual behavior has been a disaster for the majority in every generation. As a result, our foundational institutions of education, work and religion are built on faulty models which do not reflect the actual nature and behavior of persons. People are seen as in-process, incomplete, adaptable, infinitely malleable, raw material to be shaped by their parents, teachers, bosses and clergy, on the road to becoming who they will be. It is why so few have a sense of personal identity, a void which dogs them throughout their life.

- Appealing to those in positions of authority or influence, it is a disastrous ideology which:
- doesn't equip and empower students because it doesn't engage their hearts and minds
- results in 50%-80% job mismatch because employees can't become what employers require
- impoverishes faith because believers are taught that what they do for a living is not a spiritual issue

Most people find life disappointing. It isn't that they knew where they wanted to go; they didn't. It's more that they left the management of their lives to others, and assumed they would be raised, educated, employed, and developed in ways which assured a rewarding, meaningful life; at least if they did what they were told. However, paying the required dues, making hard work a habit, striving to become what others valued (even trying to reinvent themselves), didn't bring lasting satisfaction.

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Life just hasn't produced that sense of meaning, that deep yearning to be a particular somebody and somehow make a difference which people consistently and poignantly report as unrequited. Most everybody feels they have much more to give than has been asked of them. In their heart of hearts, they know they aren't doing what they should be doing with their lives. But they don't know what that is; and they don't know how to find it; and they doubt the courage to so invest their lives if and when they ever do find out.

These are matters of soul and spirit, and must be resolved if people are to experience the wonder and joy of fulfilling God's intention for their life.

Against this context of failed and diminished lives emerges a mysterious fact of satiable power about human nature which, if widely accepted, would radically transform civilization and life as we experience it. For bestowed within the soul of every person is a palpable force of uniquely arranged competencies, driven by a sought outcome, continuously seeking expression. What we recognize and characterize as 'God-given' in especially creative, or classroom smart, or performing prodigies is a provable fact for every person. Every person is endowed with a certain unique pattern of giftedness and the passion to drive those gifts to a particular outcome.

The concept of designed giftedness has been venerated in ancient civilizations as the means for creative human endeavor and used as the Biblical measuring stick for Godly examination of fruits produced from talents given. This model of each person as being endowed with a unique design and destiny to pursue has been ignored by the mainstreams of accepted thought in every field and institution concerned with human affairs.

So how do you find out if there really is an innate human nature expressing the soul of a person? And if there is such an entity as a human nature and underlying soul, how do you find its essence? Then, how do you fill out its structure and form, its organization and functioning characteristics? How do you determine whether it governs the perception of reality, is stable over a lifetime, and therefore predictive of future behavior, or is subject to change? How do you find out whether a person's soul controls or affects what, how and why they learn and think

and decide and act? What about its affect on their feelings and emotions? Is the nature and soul unique to each person, or are all people pretty similar?

Logically, one would assume you could go to people directly and get some clarity about their nature, answers to at least some of those questions. That doesn't work because people don't know the answers, or even if they have a definable nature. People are confused about who they are because they have spent most of their life trying to become the person with the strengths valued by others.

What we found many moons ago that does answer all of these questions is to explore with individuals certain things they have done in life (and those things only they know). Early on (1961) we had discovered a phenomena, true in each life of the 50,000+ we studied, one-at-a-time. Every time people do something they enjoy and believe they do well, they repeat some or all of a certain pattern of behavior which seeks one particular consummation.

Because we sought empirical data based on lived experience, we asked them to describe detailed actions of what they actually did to reach the outcome they sought. Asked to recall and describe these achievement experiences, they first completed an autobiographical form over a several week period, taking an average of 6 hours of thinking and writing. They then were asked to expand on what they wrote in an extensive achievement interview, which in our more elaborate and documented process, was taped and transcribed over 15 to 30 pages; occasionally as many as 45, or as few as 10. Usually 2 or 3 achievements for each 5-year period are recalled and described. Not infrequently, as they experience the greater freedom in talking rather than writing, they suddenly remember more achievements wanting exposition.

For most, the experience is a first; not only the idea of reviewing a lifetime of meaningful events, many of which they hadn't thought of in years, if ever, but being asked to revisit the scene and describe their detailed actions, all before a probing listener going for more action detail.

Never was our work repetitive or banal, since the uniqueness of each person made every story exciting to elicit and tell. The asking and telling and rapt listening involved was a completely new experience for all. We urged the achievers to open experiences for exploration they had merely passed through without reflection, pressing for details, illustration and examples. We positioned them back in time and place to revisit what and how they actually did what was so important to them. We had them focus on what they had done so well and what was required (if anything) for them to become that good. We interrupted their soliloquizing a favorite topic or rhapsodizing about the beauty of team efforts and got them refocused on *their* actions, *their* part, *their* role; never invading the possible whys of their behavior; never leading them into rooms whose doors they hadn't opened, staying with their scenario.

Although our data-gathering process is similar to some psychoanalytic probing, the quite rigorous interviewing methods are original with us and follow well-defined ground rules, casting a shadow on any data not elucidating action detail, or which brings psychological baggage into view, or which is contaminated by interviewer leading or achiever editorializing.

The kinds of achievement experiences people recall traverses the range of human experience: in peace and in war; in good times and bad times --- where they did something that improved how a task was done, or that solved a problem, or met a need, or won the game, or overcame an obstacle, or impressed others, or pioneered a new way, or mastered a skill, or built a structure, or gained recognition, or realized a concept, or extracted a potential, or comprehended a complexity, or prevailed against opposition, or proved a theory, or developed an instrument, or excelled, or led a team to victory, or opened eyes to truth, or controlled an outcome, or caused a response, or acquired material rewards, or advanced upward, or perfected a recipe, or created a poem, or made things right, or played a key role, or established the first of its kind, or rebuilt an engine, or won a prize, or took charge in an emergency, or maximized potential, or planned a campus coup, or became proficient, or fabricated an assembly, or conceived a theory, or beat a bully.

Once the lifetime of achievement data was gathered, we searched it to find recurring themes and threads. We found that they occurred in a recurring pattern or system of behavior which we ultimately called a Motivational Pattern of Giftedness: Motivational, because it was driven; Pattern because it was systemic; Giftedness because it was innate and not developed by the person once here.

- The range and power of our Motivational Pattern of Giftedness is hard to grasp. It is our essence; it drives our being and expresses how we think and act and what we seek to achieve from our efforts.
- Our Pattern determines what abilities we possess, how and for what purpose we use them, the subject matter and objects which draw us to a lifelong interest, the kinds of situational circumstances we require to sustain our drive, the operating relationships necessary to enable our motivated behavior; and the promised outcome or payoff we seek as the climax of all our effort.
- Our Pattern determines our view of reality and how we perceive and attempt to function in any role or situation. We shape any job to accommodate our Pattern regardless of what an objective examination would indicate was needed.
- We continuously seek to express our Pattern and will exhaust its potential for expression in any job, role or circumstance.
- How hard and how long we will persist is determined by our Pattern.
- Our Pattern is predictive of our future behavior, whether in a situation wanting it or in a situation where it would be off-putting, even aberrant.
- In matters of personal style of living (home size, location, upkeep), dress, affiliations, community involvement, partying, mannerisms and communications, our social behavior is dictated by the Pattern.
- How we relate to our parents, our spouses, our children, our friends, our coworkers, our boss, our subordinates...is heavily influenced by our Pattern.
- Our emotions and feelings of joy, irritation, anxiety, depression, rage, suspicion, greed and envy are triggered and colored by our Pattern.
- The affect on us of incentives and rewards – whether they engage, are irrelevant to, or conflict with our Pattern, determines our response.
- In a job or role which fully engages our Pattern, our performance will be outstanding and of significant value to what or to those we serve.
- We enjoy the free will in making a decision to undertake a task, but be it to work good or evil, we will do it in accordance with our Pattern, which is amoral.
- Our tendencies for dark behavior, whether in thought, word or deed; whether to cut down another or to call attention to our goodness; whether to lust after that which is not properly ours; whether to be excessive and compulsive in seeking our earthly treasure...is driven by our Pattern.
- The revelation from this phenomenological research was momentous and potentially will ultimately transform the way we educate, work, worship and experience all of life. Without a single exception, every person had been endowed with a complex, stable but growing, unique, useful, irrepressible behavioral pattern.

Highly regarded psychologists, psychiatrists and philosophers confirm our basic findings (although none apparently explored the detailed significance of their observations):

Allport, Gordon - *"Man, I submit, exists only in concrete, specifiable and unique forms"*

Herzberg, Frederick – *"The primal fact is that each human being is separate, distinct and a unique individual, with a nervous system as particular as fingerprints"*

Herder, J. G. – *"Each person is to be measured by a different yardstick, one which is properly his or her own."*

Hillman, James – *"Your difference from every other person...occurs every moment...because of the uniqueness of your individual identity"*

Horney, Karen – *‘the unique alive forces of (the person’s) real self’*

James, William – *“in every concrete individual, there’s a uniqueness that defies all formulation. --- We can feel the touch of it and recognize its tasks, so to speak, relishing or disliking it as the case may be, but we can give no ultimate account of it, and we have in the end simply to admire the Creator”*

Jung, Carl – *‘predestined vocation...a law of God’ – “Hence it is not the universal and the regular that characterize the individual, but rather the unique. He is --- something unique and singular which in the last analysis can be neither known or compared with anything else.”*

Kierkegaard, Soren – *“One Thing --- at each man’s birth there comes into being an eternal vocation for him, expressly for him”*

Maslow, Abraham – *“I must approach a person as an individual unique and peculiar, the sole member of his class.”*

Nietzsche, Friedrich – *“hidden masterful something”; ‘unique’; ‘unalterable’; within each person at his birth”*

Norton, David – *“Each person is a unique irreplaceable individual”*

Scheler, Max – *“every man --- a unique being distinct from all others”*

Taylor, A. E. - *“Qualitative uniqueness of the individual – complete expression of a coherent idea or purpose”*

Taylor, Charles – *“espousing the inner élan --- giving my life a definite shape --- each one of us has an original path which we ought to tread”*

From where do these Motivational Patterns of Giftedness originate? What is responsible for their unique, complex design and operating characteristics?

Among those who claim that we create our own motivational nature and further modify it over time are such notables as Alfred Adler, Sartre, Maslow, and Csikszentmihalyi. Problem is that the mountain of evidence we have gathered rejects the possibility that people have the power to decide and act out who they will be or become or to change who they are.

In the crowded camp of Dobzhansky, E. O. Wilson, Dawkins, Mayr, most biologists and the bulk of the intellectual community, the claim is that natural selection and conventional functioning of genetics is responsible for ① whatever innate nature, if any, with which we were born, and ② the changes in our nature caused by mechanistic interactions between our genetic mix and the environment(s) we live in. Problem is that natural selection does not apply to a Pattern of Giftedness because the Pattern is unique in each person and could not have been previously ‘selected’ as is required by the theory. Conventional genetics don’t apply because Patterns are inherited ready-made rather than being ‘developed’ through interaction with the environment over a long period of time as is required by the theory.

More productive are the thoughts of Michael Polanyi, who asserts that all living things possess ‘active centers’ which seek satisfaction by “striving for unspecifiable achievements”. It is a form of evolution involving a process directed by a principle of innovation. Problem is this ancestral system requires either divine intervention or the introduction of vitalism (by some unknown means) into a mechanistic process. Conceptually it is compatible with Patterns except for their complex uniqueness.

James Hillman’s conjecture in ‘The Soul’s Code’ about the ‘acorn theory’, motivation, and each of us possessing a ‘defining image’ and ‘pattern’ of behavior, is verified by our work. Problem is the issue I started with. What or Who is responsible for the shape of our soul? Hillman’s speculation about the sponsoring role of daemons from the occult world may provide an alternative for atheists, people who are mad at God, and those who prefer to fashion their own theology, but the most logical and rational explanation for our nature points to our triune God.

Here I would apologize for my inability to discuss matters of soul and spirit in meaningful terms yet obscure enough to avoid offending those of other, little, or no faith. Why it is critical to speak plainly of God as we experience Him is because we have been so intimidated by the academy in considering matters of the spirit. Not only is the belief we are the imago Dei derided, but we are told that we have no innate nature, are born as a blank slate, and the passion and focused intention in our everyday behavior is illusory, or at least unnecessary to comprehend us. These are all matters of the spirit and of our souls. We need, desperately need, to escape the academic shackles imposed on our lives by an unreasoning, unscientific, flagrant bias. We need to consider whatever we can determine as reality.

Evidence for the conclusion that God is implicated in our Patterns of Giftedness is much clearer than how it's done. The intention of a designer appears inescapable. Each pattern is unique in its mix and play of the 25 to 35 elements of giftedness which operate as a system of motivated behavior through repeating functional sequences -- is laden with highly-specific and complex information predictive of future behavior --- is triggered into action by certain causes or conditions, and sustained by specific others --- is stable in its basic elements --- requires a certain environment, operating relationship, form of structure and uniqueness of opportunity within which to flourish --- and governs the impact of environment on its functioning.

It is hard to grasp. It seems beyond imagination, ridiculous to consider seriously. Yet the Christian faith emphatically holds that Jesus Christ, the creator and Lord of all that exists has contemplated each of us by name and bestowed on us not only the means but the desire to find and fulfill a glorious mission in this life. Are not the unique Patterns of Giftedness evidence of that reality?

A while ago, I received a most auspicious book from Dr. Nick Isbister, the senior partner who runs our affairs in the United Kingdom and environs. This tiny collection on 'The Way of Man' (Routledge Classics) by Martin Buber provides many gems, two of which beautifully capture a Jewish teaching on these matters of God, spirituality and vocation:

"The rabbi expounded: --- Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique. 'It is the duty of every person in Israel to know and consider that he is unique in the world in his particular character and that there has never been anyone like him in the world, for if there had been someone like him, there would have been no need for him to be in the world. Every single man is a new thing in the world, and is called upon to fulfill his particularity in this world. For verily: that this is not done, is the reason why the coming of the Messiah is delayed.' Every man's foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never-recurring potentialities, and not the repetition of something that another, and be it even the greatest, has already achieved. (9)

God's grace consists precisely in this, that he wants to let himself be won by man, that he places himself, so to speak, into man's hands. God wants to come to this world, but he wants to come to it through man. This is the mystery of our existence, the superhuman chance of mankind.

'Where is the dwelling of God?' This is the question with which the Rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned men who happened to be visiting him. They laughed at him: 'What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of his glory?'

Then he answered his own question: 'God dwells wherever man lets him in.' This is the ultimate purpose: to let God in. But we can let him in only where we really stand, where we live, where we live a true life. If we maintain holy intercourse with the little world entrusted to us, if we help the holy spiritual substance to accomplish itself in that section of Creation in which we are living, then we are establishing, in this our place, a dwelling for the Divine Presence." (33)

You will note that even Buber doesn't tell us the source of our endowments. But he describes my understanding of the issues involved and, of course we have our Messiah, whom we are expecting to join us again, and who also stands at the door of our lives and knocks to be invited in. We still listen respectfully to the voice of wisdom coming from our elder brothers.

Isn't it odd that to be a turned-on, spiritually robust, highly productive and deeply fulfilled person all you need to do is ① follow a career and lead a life honoring your Creator by performing tasks that you love to do and do well, profoundly committed to the welfare of those you serve, and ② be accessible to God's Holy Spirit for any needed correction, course-changes, encouragement, repentance, and the like.

If God is our author, what is He up to? What is He asking from us? Isn't it clear that He wants us to rebuild our lives and our society with the means and motivation He has given to us? I could probably complicate that proposition to make it more spiritually nuanced, but isn't that about it? He wants us to use what He gives us in order to build His Kingdom on earth. As starters, these are some of the changes that need to be made.

The first and continuing priority is transformation of those in power, who in order to achieve their objectives, would become conduits*, and as such, utilize and enable the giftedness of those over whom they exercise power. Mothers and fathers would parent their kids as possessing a destiny. Educators would identify student learning dynamics, and equip them to pursue a suitable calling. Employers would be measured by their ability to achieve their goals by making productive use of employee strengths. Houses of worship would preach and teach a faith emphasizing the sanctified pursuit of a 'personal vocation' and, in that turned-on capacity, act as redemptive agents of God in the world. People in need would be helped through collective action of community employers, banks, schools and churches to engage and build on their giftedness.

*aka servants

Such revised scorecards for these institutions would help enable the virtual destiny of each individual under their authority or influence. Collectively, the result of this concentration on Patterns of Giftedness would produce endless numbers of fulfilled citizens: well educated for their role and mission in life; highly productive in their vocation; mature in a robust faith; accessible to serving the needs of family and community.

◆ *Please note that such results are precisely those which currently should be but are not being sought by the institutions of education, work, religion, family and government. Esteemed levels of productivity and effectiveness would go hand-in-hand with work satisfaction and meaningful lives.*

Probably the most personal implication of giftedness is its revelation about what each of us should be doing with our lives, and then in turn, what that shows us about the nature of God. When you consider our detailed, complex, unique patterns, determinative of our passion and strengths, of all that sings for us, it seems clear that we were designed for achievement.

Apparently, the things we love to do are not just a side-show to fill in time, but they are why we are here, and are what is expected of us. The implications of human design for our understanding of the role of God actively involved in our lives moves the issue of faith from the sidelines to the center of where we move and have our being. The *how* of it all remains a mystery, but signs are available, the most obvious of which is the need to respond to God's calling.

Theology which has been developed over the centuries emphasizing the next world and downplaying the present will need reexamination in light of God's apparent intention to shape civilization in the present through individual lives expressed through their bestowed Patterns of Giftedness. Such facts reveal a nature of God which is expressive of a desire to mix in with His creations as they forge their destiny and carry out His plans. Deism should rapidly disappear as a viable belief system.

We have this impoverished view of God that His concern about us is tangential to what is going on in the world, that our business is not His business. Consider that every Pattern of Giftedness designed by God has some part to

play in His will for our world as well as in our lives. Consider that He isn't done with any of us once we make our bawling entrance into the world, because He is about the expectations of a designer. Can we fulfill His dream? Through the gifts of God and the recognition of that fact, life for many people will change to a mission. Still working in the lab, or struggling with cash flow, or waiting for the purchasing agent --- but now on a mission.

That mission is played out through Patterns of Giftedness wherever they have taken the one possessing them. They become the holy grail to the person, the means to work small wonders through the distributed grace of God present in the offices and factories, farms and laboratories, from sea to sea, and in the sea and below the sea, and in the air and beyond the air into deep space. These are the marching orders God has given each of us to render. No, not to Caesar in a fallen world, but to the world God loves and is in the process of reclaiming.

What will be hardest to accept for those who embrace faith as a church-and good works-related matter is the apparent fact that if a person has been designed to pursue a calling in the law or in the trades or as an entrepreneur or in health services or medicine or business or science, that God (yes, God) intends the person to do just that.

In other words, faith mainly has to do with performance and motivation as a trial lawyer, or as a dental technician, or a tool maker, or a salesperson, or a researcher. As you wrestle through this issue, you have to keep returning to God's idea of you – not your peers, your parents, your 'class', your church, an evangelist, a rich uncle. Always remember the one resource you have with which to love those you serve is your Pattern of Giftedness. The test, unwavering in its honesty, is *can I, will I*, love those served if I take on the proposed duties? It's not a question of whether or not you can teach, or sell, or manage; or close the deal; or open a new office; or work to the required tolerance; or give the speech; or join the ticket; or take on the case. It's a question of whether 'it' engages your Pattern. Would you love doing it? If not, pass. God's first and second commandments are not optional. Of course, you make allowance for doing something as a favor, or in a pinch, or perhaps to get through the swamp for the ultimate matching position.

When you step back from what I am inelegantly trying to say, and consider its implications, you will see the obvious fact that God is apparently really trying to reshape civilization, and needs committed workers He has gifted to do so. If we are to do business with God we will need to establish as #1 priority, the work of our hands.

"And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Psalm 90:17 (KJV)

The work to be so accomplished is the same work as that confronting us today and last week and last year. It is still some part of buying and selling, manufacturing, assembling, distributing, administering. It is numbers to understand the numbers. It is solving problems, anticipating problems, preventing problems. It is planning yet again, and organizing and following up and monitoring and negotiating and resolving conflicts and misunderstandings --- and communicating, and ideas of more for less --- and doing, always the doing, the getting it done in time, the catching up, and always the pressure for success.

People adept at playing the becoming game and who are determined to get ahead regardless of their Pattern, can climb to exalted heights if they are willing to pay the heavy price demanded by their bodies and souls. But a person who seeks only to realize his actual 'potential', is well advised to strive for as complete a match of his Pattern with the work requirements as is practically possible. Nothing is ever like the proverbial fitting glove, but it can be close if the person is willing to follow his custom design wherever it would lead. The trick here is to recognize up front that you are making your own trail; nothing before you is marked as a career path or has had the rocks removed. Clearly, it can lead up to, or it can lead down from whatever mountaintop you earlier had in your sights.

Special brilliance (a sure path to promotion!) as a research scientist, or an editor, or buyer, or process engineer, or stock broker, or graphic designer, or teacher, or sales person, or computer programmer means you probably should be wary about moving out of what you love and obviously do well. 'Moving-up' into a supervisory position from work in which you excel is not only a question of whether you possess a managing ability of some sort but also, and even mainly whether the trade-off of what you gained really made up for what you lost. And I'm not talking about your pocketbook, but about your soul. The success philosophy of going for more or bigger is universal, but really stupid when you take the time to look at the individual players in the drama. Few will face a bad move and seek a better answer down the mountainside some place. Most will change mountains and go on climbing. Few realize that when they buy into a becoming strategy they can only lose.

Our responsibility before God in this matter is to be a good steward of what God has given to each of us. Being a good steward translates into a life driven by a love for what we do well, constantly seeking to conform with increasing exactness to the details of our design.

Significance of your work is not to be defined by others. Significance of your work has already been determined by God in what He has designed you to do. You see, there is no work as a calling which is holy and pleasing to God. What is holy in any work is that which is driven by love for the work involved, which seeks thereby to honor God.

Those who have been gifted to improve organizational effectiveness will be held to account for that fruit. Or those gifted to design furniture, fair-priced and functional, by that outcome. Or those with a desire to heal with a surgeon's hands, by the fruit of healed lives. And so it is with each of us; whatever you are gifted to do will be that which you will be held accountable for accomplishing. As you will have assumed, the issues around being a good and faithful steward, at least of God's calling, is not only in the end fruitfulness of your labors, but in the means used, and the affects of such means on your heart and soul.

I believe you and your giftedness are eternal; constantly in God's sight as He works to achieve always a greater fullness expressing His love and grace through you to those you serve. Translated into the specifics of a calling, the only way you can satisfy that priority is to pour out full measure of what you have been given to give in your work, in your home, in your church. Assuming you are well suited for it, whatever it is, you should be in the strong grip of what you love; fascinated and intrigued by it, compelled by its challenge, the mystery of its problems --- whether it is commercial flooring, theoretical mathematics, or buying and selling fish. It should invade your thoughts, sort of all the time, so you are mainly preoccupied with some new twist proving resistant to your brilliance.

Because God has equipped you to perform work which engages your Pattern, for you it is holy work to be performed with a heightened sense of responsibility, knowing God gets pleasure when you seek to be faithful to His intention for your life. It is in the quality of your work and responsiveness of your performance to the needs of those you serve, which you will be concerned with all of your life. It is in fact where you will learn of God's love for you, His entreating of you to be more thorough, His confronting of your unwise shortcuts, His amusement at your wounded pride, His joy as you excel, His encouragement as you wipe the jam off your face.

How does He so communicate with you? How will you know? Because God has designed your frame and understands how you are put together, and how you function, what you notice and what you ignore, what you read, what you hear, and what gets your attention. Because the Spirit of God is resident within you and has a job to do as you do yours --- leading, nudging, instructing, guiding, opening new doors, reminding, questioning, affirming, prodding, sometimes engineering circumstances --- strange, extraordinary things happen. If you need a knock on the side of your head, or a sense of God's love that will take your breath away --- that will happen in God's time and in a way only you will understand. I believe you can test God a few times when new in the faith or to gain access to His Kingdom, but only a few times, and even then He probably will respond His way in His time --- - but when He knocks your socks off you will never ever forget that moment of wonder.

- **Be actively concerned throughout your life for being compulsive in your perception of reality and especially your criticism and judgment of others.**
- **Be mindful that your strong emotions are an expression of your Pattern being adulated, blocked, ignored or assaulted.**
- **Don't pretend or presume you possess any strength or quality which is not clearly manifested in your nature and behavior.**
- **Don't cheapen yourself or your faith or your giftedness by lusting after your sought payoff rather than your love for the work involved in getting there.**
- **Always remember you are at the receiving end. Nobody is self-made.**
- **Share who you are with those close to you at home, at work, in church, or on the golf course so they can catch you from falling.**
- **Seek from the Lord a heart for repentance, the key to freedom.**
- **Closely related to these last two bullets is a universal, yes universal tendency to use your strengths in wrong ways.**

Many of our strengths can be, and are used to sin against God and our neighbor. Being quick on your feet is good in a negotiation, or a debate, or in the classroom, or in cross examination --- but is so easily used to deceive, or cover up, or boldly lie, or excuse crummy behavior, and not only when we're seven! Being strategic and playing the 'angles' is good in winning a football game; or gaining a positive response to a sales presentation; or guiding your company through hard times --- but so readily and cleverly used to sully the reputation of a competitor; or gain access to privileged information; or how to give the impression you have put in the sweat to understand a critical issue when you haven't; or how to escape responsibility for your actions by leaving your partners stranded while you somehow end up exploring yet another opportunity on a nearby ice floe. Even the proverbial saintly behavior of meeting the needs of others who are in dire economic straits, or suffering a serious illness, or a recent divorce or a job loss, can move from light to darkness through its use to encourage a widow to reveal her investment worries; to press beyond boundaries and surface latent defects requiring ministry; or through seduction to win the trust and support of women/men whose men/women have left them.

In one of His teachings about stewards and stewardship, The Lord said, *"Much will be expected from the one who has been given much, and the more a man is trusted, the more people will expect of him"* (Luke 12:48 Phillips). He had previously excoriated the steward who knew as one in charge of others that the owner had certain plans for his people and that his responsibility was to take care of them, but he failed to do so.

Consider this responsibility, you who have been promoted to lead or manage others; or you who are expected to teach others; or you who have given birth to a new life; or you who have some responsibility for the souls of your parishioners; or you coaches of athletic teams; or scout leaders; or advisors and FFA clubs; or managers and their subordinates; or summer camp counselors; or youth pastors; or career counselors and their clients; or mentors and their charges; or instructors and their confirmation classes; or business leaders and junior achievement clubs; or PhDs and their graduate students; or discussion leaders and their fellowship groups; or disciplers and their charges; or trainers and trainees; or priests and their confessors --- and most especially counselors and their clients.

When you look at those under your charge and realize God actually has a plan for each life, be someone remembered years later when they fondly reflect on how they chose a certain path.

Arthur F. Miller Jr.

This article is taken from 'DESIGNED FOR LIFE (*hardwired, empowered, purposed*)', a book on human design, evolution and a science of persons 2006.