Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



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This summer, I am taking a course entitled, "Framework for Effective Leadership." The night before the first class, I read through the syllabus, skimmed handouts, completed the first assignment and watched a required video. The video was a clip from a conversation with Oprah Winfrey in 2014 at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. The clip is entitled, "Take Care of Yourself."

The main idea I gathered from this brief part of a larger conversation is that you cannot give what you do not have. Therefore, each of us must not only recognize our gifts, but take care of them, nurture them and put them to use toward the purpose for which we were each created. This rings true for me and is something many of us have heard, especially those of us who have done vocation ministry. However, her angle was slightly different from what I'm used to in religious circles.

Now, don't get me wrong, I like Oprah Winfrey. I often think her perspective is valuable to consider when listening to different voices. However, I am also turned off frequently by what I perceive as arrogance. She's on the cover of her magazine every month, for crying out loud!

In this video clip, she mentions that it used to bother her when people said that she is "full of herself." Now, though, she sees it as a compliment. She is full of herself. She is full of who she is. She is filled and her cup runs over with gifts, skills and insights that she needs to share with others. That is the purpose for which she was created. If she is not full of herself, she cannot offer anything.

The video reminded me of a quote I read last week during my annual retreat. My spiritual director let me borrow her book *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* by Ann and Barry Ulanov. I haven't made it very far in the book since I am now taking classes. But I was struck by a passing sentence very early in the book: "Our best parts, if left unlived, can be as poisonous as our worst, if left unhealed." Let that soak in for a moment.

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I'm not sure about you, but I often focus on healing what is broken in myself and/or in my life. It is a constant part of my prayer life. It has been a focus in counseling. Sometimes my own need for healing is all I can see of myself. It is a somewhat

revolutionary notion to me that maybe I should also pay attention to untapped potential or underdeveloped gifts — actually living the parts of myself that are gifts.

This has caused me to consider what happens when we don't pay attention to our giftedness. When we downplay what is good about who we are. It has been my experience that a few things might happen:

- We may lose whatever the gift, ability, talent may be. For example, if a person does not practice an instrument, before long they may find that they can no longer play as they had in the past;
- We may become less capable of hope and compassion. If we can only see flaws, mistakes, and brokenness, it may become the lens through which we see the world around us and not just ourselves;
- It may have implications for our relationship with God. As we become less able to recognize our giftedness, we may also have trouble seeing our value or love-ability. And in this way, these "unlived" gifts become poisonous.

Some might argue and say, "What about humility?" I would say that's exactly what I'm talking about. The word humility is derived from the same word as earth (*humus*, Latin). So, one could say that to be humble is to be grounded or rooted. This calls to mind a certain sense of authenticity or honesty. And if we're honest, we need to recognize our gifts as well as our brokenness.

No doubt this will continue to be a struggle for me. And I have a feeling I am not alone in that. Perhaps there are many of us who could learn to be a little more "full of ourselves" in the best sense of that phrase.