

NATURE OR NURTURE
[This is written in oral form]

Nature orNurture?

Very simply stated: Nature means traits, characteristics we are born with – the innate qualities / the DNA given to us. Clearly, physical, hereditary attributes are “Nature” – eye and hair colour, and so forth.

Yet, to what extent are we predetermined? Does innate qualities include personality and disposition? Are we controlled by the tools / attributes we are born with? Can we change who we are?

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Nurture suggests that our environment--the influences and experiences in our lives have modelled us into who we are.

But, can we escape from that conditioning?

What is the dominant factor that determines who we are?

Nature or nurture.....or both?

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Of course parents know the answer to that question.

When parents are pleased with their child, they will proudly conclude that good parenting, good guidance and "nurture" are the reasons.

When a parent dislikes a children's behaviour, then that parent points to the other parent and declares, "Well, she got that trait from your side of the family."

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And, more interestingly, when a child grows up, she'll see all her problems / all her perceived negatives as the result of bad parenting.

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Nurture or Nature?

This debate has been going on for some time, and most experts concede that it is likely both, nature and nurture / innate and acquired attributes that form who we are. However, the experts still argue about the degree of influence / which aspect has the greatest influence.

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I think it is beneficial to ponder who we are, how we got to this point, AND to come to terms with our limitations.....and benefits.

For example, because of nature, I could never play centre in the NBA. No matter if I tried very hard, my impressive 5'8" height negates that possibility. Nevertheless, every time I ride on an aeroplane, I'm very glad that I'm not tall.

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So, I think most will agree.....that we each reflect / are a product of a complicated process that implanted, modelled, influenced and refined who we are. We bear the pedigree, the scars and polish of our journey,.....to this point,.....and "SO What?"

Does it matter? Do we need to examine the nurture or nature issue?

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Yes, we need to be cognitively and openly aware of this,....because we are deeply affected by our concept of what got us to this point.

The nurture / nature bias plays out many ways in us and in society.

Moreover, we base prejudice, judgments and decisions on how we perceive nature or nurture.

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It appears in theology: Calvin's predestination and the notion of original sin tilt strongly for nature's dominance.

Our Anabaptist theology sides more with nurture. We value the benefits of community and growing in Christian fellowship.

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The importance of the past is very evident in society.

Racism and prejudice are rooted in a surrender to nature's supreme control, often heard with the derogatory "those people."

The same motivates how some men treat and regard women.

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The nurture tilt renders comments such as, "Growing up on the wrong side of the tracks" or "He's from a broken home".... or "that person is an Ivy Leaguer".....or "She's a Newfy".

To be sure, both nurture and nature are significant factors in forming who we are.

Nature and nurture--the formational influences are regarded as very powerful,.....YET are we bound by those "inputs" that formed us? Are we static? Is there hope? Can we change?

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If not,..... then there ARE bad guys and good guys.

If the past is more important, then we might as well kill the bad people such as the Islamic Extremists,.... because love, goodness and justice are not strong enough to change them.

The same applies to criminals. If the power of the past is unchallengeable, then let's build more prisons.

Extrapolating this further, the rich and powerful are better people, and the poor and weak are trapped and doomed.

And, on a personal level: those who had an abusive past or born with poor attributes are.....well... just hopeless victims.

And, the fortunate who inherited advantages and were finely, carefully prepped for life,.... have every reason to expect the best,... to be arrogant, even haughty.

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Such is the regard if nature and nurture controls our destiny.

From the Bible we learn that there is insight in the lineage. We were even given Jesus' lineage. Nature is an influence.

We also learn the value of nurture. The Bible is full of insightful lessons intended to help form us / nurture our development.

And,...most importantly, we learn from the Bible that we are NOT bound by our past / there is hope. With God's help,.....we can rise above the restraints and past patterns.

We are can adapt; we can change,.....and we need God's help.
We cannot become *new* on our own with the tools the past has given us. And,....breaking from the past....requires wisdom.

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Consider Solomon.

*King Solomon: you know the guy--Solomon and all his Glory.*

Solomon was born into royalty. He was born with a "golden spoon."  
His mother was beautiful, and David was confident, intelligent, and likely handsome.  
No doubt, Solomon had the finest education and servants responded to his childhood needs.

This guy was given some impressive attributes.  
Moreover, Solomon inherited a grand Kingdom--land, power and money.  
His kingdom was at the cross roads of the trade routes.

When David died and Solomon became King, he proceeded to follow in his father's footsteps / the trajectory given to him. He quickly arranged for the violent demise of his strongest adversaries.  
BUT, soon after, God visited him in a dream.

God told Solomon, "Ask what I should give you."  
That is a loaded question. It was a prompt to do introspection/ to examine what is needed.

Solomon did have his eyes on a brand new Mercedes-Benz SL convertible....and some prime Egyptian beach front property, but... he overcame that impulse fetish.  
Instead, he examined Who he really was.....AND.... Who he **needed** to be. He was less than 20 years old,.... and he confessed to God his weakness / his inexperience.

Solomon could have cashed in his past--continuing down the path given to him, but he didn't. This is a significant lesson.

Solomon realized his weaknesses and his need for God's help.  
He asked for Wisdom so that he could discern good from evil.  
It was a monumental "Eden" moment.  
He trusted God for wisdom instead of trying to devour the fruit himself.

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Each new day, you and I are faced with a similar question / a similar challenge-- "Who am I" and "What do I want from God".

Each day invites us to ask, "What will I do? Where do I go from here? And, what will I do about my past?"

This is a basic challenge of life, faced by those who are rich or poor / cursed or blessed. What will we do with OUR lives....starting NOW?

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Ephesians 5: 15 states,  
"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time because the days (or the many opportunities) can tempt to evil. So, do not be Foolish, but understand the will of the Lord."

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Don't be foolish.
In Hebrew thought, "Foolish" didn't mean silly or stupid .. or even ridiculous. It meant.... brutal, course and self-centred.

In Hebrew thinking, a fool thinks he is accountable only to himself;
a fool thinks she can do whatever, and that only her own interests matter.

The unwise focus only on themselves, and.... believes that everyone else is to blame if things go wrong.

Ben Franklin accurately said, "Any man all wrapped up in himself makes a pretty small package."

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A wise person considers others, including creation, and see potential in the present and in the future. And, wisdom begins with honest introspection and confession.

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Solomon, with all his wealth and power, realized his weaknesses AND that he was NOT self sufficient, that he was NOT God/ not all knowing,... but rather under God and needed God. He understood that he needed God in order to be the King that God wanted him to be. He needed God to change him and free him from the direction his past gave him! Solomon was given a legacy of conquest and war. God gave him wisdom to change and lead his country down a different path. Solomon was king for 40 years. It was the longest period of peace that Israel ever experienced. Solomon was wise. He did Not do war.

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Wisdom begins with Confession and the willingness to be as God calls us to be.

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God, through Jesus, helps us to better understand this process / this surrender to God.

Our text from John 6, taken at face value/ taken literally is extremely bizarre. Jesus says to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Many who heard those words thought Jesus was suggesting cannibalism.

And, verse 60 reveals that even the disciples were troubled by what Jesus said.

Apparently, they did not understand what a metaphor is.

Jesus' explanation is NOT to be taken literally. He isn't talking about cannibalism... AND..... he isn't referring to a human sacrifice, either.

Realizing that they are not appreciating his colourful and creative explanation, Jesus states in verse 63, "The words that I have spoken to you are..... spirit and life."

His flesh is his life's example and his message.

His blood is the passion--God's Spirit.

When we seek God's will, God's spirit and the life of Christ becomes a part of us / in us and that changes us and saves us!

And NOTE, that chapter 6 is long before the parts about the crucifixion. The emphasis is not on the death of Christ, but on the life of Christ – being as Christ / taking in his life, his message.

Jesus is saying that the WAY of life / of living is important.

Who we are and how we live are related,and we are saved by choosing to follow / to take in Christ ... and.... we have the help of the Holy Spirit, too.

Jesus is stating, ingest the Christ – God's grace / God's gift to us / God's way for us to live. Ingest Christ as you would ingest a good book – take it all in / absorb it / make it a part of who you are.

Jesus is the way to live that God presented for us, ...and to help us absorb / follow this way, God has given us God's Spirit to be a part of us, too.

When searching to understand God's will, consider Jesus.

Jesus was a gift for everyone.

He lived for others.

Jesus ministered to those in need, especially the weak and suffering.

Jesus exposed the haughty and self centred.

Jesus lived and spoke the truth,....with humility.

The way of Christ / God's way ...is doing grace, forgiveness and love.

The way of Christ is the way of non-violence, peace and justice.

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Our culture has conditioned us/ our past has taught us to accept war, to accept inequality, to be aggressive, to steal from creation, to be selfish and greedy, to hold onto what we have and get more....

And, that past is not sending us to a hopeful and promising future.

We need to be saved from our past.

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Perhaps, it is time for us to pause as Solomon did, and take a personal inventory.

Perhaps, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I heading in the right direction? Do I have the tools necessary to change,.....or do I need God's help?"

If God were to come to us and ask, "What should I give you?"

How would we respond? Would we confess our weaknesses and needs?

Would we ask for the wisdom to be more like Christ in order to serve others?
Is that request to God part of our daily prayers or do we only think of ourselves?
are we trapped by the past or following Christ's way into the future?