

Who Am I? Why Am I Here?

"Who am I? Why am I here?" are the infamous opening lines uttered by Vice Admiral James Stockdale during the 1992 Vice-presidential debate. Stockdale, one of the most highly decorated officers in the history of the United States Navy, was chosen by Presidential candidate H. Ross Perot to be his running mate in the 1992 Presidential election.

Stockdale was not informed that he would be participating until a week before the event. Unlike his opponents, Al Gore and Dan Quayle, he had no formal preparation for the debate. Stockdale's unfocused style for the rest of the debate made him appear confused and almost disoriented.

Confused and almost disoriented pretty accurately describes how I feel at times. "Who am I? Why am I here?" are questions that I have asked myself. Some days, actually most days, God gives us a clear answer but sometimes we need a reminder.

I have been in my current job now for a little over three years. Like most jobs there have been good times and bad. The bad times have seemed to overshadow the good times lately. Most of my closest friends have moved on to other locations and though I still keep in touch with them, I miss the daily contact that we used to have. I was able to have lunch with one of my teammates earlier this week.

Ruben and I worked together daily for about two years. Though he is 15 years younger than I we became really good friends. He is one of the most positive people that I ever meet. This is ironic because Ruben has cancer. The cancer has been in and out of remission 3 or 4 times. Despite the treatments he endured, he always remained positive.

Ruben had a home built in North Carolina about a 1 1/2 years ago. His wife and daughters moved there as soon as the house was completed and Ruben joined them about six months ago. Before he left, I invited him to a bar-b-que at our church and he attended a Sunday service once. Despite him saying that he enjoyed the service, I was unable to get him to visit again. The day that he moved to join his family, I gave him a hug and a Bible. Inside the Bible, I had written how much his friendship meant to me and that I would be praying for him and his family.

Tuesday was the first time that I had seen Ruben since his move. While he and I were eating lunch, he told me that his wife was working for the North Carolina Department of Children and Families. Each day during her lunch time, one of her co-workers would share scriptures with her. He was excited to tell me that the Bible was being well used. When she got home at night, she and Ruben studied the passages together after dinner.

In a 1999 interview with Jim Lehrer, Admiral Stockdale explained that the statements were intended as an introduction of himself and his record to the television audience. He added, "It was terribly frustrating because I never got back to that because there was never an opportunity for me to explain my life to people."

When we have the opportunity, we need to be ready to explain our lives to people. I am sure there will still be times of feeling "confused and almost disoriented" but lunch with Ruben reminded me how to answer Admiral Stockdale's questions; Who am I? I am a Christian! Why am I here? To help people learn about God!

Jeff