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# The Knowing Look (Work Station Two)

Gary B. Swanson

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Gary B. Swanson

**I**t takes only one brain cell to recognize Jennifer Aniston, Halle Berry, or Bill Clinton.

This edifying bit of information comes as the result of a recent research project by the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California. As part of a treatment for epilepsy, devices were planted in test subjects to monitor brain-cell activity. When the subjects were shown photos of famous people, it took only one brain cell to recognize them.

Though this may at first blush seem to be of negligible value, it may add some light to an ongoing discussion among scientists over how many cells it takes to effect recognition. Many have thought that it would take many cells to recognize, say, one's own grandmother. Neurobiologist Jerome Lettvin coined the term "grandmother cell" to poke fun at those who thought that such recognition could take as little as a single neuron.

But it appears that grandmother cells may actually exist. Considering

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that the average human brain of an adult contains some 10 billion interconnected cells, it

makes you wonder: When we recognize a newspaper photograph to be that of George W. Bush, for example, what are the rest of the cells doing?

We know that through electrochemical impulses the brain controls both voluntary and involuntary behavior. While we're utilizing one or more brain cells to decide whether we recognize a celebrity in a photograph, whole other sections of the brain are firing to keep our physical body running: heartbeat, digestion—at the risk of being overly simplistic, basically the plumbing and air conditioning.

Presumably, though, the grandmother cells would be included in the voluntary part of the brain. We "voluntarily" program our minds to remember specific bits of information. Computer people would call this the storage of data. And the superficial bits of information, such as the likeness of Johnny Depp on

the cover of *Time* magazine, apparently don't take much brain power. Which would seem to make mistaken identity an uncommon occurrence.

Yet in the everyday world, occurrences of mistaken identity continue to be frequent. And, interestingly, there are quite a few accounts of such in Scripture—even when Jesus Himself encountered those who should have been able to recognize Him.

Apparently not.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that it would be this way: “He has no form or comeliness” (53:2, NKJV). And the Spirit of Prophecy elaborates: “In the eyes of the world He possessed no beauty that they should desire Him.”\* It seems that there was nothing in His physical appearance that made Him extraordinary in His surroundings. Men were not struck speechless by His bearing. Women didn't swoon at His drop-dead handsomeness.

He passed through His short life on this Earth with hardly anyone taking a second look. And even those who came into personal contact with Him seldom concluded that He was anything more than a somewhat off-center kind of guy from a backwater town in the hinterland of the vast Roman Empire. Generally speaking, everyone shrugged.

Occasionally even His closest acquaintances mistook Him for someone else: Cleopas and friend on

the road to Emmaus, for example, and Mary at His gravesite. Of course, these two incidents of mistaken identity could be understandable; after all, who could have expected to know who He was when He appeared to them *after* they had all witnessed His death? Believing in the possibility of resurrection is all well and good, but surely it would take at least some time to elapse for any of us to have it all sink in.

But this doesn't mean that He went entirely unnoticed during His lifetime. There were a few who did recognize Him for who He truly was, though their response wasn't based on the fact that He was devastatingly beautiful. It was more a matter that those who recognized Him knew what to be looking for. They weren't relying at all on eyesight. The ability to know who He was depended not on visual acuity, but on a condition of the heart.

There were at least two notable occasions when Jesus was instantly recognized: only eight days after His birth when He was brought by His parents to the Temple for the rite of circumcision (Luke 2); and near the very beginning of His ministry in His experience with John the Baptist (Matthew 3; John 1).

At the first incident, two elderly people—apparently unrelated—had been led by the Holy Spirit to be in the Temple on the eighth day after Jesus' birth. It was time for Joseph

and Mary to offer a sacrifice to mark the birth of their child. Simeon had received the assurance that sometime before the end of his life he would see the Messiah. Somehow he knew that this infant in the Temple that day was the promised One. Before the astonished parents, he foretold Jesus' earthly and cosmic ministry. Then Anna, a prophetess, "coming in that instant" (Luke 2:38, NKJV), added her testimony to that of Simeon.

The second incident was a much more public—and much more explicit—event. Jesus had come to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, but the Baptist recognized Him for who he was and said that it would be more appropriate for Jesus to be baptizing *him*. At Jesus' insistence, however, John complied.

Shortly after this a group of priests and Levites, sent by the Pharisees, asked John the Baptist whether he himself was the Messiah. John's response was blunt: "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20, NKJV). Just at that moment, however, he saw Jesus coming toward him, and, remembering vividly the demonstration of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, John testified: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (vs. 29, NKJV).

There were surely other instances when Jesus was instantly recognized as the Messiah, but these are two of the more familiar. What was it that prompted this recognition? It certainly must have involved a great deal more than the mere firing of one grandmother cell, the kind of awareness of someone's celebrity.

Recognizing Jesus for who He truly is comes as the result of knowing God. In Scripture the expression to "know God" encompasses far more than knowing a bunch of facts about Him, e.g., God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, etc. "The world through *wisdom* did not know God" (1 Cor. 1:21, NKJV, italics supplied). Worldly knowledge and wisdom aren't nearly enough.

Knowledge, in Scripture, is relational: "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8, NKJV).

Just as surely today as it was in Jesus' time, to know Him—to recognize Him—is to have a living relationship with Him. To know Him means to have *Him* know us (Matt. 25:12). When we are enjoying this relationship, our grandmother cells will do far more than fire. Our minds—and our hearts—will explode.

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 23.

