



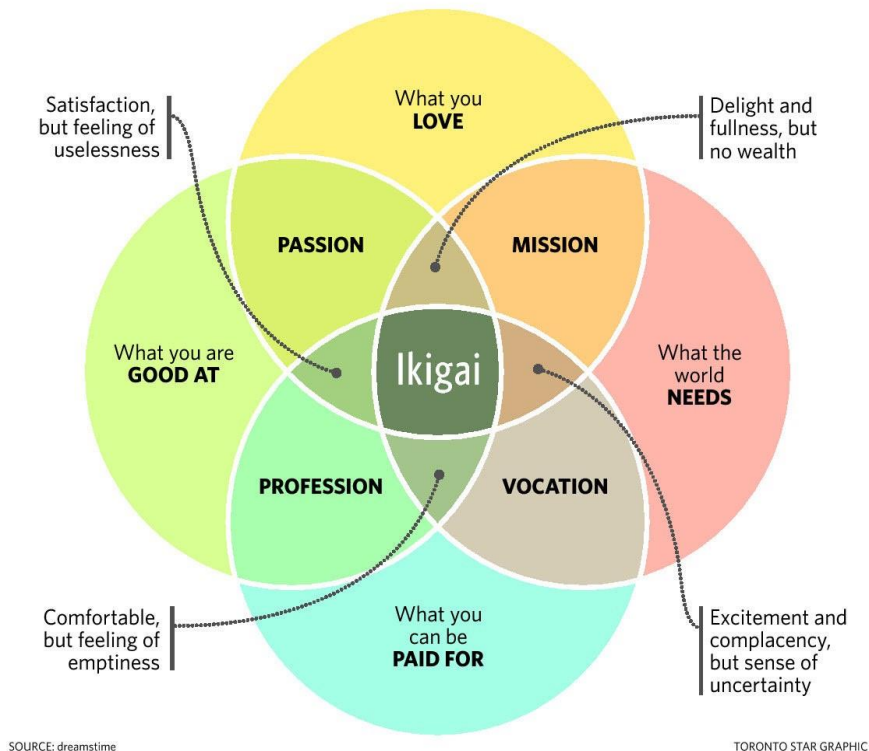
**Date:** May 4-5, 2019

**Speaker:** Steve MacDouell, Young Adults

**Scripture:** Time, Talents, Gifts

## Ikigai

A JAPANESE CONCEPT MEANING "A REASON FOR BEING"



### Japanese concept: Ikigai

At its core, one's ikigai is the reason we get up in the morning. It is the thing that brings value and purpose to our being.

Dan Buettner, an author and researcher, stumbled across this concept while he was researching blue zones: regions where people are healthier and live longer than anywhere else in the world.

Throughout his research and study in five of the world's top blue zones, he noticed that all of them had this concept, or a variation of it, at the core of their societal and cultural rhythms. He noticed this especially in Okinawa, Japan, where there are roughly 24 people, over the age of 100, for every 100,000 people. His research would go on to suggest that there is a correlation between longevity and having a deep sense of purpose—an ikigai.

Photo Source: <https://medium.com/org-hacking/when-do-you-feel-ikigai-35e310269cb9>

This concept reminds us that we, as human beings, long to leverage everything we possess in ways that are meaningful and significant—in ways that go beyond ourselves.

Friends, I'd like to suggest this morning that this longing, the longing to make something meaningful of the world around us, is an innate longing—an implication of being made in the image of God. The Scriptures tell us, in Genesis 1, that God has made human beings in his image and that he has invited us to cultivate the world around us in ways that reflect his great love. (Protect and Cultivate) The idea that we are made in the image of God is a rich theological idea—one that has implications that come with it.

In part, it means that every human life, whether it be that of our best friend or worst enemy, is innately valuable, for we are made in this divine image. It also means that we reflect aspects of who God is to the world around us. Because we are made in the image of a God who creates and cultivates—who makes the world, who fills it with beauty, and who tends to its well-being, we, as his image bearers, feel this same longing to make something of the world around us—to use what we possess in ways that are bigger than ourselves, in ways that create change, in ways that make a difference. We are called to be stewards of what God has given us, and we are invited to use what we have in such a way that we celebrate the good things that God celebrates through our stewardship.

This means that our stewardship isn't passive; it's a stewardship that requires risk, intentionality, care, and attentiveness, but it's also a stewardship that has "the other" in mind; it's not simply self-focused or self-serving. Here's what we read in,

*1 Peter 4:10-11*

*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*

We have a counter-cultural verse to ponder today, friends. Peter is telling us that the gifts that we've been given, whether they be practical, spiritual, intellectual, and everything in between, are to be used in service to others.

In a societal context that invites us to hoard the good gifts we've been given or to use them to gain power, privilege, and popularity, we're invited to consider how these gifts, when leveraged well, might impact the well-being of others. Ultimately, our stewardship of these gifts should lead to a cultivation that looks like the things that Jesus celebrates—things like community formation, the love of our neighbours, seeking justice, practicing generosity, extending hospitality to the other, and pursuing peace.

It should be said that there is an assumption here that you have been gifted by God in some way or another. While Peter isn't specific around all the kinds of gifts he's referring to—though he does allude to both speaking gifts and serving gifts—he is inviting us to ponder the resources we've been given. For Peter, if we are going to be good stewards of what we've been given, we need to have a good sense of what we possess; we need to take an inventory of sorts—recognizing how much we've been given and the responsibility that comes with it. This might mean mapping out the resources that we have—answering the question of where our time is being spent, what natural talents and abilities we possess, and what spiritual gifts we have to contribute to the church and the world.

Sometimes these things are discerned in community and sometimes they require prayer, discernment, and pondering. Either way, we all possess more than we think, and it's imperative for us to have a good self-awareness of what we have to offer in service to others.

### **Three Things to Consider Before Considering How We Might Steward Our Time, Talents, and Gifts**

1. Small acts of faithfulness matter. If we are faithful in the small moments with the small opportunities, we will be faithful when the larger ones arise. Practices move us toward habits, and habits move us toward defaults.

2. Generosity is a form of liberation.  
"Generosity is what keeps the things I own...from owning me. In other words, generosity isn't just intended to bless others, it's also to liberate me." - Eugene Cho  
Being generous, with our time, talents, and gifts, keeps us from becoming consumed with our own self-interest, liberates us from our own defaults to hoard our resources, and frees us up to experience the joy of sharing what we possess in meaningful, helpful ways—ways that extend beyond ourselves.
3. We might have to free people up, in our midst, to extend their time, talents, and gifts toward the other.

## Time

"Most of us sense something else about time: it is a resource. Moreover, it is a unique resource. It cannot be accumulated like money or stockpiled like raw materials. We are forced to spend it, whether we choose to or not, and at a fixed rate of 60 seconds every minute. It cannot be turned on and off like a machine or replaced like a man. It is irretrievable." - R. Alec Mackenzie, *The Time Trap*

Now, if we believe that Jesus shows us precisely what it means to be truly human, we have to consider what Jesus filled his time with. And as we look at Jesus, we begin to realize that he subverts some of our cultural ideas around time. He reminds us that time is not simply a resource that we use to increase our productivity, our power, our popularity, or our personal well-being.

Tragically, in our societal context, these are often the things that define the value of a person—they are the things that promise happiness, wholeness, and fulfillment and yet they continuously over-promise and under-deliver—all the while taking more from us, in our pursuit of them, than we ever intended. They end up betraying us.

Jesus critiques our longing for these things by spending most of his time with people that he couldn't profit from, who wouldn't elevate his social status, and who the powerful had little time for. He created space for meaningful relationships to develop, for trust to be cultivated, and for outsiders to experience hospitality, love, kindness, and generosity. Jesus was radically generous with

his time; he shared it with people. He seemed to believe that meaningful things transpire when we are present to one another. Of course, our time is limited—especially when everyone and everything is demanding it from us.

Talk about time can be triggering for some of us. You might be thinking that you don't have time to leverage what you possess, in meaningful ways, and fair enough: we are busy, and burn out seems to be knocking on the door at all times. That said, we are invited to think intentionally about our time—which will, likely, require us to simplify our schedules, so that we might have room to leverage ourselves for the sake of others. It's not a project to add on top of all the other projects; it's a conversation around simplifying our lives so that we have enough margin to be disrupted by the people around us

Jesus accomplished a lot, but he still created space to be disrupted by others—space where he could extend himself to the people he encountered. We might have to start thinking less, but better. When we invest in fewer things, we have the satisfying experience of making significant progress in the things that matter most. At some point, we will have to say no to good things to be freed up for divine things—the things that allow us to use everything we are in service to the other.

## Talents

In terms of definition, I want us to consider talents as natural abilities—the capacities, skills, or aptitudes that come naturally to you—allowing you to accomplish something. These can be creative abilities (arts and drama), cognitive abilities (attitudes and intellectual capacities), physical abilities (athleticism and strength), and relational abilities (leadership, communication, relatability).

Over time, we develop abilities, too. Through ongoing learning and practical experience, we broaden our skillset to include more abilities that can be leveraged in the daily rhythms of our lives. How might we leverage our talents in service of others—in both the church and the world? I can't answer this for you—though over much reflection, prayer, and pondering, you certainly can.

## Gifts

When I say gifts, I'm referring to spiritual gifts, which I'd like us to consider the God-given, unique capacity which is given to each believer for the purpose of ministry—both in the church and in the world. While there is talk of different spiritual gifts throughout the New Testament, in Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul tells us about five gifts that God has given the church to be the church that he longs for us to be:

### *Ephesians 4:11-16*

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

We, as the collective body of Christ, are gifted in these ways: as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These gifts exist in this community. When these gifts are unleashed in our common life together, and in the places and spaces that we inhabit, we start to embody a way of life—a presence—that helps us to reflect a more-full picture of who Christ is. After all, Christ embodies all five of these gifts perfectly.

WE NEED THE APOSTLES in our midst to follow Jesus' lead in sparking movements, equipping us to be a multiplying church who engages the different contexts we are sent to.

We need them to help us see how the Kingdom of God intersects with every sphere of life: from business and education to the arts and the trades. We need them to be visionary leaders who awaken our imagination to think creatively, entrepreneurially, systematically, and structurally about what it means to be the church in the world. We need them to start new things—getting meaningful projects off of the ground. We need them to help us recognize our own gifts and to learn how to leverage them for the sake of the church and the world

WE NEED THE PROPHETS to follow Jesus' lead in helping us remember what God desires of us—that justice, hospitality, and caring for those on the outside matter.

We need them to point out our idols—the ways that we've pursued power and popularity over a deep care for the outsider, and we need them to comfort us in moments of struggle—reminding us that the story isn't over. We need them to help us see economics, justice, relationships, and our present circumstances in light of God's abundant peace. We need them to help us align our hearts with the heart of God—being burdened for those who hurt, for issues of injustice, and for God's will to be done in our city as it is in heaven

WE NEED THE EVANGELISTS to follow Jesus' lead in creating space for the skeptic, gathering diverse groups of people, and helping us to speak contextually about the good news.

We need them to help us proclaim good news in ways that are relevant, contextual, and captivating. We need them to discern what God is up to in our neighbourhoods, cities, social circles, and networks. We need them to remind us that a whole world exists outside of these walls, and that we are invited to discern God's activity in the world and to join him and what he's already doing.

WE NEED THE PASTORS to follow Jesus' lead in helping us to care for those who hurt, to move people toward healing, and to help us be a family who gives ourselves to one another.

We need them to care for the holistic healing of people—engaging the emotional, physical, psychological, economic, and relational pains that exist in our community. We need them to help us mourn well and to celebrate well. We need them to show us how to be hospitable—creating space where people can be seen, heard, and welcomed. We need them to cultivate a sense of togetherness and family—reminding us to love, exhort, encourage, and be with one another.

WE NEED THE TEACHERS to follow Jesus' lead in contextualizing the story of God for us, in helping us understand the nuances and intricacies of the Scriptures, and in teaching us by appealing to our imaginations, our intellectual abilities, and our

daily lives. We need them to be intellectually and spiritually curious—pursuing more robust ways of teaching us the Christian story. We need them to make the text come alive—helping us to make sense of it and giving us nudges around what to do with it. We need them to challenge and correct our wrong assumptions about the Scriptures, about God, and about our neighbours. We need them to ask good questions while helping us to dialogue well.

Friends, we need all of these gifts to be unleashed so that we might be faithful to the mission that God has called us to—fleshing out a more robust, full picture of who Jesus is to the world around us and to one another. None of us embody any of these gifts perfectly but we can trust, through the work of the Spirit, that these gifts are intended to be animated in our midst, to build up the church, and to compel us into mission.

What might it look like for us, as followers of Jesus, to begin to embrace time, our talents, and our gifts with more intentionality—looking for ways to leverage them in service to others?

## **Points to Ponder**

### **A Generous Faith ~ Time, Talents, and Gifts**

*1 Peter 4:10-11 ~ Ephesians 4:11-16*

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. What are some of the factors that keep us from being generous with our time, our gifts, and our talents? It may be helpful to discuss each of these three resources that we each possess, separately.
2. Since time is not an unlimited resource, we must discern the best use of it—structuring our lives in a way that reflects the kind of stewardship that God calls us to practice. How do we start to take practical steps toward this kind of stewardship in the daily rhythms of our lives?
3. There are few things as inspiring as everyday people leveraging their time, their gifts, and their talents in ways that celebrate the good things that Jesus celebrates. Do you have any stories to share of the people in your life who are showing you what this kind of stewardship can practically look like? What do their schedules, practices, efforts, and intentions look like?
4. If everyone is uniquely gifted and talented, how do we, as a community, tease these valuable resources out of one another? In other words, how do we encourage one another to leverage our gifts, talents for the good of the church and the good of our neighbourhoods and cities?