

Prepare the Way: The Sacred Call of the Way Maker

There is a kind of work that rarely gets applause. It happens before the crowd arrives, before the cameras roll, before anyone is watching. It is the work of preparation, and it may be the most important work any of us ever do.

In a culture that celebrates the harvest, we tend to overlook the sower. We honor the quarterback and forget the lineman. We applaud the arrival and ignore the road that was built to get there. But what if preparation is not merely a prelude to something greater? What if preparation is itself a calling, a divine assignment worthy of a lifetime of devotion? The life of John the Baptist forces us to wrestle with exactly that question.

A Life Built for One Purpose

John's story begins before he takes his first breath. The angel who announces his coming birth declares that he will prepare the way for the Lord. His own father, holding his newborn son on the day of dedication, speaks those same words over him like a blessing and a blueprint rolled into one. Even the ancient prophet Isaiah, writing seven hundred years before John was born, described his purpose in vivid, earthy terms -- a construction crew filling valleys, leveling mountains, straightening curves, and smoothing rough ground so that the glory of the Lord could be revealed.

John was not the main event. He knew it. He embraced it. He was the pulling guard, the road builder, the voice in the wilderness whose entire reason for being was to make room for someone greater than himself.

And yet, the work John did was indispensable. His ministry accomplished several critical things. He woke people up spiritually, disrupting the comfortable complacency that had settled over religious life. He called people to genuine repentance, helping them recognize what stood between them and a real relationship with God. He created a powerful expectation that something extraordinary was about to happen. And then, at the peak of his influence, he pointed away from himself entirely, declaring that the one coming after him was the one who truly mattered.

John prepared the way, cleared the way, and then got out of the way.

The Dignity of Preparation

Here is what we tend to miss: in the wisdom of God, the one who prepares the ground is just as honored as the one who reaps the harvest. Jesus himself said that the one who plants and the one who harvests share equally in the joy of what grows. Preparation is not a lesser calling. It is not a consolation prize for those who never got to do the real thing. It is a legitimate, sacred, God-honoring purpose.

Think about the people in your own life who functioned as way makers. For many people, it was a grandparent who leaned close and whispered words of faith at just the right moment. Someone who said, God loves you. He has a purpose for your life. He can do something extraordinary in you and through you. Those words, spoken quietly and without fanfare, planted seeds that shaped entire lifetimes of faith and ministry. The grandparent never stood on a stage. They never saw the full fruit of what they sowed. But they were way makers, and the kingdom of God is richer because of them.

Educators who pour themselves into students are way makers. Coaches who build character alongside athletic skill are way makers. Volunteers in children's and youth ministry who show up week after week, investing in lives that will not fully bloom for years or decades, are way makers. Foster families who open their homes to children who need safety and love are way makers. They do their work quietly, without applause, often without ever seeing the outcome. But God sees it. And God uses it.

Three Questions Worth Sitting With

If you want to sharpen your focus as a way maker, there are three questions worth bringing before God with honesty and intention.

Who needs more of me? Way makers look beyond themselves. They scan the landscape of their relationships and ask where their time, wisdom, experience, and love could make the greatest difference. There are people in your orbit right now who need more of what you have to offer. The question is whether you are paying close enough attention to see them.

What needs less of me? You cannot put something first without putting something second. To give more in one direction, you will almost certainly need to give less in another. This is not a comfortable question, but it is an honest one. Good stewardship of our time and energy requires making real choices, not just adding more to an already overflowing schedule.

What can I do today that will impact the future? Way makers think generationally. They invest in things that outlast them. In Matthew 6:20, Jesus urges his followers to store up treasure in heaven rather than on earth, pointing toward the kind of investment that carries

an eternal return. The decisions we make about where we pour our lives have a spiritual ROI that extends far beyond what we can see.

The Ultimate Way Maker

It would be incomplete to talk about preparation and way making without acknowledging the one who embodies it most fully. Jesus himself is the ultimate way maker. He took on a debt he did not owe, carried a burden he did not earn, and walked a road that led to a cross -- all to prepare a way for us. In John 14:6, he declares plainly that he is the way, the truth, and the life. He did not just point toward the way. He became it.

If we are going to walk in the steps of Jesus, we must learn to walk in the way of preparation, sowing, and way making. We must be willing to do the quiet, unglamorous, unseen work of building roads that others will travel, of planting seeds we may never see bloom, of pointing away from ourselves toward something and someone greater.

The glory of the Lord is revealed when the way has been prepared. That preparation is your calling. It is mine. It is the sacred, ordinary, extraordinary work of the way maker.

Prepare the way.

Scripture references mentioned in the sermon:

2 Corinthians 8:11 - The call to finish what was started and match early eagerness with continued giving

Matthew 4:19 / Mark 1:17 - Jesus calling his disciples to follow him and become fishers of people

Luke 1:5-7 - Introduction of Zechariah and Elizabeth, their righteousness and barrenness

Luke 1:13-17 - The angel's announcement to Zechariah about John's birth and purpose

Luke 1:76 - Zechariah's blessing over the infant John, calling him a prophet who will prepare the way

Isaiah 40:3-5 - The prophetic voice calling for preparation of the way of the Lord in the wilderness

John 1:29 - John the Baptist identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

John 3:30 - John declaring that he must decrease so that Jesus may increase

John 4:37-38 - Jesus teaching that one sows and another reaps, and both share in the joy

Ephesians 3:20 - God able to do exceedingly abundantly more than we ask or think

Matthew 6:20 - Jesus instructing his followers to store up treasures in heaven

John 14:6 - Jesus declaring himself to be the way, the truth, and the life

Romans 10:13 - Calling upon the name of the Lord results in salvation