

A couple of decades ago the U.S. government began construction of a superconducting super collider (otherwise known as an “atom smasher”) promising unparalleled scientific discovery. The super collider would confirm the existence of the “Higgs boson” particle that physicists believe is the ‘key to all elementary particle theory.’” (I’ll take their word for it.) While Soviet scientists began construction of a super collider in the capital city of Moscow, we chose an unexpected location for ours, Waxahachie. Think of it – the secrets of the universe were about to be revealed in Waxahachie! In 1993, halfway through the project, Congress voted to cut the funding leaving a giant stretch of underground tunnels as an enduring monument to the political process. What do you do with several miles of damp, dark abandoned tunnels? A Colorado mushroom farm had the answer—raise mushrooms! They claimed that the 2 billion dollar tunnel was perfectly suited for raising white button mushrooms. The U.S. government blocked the sale but I can’t help thinking about the irony of it – a massive government project built to unlock the secrets of the origins of the universe transformed into a mushroom farm.

While it is tempting to take aim at yet another example of government inefficiency and waste, this boondoggle serves as a cautionary tale for us as a church. We have been called out (ekklesia) by God to serve Him by unlocking the potential He has placed in His people. Far too many churches are operating mushroom farms instead of helping people find and follow God’s central purpose for their lives. Too many people have exchanged God’s glorious purpose for lives of “quiet desperation.” It was Thoreau who said, “Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.” When we don’t find and follow God’s purpose we waste the life God has given us and die with a song still in us. The gospel is good news because it enlarges our lives. The gospel is good news because Jesus secured our salvation, not just from hell but from the smallness of a life consumed by the self. God so loved the world that He sent His Son to enlarge our hearts and our lives and to call us to a life worth giving.

My hope is that over the next few weeks you would consider your calling no matter where you are in life. Maybe you are one of the lucky ones, you have made “it,” but you still feel empty. “Is this all there is?” Maybe you haven’t made “it” and now you don’t think you ever will. Maybe you have grown up believing you were made for something great but don’t know what “it” is. Or maybe you just don’t think about “it.” You’re just suckin’ air and eatin’

groceries. No matter where you are I want to start the new year by challenging you to consider why on earth you are here.

So how do we find our calling? How do I get started? This morning I want to share a little of my story, not because I'm special but because I think I'm typical. As a young man I wanted to do something significant with my life but had no idea how to discover what that was. Then I became a follower of Jesus and I began to hear some people say, "God called me into the ministry." I didn't know what that meant but I was envious of those who seemed so sure about what they were supposed to do with their lives. How do you know if you're called? And what you are called to do? Do only pastors or missionaries receive a call or can you be called to be a doctor or a baker or a candlestick maker? Over the years I began to understand that the call of God emerges gradually as **our gifts, skills, experience and personality meet with opportunity. When that happens we experience a God-given sense of "fit" that is affirmed by others and confirmed by experience.** When you find your calling you can say, **"I was made for this."** Here is how it happened for me:

- In third grade I was the kid who always wanted to read to the class. I loved to transfer information to others and try to make it interesting.

- In sixth grade Mr. Wheeler kept me after class and told me I was a leader.

- A strange and wonderful thing happened on the way to Jr. High...I met Jesus and was introduced to the church, a rich environment for mentors. In eighth and ninth grade I was student body president. I was not any more interested in politics as a teenager than I am now but I was very interested in exerting influence on others.

- In tenth grade I was confronted by a man I admired who challenged me to influence people positively and not negatively.

- When I was 21 I taught Jr. High SS and loved it. I had an insatiable appetite for the scriptures. When I was 24 I wandered into a country church (was led by the Holy Spirit) and surrendered my life.

- At 25 I was hired by a church and after two years entered seminary to prepare for some kind of ministry. As I learned the truth of scripture I longed to share it with others and influence them for the sake of the kingdom.

Of course there's much more to the story but as I look back over my little story that is part of God's bigger story, I can identify some essential steps in discerning the call of God: **Calling becomes clear as you follow Jesus, submitting to the scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit over time and in community.**

Why is it important to pursue my calling?

1. The pursuit of your calling glorifies God. Peter connects calling with the glory of God in 1 Pe. 4:10-11: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

2. The pursuit of your calling leads to confident decision-making. Circumstances will no longer determine your decisions. Paul endured beatings, shipwrecks and all sorts of opposition because he knew he was sure of his calling. Listen to this beautiful testimony Paul offers to the Ephesians, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory." Eph. 3:8-13
The storms in his life served to affirm his calling.

"The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling. For he knows with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once. Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living "callings." Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of

sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about through life.”
(Institutes, 3.10.6).

3. The pursuit of your calling defines success. What makes a person “successful?” How do you know whether you are a success? “Success is not what you have done compared to what others have done. Success is what you have done compared to what God created you to do.” Tony Evans

You don’t have to save the world - the world is not yours to save. You aren’t responsible for building the kingdom – it’s not yours to build. The Holy Spirit uses those who are yielded to His gracious influence to bring about transformation.

4. The pursuit of your calling is good stewardship. “As each one has received a special gift (manifestation of the Spirit) employ it...as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” We are stewards of God’s grace and stewards of the time He gives us. God has given us the gift of time in order to fulfill God’s purpose. Jn. 17:6, “I have completed the work you have given me to do.” If you don’t have purpose you will not “redeem the time.” You will simply waste it.

You can live with the confident expectation that God will reveal His purpose to you, in you and through you. You and I have a God-given assignment. If that were not the case then we would be done.

As we go through this series it will be important to distinguish “first things” from “next things.” The first things are the things that are normative for all disciples in all cultures at all times. “First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia).” Os Guinness, p. 31. We are all called to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to be conformed to the image of Christ and to bear the fruit of the Spirit for all to see. We should all pursue these first things daily. “In the end, call is about continuous formation into the likeness of Jesus Christ far more than it is about finding direction or getting a job.” (Labberton, p. 135)

We are called by God to follow Jesus. Martin Burnham was a missionary to the Philippines. He was held by the Abu Sayyaf Group for a year then killed in crossfire on June 7, 2002. His last words to the Rose Hill Bible Church where he spoke on May 23, 2001 – just days before his return to the

Philippines and his capture – were printed on the funeral program: "I wasn't called to be a missionary; I wasn't called to the Philippines; I was just called to follow Christ; and that is what I'm doing."

The “next things” refer to our particular context of work or ministry. This is where the convergence of personality, gifts, skills, and experience meet with opportunity. There is a God-given sense of “fit” affirmed by God and man and confirmed by experience.

Our story is simply a part of God’s bigger story. Our stories of calling are a part of the long and varied story of God’s calling of people in the Bible and throughout history. Our calling is the same because it has a shared source and different because there is no one like you. “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” (Beuchner quoted by Labberton, p. 72).

Be who God called you to be, determine what God called you to do then you can begin to seek the Lord’s wisdom on where and how best to do it. Then you can truly experience a Life Worth Giving.