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Session #9 – The Payoff – The Pleasure of God.

Next week we conclude the Life Worth Giving series with some specific action steps for those of you who want to further explore what on earth God wants you to do. But today I want to offer a few guidelines for those who are still unsure about what God is calling you to do.

**Guideline #1 - Do what you love in service to those who love what you do.** Look back over your life and you will discover that there are certain things you love to do, tasks or activities that are suited to your unique design. When you do what you were designed to do you experience joy. God calls you with the voice of your gladness. “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Frederick Beuchner.

There are few things more satisfying than using your unique gifts and abilities to help others. Donald Miller tells about an interview he did with a prominent surgeon who works at a nationally renowned hospital. Miller says, “If the average doctor saves hundreds of lives in the span of their career, this guy has likely saved hundreds of thousands. When I asked why he desires to help so many people, his answer surprised me. He said, ‘Because it’s fun.’ And then he went on to say ‘I like helping people because I enjoy it, I’m the opposite of an evangelical.’” Somewhere this man had gotten the message that following Jesus means forsaking fun. He didn’t get that from the Bible. God isn’t interested in a joyless, compulsory obedience. On the subject of giving Paul says, "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Of course there are parts of every job that are just that – jobs. “You’re job is what you are paid to do. You’re calling is what you’re made to do.” When we expect our 9 to 5 jobs to fulfill our deepest longings we are hanging heavy weights on thin wires. In this fallen world, no job is easy. The objective is to match our joy with our job as much as possible.

Diagram...

Joan Curry letter...Joan is doing what she loves in service to those who love what she does.

**Guideline #2 - Embrace the ordinary.** Ordinary is a bad word these days. We are bombarded with advertisements, appeals and testimonials that appeal to our collective narcissism. “You are special, destined for greatness.” Just think how often we hear words like, “Epic, extreme, indie, radical, artisanal and countercultural.” Nobody wants to be ordinary. “In most cases, impatience with the ordinary is at the root of our restlessness and rootlessness. We are looking for something more to charge our lives with interest, meaning and purpose. Instead of growing like a tree, we want to grow like a forest fire.” Michael Horton, *Ordinary*, p. 127

A young mother recently confessed in her blog: “I’m a thirty-something with two kids living a more or less ordinary life. And what I’m slowly realizing is that, for me, being in the house all day with a baby and a two-year old is a lot more scary and a lot harder than being in a war-torn African village. What I need courage for is the ordinary, the daily every-dayness of life. Caring for a homeless kid is a lot more thrilling to me than listening well to the people in my home. Giving away clothes and seeking out edgy Christian communities requires less of me than being kind to my husband on an average Wednesday morning or calling my mother back when I don’t feel like it.” (Horton, p. 15).

It’s OK to be ordinary. It’s OK to have an ordinary job and an ordinary house and an ordinary church full of ordinary friends. Do you know why? Because there aren’t any other kind! Read the Bible and you discover that God chooses and uses ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary plan. God bestows His extraordinary gifts on ordinary servants. God loves us through ordinary fellow image-bearers and sends us out into the world to pursue our ordinary callings. So relax. It’s OK to be ordinary.

**Guideline #3 - Seek the call of God over the approval of men.** I will never forget the day that I told my father that I was giving up professional baseball to pursue being a pastor. He was not a happy camper. In fact, he said, “Do you realize you are getting paid to do what most guys would do for free? Where are you going to find another job like that?” Well dad, I did! I didn’t want to disappoint my dad I couldn’t resist the call of my Heavenly Father.

One of the saddest verses in the NT is John 12:43, “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”

There are so many out there in the workplace that are working for the approval of men and are miserable in what they do. Whatever you do, do it not for the approval of men or for your own glory but for the glory of God.

1 Cor. 10:31 says, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We are called to live life "coram Deo," a Latin phrase meaning "before the face of God." R. C. Sproul explains, "To live *coram Deo* is to live our entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God... Whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God." This means that if a person fulfills his or her vocation as a mechanic, attorney, or homemaker coram Deo, then that person is acting just as spiritually as a pastor. It means that David was as religious when he obeyed God's call to be a shepherd as he was when he was anointed king. Jesus was every bit as religious when He worked in the carpenter shop as He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

**Guideline #4 – Commit to a long obedience in the same direction.**

Faithfulness is as important as giftedness. You have no control over the gifts you have been given but you do have control over the consistent use of those gifts. Faithfulness is a higher value than famousness. We discover our calling over time and in community. Get serious about your faith. Following Jesus is a long obedience in the same direction.

Americans have a love affair with the new and the novel like the new Apple watch. It is amazing technology. It can tell you the time but it can't give you more of it. It can count your calories but it can't make your life count. It will provide you with new apps but can't give you an appetite for God. Wouldn't it be nice if there were an app that would help you discover your calling?

Novelty is not the need of the hour. It is continuity. Our calling is to make sure the faith is passed from one generation to the next. Our lust for the new and immediate puts us at risk as a nation. The Muslims are far more patient than we are. "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women. Islamic State Spokesman Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani recently said, "If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market."

The best thing anyone can do to discover their calling is to cultivate a growing relationship with Jesus. He sent His Spirit to guide us and to be His representatives on the earth. There is no higher calling than to follow Jesus. When the Puritans came to America they brought with them what would later be called “the Protestant work ethic.” Protestant as opposed to the Roman Catholic view of calling that was hierarchical. Some people received “higher callings” to “sacred” work while others who received “lower callings” were assigned to “secular” work. The Puritans rejected this way of thinking although they did believe in three callings: 1. A Christian’s highest calling was to abide in Christ. 2. Christ-followers share a set of “common callings.” These involve the commands of scripture binding on all Christians. 3. Every Christian will have a specific calling based on their gifts and abilities. Our common calling is what most churches focus on because it is the easiest to discover. Just open the Bible and there are the instructions. We struggle with our specific calling because we are not equipped to walk in the Spirit and to discern His leading in our lives. If we don’t embrace our highest calling to abide in Christ and walk by the Spirit we may never come to know our specific calling.

There is a good chance that you are right where God wants you. He placed you in the family you are in, the city, the church and the job you are in. He can certainly lead you to where He wants you so let’s start where we are.

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being king. He made application to Prior Richard the leader of a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery.

“Your Majesty,” said Prior Richard, “do you understand that the pledge here is one of total obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king.”

“I understand,” said Henry. “The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you.”

“Then I will tell you what to do,” said Prior Richard. “Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you.”

When King Henry died, a statement was written: “The king learned to rule by being obedient.”

When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us. Whether then you teach, weld or practice law, do all to the glory of God.

When I was getting my MBA at SMU in my late thirties one of the class discussions was about why you were getting your MBA. Most of the students were younger and wanted to be presidents of their companies, etc. I said I just wanted to figure out how to make enough money to retire at 45 and do something I really wanted to do. While I wasn't able to "retire" at 45, I was able to quit my job...as an actuary at 43, take a 50% compensation cut, and 75% stress cut and be a lot happier. I remember my predecessor saying he had always wanted to be an actuary and I said I had always wanted to be an accountant. Amazing how God worked that out.

I still remember the first month of balancing the bank account and it was off \$0.01 vs the balance sheet. I can't tell you how many hours I spent trying to find that \$0.01, which was crazy, but I love solving puzzles and problems (and I found it!). I still have to secretly say that I like it when Brent can't figure out balancing the bank statement on occasion and I get involved. It's solving a puzzle!

I love it when the young guys and gals come in and ask me to help them figure out their taxes as a minister. Or when they want to understand their budget and how it works. I love solving problems especially when they involve numbers or money.

I also remember while growing up, my Dad, (who was a farmer), taught me to use an adding machine when I was in grade school and I felt so important helping him do "the books". Even then, I loved math and making things balance. So Bill's description of how they determine giftedness makes a lot of sense.

All this is to say that I really do feel like I'm doing what God created me to do. And while I know it's important to encourage those who aren't operating in their giftedness to find it (as I stumbled for a lot of years), it's also important to encourage those who feel like they are doing what God created them to do and continue in it.