

## Next Steps – How to VIEW and DO Your Work!

5/26/19 – Pastor Randy

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**Romans 12:3-8**

***Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.***

***In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.***

This morning I am going to conclude this series of messages about our NEXT STEPS.

In Ephesians 2:8-10 the Holy Spirit reminds us that...

We were spiritually dead due to our sinful rebellion against God. Our decisions were driven by our sinful passions which were under the influence of Satan. We were children of disobedience and justly deserving of the wrath of God. BUT GOD, the God who is RICH in MERCY and GREAT in LOVE poured out His GRACE on us and raised us up to life out of our spiritually dead condition by uniting us with Christ. Then in one of the most well known summary statements of salvation in the whole NT we read:

For ***by grace you have been saved through faith***. And this is...

***not your own doing***; it is the ***gift of God, not a result of works***, so that no one may boast.

***For we are his workmanship***

***created in Christ Jesus for good works***, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God is working on you and in you in order to do work through you. So our work – vocational, domestic, volunteer – ought to be viewed as God's work done through our work. The Christian ought to view his/her work as a labor

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of love. Last week we learned that work is a sacred (God-ordained/God-honoring) responsibility and opportunity.

Today I want to conclude by talking to you about the way God has shaped you to serve Him and others for His glory and their good.

In Romans 12:3-8 there are some key statements that I want to draw to your attention:

1. ***Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.***

There is a benefit to understanding yourself; properly assessing your gifts and abilities. It is very unhealthy to become self-absorbed navel gazers, consumed with self analysis, but it is equally unhealthy to fail to recognize the real innate intellectual, physical, and spiritual, gifts God has and is giving us.

We have a saying today that makes the same point Paul was making: “Stay in your lane”. Sometimes other people will use that to keep you under their control, but our job is not to stay in the lane others have identified for us but the one God has identified for us.

2. ***Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body.***

Paul employs his favorite metaphor for the church – the human body – in order to emphasize that a church, a community of Christ followers, is made up of ***individuals*** who each have ***diverse, specific functions*** that ***contribute*** towards the whole community fulfilling their ***unified God-given mission***.

3. ***In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.***

Our gifts are to be put to work, used to their fullest extent for the benefit of the community. In the verses which follow, Paul gives some examples of spiritual gifts like prophesy, teaching, serving, encouraging, giving, showing mercy, and leading. Whichever of these gifts you possess, he writes, employ them to their maximum potential. There are two points of emphasis:

- a. Have a proper/correct understanding of how God has gifted you.
- b. Use your gifts for the good of the community.

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Romans 12:3-8 is focused on the way Christians are to use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Christian community in a way that meets the spiritual and physical needs of that community. But although the focus is only on how our gifts are to be exercised within the church does not mean that they are not to be employed in a vocational setting.

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was an example of a prophetic gifting being used in a "secular" context as were his leadership gifts. He was also gifted by God with a "word of wisdom" regarding how the Egyptian government should prepare the economic future he prophesied about.

One point I have been trying to impress upon you in this series of messages is that our faith ought to influence and impact every aspect of our lives. We have a tendency to compartmentalize our lives; separating our activities and labeling them either "spiritual" or "secular". But we are called to walk in the Spirit which means that we are to be empowered and influenced by the Holy Spirit in all our activities and decisions. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that our next steps after coming to faith in Christ lead us to follow Christ into and within the workplace. We need to picture our lives as an exercise in being led by the Holy Spirit to follow the will of Christ in our home, at our jobs, in the church and in the community.

Before we do the works that God created us to do we must first arrive at an honest, or truthful, evaluation of ourselves. We need to discover how God has "shaped" us to serve. Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church in California developed a very insightful acronym based on the word "SHAPE" to help Christians assess the factors that determine how they can make the greatest constructive contribution. This acronym helps us to obey Paul's instructions to honestly evaluate, using sound judgment, the way God has made us by taking into consideration not only our spiritual gifts, but our passions, personalities, physical and mental abilities, and experiences.

Imagine a football team where the 6'6" 300-320 Lb men want the positions of running back, receiver, corner and safety and the 6'2" 200-220 LB men

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want to play on the offensive and defensive line. You might have a happy team initially but when they never win a game they won't be happy for long. The football team analogy helps create a picture of the principle that we are all shaped differently and our God-graced "shape" influences how we can best work as God's agents of reconciliation.

The acronym "SHAPE" identifies five influential factors that determine how we have been "shaped for service".

S: Spiritual Gifts (What spiritual gifts has God given me?)

H: Heart (What needs and type of work am I passionate about?)

A: Abilities (What am I skilled at? What have I been trained to do?)

P: Personality (What types of work fit best with my personality type?)

E: Experience (How have my experiences equipped and trained me to serve?)

**Spiritual Gifts** (What spiritual gifts has God given me?)

The lists of spiritual gifts in the NT are not exhaustive but representative. In Exodus 35:30-35 we read, "See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan.

**Heart** (What types of work am I passionate about?)

What specific concerns of God break your heart? Some people are passionate about truth which inclines them to teach and preach. Others are passionate about things being done with excellence and integrity which leads them into administrative tasks. Some are passionate about creating and designing systems and structures that provide for more efficient and healthier work environments. Still others are especially heart broken over sins of injustice which propels them into work in the judicial/legal realm.

**Abilities** (What am I skilled at?)

Athletics, Music, Computer Technology, Administration and organization.

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Medical Care, engineering, architecture and construction (systems or structures), Financial Management, People management, etc...

**Personality** (What kind of work does my personality lend itself to?)

There are many kinds of personality assessments you can take that can be very helpful in assessing what work you are best shaped for.

**Experiences** (How have my experiences equipped me to serve others?)

Your past experiences, both pleasant and painful, positive and negative, are another factor that shapes you for service. I spoke with a young lady not too long ago who works as a mental health nurse. She opened up about being a victim of a traumatic experience when she was young and we discussed how God could use her experience to enable her to empathize with some of her patients, enhancing her ability to care for them.

Chris Pender developed athletic abilities that he is combining with his passion for young boys and his spiritual gifts of teaching and leading, in order to influence young men to make constructive decisions and to ultimately influence them towards reconciliation with God.

Last Sunday, Andy Heyer spoke about how his personality inclined him to work with numbers and how that interest guided him to pursue an education in accounting which developed into an acquired skill and expertise. Millen Heyer shared about how she always had an interest in the medicine which led her to pursue the training she needed to become a medical doctor. Andy and Millen's acquired abilities coupled with spiritual gifts of service and leadership, and accompanied by their passion for underprivileged populations led them into the work they do now.

As we get ready to transition to our time of communion worship let me remind you of what I mentioned last week. Your work in the world – vocational or volunteer – is one means by which God sends you out as his ambassador, carrying his message of reconciliation.

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Lastly, always remember that although we are new creatures in Christ, created in Christ for good works, we must never let our work of God become more important than the God of the work. God has given us purpose in our work, but we be careful not to let work be our source of satisfaction and significance. Our work influences our identity, but we must be careful not to let our work be what ultimately defines our identity.

Our value, our self-worth and significance, is firmly established in the fact of our identity as children of God through our union with Christ which only exists because of the God's grace towards us and Christ's sacrifice for us.

Fixing our minds on this reality will free us from comparing our gifts with others, or coveting the gifts of others, since our gifts and abilities do not determine our significance to God. The gospel reminds us that there is one Hero – the triune God - who has made reconciliation both a possibility and a reality. All our works are expressions of His working in and through us!

To. God. Be. The. Glory.

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