

“On A Sling and a Prayer”

I Samuel 16 and 17; Romans 12:3-9; I Corinthians 12:4-11

Series: GPS – Find Your Purpose Week 2: Gifts

The Woodside Church

October 3, 2021

When Pastor John Ortberg went out surfing off the California coast there was no one else around except for a huge guy practicing martial arts on the beach.

After I'd been out a little while, a tiny wisp of a kid came paddling up out of nowhere. I couldn't believe he was out there by himself. He pulled his little board right up next to mine. He was so small he could have surfed on a Frisbee. He told me his name was Shane. I asked him how long he'd been surfing. "Seven years," he said. "How old are you?" I asked. "Eight." Then he said, "What I like about surfing is that it's so peaceful. You meet a lot of nice people here." Then I asked him, "How did you get here, Shane?"

"My dad brought me," he said. Then he turned around and waved at the nearly empty beach. The big guy doing martial arts waved back. "Hi, Son," he called out.

Then I knew why Shane was so at home in the ocean. It wasn't his size. It was who was sitting on the beach. His father was always watching. And his father was very big. Shane wasn't really alone at all. Neither are we.¹

Let me tell you about another courageous little guy who knew his Heavenly Father was always nearby. His gifts, passion and story come together in a calling no one, not even he, expected. His earthly father Jesse has seven other sons. They are tall, tough, strong. Samuel, the last Judge, is sent by God to choose and anoint one as the next king of Israel. They are an impressive lineup and Samuel immediately considers the oldest Eliab to be the first round draft pick. Yet God says no.

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” I Samuel 16:7

Six more sons parade by Samuel yet the Lord rejects them all. When the old prophet asks Jesse, “Got any more boys?” the father admits there is one they didn’t invite to the party. He’s back home minding the family herd.

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.” So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.” So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.
1 Samuel 16:11-13

¹ John Ortberg, *I'd Like You More If You Were More Like Me* (Tyndale, 2017), pages 65-66

Central casting would never choose David for the role of King. He is not the right height, weight or age. His resume up this point is: sheep watching, stone slinging, and harp strumming. He sounds more like a hippie. After Samuel anoints the boy he doesn't begin to reign. Instead he returns to roam the hills for more years of slinging and strumming.

This reveals some essential steps on your GPS journey to find your God-given calling. First, **God is preparing you even when you don't know it.** Many in the Bible, like David, were trained for decades before they began to serve. Moses led sheep in the desert for forty years. Samuel grew up in the tabernacle. Paul disappeared into Arabia for years before starting his mission. Even Jesus lived for thirty silent years in Nazareth.

Don't feel you've missed your calling, wasted your time, or lost your opportunity. God is preparing and training you for His purpose. In our growth group discussions last week someone said they didn't feel like a masterpiece. Then another pointed out we are masterpieces in process. God's not done with us.

The next step from David's story is **God uses both your natural and spiritual gifts.** Fast forward several years. The current King Saul and the armies of Israel are quaking in their sandals before a big, bad old Philistine named Goliath. The giant roars,

Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us. 1 Samuel 17:8-9

This went on for forty days until David, now a young man, shows up with bag lunches for his brothers. He's shocked by the fear of Israel's army. He tells King Saul,

"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth." 1 Samuel 17:32-33

When David refuses to back down, Saul feels the least he can do is equip the boy for the battle. He outfits him with his own armor. Yet the king's massive bronze helmet and breastplate are too clunky and cumbersome for the boy.

Don't try to use someone else's armor or copy how someone else succeeds. When you compare yourself to others and wish you could be more popular or successful like them, remember: you are a unique, one of a kind, creation of God. There is a special role the Lord wants you to play at this time and place. To do it, He's equipped you with natural and spiritual gifts. David believed this. Suffocating in Saul's armor he says,

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. I Samuel 17:39-40

Now all David's practice during those silent years pays off. David has a **Natural Gift** for slinging stones. He logged hours of target practice on lions and bears who tried to steal his sheep. So when Goliath roars, David runs toward the battle. Swinging his sling, he launches a stone missile into Goliath's forehead and he falls like a stone.

What's your sling? What natural gift or skill can you use for God? What every day, ordinary abilities have you been practicing? Maybe you are naturally good at organization or creative pursuits. You might be naturally hospitable and friendly. Perhaps you are a born leader, a compassionate caregiver, a whiz with tools, an impressive writer, a fantastic teacher, an inspiring coach. Ask yourself, "What are my natural gifts and how does God want me to use them to slay my giant? How can my natural gifts advance the mission of Jesus?"

Since each person on the planet is created in God's image, everyone is given natural gifts by God. Yet the Lord also gives **Spiritual Gifts** to those who are followers of Jesus and filled by the Spirit. David's spiritual gift comes out when he plays his harp to soothe King Saul's anxiety. There are several passages about Spiritual Gifts in Scripture. Here is one:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. Romans 12:4-6

Scripture teaches every follower of Jesus receives one or more Spiritual Gifts from the Lord (Romans 12:6, I Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:7, I Peter 4:10). When do you receive spiritual gifts? When the Holy Spirit comes into your life.

What is the purpose of Spiritual Gifts? They are tools to accomplish Jesus' mission in the world – to help all people love God, grow in grace and share with others. You will understand your **purpose** when you understand the kind of **person** you are. Discovering your Spiritual Gifts helps you discover who you are and why you are here. Using your Spiritual Gifts brings you great joy. You will finally feel: this is what I was made for. Unfortunately, there are a lot of myths about the gifts.

1. Myth: Only pastors have gifts for ministry. Truth: **Every Believer Has Gifts For Ministry**. Paul says:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. I Corinthians 12:7

Even though you did not go to seminary, you are in the ministry. God's will is for every Christian to discover and use his or her spiritual gifts. You are a gifted minister, you have a ministry, you have a calling.

2. Myth: Some gifts are more important than others. Truth: **All Gifts Are Equally Important.** Paul describes the Church like a body – the Body of Christ.

...there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. I Corinthians 12:25-27

Some feel the more visible gifts are more important. The elder and deacon, the pastor and worship leader are more valuable than the Growth Group leader, the Greeter, the kitchen worker or the clean-up team. The real powerful people are the sound booth techs since they can shut me off. Paul says this thinking is silly. My hand and foot are more visible than my liver and heart but I would not want to go through life without any of them.

3. Myth: I use my gifts on my own. Truth: **Each Gift Depends on the Others.**

In fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. I Corinthians 12:18-22

The Church is not a club with members. The Church is a movement of followers of Jesus. A club can still function if only 10-20% of its membership is active. But your body will be in serious trouble if 80-90% of it did not work. Your body needs every part to do its part. And so does the Body of Christ. This is why, at Woodside, we are shifting our focus from being members of a club to being disciples in Jesus’ movement. Every disciple is essential. We cannot afford to have a few people burn out by trying to run everything and have the majority feel unneeded, unappreciated and inactive. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind.

4. Myth: Some gifts are miraculous, others are mundane. Truth: **All Gifts Are Miraculous.** In I Corinthians 12:7-11 Paul mentions some pretty miraculous gifts: message of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues or heavenly languages, interpreting tongues or heavenly languages. But in Romans 12:6-8 he speaks about gifts which seem more mundane: serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing, governing, showing mercy. Some people desire the seemingly miraculous gifts. Others are afraid of them. Pentecostal churches emphasize the first group of gifts. Presbyterians, being the “Frozen Chosen” are more comfortable with the quieter ones. The truth is: all gifts are miraculous.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. I Corinthians 12:11

All gifts are supernatural and miraculous since they all come from the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit wants each congregation to have all the gifts. If you have the gift of prophecy, tongues or healing don't hide it. Use it along with all the other gifts.

The first questions in Woodside's free online GPS assessment will help you discover your Spiritual Gifts. So you don't feel overwhelmed it will reveal your top gifts. Once you find your gifts, talk about them with your Growth Group or with one of our staff members. Our greatest desire is to help you unwrap and use your Natural and Spiritual Gifts to bless the world in the name of Jesus.

It's a scary time being 17, 18 and not necessarily knowing what you want to do with the rest of your life. You're asked constantly, "What kind of school do you want to go to? What kind of program are you pursuing?"

Like many young people on the edge of the adult world, Victoria Vouk felt she was driving into the unknown future without a road map. Unlike many teens and adults, Tori took a crucial step: she prayed.

Through a lot of prayer, I found that the Lord was revealing to me that my work with children was something that was more than just a hobby. I never considered myself to be a teacher until that moment in my junior year of high school, when I was really praying about it and felt that the Lord was slowly revealing to me this is my gift and passion.

Suddenly it all made sense. Her training and experience as a nanny, a babysitter, a camp counselor, a Girl Scout, a worship and youth leader all came together in a calling and purpose. Today, Tori is working as a substitute teacher in the same elementary school she once attended. She's come full circle.

I found that this is really what I want to do and I love the time I have with the kids. I love preparing lessons and just seeing their joy. It's so special for me I wish I could just capture it in a bottle and keep forever.

Now she is helping young students discover their gifts and the joy of using them. For Tori, all her years of preparation, her experiences, her gifts, her passions, came together in her calling. They fit. They felt right. They clicked.

Are you ready to unwrap your gifts and use them?