

Teaching Series: Kingdom People – Finding Our Vocation:

New theme - Advancing the Kingdom through Discovering our Vocation

This new teaching series explores the reason we are here – We are a Kingdom People – created and saved to be a blessing in our communities and to intentionally advance God’s Kingdom of love and grace, changing culture for the betterment of all. Note our church declarations - blessed to be a blessing.

We each have a contribution to make with God-given attributes to use in this respect. We have a vocation:

vo•ca•tion (vou'kei fən)

1. a calling to follow a particular activity, career or profession
2. a strong inclination or inner urge to pursue an activity or perform a service
3. a divine call to a particular function or station within a spiritual life

The Bible puts it simply as: [Ephesians 2:7-10 TPT](#): Throughout the coming ages we will be the visible display of the infinite, limitless riches of [God’s] grace and kindness, which was showered upon us in Jesus Christ... We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfil the destiny He has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfil it!

Mark Twain: ‘The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why!’

God has planned good works for us to do! Do we know what they are? How do we find out what they are? The simple Christian message is that God loves us and has an amazing plan for our lives! We can question whether we are following God’s plan for our life or whether we have strayed from the path, getting distracted by other matters. I have put a lot of time recently into working on supporting rough sleepers, calling together city and church leaders to tackle the issue. It’s had a positive impact but is this what I should be doing with my time. If I’m doing that, I’m not doing something else. I had doubts.

In March, I had this encouraging word from a man of God, Wayne Drain:

“I just saw you in a suit and tie, big smile on your face and you’re going into boardrooms and then you’re passing by the homeless. Something was happening and something from the boardroom was going to the homeless. Taking something from the homeless and it’s going back to the board room.”

I often have to wear a suit, speak in board rooms and so it encouraged me to know that I am walking in the prepared works that God has for me. It gives me a renewed confidence and faith.

We’ll look at a few stories to encourage us when we feel fearful, unworthy or constrained from fulfilling God’s plan for our lives.

The first is that of devout, Christian, Tammie Jo Shults. You can read more here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammie_Jo_Shults

She was one of the first female naval aviators in the American Navy. Volunteering for Operation Desert Storm in Iraq, she was refused active duty because she was a woman. Talented, thousands of miles away from home, she felt restricted and frustrated. She was eventually given a role training her *male* colleagues how to respond in critical air situations, crash scenarios, tail spins etc. She spent six months doing this. She wasn’t to know how God would use this experience for good.

Last year, 17 April 2018, working as an Airline Pilot, she captained flight 1380 from New York to Dallas. It was a fateful flight. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southwest_Airlines_Flight_1380

The left engine failed at 32,000 feet. With one engine only, this caused the airplane to spin. The loss of power to one side also meant the plane angled to 40 degrees. The plane fell rapidly, plunging 8,000 feet in two minutes, then 13,000 over the next five. The engine debris broke a window, sucking a passenger to the opening and decompressing the cabin. Inside was chaos, heavy vibrations, no oxygen, loud noise, steep descent at an angle and spinning – couldn't be worse.

Except that, Tammie Jo Shults, had done this over and over in faster jets for six months. She calmly instructed the crew to take on their oxygen masks, to support the passengers, give CPR to the injured passenger by the window, arrange a landing spot at Philadelphia, co-ordinate emergency services and save the plane, herself and the other 147 people on board.

At the start of the flight, Tammie Jo had shared scripture with colleagues and they testified that with her calm leadership they felt at peace through this traumatic experience.

Speaking about the crash, she said, 'I think God gives us a calm when we need it,' Shults says. "I mean as parents, whenever there's a bad cut, or a broken bone you don't go emotional. You keep your calm because your child's watching your face.' The audio released from the flight shows how calm Shults was and she has been commended by the President.

The last amazing fact of the crash is that Tammie Jo Shults was not scheduled to make the flight. She stood in for another pilot. She did and was undoubtedly one of the best qualified pilots to do so because of her frustrating time in Iraq. It's a reminder that God has a plan for our lives even when it doesn't seem so.

Our next story is that of Samson. Samson was a (super)hero of faith – listed in Hebrews 11 with the other champions of faith. An original 'Avenger', Samson was unusually gifted with strength. His destiny was to defeat the enemy - the Phillistines. But, Samson followed his own self-interests, choosing a wife outside of his people and breaking all of his Nazirite vows. Instead of leading his people, he pleased himself – 'doing what is right in his own eyes'. (Judges 21:25).

Even in his selfishness, the plan of God for his life is described as being worked out (Judges 14):

His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"

But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." (His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)

Samson ended his life killing many of his enemies. The last of the Judges, he stood as a story of faith for the next generation, a peaceful generation when the kings of Israel took possession of the promised land. Saul, and then David would follow as those that overcame the Philistines. Samson may not have been obedient to God but his final act, served as a platform for the later conquest of the Philistines by King David.

The last story is from the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The criticism he received is in Nehemiah 4:2: He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"

I once spoke on this passage in Macedonia. Prompted by God, I chose the passage on the way to a small church there. When I arrived I hoped to find a burnt stone to help me communicate the message, via an interpreter. I found one straight way and shared a message about how God builds his kingdom (wall) not with perfect stones but with ones that feel damaged by life – burnt stones. The message caused a stir

and I soon learnt that the building I was speaking in had been burnt down and rebuilt with 'burnt stones'. Everyone wondered if I knew the story. I didn't and the message was well received.

Burnt stones represent when we feel we are not good enough to be building God's kingdom. E.g. There must be better Christians than me to do this; I know God wants this to happen, but he wouldn't use me! Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, making us perfect and 'the righteousness of God' by his death on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Finally, rephrasing the verse from Ephesians, 'Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfil it!' Pastor Winnans said this to millions, at the funeral of Whitney Houston: I don't want you to feel that life has happened without purpose. God works all things after the council of his own will. You are not a mistake. You are not a mishap. God had a purpose before he ever created a person."

Questions to consider:

1. Do we believe that God has a plan for our life?
2. Are we on that path for that plan?
3. Are we following God or like Samson, are we following our own self-interests?
4. Do we feel like we are a mistake or a mishap – what does God want to say to you about this?
5. Can we relate to the story of the burnt stones – can God use me?
6. Thinking about Tammie Jo Shults, do we feel like our purpose is being frustrated or thwarted? What does God want to say to us about this?
7. What did God last say to you about the purpose of your life?