

WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING FROM GOD TO GIVE

We're continuing our new Kingdom People series, looking at finding and living in our vocation – living out the purpose for which we were made, the reason we are here – as children of God.

Today we're looking at how we all have something from God to give.

But we're going to start by looking at Thomas Edison – the inventor of the electric lightbulb. Edison loved inventing, tinkering, improving things. Loved the energy of creativity with others.

Invention book – explores the theme of our identity and purpose and helps us work through our gifts, talents, passions and opportunities in order to take steps of faith into living out our best lives for God.

“In the 1870s, while still in his mid-20s, Edison was living in a row house in Newark. He'd been working odd jobs including that of a telegraph operator. He'd done some inventing too – a stock ticker machine and an electric vote recorder – but only in his spare time. But he'd made a decision – he was going all in. He was going to devote everything to the work of inventing.

The age suited Edison. He was ambitious and impatient. He opened his first workshop in a rented factory building in the busting, bursting city. In there, he and a few employees worked long hours to improve the very kind of telegraphic gear he'd used as an operator. But he soon wanted to expand his operation, and for that he would need more room – and perhaps a more peaceful location. So, in 1876, he bought 34 acres out in the New Jersey countryside, in a place called Menlo Park.

In Menlo Park, Edison hit his stride. He was bold and daring. He knew what he wanted to do with his life, and he had a sense for how to do it. He built an impressive, state of the art workshop atop a hill overlooking the countryside and the train station. He called it his Invention Factory.

And from that shop, he pushed the human race forward. Over the next five years, Edison and his men did things people thought could never be done. They created wondrous things. They invented things unique and novel, and they upgraded things that others had invented, making them better and cheaper.

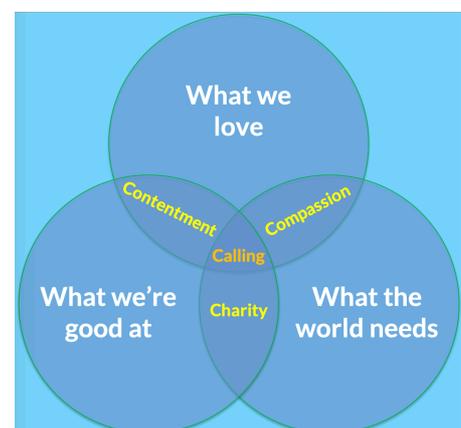
Edison applied for about 400 of his 1,093 patents while working out of that Menlo Park workshop, including a couple of his best: the phonograph and the first commercially viable electric light bulb.”

pg 16-17, Invention by Justin Camp

His inventions impacted the world – whether the world new it or not it needed what he brought – his unique gift. We may not be Thomas Edison, but the same is true of us. The world needs what only you can bring!

Edison wasn't always an inventor – he made a choice to go all in. He found his purpose in the combination of what he loved, what he was good at and what the world needed and impacted the world hugely as a result.

Romans 12:6-8 – the bible tells us that each of us is gifted – uniquely so. We are made in the image of God with unique passions – things that make us tick in a way that don't for others. The passion translation puts it this way:



God's marvellous grace imparts to each one of us varying gifts and ministries that are uniquely ours. So, if God has given you the grace-gift of prophecy, you must activate your gift by using the proportion of faith you have to prophesy. If your grace-gift is serving, then thrive in serving others well. If you have the grace-gift of teaching, then be actively teaching and training others. If you have the grace-gift of encouragement, then use it often to encourage others. If you have the grace-gift of giving to meet the needs of others, then may you prosper in your generosity without any fanfare. If you have the gift of leadership, be passionate about your leadership. And if you have the gift of showing compassion, then flourish in your cheerful display of compassion.

So, the questions for us, as they were for Edison, are: What do we love? What are we good at? What does the world need? We can then take this further, asking ourselves what opportunities we have, what steps we can take – big or small to move into our vocational calling as Kingdom People.

Journey I've been exploring with a few others over the past year or so. Using the invention book as a framework

I feel fortunate to be in the midst of what I feel called to and gifted for – although that is constantly growing and changing and it takes continued faith and commitment to walk in it, rather than settle for comfort and convenience.

There is cost in the adventure – there is effort and hard work required, it isn't always easy – there are times when I'd rather not go out for another evening meeting, or miss another evening putting the kids to bed – there are sacrifices at times, but knowing that I'm walking in the plans of God brings joy and fulfilment and God always gives back more than I can give or sacrifice.

I may miss bed time regularly with my kids, but I am privileged to be able to be there to take them to school most mornings and often have flexibility in my days to be able to be around for family where others may not be able to.

Last week, Paul quoted Mark Twain – The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why. We are made with a purpose – God purposed good works for us to do before we were made to do them.

Ephesians 2:6-10 makes it clear that we are saved by God alone – salvation is His work and not ours, we cannot add to this, but we are saved and made for purpose to do good works so that God can point to them and people will see His grace and kindness. The good works we do, flow from our position and authority in Christ – they don't earn it, they reveal it and bless the world around us.

Walking in God's will and making ourselves available to use our gifts and talents for God and for His Kingdom as Kingdom people is what brings us most joy and satisfaction – but beyond that it is what impacts the world around us the most for God. As we live as His children – walking in the gifts and authority He's given us, the world can't help but notice.

The joy and satisfaction of finding our vocation in life and the impact on the world are what we are called to – it isn't mean to be something for the few, but for all of us. It isn't necessarily about paid work either, although it could be – our vocation maybe found in bringing up a family, in building community, in starting a charity to help victims of crime, in helping people reconcile, in serving, giving financially, encouraging others, bringing excellence and integrity to the finance sector, praying, worshipping, changing atmospheres, teaching, being a doctor or nurse. It is any place where our passions and our gifts meet a need in the world – whether the world sees that need or not - and reveals God. As His children that is our calling.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 describes a master who gives three servants talents (an amount of money) and goes away. On his return sometime later the first two have been found to have

invested what they were given and double it. The third buries it for fear of losing it and what the master would say – it is taken from him and the master wants no more to do with that servant – he is cast out.

There are three things I want us to know from this parable.

Firstly - the servants were not given the same amount – they received according to their ability. We are therefore only accountable for what we've been given and no more. We are to use what we have according to the faith we have – as we read earlier in Romans 12.

Bob Buford in his book 'half time' makes it clear that we're called to use what we have – the things we are good at, the things we enjoy doing, in the places we love being. The parable of the talents doesn't require us to do anything other than use what we're given.

What you do best for God will rise out of that core being he has created within you. Do you remember our Lord's parable of the talents? The wonderful message from this story is that you and I will be held accountable only for what we were given, not for what others might have or expect from us. In Jesus' parable, the guy who was given only two talents and doubled them was esteemed as highly as the guy who started out with five. We are not all given the same equipment, but we are expected to know what we were given and find ways to invest ourselves wisely.

Bob Buford, Half Time – moving from success to significance

Secondly, we are free from the limitations of comparison and the expectations of others. When we use what we're given and invest ourselves wisely, not only can we expect it to be multiplied we can also expect to receive the pleasure of God and His reward – more will be given as we take a risk! The reward for the servant with 2 talents was the same as the one with 5 talents – Matt 25:v21 and 23 – exactly the same words – praise, promotion and pleasure! The praise of God – good and faithful, promotion – you've been faithful here is more. Pleasure – invited in the Master's happiness! (NIV)

Thirdly, the story of the third servant, which I think has been often misunderstood and misused to coerce believers into works – possibly by a literal application of this parable to real life, rather than what it is; a parable about what the Kingdom is like. What we know about Jesus and His grace towards us, what we know about the fact that there is no condemnation in Christ means that a literal interpretation of what happens to the third servant who doesn't use his talent cannot be accurate.

Perhaps a more helpful interpretation can be found as we look at what the third servant has to say – this servant seems to have a view of his master as being stern, ruthless and harsh. He operated with wrong belief, in fear and as a result lost what he had. He was afraid of losing what he had but this ended up becoming his reality. Fear and wrong belief about God and His character will rob us too.

If we hold back from the risks that God is calling us to in fear (which most often, if not always stems from a belief about God and our relationship with Him that is not true) that we won't achieve we will find ourselves robbed in life, our view of God perhaps distorted as a result because we don't see the same blessing that others are, that we can't seem to attain the same joy and satisfaction we know others have, that our impact isn't what we hoped.

I know this to be true because I lived it – fearful of getting things wrong, I'd only ever step out if I knew I could do what I was getting into. If I could do it perfectly. Jealous of others success.
Working hard, but only in my strength – never going beyond my comfort zone and taking a risk.

But here we see God valuing those who took a risk and I've since discovered that stepping out in faith, taking risks, putting ourselves out there, standing on the truth of who God really is, putting revelation into action is far better and more fulfilling than being trapped in fear.

We're called to step into all God has for us – to use our passions and our gifts and multiply them into a world that needs what only we uniquely bring. There is no-one here without purpose. No one here who is surplus to requirements and not needed for the plans of God. We are each perfectly made for good works – works that God prepared for each of us personally.

The third thing then is to recognise the truth about the character of God as loving and good, as one who eagerly desires to bless His children and to live free from fear so we can step out in boldness in our vocation in Him.

In summary:

- We are each uniquely made and uniquely gifted – graciously imparted to us by God Himself.
- We are called to use our passions and gifts for God – not to earn anything – but in response to His grace and kindness towards us.
- What we're given is different to anyone else – we cannot be compared to anyone; our contribution is ours alone and is vital in the purposes of God.
- We can expect that as we use what we have it will be multiplied, and we will receive the pleasure and reward of God.
- With a right view of God and His character we can live free from free and be bold in taking risks with Him, not on our own, but with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, alongside Christ, co-labouring together, with the loving approval and authority of the Father over us.
- In doing so we find deep joy and satisfaction as we live out the purpose for which we were created.
- And to top it off the world will be impacted, and the grace and kindness of God will be seen!

Questions for connect groups

What do we feel about our purpose and vocation being a balance of what we love, what we're good at and what the world needs?

What do we love?

What are we good at?

What does the world need?

What opportunities do we have? What steps (big or small) can we take to step into our vocational? How can we ensure these steps we take are in line with the faith we have (as in Romans 12)?

Note – be expectant that faith will grow over time as we use what we have and see it multiplied (as in the parable of the talents!)

Read the Parable of the talents

How do we feel knowing we're given different talents, and are only responsible for using these, not living under comparison or the expectations of others? What difference might this make to us?

What could multiplication look like for us as we invest our gifts and talents for God? How can we maintain expectation of this? What does the joy and reward of God look like for us?

What views of God and His character do we have that may limit our risk taking? What fears do we need God to help us with?

Spend time praying together!