

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

MEANINGFUL WORK TO PURSURE | RE-IMAGED

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Alright. Well, if you have a Bible go ahead and make your way over to Genesis, chapter 2, maybe open up the app, and grab something to jot a few notes down with.

If you missed it, last week we kicked off a new series of messages for a brand-new year called Re-Imaged, discovering God's purpose for my life. And what we covered last week was this main idea that God made you on purpose for a purpose. God doesn't make any mistakes. He doesn't need a mulligan. He didn't look at you and go, "Oops." He's got a specific plan and a purpose for you.

So, all of us, I think, are sort of searching for what it is, exactly, that God has put us on this planet to do. And yet, I think that many of us would just have to admit that that can become a great source of frustration for us. Maybe it feels like we don't know what it is or that God is keeping it from us. It's somewhat illusive. In our more cynical moments we begin to wonder if maybe God is playing a game with us.

Have you ever been to a ball game where they put up on the jumbotron the shell game? They've got like a reward or a ball or something underneath one of the shells, "Okay, keep your eye on the one that has the prize underneath it. And then they start moving around really fast and you're trying to trace it. And they stop and say, "Which one is it under?" And you picked three but it was really one.

I think maybe sometimes we feel like God is playing a game with us when it comes to discovering His purpose for our life. He's like, "Sorry, you went to the wrong school." "Sorry, you picked the wrong path." "You chose the wrong person."

And I just want you to know that God is not playing a game with us when it comes to discovering His will, His plan, His purpose for our lives. Jeremiah 29 says that God wants to give you a hope and a future. That's His desire. He's not trying to keep it from you. He wants you to discover it.

You might say, "Well, if that is the case then why does it keep eluding me?" And there are any number of things that could be the culprit of that. But last week we said the big one is that we live in a fallen world and everything is broken and messed up and not as it should be. So, on this side of eternity we can see traces of heaven and hell. We can see traces of the light and yet we are very well aware of the darkness. We can see the good and the bad. That's part of it. We just kind of live in a flawed, broken, messed up world.



Another culprit could be this. We talked about these two different things, God's general will and God's specific will.

So, God's general will could be sort of summarized in the Ten Commandments and the Greatest Commandment, love God and love others as yourself. That's like God's general will for everybody.

And then, out of that general will, comes His more specific will. So, we find ourselves in alignment with the general will first and then He begins to lead us to the specific.

There could be a number of seasons or we could describe them as valleys that God leads us through. He's with us in those valleys. It's painful and it feels like maybe He's silent. We're kind of wondering what His intent in all of this is. But, actually, He's preparing you for your calling. He's preparing you for that purpose.

Mountaintop experiences are incredible. I hope you're on one. I hope you experience several this year. But as great as they are, usually the fruit grows in the valleys. I wish that weren't true but in reality both from personal experience and observation and history I just know that that is the case. When I experience pain and resistance, that's where I grow the most. It's not that God isn't good; it's just that He's in control and He's with you through those valleys, those experiences.

God wants you to know His plan and His purpose. So, last week we kind of covered a lot of that as a basis. This week, where I want to go is I want to talk about work. And that could mean any number of things. Maybe the thing that jumps into your mind is what you do for a job, your nine-to-five, how you make your living, your occupation, career.

It doesn't have to be though. It could be just the thing that you are naturally good at, the thing that you're producing, your contribution to the world, whether you work at home or outside the home. What is that thing that God has put you on this planet to do that just feels productive? It feels like you're running in your lane. This is what you were created by God to do.

Don't you just love it when you go out somewhere? Maybe it's a coffee house, restaurant, or something. You come across somebody and it's so clear that they love their job. Don't you love to see that? Whether it's the barista at the coffee house, or maybe it's the server at your restaurant who just steers you away from a certain thing on the menu and points you in another direction. I always appreciate that.

Maybe it's the Uber driver who has cold bottles of the water in the back. The CEO who uses her influence to build up and develop others. The hair stylist who knows exactly what you want and how you want it, and she's emotionally intelligent enough to know whether you want to talk or not. Don't you just love that? I just so appreciate that.

Maybe it's a school teacher who personalizes his teaching toward each student and how he learns. The entrepreneur who risks everything to create something new as a



contribution to the community. Maybe it's the mechanic who keeps your car on the road while being fair and honest. The stay-at-home parent who changes the world by investing in the next generation. Or the DoorDash driver who delivers a burrito at midnight in the clutch.

Don't you just love it when you see people who are leaning into their calling. They just love what they do. It just makes all of the difference. It certainly encourages me. And then it becomes pretty clear, too, whenever you run into somebody who doesn't love their job.

I ordered something right after Christmas. It took a little while to get here. And I was monitoring it. I was here at the office last week and I got one of those notifications that said that the delivery had been made at my front door. And you've probably had this. Where the driver takes a picture to confirm delivery.

But this was the picture that I got on my phone. And I just want you to notice anything unusual about it. It's in the grass, not at the door. It was wet outside; it was raining in the picture. But, maybe the most peculiar thing is that he clearly took that picture from inside his car. And, that's not where my driveway is. So, I'm sitting there looking at the picture going, "Are you in my front yard?"

Sure enough, I got home later that afternoon and I asked Lindsay about it and she was like, "Yeah, I was at the window and I saw the whole thing." She said, "This car was coming down our driveway and turned and was headed straight toward the house. I didn't know what to think. He pulls up to the side and rolled the window down." She was like, "Am I about to be a part of a drive by? What's going to happen."

He threw the package out and snaps the picture. I guess he didn't want to get wet. I don't know who this person was or what kind of a day he was having. Clearly... I think it's safe to say that this isn't his calling. This isn't what God put him on the planet to do. Praying for him that he finds the right lane to run in.

Just a little lesson. Be careful what you do with me because you might end up in a sermon.

There was a national survey done a few years ago that asked people this question: What would you do if you just suddenly came across millions of dollars? Here are the top three answers.

Pay off debts

Buy a new car

Quit my job

Number one was pay off debts. Number two was buy a new car. Number three I would quit my job. In other words, I would go into my boss's office and tell him to take this job



and give it to another deserving person (I don't know what's on your mind there) "I'm done with this."

And in a sense maybe you can relate to that. In another sense, I mean how tragic. It's sort of this idea of the only reason why I'm going to work is to make some money. Now, please don't misunderstand me. Money is important. We need it to provide for our families, be a blessing to others.

Proverbs talks pretty extensively about work ethic and working hard. And yet... I think many of us know this. We just need a good reminder of it from time to time. If you're only going to a job to make money, then that's not enough. It's not going to give you the fulfillment that you're looking for.

Our motivation and reason for working, going to work, whether that's in the home or outside the home, whether you get paid or not, has to go beyond all of that to where we begin to just feel the pleasure of God in our life, "This is what I was put on this planet to do."

I don't know what your situation is right now, those of you who are listening to my voice, taking this in. I don't know what the percentage would be right now of those of you who would go, "You know what? I am fully satisfied with my job. I love what I get to do. It's such a blessing."

I would imagine that there are a number of you who feel that way. I'm just suggesting that, statistically speaking, there might be more of us who would say otherwise, "Man, I dread going to work on Monday. I'm facing a toxic work environment. This isn't what I want to do. I never saw my life going this way."

Maybe you're in a painful season of unemployment.

There was a survey done by the Princeton Management Association that said this. Forty percent of our waking hours are on the job and yet 82 percent of Americans say that they are often dissatisfied with their work. And that statistic has remained true for the better part of four decades or so. What this means is that we're spending about half of our waking time doing something that many of us don't find very fulfilling.

Now, let me just say this. Not every job has to be your calling. Not every job has to be fully fulfilling. I think that for many of us that would probably be something good that we need to hear.

Here's the deal. I've had some pretty crummy jobs in my past. But I appreciate all of them, even if they taught me what I don't want to do, even if they helped me learn how to figure out really difficult people or gave me the grit to stick with it.

I think all of us can think back to a first job or a worst job or a barely get by job. And God can use that too.



The worst job I ever had in my life only lasted a day. I worked a 10 hour shift in a chicken house and I went coup to coup reaching through the cage, unscrewing the little water spout, and then putting in a new one. I did that for 10 hours straight. It was as horrible as it sounds. It was worse. It was hell is what it was.

Lindsay and I were dating at the time. She picked me up from work. I got in the car. She said, "How was it?" I said, "I'm staying in school. That's what I'm doing. I'm staying in school. I don't want to ever, ever, ever want to do that again." So, I can look back at that and go, "Yeah, but those 10 hours weren't wasted time." Still I look back at that and it was character developing.

I just want to say that it's not as if we have to say, "You know what? I'm going to wait for the perfect job that fits my calling." No. You just kind of jump in there and as you go God reveals some of that to you.

And, yet, at the same time I would say that life is just too short for you to work a miserable job or to stay in that. I know that right now I'm talking to a bunch of different people. Some of you, right now, are just starting off on your vocational journey.

Maybe you're getting ready to graduate high school trying to figure out what you're going to do next year. There is all of this pressure from mom and dad or maybe friends of mom and dad. They are wanting you to declare a major. Have it all figured out. Or at least it feels that way. So, you get a bunch of pressure. You don't want to mess it up.

Maybe there are some of you in mid-life right now and you're like, "You know what? I went after this degree. I've been working this job. Man, this just isn't working out. But I've got people depending on me. I've got to provide." So, maybe you're trying to muster up the courage and the faith to make a switch in mid-life.

Maybe you have been very, very successful. It's not been hard for you to make a decent amount of money and to be successful. But yet, you still feel empty inside. Maybe this is requiring a lot of time for you. You travel and you're away from your family and it's killing your marriage. And the relationship with your kids is suffering. But your family has kind of grown accustomed to that lifestyle. So what do you do?

Or, maybe you've made it and now you're looking for, "What am I going to do with all of these resources to leave a lasting legacy?"

Those of you at retirement age, man it's fantastic that you were able to retire from your job. And I just want to reassure you that you never retire from the kingdom of God. It could be in the last couple of decades of life you're going to leave your greatest contribution that you might ever make.

Now, even those of us who... Maybe none of that describes you. You are like, "You know what? I'm so blessed because I'm in my dream job." Maybe in your dream job, though, it's going to have a certain portion of it that is going to be difficult. It's the 80/20



principle. Any job, probably about 80 percent of it is what you love and maybe 20 percent of it you have to put up with or you have to navigate.

In any job we still have to deal with the broken world. Your co-workers are broken. Your boss is broken. And they're just human beings. So there are going to be difficult personalities. There are going to be unrealistic demands on your time. There are going to be challenges that pop up, struggles that we have in the workplace. And yet, many of us, maybe we have just kind of settled and we've just kind of accepted them as a necessary evil, something we have to do.

Have you ever had somebody say to you, I they think they mean well, but they say, "Well, you have to work."? And technically speaking there is some truth to that. But, man if you have to do anything, then that's not very motivating. And I think it's certainly not very inspiring. You're not necessarily leaning into God's calling for you.

So, where do we begin in all of this?

I'm going to do some teaching here and then I want to get really practical. I just want to encourage you and really lean in in the remainder of our time together. I don't fully expect that everything that I'm going to say is going to be equally true or applicable to everybody listening to this. And it doesn't need to be.

What I'm trying to do here is... If you could even see my notes, I've got some things that I've written down that are mostly just suggestions. I've got some stuff written down and then I've got a little section in my notes that says, "Aaron, preach here."

That means go off the script. That means speak and let me get out of the way. I'm going to speak from a place of preparation, but I also don't want my preparation to get in the way of what God might want to say. I don't know what it is that He might want to say but, what is the one thing that He is saying to you and the one action step that He's asking you to make. I don't want you to miss it. So, I want you to lean in. Jot down a few notes.

How do we discover God's purpose? How do we find a sense of fulfillment in our career, our occupation, in the midst of this broken world?

Let me start here. I want you to know this. God cares about your job. Now, maybe that's paid or unpaid. Maybe that's inside the home or outside the home. God cares about what you are doing to fill your day, the influence that you make, and the contribution that you provide.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it that way before. Maybe you've sort of thought, "Well, I don't think God cares about what I'm doing right now. Actually, this isn't what I want to be doing full time, so God doesn't care."

Or maybe you just thought God only cares about ministry jobs like pastors and missionaries and worship leaders and social workers, but that's not true. When you look at the pages of Scripture, you see that most of the people in the Bible God used worked non-religious vocations.

Joseph was an administrator for Pharaoh. Moses and David tended sheep. Peter was a fisherman. Lydia had her own garment business. Paul was a tent maker. There is something like 220 various occupations mentioned throughout the Scriptures.

Jesus, who was God in the flesh, spent most of His time on earth not as a Rabbi or a teacher, but as a carpenter, working with His hands. I always felt somewhat convicted by that. I was kind of under the illusion like...

Some of you know my story. I felt called by God into ministry at a really young age, the age of 19. I didn't even know what I didn't know. And I kind of put an unnecessary pressure on myself that I had to have it all figured out by the age of 25 and if I didn't then I'd be an abysmal failure.

Any of you ever felt that pressure? Yeah. Somebody said that right here. I appreciate your honesty, your vulnerability with the rest of us.

Jesus didn't start His vocational ministry until the age of 30. That was really something. He was in no rush to do this.

One time, this is what I love about Jesus, clearly... You'll even see it in our passage, God rested from His work. This is called the Sabbath.

What many of us can do is we can take something legalistically and turn it into something that God never intended. Jesus would say that man was made for the Sabbath, not the Sabbath for man. So we can end up legalistically turning it into something that it wasn't supposed to be.

That wasn't true for Jesus. Jesus actually... I love this, He healed a lame man on the Sabbath, which was considered a day when there wasn't supposed to be any work. And Jesus, in His defense, says this in John 5:17. He said:

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." (NIV)

So we see here in Jesus that He considered work to be this incredible value. A. W. Tozer one time said this, "We have a common habit of dividing our lives into two areas, the sacred and the secular."

And one of the things I want you to know, if you are a Christian, and I realize that not everybody I'm talking to right now would consider themselves to be one, maybe you kind feel like you're struggling and stumbling through that walk. B



But, right now, if you've given yourself to Jesus, the Holy Spirit resides in you. If you're seeking to be re-imaged into His character and likeness, there is no such thing as sacred and secular. It's all sacred. So you can go to your job, your nine-to-five, whatever it may be: sales, food service, management whatever it is, it's all sacred because you brought the Holy Spirit with you.

One of the things that we desire to do as a church is to bring authentic and real hope and health, real change, to our city. And that's not going to happen by us just gathering together on the weekend like this. Now, I don't want to underestimate this. This is really important, but there is a specific purpose for this.

The author of Hebrews says we gather together... Let's not give up gathering together as some are in the habit of doing. That's usually what ends up happening, we turn it into a habit where we don't gather.

And then he says, "When we gather together it's not for the purpose of you having a personal experience with God, although that can happen, it's for stirring one another up. That's why we gather.

We gather together because we know that our nine-to-five, our work week, is going to be hard. We're filling each other up, getting ready so that we can be ready to actually bring about real change in the community. That's the way that our church is going to change the city.

I was having lunch with a guy right before Christmas. He leads an organization here in our city and he's part of another church. I don't think he's ever been here. But we were having lunch together and he said, "You know, Aaron, I really, really love your church." And I was like, "Well, tell me more."

So, he said, "I really love your church." And I go, "Why?" Well, here's why. He said, "I know a bunch of people who are influential in our community, people who are bringing about real change who are a part of your church. And I'm just so grateful for what God is doing there."

Can I just tell you this? That was so encouraging just to hear that. That's the way that we'll bring about real change.

And I want to encourage you in that, especially those of you who maybe find yourself in what you might call an impossible situation at work. Whether that's an unreasonable or abusive boss, co-workers who are constantly stabbing you in the back, maybe it's an unrealistic demand on your time and you find yourself in this sort of pressure cooker. And maybe that could be where you need to be quote unquote a Daniel in Babylon.

There are people looking at you. How about this? Live your life in such a way that it requires an explanation. Others might look at you and say, "Man, what is so different about you?"



Here's the thing. I've got to be careful about this when I talk about Christians in the workplace. I'm not talking about you slapping a Jesus fish on your car or carrying around your coffee mug so that everybody can see when God closes a door He opens a window. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm not talking about shaming other people because they are listening to secular music and you're turning it off and sneaking in worship music. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about showing up on time. I'm talking about doing what you say you will do. I'm talking about not losing your temper. I'm talking about refusing to gossip, having a strong work ethic. Living in such a way that people would look at you and say, "There's something fundamentally different about you." We can't expect God to reveal more, really lead us into our calling, if we're not at least doing that at a bare minimum.

I think what everybody wants, deep down, is the sense that we've found not just a career but a calling. You just know, "This is what God made me for." Last week we looked at the passage from Ephesians 2, verse 10. It says:

"For we are God's," this is the word that he used, "masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus," here's why, "so we can do the good things," and that involves your work, what you produce, what you contribute to the world, "that he planned for us long ago." (NLT)

So you are a masterpiece, God is making you, re-imagining you, anew in Jesus so that you can make a contribution where you are. And He planned this out a long time ago.

Meaningful work is a part of what it means to be made in the image of God.

Part of the reason is because God, Himself, works. The fifth word in the Bible tells us a lot about God. In Genesis 1, it says that God created. He went to work designing, planning, crafting, and building. And He found great pleasure in it.

The Bible uses all of these metaphors to describe God as a worker. In Proverbs, chapter 8 it describes Him as an architect and a builder; Matthew 7, a teacher; Deuteronomy, chapter 31, a composer; Hosea 10, a farmer; Isaiah 64, a potter; Psalm 23, a shepherd.

So, that is part of the thing that compels us to be productive and to be creative and to make a contribution and to provide. This is the nature of our Heavenly Father. He's a creator. He's a nurturer. He's a provider.

And it says in Genesis 2:2-3:

"On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work."

That's a whole other sermon that probably some of us could use, knowing when to stop working and to just be and to just rest. That's what God did. And then in verse 3 it says:

"And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation." (NLT)

Right after He made Adam and Eve He gave them a job to do. Now get this. God gave Adam and Eve work to do prior to sin entering into the world. So work preceded all of that. Work was a part of a perfect world.

In Genesis 2:15 it says:

"The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it." (NLT)

So, who knew that landscaping was the world's oldest occupation? I don't know how many of you love to landscape or garden. You've got green thumbs. But imagine doing all that in a perfect world. That means no more weeds. That means that everything you plant flourishes and produces. That means no insects are killing your tomato plants. That's what that means. And so all of this work existed prior to sin.

Now, I don't know about you, but somewhere along the line when I was growing up in church, I sort of got this idea that work was the result of sin, that work was the result of a fallen world. I don't know where I got that idea. As near as I can tell it was probably Genesis 3, a misreading of those two verses. In verse 17 it says"

"Cursed is the ground because of you."

God is sort of laying down the consequences on Adam and Eve for their rebellion, "Cursed is the ground. Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground."

I think we maybe misread that and think, "Well, work was the punishment God laid down upon us because of sin. And that would be a misunderstanding. It's sort of like what I said last week when I gave you the illustration on the screen behind me. God made us in His image but sin shattered that image. Same thing with work.

God created work prior to sin and sin shattered that. So the reason why work can be so painful and so trying is because it has been affected by our sin. And now that needs to be redeemed as well. See:

Work is not the curse of sin.

Sin has cursed the work.

Which means that God can reconcile that. God can redeem that. And we can conclude this. I think we can safely conclude that if work preceded sin, then work will also be something that we find in heaven. I don't know how you feel about that. Maybe you're

like, “Oh, man. I thought we’d go to heaven and we’d just be kicking it on the beach with a little umbrella drink for eternity.”

I’m going to go ahead and admit this. There was a time in my life when I really wasn’t looking forward to heaven because I couldn’t picture it. I just thought that we would all go to heaven and we’d be bouncing around on white, fluffy clouds wearing diapers and playing harps. And I just thought that might be cool for a day or so, but every day for eternity? I was not looking forward to that.

But see, we need to understand that all heaven is is earth restored back to Eden, back to perfection. The kingdom of God coming to earth to bring reconciliation and restoration. So we’re going to find meaningful work to do in heaven.

Solomon in all of his wisdom in Ecclesiastes 3 said this,

“What do workers gain from their toil? ... I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live.”

That’s calling. That’s fulfillment. And then he says:

“That each of them may eat and drink,” and here’s the term, “and find satisfaction in all their toil,”

What God wants is for you to find satisfaction in your toil. And then he finishes it this way, this is God’s gift to you:

“—this is the gift of God.” 3:9, 12-13 (NIV)

If you are leaned in, you know why you’re here, you’re running in the lane that God has laid out for you, you’re chasing after that and it is fulfilling, there is nothing more fulfilling than that.

And if you’re not, it is not too late to change course. It is not too late to have the courage to say, “You know what? Maybe I need to go back to school.” “Maybe I need to turn in my resignation.” “Maybe I need to go for that promotion.” “Maybe I need to make some sort of change so that I can step into and lean into God’s calling upon my life in this area.”

If that is the case, how do you find it?

Well, in Romans, chapter 12, (I just want to get really super practical for the next few moments) Romans 12, verses 3 and 6 say this:

“Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves...”

So, that’s this idea of not what I... Can I say it this way? It’s not what I would like to be true about me, but it’s what reality is about me. Being honest about my giftedness, what God has called me to do:

"... measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us... In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well." (NLT)

So, that's a statement of fact that God has given you a gift and He's created you in a specific way to do certain things well.

Let me take us through three very practical, very simple questions. I think that for many of you, this may just be review, but timely review. For others of you, maybe this is a word that you need at this time in your life.

How do you know what God has called you to do? How do you recognize that? Well here's the first question:

What gifts and abilities has God given you?

There are a number of ways that you can answer that question. Some of you probably, intuitively, know it right now. You know what you are naturally good at. Maybe others have affirmed that in you.

Maybe you've taken any number of the battery of tests that are out there right now: Meyer's Briggs, Strength Finders, Working Genius—any number of those. They are all helpful tools to help you find out what your gifts and abilities are.

Family of origin, your previous experiences, what have you done that others have affirmed? What are you naturally sort of good at?

There was a study done by the Princeton Research and Marketing Corporation that found that 50 to 80 percent of all Americans are in careers that don't match their gifts and abilities. Few things are as frustrating as being in a role that doesn't match your gifts, strengths, and abilities.

Here's the second question. The first is what are my gifts. The second is:

What are you passionate about?

And there is a difference. See, God has put a set of motivations and core passions within all of us. It's that thing when you think about it, when somebody talks about it, when you see it, when you experience it, you sort of light up like, "Man, I am passionate about that thing."

Now, here's where we really need to pay attention to, because you can be using your natural gifting and still miss your calling because you don't have a passion for where you are applying it.

For example, you might be really gifted to teach but maybe right now you're teaching high school geometry. That's really important. But maybe that's not your passion. Your passion may be teaching elementary students. So, if you could make that shift, then

that's when you really begin to come alive. That's when you begin to really lean into your passion.

Or, you might be gifted to lead a team of people in an established organization. But maybe that company has been around for a while and what really brings you to life is thinking out into the future and innovating and being an entrepreneur. And if you could use your gifting to step into that, then you'd really come alive.

You might be gifted to sell things but your passion is to make a lasting impact on the kids who live under your roof and call you mom or dad. So, for a season in your life, "You know what? They are my full-time effort. They are my passion."

I've noticed that many people use their gifts to make a living in their nine-to-five but they use those same exact gifts expressing passion in another. So, maybe you make your living using your gifts in a board room but then you express your passion using many of those same gifts to lead a non-profit organization or for a ministry team around here.

I have been on trips with doctors, dentists, school teachers who get on a plane, fly to the other side of the world in Kenya and they exercise their gifts and their education that they've spent years and lots of money on, but they are really passionate about serving those in the slums of Kenya. And when you see those two things come together, it's a beautiful thing to witness.

Every week I see people who are making their living doing something else, but, man, they show up here. I've seen CEOs out in the freezing cold parking lot directing traffic and real estate agents who are serving kids in Kids' Ministry, and people who use their vacation time in the summer so that they can go to camp with our students and be a mentor of a discipleship group.

You can find your paycheck apart from your passion, but you cannot find your calling apart from your passion.

So, what are you passionate about? What are you gifted in, what is your passion? Here's the third one. Maybe this is one that we have a tendency to overlook at times. It's just simply this question:

How has God shaped you from your past experiences?

So, you look back over your life and you just kind of do an evaluation. Where did I come from? What is my educational background? What are some of my first jobs? What are some of my defeats and some of my challenges? Maybe I just kind of fell on my face. What about my spiritual walk? What has God been saying through all of that?

Galatians, chapter 6, verse 4 from The Message wisely advises us:

"Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that." And then it says, "Don't compare yourself with others."

Don't compare yourself with others. God has got a plan specifically for you. And if He is sovereign, if you are in fact a masterpiece, and He has planned the days of your life out, then there isn't any season of your life, even the most painful ones, that aren't ordained by Him. And He wants to use you. He has a plan and a purpose for you.

About 10 years ago, I got on a plane. I went to another city and spent two to three days doing something called a life plan. I don't know if any of you have ever done this. It was developed by a guy by the name of Tom Paterson. There are a number of people who have developed these.

But here's what a life plan is. I got away in a room with this facilitator and basically I walked in and all of the walls were these blank sheets of paper. We just sat down and he said, "Hey, man. Tell me your story. Where did you grow up? Tell me about college, your education, jobs. What do you feel like God is calling you to do?"

I just rattled through the whole thing. I probably talked for about three hours and he was just taking notes, periodically asking questions, mostly listening. We get done with all of that and he was like, "Hey, why don't you take about a 45 minute break."

So, I went out to a little corridor area and I'm checking my email, checking texts. I come back in after 45 minutes and the whole wall, all of the papers are filled up. It was my life. It was almost like written out in kind of like a narrative arc. And each little section he had like, chapter one. It was written out like a book: chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3.

And he said, "Hey, I want you to go through here and I want you to give a title to each chapter of your life. And I just want you to notice this kind of arc and what God is doing and saying in your life."

I shared with you all before, I just briefly made reference to this. I felt called by God at an early age to go into ministry. But most of my 20s were really, really difficult. There was a season where I just wanted to get out of ministry for a while.

I was about burned out, if I'm being really honest. It took a toll on our marriage. And I was coming to the end of myself. I was just like, "I don't understand what You are doing. I've given this my all and it doesn't feel like it's working. So, what if I kind of misunderstood Your calling, plan, and purpose for my life?"

And I wasn't looking for Traders Point. I didn't apply for this job. I wasn't looking for it. It's too long of a story to even go into now, but God opened up this door. I came here when I was 31. It was like a rocket ship. And it was very disorienting to me because I had just gone from feeling stuck and I was throwing everything that I had at it.

And, honestly, if I'm being really honest, I was probably a bit too prideful and sure of myself. I came here very unsure of myself. I think the goal was just don't kill it. That was pretty much my aspiration, "I don't want to get in the cockpit and drive the thing down into the ground."

So, I get here and it was just like a rocket ship. People were asking me, "What are you doing differently." And I was like, "I don't know. I don't know what was happening here."

So, I'm 38. I've been here six or seven years or so at the time. And I go to my life plan and I get to that point in my life plan (this was nine years ago) and he said, "What are you thinking?" And I said, "I'm so disoriented, because it was like valley, valley, valley, valley, valley all of a sudden straight to the mountaintop. And I don't really understand. What if He takes me into another valley? And, honestly, when I looked at the growth of Traders Point and I look at the influence and the impact of the last few years, it scares me to death."

And he goes, "Why?" And I said, "Well, if we were to get into a time machine and go back to 20-year-old Aaron Brockett and throw this all up on the board, I would be ecstatic. But I would have assumed that God would have achieved all of that by the age of 67 and then I would retire and go off into the sunset. But I'm only 38. And that scares me to death."

And he goes, "Well," and these were his words, he said, "Well, do you feel like, in a sense, that you sort of scaled your Mount Everest and you're kind of at the top?" And I was like, "I guess so. I guess I could say it that way."

So he goes, "Why does that scare you?" And I go, "Well, have you seen all of those Everest documentaries? People who get to the top die of oxygen deprivation. They don't make it back down. Usually something bad happens. I'm up here today but where else do I go from here? I'm not quite sure."

And, in that moment, he said, "Well, that's a good point." He goes, "How about this? You just realized something that most leaders fail to realize until it's too late." And then he said these words, "It's not about you."

It was in that moment... What we developed out of that life plan was this. "What if, instead of just staying up on this mountain top, you start throwing lines down for other people, men and women, to help them figure out what their Mount Everest is?"

Guys, that's when I came back and we started developing a plan for multi-site. That's when we started developing the leadership residency. That's when I was like, "I'm not going to preach every Sunday. I'm going to start giving this stuff away so that way we can develop other people."

It was this idea that the NFL teams that are a legacy aren't the ones who win two or three Super Bowls, they are the ones that raise up a family tree of coaches and send them out to other teams and they win a combined 30 Super Bowls.

That's what we call the big C church.



Can I just say this to you? There was a tremendous amount of freedom in that. Recognize that maybe right now the point of frustration for you when it comes to your career... I want to say this lovingly. I don't mean for this to hit in a way that is harsher than I intend, but could it be that too much of the focus is still on you? And God is trying to pull your eyes up off of that because it's not about you.

He's for you. Please don't hear me say anything other than that. He is for you. But it's not about you. The minute that we can begin to recognize that He is at work and He wants to work through us, use us in the lives of other people, is the minute we step into the freedom for what it is He has called us to do. Your calling, you can find great pleasure in that.

Some of you, right now, today, maybe this message has been painful for you to listen to because you're in a work environment that is really a struggle. Maybe you're just in a season of extended unemployment. You thought you'd have a job by now. It doesn't seem like God is opening up any doors. And we want to pray for you.

So, we've just created a little bit of space right here before we conclude our time with a time of worship where you can just come. We'll have prayer counselors here down front, kind of in the middle of the room as well. They will have lanyards on.

You can just go. Just walk up and simply say, "I need God to intervene in my work." Or, maybe, "I'm just in a season of unemployment and I need God to provide a way." We'd just love to pray for you. And then we'll wrap up our time together in a time of worship. Would you stand to your feet and let me pray.

Father, we come to You right now and we trust You. We trust that You have a plan. And yet, at times it's a struggle. And, Lord, I just pray that You would allow us to not just work a job but to find our calling and to be certain about that.

I know that there is probably a fair amount of frustration and pain around this subject in the room and for those listening. So, I just pray that right now we could call out to You and that Your Holy Spirit would minister to hurting hearts and You would give resolve and clarity and peace around our next steps vocationally.

So, would You show up? Would You speak. We're listening. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Would you come so you can be prayed over for just a few moments? And then we'll end in a time of worship.

