

Marion weekly update

SERMON January 14 "Can You Hear Me Now" John 15:1-17, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

This week in our series generated by the conference we went to in Florida comes from a session led by Jay Shetty. Jay is a best selling author, internationally known speaker and life coach, and a significant presence on social media. He has a podcast that is followed by over 35 million people. The session was in his area of expertise, helping people find their purpose. We might call that finding calling in faith language. Part of his story is that he is of Indian descent and grew up in England. As he grew up he heard a Buddhist monk speak and was captivated. He wanted to explore the ideas and spirituality even further and eventually spend three years as a Buddhist monk. He split some time between India and England. Something that he shared with the conference that I didn't see in his biography on his webpage is significant as we think about calling. During his time as a monk he was passionate about helping people. Everyone and everything was game for him to jump into. Certainly we would applaud this kind of spirit and devotion. But there was a problem. He was doing too much. And he wasn't focused enough. He did so much it literally made him physically unwell to the point of hospitalization. Helping people was killing him.

This was a cue to him that the monastic life wasn't for him, and that he needed to make some changes. He needed to find his clear and dialed in purpose. What he realized is that his focus, the best way for him to help people, is to help people find their purpose. So he embarked down this path intertwining his spirituality with this goal, and the rest is history.

When we talk about calling focus is incredibly important. As people of faith there can be temptation to try to do everything. Burnout is the result, or dropping things because we get overextended. If we are consumed with busyness we may miss our true calling altogether because we're so distracted with everything we have our hands in.

Something that we'll explore in a few moments is worth sharing about this session. He ended with the one thing that must be at the root of everything. That thing is love.

First let's take some time to share a few of Jay's tips to find our calling.

Self-care is near the top of the list. Care for our minds, bodies, and spirits. If we aren't well it can be difficult to fully pay attention. It can also make it impossible to follow up even if clear direction comes our way.

Think better of ourselves. Negative self talk can become paralyzing and a hinderance to finding and pursuing our calling. A couple comments on this line.

Bruce Lee famously said the following: "Don't speak negatively about yourself, even as a joke. Your body doesn't know the difference. Words are energy and they cast spells, that's why it's called spelling. Change the way you speak about yourself, and you can change your life."

To that sensibility, it's estimated that 80% of our thoughts are negative and repetitive. Many we can't control, however we can add something to the equation. When a negative thought comes, don't just think that thought. Also offer a solution to the negativity.

Let's go Biblical with this idea. Christians can have some very harsh words to say about ourselves.

"We are totally depraved". "I'm worthless and don't deserve to be saved but God offers it anyway."

First, much of this is human driven and doesn't represent the fullness of scripture. Because scripture tells us that we are "fearfully and WONDERFULLY made." We are part of the creation that God called "good" at the outset. "All things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are called according to God's purpose." "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

None of this points to worthlessness. In fact it points to the truth that we have great purpose in God's sight. We know God gifts us, which means that there are strengths at play in who we are. I'm not calling us to pride, but what if we focused more on strengths than weaknesses. Our outlook would improve for certain, and if we look for strength in ourselves we're more likely to look for the strengths in others.

We also need to know who we are. What is my identity? What are my passions? What do I love? One of the great tragedies in the world is that so many of us allow others to create our identity. A statement made in the session was very significant. “We are not who we think we are. We are who we think others think we are.”

On one front we have people who will tell us what they think we should do. They will tell us what to like and love. They will tell us where they see us down the road in life. They might be right, but they can also be quite wrong. One of the clearest examples of this is the parent who is pushing and living out childhood dreams that were never fulfilled, or forcing their own passions on their children. Sometimes this looks like pushing hard into a particular occupation.

We have surveys and assessments to tell us what our aptitudes are, what our personality types are, what our spiritual gifts are. These can be very enlightening. They can also be incorrect to some degree or another. Consider what we just said. If I’m basing my notions and responses not on my own honest self, but on what I think others expect of me then my answers aren’t accurate. Therefore neither is the result.

On the other front there are people who really don’t say much, but we assume they feel or think a certain way about us. This can also be defining if we allow it.

The real question is “who do I say I am?” Who do you say you are? A couple weeks ago I offered the suggestion to SLOW DOWN. This is necessary if we’re going to know ourselves. It takes reflection and time. It takes staring at ourselves and owning all of who we are. It means that sometimes we might buck against what other people say about us and want for us. Much of this is uncomfortable. The payoff is great. We find who we really are and chart a course that is our own and not fulfilling someone else’s expectations.

Where we all as people of faith find a core center of our identity is found in our scriptures this morning. We all are called to abide in the vine. Our identity is wrapped up in Christ. This isn’t passive, it’s active. We are supposed to bear fruit. It’s possible to think we are bearing fruit yet are not. The reason this is so significant is that it’s this abiding that defines ANY calling we receive. All of us have this common calling to live as closely to Jesus as possible. What does this look like? He defines it very simply and clearly. Love. All that we say and do should be guided by and done in love. Again, not the unfortunate habit many people have playing word games to make unloving things swing back around and call them loving. Genuine, Christ inspired, Christ centered love.

If our calling doesn’t reflect this then it’s not a calling from God. It’s not a purpose worth having.

Bearing fruit also becomes important. Some confuse this with the idea of making disciples. That can be a definition but I don’t think that’s what Jesus is referring to here. Before we can make a disciple we ourselves have to be disciples. That’s what He says. Bear fruit to show our discipleship. Our fruit is actively how we engage the world around us. If we remember Paul’s fruits of the Spirit in Galatians it’s noteworthy that none of them are intended to be just an internal belief or state. All of them are actions that should be part of the core of who we are. They also define to whom we belong.

We hope and trust that actively loving the world as Christ does will inspire others to do the same.

As we discover who we are in fullness, and truly abide in Christ, we come closer and closer to finding that authentic calling and purpose God has for us. And part of the adventure is that the calling and purpose may change taking us down new and exciting paths.

Corinthians is a familiar passage to many. Here and in several other parts of the New Testament spiritual gifts are discussed. There are different examples given in different passages. Over the years the temptation has been embraced to assume that the only gifts in existence are the ones explicitly listed in the Bible. This is an error and a hinderance to many searching for their calling. We know this because of the many Christians who have taken spiritual gift inventories and come up empty. They walk away believing they don’t have a spiritual gift because they don’t fit into the predetermined mold that guides the survey.

The truth is that there are infinite gifts that the Spirit can bestow. These infinite gifts can be used in infinite ways in infinite places. While calling itself is focused and zoned in, what constitutes a calling

is beautifully broad. Once again we go back to whether or not we are being driven by who we truly are or who someone else tells us we are or aren't. "That doesn't count as a spiritual gift." Who's to say? Whether or not it is will be told by how using it bears out.

Calling and purpose are not just nice ideas. They are necessities. We weren't created to be idle and unproductive. We were created to have an impact in this world. The impact we make in the world has everything to do with the quality of the world and the quality and satisfaction in our lives. That we have a God who calls us and calls us according to a purpose is a wonderful gift. We have guidance to direct all that we do in the direction of a Christ centered love. If we allow ourselves to know ourselves, and listen for the Spirit that calls we find ourselves in places that are unexpected and incredibly rewarding in what it does for us and those around us. Abide in the vine. Listen to the Spirit.

Lastly, try. If we're not fully certain but have a strong inkling, give something a shot. If God is in it, that will make itself known. If not that will too. But too many great opportunities have been passed because of a fear of what might happen. Like most of us have been told at some point, you never know until you try.

When Hannah lifts up "she who bore seven", if we take it to mean herself we can be left confused.