

Shape – Your Gifts for God’s Good Purposes Part Six: Experience

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Are You Experienced?

The golden ticket for modern era employment is a good resume. A resume is a record of your experience—educational, vocational, and otherwise.

You have a God-given resumé as well, the ways Providence has shaped your life and lead you to your calling.

A great example in scripture of someone giving their God-given resumé is in 1 Samuel 17:34-37 when David asks to fight Goliath and Saul says he can’t:

But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

To find our calling, we need to grapple with our experience: the God things, the pains, and our limitations.

1a. A Resumé for Killing Giants

In our SHAPE—Spiritual Gifts, Heart’s Desires, Natural Abilities, Personality, and Experience—*experience* can often be the deciding factor that brings clarity to our calling.

Like David, we have been given certain experiences that make us stand up when others back down. We know something about God from our experience that shapes what we desire to do.

Eugene Peterson wrote of David:

“God was the reality with which David had to deal; giants didn’t figure largely in David’s understanding of the way the world worked.”¹

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Westminster Bible Companion: 1 and 2 Samuel*, pg. 98.

If you've been walking with Jesus for a while, changes are there are things in your experience that are your resumé for slaying a giant. There are obstacles that overwhelm others, or callings they would not consider, that you are drawn towards because of your life story.

Like the young person who wants to work with indigenous communities in social work because she grew up in the foster system.

Your life circumstances is one of the ways God speaks to you. Listen to your life and find your resumé for killing a giant.

1b. A Note on Real Resumés

The more responsibility and the higher risk a calling is, the more you will need real experience—education, character and references—to engage in that calling. Like Jesus, you too need to grow in 'wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people.' (Luke 2:52)

2a. Living Out of Our Hidden Wounds or Wearing the Scars

In dealing with our experience, we need to consider our painful experiences as well. The choice we face with our experience is either living out of our hidden wounds or wearing the scars.

David seems to have been neglected by his father, he wasn't invited to be seen as one of his son's when Samuel came looking for a new king (1 Samuel 16:6ff).

David's problems in life come from his continuation of this wounding by neglecting his own children—one of his sons abuses one of his daughters, and another son takes vengeance for this. Eventually, he tries to usurp the kingdom (2 Samuel 13ff).

If we don't deal with our wounds, we live out of them and often perpetuate the very hurts we received. Over half of the male population in prison in the states was physically abused as children.²

Now, these wounds can come at any stage of life. And they can come from households that are healthy as well. David Brenner writes:

"Powerful conditioning in childhood encourages us to acknowledge only the most acceptable parts of our self. And parts of self that are not given a place at the family

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3386595/#:~:text=Over%20half%20of%20male%20inmates,witnessed%2C%20often%20continues%20into%20adulthood.>

table become stronger, not weaker. Operating out of sight and beyond awareness, they have increasing influence on our behavior."³

No matter how 'bad' it was or wasn't, we've all been wounded and need to face those wounds.

2b. The Stewardship of Pain: Wounded Healers

Frederick Buechner, whose father was an alcoholic, was once told that he had been given a lot of pain and that he was a good steward of that pain.⁴

He likens the servant who buried his talent to the one who buries their pain, they miss out on the fullness of life because of it.

The good steward of pain knows their pain and works on letting Jesus heal it.

Because Jesus continues to bear scars on his resurrection body, we know our hurts and pains do not disqualify us from serving. In fact, they are often the place where we find our calling.

"As followers of Jesus we can also allow our wounds to bring healing to others."⁵

Making our scars visible is not hiding our pain and letting our pain be healed. When we do this, we may find unique opportunities to comfort others. Paul writes:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

If you aspire to serve the world, especially in leadership, you need to face your pain and find healing. If your pains are from childhood trauma, abuse, or neglect—or from deep loss and grief—this should be done prayerfully and with professional help.

³ David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*, pg. 51.

⁴ Buechner, 'The Stewardship of Pain': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73hdH1_z2ps

⁵ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*.

3. Stop Wearing Saul's Armor

When David volunteers to fight, Saul puts his kingly armor on him. When it doesn't fit, David says:

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So, he took them off. ⁴⁰ 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. (1 Samuel 17:39b-40)

As Malcolm Gladwell has shown, David rejecting the conventional military approach for a sling and stone may look like a limitation, but it is an advantage—the equivalent of bringing a .45 to a sword fight.⁶

Our world has ideas about what calling should look like, about how extraordinary it should appear. These do not apply to Christians.

One of the most important people in western history was a man named Ananias. When Paul was thrown from his high horse and struck blind, Ananias was told by God to heal him and welcome him into Christian community—even though Paul had been a violent threat before (Acts 9:10-19).

On the outside, Ananias' life would look ordinary, a quiet life of prayer and faithfulness. But without him, western civilization would not be the same.

You may be limited right now—parenting young children, suffering mental health issues, or easily overwhelmed.

"I cannot discover God in myself and myself in him unless I have the courage to face myself exactly as I am, with all my limitations, and to accept others as they are, with all of *their* limitations...Evasion is the answer of superstition."⁷

Your limitations may be your advantages. Your limitations may be the place your calling comes to you. You may be doing something that looks ordinary that turns out to be extraordinarily used of God.

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath*.

⁷ Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, pg. xvi

4. Nothing is Wasted with Him

As we've explored our calling, some of us may feel anxious about missing out. We may think that we've wasted time by doing things we haven't finished or working in areas we weren't gifted.

However, as Andy Squyres sings:

"My love is only a whisper now//But nothing is wasted with you."

Our personal calling is just a part of our human calling (Genesis 1:28) and our Christian calling to love God and others and make disciples (Matthew 22:37-39, 28:16-20).

If that is what we are called to do, with the right framework, nothing is wasted. Because it can all teach us to love.

We also have a community to reach out to and ask for help finding our way.

And, finally, we can place our lives in the hands of our loving God, trusting that one day the opportunity will arrive, and we can say "I've got the right resumé for this."

Discussion Questions

Open Up:

We tend to think that people only have a 'testimony' if their life has included some radical transformation or some obvious miracle. Where might that come from? What makes a testimony more valid or exciting?

How have you rated your own testimony?

Encourage a time of sharing of stories where your experience taught you a little bit about who God was.

Dig In:

- How has your experience shaped the way you've made decisions about your calling?
- How has your culture or family treated the idea of your experience of pain? What might stop you from getting the healing you need?
- Are there any pains you can share that you feel have become part of your calling?
- Where are you tempted to 'wear Saul's armor'—to be inauthentic in your approach to ministry and work?

Prayer/Sharing:

Depending on how group time went, consider these options for prayer:

- Prayer for healing from some of those core hurts members have experienced.
- Prayer for those in vocational uncertainty, ask God to show them a way forward.
- Prayer for a greater revelation of God in the ordinary for those who feel trapped by their current circumstances.