

You Do You
United Church of Broomfield
August 23, 2020

Romans 12:1-8 (CEB)

1 So, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. 2 Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

3 Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. 4 We have many parts in one body, but the parts don’t all have the same function. 5 In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. 6 We have different gifts that are consistent with God’s grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. 7 If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. 8 If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

Once upon a time the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the challenges of the new world. So they organized a school. They developed an activity curriculum of climbing, swimming, running, and flying. To make the administration easier all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact better than the instructor. But her grades in flying were barely passing. Her running grade was very low because she was so slow. Since she was so slow she had to drop swimming, which she really enjoyed to spend extra time running. This running caused her webfeet to be badly worn, so that by the end of the semester she was only an average swimmer.

The rabbit was at the top of the class in running. Swimming, however was a challenge, she developed a nervous twitch in her leg muscles because of the make-up work in swimming. Her speed fell off because of this nasty muscle twitch.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he was always in trouble in flying class. The teacher insisted that he start from the ground and go up but he wanted to start in the treetops and go down. He developed cramps in his legs from overexertion, and his grade fell in climbing, which he enjoyed, to a “C.” His flying teacher gave him a “D” because he could not follow instructions.

The eagle was always being disciplined. For instance in climbing class he beat everyone to the top of the tree but he insisted on using his own way to get there . . . flying.

The moral is clear. Each animal has its own natural abilities that is was designed to use. The only way the animal fails is if it is forced to do something it was not gifted to do. What is true of the animals of the forest is also true of us. God has not made us all the same. Discover your natural abilities and enjoy them. Rabbits

don't fly. Eagles don't swim. Squirrels don't have feathers. Ducks look funny trying to climb trees. So what exactly were you designed to do?

Yehudi Menuhin, the famous violinist, has held audiences all over the world spellbound with his playing. He made his debut in San Francisco at the age of 7 and started a worldwide tour by the age of 12 with his historic concert at Carnegie Hall. In his memoir, *Unfinished Journey*, Menuhin tells about his love affair with music.

From the time he was 3, Menuhin's parents took him to concerts in New York where he heard Louis Persinger, a brilliant musician and teacher. Menuhin asked his parents for a violin on his fourth birthday and for Louis Persinger to teach him how to play. A family friend provided the violin, but it was a toy one with metal strings. Although he could have hardly held a full-size violin, he was furious with the gift. He writes, "I burst into sobs, and threw it on the ground." Menuhin said he realized he wanted nothing less than the real thing because he writes, "I knew instinctively that to play was to be."

This story is not uncommon for musicians, John Coltrane, the saxophonist who played for Dizzie Gillespie and Miles Davis had a similar experience. Coltrane nearly died of a drug overdose; he came to faith in Christ and gave up drugs and drinking. His later works were some of his best. He wrote "A Love Supreme" a thirty-two-minute musical praise to God. After an extraordinary performance one night he stepped off the stage and said, "Now let your servant depart in peace." He confessed that his mission was done; God had sent him to make music and write "A Love Supreme." Maybe we are designed to do, who we are. Again, think about it, maybe we are designed to do, who we are.

In an article on Katie Couric, the television journalist, her sisters say that even as a child she would gather the other children around and entertain them. Which was obviously good training for her work on *The Today Show*, *the CBS Evening News* and *60 Minutes*.

In this world "we usually become what we do" but shouldn't it be "we do what we are." This morning there are children and youth in our church that have not made this most crucial decision. Then we have senior adults who no longer have to consider their career, and then there is the rest of us who daily wonder, "Why do we do what we do?" This message, however, is not about career (which would include only a few), it is about hearing and following God's calling for our lives (which concerns us all).

Be mindful that what we are talking about is a vocation not a career. Vocation comes from the Latin "Vocatio" or calling. A career is a way of putting bread on the table. If your calling and career intersect you are one of the lucky few. Most people **have to have** a career and do their calling on their own time. In the 18th chapter of Acts, Paul identifies himself as a tentmaker by profession. The scripture indicates that he spoke every Sabbath and makes no mention of any other activity, presumably because he was making tents. Paul's calling was to be a missionary, his career was to be a tentmaker. That is the real world. To find work that perfectly fits our calling is not a right but a blessing. Michelangelo once complained, "times are contrary to art [his calling], I do not . . . have any hope of further salary." In more modern times George Foreman the boxer said, "Preaching is my calling, boxing for me is only moonlighting."

Each day we will find ourselves intersecting this issue either as one who is responsible to train a child to follow a calling, or as one who is searching for our own calling, or as one who is trying to rediscover their gifts and calling.

For those of us training others, in Proverbs we read, “Train a child in the way he should go way, and when he [or she] is old [they] will not turn from it.” (22:6).

We have always considered this passage about spiritual development. Teach children about God when they are young and when they grow up they won't forget about God. I imagine there is some truth in that. Consider for a moment that the writer of Proverbs was most concerned with practical wisdom, family wisdom. Given the writer's interest in worldly matters is it not possible that the writer is saying, “Train a child in what comes naturally and when they are old they will stick with it.” Could this be vocational wisdom? Help children discover their natural gifts and point them in that direction instead of letting them do what is in vogue.

I think of myself in this situation. When I left high school, I went to school to be an engineer. Why? Because it was the “career du jour” and my parents convinced me that it was in my best interest to establish a strong, good paying job as an engineer. I dropped out of school after one semester with failing grades, feeling lost and miserable. I know they wanted the best for me, but they were focused on my career, not my calling.

Graham Green wrote in *The Power and the Glory*, “There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.” John Coltrane and Yehudi Menuhin confirm this. Consider this, “God normally calls us along the line of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship and service.”

For those of us searching for our calling Paul wrote, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.” (Romans 12:3)

Sober judgement, self-assessment, reflection, call it what we will, it is the first step toward finding our calling. Have we ever really examined who we are? Do we really know who we are? Or have we been so deceived by the advertisers, our greed, and comfort that we no longer know who we are? It doesn't take long to get so turned around that we simply become what we do instead of seeking to do who we are.

After we are prepared for our career, we find ourselves working our job for a few years and then we begin to think, “Maybe I'd be happier doing something else.” So, we look online, get in touch with our contacts and Linked-In accounts, and in short order we are setting up a new desk. A few years later and we repeat the same routine, same song, second verse. We think by changing our job, our address, or our spouse that we will somehow find the yellow brick road that leads to Oz. We are confused. Our longing is not for a new desk to sit behind or new people to work with, our longing is to use our gifts, to discover our calling. A job will not quench this thirst only a calling can quench this longing.

To discover who we are and what we were meant to do it is important to have a heart to heart talk with ourselves. We need to ask ourselves some unsettling questions.

1. What are my gifts and abilities?
2. What are the deepest desires of my heart?
3. Where do I personally sense the needs of the world and feel the brokenness in God's creation?
4. What is my unique personality?

For those of us trying to rediscover our gifts and calling, Jackson Brown wrote a song entitled “The Pretender” about the temptation to neglect our natural gifts and calling and just struggle “for the legal tender.” We start

out so young and strong he writes; we could have been a contender. Before long, however, we are going through a daily routine and as time passes by we forget all about our dreams and God's gift. In due time we are caught between the routine and the struggle for the legal tender, and in short time we become the happy idiot and a pretender. It is a harsh commentary on the life and affairs of us humans. The truth is nothing is wrong with sticking with the routine and being faithful. We all have to pay the bills. But we don't have to surrender our gifts and calling on the altar of a career.

Rediscovering what we are designed to do often takes the form of a search. In our twenties we may pursue one thing but by our forties we may be burned out on it and discover that our passion lies elsewhere. Sometimes it takes trial and error to happen upon our calling. Thomas Paine did not discover his calling until his forties, when he found himself, out of necessity writing political commentary in a print shop in Philadelphia. Prior to this he had been a seaman, a soap maker, and a government agent in England. Even after the publication of ***Common Sense*** and the discovering of his calling as a writer he had to make a living as a soldier, as a clerk for the State of Pennsylvania, and as Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

A calling once found is not for us alone. We are called by God to serve others. Our calling cannot be to travel the world; that may be our wish, but it would not be God's calling because it makes no one better but ourselves. God calls us to be ourselves, but to be ourselves for the good of others.

We are experiencing a pivotal time in our history when worldly events are providing us with opportunities to reflect on our careers and our callings. There is sickness around us – COVID and Racial injustice. How are we being called to be a living sacrifice? How can we be individual members contributing to the larger body of Christ? How can we not conform to the world's darkness, but transform; both ourselves and the world into light?

Our career is our gift to ourselves. It provides the resources needed to survive. But, what *calling* are you hearing at this time and in this moment? How can your gifts flourish to benefit creation? Let us not forget that our *calling* is God's gift to the world. It is where our deep gladness meets the world's deepest needs. May we not only find our calling but share it abundantly and extravagantly with all of creation.

AMEN