

“Shaped to Make a Difference: Following Your Heart”

We're in a series called "Shaped to Make a Difference". The theme verse we've been using is Job 10:8 **"God's hands formed me and shaped me" (Job 10:8)**. God made you unique. You're a unique combination of numerous factors, abilities, interests. In architecture, form follows function. In other words, tell me what you want the building to be used for, and then I'll tell you how to build it. But the opposite is true with human beings. Function follows form. In other words, look at the way God formed you, how he shaped you, and then you'll know what you're supposed to do with your life.

To summarize that we've put it into an acrostic S-H-A-P-E. God has given you **Spiritual gifts**. God has given you a **Heart**. God has given you **Abilities, Personality and Experiences**. All five of these make up who you are. Last week, Mark explored spiritual gifts. Today, I want us to look at the second one -- the Heart that God has given you. In Proverbs 27, it says this, **“As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the person.”(Proverbs 27:19, NLT)**. It is very, very important for each of us to understand our hearts.

Now, the Bible uses the word "heart" to describe the bundle of motivations that you have -- your desires, your hopes, your longings, your dreams, your ambitions, your affections, the things you care about, the things you love to do. All these compose your heart. And just like physiologically your heartbeat is unique, you're unique in what you care about, how you're motivated, what you're passionate about. And of course, there are some motivations and things you're passionate about that are not from God. These would be unhealthy things that you've picked up along the way in life that are not of God. But the true essence of your heart was wired by God himself.

And because of that your heart acts as an internal guidance system that God has placed in me and in you for a purpose. It's not by accident.

How do you know when you're working from your unique God-given heart? For example, how do you know when you've got a job that matches the internal heart that God has given you? Well, you enjoy it, and you're good at it.

When you wake up in the morning to face whatever it is that you typically do, do you say, "Good morning, Lord!" Or do you say, "Good Lord, it's morning." Now we all have days that we don't want to do what we have to do that day, but on a majority of days, if we're not enjoying what we do, it's probably not matched up with the heart God has wired us with.

Most days I love what I do as a pastor. But there are those days when I have to deal with the very hard stuff of life, a death, a divorce, a job loss, a serious illness. Those are very hard things. But even then I know that I'm doing what God put me on this earth to do.

When we're living out the heart that God gave us, we enjoy it and we're good at it. If you're good at what you do in your job, or as a stay at home mom or dad, that's a pretty good indicator that God shaped you for it. People are rarely successful at things they hate doing. They don't have any passion for it.

Now if you're sitting here and thinking, "I don't enjoy my job, and I don't feel good at it." Don't go quit tomorrow! That would not be wise! Figure out your heart, then begin to find ways to live that out, and if that means changing jobs, do it wisely.

Now, another word for "heart" is the word "passion". Passion is the motivation to give yourself to an idea, a cause, a person. Of course, passion can be used for good or bad. Passion can be used selfishly or to serve others. But ultimately passion is when you want to give yourself to a cause, an idea, a person, a task. There are many, many examples in history of the impact of one passionate person can have, one person who has a heart to do something.

Moses was passionate about setting his people free from Egyptian slavery. Paul, in the Bible, was passionate about sharing the good news of Jesus with everybody in the world. A guy named William Wilberforce, a Christian, was passionate about abolishing slavery from the British Empire. And he did it. Gandhi was passionate about liberating his country from British rule and having an independent India. A guy named Martin Luther was passionate about reforming the church in Europe, and the Reformation came as a result of one man having a passion. Then another guy named Martin Luther King had a passion for equality and for justice and influenced the world.

Listen, God has put certain passions in the heart of every person. Certain desires, certain dreams, certain ambitions, certain interests. The problem is this: Most people have never ever really acted on, or fulfilled, or attempted, or developed, or utilized their God given passions, their interests, their dreams. In fact, we bury our dreams. God doesn't want that.

So what keeps you from following your heart? Because before we can talk about how to follow your heart, we need to deal with a few heart-stoppers. These things are like spiritual cholesterol. They block your heart. They stop your passions. They cause you to conform to society rather than being the unique person God meant for you to be. What are they?

One big heart-stopper is **disappointment**. When you've been hurt, you tend to pull back into a shell and say, "I'm never going to let anybody else hurt me." You give up on your dreams. You give up on your ambitions. You give up on your interests, on your passions. You pull back into a protective mode and say, "The number one goal of life is to not get hurt."

Bad idea. You're not living. You're just existing when you live in a shell like that. It's a self-imposed prison. Listen, if at first you don't succeed... welcome to the human race! You're normal! Almost nobody succeeds on the first try. But we often give up. When we allow disappointment to come into our lives, it stops our heart.

Fear is another heart stopper. It keeps you from being what God wants you to be. We fear all kinds of things: failure, looking foolish, criticism, confrontation, death. But we can't let fear stop our hearts. We'll talk more about that later. But it's a heart-stopper.

Another big heart-stopper is **shame**. This is a really big one. You cannot carry shame and go after your dream at the same time. Why? Because shame takes enormous amounts of energy. It's like carrying a big sack of garbage on your back all the time. You're going to get tired because you're carrying around all the regrets of your past, all the shame of your past, all the guilt of your past.

Listen, God never intended for you to walk around with a bunch of shame and regrets. That's what Jesus Christ came to do, to forgive it all. Jesus said, "I came that you would have life and have to the full." That means release from shame. In the Gospel of Luke he told us his mission. He said, "**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor**" (Luke 4:18-19, NIV). He's not just talking about people imprisoned physically, he's also talking about the prison of shame.

Jesus came to earth and was nailed to a cross so you can stop nailing yourself to a cross. He was hung up for your hang-ups. He died for all your sins so you can be completely forgiven. He's paid for them so you don't have to pay for them. You can stop beating yourself up about it. Everything you've ever done wrong has already been paid for by Jesus Christ. That's called the gospel.

Gospel means good news. It's the best news in the world. And if you accept it you can say, "I'm going to move ahead and become what I've always wanted to be. I'm not carrying this garbage bag of guilt and regret and shame around and beating myself up all the time." You can stop beating yourself up.

Disappointment, fear, shame. These are heart stoppers. How about this one? **Bitterness**. Bitterness will eat you alive. It's worse than cancer. It's the worst heart disease you can have. When you become bitter and resentful, and you're always thinking about how to retaliate and get revenge, and you're always thinking about that person who hurt you in the past, it keeps you stuck in the past.

When you hold on to hurt from the past, it's like driving a car looking in the rear view mirror. You're going to have a wreck! Yes, there were people who hurt you in your past. As your friend and as your pastor, I'm truly sorry that you've been hurt. God is sorry, too, about your hurt. But the fact is, your past is past. The people in your past can't hurt you any more unless you allow them to. The way you allow them to is by rehearsing it in your mind. Every time you go over it, you go over and over it, you're allowing them to hurt you again. That's stupid! Let it go. That's a heart stopper. It's a heart disease that keeps you from enjoying life.

One last heart-stopper. **Rejection.** It may be the most painful one of all. Anyone who has ever experienced rejection from a friend, or a parent, or a former spouse, or boyfriend, or a girlfriend, you know how that hurts your heart. Rejection hurts. Some of you, when you were growing up, had people say things to you, either out on the playground or maybe even a parent or relative, "You're not worth anything... You're never going to amount to much... You'll never be a success... You're not good at [fill in the blank]... You're uncoordinated... You're this... You're that... You're worthless...." And on and on and on. And you believed them. They were the adult, and you were a kid, and you thought adults were right. But they were wrong! They lied to you! They were lying to you at that moment.

You need to go back and erase that tape; delete that file! You need to stop building your life on what critics said to you and start building your life on what God says about you. God says this: "I made you. I formed you. I shaped you. I have a purpose for your life. I put certain abilities in you and your heart. I love it when you do what I made you to do, and I didn't make you to be anybody else. You don't have to please anybody else. If you please me, the Lord, you're doing the right thing all the time. You need to stop living for the approval of other people."

If your heart has been wounded over the years, bruised and battered, just know this, God wants to bring healing. He wants to heal that disappointment, that shame, that rejection. How does he do that? By giving us a heart transplant. He says, "This heart you've got? It's been beat up, it's been wounded. I'll give you a new one." He specializes in heart transplants, and he says, "That heart that's been guilty, I'll give you a heart that's forgiven. That heart that's been resentful, I'll give you a heart that's full of peace. That heart that's anxious, I'll give you heart that's confident. That heart that's lonely, I'll give you a heart full of love. That heart that has been bitter and angry? I'll give you a heart that is forgiving and loving and generous and kind. Let me do a little heart transplant in you. It will make all the difference."

So those are some heart-stoppers. Let's shift gears and look at some things to do to start living your heart's desire.

You need to **open your heart to Jesus.** Why is this the first step? Because who do you think gave you those interests, desires, dreams, passions, ambitions? God gave you that heart. He shaped it. But unless you place it under his control it will be misused, perverted, and wasted. We see that all the time. You can use interests for the wrong motives. You can use them selfishly.

Some people say, "I don't feel passionate about anything! There's nothing that really thrills me in the morning to get up and say 'This is a new day!' I just don't have any passion." My answer: "You're not spending enough time with God. The closer you get to God, the more passionate you're going to become about life, the more fully alive you become."

You see, you become like the people you hang out with. If you start hanging out with God you're going to become like him. And you're going to start feeling deeply about all the things God feels deeply about. My constant prayer for my daughters, for myself, for you, is, "God, let our hearts break over what your heart breaks over, and let our hearts rejoice over what your heart rejoices over."

When I spend time with God I pick up his heart and begin to feel the way he does.

You need to **listen to your heart.** You know what the problem is on this? You're going so fast, you don't have time to listen to your heart any more. You're in so much of hurry, you're so busy, you're so on the move, you can't even hear your heart any more. You need to slow down. God wants you to listen to look at what you're made to do, and then you'll know what he wants you to do. But you've got to slow down.

Romans 12:3 says, "*Be honest in your estimate of yourselves.*" What I suggest you do is get alone with God. You ask questions like this: "What do I love to do? What do I dream of doing? What fascinates me? In other words, I could talk about it, think about it, study it and I don't get bored. It doesn't bore me. I'm fascinated by this. Where have I been most effective in my life?" These are the questions you want to ask yourself in listening to your heart.

Another way I live out my heart's desire is that I **explore my options**. I suggest you expose yourself to all different types of work. All different types of ministry. Don't lock yourself in. Try many and you will find the one that fits. The same is true in a job. What is it to get into a job that maybe paid good money, but you hated it all your life and in the end you get a gold watch? Wow! That's what I call a wasted life! You need to find out all you can. Explore the options. Proverbs 23:23 *"Get the facts at any price..."*

How do you do that? You can read widely and find out what appeals to you. You can interview people from different kinds of work. Link up with people who are successful and effective in an area you love to do. This applies to jobs as well as ministries in the church and out in the community.

Step out in faith. You open your heart to Christ, you listen to your heart, you look at all the options and then you go for it! The Bible says, **"Be bold and strong! Banish fear and doubt! For remember, the Lord is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, LB).**

Faith is expecting God to help you fulfill the dream he's placed in your life. If God's given you the dream he's going to help you fulfill it. In fact, faith is the answer to our fears. Keep moving against the fears. Fear is one of the heart-stoppers. But listen, courage is not the absence of fear. Nobody is courageous if they're not afraid. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fears. You don't base your life on fears. You base your life on what God's told you to do. Move ahead in spite of your fears. Go for it and take the leap of faith. The Bible says a lot about fear. There are almost 100 places in scripture where God tells us to not be afraid because God is near us, God will strengthen us, God will provide for us. We conquer fear by taking the step of faith, trusting, trusting, in God.

Believe Philippians 2:13, **"It is God who is at work with you energizing and creating in you the power and desire to will and to work for his good pleasure and satisfaction and delight" (Philippians 2:13, Amplified Bible).** Circle "power" and "desire". When God gives you a desire he gives you the power to do it! He does not give you the desire, the dream, the ambition, a longing, a hope and then not help you out! But when God gives you a desire and a dream, he gives you the power to do it! Step out in faith.

Take a look at this video I came across about a girl and her family in Atlanta that followed their hearts and did something truly amazing.

The Salwen's were able to do something that most of us can't, but we can have that kind of heart. Following a passion.

I can summarize this message in a single sentence -- the secret of a fulfilled life: Find out what you love to do that God made you to do and do it for his glory! Find out what you love to do that God made you to do and do it all you want! For his glory! Don't drift and drag through life. Take the advice of Psalm 37, **"Seek your happiness in the Lord. He will give you your heart's desires. Give yourself to the Lord. Trust in Him and He will help you!" (Psalm 37:4-5, GN).**

Listen, Saint Paul's is committed to helping you discover and develop your shape, and position you in your place in the world that God meant you to have. Then comes meaning, and significance, and pleasure, and satisfaction and joy. Discovering your shape is crucial. That's what this series is about, that's what this church is about so that you who call this your church home, and those who do not yet have a church home, are lead to an active faith in Jesus Christ. Follow your heart. Your God-given heart. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I don't want to waste my life and I know that there are many here who don't want to waste theirs. This message has struck a chord in some lives. They've always had a dream and a desire and they've wondered where it came from. Help them to see that you gave it to them, that passion can be used for good or for bad, for selfish or for serving purposes. Help us to commit all of our lives to you, to examine what we enjoy doing, to explore the options and then to step out in faith, that our lives might be testimonies of what you made us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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