

## ***“Finding Your Holy Discontent”***

I talk a lot about the vision of this church. About what we believe God has in mind for us to do. I talked about it in detail this past summer; I touched on it last week a little bit as we studied stewardship. But today I want us to look at what it means to have personal sense of vision about your life, about what God might be calling you to do, to be, to become.

You see, on a regular basis I have people, men and women, who come to me, sometimes they make an appointment to visit and they arrive in my office and they ask me, “Aaron, what am I supposed to do with this life of mine? What’s God want me to do...for a career, for a ministry, to serve people? Tell me.”

Really, I’m flattered that I get asked that, but I always have to admit that I don’t know. There’s no way that I can know what God wants you to do, to be, to become. But what I do know is how you find out.

Of course finding out the answer to big questions about your life, your direction, a ministry, “What does God want me to do?” is not something to take lightly. In fact, God’s probably not going to give you the answer until you’ve got a foundation strong enough to set that answer down on. Because the answer to big questions in life, needs a strong foundation to stand on. If you don’t have a foundation for the big answers in life to stand on, when you get them, they just disappear into the sand of life and you’re right back where you started.

Around here we believe that the foundation for the big answers to life to be built on, are the five purposes of life. Since we’ve just spent a lot of time talking about them, I’m just going to list them. If you want to look at them in detail go to the website to get the sermons or pick up tapes in the book store. But the foundation that we build in order to get the answers to life’s big questions is built through worship, fellowship, discipleship (growing in our faith), ministry, and mission. These five purposes lived out in a small group will build the foundation so that as you ask the big questions, you’re ready.

And when you’re ready the answers will come. The vision of what God wants you to do, be and become will start to become clearer and clearer. And usually that vision of what God wants you to do stems from an experience of some sort. A powerful, firestorm experience that propels you into the future, that clarifies your values, that energizes your life, and focuses your energy.

A biblical example of this is one of the greatest models of faithfulness in the Bible, the man named Moses. **[PICTURE: Moses]**. Moses was born a Hebrew, a Jew, in Egypt at a time when the King of Egypt had decreed that all the boys born to the Jews were to be thrown in the river and killed. Moses’ mom kept him as long as she could but she couldn’t hide him anymore so she made him a tiny boat out of a basket, put baby Moses in it and put him in the river in God’s care. And in God’s care the daughter of the king found Moses, took him in, and raised him to be a prince of Egypt.

Now, Moses always knew he was a Jew. And he knew that he had special privilege because while he lived as royalty and had the best of everything—the best food, the best clothing, the best education—he saw everyday how his own people were forced into labor and treated mercilessly by the Egyptian task masters. He saw how they were forced to work, forced to live on next to nothing, and often beaten ruthlessly.

In fact in the Bible we see what happened. **[SLIDE...]** **“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people” (Exodus 2:11, NIV).**

Have you ever witnessed a beating up close and personal? I never really have. Other than what I’ve seen in documentaries, and a couple of fights I’ve witnessed. But I’ve heard that if you witness a beating first hand, you never forget it. One man described how he witnessed a beating when he was in high school. A bully picking on a younger student. The bully knocked the books out of the other kid’s hands. Saying, “Pick up those books.” And as the kid bends down the bully shouts obscenities at him and then kicks him. The boy stands up and the bully begins to punch him in the face. As the man remembered it, the sound of that boy being hit in the face, the sound of his nose breaking, blood spraying, teeth crunching, it was a terrifying thing to witness—a gut wrenching, unforgettable scene.

And that’s what Moses came upon. Moses has seen the forced labor. He’s seen how the people are not only forced to work all day, every day in the scorching sun, making bricks, slaving in the fields. Not only does Moses see all that, but witnesses that bone-breaking, tooth-shattering beating of one of his own people. And as he saw that something inside of him lit up. A firestorm was lit and started to rage at the injustice.

Moses has to stop this beating. He steps in between the Jew and the Egyptian and then he and the Egyptian begin to fight and Moses ends up killing him. The Bible says, **[SLIDE...]** “**Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand**” (Exodus 2:12, NIV).

The Bible goes on to say that the very next day, again, Moses goes out to see his people and on that day he sees two of his own people beating each other this time. The same sights, the same sounds, the beating, the smashing of teeth and the spattering of blood. He says, “Why are you doing this?! Isn’t it enough that you’re beaten down every day by the Egyptians? Don’t do this to each other!” That must have taken Moses to the absolute limit of his capacity to tolerate the oppression. He simply can’t stand it any more.

Now fast forward a few frames and we see Moses, he’s fled Egypt, he’s now a shepherd in the wilderness. He sees a burning bush. A bush that’s on fire but not consumed by the fire. That was God’s way of getting Moses’ attention long enough for him to hear what God had to say. God says, **[SLIDE...]** “**I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering**” (Exodus, 3:7, NIV).

He’s saying, “I’ve heard the sounds, I’ve seen the suffering and I am now going to do something about it. And I am going to use you, you Moses, to make it happen.” God is saying to him, “Moses what you have seen that has made you unbelievably angry, when you witnessed the beatings and that broke your heart. Moses that has broken my heart too. I can’t stand it any more either. And I’m assigning you the task of being my emissary on earth. And I’m choosing you because I see a stirring in you that’s the same as the stirring in me. I see your passion, your emotion. I see that you are a man who can’t stand idly by while his people are oppressed and beaten. I’ve been looking for that and I’ve found it in you. I’m going to harness that anger, that discontent, that passion and I’m going to use it.”

You see, this is God’s heart and a human heart being aligned perfectly around what frustrates heaven and earth. What frustrates the heart of God and what frustrates the heart of person.

Let’s take a look at this from an entirely different angle. When I was growing up every morning before school, if we got up, got dressed, ate our breakfast and were ready early, we could watch a cartoon on TV. And one of them that I loved to watch was the old Popeye cartoons. How many of you know what I’m talking about? Popeye the sailor man. **[PICTURE: Popeye]** He had a girlfriend named Olive Oyl **[PICTURE: Olive Oyle, add to Popeye]**. Olive Oyl was a real traffic stopper! Men whistled, dogs barked when she walked by. And whenever anyone or anything threatened Olive Oyl, at first Popeye was easygoing, but if things got bad, and his precious Olive Oyl was threatened, Popeye’s blood pressure would go through the roof, and then he would say the words that a whole generation had burned in their psyche: “That’s all I can stand...I can’t stand no more!”

He would pop open a can of spinach and super natural strength would flow into his biceps. He would crush the opposition and save Olive Oyl from her distress! What a show that was! That single line, “That’s all I can stand...I can’t stand no more!”

That little line should mean something to us as Christians at a profound level. If we open ourselves up to God’s leading, if we build on foundational elements, we will see, we will witness, we will experience something that will make us say, “That’s all I can stand...I can’t stand no more!” We will see something that will motivate us to give off our...couches and do something with our lives.

When Moses couldn’t stand to see Hebrew slaves being beaten, God tapped him on the shoulder and said, “I will use you.” Moses said, “Do it. Use me.”

So let me ask you, what is it that you can’t stand? Whatever that is often creates the tension, the emotion, the internal firestorm inside of you that creates the capacity for action. It’s the point where God speaks to you and launches you in a direction that answers the question of, “So God, what do you want me to do, be, become?”

Bill Hybels calls this your holy discontent. What is your holy discontent? Looking some examples might help you know what yours is. David in the Old Testament. I preached on him earlier this year. He is just

a kid and his dad sends him to the battle lines as the Hebrews are fighting an enemy. David just went to deliver some food. But he sees thing at the battle lines. In the enemy army there is a giant named Goliath, stands 9 feet tall, and he's trash-talking the God of the Hebrews everyday. And nobody does anything about it.

David hears this giant trash-talking the God he loves and he says, "Who's doing some thing about this? Who's going to teach this guy that nobody trash-talks our God." And everybody turns away. But not David. A holy discontent wells up inside of him and he has his Popeye moment. He says, ""That's all I can stands...I can't stands no more!" He goes out to fight Goliath with nothing but a slingshot and a few smooth stones and his raw passion. Goliath is amused. That is until David slings that first stone, and God takes it like it's laser-guided and plants it deep in Goliath's head. God feels the holy discontent in David and uses it because God's heart is also breaking.

Another story in the Old Testament is about Nehemiah. He has a cushy job with a foreign king. He gets bad news from Jerusalem one day that the walls of the city have been broken down and the people there are vulnerable. Not only that but neighboring people are laughing out loud about the powerless God of the Israelites.

Nehemiah thinks about this, and stewes about it and can't get it out of his head. He breaks down crying for his people. He thinks about his God being laughed at and he has his Popeye moment. He says, "That's all I can stands...I can't stands no more!" He goes to his boss, risking his life and says, "I need a leave of absence, and I need some big resources, and then he leads one of the most impressive reconstruction efforts in history. But what got him in the game? A holy discontent. Something he could not stand. So what can't you stand?

Martin Luther King Jr. couldn't stand the racial inequality he saw in the South. And when a black woman, tired from a hard day at work, was told to get out of her seat on a bus to make room for a white woman, and Miss Rosa Parks wouldn't move and was thrown in jail. A young black preacher said, "That's all I can stands...I can't stands no more!" And he started the civil rights movement. He couldn't stand that African Americans were pushed to the back of the bus, the back of the line for employment, the back of the line for basic rights, the back of the line for education and housing. The holy discontent in him brought him to his Popeye moment. He knew that following his discontent would probably cost him his life, and it did.

I think also about our own Ben Bainbridge and the Salvage Yard. Ben's faith began to truly come alive a few years ago and as it did, he began to see people the way God sees them. People disconnected from God, people uncomfortable in a typical church setting. People hungry to know God and God's love, but unable to find a way to connect. And I believe that Ben had a Popeye moment when he said, "That's all I can stands...I can't stands no more!" And he began to focus his energy, his spirit, his time, his money, his sweat, on building a ministry for people that might never have ever set foot in a church building.

And then there's Vivian Price. She saw a need in many older people. They wanted to stay in their homes, but for some who didn't have family nearby to check in on them and do some shopping for them and get them to medical appoints and that sort of thing, it often meant going into a nursing home. But she saw that with a little help from other people, these older adults could stay in their homes longer, live more independently and comfortably. She took over a ministry called Homebound Services and makes sure that these older adults, who have no one else to count on, have volunteers to be there for them and do many things for them.

Then there's Jenny Ciani. She told me a bit of her story a couple weeks ago. She's a hair stylist and has given her life to God and asked God to use her in any way he wants. She wrote this, "I prayed about it and God put a couple in my path who run a food bank. They give out free food to the elderly, disabled and single mothers, and I thought if they can't afford food they probably can't afford hair cuts. So we brainstormed . I came up with a plan for me to come once a week for 2 or 3 hours to cut hair for free. The people are so sweet...One man said, 'God has never given me a free hair cut before.' And I said, 'Well he has today!'"

For Jenny that holy discontent was more general, it was a simple desire to help others. And I would bet the more she helps the more she will want to.

For me, my holy discontent is when I see people who go through life with a deep emptiness, a hopelessness, directionless, when I know, I know that God has so much more he wants to do in them. When I see people swept away in lies, in materialism, in apathy, in the pain of the past, in despair of the future. It wrecks me. And I live for those days when I see the light come on in somebody. When the light comes on and somebody says, "You know what, I get it. God has a purpose for me. There's more to life than just getting by, getting high, getting more stuff."

When I see people wasting their lives on illusions, it wrecks me. So let me ask you again, what can't you stand? Do you know? Most of us try to push away stuff that creates firestorms of tension or anxiety in us. Most of us feel the discomfort of that and we try to medicate it and make it go away. We rent another movie, we buy more stuff, we jump into our careers so that we put some distance between us and that discontent. But I want to tell you. One of the most important things you can do is find the answer to the question: "What is it that you can't stand?"

Is it injustice of some kind? When you're around extreme poverty does it wreck you? When you see racist behaviors and the effects of prejudice, does it do something inside of you? When you see homelessness, when you see abused children, when you see people suffering from AIDS, when you see immoral business practices does it wreck you? What wreck you? Bad music, bad parenting, crooked politicians? What about when you watch over-entertained, under-challenged young people, drifting further and further and further from God? What happens when you see young people that are aimless and purposeless? What happens when you see people who can't afford basic healthcare or dental care? Does it wreck you? Babies having babies, older adults who sit alone in their homes or rooms in a nursing home? Does it wreck you?

You better know what wrecks you because it's probably wrecking God's heart too, and he's probably looking for something who's getting wrecked just like he is. And I don't care how capable you are, how smart you are, how thin you are, how educated you are. Those things don't matter. God is just looking for people who get wrecked about the things he gets wrecked about, then he wants to sign you up and give you a vision that will relieve that get you on the solution side of something. And will get you motivated for a very long time.

Now, not everything that affects you deeply emotionally is your God-given personal assignment. As God works in our lives, many of the things that go on in our world are going to move us to action of some sort. That should be happening in all of. But what each of us should be looking for is that one cause, that one problem, that one situation that grabs us and just won't let us go. Stuff that brings us to our Popeye moment where we go, "That's the one. I can't stand. God what do you want me to do about it?" You'll know it when it happens and God will say, "That's why I wired you up the way I did. And here's why you've had some of your life experiences, here's why you've some of the pain you had I life, because I have in mind for someone just like you to address this problem. Let's do this together." Not every societal ill has your name on it. But there is one out there that God's leading you toward.

And listen, if you can't identify your holy discontent today, don't give up looking for it. Don't give up. It's never too late. Keep exposing your heart and exposing your eyes to the needs in our world. Don't cocoon yourself in your home, don't wall yourself into a predictable, controllable pattern that you never step out of. Go places, see things, spend time among the poor, go to the Community Clinic, serve with Homebound Services, help at The Salvage Yard, just keep exposing yourself to the needs of this world and their will come a time when you'll have that moment where your heart will be wrecked about something that.

And when you find that holy discontentment, feed it! Most of the time when we Americans are uncomfortable about something, we want to get away from it. But if the plight of the poor becomes your holy discontent, increase your exposure to it. Rearrange your life so you can see the horrific conditions that some people right her in our neck of the woods have to live in. Listen to people, stay close to your holy discontent.

Think about this: Can you imagine what could be released in our world, in our community, if we push into our holy discontent and the work to relieve it? Can you imagine? Think about the prayers that will be answered, the illnesses healed, the relationships restored, the hopelessness destroyed,

You see, there is a lot of darkness in our world. Will the darkness win? The answer is a resounding NO! John said that Jesus is the life and light of all people. He wrote, **[SLIDE...]** **“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5, NRSV).**

The darkness will not win, and that darkness gets pushed back every time a man, every time a woman, every time a young person feels that holy discontent, pushes into it and does something about it. What is your holy discontent? And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*I thank Rev. Bill Hybels for his keynote address at Leadership Summit 2005 for inspiration for this sermon.*