

Life's missing ingredients, the calling.

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I am Ben Bainbridge, the ministry leader for The Salvage Yard. Beyond that I am a sinner, saved by grace, which I have done nothing to deserve. It was not earned, it was freely given.

Over the last couple of weeks we have been in a sermon series called, Life's Missing Ingredients. In the first week Aaron touched on having purpose in our lives, and last week we learned about having real intimacy with God and with others. This week I like to share with you another ingredient that may be missing in your life. It is the ingredient of the calling, or being called.

The best way for me to do this is to share with you my calling, how I heard it, and what I am doing about it. That Calling is The Salvage Yard.

In a sentence, The Salvage Yard is first and foremost an extension of Saint Paul's. It is an alcohol-free Christian lounge that will be open on weekend nights to offer an alternative to the bar and nightclub scene. It will be a place where Christian bands can play, and people can fellowship and hang out together without the barrage of sex and booze that is associated with the bars and nightclubs of Joplin. It will also host small groups and worship at non-traditional times. It will be a place where believers can come together, where the lost can find hope, and where you, the servants of Christ, can serve, grow, and mature in your faith. But to truly understand what The Salvage Yard is, you must first get to know a bit about me and my calling.

Besides being the ministry leader of The Salvage Yard, I am a father, a husband, and a son. I am an artist, an accountant, a minister and a former addict. I guess you could say that metaphorically, I wear many different hats. I have a different hat for every mood, and I bet you do to.

One of the hats that I have worn for much of my life is the hat of addiction. Many of us are addicted to something. Maybe your addiction is to cigarettes, chocolate, food, laziness, work, busyness, alcohol, pornography, drugs, sex, television, etc. The list can truly stretch on forever. My addiction is to marijuana; you know, pot, weed, or grass. I indulged in other drugs as well but the one that truly had a grip on me was pot. Before I met my wife Deb, smoking pot was a 24 hour activity. Other than work, my priorities in life centered around what could get me the highest, the drunkest, or both, in the shortest amount of time. It was even something that I boasted about. It was the hat that fit me the best. I was good at it and when I was high, I was the smartest, funniest and sexiest man in the room. Well, maybe that is stretching it a bit.

After dating Deb for a while, she gave me an ultimatum, her or pot. Obviously I chose her, but I never put my hat up for good. Instead, I carried it with me and put it on when Deb was not around. When she was away for work, late at night, or when I was out with the boys I'd pull my hat out as often as I could. This proved to me that I was really an addict. I would tell myself that I was in control and this was just something I did to blow off steam and have a good time.

Well the funny thing about wearing hats is that if you're not careful, they can easily get blown off your head before you realize it. That happened to me in 1999 at a Camino weekend. I had gone through the weekend in June of 1999 and worked the one later in October. It was in October that Holy Spirit blew my hat off. All of a sudden I felt vulnerable and did not know what to do. I did not like this feeling.

It happened on Friday. We were in a chapel service and I was overcome with the feeling that I needed to share my problems with the other men so that they may carry my burden and make it lighter on me. Well, that was unacceptable! I could not tell them, what would they think of me? So, the first thing I did was to act as though nothing had happened to me. After all I had never

experienced the Holy Spirit before and was really quite confused about what I was feeling. So I picked up my favorite hat, put it back on tightly and walked around for the next couple days as if nothing had happened.

Then it happened again. This time it was on Sunday. The weekend was coming to a close and there was one last chapel service to attend. I walked in the door and pulled my hat down as tight as I could. After all I didn't have a problem, I can quit anytime I want, I'm not an addict, and even if I was, I wasn't hurting anyone else, was I?!

Well the chapel service went on and my heart began to pound out of my chest. Maybe if I breathe slowly I can get my heart to slow down a bit. That's when it happened. What was I doing? My feet were walking to the front of the chapel while the rest of me wanted to run out the back door. I couldn't believe that I was actually going up to the front to tell a group of men, half of which I had only met three days earlier, about my favorite hat. I was actually going to admit that I had a problem and that I was unable to solve it on my own. What was I thinking?

Well I did it. I walked up to the front of the room and sat down in a chair facing everyone. I then began to share my burden with them and the most amazing thing happened. They all got up from their seats, walked to the front, placed hands on me and began to pray. (That's it Ben, what have you gotten yourself into? This is starting to creep me out.) I began to cry, they began to cry, and for what seemed like an eternity, we all sat there and prayed that I would be given the strength to hang that hat up for good. I left that weekend a new man. And I lived happily ever after, well not exactly.

It was at this time that I had heard the call of The Salvage Yard or at least the concept of it. I was on fire, I wanted to reach out and help every other addict I could. I wanted everyone else to feel the way I did. I wanted them to experience, and be high in the Holy Spirit. So, I did what I thought was the next logical thing. I decided to follow my call and in the process I fell for one of the biggest myths of ministry. That is the myth that ministry is done by ministers. I mean, that ministry is done by full-time, professional, ordained ministers.

It took a little bit of time before I had actually gotten up the courage to share this news with anyone. After all, I was only weeks away from graduating with a bachelors degree in accounting, and what was I going to do this new degree. Shouldn't I at least do something useful with it so that my five years of college weren't a waste?

Well, eventually I talked with my wife Deb, my father, and Aaron and they all pretty much encouraged me to follow my calling. I even stood in front this congregation and told you of my calling to become a professional minister. And with that, I started looking at graduate schools.

I knew what I had to do. However, Satan did not like this idea because as soon I started to follow my calling, things became more difficult. First, I began doubting myself, and my calling, and became afraid of what I thought being minister was about.

Something was inside me saying things like "who do you think you are? Addicts don't make good ministers. You must be crazy to think you could pull this off. People will see right through you and you don't want them to know what you really are." That is how Satan attacks me. It is with subtle self doubt and logical reasoning that he convinced me that I was not good enough to make a difference for Christ. I was not minister material.

Does any of this sound familiar to any of you? Have any of you felt called, but then felt those doubts and fears of what being in ministry is all about?

Well, I agreed with the voices inside me and decided that I was not qualified to be a minister, and I really did not want to go back to college again. No, that call must have been a wrong number and intended for someone else. So in my time of self doubt I did what I knew best, I took that old

comfortable hat and put it back on. Now, I did not wear it night and day, but I did carry it with me always just in case I needed to put it on. I began to feel like the call of The Salvage Yard was something that was a foolish waste of my precious time. After all what kind of Christian, or minister, was I if I could not control my habit?

In the summer of 2000 Deb and I were fully engaged in a custody battle with my ex for physical custody of my two children, Chasidy and Tyler. I felt like I had my addiction under control; not gone, just under control, and felt like God was calling me to become a better father for my children. And of course, that meant that they were better off living with me, far away from the daily influence of their mom. There were many things about the way their mother lived that I did not agree with and I truly felt that God wanted my children to live with me in a stable, two parent, Christian household. God was on my side.

Well, we went through months of legal paperwork, depositions and eventually court. We were prepared and it was as though within a couple of weeks, my children would be with me. My attorney even said that he couldn't believe that the day in court was so easy. This must have been a good sign. Besides, God was on my side.

A couple of weeks went by and then I got the phone call. This is the call I had been waiting for. I was imagining it. I would call Deb at work to share the news with her, jump in the car, drive to Springfield and pick up the kids that night. My attorney began by saying that he would mail me a copy of the judgment but wanted me to hear the news from him first. We lost. Not only did we lose, but we lost big time. Almost to the point of feeling as though the judge wanted to punish me for some unknown reason. As Deb and I sat in Aaron's office crying, I began to feel like God was punishing me, or even that God really did not care. And if he did not care about me, then I really did not care about being a minister for him. What was I thinking, I must have been crazy. All thoughts of ministry left me and I ignored the calling that once burned so hot in me.

Now, when you are in pain, what do you do? When my daughter falls off her scooter and skins up her knee, what does she want? She wants me to put on my daddy hat and get her a Band-Aid. That is what I wanted. I wanted someone or something to pick me up and cover up my wound so that I did not have to see it. I thought that maybe if I didn't see the wound, it really wouldn't hurt so much. I never asked my heavenly father for help. It seems rather obvious to me today, but was not so clear to me then. Since I was already carrying around my hat, I did what came naturally to me. I put it on. It felt good; it helped numb the pain of failure and insecurity that I was having. It helped hide my shame. My calling was no longer in my thoughts and I could finally get back to my real life.

That is what a lot of us do. We have a comfortable habit or addiction that we carry around with us like a hat. We are constantly at odds with what our bodies tell us to do and what we know is right to do. Even the apostle Paul suffered with these sort of feelings. In **Romans 7:15-17** Paul writes...

I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.

Now, I am not trying to compare myself to Paul, but it is a bit reassuring to know that the even one of the great leaders of the early church wrestled with the desires of his flesh also. However, even though Paul, the very man that this church is named after, wrestled with his sin; he still followed his call to ministry. The result of which is the changing of this world.

So you may be sitting there wondering what happened to get me here now.

Well, in June of 2003, I had a life changing experience. No I am not talking about another Holy Spirit moment. Not yet. On June 1st I entered the hospital to have my L4 and L5 vertebrae fused, or bolted, together. I had a disc that had ruptured and had spent the prior 18 months in quite a bit of physical pain. I couldn't sit for more than a few minutes without hurting and I slowly began missing weekly worship. I slowly drifted farther away from my church, my friends, my family, and from my Lord.

On my 7th wedding anniversary I entered the hospital to undergo a routine back surgery. (As routine as something involving cutting you open, grinding off bone, putting cadaver bone in place of a disk and finally bolting you together.) After the surgery I hurt. It was some of the worst pain I had ever had. I was to be in the hospital for about five days and then home for recovery. That didn't happen.

What started out as a spinal fusion surgery blossomed into a case of spinal meningitis. My five days in the hospital turned into two weeks, of which I have very few memories of the first week. Deb however has some pretty interesting stories that she could share with you. After the two weeks in the hospital I was sent home with a tube in my arm, called a pic line. It traveled up my arm, around my shoulder, and into my chest area. This tube allowed me to administer IV antibiotics five times a day, for another five weeks. There I was, a broken, hurting, sick man. I was pretty much helpless. It was in this time of helplessness that God blessed me.

During my time of recovery, my ex moved to Joplin and for the last year. My children have been living me. I now have a daily, intimate relationship all of my children, and have only God to thank for that.

The other thing that happened at that time was I got to spend the five weeks with my dad. I love my dad, but we are not openly emotional about such things. We never have been. When I came home from the hospital, my father was there to take care of me and the kids so that Deb could get back to work. He spent five weeks sleeping on my couch just to make sure that his son was comfortable and taken care of. Those five weeks brought me closer to my dad than anything in the prior twenty-nine years had done. I will be forever grateful for his love and sacrifice during this hard time of my life. I will always be grateful to God for giving such blessings during my recovery.

Now through out my recovery, I was pretty good. I did not need to get high any more, but maybe that was because the pain killers that I took compensated for my habit. My hat was put up in the closet until I needed it again. You just never know.

In February of last year, I attended another Camino weekend. I really did not want to be there, but my cousin Ricky was going through and I felt like I should be there with him. What I did not know was that I needed to be there to get away from my daily life and get alone with God. That is when it happened again. The Holy Spirit spoke to me. It was the call again. I was reluctant to listen but decided to at least hear God out. This time wasn't like the last. There was no chapel service at the time. No one was singing in a great spiritual tone and no preacher was preaching. I was just sitting there when I felt God nudging me to listen throughout the weekend. I agreed to at least give the weekend a chance and see what I thought at the end. That weekend he spoke to me through the words of a man named Dave Waller.

Dave was a bi-vocational pastor who had a full time job with the fish and wildlife service. It wasn't any particular word that hit me, but rather the way that Dave related to our Lord. Dave had an openly intimate relationship with God. He used word like Abba to pray to God. I was not used to hearing someone pray with the word that means "dad or daddy" to refer to God. He was just a man, who heard God's call and lived to win souls for Christ. Spending the weekend with Dave relit the fire that I had experienced a few years earlier. You know, I needed to get out of my daily life, away from this world, and spend time alone with God before I could here the call again, the

call of The Salvage Yard. Dave Waller died two weeks after that Camino weekend. I never had the chance to share with Dave what his presence meant to me. Someday I will.

Over that weekend I was finally able to finally understand that I am here only because of the Grace of God. I was finally able to understand what I started out with in this sermon. That I was a sinner saved by grace that I did not deserve or earn. Without that Grace I am powerless. To continue in **Romans 7**, Paul writes in **verse 21**, ...

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Without Christ I am powerless to the sin that lies within me. Without Christ, we are powerless to overcome the sin that lies within us. This letter from Paul gives me great hope.

I am here because of God's Grace and because of the people of Saint Paul's who stayed by me even when I did not want them to. I am here, today, because someone invited me to go away for a weekend and spend some time with God. And I am able to stand here before you today, only because I believe with all that I am, that there is a better life to be lived, and I want to share that life with the people who struggle as I did. This time I answered the call and as a result, I have another hat that fits me well. That is the hat of the un-paid, lay minister.

In Acts 2, we see the day of Pentecost, seven days after the resurrection. The disciples were in the upper room with the doors and windows shut. On that day, the Holy Spirit came upon them like a mighty wind and all of a sudden they could speak in languages that they had not learned. It says that there were Jews from many different nations living in Jerusalem, and that they came running to see what was going on.

They were amazed at what they saw. In verse 7 it says, ***"They were beside themselves with wonder. How could this be? These people are from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking our language."***

That is the call that has been given to me; to speak another language to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ. I am not talking about learning Spanish, French or some other language. What I am referring to is speaking the language of those who are disconnected from God due to addiction, pain, lifestyle choices, or shame. I want to reach them by using their language and their environment, and I believe that this is the church that can do it.

Imagine that you move to another country where you have never been before. You step into an environment where you don't know the language or the customs and you quickly become confused and lost. That is what it is like for some people when they think about entering a church for the first time. It is nothing like the bar or nightclub they visit weekly, and at times, the church can become confusing and hard to understand. When humans fill the void of their lives with drugs, alcohol, sex, you name it, it is hard for them to understand how God could make them whole. It is hard to understand God when no one has taken the time to share him with us in our language.

So that is why The Salvage yard is here. It is here so that people can come and be amazed that we are speaking their language, and speaking it in their environment. The Salvage Yard will not be your typical church environment. It will loud at times, dark at times, calm at times. Some of us will be tattooed, some pierced, but all sinners. The Salvage Yard will look more like the bar or nightclub that so many are used to, but without the alcohol and sex that can pull us farther from God.

It will also be a place where you, the people of Saint Paul's, can serve the disconnected, as well as grow in your faith. You never know, it may be the place where you hear God's call on your life.

That is why The Salvage Yard is such an integral part of the mission of Saint Paul's. Sometimes, to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ, we need to speak a new language. Sometimes, we have to offer up some of ourselves, so that others may live free. Sometimes, we should answer God's call and trust that he will walk beside us through it.

The Salvage Yard is more than just a building that will be open as an extension of Saint Paul's. It is a new way of life for me and others in my core group. You see, over the last nine months or so there has been a group of people that have come together to help breathe life in to this ministry. The Salvage Yard is bigger than I ever imagined it to be. It is a ministry that can't be done without many hands. This core group has grown over the last nine months to include over twenty. We have added three in the last few weeks.

The core group comes together every other week, or sometimes more, and fellowship and pray together. We plan the details of the ministry and try to plan what will happen in the future. They hold me accountable, pray for me, and lift me up when I feel like the work load is too heavy. Even though I am the ministry leader, I could never be here today without their inspiration, ideas and friendship. This group is The Salvage Yard. We have grown together and I am truly blessed to have these people in my life. One of the members of this group is a man named Jeremy Smith. Some of you may know him, he goes to this church on occasion. Jeremy shared a poem with me a while back that I'd like to share with you.

The Salvage Yard is about speaking a new language so that people who are slaves to sin and shame can hear the good news of Jesus Christ. It is taking Jesus to the lost and disconnected, right where they are. It is me answering God's call on my life.

You may be sitting there thinking that all this sounds great, but you are not interested or called to be part of this ministry. That is ok. This ministry is my calling. It also the calling of others, but we don't all have to have the same calling. If we did, then the body of Christ would be missing some parts. However, some of you may be sitting there feeling a nudge from God that maybe you should be part of The Salvage Yard. Maybe your calling is to help with your time, your talents, your service, or even your money. After all, ministry can only happen when many come together and make it happen.

Just look around this church. Someone was called at some point to start a preschool and kids day out program. We, as the body of Christ, pulled together and made it happen. As a result, many children, including my daughter, have been taught to love Jesus. Countless families have been exposed to the church through that ministry. Another calling that you can see is the Alpha program that happens here a couple times a year. Rebecca Courtney felt called to start that ministry and felt like Saint Paul's was just the church to start it. As a result hundreds of people have been able to get together and ask and learn about some of the tough questions about God. Not just people here, but other churches throughout southwest Missouri have incorporated Alpha because of one persons calling. These are just a couple of ministries that happen here but there are many other ministries that happen at this church because someone like you was called to get them started.

So are you being called by God to do something? If so, what can we do as a church to help you with that call? Please let Aaron, Cameron, or Me know. That is what we are here for. If you're not feeling called to any particular ministry, that is also ok. But I encourage you to become part of something here at this church. Be in service somewhere, be part of a small group, pray and study daily. I bet that if you do these things, you will build that intimate relationship with God, and may just feel that call that is specially designed for you.