

## Vision – Radical Connections

VBC

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*Ephesians 4:7-13*

*Vision Series Three*

*Sep 11-12, 2004*

### **“Gifts Connect with Opportunity”**

#### INTRODUCTION

Attending a recent leadership summit, one of the speakers inspired me to tell two stories

Let me tell the first one up front

- It is a story about a man whose name is Paul
- For as long as I have known this man, he has always been highly energetic
- For much of his early years, life was a gift - not something to waste
- A hard worker, committed to doing things the right way
- He has not been afraid to take on risks
- At one point he left the securities of a union job, sold everything to take over a declining business
- He didn't want to just play it safe and merely exist in life
- He wanted to LIVE IT
- And he has - his creativity and perseverance, along with the efforts of his wife - made his business one that set it apart from most of the rest
- Along the way, church has not had a significant role in his life
  - He has been somewhat on the perimeter most of the time
  - Never fully involved
  - Not because he has not loved God - for he has
- But he has seldom had the experience of being deeply used of God
  - In large part because...NO ONE EVER ASKED HIM
  - For as long as I can remember - no pastor, no leader ever challenged him to consider this:
    - That God has uniquely gifted him to make a difference, advance the kingdom of God
    - No one, to my knowledge, ever said “Paul, you are God's workmanship - shaped to serve Him”
    - “God saved you, called you for a significant purpose that transcends everything else you are doing out there in the world”

- Instead, church has tended (intentionally or not) to convey the message:
  - “We have a paid staff that does the ministry”
  - “We appreciate your contribution during the offering”
  - “Thanks for being a part of the audience”
- I know all of this, because this man is my dad

I wonder how many have lived their entire lives in church without ever knowing how they were designed to be uniquely used of God?

When we as leaders sat down to dream about our future, we said:

- “Let’s not be a church like that”
- “Let’s not be a wasteland of unrealized potential and unmet needs
- “Let’s be something radical
- “Let’s be a place where the Paul’s and the Marcus’s and the Patti’s are radically connected”
  - Gifts with opportunities
  - Where people come and discover what they have been truly made for!

After all - God mandated this (read Eph 4:7-13)

BODY

What is God telling us in this text?

1) RECOGNIZE (MAYBE BETTER REALIZE) GOD’S GRACE IN YOUR LIFE

-God has done something gracious in all of us who know Him, something that goes beyond salvation

A) The context tells us he is talking about gifts - divine enablements

- When Jesus accomplished His work on the Cross, and went to heaven
- Having placed all things under His feet (Col 2:15)
- Like a triumphant king, extending his riches, Christ dispensed certain abilities (vs. 8)

B) Note - not “to some”, not “to them” - but TO EACH ONE OF US who make up the body of Christ

- Some of us have made a faulty assumption that we have nothing to offer
- God says just the opposite

- C) And note - He apportioned - MEASURED OUT
- He did not use the cookie-cutter method
  - “According to the measure” means His grace is shaped differently in each one of us
  - Rom 12:6, “we have different gifts according to the grace given us”
  - It might be a grace shaped in the form of mercy, helps, faith, teaching, discernment
  - It may be your “grace shape” is encouragement, vision casting, management, making money
  - And this is by design if we all had the same “grace” – we wouldn’t need each other
    - He apportioned in such a way that each of us comes up short, we will need each other
    - Eyes will need ears-I Cor 12
  - We will need those with the gift of healing, not all of us have this
  - We will need the gift of discernment; some of us will make some poor decisions if your gift of discernment is not exercised

D) If there are differing values, it has nothing to do with the SHAPE of our grace

- But everything to do with our USE of it
- What are the implications?
  - FIRST: The church at its core - its *radix* - is a charismatic community - in the sense that God’s enabling, empowering charismata have been given
    - *Charis, charismata*, are at the heart of the church, inherent in the DNA
    - It ought to mark, shape, our environment
  - SECOND: This grace is absolutely worthless if we do not take the time to recognize it
    - So how do we recognize this grace?
- I generally ask people three questions:
  - 1) What do you have a passion for?
    - Maybe its leading, teaching, extending mercy, giving, singing, strategizing
  - 2) What do people encourage you with when you do it?
    - When you exercise leadership, is anyone following?
    - When you extend compassion, are people moved?

### 3) What does God seem to bless?

- What do you find, that when you do it, you say “I am amazed at how God used this?”

- Illustration - Like most boys, Pop Warner, I soon discovered it was not my passion, confirmed by my peers

- It was not me

- But it is not enough to recognize that God has measured out grace

- Just as it is not enough to have a cerebral faith, it's not merely about knowing...

All of us are called to

## 2) UNLEASH HIS GIFTS

-How does this happen?

### A) GIFTED LEADERS MUST INVEST IN PEOPLE (vs 11)

1 - Leaders with various gifts who working together, ganging up on the body, reflecting an apostolic heart, a prophetic voice, an evangelistic spirit, a nurturing, teaching ministry

2 - Paul describes it as equipping for ministry (vs 12)

- It is that word *katartizo* again - a word that describes mending - repairing nets, setting of broken bones
- Putting back together, making something right
- Here—“making suitable for use”

- This involves:

- Giving attention to the details of one's life
- Envisioning what the Spirit has designed this person to become
  - What is your passion? What energizes you? What does God seem to unusually bless every time you do it?
- Guiding people towards awareness of their gifts, even as they are serving, experimenting, risking
- Helping one come to grips with the purpose He has called him/her to
- All along asking “What strengths, if surrendered to God, could powerfully advance the kingdom of God?”

- Note - this is a radical departure from a mentality that these gifted leaders are paid professionals, paid by the offerings to do ministry, while everyone else remains passive observers - their gifts and talents atrophy from disuse (Hybels)

## B) GIFTED SAINTS MUST BE RELEASED INTO SERVICE

- Released to be used by God in ways they never imagined
- To become part of advancing a kingdom
  - When churches fail to understand this, they take on other forms
    - Concerts in which the audience comes to be entertained by those on stage
    - Models that having nothing to do with the church
- We have been called, rather, to make ministers
  - Prepare the priests, deploy the delivered
  - Turn an audience into an army

-We're called to be GRACE UNLEASHED COMMUNITIES

Recognizing, unleashing - in order

### 3) TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE

- The language of vs. 13 is destinalational
  - "until we all reach" indicates the ultimate aim, end, finish
- This is Paul's favorite language: ever focused on goals - stretching, pressing, ever concerned we don't stop at false summits - make base camp home

- If leaders are equipping, if saints are ministering, if the gifts converge, here's what will happen
  - Something powerful something RADICAL, something of the presence and power of God

### A) RADICAL ONENESS

- When this poured out grace is unleashed
- Creating an environment of acceptance, affection, a Spirit filled intimacy
- How can dissension occur?

- "If we're all rowing the boat, we won't have time to rock it"

### B) RADICAL MATURITY

- A maturity that reflects Christ
- A maturity that can only happen in community
- God's word is a reminder here that it is impossible to fully mature in isolation
  - If we go it alone, our growth - at best - will be stunted

- But when each member becomes a conduit of grace – the church can't help but enter spiritual adulthood
  - A mature man, the measure of the stature of Christ
  - To be like Him in holiness, compassion, wisdom, humility
  - People whose lives exhibit Christ-like character, because *charis* is being poured in to one another

### C) RADICAL FULLNESS

- It's here everything comes together
- Grace filling us - extended to one another
- Has the potential of bringing us to His FULLNESS
  
- Frankly, it is beyond my ability to understand what this means
  - Vs. 10 gives hint -He is about "making full," pervading the whole earth with His presence, His power, His grace
    - Directing everything to its appointed ends
    - Bringing to completion the whole universe"
    - Advancing His kingdom, manifesting His rule, extending His mercy
  
  - And we are His instruments
  - We can only do this if we attain to the measure of the fullness of Christ
  - And we can only do this if our gifts connect with opportunity

### CONCLUSION

Here's my second story - Rich

- A man who was incredible strategic thinker, building the largest construction project in the world
  - Who discovered his same passions could be used for the kingdom of God and made a huge difference in The Netherlands

Have you discovered your God shaped grace in you?