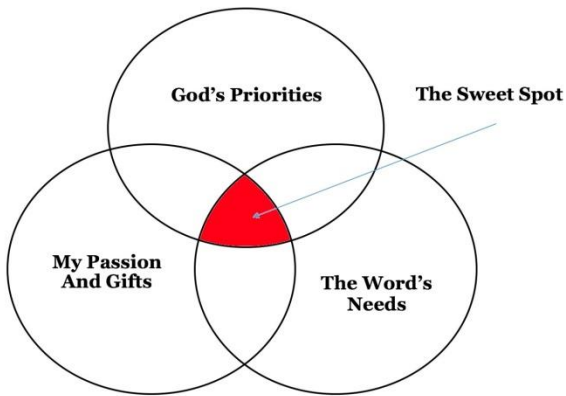


New Hope Sermon Finding Your Vocational Sweet Spot Nehemiah 1:1-4



The Vocational Sweet Spot

In our vision statement one goal at New Hope is “we will be able to powerfully live out the role that God has created for each of us in His world.” So our theme to day is finding God’s calling for your life.

Amy Sherman in her book *Kingdom Calling* calls this our vocational sweet spot. You may remember this graphic from 2 weeks ago with its 3 circles. Circle One: We look at God’s priorities – what God is doing and wants to do in our world. Circle Two: Then we look at the world’s needs with God’s perspective. When

we combine that with our choice to align ourselves with God’s priorities we find our life focus in God’s heart for the world. That is what it means to be a global Christian.

Circle Three is then the circle that represents your passions. Amy Sherman asked these questions: “What breaks my heart? In the world, my country or my neighborhood, what makes me angry because it should be better?” (Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, BakerBooks, p. 135). Questions like these help us grow how we’re called to serve the kingdom.” So, **the vocational sweet spot is when there is an intersection of the needs of the world with God’s heart and your passion.**

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness (your own passions) and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Sherman, *Ibid.*, p. 106.) But Sherman adds “Some Christians may need to be challenged about degrees of good – to be encouraged to ask whether the way they are investing their work time (typically 40 hours or more a week) reflects what really *matters in light of God’s priorities and the world’s needs.*” (*Idem*).

This is the same challenge William Carey put forward. Remember this quote we mentioned last week? “I’m not afraid of failure; I’m afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter.” With all the pressures for success that are measured by secular culture in terms of money or fulfilling our self and boosting our ego. Whether it’s in China or America, this thought is like a flashing yellow light at an intersection. Don’t proceed further.

Finding God’s calling for your life.

The biblical example of Nehemiah shows us how it happens. In Bible study fashion, as Dambudzo leads our Bible studies, let’s look first at the facts in chapter One—who is in the passage that we read? what is the context? what happens? where is it happening?

We start with Nehemiah himself. He is in the citadel of Susa in the country of Babylon. He is the cupbearer of the king. That was a position of high honor because he was to sample whatever beverage was offered to the king first to be sure there was no poison in the cup. If so, he would die and not the king. But it was a position of trust. Nehemiah was not looking for another career. What changed his job responsibilities? Hanani, one of his Jewish brothers came to visit him from Judah with some other men. Nehemiah asked a simple question about his homeland and the exiles who were still living there. And he heard this report: *Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned*



with fire.” That report broke Nehemiah’s heart and he wept. Then he turned to God with his passion - he cried out for his own people in Jerusalem and their city with its broken down walls which made them so vulnerable to their enemies. He poured out his heart to the Lord in prayer, confessing the sins of his people and reminding God of the promises God had made to the Jews in the promised land.

At the end of Nehemiah’s prayer he added *Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man, his boss, the king.* Nehemiah’s heart was so moved, he wanted to do something about the bad news that shook him to his core.

After he prayed we see amazing ways God answered:

1. First, God opened the Persian king’s heart to Nehemiah’s concern for his homeland. And he released Nehemiah from his job as cup-bearer. The king allowed him leave to go and rebuild the city of his homeland – the very city the Babylonians had themselves destroyed in 586. Neh.2:4-5
2. Then, once Nehemiah had the king’s permission to go, he presented his well-thought out plan for the execution of the plan: a. he asked for a letter to the governors between Susa and Judah so that they would provide him safe conduct on his trip as he passed through their territories .b. Then he asked for another letter to Asaph keeper of the king’s forests to provide timber to make all the beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence he would occupy. That’s a lot of timber. But the king granted all that, plus provided army officers and Calvary to go with him to Jerusalem.

The whole story of what happened is how he partnered with God to do something that hadn’t been done in several hundred years – to rebuild the city and its protective wall, to bring honor back to his people and to bring his people back to God. He went to Jerusalem and inspired all the leaders to Rise UP and build. He gave them the promises of God and told them of the provisions of God and then encouraged and challenged them as a leader who had come in their midst. Under his leadership they build that wall together in just 52 days despite great opposition from their enemies.

Nehemiah’s calling started with his reaction to bad news from his homeland. News he turned into prayer that came from his broken heart. And from that passion, he formulated a plan to do something about it. In all this provision and all the ways God intervened in the rest of Nehemiah’s story, Nehemiah kept turning to the Lord and told the people that “the gracious hand of God was upon me”. He told the leaders “God put it into my heart to....(action), to...action. Neh.7:5 that’s partnership with God.

Nehemiah’s calling came out of the combination of a need in the world (Jerusalem’s vulnerability and broken down city), God’s power and provision, Nehemiah’s broken heart and the utilization of all Nehemiah’s leadership gifts and wisdom. That’s the vocational sweet spot.

So, let’s stop there a minute. Many of you at New Hope are in a foreign land here in the States. You are far from your homeland. But have you heard news from home that breaks your heart and stirs up your passion to do something about it? Or the broader question: Is there any area of suffering or world need that shakes you to your core and makes you weep for what makes God weep?

This, I believe is the pathway to finding your vocation sweet spot. It takes courage and willingness to step outside of the box. Sir Francis Drake was one of the great explorers of the Elizabethan period. He wrote these prayers:

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore. Perhaps, like Carey feared, “succeeding at things that don’t matter.”

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of

our hopes; and help us push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."— Submitted by Dave Ward, Durham, North Carolina

To apply these principles, here's a question to ponder: "If you were doomed to live the same life over and over again for eternity, would you choose the life you are living now? ...If the answer is no, then why *are* you living the life you are living now? Stop making excuses, and do something about it." William Alexander, *The \$64 Tomato* (Algonquin Books, 2007), p. 245

Pastor Mark Batterson did 'something about a need' in his setting. He says, "During the first year at National Community Church in Washington D.C., we had been praying for a drummer to join our worship team for months. But one day I felt like I needed to put some feet on my faith, so I went out and bought a four-hundred-dollar drum set. It was a *Field of Dreams* moment: if you buy it, they will come. I bought the drum set on a Thursday. Our first drummer showed up the next Sunday. And he was good. He was actually part of the United States Marine Drum and Bugle Corps. Rock and roll."

Mark adds, "I cannot promise that signs will follow your faith in three minutes or three hours or three days. But when you take a step of faith, [for a calling from God,] signs will follow. God will sanctify your expectations, and you will begin to live your life with holy anticipation. You won't be able to wait to see what God is going to do next." Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase* (Multnomah, 2008), pp. 32-33 Passion joined with practical faith.

Let me close with a final example of this convergence of need, God's heart and our passion. "Sajan George began his career turning around failing companies. [Soon] George had an interest to apply his experience to fixing some of America's worst-performing schools. A managing director at a renowned consulting firm, George led the firm's education division, helping to turn around some of the nation's largest, urban K-12 public school districts, including ones in New York City, Washington, DC, and New Orleans.

But after a decade in this role, George was getting frustrated. He wanted to do more to fix the country's failing education system. That's passion. That's when God used a film to grab hold of George's heart and lead him to live his calling. As he watched the premiere of *Waiting for Superman*, a documentary about America's declining public school system, tears filled George's eyes.

He says, "Those weren't my kids on the screen, but I felt a deep deep sense of sadness .And I felt connected to what God must feel for those children when they're denied a decent educational opportunity. When I got home, I thought, 'I've got to go to the depth and bottom of this feeling. I've got to chase wherever it goes because there's something in that feeling that's the heart of God.'

"George's search for what God was...led him to quit his high-paying job and launch Matchbook Learning, a nonprofit that helps turn around underperforming schools by giving teachers the technology they need to customize the educational experience for each and every student." (Jordan Raynor, *Called to Create*, Baker Books, 2017, pp. 147-158).

Nehemiah, Sir Francis Drake, Mark Batterson, Sajan George – they all responded to the calling of God as their passions were kindled by a situation that combined world need and God's heart.

So, what specific area of world need are you most passionate about? What people or age group or ethnic group or area of suffering move your heart? What might God want to do about that through you? That might become your vocational sweet spot. Finding God's calling on your life.

Let us pray. Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 10/8/17 Song of response: Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.