

September 16, 2007
“Finding Your Mission”
Eph 2:10 NLT

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

What this verse says is that God has a mission for each of us.

About a month ago Jim Brennan and I went of a Leadership Summit. There were many speakers, and most were very good, but there was one speaker, John Ortberg, a Presbyterian Pastor from California that God used to speak to me.

He was taking, basically, about following God's mission for our life and not a lesser mission. This brought some thoughts to me that I wanted to share with you. As often happens to me when I am preparing a message, as I was building on the topic of God's mission for us in our lives, leading to the main point I wanted to share, I end up having too much information. So today I want to talk to you about Finding your mission, and next week a hazard we face when it comes to mission.

I heard a story one time about a man named Lee (I just made up that name because I can't remember what the man's name was). Lee worked (let's say) at a junk yard (because I don't remember that part of the story either). Sometimes he'd show up for work, sometimes he didn't. He didn't do much when he was there, just some odd jobs around the junk yard when asked. Most times the boss had to search for him if he needed Lee to do something.

Well, one day Lee died. A customer asked, “where's that guy that's usually hanging around here? The boss said, “Oh, you must mean Lee, he passed away recently.” The customer said, “Oh, so, are you going to hire someone to fill the void left by Lee? The boss thought for a moment then said, “Lee didn't leave a void!”

I am sure you don't want that said about you. Image someone standing up at your funeral to give the eulogy and saying, “Well, actually his life didn't matter much.”

We want people to say that their life was enriched because they knew us. Or, the world is a better place because we had been here.

Take an example from sports. Usually if you join a team you want to get in the game. There may be a few who want to stay on the bench. They may think, “Ah, if I get out there I will only make an error and the coach and the team will just be upset with me, and not like me. No, it's safer and easier to just stay on the bench. As long as I can wear the uniform and hang out with the team, I can feel important, even though I don't contribute.”

Maybe, there are some who feel that way in the game of life. It is easier and safer to not play in the game of life either. But, most want to get in the game. Usually, if you are picked for the team you don't want to sit on the bench. I want to encourage you this morning to not want a life on the sidelines, rather get in the game. We all want our lives to count for something. We have a need for meaning that goes very deep.

The reality is that God put each one of us here for a purpose and has given each one of us a mission. (the following story was told by John Ortberg in *When the Game is Over It All Goes Back In The Box*). I want to share a story I read recently of one person's search for a mission. It's the story of Johnny the bagger. Johnny works in a grocery store. One day he went to a training event. It was for cashiers and stockers. The speaker, Barbara Glanz, was speaking on how people can make a difference. She mentioned how every interaction with another person is a chance to create a memory, to bless someone's life. She mentioned how important it was to look for those moments. When the conference was over she left a number and invited anyone to call her if they wanted to talk more about something she said.

About a month later, Barbara receive a call from the nineteen-year-old bagger named Johnny. Johnny proudly informed her that he had Down syndrome, and then told her his story.

"Barbara," he said, "I liked what you talked about. But I didn't think I could do anything special for our customers. After all, I'm just a bagger." Then he had an idea: he decided that every night when he came home from work, he would find a "thought for the day" for his next shift. It would be something positive, some reminder of how good it was to be alive, or how much people mattered, or how many gifts we are surround by. If he couldn't find one, he would make one up.

Every night his dad would help him enter the sayings six times on a page on the computer; then Johnny would print fifty pages. He would take out a pair of scissors and carefully cut three hundred copies and sign each one.

Johnny would put this stack of papers next to him while he worked. Each time he finished bagging someone's groceries, he would put his saying on top of the last bag. Then he would stop what he was doing, look the person straight in the eye, and say, "I've put a great saying in your bag. I hope it helps you have a good day. Thanks for coming here."

A month later, the store manager called Barbara and said, "Barbara, you won't believe what's happened here. I was making my rounds, and when I got to the cashiers, the line at Johnny's checkout was three times longer than anyone else's. It went all the way down the frozen food aisle."

The manager got on the loudspeaker to get more checkout lines open, but he couldn't get any of the customers to move. They said, "That's okay. We'll wait. We want to be in Johnny's line." One women came up to him, grabbed his arm and said, "I used to shop in

your store once a week. Now I come in every time I go by – I want to get Johnny's thought for the day." Johnny was doing more than filling bags with groceries, he was filling lives with hope.

There is a reason Johnny's lines are three times longer than anyone else's. Our bodies are fed with protein and carbs; our souls are fed with words. And, when people got words from Johnny, they were reminded of the beauty of one person forgetting his own limitations and seeking to make his life a blessing to someone else.

Know who the most important person in the store is? Johnny the bagger.

A few months later, the manager called Barbara once again to tell her Johnny was transforming the whole store. He told her that when the floral department had a broken flower or unused corsage, they used to throw it away. Now they go out in the aisles, find an elderly woman or a little girl, and pin it on her. The butchers started putting ribbons on the cuts of meat they wrapped up for the customers. Even the people who make their shopping carts are trying to make carts with wheels that actually work.

And all the peoples of the grocery store will be blessed through Johnny.

By the way, do you know who is the most important person in your family, neighborhood, school, and your workplace? You. If Johnny can make this happen in a grocery store, it can happen anywhere. You can make it happen wherever you are.

Finding your mission:

Your mission starts right where you are. Sometimes we are tempted to think God can't use us or can't use us until there are certain change in our circumstances. No, God wants to use you now, your mission starts at your current job, in your current position, in your current situation. Sometimes we don't realize the significance of what a person does until that person's contribution ceases. Like the husband who came home from work and found that the house was a disaster. The baby was crying, there were dirty dishes all over the counter, dirty laundry was piled up on the floor and hanging from door knobs, the TV was blaring, beds were unmade, the carpets were not vacuumed, the furniture had not been dusted, and there was no dinner cooking. He went searching for his wife and found her sitting up in bed reading a magazine. When he asked her what happened she said, "You know how you always ask me what I've been doing all day? Well, today I didn't do it."

What you do for others is important. God wants to use you where you are.

God will use your strengths. Your gifts, your education, your temperament, your experiences, your relationships, your mind. These will help you determine your mission.

God will use your weaknesses in the mission He has for you. God never wastes any experience you have in life, even the ones that hurt. The struggles we have had can help

us in our mission to others. People who've had drug problems, want to help others with drug problems. People who have suffered deep loss, and help other who are grieving. Johnny the bagger did not have a mission in spite of his limitations. Rather, it was those limitations that made what he did more significant.

Your mission is not about you. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt does not exist for itself. Imagine being invited to someone's home for dinner and saying, "Man, this is the best salt I've ever tasted. Hon, how come we don't have salt like this at home, we got to get some salt like this." Salt loses itself for the greater good. We are to be salt. Our mission is not about us. If you do something by yourself and for yourself its death. If you do something with God for others it's life.

Your mission is often connected to your (holy) discontentment. Last week we heard how Lynn Wohland heard about the homeless children of Romania living in the sewers and felt she had to do something about that. Her holy discontentment has led her to go to serve in Romania for three years.

We sent a group to Mississippi to help repair homes damaged by hurricane Katrina. Deborah Hughis felt that there is a need here in our own community for people to get help with home repairs when they can't afford it. Her holy discontentment has led her to start a not-for-profit business connecting volunteers to people in need.

God has a mission for you. And you know what that means? It means that God believes in you. God put each one of us here for a mission. Find your mission, get off the bench and get into the game.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. - Eph 2:10