

October 24, 2021

Created to Do Good Works

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 2:8-10

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

I Corinthians 12:4-7

Last week we talked a bit about the Spirit-given gifts that were provided to us through our birth. All of us are born unique and all of us have genetic traits that are peculiar to us and a lot of those genetic traits are, I am convinced, part of God's plan and preparation for us to fulfill our mission as believers.

The other major sources of our Spirit-given gifts are found, I think, in our experiences, our training, and our education. From birth all of us have been constantly shaped and molded by our life experiences. If I grew up in a lower middle class intact family in Bozeman, Montana those experiences will have shaped me in very different way than those of someone who grew up in a single-parent family in a poor neighborhood in Chicago or in a very affluent family in Beverly Hills.

A perfect example of how experiences shape and mold us and effect our capacity for good works is in how we typically address conflict. We are not born with an innate ability to address conflict, but we develop whatever skills we have to do so through the example of and sometimes the training provided by our parents and significant others.

If you grew up in a home where your parents fought over everything in front of you then you very likely are prone to be battler when it comes to conflicts. If you grew up in a home where your parents sat down at the kitchen table and calmly and quietly crafted solutions to their conflicts in front of you then you are much more likely to be a collaborator.

If, on the other hand, you grew up in a home where one of your parents would go quiet or walk away at the first sight of conflict you might have grown up to be an avoider. These conflict management styles are the product of your experiences. From these experiences you learned at least one way to address conflict and you most likely still use that same basic approach to conflicts in your life.

Experiences matter when it comes to preparation for our particular mission or missions in the body of Christ, but education does too. In a lot of ways education can be an effective tool in God's hands to mold and shape us in preparation to do his will. After high school I attended Christian college eventually graduating from Harding University. Because of the opportunities God provided through that education I learned a lot about his word and I also learned different ways of understanding his word than I might have if I had not attended those schools.

God also blessed me with the opportunity to become a teacher and eventually to receive training in counseling. At the time I primarily saw those educational opportunities as a way to make a better living, but I am convinced now that God was preparing me for very specific ministries that he had designed for me to do here long after that training had ended.

Experiences, education, and training are ways that I believe our God and Father uses to prepare us for the good works he has created us to do. Our God even uses the troubles that we experience to prepare us for works of service. Paul would write to the believers in Corinth, "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*" (II Corinthians 1:3-4)

In both the gifts that we received through birth and the gifts that we have received through life's experiences God has been molding and shaping us for the missions he has designed for us as a part of the body of Christ. Paul would tell us, I think, that we must think of ourselves with sober judgment (Romans 12:3) in order to identify and fulfill our personal mission in the church.

