

# DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS

"Ministry Gifts"

10/14/12

Verses from New Living Translation unless noted.



The Incredibles is a 2004 computer-animated superhero film released by Walt Disney. It's about an entire family of superheroes. In 2004 I still had grandchildren that liked Disney animation films and this is one of those children's movies that had as much entertainment for the parents and it did for the kids.



Mark Batterson, the pastor of a young church in the D.C. area bought a Mr. Incredible suit and decided to wear it home from work to surprise his kids. It's only about a three block walk so he thought he could play it cool, but he was wrong.

He said, "I hadn't walked half a block before people were screaming, Mr. Incredible. Cars were stopping. People were staring. Kids were waving. I just had to go "into character" so as I passed people I said things like "At ease" and "The neighborhood is safe folks."

Later he said, "I have to admit: it felt incredible being Mr. Incredible."

Now here's the point: you don't have to get a Mr. Incredible suit and feign superpowers to feel incredible. I'm absolutely convinced that when you and I simply exercised our God-given ministry gifts to their God-given potential we feel like Mr. Incredible (or Elastigirl or Dash or Violet).

There is nothing like using your ministry gifts to serve others and God's church. It's the greatest feeling in the world.

Acts 20:24 "My life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus..."

The Apostle Paul was arguably the greatest superhero in the NT church with the obvious exception of Jesus himself. Paul authored more of the NT than any other writer, 13 letters included in the most sacred book ever published.



On four different occasions he traverses the Roman Empire carrying the message of Jesus and planting churches in strategic cities. He was a man of extraordinary intellect, missional focus and unstoppable resolve.

Ship wrecked, snake bitten, stoned, jailed, beaten five times within an inch of his life, sleep deprived, persecuted and oppressed, Paul relentlessly pursued his assigned task of getting his precious treasure, the message of Christ to the Gentile world.

It is primarily because of Paul and his tireless efforts that we sit here in this auditorium today; non-Jews having come to know Jesus through the life and teachings of this man.

In the above verse Paul is delivering a farewell address to the leaders of the church at Ephesus. This is the latter part of his ministry and he knows he will probably never see these people again, so these are his final instructions.

Life is worth nothing unless we are faithful to do the work Jesus has assigned to us; the work of telling the Good News of God's wonderful kindness and love and then helping those who respond grow to maturity in Christ – that's discipleship.

At the end of his life he said, (2Timothy 4:7 NIV) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Life is worth nothing unless we use it for doing the work assigned us by the Lord Jesus.

God created you special. According to the Bible, you are a divine masterpiece, most certainly, an engineering marvel. Do an experiment with me. Take your finger and touch your cheek very lightly.

Did you know that you can actually feel your finger before it touches your skin? The tiny hair follicles on your face feel your finger before it touches your face.

I bet you didn't know that you can feel the weight of a bee's wing falling on your cheek from less than half an inch.

Actually the tip of your finger can feel pressure that depresses your skin .00004 inch (One 40 thousandths of an inch).

If your eyes are normal, you can see a small candle flame from 30 miles away on a clear, dark night. Your eye can distinguish more than 300,000 shades of color.

You can smell on drop of perfume diffused through a three-room apartment and can distinguish 10,000 different odors.

You can taste 1/40<sup>th</sup> of an ounce of table salt dissolved in 130 gallons of water.

Psalm 139:13-14 "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous..."

And of course the truth is, all of us are different. None of us is the same. We're all unique with our own special distinctives and variations. You are a carefully mixed DNA cocktail. Now, why do you suppose God went to all the trouble to make you like he did?

The reason is, he has a special unique purpose for each one of us. Today we're going to look at God's purpose for your life.

### WE SERVE GOD BY SERVING OTHERS

#### The Plan: TO DO GOOD WORKS

The Bible says this, let's read it together in Ephesians 2:20, "We are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Now it's important to understand that we don't work our way to Christ. We work our way from Christ. You don't work to earn his love. He offers you his love as a free gift. We serve out of gratitude for what he has done.

When we come to Christ, he changes us. We walk away different. This is one of the greatest indicators that we have truly come to Christ; this is how you can tell if a person is really a disciple of Christ – if we walk around doing good works.

Now it's not about consumption, but contribution. True followers of Jesus seek to make a contribution, not just to consume. What matters is not how long you live, but how you live. What matters is not the duration of your life, but the donation of your life.

God never created a life that was intended to be purposeless or meaningless. We're all designed to make a contribution, to give something back.



Now it's true some people go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. Instead of having one hand free to throw the ball back, all they are interested in is getting and receiving. They give nothing back.

Sometimes little children are that way. They are interested in nothing but what they want. Some of them have already given you their Christmas "want list." But that's children. When we grow up, when we come to Christ we're changed. As we mature we start giving as well as receiving.

I noticed when my kids showed signs of growing up – when my daughter started helping clean up the kitchen after a meal, without being asked; when my son first offered to pay for my lunch, I almost dropped my French fries. Those were signs of maturity. They were willing to give and serve.

The Bible says we're created to serve, we're saved to serve, we're gifted to serve, we're shaped to serve. We're commanded to serve. Serving is a sign of maturity; growing into the likeness of Christ.

Are you going through life selfish or self-less? Are you a self-server or a God-server? Are you here for what you can get out of it, or what you can give? Your answer to these questions will determine your real success and satisfaction in life.

The same is true of marriage. If you are there to be served, to get your needs met – that's just selfishness. If you enter marriage to give, to serve, to meet someone else's needs, - that's love.

### [The Paradox: THE GREATEST IS THE SERVANT](#)

The whole idea of this spiritual purpose, divine purpose, flies in the face of contemporary culture. The world defines greatness and success in terms of possessions, prestige, position and power.

If you are a really great person, you will have a lot of people serving you. When you walk into the room, everyone scurries about making sure you have everything you want or need. Greatness is measured by the number of people serving you.

Jesus turns that all around. He says true greatness is measured by the number of people you serve. Jesus, the greatest human being who ever lived said, (Matthew 20:26 NIV) "[Whoever wants to become great must be a servant.](#)"

Jesus' disciples were with him for three years and they still didn't get it. On the night before he was crucified he had to demonstrate it by washing their dirty feet.

When the final accounting is complete, when they draw the bottom line under everything you have done on this planet, during your time on earth, the only things that will count will be your acts of service; the things you did for others.

It won't matter how many degrees you have, how much money you've made, how many things you owned, how many honors or awards you were given or how many trophies decorate your mantel. The only thing God will look for is faithful service.

"The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful..." 1 Corinthians 4:2(TEV)

### The Preparation: INTENTIONAL DESIGN

You were designed to serve. It's kind of like a hammer or tool designed for a certain task. If we are not accomplishing that for which we were designed, we sense our lives are out of sync, even useless and meaningless.

Now whenever God gives us an assignment to do something, He never gives it to us without equipping us for the task. And in the next verse Job says, "Your hands shaped me and made me." (Job 10:8 NIV).

We have often taught a class around here about the five things that God has given you that determine your SHAPE: Spiritual gifts, Hearth, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences. The first letter of those five things spells the

**S**piritual Gifts – what am I gifted to do?

**H**earth – what do I love to do?

**A**bilities – what am I good at?

**P**ersonalities – how can my traits best match a ministry?

**E**xperiences – how can my past best shape my influence?

word 'SHAPE'.

Those five things make you what you are. God uses these things to uniquely shape you, different from anybody else in the world, and for a purpose. And that purpose is to serve Him and others in this world.

Let me explain each of these briefly:

Spiritual gifts - these are spiritual abilities given by the Holy Spirit at the moment of spiritual birth. God then chooses to bless and use them when employed for his service. There are several listings of these in the Bible: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.

There are about 27 different gifts listed, but these lists are not intended to be all-inclusive. They are just some of the more obvious.

Their effectiveness is demonstrated in the use. When Billy Graham preaches, hundreds sometimes thousand respond. Other preachers hear him and are amazed realizing that he is far from the best in organizing the material, delivering the message, or engaging the audience. He's good...but a lot think they are better.

But when he gives the invitation to respond, something unexplainable, something supernatural happens. It's God at work through his special gifting – the gift of evangelism.

Heart - What is it that you love to do? What you are passionate about? Some people love children. They have a teaching gift and their love for children directs them to a teaching ministry with children.

Abilities – These are strengths or talents that are inborn. They are hard wired at the factory - athletic ability or musical ability. Maybe you're good with numbers, or good with people. Yes, these will need to be trained and developed but if the raw talent is not there, you can't add it later.

Personality – This is another part of the package that makes you special. Some people are introverts, and some are extroverts. Some are thinkers and some are feelers. Whatever your personality type, this could determine where you are best suited to serve.

Experience – All your experiences of life, both good and bad contribute to your shape. Your family experiences, your educational experiences, your work experiences, even your painful hurtful experiences all shape you into who you are.

A woman who was molested as a young girl becomes the head of a rape counseling center; God even uses our pain to help us better serve others.

All of these five factors are used by God to determine your unique shape. We're all different – like finger prints and snowflakes. God creates infinite variety.

As an example of this I've selected a small sample from this church – people who are using their gifts in unique ways.

**Panel:** Scott Packham, Melanie White, & Matt Hiltibran

Now I want you to notice this, God makes everyone unique and your uniqueness is not primarily for your benefit, but for those you serve. Look at the next verse. Let's read it aloud:

1 Peter 4:10, "God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another."

You want to know why you're alive? That's why you're alive. You weren't put here just to take up space, consume resources and to be served. You were put here to serve God and the way you serve God is by serving other people.

Now we come to his fourth purpose, serving God by serving others. The Bible calls this "ministry".

**The Potential: EVERY BELIEVER A MINISTER**

What do you think of when I say the word "minister"? Most people think of priest or pastor or professional clergy. They think of somebody who wears those funny collars, or a robe. But the Bible says every believer is a minister.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:12 (NKJ) that the work of the pastors and teachers is "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry."

Now, not every believer is a pastor, but every believer IS a minister. Ministry simply means using my shape to help somebody else in the name of God. Any time you use your talents, your abilities, your background, your experiences to help somebody else, that's called ministering. And you know what you are? You're a minister.

In the Bible the word "service" and "ministry" are the same word. And in the Bible "servant" and "minister" are the same word. So all of us are called to ministry.

Turn to the person next to you and say "*I'm a minister*". Go ahead, just say that right now. Now, unfortunately I can't get us all tax deductions on that! But the truth is every Christian is a minister.

**The Pattern: JESUS CHRIST**

Now the good news is that God not only created us for service, He gave us a model. He came to earth Himself and said "*This is how you do it. I want you to watch Me*". Notice the next verse. Let's read it aloud together: Matthew 20:28(LB) "*Jesus said, 'Your attitude must be like My own, for I did not come to be served, but to serve'.*"

You know a lot of people today spend so much of their time searching for self-esteem, for self-worth, and significance. They want to feel good about themselves. But they're looking in all the wrong places!

They are hoping making money will do that. They're hoping getting a degree will do that. They're hoping marrying the right person will do it. But none of those things work.

You don't get your self-worth from success or salary. You don't get your self-esteem from status. You don't get satisfaction from sex or self-gratification. The Bible says you get your self-esteem from service. You get self-worth from giving yourself away.

Jesus said you have to give your life away in order to find it. The greatest thrill in the world is to be used by God - to be used by God, serving others. And what does it take to be used and to learn to serve like Jesus? What ability do you need?

### The Prerequisite: [AVAILABILITY](#)

Someone told me early in my Christian life that the greatest ability is availability. One day Jesus was walking down to go to Jericho and some blind men start yelling at him. And the Bible says this (Matthew 20:30-32 NIV): Two blind men shouted 'Lord, have mercy on us! "*Jesus stopped and called them. 'What do you want me to do for you?'*"

Now I want you to circle the word "stopped". Jesus stopped. If you want to be used by God, if you want to serve God, you must be willing to be interrupted. You may need to write that down? You must be willing to be interrupted.

Much of Jesus' ministry and miracles were the result of interruptions. You think about it. Jesus is enjoying a wedding feast with his disciples and he's interrupted to turn water into wine - that was his first miracle.

Another instance a woman sneaks up behind him to touch his robe to be healed. Another time he's asleep; getting some much needed rest when somebody abruptly wakes him up to stop a storm.



Later He's leading a home Bible study group in the living room of a house, and suddenly rubble from the ceiling starts to fall. Then some men start tearing open the roof above his head to lower a lame friend down on a mat for Jesus to heal.

A lot of people talk about following the **steps** of Jesus? I think we ought to follow the **stops** of Jesus. Jesus let Himself be interrupted. All through his ministry He did. He didn't get irritated. He didn't get bent out of shape. He just stopped and ministered.

The Bible says this: [Proverbs 3:28 \(GN\)](#), "Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now."

To be used by God, folks, you must be available; you must allow for divine interruptions. Now what keeps us from being available? Let me give couple of common problems.

### The Problems:

#### 1<sup>ST</sup> [SELF-CENTEREDNESS](#)

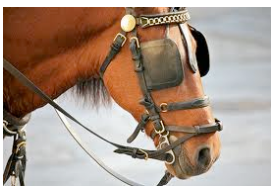
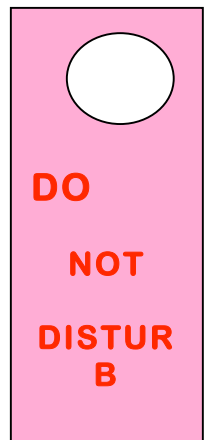
Philippians 2:4(Msg) "Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand."

Whenever you see a need right in front of you, guess what? God is giving you the opportunity to practice serving. You see the number one enemy of compassion is busyness. We just get too busy! And because we're so busy, we don't have time to serve.

I've got my agenda, my plans, my schedule, my goals, and my appointments. You know what the problem is? We hang a "do not disturb sign" on the door of our heart.

"Do Not Disturb." We do it all the time. "I've got too much to do, God. I'm sorry but I just can't fit you in. Maybe some other time."

Between the kid's soccer, running them back and forth to school, my job, my family – I don't have time for ministry. I don't have time for God.



Maybe some of you are like me. I have horse blinders on at least half the time; a piece of race horse equipment that prevents the horse seeing to the side. Many trainers believe these keep the horse focused on what is in front of him.

I have tunnel vision sometimes and I don't see the needs around me.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Perfectionism

Ecclesiastes 11:4 "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done."

We're waiting for the perfect conditions, the perfect situation, the perfect time when we feel we can do a perfect job.

Many people worship excellence, even Christians. And they say "Well, you know if you can't do it first class, don't even try." Well, there's a Greek term for that...hogwash! OK?

The truth is, it doesn't have to be perfect for God to bless it. If God only used perfect people, none of us would qualify and nothing would get done. We're all a bunch of misfits. We all have weaknesses. We all have faults. We all have failures and handicaps. But guess what? God uses us all. Why?

God doesn't use perfect people because there aren't any. God uses normal people; imperfect people. Because normal, ordinary, average people say, I'm available.

I know it's only October, but planning ahead, I'm already getting into the Christmas spirit, and one of the traditions I really enjoy at Christmas time is putting out a 1000 piece puzzle on the dining room table.

I spread out all the pieces, I group them by color and shape and I waste hours putting the puzzle together. It's not really wasted - it's good relationship building time. Everybody jumps in.

Have you ever gotten to the end of a puzzle and had a handful of pieces left over?? Probably not. If you're like me, you've run out of pieces with still one or two holes in your puzzle. I hate that!

But that just the way it is sometimes here at church. We get through trying to put everything together, and there are still some holes. We don't have all the children's workers we need. We don't have all the singers, instrumentalists, all the ushers or greeters that we should have.

Do you guys have any idea why that might happen?? Sure, somebody isn't filling their spot. I believe God has a place where each of us fits - a spot specially designed for our shape. And I guarantee you, there is nothing that makes you feel more like Mr. Incredible than simply exercising your God-given ministry gifts to their God-given potential.