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Spreadsheets, Calling and Whatever

Genesis 1/2 and Colossians 1/3

2014 Time, Talent, Treasure Series

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There's this question that I would imagine, at maybe some point in your life, maybe frequently, maybe right now, you find yourself asking, "What is it that I am called to do with my life?" "What is it that God is asking me to do with the talents, with the gifts, with the abilities that He has given me and you and us?" Perhaps right now you are younger; you are about to go off to college or you are in college and you are looking at that big, scary world of adulthood and you are wondering to yourself—I have no idea what I am supposed to do with my life, with the talents, with the gifts, with the abilities that God has given me. Maybe you are entering a new season and the kids are moving on and you are looking around and you are like, "I've got a few more decades; what is it that God is asking me to do with what He has given me? Where is He calling me to be?" For some of you that might just come easy and you are one of those people that we all look around at and we think, "It's just so obvious...lucky them!" They just know; it's just in them. Those people, at times, drive me crazy! Or maybe you are like me and it's just a hard question and there are times when you are saying, "God, what are you asking me to do with these days...these weeks...these years? What is it that you are calling me to do? How do I make this decision between this and that?"

Today we are going to wrestle with that question a little bit—this idea of the *talents*, the *gifts*, the *abilities*—this idea of *calling*. Who is it that God is calling you to be? Now as we begin, I want to start with a bit of a confession. This really has been a difficult question for me—something I've wrestled with in college and in most of the last ten years of my adult life I have not had great clarity about. And it's been something I have sought a lot of help with and I've talked to a lot of people and, thankfully, over the last five years through just amazing people, Scripture, stories—all sorts of things—that I've been able to find help. I've learned a lot about this conversation and I've been able to spend the last five years or so amongst a lot of other leaders similar to myself, through these leadership events that I help lead called "*Rhythm in 20*". It's helping other men wrestle through this question, and I feel like God has brought a lot of wisdom into my own story and has helped me to understand this a little bit. So, though it has been difficult, there have been a few things that I would love to share with you this morning as we wrestle through this idea of, "What does it look like to use our talents and our gifts and our abilities in this world today?" As we begin, I would like to offer us a prayer.

> *Father, we all walk in here with so many different stories, some of great struggle and suffering and some of just great passion and joy. No matter what, You know us so intimately that You can speak into each one of our lives and I just pray, Lord, that You would use stories and Scripture and songs and words and phrases and bring new, fresh words into our hearts this morning. Speak to us in a passionate and deep and intimate way. Thank You for being the God that cares about every single person who has walked in these doors today. In Your Son's name we pray, Amen.*

So as we begin this conversation around talent and calling and using the gifts that God has given us, I think it is really, really helpful—and it has been helpful for me to go all the way back to the beginning—and by that I mean the very, very, very, very beginning of all things. Now some of you

are going to be really familiar with this—Genesis 1—the creation story. We are going to start there and we are going to pull out a few things that I think are really helpful for this conversation. Genesis 1, verse 11:

Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation..." (*NASB, Genesis 1:11a)

So the God that has made the heavens and the earth and all that is, He creates the earth and the world with the unique ability to also create. What He creates isn't just a static thing, but it's this dynamic, moving creation that is headed somewhere that, too, has the ability in the same way that God has the ability, to also create. Interesting thought...it's going somewhere. Next, Genesis 1:26:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;"

Now a few things about God: We get our first picture of the Trinity here—Father, Son and Spirit—all present at the time of creation. So what do we know about God? God is *relational*. God is not just an individual, but God is in a relationship and that also then goes on to...**according to Our likeness**" which shows that God has made us like Him and in that we, too, are relational. The very God that creates the heavens, the earth, that beautiful sunset that you saw the other night, those majestic mountains that you love to vacation to—all that is beautiful that you see—the God that made that, made us in the same way. We, too, are created beings. Then this one which I don't love as much and my wife could tell you exactly why, but also there is this *order*, this *organization* and this *structure*. There is night and there is day and we, too, are created with this organized and structured part of who we are, and though mine might be like really, really small, it's still in there somewhere. Next, in Genesis 1:26 God says,

Let them rule over...

So God makes all things and then He says to man and woman—Adam and Eve—"Let them rule over"... The word **rule** is this Hebrew word *rada*; it means to *rule* or *lead*, *direct* or *manage*. He takes all of creation and He says to us—me and you—"It's yours to rule over—to direct. This thing that is going somewhere, that is dynamic, that has movement, you are going to take care of it for Me." He says,

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." (Vs. 28)

Like the earth, which is going to sprout vegetation, He calls us to also be able to create, to make more people made in the image of God. He gives us the ability to create with Him.

...and subdue it...

Again, it jumps back to this idea. **Subdue** is this Hebrew word 'kabash' to *subdue* or *overcome*. It is actually a really, really strong word, as if God is going to say, "This is yours and you have to control it and manage it and take care of it," and He leaves it up to you and me. Interesting...then He goes on to say in Genesis 2:19,

...whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.

I would have loved this job. He goes to Adam and He says, "All of these weird things I have made: all of these animals, everything that is in the sea and is in the sky, you put a name to it." That would have just been a weird, fun process, and He again invites us into creating and naming all that is, that He has made. Then He goes on to say that it is *blessed*. On multiple occasions God says that all of His creation is good and then He looks at man and woman and says, "It's *very* good," and

He blesses all of it, as if to say, "Every thing I've made—it's perfect and its whole and it's beautiful." There is this harmony to all of it and it's exactly the way things are meant to be. I would argue that all that we love about the world and our role in it is found right here in Genesis 1 and 2.

This makes me think of great stories that I get to hear all the time from people when their eyes light up and tell me about the things that they love in the world. I think about my mother who loves to landscape and garden and who, this summer alone, has already re-landscaped her yard six times. There is something about the dirt underneath her fingernails and that grass stain that you get around the rim of your shoe when you are cutting the grass and you are tearing up the dirt. There is something about that she just loves and when she does it, the time just flies by. I would imagine that every single one of us can name those things in our story that when we do them, when we participate in them, we just feel electric. What is that thing for you? I would argue that whatever it is, the primal core, the thing under the thing under the thing, about that thing that you love, can be traced back to Genesis 1 and 2. We see these things like responsibility in the Garden—stewardship...relationship and trust...order and rule...spreadsheets and making things...creativity and beauty...sleeping under the stars. All of it—its primal beginning—is right here in Genesis 1 & 2.

What is that thing that just makes you come alive? Maybe you love to just grab your Marshall Twin Stack, head to the basement and rock out all night. Whatever it is, we all have something that, since the beginning of time, God has placed in us to do with Him. What is that thing that you love? Now some of you might be thinking, "Well, I love knitting underwater but it's not really practical and I can't really make a living at it." *(laughter)* But at the bottom of all of those things there is a very great sense of what God has made you to be, and it's a gift and an offering to the world. What's that thing that you do that you could do forever? I want you to think about that for a minute. I want you to get it in your mind because we are going to shake this up a little bit and I'm going to make the extroverts have a great morning and the introverts not like me for the rest of the morning. What I want you to do is: I want you to get that in your mind and I'm going to give you 30 seconds and you are going to turn to the person next to you and you are going to share it because I believe that naming things and saying things out loud and marking these things are really helpful as we process our own lives. So if there is an introvert next to you just smile at them, *(laughter)* no need to make anyone uncomfortable. Right now, for 30 seconds, tell someone next to you what is that thing that you do that, when you do it, you feel like you could do this forever? Ready, set, go. (30 seconds)

All right, now that I've started a party, let's bring it in, or maybe we could just do this the rest of the time? I'm sure some of you would love it and some of you would hate it. See the thing is, Don just shared with me that he loves to build and make things and, in doing so, he loves to help others do that, and there's just this spark. There's this spark behind our eyes when we talk about those things and just know: I was made to do this because the story...our story...your story and my story...it starts right here in Genesis 1 & 2. It starts in this place of wholeness and shalom and beauty and love and connection and relationship and order. It starts with peace and goodness, but it moves on, doesn't it? It moves on to Genesis 3—this disruption of shalom—the entering of sin, where Adam and Eve decide that perhaps they could be their own god. Perhaps they know what's best for their lives and for their story, and what we find is rebellion and struggle and heartache and moving east of this Eden. For you and me, most of the time this is where we think our story starts.

Bryan asked this question beautifully last week. "When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Do you see someone fearfully and wonderfully made? Do you see someone whose story starts in Genesis 1 & 2 or in Genesis 3?" I believe that this question is absolutely central when it comes to us tapping into exactly who God has called us to be. Do we believe that our story starts with

wholeness and shalom and peace or brokenness? When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Do you see someone who is missing all sorts of things, who needs to look different, who doesn't have any good skills, who has nothing to offer the world? Or do you see someone made in the very image of the Creator God? Psalm 139, which Bryan shared with us last week, reminds us,

> **I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.** (Psalm 139:14)

You...I...us...the world around us...are fearfully and wonderfully made and I want to leave you with this question during the next few songs and I want you to think about it. Do you...do you believe that?

(Worship Songs)

See, Scripture is full of stories where people use these God-given gifts, these talents, these abilities, living into their reality of Genesis 1 & 2 to change the world. It happens all throughout Scripture; it's happening all throughout our city and our world. You hear stories from within our own church of people beautifully using their talents and their abilities for whatever it is that God is calling them to. There have been a few stories for me that I wanted to share that I think point out a few things that we can learn from within Scripture, a few which have challenged me in my own journey in some beautiful ways. I want to share a few of those. We are going PowerPoint the whole way, so the note takers in the room, "Rejoice!" *(laughter)*

Jethro—this is a beautiful story; this one just totally caught me by surprise when I first read it. Exodus 18, verse 1:

> **Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law...**

So Jethro is Moses' father-in-law and in-law relationships can, at times, bring all sorts of emotions.

> **...heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people...**

So at this point Moses, through God's calling, has brought all of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and rescued them from Pharaoh, and the story has spread and Jethro has heard it and he came to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped. And it goes on:

> **...Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people,** (this is fantastic) **he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? (**Father-in-law jumping in to help Moses figure some things out)...**Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?** (Exodus 18:13-14)
>
> **Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel and God be with you.** (I am going to give you some advice, Moses, and you are going to also need God's help too.) **You be the peoples' representative before God...** (Vs. 17-19)
>
> **Select...able men who fear God...and you shall place *these* over them, as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.** (Vs. 21-22)

So Moses is up to this beautiful work, and his father-in-law comes in and he says, "You are not going to make it. You are going to burn out; they are going to burn out. There is no way this is going to work." And he says to Moses, "Moses, I know what you need. You need a spreadsheet. *(laughter)* You need some organization. You need to empower some other people to help you here. There is no way you can carry this load yourself." Jethro steps in with this unique ability to look and see the problem and then see the systematic-ordered system that could help Moses actually figure out how to do what he's been called to do. It's a beautiful moment.

I'm a lot like Moses. I love to take everything on. It just happens—it's not my fault! But there have been beautiful people who have come into my own story and said, "There is no way you can keep going at this pace; you need some help; you need some organization; you need to empower others to help do the work too."

Jethro shows up and brings this unique talent, this ability that's not flashy but that is really simple, and he brings it and there's this sense of him bringing this deep resonance with the calling that he has to Moses and helping change the trajectory of Moses and the nation of Israel. It's a beautiful story of someone stepping in and using their talent. You see, Scripture is full of stories of people like Jethro, using their talent that God has given them to change the world.

Sometimes it is in really subtle stories and sometimes in beautiful, big, overarching parts of Scripture, but it is full of these kinds of stories. It reminds me of this quote from Frederick Buechner. "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." I'd imagine at times you've been able to step into places of great joy, great gladness, those things that you love to do and could do forever, and you use them to meet great needs in the world and it's electric. There is almost a sense of, "This is heaven; this is what this world was meant to be like," and you know it somewhere deep in your soul, and it's a beautiful thing. Hopefully, at times, you've had a great sense of that. Hopefully, it's right now. But perhaps your story is a little different than that.

Perhaps your story is something like Paul's. Now we know a lot about Paul so let's recap a little bit. Paul was a great Jew who once persecuted lots of Christians and wanted to do everything he could to get in the way of the movement of Jesus. He has this beautiful conversion experience and ends up going on to write 14 of the 27 New Testament books and letters. Paul is a beautiful picture of someone who is willing to step in and make things happen. But what else do we know about Paul? He often writes about this very conversation of talents and spiritual gifts. In multiple letters he talks about what it looks like to use the gifts that God has given you but the interesting thing about Paul is that Paul writes a lot of these letters from prison. You see Paul's story, though beautiful and though one that inspires many, also comes from places of great suffering and mystery and struggle, as over and over again he finds himself in these situations that I, for one, would absolutely never want to be in. Yet, he teaches us a lot about this idea of talent and calling.

Particularly, I want to look at one letter he wrote—the letter to the Colossians. Now your homework for this week is to go home and read this book. Read it every day; it's short. It's an amazing book. What do we know about Colossians? We know that it's the city of Colossae, not a huge city but not a small city—maybe something like Lincoln, Nebraska? What else do we know about the city of Colossae? It's a Roman city; it is under the Roman Empire where Caesar is lord, which is actually where we get our phrase '*Jesus is Lord'* in response to '*Caesar is lord*'. What do we know about the Roman government? It is a government founded on the ideas of money and power and military might, where at times even the Christians got caught up in idolizing safety and security that they find in having money and power and military and government control—which

doesn't it all sound like our context today, in any way? So we perhaps are a bit like the Colossian people. Paul, from prison, writes this to them, starting in chapter 3, verse 12:

> **As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved...** (Colossians 3:12)

Paul starts this section of his letter by taking the people of Colossians back to Genesis 1& 2: "You—made fearfully and wonderfully, holy, beloved children of God, whose story begins in Genesis 1 & 2—listen up. I've got a few things to share with you about who God has called you to be."

> **...put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.** (Vs. 12b-14)

It's as if to say, "Hey, you need to go back to Genesis 1 & 2 to believe it about yourself, but also to live that way. Live the way that things were intended to be."

> **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.** (Vs.15)

I love this next section:

> **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...** (Vs. 16)

He goes on to say, "You need to remember, your story starts in Genesis 1 & 2, but also, by the way, make sure that you teach one another and that you read psalms and hymns and you preach and you gather and you get together because you are going to forget where you come from and you are going to put your story back into this place of brokenness and you are going to have to remind one another." Paul tells the Colossians, "You are going to get lost along the way and that's okay, but remind one another where it is that you come from." He goes on to talk about our calling.

> **Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** (Vs.17)

So in all things Paul reminds the Colossians, "Whatever it is that God has called you to, whatever context, whatever place He has put you in, *do all things in the name of Jesus*." This is written by Paul while he's in prison, likely struggling and having lonely nights and suffering and wondering, *"Where is God in the middle of all of this*?" At least that's what I would likely be thinking, and yet Paul reminds us that in whatever we do, do it all in the name of Jesus. He goes on to talk about fathers and mothers and what it looks like to be masters and slaves and he finishes this section with:

> **Whatever you do, do your work heartily, *as* for the Lord rather than for men.** (Vs.23)

Paul compels us, no matter what, no matter what our context is, no matter where we might find ourselves in life, *do it all in the name of Jesus.* I am reminded that sometimes in our story, our greatest use of talent can often come out of the most difficult of places. Perhaps some of you come in here today and you are in a job that feels like a dead-end. Your co-workers are miserable to work with. Perhaps you are unemployed and you are wondering what God is up to in the middle of this. Perhaps you are in the middle of crisis and struggle and families are falling apart, or you are in an abusive relationship and there's so much struggle all around you. Paul writes these words of

encouragement to us, that in the middle of all of that, that Christ is with us and he calls all of us to be right there and to do all things in the name of Jesus. But it's not always easy, is it?

See, there is this paradox that we see in these two stories. At times God calls us to places of great synergy, of passion and gladness, in stories like Jethro. Then there are certain times where God calls us to places of mystery, suffering, struggle and despair. Matt shared his story a few weeks ago and it was a beautiful picture of discovering God's calling in the midst of struggle and suffering. At times we might be connected to those great places of gladness where it meets the world's great needs, and at other times it is full of mystery and wondering where God is at in the middle of all of it. Yet, in all things we are reminded by Paul, **whatever we do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of Jesus**. But why? Why does this even matter? Paul, earlier on in the book of Colossians, tells us exactly why it matters, and this is actually where we get our mission statement as a church. This is *The Message* translation and I think it's written beautifully. (*MSG, Colossians 1:26-29):

> **This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. God wanted everyone, not just Jews…**

...not just Blacks or Whites or Muslims or conservative Christians. God wants everyone to know.

> **... to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you…**

You Genesis 1 & 2 people, made in the image of God, fearfully and wonderfully made...

> **...Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory.**

You can look forward to the fact that Christ has come and through His death and resurrection has brought forgiveness and wholeness, and He promises to come again and make all things right.

> **It's that simple. That is the substance of our Message.**

Why does it matter? Why do we use our talents and our gifts and our abilities for God and for His Kingdom? Because you and I—we know the reality of Genesis 3, don't we? The world around us is broken. I think about what is happening in Ferguson right now. Yes, it is a racial issue and yes, it is a political issue but more than anything, it is a gospel issue. People in our neighborhood and our street and in our cities and around the country are being oppressed and they are being wounded. You know these stories in your own life—these stories of brokenness. I think about what is happening in Iraq and around the world. Our world is broken and it's in desperate need of a return to what Christ has brought—that story that begins in Genesis 1 & 2, that Jesus promises He is going to bring back to our reality.

The world around us and this hope that we have found, this Christ that is in you and me, the world around us is dying to hear this word of redemption and reconciliation. God comes and not only does He commission us from the very beginning to care for all things, but Jesus comes and He says, "You, go and make disciples. Share this word of hope. Share this word of forgiveness, of kindness, of patience, of love, of gentleness. Remind one another when you are going to forget, as Paul reminds us." We know the reality of Genesis 3 all too well. Yet it is not the way things were intended to be, so we take this mystery, this sharing of God's glory and we take it as the substance of our message and we go into the world.

So what is God calling you to...and me to? He is calling us to step into whatever context, using whatever talent He has given us since the beginning of time, and to use it that the world around us might know this hope and this love. This room is full of teachers and mothers; it's full of entrepreneurs and coaches and scientists and gas station attendants. It's full of really good high-fivers and welders and architects and stay-at-home dads. There are philanthropists among us. There are missionaries here. There are doctors and writers and gardeners and artists and bartenders and chefs, soccer players, garbage men and garbage women, scientists and funny people. Funny people are awesome. *(laughter)* Creative strategists and tinkerers and magicians, cosmetologists, dreamers, soldiers, dentists, farmers—I could do this all day, but I think you get the point. Whatever context, whatever talent, whatever ability God has given you, He has given you a place and a calling. Sometimes it comes from great mystery and struggle and other times it comes from deep gladness. Whatever it is that you do, do your work in the name of Jesus so that those around us might know this great hope that we have found in the death and the resurrection of Jesus—that one day all things will be made right, that one day we will return to Genesis 1&2 where everything is in its right place, where shalom and peace and love win! That is our calling. That's what God calls us to every day—no matter your context—that we might tell those around us in our world, the hope that we have found in the message of Jesus. Amen? Let's read this again:

> **Colossians 1:26-29 This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. God wanted everyone, not just Jews, to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you...**

...you Genesis 1 & 2 people, made fearfully and wonderfully in the image of the very God who created all things...

> **...Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. That is the substance of our Message. We preach *Christ*, warning people not to add to the Message. We teach in a spirit of profound common sense so that we can bring each person to maturity...**each person complete in Christ**. To be mature is to be basic. Christ! No more, no less.** What Jesus has done for you and for me on the cross... **That's what I'm working so hard at day after day, year after year, doing my best with the energy God so generously gives me.**

And you and us—the church—we have to rise up. We don't need political help. We need the church to stand up and to save the oppressed and to bring the broken in and remind them that Christ is coming back and all things will be made right.

It reminds me of this story and these lyrics we were just singing. Peter and Jesus are walking along the water and He says to Peter, "Peter, drop your net. You are a fisherman, but I'm going to teach you something else. I want to teach you about this revolution. Follow Me. Come. Let's change the world. Let's remind people of the redemption that I'm here to bring."

Later there is this other story. The storms are coming and Peter is on a boat and Jesus comes walking on the water—a crazy enough story—and He says to Peter, "Get out; come to Me. Come with Me." If I'm Peter I would say, "You're nuts," and yet Jesus calls Peter and Peter gets out and he has the faith to trust in Christ and he has the faith to trust in himself—made in the image of God as a Genesis 1 & 2 person. Peter gets out of that boat and he believes in who God has made him and he follows Jesus.

That is our call. May we...may you...may I—may we step boldly into the talent, the context, the calling that God has for our lives, so that the world around us might know hope and redemption and reconciliation. May we—the church—rise up and change this world with the hope of the gospel! Amen! *(Clapping)*

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