

As I begin this morning, I want to set the table for my sermon by reading Acts 13:36 to you—the words are easy to understand, but the implications are profound. The apostle Paul said the following, “*when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation; he fell asleep [died]*”.

For just a moment, I want you to seize upon the word “**purpose**”. Three weeks ago I said that humanity craves meaning and purpose—we make it or find it, any way or anywhere we can. These days many people bounce from job to job, from relationship to relationship, from experience to experience. In part, people are searching for a sense of purpose; when they don’t find it in their work, in a relationship, or an experience, they move on.

Three weeks ago I invited you to take a look at your life and answer the questions: *who am I? What am I becoming? What am I here for?*

Paul’s words about David remind us that purpose isn’t something we find within; we exist for something and Someone greater than ourselves. David served **God’s purpose** in his own generation; David’s generation experienced the impact of God’s purpose through his life.

My question is, “*What is God’s purpose in this generation? What’s God’s purpose in this church? In our city?*” If it were possible to look at the end of your life, would you be able to say, “*I served God’s purpose in my own generation?*”

illus: I have a vivid memory from when I was 19—I was at home alone, sitting at our kitchen table. I had completed a year at

Kwantlen College and had taken the year off school to work. During that year I wrestled over my future; I had been accepted at UBC but had no peace about going.

Sitting at the kitchen table, a CD playing in the background as I read through Isaiah 40. “*All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever... Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, or with the breadth of His hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales?*”

My heart resounded with the answer, “God has”. It was then that I noticed the song playing in the background, “*Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power and love, our God is an awesome God.*” If I close my eyes, I am transported back to that moment, and I remember being overwhelmed with the vastness of God and the comparative tiny-ness of my life. And in that moment, God put a prayer on my heart that changed the direction of my life.

For the first time in my life, I began to pray: *God, where ever you ask me to go, I’ll go; whatever you ask me to do; I’ll do.* That prayer was a first step towards the possibility of serving God’s purpose in this generation.

This morning we are going to walk through a prayer that Paul, Silas, and Timothy prayed for a little church that was situated in what is now modern-day Greece. They prayed for a group of Thessalonian Christians who lived in a city that was hostile to their faith in Jesus.

This prayer is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, but before I read it, let me tell you why I included it in our teaching series on serving. This prayer is less about what you should be praying and more about what the pastoral staff and elders are praying for you. As you listen to this prayer, I trust that you will hear both God's heart and ours for you, for this church, and for our city.

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This morning I want to explain the three movements of this prayer, and the implications we can draw from them—implications that have to do with our own identity and calling. Let's begin by looking at the first movement in vs.11.

1. Movement One: *We constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling.* In order to understand this phrase, we need to apprehend Paul's meaning with respect to the words “worthy” and “calling;” let's begin with the latter and then return to the former.

When Paul speaks of *calling*, usually, he has in mind that moment when God invites people to into relationship through faith in the

finished work of Jesus Christ. Now, this *calling* is expressed in a number of different ways throughout the New Testament. Sometimes it is described as an invitation to join God's family as sons and daughters. At other times, God calls people from one realm to another—Colossians 1:13 speaks of being rescued from the dominion of darkness, and 1 Thessalonians 5:5 speaks of living as children of the light.¹

In one sense, we fulfill this calling simply by saying “yes” to God's invitation; we say “yes” when we recognize our need for the forgiveness Jesus offers through the cross. But there is another sense in which we embrace God's invitation and calling, and it's tied to the word “worthy”.

*We constantly pray for you, that our God may make you **worthy** of His calling.* What does this mean? If you look up the word “worthy” in the dictionary, you are likely to find the companion word “deserving”—both words carry the connotation that someone has earned something by effort or virtue.

But Paul must mean something different here because his other writings leave no doubt; no one makes their way to God on the basis of their own purity or self-effort. It is because of grace—the undeserved mercy of God—that we are invited into relationship with God; all that we receive from Him is pure gift.²

So how are we made worthy of our new status when we clearly

¹ Ephesians 5:1-2; Colossians 1:13-14;

² Ephesians 2:8-9.

haven't done anything to deserve it? Let me try to draw an analogy.

Analogy: the most fitting way to celebrate a gift is to unwrap it and put it to use. Imagine with me that you are a parent of a young girl who is now old enough to be given her first big-girl-bike. It's pink (of course), it has a shiny silver bell, with streamers flowing from the handle bars. When your daughter sees it she squeals with delight.

When you pick her up from school that afternoon, you overhear her talking to her friends about her new bike. That night she calls her grandparents to share the exciting news. She snaps a picture of her bike and prints out two copies; one is pinned to the bulletin board in her room, the other is pinned to the back of her jacket—in a way, she brings her bike with her wherever she goes. She loves her bike.

But within a few weeks, you notice something strange. Although she talks incessantly about her bike, she's never actually rides it; it sits in the garage gathering dust. A gift is meant to be unwrapped and put to use—to cherish the bike is to ride it.

To cherish God's calling is to live with Him, for Him, and like Him. What Paul is saying is this, *if you've been saved by Jesus, then walk in His way.* If you are a child of God, your life should bear His resemblance. If you've been rescued from the dominion of darkness, then live as children of the light—have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.

We live worthy of His calling as we participate in God's purpose for this generation. *Will you live worthy of His calling?* Let's move on to the second movement in vs. 11.

2. Movement Two: *We constantly pray for you...that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.*

Here Paul employs a common Hebraic literary device whereby the second phrase is used to explain the first. Let me read it again with a simple nuance: “ *we constantly pray...that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness [that is] every deed prompted by faith.*”

Paul is saying two things simultaneously: (1) faith is more than belief in propositional truths about God; and (2) a part of the Spirit's work within is to prompt us to participate in God's purposes for this generation.

This prayer for the Thessalonians was a prayer for integration—the integration between faith and deeds, between being and doing, between identity and calling. This morning I want to see if I can offer you a physical analogy of this integration by making use of a much beloved childhood pastime—I'm talking about the wonderful world of Lego.

Analogy (Lego): by a show of hands how many of you played with Lego when you were younger? And how many of you had children so that you could continue playing with Lego (Andrew Smith)?

Lego is all about integration. You buy a box filled with hundreds of pieces, and upon first inspection these pieces appear completely unrelated. But the box comes with a set of instructions, outlining step by step how these various pieces integrate to form one whole.

Now let me relate the Lego to our lives. We've made the mistake of thinking that we can separate our lives into nice, neat, separate, categories. We speak of work, school, home, church, and entertainment as though they are unrelated to one another, as though the one sphere has nothing to do with the other. This way of thinking leads to disintegration.

When it comes to faith, I've heard people say that what they believe about Jesus should have no bearing on what they do with their body. I've heard other people say that that what they believe about Jesus should have no bearing on what they do with their time, their money, and their talents. I say, *show me how you live and I'll tell you what you believe.*

The division between what we believe and how we live is a disintegration of what it means to be truly human. True faith always results in alignment with God's purposes—this is the work of the Holy Spirit within a life, within a family, within a church. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Paul is praying for the integration between faith and deeds, being and doing, identity and calling—your leadership here at North Shore Alliance is praying this same prayer for you. There is joy and fulfilment that comes with an integrated Christian life, but there is another purpose for this integration and we discover this purpose in the third movement of Paul's prayer. Let's turn our attention to verse 12.

³ c.f. Matthew 5:13-16.

3. Movement Three: *“We pray this—that you may be worthy of His calling, and, that He may fulfill every act prompted by your faith—so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

You might think that the small, individual, deeds, prompted by your faith, don't add up to much and don't make much of a difference. But think about the multiplication factor of person by person, prompted by the Spirit, living in alignment with God's purposes. Who we are, what we believe, and how we live becomes a part of the mosaic that ultimately reveals Christ.

Jesus said, *“let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*³ The integration of faith and deeds results in God glory being revealed—people get a glimpse of Jesus Christ.

illus: Last Winter, Dave Sattler and I sat down with the chief planner for the City of North Vancouver. Our purpose in the meeting was to join in the conversation regarding the property surrounding our church. As you may be aware, the city is deciding what to do with Harry Jerome Rec. Centre, Mickey McDougall Rec. Centre, and Norseman Field.

At one point in the conversation, the chief planner asked us to share our thoughts about our city—*where are you trying to make an impact for the good of the city?* Dave and I began to talk about some of our partnerships with local high schools, the North Shore Community

Christmas Dinner, and our vision for safe, affordable, housing for the most vulnerable in our community.

After we had finished talking, the chief planner turned to us and said something that Dave and I are still talking about. He said, “*There are a lot of churches in North Vancouver—I see their signs everywhere I go— but they don’t do anything for the good of our city. But your church...I keep hearing stories about all that you’re doing in our city, and I want you to know that we will do all we can if you ever decide to redevelop your property.*” It was a profound moment, one that further convinced me that our church is moving in the right direction.

We have a diverse church community—young and old, rich and poor, male and female, Latinos, Africans, Asians, Persians, Caucasians—and together we have committed to following Jesus, to seeking healing together, and to bringing the good news of Jesus across the North Shore and around the world. When we live an integrated Christian life, people take notice; it is Jesus they’re encountering.

The last three weeks we’ve been saying that each of you has been designed to bear fruit that will last, fruit that will draw attention to God and bring blessing to others. God has led each of you through experiences, given you skills, talents, and passions, all of which makes you a gift from God to others. My dear people, we need what God has placed within you—so bring your gifts, your passions, and your experiences, and come and be a part of what God is doing in our midst.

Will you serve God’s purpose in your family, in your neighbourhood, in our church, and city?

As I wrap up this teaching series on serving, I want to take a few moments to speak about the vision of our church. Perhaps you’ve recently joined our church community, and you may be wondering what kind of church we are, and, by the grace of God, the kind of church we intend to become.

As I think about the vision of North Shore Alliance, 4 images come to mind—a **home**, a **hospital**, a place to **apprentice**, and an **airport**.

The word “**home**” evokes images of shelter, safety, shared meals, and family relationships—a home provides us with a place to belong. Our church is like a *home*—we offer people a place to belong. God has invited all people join His family, and this invitation finds physical expression in and through our community.

We regularly invite people into an experience of family through age level ministries, through small groups, through church wide gatherings, and service opportunities. In a good home, people give and receive love, individuals are valued and celebrated, forgiveness is practiced, and everyone makes a contribution to the common good. NSA provides this kind of place (people) to belong to.

The word “**hospital**” evokes images of crisis, sickness, and need—we go to a hospital when our body breaks down. NSA is like a *hospital* in that we provide a place for people who are experiencing brokenness of body, mind, heart, and relationships. God loves the world and He demonstrated this love by sending His Son to rescue, to heal, and to restore humanity. And we are invited us to participate in His work of healing.

Every Sunday we provide prayer ministry opportunities where people can seek healing. We are providing environments where people can journey through issues like mental illness, addiction, rejection, loss of a loved one, or divorce. We are also providing settings where people who are marginalized can experience love, support, and practical help.

The word “**apprentice**” evokes an image of learning on the job, growth, change, and development. If you have put your faith in Jesus, you have become a disciple—an apprentice in training—and the goal is to one day know what He knew, say what He said, and do what He did. Here at North Shore Alliance, we are committed to providing environments where people can grow in their knowledge and experience of Jesus.

We are committed to teaching people to think biblically, to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, and practice the spiritual disciplines. We are committed to equipping people for works of ministry through the discovery of spiritual gifts, and, creating opportunities for service. We are actively developing lay leaders and future missionaries to join in God’s kingdom work.

The word “**airport**” evoke images of new places, new people, and new adventures. Not many people think of an airport as a destination, instead, an airport functions as a launching pad—the airport is the hub from which we are sent out. NSA is like an *airport* in that we gather together and then we are sent out on mission. Jesus made it clear that love for God and love for neighbour always go hand in hand—this has been a part of our church’s DNA from our early beginnings in Horseshoe Bay right up until our present at 23rd and St. Georges.

We deliberately employ a relational strategy of evangelism in order to reach family, friends, and neighbours. While we are equipping people to share about Jesus, we are also building intentional bridges into the community through Coffee Time, CityFest, school BBQ’s, Community Christmas Dinner, SummerJam, and Flo Soccer Camps. We are also actively cultivating partnerships with missionaries—locally and globally—to bring the good news of Jesus across the street and around the world.

We believe that we have been placed in our present location by God’s design. The Lonsdale corridor functions something like an ancient marketplace; it is the place where food, business, recreation, entertainment, and neighbourhood meets. We believe that God chose our present location—one block east of Lonsdale—so that we could live out our mission in the centre of the marketplace.

North Shore Alliance has embraced its calling for over 65 years; these days we’re seeking to be a home, a hospital, a place to apprentice, and an airport—we have enjoyed 27 years of fruitful ministry on this site, and by the grace of God the next 27 years will be even more fruitful.

Here’s the question: *Where is God asking you to step out of the bleachers and into the action? Will you be a part of serving God’s purpose in your family, in your neighbourhood, in our church, and city?* May the Spirit fill us, may the name of Jesus be glorified, and may the Father’s purposes come to pass in our generation. Amen.

Worship—*Be Thou My Vision*
Benediction