

“Employing Your Experience”

Text: Job 10:8 and selected

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Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

Rev. Chris Gelini

Job 10:8 says “*God’s hands formed me and shaped me.*” This is the verse we’ve been using as our theme verse in this six week series on “You are SHAPed for Significance”

- Review S-H-A-P

Today, I want to wrap up this series, by looking at “E” in your SHAPE, your **Experiences**; how God has customized the experiences you’ve had to make you, you. You have been shaped by many different experiences. Some of them have been your choice but many of them were beyond your control.

- There are family and relational experiences. Obviously, people have tremendous influence in our lives. People say, “You’re just like ...”
- There are educational experiences – the schools, the books, the seminars, the training you’ve gone through have all helped shape you.
- There are spiritual experiences – meaningful times with God, times of commitment, often in a time of crisis. Those experiences have shaped you.
- Vocational experiences – your career, your job.
- And the painful experiences. All of these – even painful experiences.

Remember the story of Joseph from Genesis in the Bible. He was a man who had everything go wrong for him the first half of his life.

- He was betrayed by his brothers.
- He was sold into slavery.
- He was taken to a foreign country.
- He was sold to a master.
- He was falsely accused of rape.
- He was put in prison.

His life was all downhill the first half of his life. Yet, later at the end of his life, he could say to his brothers, *Genesis 50:20*, “*You intended to harm me but God intended it for good.*”

God has a personal plan for your life. God made you for a purpose and He has a plan for your life – He has uniquely designed experiences in your life which are both personal and purposeful. God has a purpose in your experiences. There are three purposes for your experiences:

1. TO TEACH US TO TRUST GOD

- A. 2 Corinthians 1:9, “... *But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*” You’re never going to know that God is all you need until He’s all you have. Sometimes God knocks out the props from underneath you. Everything falls flat and things don’t go the way you wanted

them to go. You'll never know God is all you need until He's all you've got. God allows experiences to teach you that He is trustworthy.

- J.D.

2. TO BUILD CHARACTER

A. You don't grow character by reading about it in a book. You grow character by experiencing it, by making right choices when you're tempted to do the wrong thing. Romans 5:4, "*We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*" Suffering actually builds character in our lives.

- Chris & depression

3. OUR EXPERIENCES ACCOMPLISH GOD'S PURPOSE

A. There's a purpose behind it. For instance, Paul was taken prisoner to Rome. He was taken prisoner falsely, hand cuffed, in a shipwreck on the way to Rome. Then he was jailed in a dark, dungeon jail. He was chained to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day. One of Caesar's own guards was chained to Paul 24 hours a day. Yet in spite of all that, Paul says in Philippians 1:12, "*Whatever has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*" He says, "Yes it's tough on me right now but there's a greater purpose behind it." What was that greater purpose? One, he was getting to witness to a captive audience. There was a guard chained to him every day and as soon as that guard went off duty he went back to Caesar's inner palace and shared what he heard with others. History tells us that in a matter of a few years there were actually members of Caesar's own family who had become believers. Where had they heard about it? "*What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*"

B. Hear this. There are many experiences in your life that you're not going to understand here on earth. When you get to heaven they're going to make sense.

Our lives are full of experiences, good and bad. I want to talk with you now about how to make the most of your experiences here on earth.

Experiences can make you bitter or they can make you better. It's your choice. You get to choose whether the experience will make you bitter or better. There are three steps you can take that will help you make the most of the experiences of life.

1. EXAMINE YOUR EXPERIENCES

- Examine your experiences. Look at them and take some time to review them. Think about your life. Don't just live it.
- The question you want to ask is, What really happened in my life in that circumstance, that experience? For instance, don't just say, "That job was a good experience." Ask yourself, "What aspects of that job were a good experience for me?" That's a good clue about what you ought to do in the future. Look behind the experience whether bad or good. What was it that

- didn't work in that experience? What was it that I didn't enjoy? What was it that I did wrong? You examine your experiences.
- C. Galatians 3:4, *"Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing?"*
- D. A very practical thing you can do to aid your personal spiritual growth and your success in life is to get a journal and keep a journal of the lessons you've learned. You ask "What did I learn from that?" "What was God teaching in that experience?" and you write it down. Why? Because I don't want to have to relearn those lessons. Examine the lessons you learned.

2. UTILIZE THE EXPERIENCES OF OTHERS.

- A. Tap into them. Get yourself into a network and learn from other people. The average person in life learns from others. The wise person learns from the experiences of others.
- Bob Munger
- B. Proverbs 27:17, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."* How do you learn from others? Learn to ask the right questions. That's the secret. You can learn from anybody if you just know the right questions to ask. If you ask questions, you can pull it out of people. God not only intentionally plans experiences in your life, but He also brings people into your life for a purpose so that you can learn from them. The people that were and are around your life are intentionally there. Some of them are good examples and some of them are examples of what not to do. We learn from each other.
- C. The richest source of human experience is not just people around You, but the Bible. It is filled with thousands of years of stories and examples of people we can learn from. The Bible, because it's God's Word, always tells the truth. So when it tells us that David was a man after God's own heart, it also says he committed adultery. When it says he was a great leader and writer of songs, it also tells us his family fell apart. Why? Because the Bible tells the truth about people.
1. If you want a graduate course in life, immerse yourself in the Bible. Learn from the experiences of Abraham, Moses, David, the disciples and others by studying this book.
- D. Always use God's word to judge experience. That's very important. Our own experience can be misleading, misinterpreted, misunderstood. It can be an illusion. But you have to use something that is reliable. A mark of maturity is this: if I have an experience that contradicts what God's Word says I'm going to choose what God's Word says over my experience because I would be wrong. If I set up myself and say, "I experienced this!" even though the Bible says the exact opposite, then what I'm saying is my experience is more legitimate and reliable than God. You then set yourself up as God.
- Man who wants to leave his wife.
- When the Bible says the exact opposite what does that say about your experience? Your experience is coming from the wrong source, that's what's happening.

3. EMPLOY YOUR EXPERIENCES TO ENCOURAGE AND BUILD UP OTHER PEOPLE.

- A. Use your experiences for the good of other people. If you have all those experiences stockpiled in your mind and nobody benefits from them, what's the value of them?
- B. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *"Encourage one another and build each other up."*
Where do we find a network of people who will encourage, build up and help other people? The church. The Bible says, Titus 2, that the older women are to use their experience to train and encourage and help younger women. In the same chapter, it says that older men who are more experienced in life, in business and family, are to use their experience and wisdom to teach and train and encourage younger men. That's what it's all about. God wants you to use your experiences to help other people. It's a critical need today.
- Help widows & 12 steps
 - How many men would like to have that kind of relationship with another more experienced male? Women?

God has given you your SHAPE for purpose and significance that your life would matter, that you would make an impact with your life that nobody else could because your experiences are unique. God is saying to us: "Use your experiences to help other people for my glory."

PRAYER

Father, I look out on these faces and I am in awe of the potential in our church. Would You help us to commit all that we have to You, realizing that we can trust You. You're also building character and You have a grand purpose and we want to be in on it. Use our gifts and abilities and experiences for the good of others, for the glory of God, and for the growth of ourselves. In Jesus' name.