

THREE MEN, SIX NAMES

But all of the books, all of the materials that I have, one way or another, are going to talk about finding your life purpose. God has something for you to do that only you can do. God has something for you to be, that only you can be. And God is a God of great diversity. Unfortunately, the church very often has limited God's diversity. We have required that people check that understanding of diversity at the door of the church when they come in, and consequently we've tried to fit people into just a few categories: like five-fold ministry or twelve spiritual gifts.

But God is much, much bigger than that. I went to an Angels' game last night, and I saw them beat the New York. There were fifty thousand people there last night, and it did not surprise me that none of those fifty thousand people looked like one another. That doesn't surprise any of us. How does God do it: with two eyes, a nose, two ears, skin, lips...? He works with so little, yet nobody looks like anybody else. And that doesn't surprise us. The only thing that surprises us is when we see somebody who resembles somebody we know. "Look, look honey, that looks like your cousin Harold!" "You're right, it *does*." The tips of our fingers – we have a skin pattern that is known as our fingerprint – we touch something, and when we touch it, we leave a mark that distinguishes us, not just from every American, not just from every person in our race, but from every other person that walks the face of the earth. And, have you ever heard of anybody's fingerprints today being mistaken for somebody's on file from twenty years ago who's passed away? My theory is that your fingerprints distinguish you from any print that ever existed. Now, how does God do that, in that small a space, putting together a skin pattern that uniquely belongs to you? He's the God of diversity.

But beyond that, we've all watched movies, and it's not so much a current practice because of technology, but in the past, if you're watching a movie where somebody escaped from a POW camp, or from a prison, and they didn't know what they were going to do, somebody eventually said, "Well, let's get the dogs." And suddenly somebody would appear, being dragged by a snarling group of German Shepherds, and they would bring out a blanket or some piece of clothing that had been close or next to the person that had escaped, and the dogs would "grrrrr," and they'd sniff it up, and even though there were a whole lot of other people standing around those dogs, they would take off following the trail of the scent that they had picked up off of that blanket or that piece of clothing. Oh, we are distinctive, down to our very aroma – and some of you can say *AMEN!*

So God is the God of diversity. There never has been anybody like you. God truly threw away the mold, when he made you. But do you know what your purpose *is*? It's hard for many people to talk about it, because, it's not *polite*. We don't want to talk about *ourselves*. It's not the *Christian* thing to do.

But it is essential that at some point we determine who it is that God created us to be. And when I did give this message – I'm not going to do the exact same message –

twelve years ago in Pismo Beach, California, I thought it was a seminar, that I would do once or twice and put to rest, and move on to other things. But for twelve years I haven't been able to move on. In fact, up until two and a half years ago, whenever I would go out and teach on purpose it was a hobby; it was a supplement to what I was doing; it was a diversion from my day-to-day job. But for the last two and a half years it has been a consuming passion. It has led me to surrender the two paid positions I had at that time, to go out and do what it is that I'm doing here today.

I never lack for invitations – not only because only people want to hear and talk about purpose, but because God wants me to talk about it. So that's why I'm here this morning. And I want to *confront* you, perhaps for the first time—or perhaps it's not the first time if you've heard me before—but I want to confront you with the truth that you have something to do that only you can do. Christianity is not a spectator sport. It is not something where we sit back, and buy a season or a lifetime pass, to be able to come and go as we please, and watch other people entertain us. Christianity is something we're to get involved in. God has something for you to do. And the world is waiting for you to do it or to be it: what it is that you are supposed to do, and what it is that you are supposed to be.

Happy Fathers' Day to all of our fathers, by the way. Let me extend my best wishes for a happy day to all the families. My thoughts are with you. Unfortunately, last Monday, I had to go to Baltimore and do the eulogy for my best friend. He was fifty-one, and passed away unexpectedly. Last Sunday we were going to celebrate his son's graduation from high school. Instead, we buried the father on Monday – a great man, who knew the Lord. Those kind of events only give me more urgency in what I'm doing. We are not guaranteed tomorrow. We must seize today in the will and the purpose of God. We cannot be saying, "One day I'd like to do this," or "One day I'd like to do that." Go for it. Do what it is that's in your heart to do. Don't just watch somebody embrace and engage the will of God, but do it.

Let's go to Acts chapter six. We're going to jump around a little bit. Acts 6:1 – "In those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food." Very quickly: this verse contains good news and bad news. The church was growing but there was an ethnic problem in the church. This is ten years after Jesus had ascended to heaven, and people weren't getting along. If it happened then, it shouldn't surprise us when it happens now. Any growing church, any church that is drawing people, is going to have problems.

And how did the apostles address this problem? The underlying theme here is that the people were putting the problem at their feet, and saying, "What are you going to do about it?" Nothing's changed in two thousand years. You know, "This is what we pay *you* to do!" (Not well, by the way...) But you know, "This is what we pay you to *do!*" Verse two says, "So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'Uh-uh! We're not going there.'" (Yes, I know, you're looking, "Where? Where is that? It's not in my version." I added that.) "So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said,

‘It would not be right’” (Now I present to you, if something is not right that makes it wrong. And there are some things for you, no matter how *good* they are, no matter how *noble* they are, they’re the wrong thing. Now, helping widows was something the church had determined to do. But the apostles said it would not be right; it would be *wrong*) “for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” Verse three, “Brothers, choose seven men from among you, who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them, and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

“Prayer and the ministry of the word.” Let’s say that together: “Prayer and the ministry of the word.” Now that sounds real religious: real spiritual. You know, they were praying, reading people. And we should, you know, get up early in the morning, or so we’re told, and spend an hour here, and spend an hour there – it sounds so idyllic; it sounds so spiritual. It seldom *happens*. But at least it’s something that we pay lip service to. But they weren’t talking about the normal devotional life of the believer!

When they prayed, buildings shook. What is it that you do, that when you do it, you shake the foundations of where you’re doing it? When they ministered the word, thousands of people came to know the Lord. What is it that you do, that when you do it, it seems that you attract a crowd, you touch people, something happens out of the ordinary? It can be so second-nature; we are looking right through who we are to some *standard* that we *think* we have to be in order to be spiritual. Consequently, one of the most difficult things in identifying your purpose is to look at the things that you do best, that come naturally to you, that are second nature.

But you must do that, because it is a fantasy to pursue who it is that you *think* God wants you to be. It’s a fantasy to pursue who somebody *else* is, that you’ve seen functioning, at some level of anointing or success. The only way to please God, the only way to function in success in the purpose of God, is to be true to who God made you to be.

They said, “We’ll turn this responsibility over to them, and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” See, if you pray, and you shake a building – Please, please, pray as often as possible. If you can gather a crowd and lead people to Jesus – Please, please, don’t feel pressure to run the nursery ministry for the next three years. (Now, take your turn; be faithful. If you’ve got children, and the rules are that you have to take your turn – take your turn.) But don’t feel under pressure to *be* something you’re not or *do* something that you don’t do well. Because it will keep you from doing *the* thing, or the things, that you do best.

You see, I was a pastor. I was in Orlando, Florida. I was evangelizing Mickey and Minnie. We were making progress! I had them *this* close to tithing. These mice – they were going to turn the Kingdom around! But I wasn’t happy. I had been born and raised Catholic, and if you were Catholic, to serve the Lord you really had to be a priest. So that was my objective: to be a priest, or do pastoral things. And the only way I

thought to *do* pastoral things was to be a pastor. But I wasn't happy. And it was in 1993, when I resigned the pastorate, that I sensed the peace and the presence of God, because I freed myself from a figment of my own imagination – that if I was going to serve God, I had to do certain things. Now, when I resigned the pastorate in 1993, that did not get me out of church work (although I, I tried... I begged the Lord to send me to IBM... But He didn't hear me.) But it didn't *free* me from church work. But it freed *God* to fashion and shape a ministry and opportunities that were perfectly suited to who He created me to be.

My brother-in-law's a bowler, a very good bowler, and he has a custom bowling ball. I mean, his fingers fit in exactly. It's shaped to his hand. It's not a particularly great example, but that's how I feel. I mean, when I hold what I'm doing, it feels *good* in my hand. It just slips in right. I don't always get a strike, but at least I've got a good handle on what it is that I'm supposed to be doing. Do you?

Let's skip down to verse seven: "The word of God spread." God's ways work! I mean, you may go through seasons where you're knocking your head against the wall, but it's not to be a way of life. There are results from what I do because God does it with me and through me. The word of God spread. The apostles knew what they were doing, they said "No" to the wrong activities, they said "Yes" to the right ones. God, who is more motivated to build His church than we are, worked through them, and the word of God spread.

Now the title of my message this morning – we're going to move very quickly so please turn back to John chapter one – is "Three Men, Six Names." Three men, and six names. There are a number of examples in the Bible of people whose names were changed, or who changed their names. We're going to look at three of those examples, and examine them in the context of purpose. We will look at three elements that can line up and help you know what it is that you were created to do. My purpose, and I share in my books and the seminars I do, is "to bring order out of chaos." I found that phrase in the midst of a failed business opportunity – it was painful; I was in debt and was begging God, trying to twist His arm to somehow save the business, and it didn't work. God helped me pay off all the bills. I did not declare bankruptcy. But in the midst of crying out for God to save the business, God spoke to me about what my purpose is.

Now some of you say, "How do you know when God speaks to you?" Ohhh, you know. I mean, God's always broadcasting. My problem is not that I can't hear, it's just that He's on FM, and sometimes I'm tuned over to AM; but God's always broadcasting. God's a great communicator. He knows every language. He speaks through circumstances. He can speak through somebody who knows Him, speak through somebody who doesn't know Him.

When I was in Orlando, I would drive to my office, and I don't like to ever stop, so I take back roads, and even if it's twenty miles longer, just so long as I'm moving. So I'd always go the same way (Some of you are smiling – you know what I'm talking about.), and I'd go past the Embassy Suites hotel, in Altamonte Springs, just north-west of Orlando. For a while, as I'd drive by, they were renovating the hotel, on the outside,

and they had equipment and trucks. And they had a high-lift on a fire truck, and they would take that high lift up and work on the high areas. For about three or four mornings, I drove by; they were there.

And on one of the mornings, as I drove by, something terrible had just happened. The fire truck was on its side. There was stucco, mud and paint and equipment strewn all over the cars in the parking lot, and one car in particular had been crushed as the fire truck had turned over and hit that car. I got out to inquire what had happened. It turns out that the man who had extended the lift on that fire truck forgot to put out the stabilizing feet on the truck. The truck teetered and fell over, and he was in it. Now, there was a basket, a waist-high basket, and when he started to go down, he ducked down, held on, hit the car, and came crawling out. And all his co-workers went running over to him, amazed that he was able to crawl out. They said, you know, “Are you okay?.” He said, “I think I’m all right.” They said, “Well why don’t you sit down. What do you want to do? Do you want us to call your family? Do you want to call an ambulance? Do you want to go to the hospital? What do you want to *do*?” And his answer was: “I want to go to church on Sunday.” Now, someplace between the top of the hotel and the hood of the car, God spoke to him! As I said, God is a great communicator.

“*How do you know? How ...*” He knew! He knew! You know! If you want to know, you know. If you commit to do *what* it is before you *hear* it, oh, you’ll hear. God’s a great communicator. He speaks your language.

Three men, six names. First man. Verse forty of John one: “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and had followed Jesus. The first Andrew did was to find his brother Simon, and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah, the Christ.’ And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas’” (that’s the Aramaic translation, which when translated into Greek is ‘Peter,’ which means ‘Rock’).

Three men, six names. The first name is a man by the name of Simon, and when he comes to Jesus, Jesus changed his name. We see another account of this in Matthew sixteen, when Jesus asks, “Who do men say that I am?” Peter speaks up. And Jesus says, “You’re Simon Bar-Jonah, Simon son of John, but from now on your name is Peter.” A part of understanding your purpose is divine revelation. It is a heavenly vision, as Paul referred to it in Acts 26:19.

And Paul understood something of a revelation from God, because, known as the Pharisee Saul, he was on the Damascus road, and in Acts 26, over two decades after that event happened, he is standing before King Agrippa, and he tells him his testimony, and in verse nineteen of Acts twenty-six says, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” God is more motivated for you to fulfill your purpose than you are. He wants you to know exactly who you are and what it is He wants you to do. But a lot of the evidence He sends us, we discard. We’re ambivalent. “I love music, but there’s some music, I’m not sure if it’s Christian or not, so, I’m going to throw out all of my love for music, and

rather than go into any mine field at all, I'm just not going to walk." Evidence. Things that God has shown us: it is so easy to look *past* that evidence.

I told the story yesterday in the seminar of a church I went into, about twice this size, with decorations like nothing I had ever seen. I complimented them and the people said, "Well, it's the pastor's wife. Her name is Georgia. She does this." So when she came up that night after the service, I complimented her. There was a group of women around her, and I said, "You really have an eye for decorations." She said, "Well, you know what I really love doing – I really love going into people's homes, and helping them use what they already have, to decorate their world." I said, "Wow, that sounds like purpose!" She said, "Welllll." And the women around her are saying, "Oh, Dr. Stanko, she's fabulous. Gifted. Talented." But she said to me, "You know, it just doesn't sound very spiritual." That's how we can feel about our purpose: It just doesn't sound very spiritual. "I fix broken things. I listen to people who need a listening ear." But it just doesn't sound very spiritual.

So I said, "Georgia, I understand. I'm not trying to say that *is* your purpose, but if that's the understanding you have, why don't you walk in it and treat it with a little more attention?" So she put a little flier together, a little brochure, and the last three years God just continues to open doors for her. She doesn't really have to market or promote. People call her; can you come over; when she gets over, she helps them decorate; she prays; she leads them to the Lord. And her husband, the pastor, called me a few months ago, and said now a contract has opened up to her to a chain of women's homes in the area where they live in Arkansas. He said, "We've been trying to get into these homes for ten years to do Bible studies, to do concerts. We couldn't get in. Now my wife, in embracing her purpose, has a contract to go decorate the apartments and all these homes for the women. She's bringing them to church. She's leading them to the Lord..." He said, "She's no longer following me – I'm following her." ... The power of purpose. And it all started with her embracing the thing she loved to do.

Why are you looking to sing like Amy Grant? Guess what – you never will! But you don't have to. We don't have to be like anybody else. If we're good enough for God, shouldn't we be good enough for ourselves?

Here's Simon, brought by his brother Andrew. And when he comes, Jesus gives him a new name. God wants to help you define who you are. But we've got to recognize it for what it is. In Revelation 2:17 it says, "He who has an ear, let him *hear*" what God is *speaking*. He's knocking, at the door of your heart. It says, "Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes ..." Overcomes what? Overcomes the inertia that is in our own hearts, that keeps us from going on, the hesitancy to say, 'This is what God has spoken to me.' "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna."

God can give you food that nobody else can see. Jesus was at the well, and the disciples, in John 4, went to get food. By the time they got back, he said, "Never mind. I'm not hungry. I have food to eat that you know naught of." In one of the temptations,

Jesus responded to the devil and said, “Man doesn’t live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” And I ask people, in trying to find their purpose, “What is it that you do that you forget what time it is? What do you do? Is there *anything* that can make you forget to take a meal?” If there is, then that’s a very strong indication you are doing something that is connected or tied to your purpose.

But it goes on to say, not only God give some hidden manna, but “I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” Can God show you something about yourself that doesn’t mean anything to anybody else, but is something special to you? Oh, yes he can! And how often, when I’m dealing with purpose issues, and when people get close to it, they start to cry. And as soon as they do, I know we’re very, very close. Because when you realize that the God of the universe knows *your* name, and is giving you something to do that only you can do, it’s hard not to weep. As *simple* as it is, it is profound – because it’s coming from the throne of God. And He hands you a white stone, with your name on it, that is known only to you and to Him.

Out of that failed business opportunity, God handed me a white stone. I said, “What is this?” I looked down, and it said “Order Out Of Chaos.” And for twenty years, I’ve never looked for a job. I’ve never been unemployed a day in my life. Opportunities always come to me, and they’re always the same: they always need who I am. Again, God is more motivated for you to know your purpose, than you are. Ask Him – and *count* on divine revelation: a special message from heaven, that God can work through and get to you in such a way that it’s meaningful. That’s the first name: Simon, who became Peter.

Now let’s go back to Acts, and let’s look at Acts 4. We want to look at the second man, and the second name change. You see, not only is God trying to communicate with us directly. Very often he sends people to us. And, when I sit down and work with people on purpose issues, I ask them, “What compliments do you receive on a regular basis, that you tend to dismiss as not very significant?” Invariably, there are things that individuals, that *you* have been told throughout your life, that you don’t think are very special. Because, again, they’re so second-nature to you. “Man, you know all kinds of music! You just, any song that’s on the radio, you know.” And we don’t think anything of that.

I shared the story yesterday of the syndicated radio host, Delilah, a believer who’s on in most cities in the United States, who took a *love* for music, and an affinity and of knowledge, that she had of music even before she knew the Lord. And today, people call her from all over the country, and she prays for them – this is on national radio, regular stations, rock stations, soft rock – calling her, and she says, “Hold, I want to pray for you.” She sneaks in Christian music. She took a love for music, that I’m sure people had commented about, her knowledge and her understanding, and she turned it into a ministry.

And here, in Acts chapter four, is the second man: his name is Joseph. We don't know him by Joseph. In the great receiving line of heaven, when we are being introduced to the heroes of the faith, we will not be introduced to him by the name of Joseph, the name his father gave him. Instead, we will be introduced to him according to the nickname that the apostles gave him. Because in verse 36 it says: "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Bar-nabas, the Son of Encouragement." This man didn't have a *gift* of encouragement. This man spent day and night encouraging people. I'm really not interested in what your gifts are. Gifts are hobbies. Gifts are things that come and go. They're tools in your toolbox. You take them out, and you use them according to the need. But your gifts are not your purpose. They help you *fulfill* your purpose. And people say to me, "Well, I give mercy," or "I encourage." And I say, "That's fine. How often do you do it?" Do discouraged people seek you out on a public bus, and start to tell you their story? If that is, then we'll talk about that as your purpose. But if it's a hobby, if it's something you do once a week, it's a gift.

But here was a man so consumed with encouraging people. And this very story, is of him selling a field, and bringing to the apostles to *encourage* them in the work that they were doing. He was a giver, but they didn't call him Son of Giving. Paul said he was an apostle, but they didn't call him "Son of Apostleship." He was prophetic, but they didn't call him "Son of Prophecy." But Joseph was so consumed with encouraging people, that they renamed him the Son of Encouragement.

What hints have people been giving you? What prophetic messages has God been sending to you, even by people who don't know Him, that continually confirm who it is that you are, and what it is that you do?

So now we have the second man: Joseph became Barnabas. Now *he* didn't change his name. God, as he gave Simon the new name, Peter, didn't rename him. Other people called him the Son of Encouragement. And it stuck! We don't *know* him as Joseph. How many people tell me, "I never even *saw* this! I've read right by it, and *always* referred to him as Barnabas – had no idea that it wasn't even his real name."

Who are you? You see, sometimes we can resist what people are trying to tell us...because we don't like it? A lot of people don't want their purpose, because it makes them too accountable. They would be a little bee, going from flower to flower. Who's to say they're right; who's to say they're wrong? Do a little of this, a little of that, little this. "Yes, I've heard all that. I know people have always said, when they come to my home, it feels very special; they always sense the presence of the Lord. But that can't be a ministry." Oh, really? "That can't be a purpose." Really? You've heard it all your life. People have said, "You could take ordinary recipes and make them special." But that's not very spiritual. So you look right past that, hoping to be a prophet. Oh, really? It's not *good* enough for you.

We don't want to be that accountable. We don't want to focus. We don't want to see what God could do. Because we may *fail*. Because of the *uncertainty* of it. We can be so *concerned* about missing the will of God that we miss the will of God. So

concerned about doing the wrong thing, we do the *no* thing. My goodness! And we dismiss what other people have said because... “Well, you’re good in the kitchen.” “Well, my mother taught me how to cook.” Oh, it’s deeper than that. A lot of mothers taught a lot of sons and daughters to cook. It didn’t always work out, but for you it *worked*. But you wrestle with that. It’s got to be more than that. Why? ... Why? ... If it’s good enough for God – shouldn’t it be good enough for you?

Now, for some of you this morning, you need to just rest. You say, “Well, I haven’t heard from God.” I was with a man in San Antonio this week. He said, “I’m fasting, and I need to hear from the Lord, and I haven’t heard from Him yet. I lost my job,” he said, “and five people have come to me and said, ‘We’re standing with you; we’re going to finance whatever God says to do,’ but I’m waiting to hear from the Lord!” I said, “Brother, you sound to me like the old story of the storm that came in, and the police came and knocked on the door and said, ‘You need to evacuate,’ and they didn’t go because they were waiting on God, and then the water rose and the rowboat came, and they rowed up the house and said, ‘Get in and we’ll take you;’ he said, ‘no, I’m waiting on the Lord – God’s going to save me,’ and then they had to go up on the roof, and the helicopter came, and threw him a line, and they said, ‘Come with us,’ and he said, ‘No, no – God is going to save me.’ And then they drowned and went to heaven, and said to the Lord, ‘Why didn’t you save me?’ And the Lord said, ‘I sent you a policeman, a rowboat, and a helicopter. What more did you want?’”

Some of us want ... This man is trying to hear from the Lord, and God is sending people to him, to say “We’re standing with you,” but, that wasn’t good enough. We want a *direct* revelation. But if we got it, could we handle it? Some of you are crying out to know the will of God. God’s sending people, and you say, “Well, they just know me. They’re only familiar with me.” But think about it. There are some people who just met you saying the same thing.

Second person, fourth name: Joseph became Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement. What is it that you *do*, that when you do it, people have something to say? Do you have the faith to walk in it? Do you have the faith to receive it as from the Lord?

Now, finally, let’s go to Acts thirteen. We’ll look at the third man; we’ll look at the sixth name.

(About nine months ago I was teaching someplace, and I started to talk about a woman I knew while I was in Mobile, Alabama. She was married to one of the pastors, and we were fairly close. At one of the first seminars I ever did, I think it was about 1987, Nancy was in the front row. I taught five consecutive Monday nights, and Nancy just sat on the front row and absorbed everything I said – you can sometimes notice that dynamic when you’re speaking.

At the end of the five weeks, Nancy, whose husband, while he was pastoring, he was also in construction, part-time employment, they didn’t have a lot of money, she had

five children, one was a babe in arms who she had at a couple of the Monday night sessions, when she walked out, I remember Nancy saying to me, “You know, I love to sing to my children. And I wonder if other children would want to hear me sing to them.” And so I was talking about her last fall – I realized it had been fifteen years since that seminar – so I searched her out, and I reconnected, and I wrote her and I said, “Would you please tell me your story, because I’m aware of some of it, but I want to make sure it’s accurate.”

And this is what she wrote me:

“I remember hearing you teach on purpose in your ‘Life is a Gold Mine’ seminar. At that time I was at a critical point in my faith journey. I ached for more creative expression in my life. Being the daughter of the sports editor for our local paper, writing came naturally and easy for me. I loved words and I had always loved music. Little did I realize that your seminar would be one of the things God would use to help me find the courage to believe and pursue the desires of my heart – namely, song-writing.

First, <and this is what I wanted you to see>, I had to acknowledge the desire that I wanted to write, to myself, to God, and to family and friends. Then I began to actively pursue this dream and desire one day at a time, one step at a time. I remembered the phrase, ‘Never despise small beginnings;’ maybe I heard it from you.

Now, some twelve years later, I have published more than three hundred songs; I have written twelve musicals, for children and adults; I’ve had four songs nominated for a Dove award, and created the Children’s Praise character, Miss PattyCake. The Miss PattyCake line now has six videos and two CDs, which I helped to write and create. I just finished my first book, which is a Miss PattyCake Easter story. There’s so much more, but I don’t know how much you want to hear.”

She said, “As a speaker, writer, worship leader and creative consultant, I desired to increase my speaking venues and to write several books. I now have my own publishing company, Mother’s Heart Music/Mother’s Heart Ministries. They both exist to nurture, inspire, and encourage all people to experience and know the love of God.)

Acts chapter thirteen, verse nine: “Then Saul, who was also called Paul...” Then Saul, who was also called Paul. Simon to Peter; Joseph to Barnabas; and now, Saul to Paul. The first one, God did: “You’re no longer Simon; you’re now Peter.” The second one, the saints did: “You’re no longer Joseph; you’re the Son of Encouragement.” But this one, Saul did. In this day, and in this context, this Pharisee from the city of Tarsus, one of the most cross-cultural cities in the Roman Empire, where the “olympic” games, the Empire Games, were held on a regular basis. This man who knew four languages. This man, who was traveling the world, even as a Pharisee, is now teamed with Barnabas, and they’re on the island of Cyprus, and he’s standing before the proconsul, and he says, “I’m no longer Saul. I’m Paul.” We don’t know him as Saint Saul. That’s the name that his father gave him. We know him by the Latin equivalent, by the name of Paul. See, one of the things Nancy said in her letter is, “I had to acknowledge to myself who I am.”

And Saul at this point and juncture of history stood before the crowd performing miracles, healing blinded eyes, striking eyes that could see with blindness, gathering crowds, speaking to them in their language... Do you realize, Paul had more rights as a Roman citizen than even his Lord, Jesus, Who, when He went to trial and was beaten, had no recourse for appeal, but this Roman citizen Saul, this man named Paul, when they laid a finger on him, when they asked him to leave town, he said, "You come yourself; I'm a Roman citizen. How dare you?" This is the most courageous act in the pursuit of purpose: when you can stand... And it's one for God to say who you are; it's another thing for people to say who you are; but when you can finally stand and say, "This is who I am"...

You see, the name Saul means "asked for; sought after." Paul, we're not sure. If it was the Latin word, it means "wonderful, counselor;" it means "spectacular." But if it's from the Hebrew root, it means "little" and "insignificant." My own opinion is that (when you saw Paul, he wasn't much to look at – by his own admission, he said, "I can't speak very profoundly."), so I think he was probably a runt. I think his family, probably, being Roman citizens, gave him two names. One was his Hebrew name, but one was this "Shorty," not much to look at, but he stood and said, "You know, I *am* Paul – I may not be much to look at but this is who I am. But it doesn't matter, really, who I am: it matters Who God is *in* me and *through* me."

There are people I meet with all over the world, so hung up on the will of God, that they can't do the will of God. "What is your purpose?" "Well, my purpose is to do whatever God wants me to do." "Well, what *does* God want you to do?" "Well, whatever it is, that's what I want to do." "Well, what is your purpose?" "Well, it's, I want to make sure, I, I don't want, uh, I." It reminds me of the movie "Coming to America," Eddie Murphy's movie.

In the beginning of the movie, he meets the woman who's been prepared all her life to be his bride. And he says, "Tell me about yourself. What kind of music do you like?" And she says, "Well I like whatever kind of music you like, Your Highness." He says, "Well, I understand that, but, like, you know, on your down times, what do *you* listen to?" She says, "Well, I would listen to whatever *you'd* want me to listen to." He says, "Okay, we'll skip that – what kind of food do you like?" She said, "I like whatever kind of food you like, Your Highness." He said, "Uh, well, uh, I know, but, but, but what kind of food do *you* like?" She says, "I, I, ... I like, whatever, will eat, whatever kind of food, you like." He said, "This is not working."

Who are you? "Well, I'm whoever God wants me to be." Who are you? "Well, I, I..., I, I'm whoever God wants me to be." Who ... are ... you? This little, diminutive man, a Jew, trained as a Pharisee, is standing on the island of Cyprus, and he says, "From now on, I'm Paul." Saint Paul. In the stained glass windows with a halo around his head and we know him as Paul, not Saul. And he went on, and next to Jesus, nobody did more to establish the New Testament church, because, he said, "This is who I am."

“I’m not a pastor.” In 1993, I said that. In 1993, I said, “I’m going to go after what it is that God wants me to do. *This is who I am.*” And people have gotten mad at me, and people have tried to define me, and people have tried to call me by certain titles, but I said “This is *who I am.*” Who are you? Simon to Peter, was direct, divine revelation. Joseph to Barnabas, was what the brothers and sisters had to say. But Saul to Paul, is who he said he was. And you’d have to say, he had some measure of success.

I can’t promise you results like we heard from Nancy. I can’t say you’ll write three hundred songs and have musicals – and that’s not really the issue. It’s not important how *much* you do. It’s just important that you do what it is that you were created to do, and leave the results to the Lord. I had a seminary professor say, “So much of maturity is understanding what it is that only God can do, and realizing what it is that only we can do.” Because very often, in immaturity, we’re trying to do what it is that only God can do, and we’re waiting on God to do what it is that only we can do.

And one of the things that only *you* can do, is have the courage to say, “This is who I am. This is who God created me to be, and it is wonderful, and it is marvelous in his eyes.” Oh, I’ve said it many times already, just in these last forty-five minutes, but I need to say it again: “If you’re good enough for God, you should be good enough for yourself.” Accept who it is, by whatever means God may choose to show you. But then please, for God’s sake, have the courage, the faith, to stand and say, “This is who I am.”

Let’s bow our heads. Just very quickly... Some of you say, “I need what Simon had – I need God to speak to me. I don’t know where to start, where to go; I’m at point one.” And God will meet you where you are, just like he met Simon and said, “You’re Peter; you’re the Rock; that’s your purpose.” And Peter always was. He had his problems, but in any time of confusion or trouble Peter was the one who stood up and said, “This is what’s going on.” He was *the man!* Now if you’re at a place where you say, “I... I need a word from the Lord (heh, heh, heh ...), you know, I’m no spiritual giant, but if somehow, if God could cut through all my hesitancy, all my apprehension, I’d like to hear something about who I am.”

If that’s you, I want to pray for you. Just raise your hand. If you’d just slip your hand up. I don’t know most of you, so you’re not going to impress me if you raise your hand or don’t raise your hand. Very good. Anybody else, just slip your hand up and put it down; that’s fine. Yep. Any more? Great, fine. Father, I count on you, as I have for the last dozen years of continuing and finalizing this message. I know, in the moments that I have, I generally stir up more questions than answers, and if it were up to me, I would feel tremendous pressure. But I don’t, Lord. I commit these who have raised their hands to you. Jesus, I pray like you did to Simon, you will do for each one who raised their hand, that you will speak to them, and clarify to them, who it is that you’ve created them to be. Help them make sense of their past. Help them make sense; help them to put the pieces of the puzzle together, that individual pieces would show no indication of what the totality is.

But, Lord, help them put it together in such a way that they can say, “Ahhh. I see.” Help them, Lord. We are counting on you. We can’t figure this out. This is not an exercise in mental gymnastics, where we can take this piece and tie it to that piece. We need light from heaven. We need what Paul called the heavenly vision. And I pray, Lord, for each one who raised their hand, that You, that You, Lord, would reveal to them what they need to know, as the Rock-solid foundation of knowing who it is that you created them to be.

Now, there’s the second group, as we close; you may be in the Saul-to-Paul stage. You need to just stand, and say, “This is who I *am*. This is who God created me to be. This is what I love. This is the essence of who I am.” And you’ve struggled with it, and you’re still going by Saul – It’s your identification with the past, and God wants you to step into the present, and say, “This ... *this* is who I am.” If that’s you, with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, I want you to just stand to your feet. I’m not going to embarrass you; I’m not calling you forward; we’re ending here – but I want to pray for you.

And I want to say that I’m standing not because I’m speaking, but because I’m saying this is where I am: I’m doing what it is that God created me to do. Other people; anybody. This is courage. This is faith. This is ... this is a tremendous step. I don’t know what God does with you from this point, but He could do what He did with Nancy; He could do what He did with Saul. You can change the world. If not *the* world, you can change *your* world, if you’ll just have the courage to say, “This is who God has created me to be.”

Anyone else? No pressure, apart from what the Lord would be directing you to do. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Some of you have a passion for children, not just your children: all children. And you just need to acknowledge that; say, “This is what makes me tick.” Thank you, Lord. Some of you have a love for learning, a love for understanding. I had a woman, nuclear scientist, in Atlanta, just refused to admit that she was a brilliant woman. Everybody else told her she was brilliant, but she refused to stand – it’s false humility to deny who God has made you to be. It’s *not* spiritual. Who are you? Do you have the courage to stand, and say “This is who I am? This is who God made me to be.”

Without belaboring it, let’s pray. Father, I thank you for each person who’s standing. Oh, may the Spirit, the same Spirit that empowered Saul to be Paul, be upon them this day. Lord, may they have greater impact than they ever thought possible: not by trying to be who they’re not, but by courageously, and in faith, standing and saying, “This is who you have made me to be.” Lord, be with each one of them; speak to them today; speak to them tonight; speak to them this week, Lord. Show them great things. Release them, Lord, to play as big as you want them to play.

And I just want to say – this is me talking, now; let’s keep right where we are – but I just want to say, for those of you who are standing, by whatever is given to me in the nature of the message, I give you permission – to be who it is that God created you to

be. I give you permission. That sounds strange, I know, but very often people are struggling with letting themselves be who it is that God created them to be. By the power vested in me, heh heh, by the Lord Jesus Christ, I say, “Go for it!” Don’t walk in anybody else’s shadow; don’t try and please anybody else but Him. If you have a love for travel, you have a love for missions, you have a love for language – whatever it is, I give you permission, to be who it is, that He’s created you to be. And I do it, in Jesus’ name. Amen.