



LIVING OUT YOUR VISION, PURPOSE AND CALLING

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DECEMBER 6, 2014

RUACH ISRAEL



Lessons from Jacob and Esau Vision, Purpose and Calling

Last week, Rabbi Rich gave a moving message where he shared a few lessons from Jacob and Esau on “living well.” I want to pick up on that theme again, but this week focus on living a life of vision, purpose and calling.

We will start by looking again at Jacob and Esau and our readings this week. To conclude, I want to share with you about a close mentor of mine who recently died from cancer.

We all know the pop Christian book title, “The Purpose Driven Life.” I think that Jacob had a purpose driven life. Although Jacob did not seem to be more any virtuous than Esau and may not have gone about his purpose in the most upright of ways, (deceiving his father and stealing from his brother) he lived life out of God’s larger promises.

Esau however, did not seem to know who he was or have a sense of his own purpose. He followed his own passions, he went off to hunt game and married the wrong women. He was hungry, so he gave away his inheritance for a bowl of soup. He then lost his father’s blessing and also lost his brother because he drove him away in a spirit of revenge.

I think a lot of people go through life with a vague sense of something they want to achieve and someone they want to become, but like Esau, have little vision or awareness of who they are and what they are called to do. So often people make major life choices based on their desires or fears, or other people’s desires and fears, rather than based on God’s vision, purpose and calling on their lives.

The result is that we accidentally trade our inheritance in the kingdom for the equivalent of a life-time supply of lentil soup.

Keeping the Target in Sight

I like the analogy that Steven Covey uses in his famous book “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”:

If you want to fly a jet from the US to Israel, but you neglect to take the time to figure out where Israel is on the map and instead just launch off into the sky hoping you will get there, the chances are like finding a needle in the hay stack. But if you know exactly where Israel is and you keep your target in sight, you will get there. The way a jet flies is sort of like the way a canoe paddles. It goes a little one way and then corrects the other way and back and forth. So in a sense, even though the jet is actually off target most of the time, you will land where you want to land because you’re keeping Israel (your vision, purpose and calling) in sight.

See, that’s what happened with Jacob through his life. To play on the analogy a bit, he kept ‘Israel’ in his sights. Yes, he went to the left and right through deceit, failure and challenges along the way, but God’s call on his life was so strong that God’s purposes were still played out. Jacob landed in Israel. He even became Israel, we might say.

We might wonder, who would take off in an airplane across the ocean without a destination? But we do this with our lives all the time, don’t we? *We launch into living without GPS coordinates and then wonder why we later crash landed somewhere in the Atlantic.*

Being Driven is not the Same Thing as Being Called

Now there are lots of motivational books out there that use phrases like, “keep the end in mind.” Those are good resources, but many of these books leave out the most important step-- *seeking after God’s calling for your life.*

Growing up, I knew that I wanted to experience purpose and meaning, but I did not even know which runway to take off from.

So I lived life. I felt a passion for music, a desire to become great and I thought that happiness lay in the conquest of my own pursuits. In high school I practiced trumpet 5 hours a day, went to the New England Conservatory and practiced 10 hours a day my freshman year, because I was driven toward success. I wanted THAT job, with the six figure salary, the prestige and the respect.

And somewhere in my 4th year of college, I crash landed.

I was driven... but I was not called.

Imagine that you want to fly to Antarctica but God is calling you to fly to Israel. But you don't listen. You plug in Antarctica and you might get there, but it won't be what you thought it was going to be like. Your successes won't bring you the kind of happiness you were hoping for.

For me, flying to Antarctica was not what it was made out to be ... so I decided to walk. Finally, God had to rescue me while I was wandering in the White Mountains, walking from Maine to Georgia.

It is not about you or your successes or failures. It's about God and what He would choose to do with your life.

Raina and I like to take time to pray for each other. And one thing we have learned how to do in our prayer team at Ruach is to pray for healing of past memories that seem to still be playing out in our lives. We were praying through a high school memory. In that memory I found out that I did not make the Senior District band. I was standing in the woods outside the school hurt, crying and angry. In prayer, I saw myself in that memory. The whole forest looked like it was filled with prisms of light. It seemed as if a figure of pure light was approaching me. It was Yeshua and I felt him say to me, *"This is not what I called you to do."*

I might have expected, "I'm with you... it's OK, you will get it next time..." But no, I heard —"This is not what I have called you to do." And that was healing, because even though I feel that God has already given me a strong and clear purpose and calling, it was a reminder that it is not about me. It is not about my successes or failures. *It's about God and what He would choose to do with my life.*

Going back to Jacob, when he's running away from his brother, we can imagine him feeling bummed out that his mother got him into this mess. Maybe he's feeling like the blessing was not legitimate because it was stolen. Maybe Jacob is feeling like a failure.

But then he has a vision with angels going up and down a stairway into heaven. It is like God was saying, "no — I have plans for you." You have a great calling. It is not about you and your brother, it's about me and the work that I am doing through you."

Living out of your calling will give you what you need to get through hard times. It gives you hope.

In our parsha this week, Jacob panicked when he found out that Esau was coming out to meet him with 400 men. Jacob assumed that Esau was going to slaughter his whole family. But he prayed to God, "listen, you told me to go back home and you told me that you would make my offspring into a great nation. If they kill me now, your purposes won't come to pass."

Jacob was still scared, but he could remind himself that he was following God's calling, that he was part of something bigger than himself.

Seek God in everything you do

And see this is why it is so important that you seek God in everything that you do, in every decision that you make.

- Where does He want you to go to school?
- Who does He want you to marry?
- Where does He want you to work?
- Some you might be asking whether he wants you to work outside the family, or take on the challenging call of being full-time at home raising and educating your children.
- Do you seek God even for how many kids He might want you to have?
- Where should you live?
- How does He want you to invest your time?
- What is the purpose that you've been given in life?
- *Who* does He want you to be?

I want to encourage you to not just think about this, but set aside some time to come up with what you feel like God is calling you for, what is His vision for your life and how are you going to live out your call? Let's not go with the default. Let's really seek God in our lives.

Because it is not about you. It's about God.

Living your Calling: Putting first things first

Once you have a good sense for your vision, purpose and calling, than you have to live it. That's where we need to be wise about how we invest our time and make sure to "put first things first." Let's look to our Besora passage Luke 4:16—22:

Yeshua is in his hometown. He attends the local synagogue and during the Torah service, he reads out loud from the scroll of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim Good news for the poor, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lords favor.

And then he says something incredible, "*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" Yeshua applies this passage to himself. It is like he is reading his personal mission statement.

What does he do right after reading this? He starts laying hands on people and healing them. "*The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.*" *Matthew: 11:5*

If you only had the next three years to change the human race, before you were going to be martyred for the sake of all humanity, how would you spend your time??

Would it have made sense for Yeshua to have just said to everyone, gather here at this time for an hour meeting and I will say the word and you all will be healed. But instead, Yeshua spent days and days healing and touching individuals, insignificant regular people, one on one. Because Yeshua's call was to begin to transform our broken world, *one heart at a time*.

And I might suggest that this is a good place for us to begin as we pray and work on our own sense of vision and calling. We need to understand that our time is a gift from God.

Your time is the greatest resource that you have to actualize God's call on your life.

I am sure you have heard this analogy. You have a jar, a few big rocks and sand. If you put the sand in first, the rocks will not fit in the jar. But if you put the rocks in first, the sand will fill in around the cracks and it all fits.

I think that if you haven't spent significant time parsing what in your life is a rock (the important things) and what is sand (less important things,) most likely you will fill your jars with sand, and then the rocks will not fit. *In other words, if you spend your precious time on the wrong priorities, you will wake up one day wondering why the most important things in life seem to be falling apart.*

Like Esau, the tendency is to focus on the urgent — what is present. But, like Jacob seemed to understand, what was right in front of him *wasn't necessarily what was most important.*

A few years ago, I was privileged to spend a year being mentored in time management by the CEO of a mega company -- a high powered business man, working seventy hour weeks, in charge of 4,600 employees. He also was a husband, father and seeking to be a faithful Christian man. He wrote a book and spoke about time management — balancing being present at home while also being highly effective in a busy work life. Monthly he would comb through my vision statements, goals and help me to use my time more effectively in order to actualize them.

For those of us who have said, "I'm just too busy for my wife or kids..." you know what? There really are enough hours in the day to be effective with a busy schedule while still investing significant quality time, one on one, with the most important relationships in your life. But you will have to work hard to cut all the extras out.

You just need to make sure that how you spend your time reflects your priorities and that your priorities reflect your vision and values, and that your vision and values reflect God's call on your life.

Ecclesiastes teaches us to number our days. So many people on their death-bed look back and wonder where the time went and why their lives are such a mess. You do not want to look back and regretfully say, "I wish I had spent more time serving God." or "I wish I had spent more time building meaningful relationships with the people that God put in my life..."

My last point here is probably the most important part of living a life of vision, purpose and calling.

We all need a healthy dose of Chesed (God's Grace and Mercy.) *You give it your best shot. Then where you fail, let God make up the difference.*

We wonder why God still seemed to honor Jacob even though he attained the blessing and inheritance through deceiving his brother. I don't think it was because God really approved, but that even though they were a broken family and they may not have gone about it the best way, God still met Jacob that night as he slept with his head on the rock and reaffirmed Jacob's call, "I'm still with you."

When Jacob wrestled with the mysterious divine figure, our sages suggest that it gave him an opportunity to change from a pattern of running away and deceit to trusting God and facing his brother. We are reminded of Jacob stealing his father's blessing when Jacob asks the divine figure to bless him. The Man says, "What is your name?" This time Jacob tells the truth and he is restored.

Esau lived a life to of all the wrong priorities. But in the end, Esau's 'saving grace' here was just that, grace. He was able to forgive his brother and they were able to reconcile on some level.

I take comfort in all this. We're all broken human beings. We all mess up. We will all fail. But God can still use us in our brokenness. Not only that, he uses our brokenness for good, if we trust Him. Because God is so merciful and gracious, he can put the pieces back together.

And at least while we are alive in this world — it is never too late.

A Memorial to David Midwood **A life lived after God's vision, purpose and calling**

We have been talking in theory here about living a life of calling. I want to change gears and share with you about someone who I think really lived these things out and finished his time here on earth, 'well lived.'

I met David Midwood 6 years ago at a meeting for Christian Denominational leaders in New England. I was there to represent our synagogue, as we sought to bring awareness of Messianic Judaism to the Christian world. He was the president of the organization, so I asked him to do a lunch with me. We met at the Burlington Mall for lunch and a leisurely stroll.

We were just about to have our first son, Chaim, and so I asked David for his most important parenting advice. He said without pause, "love your wife."

Largely because of that shaping comment, Raina and I have adopted a core value in our home that for our children's sake, we must prioritize our marriage above the kids' needs. That allows the kids to get caught up in our marriage, providing a sense of family security, belonging and safety.

Thank you, David.

In a very gentle way, David began to speak into my life. What was initially a networking meeting turned into a life shaping, mentoring relationship. We met just about every month for the next 6 years.

Then suddenly, David was diagnosed with late stage cancer and within 6 weeks, rested in Yeshua's arms. David was someone who loved life, but he always longed even more to be in the presence of his Heavenly Abba.

David shared with me something intangible. David was a large man, over six feet tall. He was also very confident in who he was as a man. Every time I would leave our meetings he would give me a huge bear hug, look at me in the eye and say, "I love you."

Now — coming from reserved New England culture, I did not like that. It challenged me, but over time I began to see that David was instilling in me a sense of secure masculinity. I never asked him, but I think David was intentionally trying to model and impart God's fatherly love for me. He was someone who believed in me, not because of what I did, but *because of me*.

For some reason or another I was often late for our meetings. I was running around with too much to do. One time I got turned around on the freeway in traffic and was an hour and a half late for our meeting, but David was there with a big smile, big bear hug, relaxed, loving presence that said, 'I love you even if you are late.' Then he would literally carve out 3 hours and take me out to a fancy lunch to just sit and talk.

David would always give me a straight answer and hold me accountable. I remember him once asking me, "Do you think that God likes your busy-ness?"

He was fond of saying, "Ok— so you blew it. But God still loves you and so do I."

He helped me prioritize my time, calling me out when I'd work 80+ hours in a week and make sure that I was going home on time. While I was working on detailed time management, David would slow things down and help me not to get too caught up in schedules that I could never keep.

He taught me to throw out the whole schedule for a person.

I remember one time I came to meet David at his New Hampshire office. The office was empty, but I heard David all the way down the hall singing away with his booming voice in the bathroom. I'll always remember that. And even now I find myself singing loudly and unashamedly in the bathroom to The Lord. He taught me to rejoice in God and not to worry or care what others thought or how busy I thought I was.

Even more, David really helped me to experience God rejoicing over me.

David was a major player in encouraging me to pursue training in healing prayer with the MacNutts in Jacksonville, not only for my sake, but to pick up a mantle to reclaim Yeshua's healing in the Jewish world. David was the first one to really coach me in praying in a prayer language and to reconnect to the simple truth of God's love.

I can really say that David's investment in me made me a better follower of Yeshua, a better husband, a better dad, a better rabbi and a better man.

And the thing was that somehow, though he was a successful lead pastor, a denominational leader and father himself and probably busier than most people, David seemed to make the time to mentor dozens of other men. As I started to speak more regularly in New England, I would meet other leaders whom David had mentored in the same way for years and years. We have a special bond, we both had David mentor us.

David always told me relationships come first. Invest in people. Transform lives.

And you know what? There must have been a thousand people at his memorial service. It seemed as if everyone felt the same way about David as I did.

Touched, encouraged, loved.

David left a legacy here on Earth because he invested in people, one heart at a time. David Midwood lived a life of vision, purpose and calling and he finished well.

David died when he was only 65 years old.

Let's learn from David's life. Let's learn from Jacob and Esau. And let's learn from Yeshua before it's too late.

To quote pirke avot. "If not now — then when? "

