

The SHAPE of Our Calling

Summary: We are all called by God, generally and uniquely, to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit and with each other. Every member and friend of NCCC should know their SHAPE. Why? To better express and enjoy their and our unique contribution to God's Eternal Purpose.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1–10¹

Date: Sunday, 29 January 2023 (NarellanCong)

Introduction

Rorschach Ink Blots

Just for the sake of my interest, call out what you see in this ink blot...

I see a motorcycle. How about this one?...

Again, for me it's a motorcycle. And this one?...

Another motorcycle. I'm not sure what's going on with you all, but here's another motorcycle ... motorcycle ... motorcycle ... ah, now that's a thing of beauty. It's my motorcycle, in fact.

The Rorschach Ink Blot Test is one of psychology's best-known evaluations. It was developed around 1920 by a physician named Hermann Rorschach from a popular game he played as a child.²

While in medical school, Rorschach was studying patients with schizophrenia and observed they gave responses much different from those of his friends when shown the inkblots. He wondered if the inkblots could be used to identify and diagnose different mental disorders.

The test does not analyse what a person sees in the image as much as the characteristics of what he or she reports, if they focused on the whole image or just a small detail, or on how much time they take to answer.

Basically, the theory is if your imagination is fixed on an image or idea, then you will see it everywhere (e.g., a motorcycle). Identifying these fixations may reveal psychological distress or even disorder.

And if you think I have a disorder because of my love of motorcycles, all I have to say to that is this... (meme with a lone rider under the heading, "Therapy", above a group of riders under the heading, "Group Therapy")

And it may also be worth noting... (meme stating, "Teach your child to love motorcycling and they won't be able to afford drugs")

Remember the Eternal Purpose

Speaking of images we see in our heads, and setting aside the Fall of humankind into sin for a moment, what do you imagine God's Eternal Purpose actually looks like?

God created everything and everyone because he has a purpose in his own mind. If that came to fruition, what do you think it would look like?

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)

In the Bible, we are told that when God saw all that he had made, he declared it was very good (Gen 1:31). Into that very good creation, he placed a garden for the humans to work and enjoy (Gen 2:8).

We can get a sense of what that place and state of being was like for the first humans from the description of what it's all not going to be like in the future. In the Bible we are told:

Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. (Revelation 21:3–4)

- There will be no sorrow (Rev 21:4; Isa 35:10; 51:11)
- There will be no crying (Rev 21:4)
- There will be no pain (Rev 21:4)
- There will be no curse (Rev 22:3)
- There will be no night (Rev 22:5)
- There will be no more death (Rev 21:4)
- There will be no more separation between he and us, for "God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them" (Rev 21:3).

God created a garden paradise for the benefit of all of his creation and intends for this to get back to that state. That is the Eternal Purpose —what the Bible sometimes calls, The Kingdom— and the Fall does not change God's Eternal Purpose.

The Dying are Attracted to Life

For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's [children] to be revealed ... in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. (Romans 8:19–21)

In the meantime, those who have placed their faith in Jesus are the New Creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:23–24). We are the children of God; we have been set free, so let us live like it! If we can imagine what the Eternal Purpose looks like —and, very likely, that is precisely why we responded to the good news about Christ Jesus in the first place— if we are filled with that hope, then we can, and should, begin living that reality now.

Can you imagine what living in God's Eternal Purpose looks like now?

We anticipate the fulfilment and fruition of God's Eternal Purpose by living the Way of Love now. We can love God and love people right now, however faltingly.

Even if we make mistakes along the way, we will certainly be doing better, and more often, than those who are not even trying.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Like moths circling a light globe, the dying are attracted to life, and the Way of Love is life! When you and we together, live the Way of Love, we will overflow the life of God, and the people around us will want to know where our love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control come from (Gal 5:22-25).

So, the will of God for his children, generally, is to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have (1 Pet 3:15-16) AND be ready to guide others in living the Way of Love when they place their own faith in Jesus (Mt 28:19-20)!

Unique Expressions

If the *general will of God* is that He wants the friends of Jesus to follow Him in the Way of Love, then to encourage and equip others to do the same, is there also a *unique call of God* for each of us? I believe the answer is yes.

The apostle Paul wrote to the friends of Jesus at Ephesus,

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Theologian N.T. Wright argues that the Greek word behind "workmanship" is better translated as "poem", conveying the sense of artwork or poetry, rather than merely tools or products.³ Author Will Mancini agrees and took the point further when he wrote,

God doesn't make generic art. He crafts each individual as one-of-a-kind, utterly and irreducibly unique. If each of us is God's one-of-a-kind handiwork, then isn't each of us created in Christ Jesus to do *one-of-a-kind* good works? (emphasis original)⁴

If humankind is the pinnacle of our Creator's artistry, why then would we expect all of us to be the same and to do life the same way? It is entirely realistic that we would all follow the general will of God, yet fulfil the call of God uniquely. Wouldn't a little colour and variety be much more glorifying of the Artist than mere cookie cutter reproductions?

Notice the apostle Paul declared "we" are God's artwork, rather than only individuals. As a local church, being a community of unique and faithful individuals, we are a beautiful and useful tapestry, even if a little rough around the edges in some places ☺

Our SHAPE to Come

If you and I and we are “the poetry of God”, how then does our uniqueness express itself? What is YOUR unique contribution to make toward fulfilling God’s Eternal Purpose?

SHAPE is an easy tool for discovering your uniqueness.

The “S” stands for **Spiritual Gifts**. Spiritual gifts are abilities given to individual believers by the Holy Spirit in order to equip God’s people for ministry, both for the edification of the church and for God’s salvific mission to the world.

The “H” stands for **Heart**. It reflects the people or things or issues that concern or excite you.

The “A” stands for **Abilities**. These are the skills you have.

The “P” stands for **Personality**.

The “E” stands for **Experience**. Your experience includes your testimony of faith, your positive moments in life along with your negative moments.

Combined together, these form your SHAPE and, with honest reflection and assessment, provide a tool for discerning God’s unique call on your life.

You can do an online SHAPE assessment at www.freeshapetest.com

The important point to keep in mind is these are not stagnant. Each of these areas develop over time. Will you develop them for the common good or let them fester, to the detriment of yourself and those around you?

We believe God the Holy Spirit has drawn us together into a community of faith, individuals following the general will of God and seeking to fulfil our unique calling. Would he do so arbitrarily? No, because God does not work that way. He has brought us together to build each other up to follow the general will more faithfully and that we together might fulfil a unique call together.

What then is OUR unique contribution to make toward fulfilling God’s Eternal Purpose?

Prayer, Vision, Alignment and Leaders are the tools for discerning our unique call.

Imagine a puzzle. A puzzle starts as a random assortment of pieces, each with its own shape. With much frustration and effort, all those pieces come together. Once together, those pieces present a picture, usually a beautiful piece of art.

Interestingly, you can be helped in completing the puzzle by looking at the picture on the box.

You can also forego the frustration and effort by just looking at the box, but that was not the intention of its designer and yields none of the pleasure of completing the puzzle.

At Narellan Community Congregational Church, we are a motley crew, a truly diverse group of people. One would almost think it a mistake that we should be in the same room together.

But God doesn't make mistakes!

Each of us is a unique piece of this puzzle. When we all fit together, we will then form a completed puzzle and a unique picture, compared to all other puzzles.

In the worldwide and eternal Church, there are many and diverse puzzles, where all the pieces form unique pictures, but those looking at the puzzle pictures should always see Jesus!

Conclusion

We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good [with] those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, BE:NT)

God knows what God is doing. What are you and we doing? Are we co-workers with him? Are we co-workers with each other?

Are we fixated on the idea and an image in our minds of God's Eternal Purpose fulfilled? Can we dare believe God can use even us to fulfil his Purpose uniquely?

If we love God and love people together, then people will see Jesus in us and be drawn to him through us. There is joy in expressing our unique SHAPE and making our unique contribution to God's Eternal Purpose.

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 "Inkblot Test", *Kansas Historical Society*, Apr-2012, <https://replug.link/5c76f300> (accessed 27-Jan-2023).
- 3 "#150 NT Wright on the multi-ethnic mission of the church - Oxford Conference Session 2", *Ask NT Wright Anything* podcast, 29-Dec-2022, <https://replug.link/81ce8920> (accessed 27-Jan-2023).
- 4 Will Mancini, "Younique: Designing the Life that God Dreamed for You" (Nashville, TN, USA: B&H Books, 2020).