

Tom Brady May Be the Patriots' MVP, but What About God's Standards?

If you watched the most recent Super Bowl, you probably heard the commentators referring to the winning quarterback as the “.”—the Greatest of All Time. And that label is not without reason: That quarterback has led his team to nine Super Bowls, winning six of them; has been the Super Bowl MVP four times and league MVP three times; has been selected for 14 Pro Bowls; has led his team to 16 division championships (more than any other NFL quarterback); has the most wins of any quarterback in NFL history; has never had a losing season in his NFL career as starting quarterback and the list goes on. So, it may be no overstatement to say that Tom Brady of the New England Patriots is a standout quarterback.

The Patriots organization saw something in Tom Brady, just as corporate human resource directors look for talents and attributes when they are interviewing potential employees for their organizations. But let me make two critical points related to the theme of this article and the success of God's “organization,” the church of Jesus Christ.

First, standouts for God might be overlooked by the recruiters and human resource directors of the world. Standouts in God's sight are not always the biggest, the fastest, the strongest or the smartest at any one thing. Instead, God tends to take ordinary people and make them extraordinary.

Take an “ordinary” person named Jesus, for example. “He [the Suffering Servant, the Messiah] has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men. . . . And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not

esteem Him" (Isa. 53:2-3, NKJV). When the prophet Isaiah painted a picture of the coming Messiah, it was not a picture of a standout in the world's eyes.

Second, God is our divine human resource director. God doesn't call people into positions of accomplishment on the basis of natural attributes or talents, but on the basis of His gifting and purpose. For instance, Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit gifts individuals to serve in the body of Christ after they become Christians, not before (1 Cor. 12:11). Ultimately, God knows far better than we how to help us become His faithful servants. It is not up to us and our abilities; it is up to God's calling, His gifting and His empowering. Our responsibility is to embrace His purpose for us.

What does that mean? It means every single Christian is called by God to make a standout contribution to God's plans and purposes in the world. We know this because of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-10 (MEV): We are saved by grace through faith, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them." God didn't save anyone in order for them to be lackluster and sit on the sidelines of the spiritual life. God saved each Christian because there is work He wants them to do. The body of Christ will only accomplish God's purpose in the world when it is filled with standout people—which we all have the potential to become.

In the world, candidates who want to become standouts bring their own resources to the task. But in the Christian life, we bring God's resources. We come with empty hands, asking God to fill them with His power and purpose. Yes, we bring our natural abilities—we are as responsible to develop them as any other part of our life. But what we usually find is that even our natural gifts and abilities have to be shaped and conformed by the Spirit of God into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29)—a process that takes time and humility.

So how do we prepare ourselves to receive and accept God's resources? How must we think about our role and the roles of others if we are going to be standout people for God? Consider these four points:

We must understand how God wants to use us.

There are many examples in Scripture of people knowing God's purpose for their life. Jeremiah knew God had "ordained [him] a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Samson's parents were told that their son would "begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5b). It was said of the Suffering Servant that God formed Him "from the womb to be His Servant, to bring [Israel] back to Him" (Isa. 49:5b). The apostle Paul came to understand that from birth God had called him to be His apostle (Gal. 1:15).

And speaking for all of God's people, David explained how we are made "with fear and wonder" in the womb, how before our birth our days were recorded in God's "book" (Ps. 139:13-16). These passages speak to our uniqueness in God's sight. We don't have to immediately understand every point of God's purpose for us—look how long it took Paul to recognize his. But we should constantly be asking God to deepen our understanding of who He has created and called us to be.

We must understand how God uses others.

As the old saying goes, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander." That is, we cannot insist on our own uniqueness, gifting and calling from God and deny the same in the lives of fellow Christians. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12–14, each one is a part of the body of Christ; each one is as unique as the various limbs and organs of the human body. The enemy of our souls will always tempt us to envy, even resentment, when we think our calling from God is not equal to that of another. We are to "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom. 12:15), giving God thanks for His work in the lives of

others—and for their standout accomplishments for Him.

We must understand that God works through people.

You may have heard about the pastor who moaned to his wife after a challenging week, “I love everything about being a pastor except for the people!” That’s like a shepherd saying, “I love being a shepherd except for having to deal with the sheep!” But there is no shepherding without sheep! There is no pastoring without people!

Given the disunity of the body of Christ today, and even the challenges that arise in our own local congregations, we wonder why God didn’t choose another method for gospel work other than doing it through people. Ultimately, it boils down to God’s purpose: conforming each of us to the image of another person—Jesus Christ Himself. Just as Jesus learned faithfulness to the Father through the things He suffered, so must we (Heb. 5:8). Some of that suffering we inflict on ourselves, while some is caused by others. But learning to humble ourselves, forgive one another and bind ourselves together to accomplish God’s purpose is what we are called to do. We cannot be standout people if we refuse to live heart-to-heart with others.

We must understand how God works in today’s world.

Finally, we must understand that God is working today the same way He has always worked in the world: through fallible human beings who substitute God’s agenda for their own. The biblical story is one of God calling and equipping ordinary people to do extraordinary things. When Jesus left this world to return to the Father, He turned over the task of reaching the world to 12 ordinary men who had become His disciples. Their commission? Preach the gospel, disciple those who believe, gather them into congregations and teach them so they could teach others (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2).

That’s it; that’s God’s plan for working in the world today.

And that means you and I have to discover the part God wants us to play, embrace the part others play and accept the fact that all of us are called to be standout people for Him. God didn't call us because we are standout people; He called us to become standout people for Him.

We're all in different places in that process. So think back over what God has called and gifted you to do in the past and commit to fine-tuning your calling in the future. Ask Him to do even greater work through you in the future than He has done in the past. {eoa}

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