

Watering the Seeds of Destiny

Every mother occasionally finds herself watching her child with a stirring suspense, wondering about his or her destiny. "Perhaps my child will become president," she muses. "Or maybe a teacher, or a missionary, or a scientist who will discover the cure for cancer." A profound sense of responsibility grips you when, as a parent, you realize the mandate you have to greatly influence one of God's dear children.

Yet as Christians, our opportunities to invest in the lives of people go far beyond natural parenthood. The world is filled with spiritual children—believers and seekers alike—and God wants us to recognize the potential for greatness He has planted in each one. Then He can use us to impart to them a sense of spiritual destiny. We might be surprised to see what extraordinary intentions God has for the ordinary people who walk among us today!

Imagine Mary and Joseph, just after Jesus was born. If it hadn't been for Jesus' miraculous conception and the angelic message they received about who their Son was to be, the humble circumstances of His birth might have led His earthly parents to dismiss any fleeting thoughts of greatness. At first glance, Jesus looked like an ordinary baby born to ordinary parents—a child who would probably follow His father's footsteps in becoming an ordinary carpenter.

But the Holy Spirit prepared the way for Jesus, revealing His majesty to select servants, some of whom were spiritually poised to hear the voice of God, and others who unexpectedly found themselves in the midst of a supernatural drama.

Anna the prophetess and Simeon the prophet were two of the former. The Spirit of God rested upon these devout servants as they worshiped daily at the temple. On the day Jesus was being presented for circumcision, the Holy Spirit revealed to them

that He was their long-awaited Messiah.

Even Mary and Joseph, who already knew their Son's true identity, marveled at the prophetic blessing Simeon pronounced upon Jesus: "My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32, NKJV).

As He did to Simeon and Anna, God may impart to us supernatural wisdom about His purposes for others, allowing us to speak pro-phetically into their lives. He may strategically place us among them for the purpose of instilling in them a sense of holy chosenness.

You don't have to be a prophetess to impart destiny. When you look with spiritual eyes, you may discover in one person an extraordinarily merciful heart, and in another a capacity for leadership, and in yet another an untapped skill or talent. Your friend may not see any special qualities in herself, but she will surely appreciate the blessing of a discerning and timely word from you. Encouraging others that God has placed them on this earth to fulfill a specific call serves to draw them closer to His heart as they seek out His will for their own lives.

At the time of Jesus' birth, there were also those who were drawn into the mystery of His incarnation by no dealings of their own. Shepherds minding their own business in the fields suddenly became audience to a multitude of angels proclaiming Jesus' glorious birth, and they responded by going to His side to worship Him (see Luke 2:13-16).

Meanwhile, God was announcing Jesus' arrival to a distant group of wise men, the magi, who helped spare the baby's life. Under the pretense of also wanting to worship the child, King Herod instructed the magi to find Jesus and report His whereabouts, although his real intent was to have the baby

killed (see Matt. 2:7-8). What would have happened if the wise men, after their long, tiring journey from the East, had been utterly disappointed to find that the king they were searching for turned out to be nothing more than a newborn baby lying in a pile of hay?

There must be some mistake, they might have thought. How could a baby born in such obscurity ever amount to anything, much less a king? Why go out of our way and disobey Herod for the sake of a poor Jewish child?

The men might have returned to Herod with news of Jesus' location or sent word that it was all a hoax. But somehow the magi dismissed the peasantry of Jesus' birth and recognized the child as the promised King. After worshiping Him and presenting Him with fine gifts, they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their countries by another route, thus protecting Jesus from Herod's scheme (see Matt. 2:9-12).

In our own lives, we make judgment calls daily—perhaps not in such profound circumstances, but significant all the same. We appraise one another on the basis of social class, skin color or age. But if we see greatness only in people of high social standing, we will fail to recognize the divine gifts and callings in those not so materially blessed.

The Lord makes it clear that outward beauty, age and wealth have no bearing upon personal worth. In fact, He encourages us to minister to the least fortunate, saying that whatever we do to the hungry, the poor, the sick—even those in prison—we do to Him (see Matt. 25:37-40).

In Old Testament days, people made judgments just as we do. When Samuel was commissioned to choose a new king to lead Israel, he told a man named Jesse he wanted to consider Jesse's sons as possibilities. Jesse brought them all before Samuel—all, that is, except David, the youngest, who was left

in the field to tend the sheep because he was considered too young and too small to be king material.

But God was not evaluating David by his age, looks or size. He knew that David's confidence was in the Lord rather than in his own might, and He revealed to Samuel that this most unlikely son was His anointed choice. "Man looks at the outward appearance," God told him, "but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV).

Jesus was also discriminated against. Soon after His birth, rumors began to stir among the people of Israel. God had finally sent His Chosen One to save His people, but they had been expecting a lofty king and political ruler—not a cooing, drooling, helpless baby—born in a barn like the son of a homeless wanderer! I can just imagine the buzz throughout the countryside: "What child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?"

In spite of the controversy, however, Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and at the age of 30 His ministry was launched. His wisdom confounded the temple scribes, His miracles confounded the pharisees, and His magnetism confounded the political leaders—yet many continued to question His authority. This was especially true in His hometown of Nazareth, where His childhood friends and neighbors just couldn't see Jesus as anything more than the boy next door.

"Isn't this the carpenter's son?" they asked. "Didn't He climb trees and skin His knees along with our own children?" And instead of recognizing God's anointing on Jesus, they took offense at Him, and "He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:58).

As 20th century Christians, we must ask ourselves how we might have responded to the question of "What child is this?" if we had been alive in Jesus' day. Would we have responded to His

spiritual wisdom and power, or would we have been blinded by the fact that He was just the son of a poor widow named Mary who lived around the corner?

And what about His physical attributes? Was He “presidential” enough to be a leader? Was He tall or handsome enough to fit the image of a king?

The Bible says Jesus “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him... He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” (Is. 53:2-3, NIV). I must admit that I might have been just another skeptic in the crowd.

When you look around at the people closest to you, are you tempted to minimize their potential in Christ because of over-familiarity? The popular saying “You can never go home again” shows us that the people most familiar with us never let us live down our past. Those who knew us as unregenerate or who witnessed our failures often have the hardest time recognizing Christ’s ongoing work in our lives.

But if we label others as “least likely to succeed” because of their failures or relative obscurity, we join with the skeptics of Jesus’ day who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46, NKJV). Who could have been more great and more obscure at the same time than Jesus?

The Bible is replete with examples of great people, such as Moses and Esther, who rose out of obscurity. Moses, whose mother floated him down the Nile River in the hope of saving his life, was miraculously rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter. He ultimately led the nation of Israel out of captivity from Egypt and into the promised land. And Esther, once a hopeless Jewish orphan, grew up to find herself a chosen queen who saved the nation of Israel from slaughter.

The Bible also abounds with stories of those who failed God but still rose to their potential because of God’s great mercy

and forgiveness. David, known as a man after God's heart, was restored to God's purposes despite the fact that he had committed both adultery and murder. And the apostle Peter, who denied Christ during His darkest hour, was forgiven not only by Jesus, but also by the other apostles who then labored with him to establish the New Testament church.

If we judge others as "small" because of obscurity, unseemliness or failure, we rob this world of the blessing they might have become. God requires impartiality and restoration, not elitism and scarlet letters.

But don't mistake greatness for fame or reverence, like that of a celebrity or dignitary. In the kingdom of God, the last shall be first, the weak shall be strong, the humble shall be exalted. God's idea of greatness is one whose life demonstrates excellence in servanthood, love for Him and the fruit of the Spirit. A great person may lead the masses or quietly influence the life of one small child.

When a sense of destiny is imparted to someone, he carries an abiding trust within him that God will make good on His promise for his future:

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11, NIV). He might feel a sense of having been greatly spared, like Moses; greatly chosen, like Esther; or greatly forgiven, like Peter.

And a truly great person will be humbled by that knowledge. He may never escape his obscurity, but he won't mind, because pursuing the will of God rather than notoriety will usher him into the spiritual greatness that his Maker had planned for him all along. In the end, perhaps we define our own greatness by whether or not we were satisfied with the stewardship of our lives.

And when we honor the Lord's work among His children of

obscurity, we honor the Lord Himself, for it was Jesus who said, "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; who sent Me." (Mark 9:37, NKJV).

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