

Will You Fulfill Your God-Given Potential?

As a pastor, hospital visits were never very high on my list. I love people, but I don't like seeing them in a hospital bed.

But I did look forward to visiting maternity wards and the nursery. Rows of babies tucked tightly in pink or blue blankets, asleep in translucent isolettes, bring a smile to any face.

My favorite exercise is to look through the nursery window and imagine the pond of potential lying dormant before me. I try to imagine what gifts God has already placed in the tiny bundles. Who will follow Jesus? Who will praise Him in early mornings? Who will stand before others and declare the goodness of God?

I had similar thoughts when I stood before groups of students on the first day of college classes. I tried to look through their swollen eyes and grumpy moods to see the potential packed within. It had only been a minute since they left their blankets and cribs. Only a few minutes later, today's students will be called upon to produce from the flow of their gifts.

My takeaway from many years of serving as a professor and dean reminds me that students feel the pressure of potential. They know the expectations of those who nurtured them through life. They know about the sunk costs. They hear the drums beat a cadence of anticipation.

Sometime during their senior year, my students would speak with me about finding their calling. Actually, they only wanted to listen to my counsel. I found it intimidating. How should I guide them to hear God? Could I help them activate their gifts? What doors could I help them open?

I believe the Lord calls us based on the potential He placed within us at birth. God directed my path. I didn't arrive at my keyboard through a series of random acts.

Jesus knew His disciples had the potential to succeed. He understood their gifts. They responded to His teaching and discipleship. It seems some disciples needed more attention than others, but we recognize their great success as a whole.

I wonder about Eve's potential. She lived in paradise but hindered her potential by the choice she made. That's the thing about potential. It's easy to mess it up.

"But I fear that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve through his trickery, so your minds might be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

We must be doers of the Word. We must follow Him. We must make disciples and equip the saints. We need to avoid the decisions that limit our potential.

"But be self-controlled in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and prove your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5).

Paul saw potential in the churches he planted. Most of his writings seem inspired to help us "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [we] were called" (Eph. 4:1b).

We receive encouragement from the stories of the many failures of Bible men and women who failed to realize their potential. In many cases, we see success after failure. We learn from adversity. Life and business lessons help us grow from potential to production.

"For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

God does not repent over the gifts He gives us for the work of the ministry. His work of grace is sufficient. Sadly, the

receiver of gifts and mercy can choose to exercise free moral agency and walk away. We have the option to allow our gifts to remain unused. We can develop an affinity for sloth. We can quit. Find a new path.

There are many people of all ages with resumes filled only with potential. Choices determine outcomes.

Yet the opportunity to fulfill our potential and produce fruit remains open.

Jesus taught His disciples to remain near the cross. Remain; don't drift away and lose your potential. Remain in the Word. Remain in the kingdom of God. The Modern English Version of the Bible contains over 30 uses of the word "remain" in the Gospel of John. Jesus understood the potential of bad choices.

"If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

The next time you are privileged to review a baby nursery, recall that you are still pregnant with potential as well. Kingdom potential percolates on both sides of the glass.

God sees more in you. Use your gifts. {eoa}

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