



Roanoke, Virginia

August 1, 2021

“The Gift of Why”

Ephesians 4:1-16

Rev. Benjamin S. Brannan

We find ourselves at a turning point in the book of Ephesians. The author has proclaimed what Christ has done on behalf of the church and has reminded the letter’s audience of their new, shared identity in and through Christ. The author then pivots to practical ethical implications, which then led to the letter’s goal: the advancement of unity, of love, of maturity as the church and growth into Christ. To begin this section with “therefore” indicates that it is the logical outcome of such stated convictions, that they were foreign to each other, Jews and Gentiles, yet are saved through faith in Christ, who is the unifier. They now take part in establishing the new family of love and truth as the one body of Christ in the world, together as one. Here, we move from explaining what God has done to considering what is a fitting response. I will be reading from a blended translation of the NIV and NRSV. Listen for our calling as the church, and for God’s Word, as we read Ephesians 4:1-16.

4 Therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. **7** But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. **8** This is why it says: “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”



⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all come to the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed back and forth and blown about by every wind of teaching, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, as each part does its work, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

If you have ever taken a flight, whether with others or by yourself, you know the anxious feeling that seems to always surface as you board the plane. Walking down the aisle, checking, and double checking your seat number, counting the rows, looking ahead to see if you spot someone already seated beside you. Hallelujah, your row is empty. So, you put your carry-on in the overhead bin, you sit down, slide your personal bag underneath your seat, and... (well you might not do this, but I do) watch as people walk towards your row. Wondering which stranger you have been destined to sit beside for the duration of the flight. And I don’t know about you, but I want to sit down, say hello, take off, and then land.

Here is a story:

Flying from Miami to St. Louis, Peter wanted to be left alone. Exhausted from the work week, he wanted to sit down, take off, and land—simply get where he was going. But as it turned out, his neighbor was going to be one of those people, and that flight was going to be one of those flights. Peter was settling in for the four-hour flight when Steve sat down and introduced himself. After some chitchat, Steve started telling Peter what he does for a living. For me, it is always a big decision when asked on a flight what I do for a living. Because when people hear pastor, some believe it is a greenlight to confess their wrongdoings, dive deep into interpersonal struggles and family issues, or push and prod for validation for their lack of church attendance. Anyway, if you have ever been in the situation Peter found himself, you already know that Steve was not a movie stunt double, a secret spy, or a captivating magician. Steve was not a bodyguard for Hollywood stars, either, eager to share behind-the-scenes drama and stories. No salacious gossip to entertain Peter for the flight. No secret mission objectives to share. No crazy stunt stories on various movie sets. For twenty-three years, Steve had been selling steel. Yup, steel.

It turns out, however, the steel Steve sells is not just the old run-of-the-mill variety. Peter found out that Steve’s company, based in Sweden, produces a particularly pure form of steel that enables machines to run more efficiently because their parts are lighter. An engineer himself, Steve personally attested to his product’s superiority over other options available on the market.



As Steve wrapped up his rehearsed “Here is what I do” elevator speech, he looked at Peter expecting a follow up question that would let him talk more about steel. The trouble was, Peter was not at all interested in what Steve did and what steel he sells. What draws Peter in is not *what* people do for a living but *why* they do it. So instead of asking Steve how much his steel costs, or how many clients he has, or what his sales numbers are, Peter turned and said, “So, what?”

“Well...err...uhh,” Steve faltered and stammered, not understanding the question fully. Peter rephrased: “I get that your steel is pure, allowing for lighter parts, which makes machines more efficient. But so what?”

“Well, not so much material is needed then.”

“Ok,” Peter jumped in again. “And what difference does that make?”

Seemed the table was now turned on Steve. All he wanted to do was to make small talk, and now he was stuck with Peter’s weird questions for the remainder of the flight.

As it turns out, such pure steel means that parts built with less material still remain strong. Using less material means less smelting, which results in less energy used for production, and less pollution is created. And when this steel is used to make machines such as a car, those advantages are repeated: a lighter car means less fuel is used, which produces less pollution. And purer steel is easier to recycle than other varieties. Peter found this to be interesting, but Peter still didn’t get to why Steve was so enthusiastic about his job.

Peter continued to prod Steve about why he did what he did. “There must be something more at stake, something you truly believe in.” And then it happened. For the first time in their conversation, Steve’s eyes lit up, and his feelings poured out. Steve is committed to keeping the planet healthy for his children and future generations, and one way to do that is to be more responsible in the way we use our planet’s resources. The whole time, Steve just simply talked about steel. He never once mentioned this revelation, yet it was the very thing that inspired him to start telling a stranger on a plane all about steel.

So, Peter asked Steve for permission to rephrase his sales pitch. “In simple terms,” Peter began speaking as if he were Steve, “I believe in using natural resources for the benefit of humankind. And I also believe that we should do so responsibly, leaving the planet safe and healthy for our children. This is what led me to become an engineer and to join my current organization. Our company, based in Sweden—a country committed to sustainability—has developed a way to help engineers create lighter, more efficient, greener products. And our particular path to sustainability happens to be lightweight steel;”¹ want to buy some?

¹ Sinek, Simon, Peter Docker & David Mead. *Find Your Why: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for You and Your Team*. Portfolio, September 5, 2017.



Now that is a sales pitch.

This is a story told by Peter Docker, who, along with David Mead, joined Simon Sinek to write *Find Your Why: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for You and Your Team*. This is the sequel to *Start with Why*, a book Sinek wrote almost ten years before.

In the book *Find Your Why*, Peter writes, “Simply by starting with *why* he loves his job, I helped Steve see that it’s not *what* he does that has kept him fulfilled for more than two decades. What inspires him is *why* he does it. By connecting his work to his sense of purpose, Steve had discovered his *WHY*.” Connecting work with purpose, this is where you find your WHY.

So, I ask you: What’s your WHY? Why do you do what you do?

Simon Sinek gained fame from a TED Talk he delivered that has gained over 70 million views. In this talk, Sinek says that “the great influencers of our time—whether it’s Apple, Martin Luther King Jr., or the Wright Brothers—all think, act, and communicate the same way, and it’s the complete opposite to everyone else.” He calls it the Golden Circle.²

And he says this circle is a simple, yet profound idea, “that explains why some organizations and some leaders are able to inspire where others aren’t.” What—How—Why—he defines these terms like this:

- Every single organization on the planet knows what they do—the products they sell or the services they provide.
- Some organizations know how they do it. Whether they call it their “differentiated value process” or their “proprietary process” or their “unique selling proposition”—the things that set them apart from other organizations and competitors. Some know how they do what they do.
- But very few know why they do it. This is not about profit—that is a result. The WHY is the purpose driving the existence of the organization.

So, why do you do what you do?

Why does Second Presbyterian do what it does?

Why does the church, the body of Christ, do what it does?

² Sinek, S. (2009, September). *How Great Leaders Inspire Action* [Video]. TED Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en#t-1058367



The book *Find Your Why* takes the reader through three steps to reflect, refine, and then recite a discovered WHY statement.

I want to walk through these steps looking at Paul's letter as a whole and keeping in mind our passage for today:

STEP 1: Gather Stories and Share Them

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus to expand their understanding of God's call and to appreciate the goals God has for the church. He lays these out in the first few chapters: God chose you in Christ before the creation of the world, and God loves you and adopts you as beloved children (1:4-5) forgiven, redeemed, and given the riches of grace with all wisdom and understanding (1:7-10) through the promise of the Holy Spirit (1:13). Paul reminds them, we were all dead in sin, craving the ways of the world (2:1-3), but God's mercy made us alive with Christ, even in our death, and raised us up by grace through faith to be God's workers in the wicked world (2:2-10). We were once separated, excluding those who were different; but now we are reconciled as fellow citizens, made one in Christ through his peace, built up together with Christ as the foundation (2:11-22). Paul continues, I became a servant of this gospel that calls Gentiles heirs, members of the one body, and by grace I am the least among you and greatly suffer for your sake (3:1-13).

These are powerful stories that he shares as he writes to the church in Ephesus. Step 1: Share stories.

Step 2: Identify Themes

As stories are gathered and shared, themes will begin to surface. What themes do you identify in what Paul is saying?

I hear the theme of God's eternal love and grace. I hear redemption through Christ, who lived and died and was raised to new life for all of creation, and upon whom the church is being built in the power and freedom of Christ's salvation for all. I hear the theme of inclusion, breaking down old barriers to welcome those who were once considered different. I hear the theme of seeing the big picture, from the beginning of creation to the fulfillment of time. Now we have our themes; on to step 3.

Step 3: Draft and Refine a Why Statement

This is a hard task that needs proper time and attention. WHY statements need to be simple and clear, actionable, focused on effect, and expressed in affirmative language. You start with an action infinitive, and then the result of that action. The book provides a template for Why statements:



TO _____ SO THAT _____.

The first part is the contribution made in the lives of others. This is in verb form, as an action phrase—to encourage, to fight, to reach, to lead, to become.

The second part is the impact or the effect that actionable contribution has on others; this is the result. TO do something, SO THAT this will happen.

I don't think this template was around in the first century, but we read Paul's why statement in chapter three: TO preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and TO make plain the administration of this mystery to everyone SO THAT all may approach God with freedom and confidence. To preach and to make plain this mystery—the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ—so that all may approach God with freedom and confidence. This is Paul's purpose, why Paul does what he does.

But as I said, our passage is the hinge, where Paul transitions from his WHY statement to the church's WHY.

Writing to the church in Ephesus, Paul provides the church with a statement of purpose:

TO live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, TO keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, SO THAT the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the full measure of Christ.

This is not the purpose the church has found for itself. This is the purpose given to the church through the love of God made known in Jesus Christ.

As you share stories of what God has done in your life, through love and mercy and grace, I hope you will come to see the unique God-given gifts of your calling, so that you may find your purpose, the reason you do what you do—your Why—and live it out.

Paul says, “some are called apostles, some are preachers, some are teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

What is your purpose? What is the reason that you do what you do? The WHY for your life?

To live a life worthy of the calling to which each one of you has been called, to keep the unity of the Spirit, a unity that doesn't erase our differences, but embraces them and reconciles them in the bond of peace, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all, each and every creature in heaven and on earth, are made one in the faith and made one in the knowledge of the Son of God, attaining to the full measure of Christ.

May it be so. Amen.

