

## Crafted by God: My Unique Identity

- I. Confession time. How many people love 80's TV shows like *A-Team*, *Alf*, *Wonder Years*, *Magnum PI*, *Air Wolf*, the one with a talking car I can never remember and then there is one of my favorites. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhRvG7px3Mo> How many *MacGyver* fans do we have here? It's okay, this is a safe place. So many things to love about *MacGyver*. His knowledge on all things technical, his unique ability to end up with a ticking bomb at the end of every episode, and, most importantly, his 80's feathered hair that seemed impervious to gale force winds, explosions, and ridiculously inane dialogue that I am fairly sure was written by a preteen boy. No offense to our preteen boys. But what probably made the show work (besides his hair) was *MacGyver's* uncanny ability to take something as ordinary as a rubber band, tooth paste, or a paper clip, and do with it the almost miraculous....the extraordinary. Defuse a bomb, burn through steel handcuffs, knock unconscious an army, all with something as common as a toothpick. Impressive man, that *MacGyver*! But in a way, according to Todd Wilson in our *More* series, God is the same way. He takes someone as common and as ordinary as you...and me ☺...to do the extraordinary...to accomplish His work and will in this world. And really, if you think about it and look in the mirror long enough, as least in my case, it's even more amazing than *MacGyver*.
  
- II. I share that because we are exploring how we can find our personal calling in this life. And Wilson has been taking us on a journey of sorts...a logical process where we can discover our specific mission and purpose. He uses the framework of Be-Do-Go. "Be" is the idea of identifying what he calls **core identity**... understanding who we really are...which, as we talked about, is not in what we do, what we own, or what others think about us, but rather seeing ourselves as **children of God, made in His image, Jesus followers called to live like Christ**. "Do" is the idea of claiming our **core mission** which, according to Jesus Himself, is to "**make disciples**" or **fellow Jesus followers**. That is to be our primary "do" in life. And last week Bob did an excellent job in talking about the "go" piece, or what Wilson calls our **core position**, which is our mission field. As Bob challenged us, we are all on mission whether we are in Timbuktu, Africa; Booger Swamp, NC; or working at a law office in downtown Winston-Salem. We all have a mission field if we are followers of Jesus.
  
- III. Today we return to the idea of identity, the "Be" bit, but we are going to drill down a little further. Let me offer the following as a way to get our mind around it. Maren, my niece, goes to Chapel Hill. Yes, she is among the blessed. ☺ In her required PE class there is a young man named Bug. Bug plays wide receiver for the school. He is 6'5", a wall of muscle, and an unbelievable athlete. A couple of weeks ago Bug snatched the winning touchdown pass at the last second against the Pittsburg Panthers. Maren shared how Bug was complaining to her PE instructor. He wanted Bug to run a mile with the rest of the class. Bug didn't want to because there was a big game the next day. The instructor didn't budge. Well, all the other students began running the mile while Bug decided to walk. Maren said that when they were at the ¾ mile mark, Bug had a change of heart. Despite the tremendous lead, running faster than Forrest Gump, Bug closed it and overtook them all,

finishing first and leaving the rest in his dust. Again Bug is a tremendous athlete. But Bug is not a Bo. Bo Jackson. The guy several years ago that could play like 10 sports. Maren was sharing that they had to play basketball one afternoon. Just like middle school, there were team captains. Everyone fought over who would get Bug. He ended up on Maren's team. Even though my niece is no ball player (it runs in the family) she thought she would be okay because, well, her team had Bug. But there was a problem. Bug knows football. But Bug doesn't know b-ball. According to Maren, he was almost as bad as her. His teammates were astounded. The point? Yes, Bug is a tremendously gifted athlete. But his athleticism doesn't extend to every field... gridiron, yes; basketball court, no. Likewise, our core identity may be Jesus followers, but that doesn't mean that we all have the same gifts, abilities and skills. There is no Bo Jackson in the church. Bug's but not Bo's. And this impacts our personal calling.

- IV.** Listen to what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 139:1-16. This is one of my favorite Psalms. (Psalms are the Old Testament songs of praise used in public worship.) King David not only got the poetic imagery down here, he is giving us some key truths about the nature of God. In a sense, David is saying that God knows our zip code. Our street address. Our Facebook account. Our Twitter handle. Our Snap Chat name. Should this bring us comfort? Yes! Absolutely! God is near! Like having mom and dad close when you are a kid in a crisis. On the other hand, should this give us pause, like a kid having your parents catch you when you are doing wrong? Absolutely! God is near...even when we think no one is looking. But that is not the primary point David is trying to make. That God is playing Big Brother in a 1984 Orwellian sense...keeping a tally of our indiscretions to be used in a court of law at a later date. But He is present from the moment of inception in our mother's womb to the moment we return back to Him at the grave. He never leaves our side. But it's really not just about location, but also identification. In short, we are known. God knows not only my name, and the numbers of hairs on my head according to Jesus (which is pitifully few!) but He deeply loves me. Jesus didn't just die for the whole world. He died for Kevin, for Mary, for Jake, for Ron. Because He loves us, individually as well as collectively. At the risk of sounding like your kindergarten teacher or Dr. Seuss, King David is saying that each of us is special in our own special way.
- V.** But what do we do with Psalm 139:14? Let me ask, how many of us here today saw firsthand a child being born? As I have shared in the past, I was in the delivery room when both of my daughters were born. Some husbands like to remain head-side, leaving the baby stuff to the doc and nurses. But I wanted to be in the middle of the action. So I was "ring side." I will never forget when the nurse said to me "Look! You can see your daughter's head." Okay, this is a family friendly environment, so I will be careful how I describe this. I mustered all my courage, leaned over, and looked straight into the "mommy tunnel." And sure enough, there she was. Covered with this white stuff that looks a little like a watered down version of Elmer's glue, her head was wobbling around slowly emerging. Again, being an 80's guy, the only way I can describe it (and please don't judge me mom's)...it bore a remarkable resemblance to a scene out of the space horror movie *Aliens*. Okay, I know... terrible, right? But you had to be there. I truly was a bit scared. I was standing there

watching as another living being was emerging from my wife's body. "Fearful" is completely accurate for how I felt. But then when my baby girl finally cleared the final stretch and I saw her in all her pink, screaming beauty, my heart was overwhelmed with love and joy. If I had not already been a believer in a loving good Creator, I would have then. The word David used in his song of praise really is not fear as in fearing aliens, but best described as awe and reverence. And that is what I felt that night. The point with this Psalm and the point I am trying to make is that we are all loved and woven together by our Creator, as David poetically puts it, uniquely. In short, we are all His children, share a common core mission to make disciples, all have a mission field...but we are all wired differently to live out God's purpose. And we come together in our uniqueness to live out the mission of the church universal as paraphrased by Todd Wilson (referring to Ephesians 1:22-23) to "carry the fullness of Jesus into every crack and cranny of society."

- VI. Again, we are more like a Bug than a Bo. Specialists rather than generalists. Each of us has a specific way to help the church to fulfill its purpose, to make disciples, and to fill the world with His presence. The question then becomes how do we discover what Wilson calls our **(UI) Unique Identity**...or the specific way we were woven together to carry out our calling? He says that although we can't always get a definitive answer, we can find clues. He offers three specific ways to tip us off. First, we might discover our UI if we see **our life as a book to read**. Say, what? When I was seven years old my family and I were on vacation in St. Augustine, Florida. I remember walking up to a fan that was sitting next to the cash register. The elderly gentlemen looked at me and said to my mom and dad, "I can tell by the way your boy is looking at that fan that he has a good mechanical mind about him. Trying to figure out how it all works. You should buy him an old car and let him work on it. I bet you have a future mechanic on your hands." I felt a rush of pride. So they listened, but thought they would get a transistor radio that needed assembly first, and then work up to the car. But several months later the radio was still in dozens of pieces. And my dad said something like, "Son, you haven't done anything with this yet. I thought you were interested in how things work. Like the fan." To which I confessed, "Well, Dad, actually it was just a hot day and I was trying to cool down." And that was the end of my mechanic dreams. Megan is the only one in our house now that is allowed to touch the tool box. But this is a good example, albeit one in reverse, of what Wilson is getting at. If we look at the chapters of our lives, from our earliest childhood memories, what patterns and trends do we see? If I had in fact put together that radio, and my parents got me that old car, obviously part of my unique wiring would indeed be in the mechanical department. Take a moment to reflect on your life. As Wilson says, in determining our **unique identity, clarity is found in the patterns in the past**. So take time to reflect on the stories of your past to give you clues on your (UI)...and do some detective work with a close family member, friend, or spouse.
- VII. The second way that we discover our UI is by looking at those **characteristics that transcend all domains of life**. This includes our relationship with God, family, work, church and community. Permit me a parental brag for a moment. My youngest daughter has this uncanny ability, unlike her father, for problem solving. Recently we had to put up a free-standing sign, but the sign's tripod legs were broken...and it had to be done quickly. So I

turned to Molly, and straight out of a scene of Ron Howard's movie *Apollo Thirteen*, I said to her, "Honey, you have three minutes and you have a paper clip, a rubber band and toothpaste. You've got to make this fit into that," pointing to the broken leg. And Molly MacGyver got the job done. And she brings her problem solving to wherever she is...at school, helping at church, or around the home. As Wilson says, "God made us with unique elements of identity that touch every aspect of life." We need to discover these and bring these to bear in the life of our mission field and in the communal life of the church. To fill every nook and cranny of this world with Jesus.

**VIII.** And the final way we can discover our UI is with the help of assessment tools. As you came in today you were given an APEST identity exercise. This is based from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4. I am going to ask that you take this home and work through the three steps, and then at the bottom, as hokey as it may sound, come up with a descriptive statement. Now this is only one tool and there are dozens of others like the DISC, Myers Briggs, and Strength Finder. A great free resource is <http://personalcalling.org>. It's important to note that these are all like road signs that can point you in the right direction to discover your UI, but they are not like a GPS that will definitively get you there. You need confirmation again from friends and family that this is indeed your unique identity and not your preferred ID. No matter how much I, or Megan, would like it, I will never be a mechanical craftsman type...no matter how much HGTV I am forced to watch.

**IX.** I want to close by sharing an abbreviated version of how I discovered my UI. Unlike what you may think, I didn't grow up wanting to be a pastor. Although I respected and even liked many of the pastors I knew, I never once thought, "Wow, I would love to do that. Wear a robe, listen to some sweet organ music, give a 'speech' weekly, spend long hours in the pastors 'study' and visit elderly people in the hospital." That had zero appeal and didn't fit my personality style. I longed for excitement, risk, adventure, and something that didn't require a robe. If I had lived a few centuries ago, I would have loved to have been a pioneer, a mountain man, or explorer. So I thought the military was the right fit. But as the Yiddish proverb goes "Man plans, God laughs." I found myself being drawn again and again to vocational ministry. Even while in the Army. So years later I ended up as a pastor in a more traditional church setting. And it didn't take long before I felt unsettled. I loved the people and even found myself loving many aspects of pastoring, and in time I made peace with the robe. But deep down inside of me, I knew something was missing. As Wilson would say, I am a serial entrepreneur. I need to start new things. This goes all the way back to when I was a kid when I started a lawn business. I don't do well with maintaining the status quo. There is nothing wrong with maintaining, especially when it's a good system or institution. Why fix it if it ain't broke, right? But that is just not me. I was seriously thinking about leaving the vocational ministry when a conversation during an evangelism meeting became the seed for G3. Something stirred deep within. As I explored the idea of a new campus I came across the characteristics of a church planter in some material I was reading. It described a church planter as someone who is a "visionary, a risk taker and has an entrepreneurial spirit." It was like a light bulb went off! God wasn't calling me to be my momma's pastor! I can live out my calling the way God wired me instead of trying to

squeeze a square peg into a round hole. Best of all, I wouldn't ever have to wear a robe, never again. Except maybe on Halloween and costume parties. I could embrace both my core identity as a Jesus follower and my unique identity as a "church pioneer." I could eat my cake and have it too, or however that expression goes. The point for me sharing my story is for you to explore yours and to embrace your UI for the sake of kingdom.

- X.** (Pointing to objects on table) A rubber band, toothpaste, roll of tape, a paper clip. Common items. But in the hands of MacGyver, watch out villains. But even more so...you, me, seemingly common people, but in the hands of our Master using our UI, watch out Meadowlark, watch out Winston-Salem, watch out world. Here we come!