

Shaped for Serving God

Sermon for St Pauls – 28 Oct 07

One more week of SwotVac at Uni, and then we are into the exams. I used to hate exams. And yet, somehow, I managed to end up with a postgraduate degree.

I couldn't even pass Year 12 at one go. I had to do Year 12 twice. When I went to school there was an exam at the end of Year 10 that was called the Junior Certificate. Or in NSW, it was called the Intermediate Certificate. I don't know what it was called in Victoria.

Anyway, because my family moved to Queensland from NSW, I even did the Intermediate Certificate one year and repeated the same year in Queensland the next year. So I effectively did Year 10 twice too.

Not really Einstein.

Yet I can't say my poor record as a student has exactly stopped God from giving me an interesting life, and an interesting career.

I went from school to work in the National Bank. Then I went radio announcing for ten years. First on the Sunshine Coast, then in Cairns, and then for six years in Brisbane.

Then I joined World Vision here in Melbourne. I was 30. During the next 23 years I worked as the Marketing Director here in Australia. Then World Vision sent me to Hong Kong where I was in charge of their offices in Hong Kong and Singapore. Then I came back here and was CEO of World Vision Australia for eight years.

I was like the Tim Costello of the 1990s. Or maybe Tim Costello is the Philip Hunt of the 21st Century.

And then they sent me off to Vienna where I was responsible for one of World Vision's four field regions, responsible for World Vision projects in ten countries in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Then we came back to Australia and I left World Vision. And after a couple of years I found myself the General Manager of the Deakin University Student Association. Which is where I still am today.

The amazing thing about this career history is that so little of it seemed possible or planned when I was struggling to finish High School. But, you see, God is working in our lives from before the day we are born. God is shaping us for the plan he has for our lives. God is at work in our lives, from our first day, and then every day, shaping us for the service he has in mind.

And, most of the time, we don't even notice.

When I came back to Brisbane as a radio announcer I enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Queensland. I concentrated on Journalism and English. In my last semester, I need just one-half subject to complete the requirements for my Bachelor of Arts degree. I looked at the lecture timetable and saw that I had a spare hour between my fourth year English and Journalism subjects on Thursday. So, with great care and attention to the subject matter of all the subjects, (not), I selected a subject that was taught in that spare hour. The only criterion that seemed important to me was that it fitted my available time.

That subject was called "Sociology of Revolutionary Movements". I wasn't much interested in sociology, and even less interested in revolutionary movements. I thought revolutionary movements was what happened to you after bad curry.

Actually I found "Sociology of Revolutionary Movements" more interesting than I predicted. But I saw no use for the subject. After all, I was a radio announcer. I was interested in writing and journalism. How would the sociology of revolutionary movements be useful to me?

Well, two years later I found myself led to apply for a communications position at World Vision. They were looking for a journalist with media experience, and I was qualified. Soon I was trying to understand what World Vision was doing. In particular, I began to try to understand why people were poor and how they responded to the things that caused their poverty.

To my very great surprise, I found myself going back to the sociology I had studied. Looking up the books I had read and discovering that the things I had studied were central and important for my growing understanding.

I remember thinking, How clever is God, eh? I didn't know I would need this subject, but He did. Not only that, he made sure I had a little hole in my lecture timetable where this subject fitted perfectly.

Without my even knowing it, God was shaping me for the work he wanted for me. God was at work. He was shaping me for service.

But I have to say if you had known me when I was in High School you would not have thought that this interesting career lay ahead of me.

When I hit Year 12 I failed. Suddenly I no idea what I was going to do.

My immediate remedy was to suggest I go jackarooing. My parents saw that jackarooing was an occupation for which I was immensely NOT gifted. And they sent me back to repeat Year 12.

Slowly the idea formed in my head that I was to be a doctor. God knows why! No, actually, God knew something altogether different. I imagine he said "Philip! A doctor? I don't think so."

Anyway, I had another great year at school. I debated. Won the public speaking competition.

Took the role of the Captain in "HMS Pinafore". Crammed to do the entire secondary level music course in one year and passed. Took leadership roles in Methodist camps all over the State every school holidays.

But also, I played in the 6th Rugby Union side. There were only six sides. And only one other school, Nudgee College, had enough boys to field six sides, so we only played one game for the entire year. Nudgee College won, 76 to nil.

And I also tried to pass Chemistry a subject I had consistently failed in every exam for four years. And, not surprisingly, I failed again. At the end of the year, I couldn't get into Medicine, because I needed Chemistry. Now what?

Dad took me along to the National Bank and held my hand while I applied to be a bank Johnnie.

I enjoyed just over a year in the bank, but my real life was happening elsewhere. I was in a band, well, a folk group in those days, and we were busy every weekend. I was compering at discos, and helping to stage monthly youth rallies. Not to mention driving across Brisbane regularly to visit a very interesting female who, I had discovered, could also play the organ like me.

Somewhere in the midst of this, the manager of one of the Brisbane radio stations got to know me and one day he said, "If you ever want to be in radio, let me know."

Did I want to be in radio? Now that sounded like fun.

In 1976 after 10 years in radio, I got the first real inkling that maybe God had taken seriously a prayer I had prayed as a nine year old. I had said I wanted him to guide me, that I wanted to do with my life what he wanted.

I was reading the trade magazine, Broadcasting & Television weekly. And there was a job ad, not for a radio job, but for a charity job. World Vision was advertising for a "Communicator." One thing impressed me about their ad, and a second thing just blew me away.

The thing that impressed me was that a charity had the unusual good sense to advertise in this particular magazine. If they wanted an experienced media person, this was the ideal place to advertise. And yet, I had never before seen a non-media organisation advertise here. Clearly, whatever this World Vision place was, they seemed to know their business.

But the thing that blew me away was that the ad was like a summary of my experience. It was like my CV. Every one of the things they wanted, I had done. I took the ad home and showed it to Judy and we agreed I should apply. It was just as if I had been shaped to fulfil this role. Now isn't that surprising?

Well, to cut a long story short, I got the job as one of two communications officers. And I thought that maybe this was all part of some divine plan. That maybe my childish prayer had been carefully considered by a power higher than I could imagine. That someone out there

really did have a plan for me.

Those first six years with World Vision were really exciting. We introduced the 40 Hour Famine and turned it into a national success. We got onto television. We developed a direct marketing strategy. World Vision became a household name.

Well after this there were many and regular examples of how God was shaping me, and then inviting me into ways of serving Him that I had not planned, but that I realised He had uniquely equipped me for.

And one other story.

God led me into radio. And he led me out. While I was working at World Vision Australia, about 15 years ago, a radio station licence here in Melbourne came up for sale. A World Vision colleague and I expressed our dream for there to be a Christian radio station in Melbourne. We had this vision of a radio station that would speak to the whole Melbourne community, Christian and non-Christian. Not radio FOR Christians, but radio by Christians and operating with Christian values.

We wrote a business plan, but we could not raise the finance and the idea died. Or so it seemed.

Four years ago, I was invited to join the board of Light-FM and I discovered that my dream had not died. It had been God's dream all along, and he had kept it alive through others. These days I am vice-chairman of Light-FM and through my involvement I am discovering all over again how God has shaped me for this role. What a great privilege to be a servant of a master who shapes us for the very service to which he calls us.

Why do I have this journey to talk about? Is it because I am a good Christian? This journey has got nothing to do with my faithfulness.

It has to do with Jesus and His faithfulness. As I look back I see so much evidence of a higher power that shaped a child, shaped a man, and who still today shapes and leads me into the work to which he calls me.

God will do the same for you too. You just have to let Him.