

We are going to study the Benediction of Equipping. When I think of equipping, I think about a conversation I had over ten years ago. Over ten years ago, I sat at a cafe with my boss at the time with a question on my mind I partly wanted to ask but still hadn't convinced myself that it was worth pursuing. It was a question birthed out of curiosity, and it would eventually lead me to a host of new experiences, including being CPC's South Campus Pastor. The question was this, "What is required to be a pastor?"

It's important to know I never had plans to be a pastor, nor long-term plans to be in full-time ministry. I have an undergrad degree in finance and spent several years in corporate finance. But after a few years of full-time ministry, my curiosity was stirred to understand what prepared a person for the role of pastor. To put it another way, my question sitting in the cafe was, what would it take to be equipped?

We think about equipping all the time (though you may not use that word). For example, perhaps you pursued a certain education you thought would prepare you to get a certain job. You took a certain job you thought would prepare you to get the next job. Or maybe you've had experiences, which remind you of the equipping that has taken place through the years. I was in Santa Cruz this week for a wedding and stopped for coffee. The coffee shop was on a one-way street, and the parking space available meant that I had to parallel park on the left side of the street, which to me is strange. Think about it, unless you spent time in the UK or Australia, most of your experience parallel parking is on the right side. I've parallel parked for years, but I don't think I have ever paralleled parked on the left side, and it took me a few seconds to flip my movements. But I was able to do park on the left because I was equipped through years of practice (and the backup camera—how great are those cameras?!)

Today, we're going to read a benediction, which will help us see equipping in a way that perhaps you haven't considered. The writer of Hebrews describes God as the One who puts the world together and puts us together in a way you and I can participate in His story. We're going to see that equipping is a divine work.

Why does this matter? What good is God's work of equipping? To me, if God doesn't equip us—put our story and us together for a more significant purpose—than life is fragmented, and meaning dissipates. We're stuck on our own trying to make sense of a world, which doesn't work as it should. Or we exhaust

our efforts trying to squeeze hope from a world that is as confused as we are.

The good news is God offers a different way through Jesus. God does something in you, so you can do something through Him. Both you and your work have eternal value because of God's work for you and in you.

God Brings All Things Together

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, (Hebrews 13:20)

The writer of Hebrews begins with the phrase, "God of peace." Peace relates to the Jewish idea of "shalom"—wholeness, completeness, and bringing all things together. How does God bring all things together? God brings all things together through the blood of the eternal covenant, and the resurrection of the great Shepherd. The "blood of the covenant" is a phrase, which connects to the ancient Jewish prophets. God spoke through Zechariah about a day in which God would free His people from oppression. It would require sacrifice (blood), and God would do it because He promised to be loyal to His people. It's a picture of grace. In other words, God would act with enduring (eternal) grace toward people.

Similarly, shepherd was an image of Israel's redeemer. The prophet, Micah, spoke of a shepherd who would lead God's people from the thicket to the pastureland (Micah 7:14). God declared through Ezekiel that a future shepherd would restore His people (Ezekiel 34:23). Jesus uses this image of a redeeming shepherd when He describes His role. Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd, and He proves His goodness by sacrificing His life for those under His care. His death and resurrection mean a new start for those who follow Jesus.

So, the writer of Hebrews describes God as the one who puts all things together with a grace that endures, through Jesus who died and was raised to new life so people could have a new start. Which presents us with a question, what does that have to do with equipping?

equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:21)

To see how this connects, we need to define the word equip. The word, equip, has two elements: (1) to put something together, and (2) to prepare for a purpose. For example, when I was in elementary and middle school, the start of each school year began the same way: with a trip to the store for school supplies. My mom had a list from the teacher of what I needed—pencils, three-ring binder, etc.—and we trekked through the store gathering the supplies. We were putting together the elements, which would help me carry out the role of student.

The writer of Hebrews wrote that God equips people. More than gathering external material, God does something in us. Much like Mark talked about last week, God works to grow those who are in Jesus. With (or, in) every good thing, God brings together the various elements of our story so we can live into a new purpose. How does this connect to verse 20? The God who puts all things together also puts you together.

Your story has value

This has myriad implications, but two things stand out to me about how God views people like you and me. First, God values your story. One of the heartaches of our sin-married world is how often we devalue what God values. Maybe someone has said or done something, which has devalued you. But God leads a different message; you and your story matter to God. God equips people, putting together the parts of their story to form a whole. Whatever the eternal God spends His effort on doing has eternal value.

God Uses Every Thing

Second, not only does God value your story, but God uses every good thing and every bad thing, which He turns for good for a purpose. Life on earth can sometimes seem fragmented, or perhaps you struggle to see the purpose behind your story. This benediction describes God as the one who uses every good thing purposefully for your good. God brings meaning in what seems like chaos. There is a fascinating statement in the ancient story of Joseph. Joseph's story was marked by incredible injustice. His brothers hated him and sold him as a slave to foreign people, and then Joseph found reprise through hard work but was falsely accused of a crime and imprisoned for years. But through it all, Joseph chose to believe God hadn't left him. Eventually, Joseph was set free and placed in a position of great privilege and power over the entire kingdom, including his brothers, whose evil intent started this dramatic chain of events. Instead of exacting revenge on his brothers, Joseph believed God was at work through his story. He said, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...*" (Genesis 50:20a). Joseph chose to believe God uses every good thing and turns every bad thing for good.

Because God equips you, it means you matter to God, and He uses every good thing for a purpose. What is that purpose?

The Purpose of Equipping

The purpose of God equipping you is so you would do something, namely, "the will of God." "The will of God" is a massive phrase, which fills books and hours of conversation. For our discussion, I want you to think about "the will of God" in connection with a Greek word, *oikonomous*.

In Jesus' day, large households had a manager who was in charge of operations for the property. This manager didn't own the property, but everything was under his or her authority to make the house function well. In Greek, the name for this job was *oikonomous*—a manager or steward ("*oikos*" meant house, "*nemo*" meant to manage).

As the writers of the New Testament articulated the relationship between God's equipping and our call to act in response, some of them used the concept of *oikonomous*. For example, Peter wrote everyone who is in Jesus has received a gift as a result of God's grace, and to use the gift for the good of another person. In doing so, Peter writes, you are an *oikonomous* of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). To put it another way, the concept of manager the early Christians promoted was this: (1) God has given you what you have, (2) and God has entrusted you with the responsibility to use what you have for good.

What if the will of God is not something in the distance or something you don't have, but something you could do right now? What if God equips you so that you can be an *oikonomous* for what He has already given you? When you do so, according to Peter, you are extending the grace of God beyond yourself.

He Works in You

And as you do the work God has given you to do, you'll find God is doing the same thing in you. It's a beautiful tension. God is at work in you as you work (Philippians 2:12–13). You're not left to your own energy, planning, and intentions. God is at work forming and shaping you. Equipping is a holy act in which God puts together your story for you to carry out a purpose He is actively working in you to bring about.

Through Jesus

This entire movement, God's eternal grace and divine work of equipping people like you and me, has a central radius. All of this happens through Jesus. This is the second time Jesus is mentioned. He is the central figure of God's work of putting the world right and putting you together so you can participate in the work of God.

Paul writes about this in his letter to the church in Ephesians 2:8–10. God saved us by grace through faith in Jesus. You and your story find meaning in what Jesus has done for you. Paul doesn't stop there. This salvation gives you a new story in which to work. Work does not save you, but you are saved for work, to live a new life in the way of God.

How does this Benediction help us to live in the way of Jesus? I want to challenge you to look at your life story to this point and consider, what is unique about your story? What has God given you? What is the good you've experienced, and the not-so-good God turned for good? When I first went to Europe, our staff did this process by creating a timeline of key life events. It's a challenging, but eye-opening experience. Create a timeline. Maybe you need to talk it out with a close friend, or a group of people you have chosen to trust. Make a plan this week to examine your story. Your unique story is the gift you've been given to steward grace to your sphere of influence.

Life isn't easy. Maybe you're in a situation where you don't see how it's possible your story makes sense. Maybe it seems like a note, which doesn't fit. The good news is that in Jesus, what

seems like a dissonant note in your story is put together to create a beautiful song for you to sing.

If I could go back to the version of myself sitting at the cafe ten years ago, when I asked my question about being a pastor, there's one thing I would tell myself. You'll discover God will put together aspects of your experience, desires, and personality in ways that you wouldn't have imagined.

My hope for you reading this is you would take a step of faith to believe God, that through Jesus, you have eternal value and He is forming you for a story bigger than you could imagine.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.