

SHAPE

S = Spiritual Gift

H = Heart – Your passion as a clue to joyous impact

A = Ability – Your natural talent, skills, training, things you are good at

P = Personality – Extrovert, Introvert, Risk taker, active, reflective, Cautious, Shy, OCD!

E = Experience – What life has revealed to you about yourself/ What worked/ What didn't

Introduction

1. Boy and Baseball story

A young boy's self talk was impressive. Everytime he prepared to throw the ball in the air, he recited his mantra – "The greatest baseball player in the world." A light toss of the ball, a hearty swing with the bat, only to miss completely. He repeated this process a few times, each time exclaiming, "The greatest baseball player in the world." After several attempts at hitting the ball without success he stared down at the ball on the ground. He pondered carefully, bent to the ground and retrieved the ball and looked at in wonder and exclaimed, "The greatest pitcher in the world."



2. Experience



What have you learnt from experience? Experience is a process of elimination! We quickly discover what isn't our fit, what isn't our shape. Just because mum, dad, or brother were good at sewing, drawing, cricket, doesn't mean we will be! Yet parents, schools, friends, invite us to make the attempt. And that is learning. That is experience. But I hope we are also learning from what came easily, what gave us delight, what we kept going back to and becoming absorbed in. Our positive and negative experiences, our successes and failures, are clues to our SHAPE. From childhood, family, education, work, opportunities, trial and error, we start to determine what our natural gifts, talents, preferences, dispositions, and aptitudes are.

3. Yummy-Yucky view of life.



Experience also teaches us what we like and dislike, find easy or difficult, boring or exciting, painful or pleasurable. This is a significant guide to my life. I avoid stepping on nails (yucky). I order my favourite flavour from the ice cream stand (yummy). I am going to call this the "yummy-yucky" view of life!

There is a large part of truth to this approach to life. It is obvious at a basic pain versus pleasure level. We avoid what is painful, boring, difficult, and embrace what is fun, exciting, easy or pleasurable. It helps when choosing a marriage partner! But how might this "experience" based approach to life also be a fickle and false guide?

Yummy can lead to yucky. A diet based on yummy alone leads to diabetes, obesity or addictions. To avoid hard work and difficult or boring challenges (yucky) leads to incompetence and low resilience. Yucky things may also be very valuable. (Training, exercise, finishing homework, study, weeding a garden, changing nappies!).

For it is not just the *sensations* but the *meaning, purpose* and *value* of the activity that counts in shaping us into creatures that behave in meaningful, moral, committed ways. When the goal is purposeful and valuable we put up with difficult, demanding and costly experiences. (See Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*). We can put up with almost any "how" (no matter how uncomfortable or challenging) when we have a "why." It is the embraced reason for the activity that lends us its value, not its comfort or ease.

4. The mundane experience. (Charles de Foucauld)

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2: 40)

So he went back to Nazareth with them, and lived obediently with them. His mother held these things dearly, deep within herself. And Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people. (Luke 2: 51)

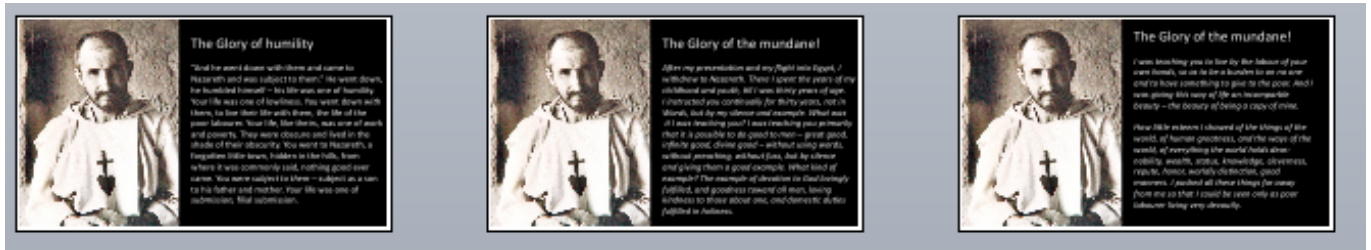
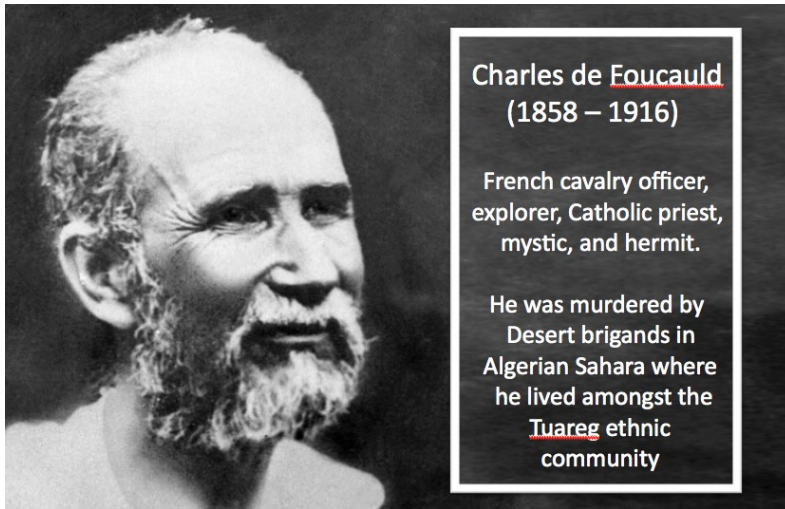
The two readings frame the story of Jesus visit to the temple as a young adolescent; a story that focuses on his growing independence from his parents, his love of learning and suggests a healthy development of his intellect, spirituality and intimacy with God even at that age. Then he goes home. And nothing happens for **thirty** years!

Painting by Holman Hunt. He anticipates the suffering of the adult Jesus on the cross. There is a cut on the palm of Jesus the boy in his father's woodwork shop, and a drop of blood on his foot, signs of his future mission as crucified saviour. But what of his thirty years before then?

I want you to think deeply about that. **Jesus achieved nothing, did nothing noteworthy, experienced nothing worth telling us about, for thirty years.** Thirty years wasted and useless? That is a time period that is more than half my life so far. What do you do with that?

(Discuss)

Those thirty silent years of Jesus life became the inspiration for Charles de Foucauld approach **to his entire life and ministry!**



The Glory of the Mundane

Three quotes from Foucauld

“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them.”
 He went down, he humbled himself – his life was one of humility. Your life was one of lowliness. You went down *with* them, to live the life of a poor labourer. Your life, like theirs, was one of work and poverty. They were obscure and lived in the shade of their obscurity. You went to Nazareth, a forgotten little town, hidden in the hills, from where it was said, nothing good ever came. You were *subject to them* – subject as a son to his father and mother. Your life was one of *submission*, filial submission.

After my presentation and my flight into Egypt, I withdrew to Nazareth. There I spent the years of my childhood and youth, till I was thirty years of age. I instructed you continually for thirty years, not in words, but by my silence and example. What was it I was teaching you? I was teaching you primarily that it is possible to do good to men – great good, infinite good, divine good without using words, without preaching, without fuss, but by silence and giving them a good example. What kind of example? The example of devotion to God lovingly fulfilled, and goodness toward all men, loving kindness to those about one, and domestic duties fulfilled in holiness.

I was teaching you to live by the labour of your own hands, so as to be a burden to no one and to have something to give to the poor. And I was giving this way of life an incomparable beauty – the beauty of being a copy of mine. How little esteem I showed of the things of the world, of human greatness, and the ways of the world, of everything the world holds dear: nobility, wealth, status, knowledge, cleverness, repute, honour, worldly distinction, good manners. I

pushed all these things far away from me so that I could be seen only as a poor labourer living very devoutly.

Note the total contrast to our contemporary western secular cultural values. In the modern west, status, wealth, education, power, are signs of success. There are correct and incorrect “shapes” based on fashion, politics, popularity, etc. The “celebrity” and entertainment culture informs the arts, news, media, and politics in terms of style and presentation and values. **This approach to life did not typify Jesus commitments or values for 30 years of his life!**

SHARE: Your experience of the mundane, dutiful, normal, average, yet in your experience of that world, job, relationship, activity, you were true to your shape – you recognized and realised great value in that part of your life.

5. The Crisis or Hardship experience

Sparky – the story of Charlie Brown!

Sparky failed every single subject in eighth grade. He failed physics as a senior by getting a zero. He also failed Latin, Algebra and English. He did make the school’s golf team. He was socially awkward, but not actively disliked or bullied. Just not really noticed. He never once asked a girl out during his years in high school. He was too afraid of being turned down. But he did love drawing. In his last year of high school, he submitted some cartoons to the editors of the school yearly magazine. They rejected them, but Sparky had decided to become a professional artist anyway.

After leaving school, he wrote a letter to Walt Disney studios. They told him to send some samples to represent a chosen subject. He spent a lot of time on these submissions but Walt Disney also rejected his drawings.

So he decided to write his own life story – the story of a simple loser – in cartoons. He described his childhood self – a quiet boy who means well but is an underachiever. The cartoon strip he created became famous worldwide. Sparky’s real name was Charles Schultz and the cartoon strip was known as “Peanuts.” And the hopeless kid who couldn’t kick a football or get his kite to fly, was Charlie Brown.



Struggle and hardship, can both transform and enlighten us. You may now be a gift of hope and encouragement for others in the areas in which you yourself struggled, and grew. History is full of these stories where the catalyst for social change was personal struggle. The Alistair McGrath Foundation is a famous and current Australian example.. A *purpose* has been discovered that lends meaning and value to all you experienced, so that you can bring grace, truth, comfort, knowledge or support to others in a similar place.

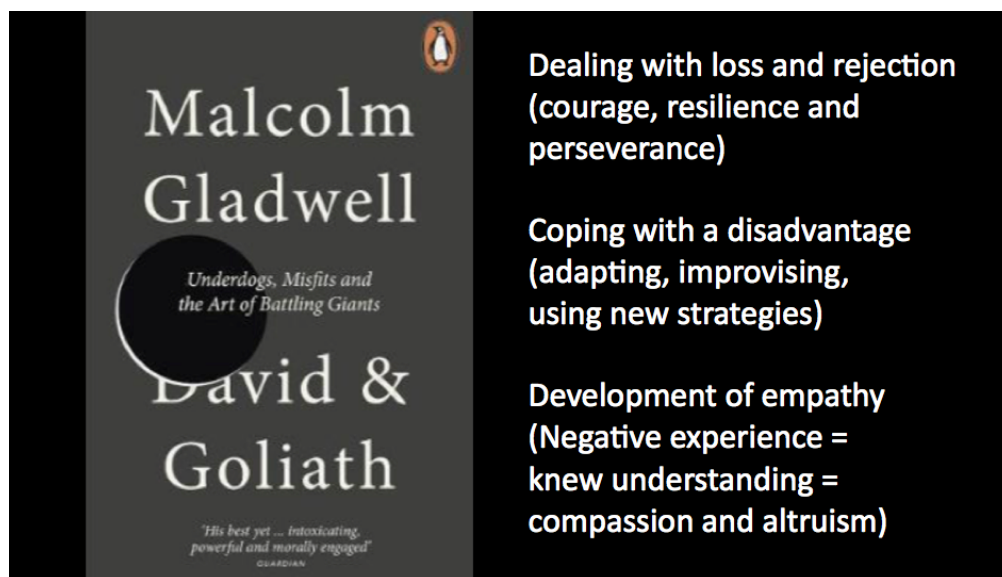
The Power of Crisis, Shame, Failure and Loss may lead to the following positive off-shoots:

- * Personal moral and spiritual growth
- * Resilience and courage
- * Empathy and understanding
- * Altruism and charity

This is an insight expressed by Paul in Romans.

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. (Romans 8:28)

For we are God's masterpiece, created anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things planned for us all along. (Ephesians 2:8-9)



Malcolm Gladwell's book is an exploration of these ideas through narrative history – stories revealing the triumph, the value, the achievement, that came from being the underdog, the struggler, the sufferer.

- * 67% British Prime Ministers lost a parent before they were 16. Early need for resilience.
- * Dyslexic people are over-represented in business (they relied more on observation and listening to compensate for their inability to read; they were also more verbal in “selling” themselves)

Share an experience of struggle, hardship, or loss that has definitely shaped you in a way that has enhanced your life or the life of others.

6. The Granny Smith Apple Story: Eucharist



The Granny Smith Apple had its origin in Eastwood, Sydney. Maria Ann Smith arrived in Australia with her husband Thomas in 1830 aged 30. She had three children when they established their family home and orchard in North Road.

At the City Markets, Maria bought a crate of French Crab apples from Tasmania. On finding the bottom ones in the crate had gone bad, she tipped them out down by the creek that ran through the family property. From those seeds a new fruit tree grew up along the creek course.

In 1868 it was confirmed as a new variety of apple. They became popular cooking apples at the local markets. She died in 1870 and her husband Thomas in 1876, and the property was bought and the apples cultivated by Edward Gallard who in 1891 won first prize for best cooking apples

at the Newcastle show. He sold them under the name *Granny Smith's Seedling*. The NSW agricultural department took interest and they were developed commercially for export. By 1974, they accounted for 40% of the Australian market. They are a very healthy food – high in fibre, potassium and antioxidants and low in calories.

Here is a Metaphor for new life, new shape, new hope, new potential in something that was once rotten, discarded, accorded no worth or value. Something unwanted, politically powerless. Something crucified! History is full of such stories – Nelson Mandela (political prisoner and terrorist to presidential peace-activist!), John Newton (slave trader to hymn writer and anti-slavery activist).

In the gospel of Christ, this truth has been demonstrated and validated. There is nothing mundane. There is nothing valueless. Everything is a seed of potential in God's soil. Our lives constantly, through grace, grow through error, mistakes, shame, and failure towards renewed strength, wisdom, clarity, and hope.

Eucharist with Apple! Take some apple, some wine, some cheese and crackers, and be renewed today in Christ's love and power. Neither in the mundane or the crisis, have you ever lost your value or worth in Christ. Indeed, these are the things that have shaped you for ministry.

7. Glenn Cardier – The Odd One Out



There are no wrong shapes; only different shapes. There are fashionable, and popular, and statistical and demographic variations of shapes, but in a church, there are only those shaped by life (DNA, childhood, culture, experiences), but are being reshaped by grace! We are all learning how to recognize and reflect that shape that is called God.