

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:11-15, 40; Philippians 1:1-11

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SUBJECT: Middle Adult

Series: "For Someone Your Age..."

THEME: Middle Adult is a Time to Make Your Mark

SERMON: "Making Your Mark"

(source - All the Women of the Bible)

Introduction

Every time my father poured a concrete slab or built something, he would always leave his mark. Usually his name, **H.F.KIPE** and the **date**. Or he would use the hand or footprints of his children or grandchildren. Here are Pastor Shaun's footprints from **August 1983** in some concrete steps at my house. BTW He was born July 18, 1983. So he was one month old when he stepped in that concrete. But hey, some people just have to start making their mark early in life.

Why did my dad do that? Well, how many times have you asked, when you saw something – "I wonder how old this is?" Or, "I wonder who built this?" My dad just wanted to leave the answers for you, and he was a man who was always thinking about and preparing for the next generation. He knew he was part of something bigger than his generation.

Sometimes the mark you leave lasts far longer than a generation. Have you ever carved your name in a tree? Here is a picture of a Beech Tree in Tennessee – estimated to be about 500 years old.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tufc.com%2Fproject%2Fdaniel-boone-beech%2F&psig=A0vVaw2DKOORqCTQGSJYULQBI9E&ust=1605275074751000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCLC5-uSR_ewCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAG

Apparently Daniel Boone carved his name in this tree in 1776. Leaving his mark.

What type of marks are you leaving? It is what we want to talk about today.

Children and young people aren't as likely to think about leaving a mark that will outlast themselves. But it is this next age group/generation that does. Today in our series "**For Someone Your Age...**" we are talking about those **middle adult** years. Roughly 35 or 40 years old to 60 or 65 years old.

We will consider the same questions:

"What does this generation have to offer the church?" and

"What does this generation need from the church?"

It is important to us that everyone who comes to Five Forks finds a way to become part of this community of believers, as we journey together, following Jesus.

Let's try to get a **better handle** on this age group and some of their characteristics.

Remember, **Children** specialize in **depending** on others and seeing God and God's world with **wonder** and awe. Jesus said, "Change and become like them – depend on me."

Young people seem to specialize in **new adventures**, taking risks, thinking outside the box. Challenging what they have been taught and making their faith their own. This feeds freshness and energy and vitality into the community. Jesus says, "Always be ready to welcome them, restored to their place of honor in the family."

One author called this **next** generation, the **MOSS** generation, not because they are like dead logs laying in the woods, but **Middle-Aged, Over-Stressed, Semi-Affluent, Suburbanites.**

"The typical MOSS, according to this author, is forty some years old, working on a second marriage, has 2.0 biological children and 0.5 step children, owns at least one publication on **cholesterol**, and is **affluent** but doesn't feel that way."

You can't wait till you get into this group, can you? Some of you remember being in that age group don't you?

Another article noted some of the perks of being over **fifty**. They are:

1. In a hostage situation you are likely to be released first.
2. No one expects you to run — anywhere.
3. People call at 9 PM and ask, “Did I wake you?”
4. There is nothing left to learn, the hard way.
5. You sing along with elevator music.
6. Your joints are more accurate meteorologists than the national weather service.

Seriously though, in our middle adult years, we seem to want to **settle down**. We have become used to where we live. We are familiar with our jobs. And even if it is not the most satisfying job, at least we like the familiarity. We prefer this sense of **stability** and **permanence**.

But we also become more aware of our own **mortality**. We suddenly realize we won't be around forever. And we experience a need to create or nurture things that will **outlast us**.

That is, we want to make our mark on the world. So the title of this sermon is:

“Making Our Mark.”

What type of a mark are you making? In your family, your vocation, your ministry activity? Do you think about the mark you are making?

At this age particularly, we more keenly feel a need to **give back** to society. We want to create **positive changes** that will benefit others. People of this age often have someone or several people, they **mentor**. We want to be **remembered** as productive people in society. There is this growing sense that we are part of some **bigger picture**.

If we navigate this period of our lives successfully, it leads to feelings of **usefulness** and **accomplishment**. If we don't do so well, and don't find ways to contribute to society, we become **stagnant**, feel **unproductive**, and often feel **disconnected** from the community. It can easily lead to **depression**. It is a real, significant **life transition** we all go through.

As you can see, the church needs this group and this group needs the church.

Let me introduce you to someone in the scripture who fits this group well and seems to be navigating this period in her life well.

Turn to [Acts 16:12-15](#)

This is Luke, describing part of a missionary journey he went on with the Apostle Paul and some other companions.

¹² We reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.

Paul would typically begin the evangelism of a new city by going to the Jewish **synagogue** in that city, first, and telling the Jews and Proselytes (those who had converted to Judaism) about Jesus, the Messiah. But apparently in Philippi, there was no synagogue. Which means there were less than ten men in the city who were practicing Jews. Because that is what you needed in order to have a synagogue.

But, as is often the case, undeterred by the failure of men to gather and worship, the women gathered. So Paul and his companions joined the women for a prayer meeting down by the river.

¹⁴ One of [those women] was [Lydia](#) from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God.

We are introduced to **Lydia** as one who is:

Making her mark as a diligent and successful business woman.

Lydia is someone who has already left her mark in one arena of life, in the clothing industry. As we will see, she will also make her mark in other ways.

Scripture does not give us any information about Lydia's background apart from the fact that she was from **Thyatira**, which was one of the Macedonian city/colonies. Thyatira was a melting pot of many nations. It was well known for its pagan temples but did have a strong Jewish presence, with the worship of Jehovah.

It was especially famous for its **trade guilds**. These were powerful, influential, well organized as both businesses and training schools for new tradesmen and women. It was like a large Vo Tech city. Not just a school.

Copper smithing was a big, important guild in the area. But even more famous, was the **cloth dyeing** guild. This area dyed deep purple cloth. These were the colors and garments of royalty. These were the expensive clothes. The Armani's and Gucci's of the day. I suppose people would go around asking: "How do you like my new Lydia's?" Just kidding but:

Lydia was a prominent player in this circle of business. She had moved to Philippi, several hundred miles away. She owned a large spacious home with servants and apprentices under her. That is the business she was in.

Do you get the picture, she was making her mark in the clothing industry. As one commentator summarized it,

"Lydia had ability, enthusiasm, and singleness of purpose. She was clever and sharp. She was prosperous in an honorable and extensive trade." She is a good example of a successful middle adult woman – making her mark in business.

Lydia was also **making her mark as a Devout Woman**, a religious woman. But she seemed to be seeking something more, spiritually.

She was a leader in business **AND** she worshipped God and met with other women to pray.

Often, successful business people get so engrossed in their business that they have little or no time for religious activities. But Lydia, in spite of all her business obligations, found

time to worship according to the Jewish faith. Probably daily, she made her way to the riverside to pray.

Success by the world's standards does provide some comfort and a sense of fulfillment. But for those who have met Jesus, we know there is more to life than just business success. Lydia seems to have been experiencing this thirst for more meaning and purpose.

Although sincerely religious, Lydia was not yet a follower of Jesus, but was willing to hear more.

Lydia was in the group Paul and his companions sought out to tell about Jesus. Luke continues:

As she [Lydia] listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. ¹⁵ She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

Lydia then began **making her mark as a follower of Jesus.**

First thing she did as a mark of her commitment to be a follower of Jesus, she was **baptized**. Baptism is a very significant part of being a follower of Jesus. It is a public statement of your new allegiance. It is one way you begin making your mark as a follower.

Maybe you are a follower, but have never been baptized. I would encourage you to consider baptism.

Baptism in Lydia's day was often reason enough to be **ostracized** by the community.

Lydia didn't seem to care what effect this may have on her business. She chose to throw her lot in with those who later became unwelcome in the town.

She also enthusiastically told her whole household what had happened, and they believed and were baptized as disciples of Jesus.

Lydia was also a woman of **integrity**. She was concerned with whether her faith was

genuine, authentic. She said:

“If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord...[come and stay at my house]”

“Do you think my faith is genuine?” How do you test that?

The apostle James says in his letter to believers:

“You say you have faith. Show me your faith is genuine by your good works.”

James 2:18

Lydia did exactly this. She acted upon her new found faith immediately and extended Christian **hospitality** to Paul and his companions.

Making our mark as a follower of Jesus means **getting involved in the work of the kingdom**. That includes hospitality and many other activities.

Not surprisingly, for a person with her leadership personality and the transformation God’s Spirit was working in her, she was persistent and persuasive. How does Luke say it?

“She urged us until we agreed.”

She didn’t give up. But she knew what **she** had received – the **Good News** of the Gospel, **forgiveness** of her sins and **salvation** for her soul, and the **presence** of God’s Spirit. It spurred her on to being involved in kingdom work as well.

And she was also well aware of **her material resources** – her wealth. She generously committed her wealth to the cause of Christ. Again, another way she began making her mark.

Lydia is mentioned explicitly just one more time in the scripture.

Shortly after Paul and Silas had shared the gospel with Lydia and her household, they got in trouble with the towns people. A girl possessed by a spirit kept following them around yelling. This exasperated Paul to the point that he turned around and cast the demon out of the young girl. It caused her master to lose his source of income from the girl. Of course the master became angry.

Long story short, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. There was an earthquake, the prison doors flew open, but instead of escaping, Paul and Silas shared the gospel with the prison warden and he became a Jesus follower.

Luke concludes this incident with **verse 40** of Acts 16.

⁴⁰ When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

Lydia was not ashamed of the prisoners but instead continued to offer them her support and hospitality. Tradition says her house became the first house church in Philippi.

Evidently Lydia continued making her mark. Commentators are convinced Paul was including Lydia when he wrote his beautiful letter to the church in Philippi. This is how he starts the letter.

Think of Lydia, as I read this. Picture what she and Paul and Silas went through together. This is what it means to leave your mark for Jesus.

Philippians 1:1-11

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.

³ Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ, from the time you first heard it until now.

⁷ You have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. ⁸ God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

⁹ I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹¹ May you always be filled with the fruit of

your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

Lydia made her mark Serving the Lord

Lydia served her Savior by continuing to sell her dyes. God designed her uniquely for that purpose. It is what she brought to the table as God's servant for God's kingdom and she flourished in that role. She recognized her skills as a business woman and was able to wield these talents to support Paul and Silas's ministry, monetarily. Her generous care of Paul and Silas, and of many others, is what cheered their hearts.

Lydia was a **consecrated Christian**, and a **conscientious business** woman. That's how she made her mark - as a Christian business woman.

Making our Mark, this is what the middle adult generation is particularly gifted at and it is a significant part of what Middle Adults offer the church. For a few moments let's consider

What this generation offers the church? Or, what does the church need from this generation?

The **little children's** constant activity and curiosity may fluster us and tire us out.

The **young peoples** out of the box thinking and continual search for new ways to do things, and adventure, may leave us constantly nervous.

Middle adults offer some **stability** and **consistency** to our community of faith. By nature, we can't always be trying new things and taking risks. There are times when we need to take a deep breath and chill for a bit. Times when we need to stick with something for a while and develop the character of persistence and endurance.

Middle adults help us learn this.

Middle adults can also offer **training**. That is, mentoring or **raising up** those with little or no experience.

The guilds of Lydia's day were adept at training and raising up those who would come

after them to keep the guild going and growing. Using their practical experience to help train others.

How many times have you seen, on job descriptions, the words: “**Experience required.**”

If you are new to the job market, and don't have experience, how are you going to get a job, so you can get experience? You need someone to take a chance on you, and give you a chance to gain experience.

The church community needs those who will draw on their life experiences, who have already learned things the hard way, to teach others so they gain skills for the work that lies ahead. So they might avoid some unnecessary pitfalls. It may mean taking a risk on a younger, new employee, and training them.

Middle Adults are best suited to this.

A young man who was recently hired as a worship pastor at a new church plant, came and asked me to be his mentor. I was humbled by that request. But agreed to it. So we meet almost every week. What a joy it has been for me. And I have probably learned as much from this young mentee as he has been able to learn from me.

If you are in this middle adult age group, would you consider connecting with a younger person and become their mentor. Mentor them in life and in faith and maybe even in business.

The church needs middle adults doing this.

It was also common in the early church for those with means, or **resources**, wealth, to provide from that wealth for the work of the church. Middle Adults are most likely to have resources to provide for the ministry of the church.

We noted that children are not wealth creators. They can't pay their own way. In fact it cost's money to raise children and minister to children. Who is best suited to provide the necessary funds for ministry? The middle adults.

These are the years when we are most likely to create wealth. In these years, many times, our own children are leaving home and starting to create their own wealth. They don't need as much of our financial support. That means our wealth becomes more available to share with others in need and the ministry needs of the church.

The call of God on followers of Jesus is to freely and generously share the wealth they create. I know it's hard to know how much you need to set aside for yourself for retirement.

That's a valid conversation to have. And there is not one answer that fits all.

But in the same way that Lydia put her faith in action by offering hospitality and resources to the itinerant preachers, the church needs middle adults to step up and generously give of their resources, their finances. Five Forks has been able to minister in so many ways because many of you have been so generous with your material resources. Thank you.

The church also needs the **in-person participation** from this particular group. Participation in the work, worship and play of the church. We talked earlier this year how in order to build a strong, healthy, alive community we need to **play** together, **pray** together, **work** together and **eat** together.

Middle adult years can get very busy with jobs, hobbies, and family functions. None of these activities are necessarily wrong. But several have written about the dangers of these personal aspects of life keeping us from participating together in life as fellow followers of Jesus.

Lydia serves as a good example of one who found a good balance between being a good business person, and one who also participated, in-person, with other believers. She joined the women at the riverside to pray.

Middle adults, the church needs your regular and frequent **presence** in the life of the church. Worshiping, working, eating and playing.

But **What does this generation need from the church?** Those of us who are 40 - 65 years old – what do we need from the rest of you?

Wow, I struggled to answer this question. I think I'm on the upper edge of this group, if I'm still in it.

Pride, self-dependence, semi-affluence, make it difficult to admit that I need anything.

How do you learn to depend on God and the community of faith instead of yourself? I'm still trying to learn that.

Maybe by being **asked to participate** in or help with things that really are bigger than ourselves. So, be sure to include this age group when you are looking for volunteers.

Ask us to **mentor** you. We probably will not offer to do that on our own. I have found my mentoring has been one of the helpful things in life to keep me growing in my faith and in my knowledge of Jesus. I needed to mentor someone. I just didn't know it.

I also need to be **challenged** with new ways of doing things. Because at this age we tend to get stuck in ruts. Fear, the discomfort of change, hurts and embarrassments from past failures all tend to keep us in the ruts we are in. We may not see that there are different ways of doing things. We need to be challenged with new things.

So I guess we need to be asked to participate in the new things. And when we object, or think of all the reasons, your new ideas won't work, please **be persistent**. Don't give up on us too quickly. We want to feel like we are still needed and have something valuable to offer. Our culture tends to act as if this age group is already out of touch. So help us stay in touch.

How did Luke describe Lydia, **"She urged us until we agreed."** Keep insisting that we participate in the new things.

But also acknowledge that our **past experience (and contributions) are valuable**. Acknowledge that we do know some things. We are not totally out of touch with reality.

Also show us that you seriously consider the **objections** or **warnings** we might raise. When you acknowledge our contributions to the community as valuable, you help fulfill that need we have, that we have been "making our mark." That we have been having a positive impact. Something so important to this age group.

Finally, be **patient** with us as we middle adults try to learn to adjust to new ideas and new ways. You move slower in middle adult years and probably think a little slower as well. And we may even be stubborn. So be patient. Hopefully we will come to embrace the new exciting work that God wants to do in and through Five Forks church.

PRAY

As you go out this week, take some time to contemplate what mark you are making. May you hear Holy Spirit say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”