Our story this morning is about a man
you’ve probably never heard of
unless you fall into one of two categories.

One is you’re a surgeon.
In that case you may have read one of his books
or one of the 100 scientific papers he authored.

Or you may have heard of him if you have leprosy.
In that case you know him as the man
who changed your life.

His name is Paul Wilson Brand.

Biographical Notes

Paul was born in 1914 in the beautiful Kolli Hills of south India.

(Picture)

His parents were missionaries.
They founded nine medical clinics and schools during their ministry there.
His mother Evelyn,
   known as Granny,
   was a feisty woman
   with a huge heart.

The hill tribes where Paul was raised
disposed of unwanted children by leaving them beside the road.
Granny Brand would take in these children,
nurse them to health,
rear them and educate them.
Years after his mother’s death,
    Paul returned to the village where he grew up.

An Indian woman told Paul,
    “I was one of the unwanted ones,
        left to die.
    There were several dozen of us.
    Your mother took us in.
    We called her Mother of the Hills.
    She paid for my schooling;
        I earned my Masters, and
        today I teach nursing at the University of Madras.”
The woman had traveled several hundred miles to meet Paul
    and to tell him how grateful she was for his mother.

Paul’s childhood was common for the area
    but difficult by our standards
        with several bouts of dysentery and malaria.
He was sent to the United Kingdom at the age of nine
    for his education.
His father died of blackwater fever,
    a complication of malaria,
        when Paul was fifteen.
He had not seen his father since he had left India
    six years before.

When Paul finished school,
    he decided not to follow in his father’s footsteps
        by pursuing a medical career.
Instead he chose building and carpentry.

Over time, though, he felt a calling to medicine
    and he trained at University College Hospital in London
        during the Second World War.
He passed the examination for the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons
    in 1945 while working as a casualty surgeon in the London Blitz.
During this time he met his wife Margaret, who also was a surgeon and who became an eminent ophthalmologist.

**Clip: The Story of Paul and Margaret Brand (youtube) 00.17-2.50**

So the Brands made their home in Vellore, India, where Paul taught surgery at the Christian Medical College and hospital, one of the best medical schools in India.

Shortly after arriving, Paul encountered for the first time persons with Hansen’s disease, more commonly known as leprosy – one of the world’s oldest and most dreaded diseases. He saw persons who were deformed and crippled and often blinded by the disease. Many had been rejected and forced to leave by their families, and they lived as social outcasts, begging for their next meal.

Paul and Margaret could not pass by such desperate suffering without wanting to help. Working to aid those plagued by this awful infirmity became the focus of their lives’ work.

Before Dr. Brand began his research, it was believed that the terrible disfigurement and (Pictures?) the rotting away of fingers and toes and hands and feet were due to the disease itself.

Trying to improve the lives of victims through surgery, for example, restoring the use of their fingers, was unrealistic, he was told, since lepers had “non-healing flesh.” Any incision you might make during an operation would leave a wound that would not heal and you would only worsen the patient’s condition.
In a lecture, I’ll show you parts of in a minute,  
Dr. Brand said he could not accept those words “non-healing flesh.”
He raised money from friends in England  
and built a small Indian village near the hospital.

He recruited twenty-five teen-age boys with leprosy to live there  
so he could observe their lives and their wounds.  
He also believed that because all the lepers he knew were beggars  
that to help them fully  
he would need to make them employable  
so they could be self-sufficient.  
To that end they employed professional carpenters, plumbers, tailors and gardeners  
to teach the boys a trade.

Knowing that leprosy created an inability to feel pain  
in peripheral nerves (neuropathy),  
Brand wondered if maybe the wounds they suffered  
and the loss of their extremities,  
could be the result of injuries that were not felt  
and therefore not treated,  
and as a result became larger over time.

A leprosy specialist told him  
that his hypothesis was possible  
but at times a person would go to sleep at night  
only to wake up with a new wound  
or even with a finger or toe missing.  
What trauma could he have suffered while sleeping?  
It had to be the disease itself  
that caused the wounds  
and the decaying of the flesh.

I want you to hear part of Dr. Brand’s lecture given in San Antonio  
when he was 86 years old,  
describing his first work with leprosy.

Listen for two things.  
(1) The affection and respect he had for these teenage boys with leprosy  
and (2) the diligent care he gave to them and their condition.
The boys learned to be more careful and the injuries went down.

Dr. Brand was encouraged.
   It seemed possible that the wounds and the loss of flesh might not be caused by the disease itself.
Maybe they could be prevented and fingers and toes and hands and feet could be kept in spite of having leprosy.

But then one morning one of the boys awoke with a terrible wound on his index finger.
And a few days later, another boy came to breakfast with a large piece of flesh missing from his foot.

How had this happened?

Brand conducted genuine scientific research which confirmed what his anecdotal observations had led him to believe.

And how the world saw leprosy changed. What practically everyone believed – that the loss of flesh was caused by the disease itself – was replaced with the idea that the inability to feel pain and the repeated injury to a particular portion of the body was the reason for the awful wounds that leprosy patients suffered.

With this one discovery, fifteen million victims of leprosy were given hope that, with proper care, they could preserve their fingers and their toes.
Later Dr. Brand applied the same principles to the feet of diabetics, also lacking the ability to feel pain and often terribly ulcerated from small, repeated injuries.
It has been estimated that his research annually prevented 70,000 amputations for diabetic patients in the United States alone.

Brand’s research meant that it now made sense to believe that surgical solutions might be able to treat clawed hands, twisted limbs and even more challenging issues. He began experimenting with tendon and muscle transfers, developing new surgical techniques, until he found the very best combination to restore a full range of motion and his patients could use their hands and feet again.

However, after returning to the world, his first patients came back to him, asking that he reverse the effects of the surgery, so they could go back to begging.

They now had restored physical capabilities and they had learned a skill but no one would hire them because of the scars and the deformities they bore.

Paul and Margaret went back to work. Paul became the first surgeon in the world to use reconstructive surgery to correct the deformities of leprosy in the hands and feet.

Margaret and he learned to remake a human nose by entering it through the space between gum and upper lip, stretching out the skin and moist lining, then building up a new nasal structure from the inside with a bone transplant.

Blindness often occurred because leprosy deadens the tiny pain cells that prompt a healthy person to blink several times a minute. Without binking, the eyes are not moistened properly, and they dryness leads to blindness.

Margaret learned to tunnel a muscle that is normally used for chewing up under the cheek and attach it to the upper eyelid.
By chewing gum all day long,
patients simultaneously moved their eyelids up and down,
thus lubricating the eyes and averting blindness.

Finally, they replaced lost eye brows on the faces of their patients
by tunneling a piece of scalp,
intact with its nerve and blood supply,
under the skin of the forehead and sewing it in place above the eyes.

Many who arrived at the hospital looked barely human,
their shoulders slumped,
cringing when other people approached,
the light having faded from their eyes.

After months and sometimes years of treatment and operations,
and being cared for by a staff that related to them with respect and concern,
not only were their bodies reshaped and rehabilitated,
but so were their spirits.

After 17 years in India,
Paul and Margaret moved to the United States Public Health Service Hospital
in Carville, Louisiana,
which was the only leprosy hospital in the US
and a world famous center for the study of leprosy
and which gave him a greater platform both for research
and for dispensing the knowledge he had acquired
and the techniques he had developed.

Dr. Brand retired in 1986
and later served as the President of the Leprosy Mission International
until 1999
and continued to work with the World Health Organization.

Upon retirement,
the Brands moved to Seattle
where they bought a modest cottage,
the only home they ever owned.
His honors and awards are many. He was Hunterian Professor of the Royal College of Surgeons. He received the Albert Lasker Award for outstanding leadership and service in the field of rehabilitation. The Queen of England honored him with a title Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

His book Clinical Mechanics of the Hand is still considered one of the premier handbooks for hand surgeons and physiotherapists.

And beneath all of this was a man of truly Christian character. Humble, compassionate, simple and self-sacrificing.

Philip Yancey is one of our most insightful contemporary Christian authors. Through his writings he became a close friend of Dr. Brand and spent time with him in the US and in India. They co-authored a number of books together.

Here’s what he wrote about Paul Brand.

Philip Yancey: I see the world largely through his eyes. My father died just after my first birthday, and in so many ways Dr. Brand became a father figure to me ... I have never known anyone more brilliant, nor anyone more humble. … Truly, I believe that God brought Paul Brand into my life so that I could take all the time in the world to examine one human being and learn what God had in mind with the whole creation experiment. No one has affected my faith more. You need only meet one saint to believe, and I had the inestimable privilege of spending leisurely hours on visits, trips, and phone conversations picking apart a saint piece by piece. He stood up to scrutiny.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM PAUL BRAND’S STORY OF A LIFETIME

1. If You Don’t Know What God Wants You to Do with Your Life, Do Something.

The first life we looked at in this series was the Apostle Paul. One of the points we made in that session was that your vision will determine your direction.
And we said that Paul had a leg up on us
    when he came to having a vision for his life.
He’s on the road to Damascus,
    Jesus appears to him,
and gives him a vision for his life.

If you remember,
    Paul recounts it for us in Acts 26.

Now, most of us don’t get a personal visitation
    that knocks us to the ground
and tells us exactly what to do with our lives.

I’m hoping that this series will help you.
Learning about the stories of others and their callings,
    I am praying will help you learn more about your calling
    and the story God wants you to live.
But, it’s just possible,
    in fact it’s likely,
    that at the end of this you won’t have a perfectly clear picture
    of how God primarily wants you to invest your life for his kingdom.

What do you do then?
Something.
Something that matters.
Something that meets a need.
Something that helps others in the name of Jesus.

And what you’ll find is that once you’re doing something for Christ,
    very often it’s in the doing of it,
that God will lead you to what he most desires you to do.

Nothing wrong with sitting at home,
    reading the Bible, and
    praying, “God show me how to serve you.”
But even better,
   after you’ve done that,
   step out and do something.
A moving ship is easier to steer than one that has dropped anchor.

Look at this clip.

**Clip: No Idea of Leprosy Paul and Margaret Brand 2.51-end**

I love that.
They knew they wanted to serve God.
They saw a need and they stepped into it.
And because they did that,
   God was able to direct them to their calling
   and to their life’s work.

Don’t wait for the perfect to come along.
Serve God the best you know how,
   and he will guide you.

Some of you have heard me say that Quest was not my idea.
I’ll make this short since some of you know this story.

A man in the church made an appointment to see me.
He told me about one of our members
   who had attended church with his family off and on,
   but he never connected with Christ in a deep way
   or with other men in the church.

When I was told the story,
   that man had become a full-fledged alcoholic.
He had lost his job as VP at one of the banks downtown,
   was separated from his wife and children
   and was living on the streets of Austin.
He died just a couple of years later.

The man who came to see me said,
   “Rob, there are other men in our church just like that guy.
   They come but we haven’t reached them.
   I think you can connect with them.
I think you’re supposed to.
I think we’re supposed to start a breakfast for men
and you’re supposed to talk to them from your heart.”

Not my idea.
Probably never would have been.

A year earlier I knew God wanted me at this church.
So I came.
I was glad and honored to come
and to do the work I knew to do.
But I had no idea I’d ever do anything in a concentrated way for men.

Do something.
Don’t sit around thinking that you don’t know what to do
or that you’ve prayed and still nothing.

Do something.
Look for suffering.
Look for need.
Look for people who are struggling in some way.
And step into it,
do what you can,
and it’s very likely you will be putting yourself into a place
where God can direct you to what he most wants you to do with your life.

2. The Most Important Needs People have are Spiritual Needs.

I’m using the term spiritual here in a very broad sense.
Trusting in Christ,
coming to know God in a personal way, and
having our sins forgiven –
that’s what we normally think of from a Christian perspective
as our most important spiritual needs.
And they are.

In addition to those, I’m thinking of
living with a sense of wholeness and hope;
being freed from the oppressive enslavement of shame;
feeling that we have a place to belong
and that people care about us.
Having our dignity in tact
and being productive with the time and the talents God has given us.

In essence as I’m talking about spirituality here
I’m thinking of all that it takes to
be a healthy human being emotionally and relationally

A story from early in Dr. Brand’s work illustrates what I’m trying to get at.

After examining a leprosy patient,
unable to speak the local language,
Dr. Brand gave the man a friendly pat
to assure him he would help him as much as he could.
Tears started to stream down the patient’s face.
Brand asked a colleague what he had done
so he might apologize.
She replied: “You touched him and no-one has done that for years.
They are tears of joy.”

As I read that story,
I was reminded of one of the times that Jesus healed a leper.

Matthew 8.2-3: and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if
you will, you can make me clean.” And he stretched out his hand and touched him,
saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed

What did the leper doubt?
Not the power of Jesus.
If you are willing, he said, you can, you have the power to make me whole.

But the question was: Are you willing?
Will you have compassion on someone like me?

There are lepers all around you.
Every day.
Some in this room –
who believe there is something about them,
something they’ve done,
something they are,
that makes it unlikely that God will love and accept them,
or that he will work for their good
or that he takes joy in them.

What did Jesus do for the leper?
Before he healed him,
he touched him.
He said, “You are accepted and wanted and loved and important,
right now, just as you are.
All those who told you that you’re not,
they are wrong about you.
You are loved by God and by me.”

I know he was grateful for his healing.
But I have wondered
if he ever forgot what it felt like to be touched by Jesus.

You and I – we are to be the touch of Jesus
with our words,
with our concern,
with our embrace.

What Mother Teresa said about her work,
Dr. Brand lived as well.

**Mother Teresa:** We have drugs for people with diseases like leprosy. But these drugs do not treat the main problem, the disease of being unwanted.

It’s so easy when you see the needs of the world
to think you need to fix a problem.
On a systemic level that may be true.

But when you’re in ministry,
your most important task is not fixing a problem;
it’s loving a person.
It’s listening,
it’s caring,
it’s touching,
it’s walking with another person emotionally and spiritually
as they journey towards wholeness.

A friend and colleague of Paul Brand at The Leprosy Mission, said of him:

**Eddie Askew:** From his work many thousands of individual lives have been transformed
and enriched. It wasn’t just the surgical techniques that Paul worked on, it was the
people. I have often watched him as he engaged with patients, assessing their
disabilities and deciding what would best meet their needs. I noticed that he never
concentrated solely on the hand or foot he held so gently and intimately. He looked at
the patient’s face, looked into the eyes. Paul was concerned for the individuals, their
personalities, acknowledging and valuing our common humanity.

And it’s in our love that people experience the love of God.

In his travels with Dr. Brand,
    Philip Yancey met many of his patients.
One was a man named Sadan.

He met the Brands too late to save his feet.
They were only stumps.
As a child his classmates made fun of him.
He suffered rejection from his family.
A bus driver humiliated him
    and threw him off a public bus.
Hospitals turned him away, stating,
    “We don’t treat lepers here.”

When he had no place left to go,
    he traveled to the Brands’ hospital in Vellore.
He told Yancey about his first encounter with Dr. Brand.
Sadan: I can still remember when Dr. Brand took my infected, bleeding feet in his hands. I had been to many doctors. A few had examined my hands and feet from a distance, but the Brands were the first who dared to touch me. I had nearly forgotten what human touch felt like. Even more impressive, they let me stay in their house that night, and this was when even health workers were terrified of leprosy.

Sadan spoke to Yancey for half an hour, telling him about the surgeries the Brands had performed for him which had made it possible for him to write again and become employed.

He also spoke about the mistreatment and prejudice he still faces. Shortly before, he had sat in a car alone and watched his daughter’s wedding from a distance.

But before he left, he made a statement that shocked the author. He said, “Still I must say that I am now happy that I had this disease.”

Yancey incredulously asked for an explanation. The man continued.

Sadan: Apart from leprosy, I would have been a normal man with a normal family, chasing wealth and a higher position in society. I would never have known such wonderful people as Dr. Paul and Dr. Margaret, and I would never have known the God who lives in them.

What does John Hull tell us when we go on a mission trip? He says, Your most important job is not to get the work done but to look at the people, play with the children, treat them with dignity, and love.
Why?
Because a person’s most important needs are his or her spiritual needs.

Live a story that loves.
Even if God calls you to some grand ministry,
  like changing how the world treats leprosy,
don’t ever forget
  that you are here to care and to listen and to embrace –
    in some way to be the touch of Jesus –
  so another person will know that God loves them
    and is committed to giving them hope
      and making them whole.

There are many other lessons we could learn from Dr. Brand.

But here’s the last one for this morning.

3. The Best Way to Become Somebody is to Help Nobodies.

Of course there are no “nobodies.”
Everyone matters to God,
  but I’m talking about those that the world thinks of as nobodies.

Dr. Brand used all of his talents and training,
  he passed up opportunities to lead major medical facilities, and
  he gave up the wealth he might have accumulated
because he decided to spend his life caring
  for the poor,
    the outcast,
  the unwanted,
    the rejected –
      those who could never pay him back.
He cared about those who others,  
even good people,  
even Christian people,  
thought of as nobodies.

Here’s one of his first experiences  
as a young doctor beginning his work at the Christian hospital in Vellore.

Clip: Dr. Paul Brand on Leprosy (youtube) 2.47-4.34

Dr. Brand dedicated his life and his talents to those that others looked upon  
as cursed and worthless.  
But he had no regrets.

Here’s what he told Philip Yancey.

Paul Brand: Because of where I practiced, I never made much money at it. But … as I  
look back over a lifetime of surgery, the host of friends who were once patients bring  
me more joy than wealth could ever bring. I first met them when they were suffering  
and afraid. I shared their pain. Now that I am old, it is their love and gratitude that  
illuminates the continuing pathway of my life. … Those of us who involve ourselves  
in places where there is the most suffering, look back in surprise to find that it was  
there that we discovered the reality of joy.

Yancey met many of Dr. Brand’s former patients.  
I told you about Sadan.  
Another was Namo,  
who came to Dr. Brand as a youth.  
4 million lepers in India.  
15 million worldwide.  
But only one orthopedic surgeon at that time  
trying to treat their deformities.
Namo had been rejected by
his school,
his village, and
his family.

When he arrived at the hospital he was so angry
that he told Dr. Brand to cut off his useless hands
and to take his soon to be useless feet as well.

But after five years of painstaking surgeries,
he regained the use of his hands and his feet.
He was trained in physiotherapy
and became the Chief of Physical Therapy at the All-India Institute.

On Namo’s wall,
there is a picture of a man he loves
and who made his new life possible.
It was twenty years old when Philip Yancey saw it there.

Beneath the picture of Dr. Brand there is the caption that Namo had added.
“May the spirit that is in him live in me.”

Jesus said

**Luke 14.13-14:** When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,
and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

We don’t earn our salvation by doing good for others,
not even for the least and the last.
But it is one of the primary ways that we become somebody
who lives a life that matters,
who pleases God, and
who will look back on the story of a lifetime with joy.
Money can’t do that.
Success can’t do that.
Awards and prizes and honors won’t do that.

Feeding the hungry,
clothing the naked,
giving water to the thirsty,
caring for those that others do not care for –
that’s the best way to become somebody.

That’s one of the great lessons we are taught by the great man
who was Paul Brand.

Prayer:

Lord God, you are my creator and you know me better than I know myself.
Reveal to me who I am to be, what I am to do, what message I am to give, what
gift I am to bring into the world. Big or small, public or private – reveal it to me,
and even before I know what it is, my promise to you is: I will do your will.