GUIA DE ESTUDO

Finding strength in your unique story

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New Hope Fulton · doxus.org

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BIG IDEA

God's faithful kindness shapes our lives, and each person must make that faith their own.

Everybody Has a Faith Story

The sermon began with a simple but powerful claim: everybody has a faith story. Pastor Shifra's story was shared live from the Paul Kirkpatrick production studios upstairs at New Hope, as the church combined its weekly podcast and message series at New Hope Fulton Church. Her story highlighted a Samoan faith heritage, generations of pastors and missionaries, and the moment a child must move from inherited faith to personal faith.

> *My faith story is one that testifies to God who has been faithful through the ages.*
>
> — Shifra on her testimony

Faith Heritage Before Birth

Pastor Shifra rooted her story in her Samoan cultural and faith heritage. She emphasized that her testimony did not begin at her birth, but before she was born, because God had already been faithful to her people through the ages. She described Samoa as a Polynesian world of many islands, with oral history carried through centuries, and she connected her people's story to a prophecy and to the arrival of Christianity through John Williams and the London Missionary Society in 1830. She also noted that her family includes six generations of pastors, and she is the fifth generation, with Liz Adams continuing in the sixth.

> *And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*
>
> — Shifra on the Spirit

The Spirit, Prophecy, and the Black Box

She connected Genesis 1 to her lived spirituality by saying the Holy Spirit has been hovering over the waters since before creation was filled. In her family story, the Spirit also showed up in a prophecy to a woman ruler in Samoa who was told that a kingdom greater than hers would come from the horizon, from heaven. When the London Missionary Society arrived by boat in 1830, the people were looking for a black box, and they recognized the Bible when it came ashore. For Pastor Shifra, this showed that God had already been working among her people long before she knew the name of Jesus.

PARA REFLEXÃO

Discuss the Faith Heritage

1. What stands out to you about Pastor Shifra's description of faith being present before she was born?
2. How does her Samoan heritage shape the way she understands God's faithfulness?
3. Why do you think she connected the Holy Spirit so strongly with her personal spiritual life?
4. What does the arrival of the Bible in Samoa reveal about the way God works through history?

A Family of Mission and Courage

Pastor Shifra spoke with gratitude about her parents and grandparents. Her mother and father were born in Samoa, but met and married in San Jose in the Bay Area. On her father's side, her grandfather established about 11 Adventist churches on the largest island of Samoa. She told the story of her grandfather traveling in an outrigger canoe with only a knife to confront his brother about becoming Adventist, only to spend the night in Bible study and be converted himself. Through that story, she showed how faith was passed on through courage, Scripture, and family witness.

> *I knew I wanted to be baptized.*
>
> — Shifra on belonging to God

Making Faith Her Own

Even with such strong heritage, Pastor Shifra insisted that there are no grandchildren of God. Children do not automatically inherit saving faith; they must make it their own. She shared how her parents gave her room to ask any question about God, life, or love, and they did not shelter her from real ministry situations such as divorce, physical abuse, gang violence, death, and funerals. That freedom helped her become inquisitive and genuinely ready to choose Christ for herself. At seven years old she wanted to be baptized, and after waiting a year, she was baptized on her ninth birthday.

REFLEXÃO

Personal Faith and Family

Consider where your faith came from. What parts of your story were inherited from family, and what parts became your own choice?

Where have you experienced the freedom to ask hard questions about God?

How might your spiritual growth change if you saw yourself not as a passive recipient, but as someone responsible to respond to God personally?

> *It is not baptism is not about I now am going to be a faithful person perfectly.*
>
> — Shifra on baptism

Baptism, Failure, and the Kindness of a Father

Pastor Shifra made clear that baptism did not mean she became perfectly faithful. She shared a painful childhood story about

a 10-page letter written to her father listing her sins, including not closing her eyes in prayer and other misconduct. Her father then handed her his own written response, full of kindness. That response protected her from shame while still calling her toward change. She said that moment revealed the kindness of her father and helped her understand that repentance is shaped by kindness, not humiliation. She used this to show that God's faithfulness, not her own perfection, is the foundation of her life with God.

APLICAÇÃO PRÁTICA

Practice Kindness in Discipline

If you are a parent, teacher, or mentor, correct with kindness the way Pastor Shifra's father did.

If you are carrying shame over real failure, ask God to meet you with mercy instead of hiding.

Make room for children and young people to ask real questions about faith, just as Pastor Shifra was given room to do.

PARA REFLEXÃO

Kindness, Shame, and Growth

1. How did Pastor Shifra's father's response change the meaning of discipline for her?
2. What is the difference between shame and godly correction?
3. Why does kindness help repentance more than fear does?
4. Where in your own life have you needed protection from shame?

A Turning Point at Age Twenty

Around age 20, Pastor Shifra said she needed to distinguish God from even the most godly people she admired. During that season, while studying Spanish studies and clinical laboratory science, she found herself more drawn to the Gospel of John than organic chemistry. She felt called toward mission work and considered a student missionary opportunity in Laos after already spending a year in Argentina. Though her father wanted her to stay in Michigan at Andrews University, she believed God was asking her to go. Eventually she declined the Laos invitation, and later her father told her that whenever there is a toss-up between following him and following her heavenly Father, she must always choose the heavenly Father.

APLICAÇÃO PRÁTICA

Choose the Heavenly Father

Identify one area where you are choosing human approval over God's direction.

Like Pastor Shifra, pray honestly when you face a major decision, even if it means disappointing someone you love.

Remember that calling may require leaving familiar places, whether that means Laos, Argentina, Michigan, or, later in her life, Maryland.

PARA REFLEXÃO

Discernment and Calling

1. What does it mean to distinguish God from the godly people you admire?
2. How did Pastor Shifra's call to Laos help her grow spiritually, even though she did not go?
3. Why was her father's counsel so important: always choose the heavenly Father?
4. Where might God be asking you to trust him over comfort or family preference?

> *It is not my faithfulness, but God's faithfulness, and it's the kindness of God truly that saves, like, whatever you're going through.*
>
> — Shifra on what saves

The Message for the Church

Pastor Shifra ended by inviting listeners to remember that faith stories matter and should be shared. Her own story pointed again and again to a faithful God who works through Samoan heritage, missionary history, a praying family, childhood questions, baptism at nine, correction with kindness, and major life decisions like moving to Maryland. The sermon's heart was not self-improvement but God's faithful kindness, which strengthens and changes lives wherever people are willing to receive it.

ORAÇÃO

Prayer

God of faithful kindness, thank you for working in our lives before we were even aware of you. Help us to make faith our own, to choose you above every other voice, and to receive your correction without shame. Give parents, mentors, and churches the kind of wisdom Pastor Shifra described, and teach us to share our faith stories with courage. Amen.