

Message: “Living Your Gifts”

Exploring spiritual gifts may lead us down paths we can’t imagine.

Back in 2003, the church I was attending decided to send a missions team on a trip to Cochabamba, Bolivia, a city of 800,000 people. The group was headed to Via del Norte, a small church in the barrio. We were going to teach the group how to do a vacation bible camp. And, as part of the training, we held a 4-day camp for the kids in the community.

God had an amazing plan. I was blessed to be chosen as one of the members of the team. God was working on the team members and our congregation just as much, maybe more, than those we went to serve. It was a lesson in humility and embracing different spiritual gifts.

For example, I wasn’t the team leader, even though I had run companies. A tall, blond, young man named Matthew, who was 26 at the time, was our leader. Next, we performed skits and lessons in Spanish, which I don’t speak. Matthew, Marie, Dan and other team members either knew or learned Spanish well enough to interact. Our teacher Erica designed the lessons. Ted & Laureen took care of food and logistics, and we were supported by the local missions house.

What was left? Pretty much being the go-for. So I helped as needed, like non-verbal parts in skits, carrying bags, cutting vegetables. I remember one task was to go out into the neighborhood before the camp started, beating a tambourine and inviting families to come. I remember shouting “Ven a la escuela.” I was kind of proud until someone told me I was actually inviting them to school. The phrase is “Ven a la iglesia.” We all learned lessons on patience, humility and poverty.

The trip was successful. Part of this was due to preparation; we spent a year preparing to go with weekly lessons, training and work. Part of it was the right attitude; we went to serve, not to be served. This wasn’t a “missions vacation.” A big part was our morning and evening devotions, group sharing and prayers. We lifted everything up to God and cared for those giving to support us. God was faithful. Everyone used their gifts. And lives were changed for the better that year and over the next 15 years. God gives us gifts to benefit others, but we benefit and find contentment, even if it’s not in the way we expect.

So how do you put your gifts to use in groups? Let’s consider a hypothetical situation to show how naturally we use our motivational spiritual gifts. Suppose you have a dinner party and invite seven people. It turns out each happens to have a different motivational gift. You’re bringing three salad plates to the table when one slips and crashes to the floor, scattering bits of glass and salad.

How would you react? Here’s how those with different gifts might respond:

- Perceiver: “That’s what happens when you try to carry too many plates.”
- Server: “I’ll clean it up.”
- Teacher: “The reason you dropped the plate is because it wasn’t balanced properly.”
- Exhorter: “Next time, it would be good if someone helped you carry the plates.”
- Giver: “I’ll be glad to help you make another salad.”
- Administrator: “John, go get the broom and dustpan. Sally, bring the mop. Marie, help me fix another salad.”
- Compassionate person: “Don’t feel embarrassed, it could have happened to anyone.”¹

You may hear words that resonate with you in these responses.

There’s nothing wrong with any of them. They are natural and normal. Once you know your giftedness and you learn about other gifts, you’ll understand yourself and others better.

This will help you make wise choices and decisions. You’ll be able to live life to the fullest. And you can intentionally be a blessing to those in your household, your extended family, friends, neighbors and others you meet in our community. It will help you accept and appreciate other people. This can help us in conversations, as couples, in groups and as those who work up front or those who work behind the scenes.

This is what it means to live into our spiritual gifts. We don’t deny or ignore them, but use them for the benefit of others. We do so freely and willingly as a conscious, intentional way of passing God’s blessings on.

¹ Don & Katie Fortune, “Discover Your God-Given Gifts,” Baker Publishing Group, 1987, 2009, pp. 229-230

Henri Nouwen said, “A gift only becomes a gift when it is received. And nothing we have to give ... will be recognized as true gifts until someone is open to accept them. This suggests that if we want others to grow - to discover their potential and capacities, to experience they have something to live and work for - we should first ... recognize their gifts and be willing to receive them. For we only become fully human when we’re received and accepted.”² I believe this is true in any kind of relationship, particularly covenant relationships, like marriage.

You know the saying “opposites attract” in marriage. There’s a truth to this. It turns out this is also true when we’re talking about spiritual gifts, particularly the gifts a couple have.

Take Tim and Darlene, for instance. Tim is a quiet type who likes to work with his hands. He’s a builder by trade. Tim is easily moved to tears, easily swayed in his opinions. Darlene is more outgoing, highly opinionated, unmovable in her standards and drawn to prayer.

There were many conflicts at first for them. Darlene would get irritated at Tim’s “wishy-washiness” and changeability. He was upset with her unbending ways and easily hurt by her outspokenness. They did the motivational gift inventory and found out she was a perceiver and he was a compassionate person.

Almost immediately, their relationship improved. Darlene realized she needed to pray more and comment less. She began to appreciate her husband’s sensitivity and gentleness as a beautiful gift from the Lord, and understood he could hear from God, too. Tim realized Darlene’s giftedness came from the Lord and he could value, rather than be threatened by her strong standards. He saw that it was okay for her to be the more verbal of the two.

They began to appreciate each other and their gifts, rather than resisting them. Differences became assets. They’ve since become a very loving and spiritually mature couple. Darlene said, “I realized if both of us were just alike, one of us wouldn’t be needed.”³ Imagine how this improves their family’s spiritual life!

² Henri Nouwen, *Daily Meditation*, August 18, 2022

³ *Ibid*, p. 230

All types of relationships, not just married couples, can benefit from a heightened awareness of their spiritual gifts. It can help us appreciate our unique differences and navigate those areas of life with the potential to be negative, transforming them into an opportunity for positive engagement. It can help you find new ways to overcome problems. Ask the Lord to guide you. Remember, you can't change anyone else, but you can change yourself, your attitude and actions.

I'd like to conclude this series by briefly examining how our spiritual gifts influence the ways we share our faith, offering a witness to the Lord. Let me first say this: there is no formula that works for everyone. If you know your gifts and you have a sense of how the other person is, it can make sharing better and easier.

Rather than asking someone “Are you saved?”, there are better ways to share our faith. If we ask the question with little knowledge of the other person, we run the risk of several things happening. We can make them mad, as it shows no consideration for a relationship on any basis other than religion. Also, it can be seen as threatening or judgmental. If someone says “no” it implies they are lesser. Finally, it doesn't recognize people handle new ideas in different ways. I don't think this is the best way to communicate or build a relationship.

Here are some tips on sharing faith based on your spiritual gifts. They aren't foolproof, but should help you to be heard. In all cases, try to build a bridge first. Let people know you are genuinely interested in them, their needs and their opinions.

- Perceivers respond best to questions about right and wrong, good and evil, injustice and other things. Asking “Why do you think there's so much evil in the world?” or “What do you think happens to people when they die?” is a good way to engage. Depending on their answers, the conversation can lead to what you believe and why.
- Servers respond to good news that is practical and useful. Questions like “What is a human's greatest need?” or “Did you know Jesus focused on the importance of having a servant's heart?” may arouse interest and a response.

- Teachers want to know facts and the reliable basis of proof for what you share. Asking something like "Have you ever considered what Jesus said? Do you think it's valid?" may get a response.
- Exhorters are concerned with people and their problems and what they can do to help. Questions like "What's the best way to help people overcome their problems?" or "What do you think is most important to have a fulfilled life?" will likely bring responses.
- Givers can have an eager response to the good news. You can be more direct, asking "Do you know what it means to be born again?" or "What's the greatest gift you can give?" may be helpful.
- Administrators are interested in the overall view of life and the universe. Asking questions like "What do you think will happen to the human race?" or "Why do you think people were created?" may catch their interest.
- Compassion people relate best on a feeling level; logic leaves them cold. So you might ask "How do you feel God wants us to treat each other?" or "Do you feel there's any hope for suffering people in the world?" to start a conversation.

These are just suggestions. You'll develop your own questions over time. Keep in mind the focus of each gift is different. And after you've attracted the person's interest, they'll come to Jesus in a different way: Perceivers feel the need to repent and deliberately choose salvation. Servers will be attracted to the good works of Jesus and want to join in. Teachers may read the New Testament before making a decision. Exhorters gladly hear about how Jesus helps people and want to be part. Givers will be excited when the Gospel makes sense, and want to share. Administrators will examine the whole biblical drama before deciding. Compassionate people will be moved to tears of joy over the greatness of God's love for them.

And all of us will be together as we worship God, not just on Sunday and not just here, but every day of the week, wherever we may be.

Together, we invite others to a life with meaning and purpose, filled with love and grace. Best of all, we get to pass God's blessings on, filling us with faith and hope for the future. I don't know about you, but I'm very grateful for these gifts from God.

Let us pray:

Lord, thank you for loving us, your children, without bounds. Give us the boldness to speak in your name, to offer your love to a world so lonely and in need of hope. Help us to follow you as disciples and be transformed by your love so we may bless others with that same love, using the gifts you have given us. Bless us with generous spirits, without fear of scarcity. We devote our lives to you in faith and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 12-16 (CEB)

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.

God has given his grace to each one of us measured out by the gift that is given by Christ.

His purpose was to equip God’s people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son. God’s goal is for us to become mature adults - to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. As a result, we aren’t supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let’s grow in every way into Christ, who is the head. The whole body grows from him, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.