

**Life In A Whole New Light**  
***Congratulations! You are Gifted.***

This is the last message in our series *Life In A Whole New Light*. We have examined indicators that we are growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ. God calls every one of his children to be his disciple, to grow towards spiritual maturity. And so we have been trying to answer the question: “What does that look like?”

Or another way of looking at it is this: “What should be happening in my life if I am growing?” The first thing we considered is that we should have an assurance of our salvation. We should know for certain that God has saved us for eternity.

Then we looked at experiencing God’s forgiveness in our daily lives. We come to our Heavenly Father and confess our sins. We agree that what we have said or thought or done was wrong. We also agree that Jesus Christ died for that sin and that God has completely forgiven us. Through confession we make real in our condition what God has declared to be true in our position.

Next we talked about daily yielding our bodies to the Holy Spirit. Asking and allowing Christ to live his life in and through ours.

We followed that up by looking at the importance of spiritual growth, particularly through the disciplines of Bible study and prayer. You will not be a growing Christian without being in the Word where you allow God to speak to you, and then you respond in prayer, speaking back to him. It’s a dialogue, interaction, communion, and fellowship.

Last week I shared the Biblical perspective on giving. If you are a growing Christian, you will be a giving Christian. God calls each of us to account as stewards of the blessings he has entrusted to us.

This final message is really the completion of the concept of stewardship. We are called to stewardship not only in our treasure (our finances), but also in our talents and our time. This means being involved in ministry, in service.

I am not going to spend much time today on the Biblical rationale for being involved in ministry. Probably most or all of you who have been in church understand in some way that every Christian is called to be involved – to serve. It follows on from being a part of the body of Christ, which is the Church.

Paul writes in his Ephesians letter about the gifted men God has given to the church and the purpose they are to serve. Now you get to see a pastor’s job description.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor-teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.... – *Ephesians 4:11-12*

Note – this equipping is for all the saints, all believers, not just those with special abilities, not just those who have the time, not just those who have “the calling,” not just those who have the inclination. It is for all!

Someone has described the church as being like a Sunday NFL game – 50,000 spectators in the bleachers desperately in need of exercise, watching 22 people on the field desperately in need of rest.

You are here, at least in part, to serve. What is my “service, my ministry?” What should I be doing? Service is both broad and focused. The Scriptures often instruct us in broad, inclusive aspects of service (which is ministry). These are things that all of us should be involved in – for example: the ministry of reconciliation, the ministry of encouragement, the service of prayer, the ministry of giving. Even if we don’t have the “gift of evangelism,” we all are to be witnesses for Christ; even though we don’t all have the gift of giving, we are all accountable to God to be responsible and generous givers, etc.

Focused service reflects those things that are part of your individual calling in ministry as a believer. Paul writes about this focused service in Ephesians. He begins by stating that God saves us by his grace through faith, that it is a gift from him, not a result of things that we do that somehow earn his favor. Then he says:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – *Ephesians 2:10*

Before you ever came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God already prepared ministry – service – for you. So, how do I know what those good works are? Where should I minister?

Saddleback Community Church in Mission Viejo, California, helps people find their SHAPE. I want to borrow that acronym and spend the rest of our time focusing on these five things that will help you begin to see where you should serve and minister. Here’s an overview before we dive in:

Spiritual Gifts  
Heart/Passion  
Abilities  
Personality

Experience / Know-How

## Spiritual Gifts

What is a spiritual gift? The Greek word for “gift” is: *charisma*. It is closely related to the word for “grace” – *charis*. So, a spiritual gift is a gift due to grace. There are many things that a spiritual gift is not.

- 1) It is not the same as a talent
- 2) It is not primarily a particular place of service
- 3) It is not primarily a particular age group ministry (children, youth, etc.)
- 4) It is not primarily a particular specialty of ministry: no gift of writing or Christian education, etc.

So, what is a spiritual gift?

A spiritual gift is a Spirit-given, divine enablement for Christian service.

I would suggest to you that there are three primary purposes for spiritual gifts.

- 1) For the common good of the body of Christ. Turn in your Bible to the book of First Corinthians, chapter twelve and stay there in that book. **I Corinthians 12:7**

Look what the Apostle Peter writes about this purpose:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace. – *I Peter 4:10*

- 2) For the glory of God. Peter goes on to say:

Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. – *I Peter 4:11*

- 3) For the authenticating of God’s message and messengers. This is particularly true of the sign gifts in the apostolic era. Miracles are grouped primarily in three periods of Biblical history: time of Moses and the Exodus; time of the prophets, particularly Elijah and Elisha; and the time of Christ and the apostles.

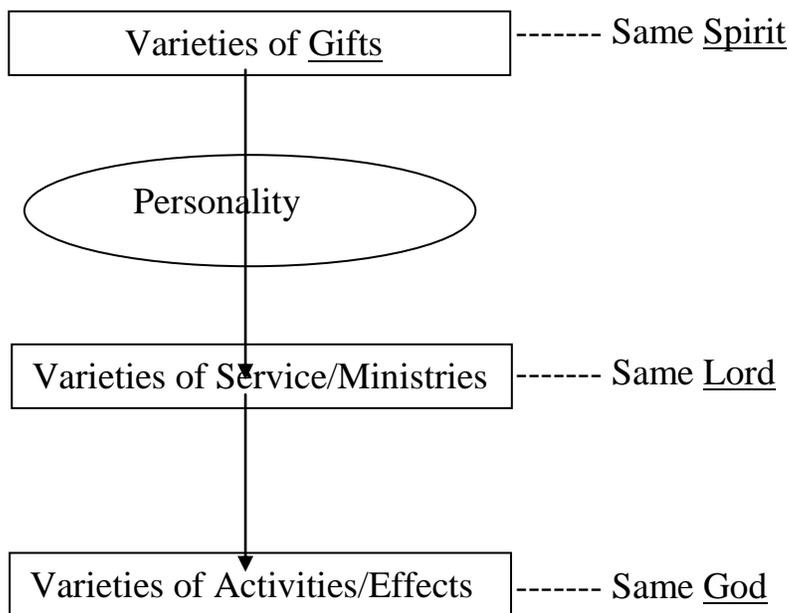
Works of miracles authenticated the message they brought and authenticated them as true messengers from God.

Let's look, then, at how spiritual gifts are employed.

### **I Corinthians 12:4-11**

First of all, we note that it is the Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. It is his choice, not yours. Nowhere in the New Testament are we ever instructed to individually seek specific spiritual gifts. There is a word to the church corporately: **I Corinthians 12:31** Here Paul speaks to the church as a whole.

So we can diagram this passage in this way:



How do you discover your spiritual gifting? Let me suggest you seek to answer these three questions:

- 1) What do you like to do? – Teach, help, give, organize, lead, etc.
- 2) Where have you sensed God's blessing? If you haven't tried different things to develop a basis for this, get involved in an area of desire or conviction or interest and see!
- 3) What do your Christian friends say? Be willing to believe them!

Here's a *Perspective Thought*:

It is not the possession of extraordinary gifts that makes extraordinary usefulness, but the dedication of what we have to the service of the Lord. – *Frederick William Robertson*

The folklore surrounding Poland's famous concert pianist and prime minister, Ignace Paderewski, includes this story:

A mother, wishing to encourage her young son's progress at the piano, bought tickets for a Paderewski performance. When the night arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall and eyed the majestic Steinway waiting on stage.

Soon the mother found a friend to talk to, and the boy slipped away. When eight o'clock arrived, the spotlights came on, the audience quieted, and only then did they notice the boy up on the bench, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

His mother gasped, as all you mothers would, but before she could retrieve her son, the master appeared on the stage and quickly moved to the keyboard.

"Don't quit – keep playing," he whispered to the boy. Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized.

An important thing to add to this: we all have different capacities – capacities developed and determined by temperament, personality, natural abilities, experiences – good and bad, that affect the areas of our service and the effectiveness of our ministry. Jesus once told a parable about the Sower. He talked about seed that fell on rocky places, seed that fell among the thorns and then said there was seed that "fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Listen – it was all good soil. But there were different capacities. Be careful that you succumb to the disease of "comparisonitis."

### **Heart / Passion**

Some of you have a heart for kids; others for seniors around you, or for teenagers. Some of you have a passion to teach; others, an inward compulsion to help others by practical means. Some of you, unbelievably but blessedly, have a passion for administration. What has God put in your heart to do?

## **Abilities**

Every one of us has strengths and weaknesses; God made you that way. This requires a critical, healthy self-assessment. What are you good at? What are you not? Remember, an ability is not the same as a spiritual gift. However, it can enhance the exercise of a gift. It can work alongside the exercise of a spiritual gift.

I once heard a wise man say: “Accept the limits of your limitations and the responsibilities of your abilities.” Does it make more sense to serve in areas of your strengths or in areas of your weaknesses?

Listen, a genuine weakness will rarely, if ever, become a genuine strength. This doesn't mean we don't seek to improve areas of weakness, but we should invest the bulk of our time and effort in those areas that fit within our natural abilities.

This requires a healthy acceptance of self, not a pre-occupation with self. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans, chapter twelve:

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. – *Romans 12:3*

Sometimes it is painful to accept yourself as you are. Sometimes an accurate inventory is difficult. God desires that we have an accurate assessment of who we really are – our gifts and abilities and talents.

## **Personality**

Every one of us is different. Ain't that the truth!! But think about this. If two of us were exactly alike, one of us would be unnecessary. Individually, we are wired differently. God will sanctify your personality, but he does not basically change it or take it away. In fact, that is part of the multi-faceted work of service within the body of Christ.

The “where” of service is affected by personality. “Styles” of service are different. As we saw earlier, different personalities, for the most part unchangeable, are a factor in the various ministries. The gift of teaching will look quite different when passed through different personalities.

## **Experience / Know-How**

This, as well, may affect avenues of service. If you have mechanical experience, help out someone else. Mentor someone with your specific experience, know-how. Other times, we serve just out of life experience.

**SHAPE** Now, at the risk of sounding negative, may I give you some warnings?

1) Do not neglect the gift(s) that God has given you. Every one of us is a steward of God's grace. Remember the Parable of the Talents? Eventually, the Master calls his servants to account for how they used what was entrusted to them. We, as believers, will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to have our works judged – not for salvation, but for rewards or lack of rewards. We place ourselves at God's disposal and leave the results to him.

2) Guard against self-reliance. We are really susceptible to pride, self-congratulations, particularly when complimented, when thanked for our service. We need to ask ourselves: Where do we place the value – on the act of service or the compliment for it? There is a false humility we have to guard against as well. "Oh, it wasn't me; God did it." Yes, he worked through you, but you were a partner in the process. A simple, "Thank you," is not out of place, knowing in your heart that you give God glory that belongs to him.

3) Guard against the temptation to be spectacular, to become a celebrity. The church doesn't need celebrities; it needs servants. Leonard Bernstein, one of the greatest orchestral leaders of all time, was once asked, "What is the most difficult instrument to play?" He replied, "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm, or second French horn, or second flute, that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

Finally, some concluding thoughts:

1) God is concerned with faithfulness, not success. Paul says about himself and another fellow-worker in ministry:

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. – *1 Corinthians 4:1-2*

The starting point is availability.

2) Don't get discouraged. Sometimes we wonder if our service, our ministry, is accomplishing anything. Is it making any difference? Listen to Paul's encouragement:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. – *1 Corinthians 15:58*

God will not leave your service unrewarded. Paul says that one day we will stand before Christ and give an account of the deeds we have done in the flesh. And he will reward us for our service, done the right way for the right reason.

God knows your work; He is aware of your service.

3) We work for God. There is a wonderful story in John Kenneth Galbraith's autobiography, *A Life in Our Times*. Emily Gloria Wilson was his family's housekeeper. On one particular difficult day, Galbraith asked Emily to hold all telephone calls while he took a nap. A bit later the phone rang. President Lyndon Johnson was calling from the White House.

"Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson."

"Sorry, Mr. President," she said, "he's sleeping."

"Now look here, I'm the President of the United States."

"Sorry, Mr. President, but he said not to disturb him."

"Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him."

"No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you."

When Galbraith called the President back, Johnson could scarcely control his pleasure. "Tell that woman I want her to work here in the White House. It's great to meet somebody who knows who she works for."

You work for God. You don't work for me or any other staff member. You don't work for Knollwood Community Church. You work for the Master, the Savior, the King.

That's service; that's ministry.