



# Your Gifts Your Calling Your Service



A FAITHPATH Resource  
by Scot Pollok



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The background of the page is filled with a dense, abstract pattern of small, colorful geometric shapes, primarily squares and rectangles, in shades of blue, yellow, purple, and grey. These shapes are scattered across the left and bottom portions of the page, creating a textured, mosaic-like effect.

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## About the Author

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Scot Pollok is a graduate of Texas A&M University where, as a freshman, he first understood the Gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ. He then earned his Masters of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He has worked in the ministry since 1994. Currently, he serves as Lead Pastor of Faith Bible Church in The Woodlands, Texas. He is married to Liza and has two children, Andrew and Isabel.

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# Introduction

When I was a child, Sunday morning church attendance was a duty, a must, and not much else. There was very little joy and no expectancy involved. I shallowly believed that God needed something of me, perhaps a sign of my continued loyalty, so I went and did my part. As I spectated the mysteries of the morning, I keenly felt like an outsider, a guest. Worse, I was a reluctant guest forced to accept an unwanted invitation.

Today, it would be a significant communication challenge to succinctly describe the heart and soul difference in my participation in the regular Sunday gathering of the family of the church. Now I look forward to the corporate gathering of the church with expectation, joy, love, excitement and familiarity. This transformation began with a clear view of Jesus, His cross, God's grace and salvation. But it quickly grew and permeated my view of the local church and the Holy Spirit of God. This personal revival opened the door to a new calling and ministry within the local church. What a plot twist.

Since that transformation began, I have discovered many friends in the family of the church, like I used to, still feel like guests. They understand the gospel and grace but some mysterious collusion keeps them feeling like practical outsiders, or worse, outcasts; like the junior-varsity of the church family or members of an unwanted caste. So sadly, their experience of the life of the church is relegated to Sunday morning, regularly or irregularly. Even this may be shallow at times.

The Bible study you are holding has a simple but large goal: to dismantle a string of misunderstandings and lies that keep far too many Christians on the sidelines of joy and engagement in the local church. The regrettable but fixable fact is, most (and I do really mean *most*) believers in the local church struggle to discover and enjoy the unique place God has designed for them. This place is

far more beautiful, far deeper, far more lifegiving than simply a cushioned seat in a large room, one day a week. It is a place of the best relationships you've ever had, the most eternal impact, the greatest influence and the most robust joy.

As a pastor, I suspect that for these “most” in the local church, insecurity, isolation or ignorance effectively distance them from the joy of God’s unique plan, which includes an outworking of their spiritual gift inside a ministry calling. So they go through life as a church-goer, a worshipper, a reader of their Bible and a person of prayer, because those steps are clear. But deep down they know something is missing. They see others with a unique spark of joy or influence and wonder what the difference is. They love Jesus. They follow Him. They have the Holy Spirit. But they still look in the mirror every now and then and ask heavy questions with furrowed brows. I love these people so very much. I am burdened and broken for them. I remember the many years when I felt the same.

If you are one of these people, I’m so glad we’re chatting right now. The pages before you are concerned with a simple, central question: how can you discover the lifegiving place God has tailor-made for you within the family of His church?

If you are one of the happy few that already know and enjoy your place, I’m also glad we’re talking together. Your church needs you. The people around you, many of them still struggling to find what you have found, need you. And perhaps there’s much more for you to learn about the unique gifts, calling and areas of service your Heavenly Father has revealed to you. The adventure doesn’t end at the discovery. It begins there.

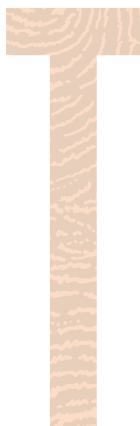
Scot Pollok | Lead Pastor  
Faith Bible Church

# FAITH*PATH*

Faith*Path* is a bold attempt to organize and visualize all that the New Testament reveals about following Jesus as His disciple. But more than that, it is an invitation.







The San Juan Mountains of Colorado hold a very special place in my heart. The ice-cold sting of the often raging, snow-melt Animas River working in perfect harmony with a warm, crackling fire, fueled by laughter and story is hard to beat, in my opinion. Even if you're not outdoorsy, I find most admit there is something primal and spiritual about being in wild nature.

Several times, I've had the privilege of being on a team that led mostly novice hikers on a serious, week-long climb up to a high mountain lake in the San Juans. We boarded the famous, coal-steam train in Durango, Colorado on its way to Silverton. Hanging off of hair-raising cliffs and marching across several sketchy bridges, it slowly wound its way up the mountain. At around the halfway point, the conductor would stop to reload his water supply, and we would hop off to start our hike, already deep in the mountains. It was glorious. I can still hear the river and taste the wild raspberries.

Preparations for this journey started many months before. Multiple meetings with team members involved long conversations about packing lists, expectations, potential dangers, a training regimen and lots of question and answer. In the San Juans, we would be deep in the wild and far from help. Each member must be prepared.

I recall several hikers wanting to wear their worn-out sneakers on the hike. No good. The terrain on the ascent would not treat sneakers kindly. Good hiking boots were a must. If someone twisted an ankle or developed serious blisters, the whole journey could be in jeopardy. They couldn't understand it yet, so we had to persist.

In these meetings we would insist that smuggling food into your tent at night was a bad idea, but they couldn't yet understand. The first night of actual camping, after we arranged our "bear bag" fifty yards from camp, while dangling by a rope high in a tree, they began to ask questions. *Bears? Yes, this is their home. We are visitors. And if you try to hide your contraband teriyaki beef jerky, they will smell it out and come a knockin'.* With wide eyes, one by one they handed it over. Smores Pop-Tarts. Chocolate-covered gummy bears. Zip-loc bags full of mustard-flavored pretzels. I mean mustard pretzels are awesome, but they aren't worth a bear as a bunk-mate.

Over several decades of following Jesus, I have discovered that the journey of discipleship is, in many ways, analogous to a mountain climb in backwoods. It is indescribably glorious, with breathtaking views and unexpected treasures around every corner. It is also difficult. There are dangers and best practices. It is best done with a group. It requires attention to certain important factors and details that, outside of the hike itself, can be difficult to understand. Fortunately, as you follow Jesus, mustard-flavored pretzels are pretty safe.

One of the key pieces of "equipment" in every individual discipleship climb is a personal knowledge and practical experience of the spiritual gifts given to every believer by the Holy Spirit of God. That's what this study is all about. It is part of your growth in Jesus Christ and in His church. It is part of your discipleship. And—spoiler alert—this discipleship journey is infinitely more breathtaking than any hike to a San Juan mountain lake. And way sweeter than any wild raspberries.

# Discipleship

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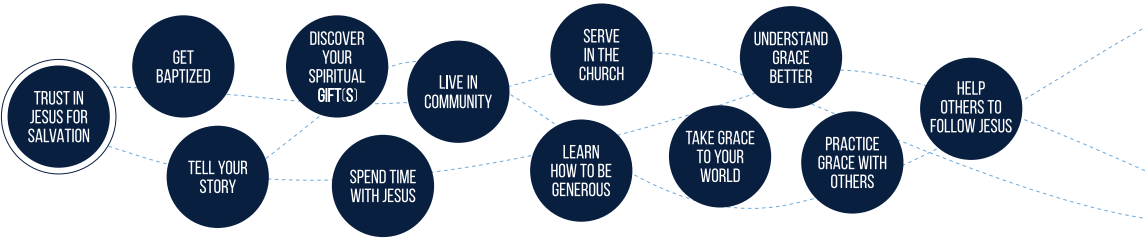
Definitions are important. They bring clarity and focus. At Faith Bible Church, we define discipleship as *the lifelong pursuit of nearness and submission to Jesus our Master, appropriating in ourselves Jesus' character, values and mission.*

But definitions need practical motion. So how do we actually *do* discipleship at Faith Bible Church? FaithPath is our answer. Simply put, hiking together through FaithPath is how we *do* discipleship in the Faith Bible Church family. The glorious intricacies of following Jesus can never be captured in a simple drawing or a book, or even in volumes of books. The reality is far too personal to describe, yet it still needs definition, movement and focus. So over many years we have worked to add practical focus to the critical discussion of discipleship without sterilizing it into a theological laboratory or flattening any of its surprising details. FaithPath is what God gave us.

FaithPath is a tool, a bold attempt to organize and visualize all that the New Testament reveals about following Jesus as His disciples. We have attempted to organize these aspects in a straightforward interactive map shown below. It is a simple arrangement of twelve circles, each with accessible, descriptive language. Take a minute and explore it now.

## FAITHPATH

— DISCIPLESHIP MAP —



## Critical Map Details

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I want to call your attention to several things about the FaithPath map, much like the legend codes and directions cartographers include. To begin, approach this map just like any city map, as a help to locate your current position and aid you in getting where you want to go next. That's what maps do. As you explore, ask yourself two questions. First, which aspects of Jesus-centered discipleship expressed on this map do I already have some experience and adventure? Second, what details of my discipleship journey do I need to explore further or for the first time? Simply put, where have you been, and where should you go?

As you prayerfully explore, you will need to remember three vital principles about FaithPath. First, there is one and only one starting point to Christian discipleship: *trusting in Jesus for salvation*. Unless a person finds the joy of receiving God's free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, the rest of the activities and adventures on the map will be formulaic, academic, or worse, a confusing and futile attempt to earn God's love. That is why only that circle has a double outline. It is the indispensable and irreplaceable starting point for Christian discipleship. Placing personal faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for your sins and was resurrected from the grave, is a permanent, secure transfer into the family of God. You are forgiven of sins by a free gift of God's grace. You are now daughter. You are now son. Christian discipleship is a family affair. Faith in Jesus is where it begins.

Second, notice there is no strict sequence or chronological order to the circles that come after the first. While there are some steps, such as baptism, that should come early in your walk with Jesus, there is no stringent pattern or arrangement. After placing your faith in Jesus for salvation, you do not have to wait to help others follow Him (circle on far right of the map) until you touch each of the other steps. Discipleship doesn't work like a university degree, with prerequisite classes before higher level ones. All discipleship aspects are open to the believer in Jesus at any time.

This leads to the third thing I need you to remember: there is no full graduation or completion of any of the steps after the first. Spending time with Jesus, practicing grace with others and taking grace to your world are all lifelong pursuits. This truth will serve as a strong reminder not to misunderstand yourself as a master in any specific part of discipleship. Even while you experience more and more freedom, joy and impact on others, you will always remain an imperfect and incomplete disciple. Until Jesus takes you home, that is.

## The Focus of This Study

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Now we are set for an exploration of three of the specific circles on *FaithPath*, the focus of this study. As we journey together, you will spend a lot of time with Jesus discovering and understanding your spiritual gifts and learning how these gifts create a unique place within the local church for you to serve. This is part of God's distinctive calling in your life. No one else on the planet has your calling. Only you. God has divinely orchestrated a magnificent, ineffably joyful space for you to live, relate and impact others. Filling that divine space is what this study is all about.



Without exploration of and engagement in these discipleship truths, you will miss much of the beauty God wants to show you. Yes, the hike is difficult in places, but the view makes up for the climb. In all my visits to the San Juans, I've never sat on the edge of that mountain lake, high and inaccessible to the average man, and had a hiker say it wasn't worth it. That she regretted all the effort. That he was disappointed.

The same will prove true for you. As you progress, this study will equip you with some of the critical tools needed to excel in your discipleship journey. Like great hiking boots and the right kind of backpack, they may seem less than essential or urgent in the beginning, but I promise they will serve you well for the rest of your life, unleashing waves of grace into your life. There are countless stories of impact, joy, ministry and meaning ahead of you.

The study before you will largely focus on God's Word. We must start and end here if we want to faithfully follow Jesus. The chapters are designed to be read privately and then discussed and practiced in community. In fact, as you journey with Jesus as a disciple, it is critical to remember His design for community.

## A Group Hike

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As a follower of Jesus, it is wise to travel in a group. Your Father does not intend for you to journey alone. Specifically, consider the benefit of intentionally inviting at least one person to travel *ahead* of you. By *ahead*, I mean a person who has walked with Jesus longer than you have. They are more familiar with the terrain. This person will likely be older than you, more spiritually mature, more disciplined and consistent in their spiritual journey and should be the same gender. This individual will become a ready source of spiritual counsel and prayer. If you don't have a fellow traveler ahead of you at this point, ask God to show you someone you can invite into your journey. I promise He has someone in mind.

You will also want to constantly have at least one person *behind* you. Now, in no way do I use *behind* in a condescending way. I'm picturing the single-file line on the hiking trail. In the analogy, I mean another believer in Jesus who is slightly younger than you in the faith and of the same gender. He/She is still wrestling with a few of the questions that God has helped you answer. You can help her understand the terrain of the discipleship hike. You can serve

him with spiritual counsel, prayer, support, presence and love. This unbroken chain of connection, community and support is God's brilliant, lifegiving design for His church. Pray and seek out these people in your life. Just ask.

## YOU

As a disciple you are pursuing  
nearness and submission to Jesus.  
This is best done in the community  
of at least two other disciples  
of the same gender.



### SOMEONE WALKING BEHIND YOU

You are intentionally pouring  
attention and time into this person  
as a spiritual leader, encourager  
and prayer partner.

WHO IS THIS PERSON FOR YOU:

### SOMEONE WALKING IN FRONT OF YOU

This person is intentionally pouring  
attention and time into you  
as a mentor, encourager  
and spiritual coach.

WHO IS THIS PERSON FOR YOU:

## Transformation is the Goal

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Finally, as you progress in this study, each chapter will conclude with a section of personal reflection that will help further your personal application and understanding. Hopefully this will encourage you to slow down a bit because transformation is the goal and transformation typically happens slowly. This book is not intended to be read cover to cover in one sitting. You will need periods of space in between chapters, at least a couple of days. Think. Pray. Talk it through with your fellow hikers. It will help you make the most of it.

After the personal reflection, there will be several thoughts and questions intended for group discussion. It is my sincere hope that you engage this study with a small group of other believers. Interaction with a group of other fellow travelers will challenge your interpretations, sharpen your understanding, solidify your conclusions and encourage your heart along the way. If you are in a small group already, talk to your leader about starting this study together. If you are not a part of a small group, now is a great time to join one or start one.

Above all, please remember, your goal is spiritual growth, change and transformation, not education, information or simply completion of a task. Be richly blessed as you climb. And enjoy the view.



## My Story...

"Serving the church in my unique gifts has been the realization of the phrase "I was made for a purpose." You hear that all your life and, for me, serving in His church is what God used and is using to make me believe it. It's all for Him. It has enabled me (like nothing else could) to totally love and appreciate the gifts He gave to other people."

*Kayla*

# Chapter 01

## Foundation Excavation

“Man’s mission in life is not something general and impersonal like a ready-made coat; it has been designed specifically for him and given into his possession as the most personal of all gifts. By it he becomes, in the fullest sense of the word, a person.”

Hans Urs von Balthasar,  
*The Christian State of Life*





On an otherwise typical day in November 1947, a young Bedouin shepherd boy named Muhammed ed-Dhib and several cousins were attempting to coax a herd of unruly sheep through a bleak, parchment-colored hillside on the shores of the Dead Sea. As the story is told, Muhammed threw some rocks into a cave to ensure it was free from any stray sheep as he moved past. At least one rock did not return its expected *thud*. Instead, a surprising *plink* and *crash* echoed out of the mouth of the small cave.

Muhammed recognized the sound but it was very out of place in the barren desert. It was the sound of broken pottery. With the curiosity and agility of his age, he climbed up and in for a closer look. Even in the shade of the cave, the long red-clay pots stuck out against the monochromatic background. I can only imagine the thrill and excitement as the teenage shepherd carefully peered inside the broken pot.

Emerging from the cave, he left that hillside with an unusual gift for the patriarchs of his nomadic encampment: an armful of ancient scrolls, leather brown

in color, with their clear Hebrew script still plainly visible. Hundreds more scrolls were discovered over the next few years. They passed from hand to hand, in exchange for money, for several years before they were identified by the rare minds that could authenticate and appreciate their history and value.

In total, over 900 manuscripts were unearthed, many of them only fragments, including over 200 biblical manuscripts, full or partial copies of every book of the Old Testament except Esther. With a harmony of several fields of study and dating methods, the scrolls were dated sometime between the 3rd Century B.C. and the 1st Century B.C. This means they were a full 1000 years older than the oldest existing manuscripts of Old Testament books at that time, yet they exhibited a nearly flawless confirmation of the accuracy of the text that we have today. Taken together, the scrolls tucked under the arm of a Bedouin teenager in 1947 were the greatest archaeological discovery of the 20th Century. We know them as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## Personal Treasures

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For most of us this true story seems trapped in the widescreen parameters of an Indiana Jones movie. Removed. Detached. The cataclysmic shift in multiple fields of studies that resulted in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is also difficult to appreciate. It too seems distant.

But what if you could make a similar discovery on a very personal level? What if something greater than the profound ripples that are still emanating from a chance discovery in the late 1940's could be spiritually repeated and redoubled in your very own heart, right now? Would you be interested?

You have been given a treasure far more valuable than old scrolls; a personal and unique gift of God's grace. The New Testament calls them *spiritual gifts*, but they could also be called *grace gifts*. As we continue, I will occasionally use both phrases to describe these incredible Divine gifts because I want to

remind you of both qualifying adjectives. These gifts are Divine Gifts of the Holy Spirit of God; *spiritual gifts*. These gifts are given freely of God's grace; *grace gifts*. Spiritual gift = grace gift.

Have you discovered the priceless treasures God has placed in you? You may have. You may just have an inkling. You may have never engaged this subject at all. If you have, you may or may not be employing your gift in its intended purpose. These basic questions are what this study is all about. In many ways, it's like a shovel. You just need to start digging. To begin our excavation, let's start at the very beginning, with a simple, foundational question: ***What is a spiritual gift?***

## Biblical Words

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To answer this initial question, the inspired words of the New Testament will be our source and guide. God's Word will reveal the components of a final, concise answer by way of two more questions, so be patient and enjoy the discovery. We will build a biblical conclusion together.

As author of three of the four principal texts on the subject, the Apostle Paul gives us the most biblical insight about spiritual gifts. He spoke at length on the subject to the young church in Corinth, Greece, which he founded. They struggled with a number of significant issues and had some big questions. A full three chapters on spiritual gifts suggests the church family was very confused on the topic. Paul obviously thought it critical to provide truth, insight and application. He begins in Chapter 12 of First Corinthians.

*"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware."* —1 Corinthians 12:1

Even in his opening line, Paul uses one specific word that helps us approach an answer to our first question. The text literally says *"now concerning*

*spiritual, brothers, I do not want you uninformed.*" The word "*spiritual*" is an adjective, which describes a noun; but there is no noun in the text. That is why translators include the word "*gifts*," which is clearly true from the context of the following verses.

The root of this adjective is *pneuma*, the Greek word for *spirit* or *wind*. It is used almost 400 times in the New Testament, referring to a gale wind, angelic or demonic spirits, the human spirit and the Spirit of God. The reference to the Holy Spirit of God is the usage here in First Corinthians 12:1. Thus with this one intentional and unadorned word, Paul reveals that these gifts are integrally linked to the Spirit of God. This is indeed his chief point. That is why they are called "*spiritual*" gifts and not simply "*divine*" gifts. Thus when we use the phrase "*spiritual gifts*," we are not making a contrast to some sort of "*natural*" or "*fleshly*" gifts, we are making a statement of origin. These gifts come from the Holy Spirit of God. Perhaps to make this point boldly at the start, Paul simply omits the word "*gifts*" and reveals his intent to discuss the "*Holy Spirit*" as a beginning of his clarifying teaching on spiritual gifts.

Although volumes could be written, it is worth a moment's pause to slow down at this point and very briefly celebrate the person and work of the Holy Spirit of God. While some are unfamiliar with the Holy Spirit, or even afraid of Him, it is critical to understand that the Holy Spirit is at the very center of Christianity and discipleship. There's nothing to be afraid of. Much more than a force or an "it," the Holy Spirit is a distinct person of the Triune God, the Trinity; One God in three persons. The Spirit perfectly fills and seals all believers as the Father's downpayment of our full redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14), yet we can also repeatedly "be filled" with the Spirit as the means to holy living and courageous faith (Ephesians 5:18). The Spirit guides believers into truth by illuminating the Scriptures that He inspired through human authors (John 14:25-26 and 2 Peter 1:20-21). The Spirit convicts believers of sin and continually points them to the person of Jesus (1 John 1:9 and John 16:8f). The Holy Spirit binds the church together, restrains evil in the world and intercedes in prayer for the saints. The Spirit of God bears fruit in the lives

of believers (Galatians 5:22f) and is responsible for our unique gifts, the very gifts that Paul simply mentions as “Spiritual.”

Paul shares confirming and additional insight to another church in Ephesus. In a similarly concentrated section on spiritual gifts (4:1-16), Paul introduces the subject in this way:

*“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’”*  
—Ephesians 4:7-8, quoting Psalm 68:18

We see several things in this text that help us with different aspects of an answer to our first question, *what is a spiritual gift?* First, notice that “each one” of the believers in the church is given a spiritual gift. This gives us significant insight into the recipients of gifts, but let us hold that for now. Next we see that spiritual gifts are deeply related to God’s grace. Paul says *“grace was given”* instead of *“gifts were given.”* Again it seems like Paul is intentionally monitoring his language to direct our hearts to God. He confirms our thought by adding *“according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”* The focus is clearly on God.

We’ve quickly discovered two insights as we try to answer our first, foundational question: *what is a spiritual gift?* The passages above reveal two simple truths. In fact, they are so simple that they are often forgotten or dismissed. The first is that spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit of God. They are sourced in God’s Spirit. This is why they are called *“spiritual”* gifts. The second is that they are freely given. These *“gifts”* are an aspect of God’s grace or unmerited favor. There is nothing one does to earn these gifts of grace because grace, by definition, cannot be earned. Grace is only given and received. These Divine grace gifts come from the Holy Spirit of God and are free.

## A Second Question Emerges

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Taken together, these insights align to provide the first element in a full answer to our question, **what is a spiritual gift?** We have determined origin and nature. Spiritual gifts come from God and are given freely as a gift of His grace; they are directly and emphatically identified with the Holy Spirit of God. But in the second text above we have nudged up against another question that will help us with the first: **to whom are spiritual gifts given?** To answer this, let us return to First Corinthians 12 and dig some more.

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ...But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ...But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.”* –1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 11; 18

Notice Paul says “to each one” several times. We’ve seen this before in Ephesians 4:7. This reveals that every believer in Jesus is granted a grace gift. Just as salvation is a free gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life by the grace of God, according to your faith in Jesus Christ, so too God’s spiritual gifts are free gifts to all who are found in Jesus Christ by faith. This is a clear, repeated and confirmed answer to our second question, *to whom are spiritual gifts given?*

The word “gifts” here in First Corinthians 12:4 is the Greek word *charisma*, clearly the root for the English words *charisma* and *charismatic*. It is used in the New Testament to refer to something that is graciously and freely bestowed. The idea is that this “gift” is not a wage or payment or bargaining chip. It is free, which is why it is related to the word *charis*, the Greek word for *grace*. As we continue to see, there is a powerful connection. This is why we can refer to spiritual gifts as grace gifts.



This time writing to Christians in Rome, Paul substantiates our conclusion that every believer in Jesus is given a grace gift from the Father. Notice he again says “to each” and “each of us.”

*“God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly....”* – Romans 12:3-6

The Apostle Peter, one of Jesus’ best friends, further corroborates this truth with very similar language as he writes to believers persecuted for their faith in Jesus. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). Each one. Not the mature. Not just the varsity. Not only fifth-year seniors or graduate students. Everyone. Each one.

In each of the four principal New Testament passages on spiritual gifts (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4), we see that every believer is given a grace gift. Just like natural talents are given at physical birth, spiritual grace gifts are given at re-birth, spiritual birth, the moment of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This makes sense when we remember that at the moment of our salvation by faith in Jesus, God the Father seals us with the gift of His Holy Spirit (See Romans 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14). When the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God takes permanent residence in the believer, it follows that He would bring and install His unique spiritual gifts as well.

## A Final Question Makes Three

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We have one final foundational question to excavate: **for what purpose are spiritual gifts given?** A biblical answer to this question, in cooperation with the conclusions we have already made, will help complete the foundational truths about spiritual gifts and set us up for great application and growth. So what is the goal of spiritual gifts? Why does God give them to His children? Perhaps this is the most practical question of all.

We return, yet again, to the Apostle Paul.

*"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."*

—Ephesians 4:11-16

Don't get bogged down in the individual gifts just yet. We'll get to that in the next chapter. Focus on Paul's stated goal and purpose of the gifts. He clearly says God gave the gifts *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."*

God's grace gifts are given to build up the Body of Christ. They are given to the church, for the church. But at this point let us be careful not to draw a thick

boundary line around the family of God in the local church, for of course the plan and purpose of God for His Body, the church, is for it to be an influencer of the culture in which it is embedded. A light. Salt. Meeting needs. Sharing the Gospel of grace. Representing Jesus. Living a body-life of mission. As we will see, one of God's spiritual gifts is evangelism. The evangelism gift is focused on those who do not yet know of the grace and gift of God available through faith in Jesus. This gift too is for the church, but focused to those yet outside of the family of God. So, it may be best to say that God's spiritual grace gifts are given to the church to enable the church to fulfill her mission. The gifts help the church be the church.

Our text in First Corinthians agrees. *"But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good"* (1 Corinthians 12:7). The common good is the building up of the Body of Christ. Paul confirms the same purpose with the illustration of a body with members. The body is only able to do what the body is designed to do, when all of its individual members are working as they should, in harmony and unity.

*"But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."*  
—1 Corinthians 12:11-13

*"But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."*  
—1 Corinthians 12:24-26

After an “excellent” discussion of the effects of love in the context of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 13), Paul returns to practical matters of church gatherings where spiritual gifts are expressed and employed for mutual edification. This edification is focused on the other person. It is service, improving, encouraging and bettering another person. This text is perhaps the most insightful as it places spiritual gifts in their proper context inside the life and mission of the church family.

*“What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”*

—1 Corinthians 14:26

We have mined each of the four central texts on spiritual gifts as we’ve attempted to answer our foundational question, **what is a spiritual gift?** God’s inspired Word has guided us into several component revelations, including two other questions, that together form a clear answer. We’ve discovered that spiritual gifts are from God, identified with God’s Holy Spirit and are free, deeply related to God’s grace. Spiritual gifts are therefore very different from natural or developed talents. These grace gifts are given to all believers in Jesus Christ upon their initial faith. They are not gifts to the mature only, but to each and every Christian. Finally, grace gifts are given by the Father through His Spirit for the building up of the church body. They are given to the church, in order that the church may be fully alive and fully accomplish her mission from the Father. Perhaps we can state it succinctly like this:

EVERY BELIEVER IN JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN GIVEN A SPIRITUAL GRACE GIFT BY THE FATHER THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS GIFT IS A UNIQUE, SPIRIT-SUPPLIED ABILITY, FILLED WITH DIVINE POWER, INTENDED TO SUPPORT AND BUILD UP THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST, SO THAT SHE MAY FULLY ACCOMPLISH HER MISSION IN THE WORLD.

## Your Entrusted Treasure

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So what's next? Finding true answers to big questions is as important a task as anyone can engage in. But our questions reflect a living, breathing, moving reality from God: His church, His mission, His grace. We dare not end our conversation with stale answers in black non-serif type. It must become personal. Our discussion must live. Reflect on what Paul said to his young protégé Timothy in First Timothy 4.

*"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the [elders]. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and your teaching; persevere in these things..." —1 Timothy 4:12-15*

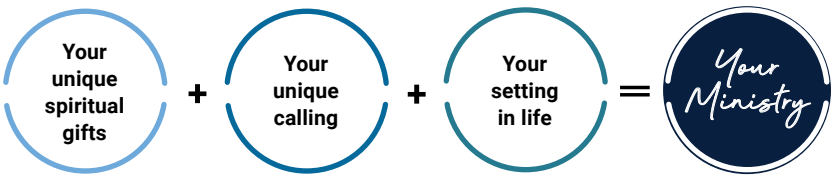
Notice the engagements to which Paul directs the young pastor. They are much more than academic question and answer. The goal is exemplifying behavior, reading Scripture, teaching and developing Timothy's spiritual gift. He goes on to say, *"take pains with these things"* and *"be absorbed in them so that your progress will be evident to all."* Pay attention to the part about Timothy's spiritual gift. In the whole list, that is the one thing that no one else can do. Only Timothy, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and by the grace of God, can discover, develop and employ the spiritual gift given to Him. Paul recognizes that Timothy, and everyone else who has trusted in Jesus for salvation, has a unique gifting. Only Timothy can fill the space God has created for him. Paul advises his young apprentice to cherish this gift, concentrate on it, develop it, put it into service.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, probably some time after the letter quoted above, and near the end of Paul's life, the great Apostle seems to pick up right where he left off, encouraging the young pastor Timothy to give attention to his spiritual gift.

*"Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." —2 Timothy 1:14*

You, dear friend, are just like Timothy. Your spiritual gift is a treasure. Your Heavenly Father, in His infinite wisdom and love, is crazy about you. He created you, redeemed you by your faith in Jesus Christ. He gave you an incredible gift saturated with His Divine power. It is a treasure. Guard it. Study it. Sharpen it. Use it. Grow in it. As you continue to discover, hone and practice your gift, you will gain a whole new world of gratitude and appreciation for your Father's grace. And the local church will be marvelously blessed by you in turn.

We've opened our study with several big questions. The biblical answers to these questions are your first step towards building a compound truth. This truth builds upon several individual elements, some of which we haven't excavated yet. You will see each of these in turn and add them together to discover a powerfully meaningful reality for your engagement with the Body of Christ. It goes like this:



You have taken an initial step towards identifying the first element in this compound truth. Your journey is only beginning. But I hope you are beginning to see why this subject and study are so central and critical to your journey as a follower of Jesus Christ. You are not meant to walk alone. The Christian life is largely a community project. You are intended to be a fruitful and faithful member of a family, the body of Christ. This is the Father's will for your life. Discovering your unique spiritual gift, and walking in it, is the way.

## My Story...

"Serving has helped me grow closer to Christ. It has shown me what He is pursuing me for. It has also strengthened my walk with Him immensely. Through prayer, I can see where He is leading me, what He wants me to do in His kingdom, and how I can use my testimony and spiritual gifts to help others. That is the greatest blessing, knowing that all I have been through is for a purpose."

Brianna

## Personal Reflection:

Take some time to read for yourself the four central New Testament passages on spiritual gifts. It won't take long. Perhaps read one a day. Read carefully and take notes. Remember the steps of good bible study methods from *Sit With Me Volume 2*, and ask God to reveal Himself in your study. Recall the big questions in this chapter as you read. 1) What is a spiritual gift? 2) To whom are spiritual gifts given? 3) What is the purpose of the gifts?

- Read **Romans 12:1-13**.
- Read **1 Corinthians 12:1–14:40**. This is the longest and most detailed discussion on gifts in the Scriptures. It covers three chapters, and yes, the chapter on love is in this context.
- Read **Ephesians 4:1-16**.
- Read **1 Peter 4:7-11**.



## Group Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever done a study on spiritual gifts before this one?  
Share with your group.
2. Do you believe you know what your spiritual gift from God is?  
Why do you think this? Share with your group.
3. To an outsider, how would you define "spiritual gift"?
4. What did your personal study of the four passages reveal?  
Share at least three insights with your group.
5. How did the three foundational questions of this chapter help you?
6. How does the "ministry formula" shared in this chapter help you put things together? (Your unique spiritual gift + Your unique calling + Your setting in life = Your ministry)
7. What remaining questions do you have about spiritual gifts?
8. As you close your group discussion, spend some time in prayer.  
Ask the Father to reveal His unique calling and gifting to each of you during the course of this study.

# Chapter 02

## What Are God's Grace Gifts?

“The orchestration of the Body is something beautiful to behold. Christ Himself selects who will play each instrument. As the conductor, He determines the sections and then decides which parts each will play. Because He is also the composer, the music He writes is perfectly designed to impact the world as well as encourage the members of the orchestra. It’s a phenomenon duplicated nowhere else.”

Charles Swindoll, *Spiritual Gifts*





My sweet mother was not a gift wrapper when I was growing up. This made Christmas morning extremely tempting. Carefully arranged on the hearth or the nearby chair was a dizzying pile of delights, each one specifically chosen for me. Yeah, there was another pile for my brother but I never really noticed that one. My pile was my only focus. And each gift was unwrapped. With a silent, careful glance around the corner at 2 a.m. and 2:30 a.m. and 4:00 a.m., by the faint glow of the hallway night light, I studied this unwrapped pile. No need to shake any packages. Does that box say Star Wars? Is that Castle Grayskull from Masters of the Universe? Quiet grins and muffled jitters. I never got any sleep on Christmas Eve.

At some indiscernible point in my past, I went from primarily a gift-getter to a gift-giver. I love giving gifts, especially to my family and friends. I also love giving gifts to strangers. Sometimes these unexpected moments of giving can be the sweetest. But this is a story about family. Did I mention I love giving gifts to my family?

I distinctly remember a family Christmas a few years ago. Now, my wife and I are wrappers. We wrap all gifts, label them and place them under a tree. This particular year we overdid it a bit and the tree looked like it was fragile and endangered, carefully protected by a high, broad wall of brightly colored presents. But this Christmas, I had another secret gift for Liza, my wife. My kids knew about it, but she didn't. It wasn't wrapped. It was perched in the tree. Deep inside. Up top where only tall fathers can see. After the broad wall had been dismantled and the pile of wrapping paper picked up, there was a deep satisfying sigh. It's over. We did it. Love was shared all around.

*Oh, wait a minute. What's that in the tree? It's a small felt, hinged box. That's not an ornament. Is that a jewelry box? It must be for Liza, magnificent wife and mother.* She was shocked. Totally surprised. Just a simple crack of the box and the tears began to flow. She immediately knew what it was. It wasn't over the top. But it was specific. For many months I had been listening, taking notes, researching, hunting. Liza took the ring out of the box and slid it on next to her engagement ring and wedding band. It perfectly matched and completed the set. She was overwhelmed. Yes! Mission accomplished. I told you I love giving gifts.

How about you? Do you like giving gifts? If you are a parent, do you recall giving one of your kids a gift that needed a bit of explanation? *This is why I'm giving this to you. This is what it's for. This is what it does.* If you're not a parent, have you ever received a gift like this, perhaps from your parents? Sometimes, the most meaningful gifts need a bit of explanation. The gift itself is great, but the story behind it can be even more meaningful. A gift with personal, specific, particular, perfectly-sized reason, purpose and intent. This is how God gives gifts.

## Your Father is a Giver

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Jesus shared some memorable words about prayer that will prove very helpful at this point in our study. Near the end of His most famous sermon, often called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to His disciples and the crowd:

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him?” —Matthew 7:7-11*

To be clear, Jesus is not talking directly about spiritual gifts. He is giving us the proper paradigm for prayer. It’s an argument from lesser (fallen human fathers) to greater (our perfect heavenly Father). We pray to God as Father. God answers our prayers as a Good Father. Good fathers give good gifts to their children. They give gifts based on their love and their child’s need.

It should encourage you, dear Christian, that your heavenly Father gives you good gifts. It should inspire you to know that the spiritual gifts God has given you through His Holy Spirit are good. They are unique; even though others may share the same gifts, no one else has been created like you. God’s gifts are given to you for the sake of His church, to build it up, to help it stay strong, resilient, missional, true, healthy. All of this means, that if you don’t know, understand or operate in your spiritual gifting, the local church of which you are a part will be deficient. It is deficient because it is missing you, walking in your gift.

In the last chapter, we asked three big questions that are foundational to any biblical study of spiritual gifts. Our answers there will continue to be relevant as we proceed. In the personal reflection section, you were asked to read through the four New Testament passages about gifts. In this chapter, we will expand on that reading and study by examining the specific gifts themselves, working towards definition, clarity, organization and engagement.

From the following passages—Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 (two distinct lists), Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4—we can create a simple chart that records the specific spiritual gifts mentioned in each passage. The words in the chart and their order are as they appear in the New American Standard translation. Take a moment and review it. Make note of similarities, relationships and link the same terms between lists.

Romans 12:1-13	1 Corinthians 12:1-11	1 Corinthians 12:27-31	Ephesians 4:1-16	1 Peter 4:7-11
prophecy	word of wisdom	apostles	apostles	speaking
serving	word of knowledge	prophets	prophets	serving
teaching	faith	teachers	evangelists	
exhortation	gifts of healing	miracles	pastor/teacher	
giving	miracles	gifts of healing		
leading	prophecy	helps		
showing mercy	distinguishing of spirits	administra- tions		
	tongues	tongues		
	interpretation of tongues	(interpretation of tongues)		

Some words likely seem a bit foreign to you. We don't often use many of these words in everyday conversation. Please try to see the above words and phrases and gifts from a Father who is absolutely crazy about you. These are the specially designed gifts that the Creator of the Universe picked out for His church. At least one of them has been given to you. In His eyes they are bright and shiny and perfect. I hope you see a wide smile on His face. He's excited for you to open these gifts. To live them. To enjoy them. To be a blessing.

# Specific Spiritual Gifts

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As a way of getting to know the Father's heart in His grace gifts, let's proceed briefly through each spiritual gift, simply in the order in which they appear in the Scripture. Some background will be provided for each. As you read, take note of which gifts seem to connect with your experiences with the Lord and how He has already used you in the lives of others. This could be the first clue to which gift(s) the Father has given you.

...

☐ **PROPHECY** /// In this first term, many see the fiery face of someone foretelling a dismal future. But that picture is not the full story. There is a technical use (very strict interpretation of usage) of the term "prophet" in the Old and New Testament. Technically speaking, this was an individual who heard directly from God and was commissioned by God with a responsibility to deliver God's message to others. Think of Elijah, Isaiah, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Micah, Nathan (some wrote and collected their oracles, some did not). But, much like the apostle below, the spiritual gift of prophecy seems to be wider than this technical use, illustrated simply by the fact that Paul discusses this gift with members of a local New Testament church. Prophecy, as a gift, is best described in 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul says *"One who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. ...one who prophesies edifies the church"* (14:3-4).

Paul also says that prophecy is a “greater” gift than speaking in tongues (14:5; 39), to which we will come in due course. This comparison may reflect a specific question or controversy in the Corinthian church. Later Paul says “prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe” (14:22). Finally, Paul reveals “if all [in the church] prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you” (14:24-25). Taking all of these inspired revelations into account, prophecy seems to be an active speaking gift of special insight and spiritual edification that may overlap somewhat with the gift of exhortation, teaching, speaking or words of knowledge and wisdom. Notice prophecy appears in each list except First Peter, and is “second” on the prioritized list in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

□ **SERVICE** /// This gift is not greatly expanded upon in our texts, but it is not difficult to discern. The Greek term is *diakonia*, and is the root of the word and office of *deacon*. This term describes a role of service, support, administration or mediation. It is used 34 times in the New Testament and is most often translated “ministry.” This gift is mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4. Please remember this is a spiritual gift. While a generalized *service* may seem common, the spiritual gift of service is exceptional and noteworthy. Men and women with a practical employment and enjoyment of this gift are desperately needed in the local church. They possess a God-given and Spirit-infused facility to serve the family of the church in various ways. Thus they experience both joy and success in the service. Hospitality, which is perhaps mentioned as a specific gift in 1 Peter 4:9, may also be a specific aspect of the gift of service.

□ **TEACHING** /// Like service, the gift of teaching is not explicitly explained in the text. The Greek term used is the noun *didaskalia*, from which we get our term *didactic*. The noun and connected verb (used over 120 times combined) are used to describe spoken teaching or instruction. Often in the New Testament, this teaching is connected to biblical doctrine in the form and fashion of Jewish rabbis. This gift is also mentioned by Paul in Romans 12



and by Peter in 1 Peter 4. The man or woman with the spiritual gift of teaching will find great joy and success in the transmission of knowledge and the transformation of spiritual application. Teaching is rarely easy and comes with its challenges, but those with the spiritual gift of teaching also have the Holy Spirit of God working through this specific gifting and calling as they teach.

□ **EXHORTATION** /// This noun is used 29 times in the New Testament and describes an act of emboldening another person in a specific belief or course of action. It is used of encouragement, a strong request or appeal in the act of comforting or consoling another. Thus this specific gift is closely related to the critical task of encouragement. It brings to mind all the Book of Acts says about the life and ministry Barnabas as an example. His name translated means “son of encouragement.” Again, as with many of God’s grace gifts, the spiritual gift of exhortation or encouragement goes far beyond the generalized encouragement to which all believers are called. This is a special spiritual gift given to men and women in the body of Christ who are called to the challenging task of entering hard, sometimes messy and dire circumstances and lifting another’s spirit and soul through words and actions of affirmation, perhaps elements of teaching, protective love and spiritual encouragement.

□ **GIVING** /// This verb is only used five times in the New Testament and it means to give a part of something to someone else, to share or to impart. Most would see here the concept of financial giving above and beyond what is normally expected, but the term seems to be wider than that. Great financial generosity is definitely included, but that’s not all of this spiritual gift, which includes general generosity and prodigious unselfishness with “*sincerity*” and “*liberality*.” There is a universal command and invitation for the body of Christ to walk in faithful financial stewardship and generosity to the local church, but this spiritual gift goes beyond a blanket command. The spiritual gift of giving is given to men and women who find joy, wisdom and success in exceptional levels of selfless generosity and giving of resources and finances for the sake of God’s people and God’s purposes.

□ **LEADERSHIP** /// This particular verb used in Romans 12:8 is only used nine times in the New Testament and it seems to have a dual meaning. On one hand it is used to describe the exercise of a position of leadership; to rule, to direct, to manage. On the other, it describes the demonstration of concern, care or empathy in the giving of aid. As with others, the spiritual gift of leadership is altogether different than a penchant for leadership, leadership principles, leadership books, organizational development or human resource expertise. It is higher and deeper than a vocational role that involves leadership. This spiritual gift of leadership is a God-designed gift for men and women who lead at various levels in the life of the church family, not just at the top. These gifted individuals face the diverse challenges of church leadership with the humility and grace appropriate to the exercise of a gift. It may also be a larger term into which other gifts such as pastor/teacher or apostle fit. Romans 12 adds that this gift should be employed with “diligence,” a word that means commitment, haste and zeal.

□ **SHOWING MERCY** /// While the idea and use of the noun “mercy” is widespread, the verb in Romans 12:8 is used only four times. Of course, it means to show compassion, to have leniency, to have pity and to show or have mercy towards another. Mercy, in simple form, is not getting what a person deserves (i.e. justice for a crime or sin), but again, the spiritual gift of mercy goes far beyond the Christian duty of being merciful. Jesus’ kingdom statement, “*blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*” is a statement of truth for all believers, not an exposition of the spiritual gift of mercy. This gift is a divine ability to extend great mercy, often in dark, desperate and tragic circumstances, and may overlap with other gifts such as exhortation.

□ **WORD OF WISDOM** /// This two-word phrase in Greek is only used in 1 Corinthians 12:8, as is the next gift. At the basic level, it seems to describe a Spirit-led speaking gift by which the gifted person speaks timely, appropriate, godly wisdom to another person. In this way, it could overlap with other gifts such as pastor/teacher, exhortation, prophecy, teaching or others. Some refer

to this gift as simply the gift of wisdom, but it should again be considered a special grace gift that rides above the general acquiring of wisdom through the Proverbial paths of humility, teachability and the fear of the Lord.

□ **WORD OF KNOWLEDGE** /// As with the previous, this phrase is only used in 1 Corinthians 12:8, and seems to describe a Spirit-led speaking gift whereby the gifted person speaks or reveals some spiritual, personal or practical insight to another person. As above, this gift could overlap with the gift of exhortation, prophecy or others. Some refer to this gift simply as the gift of knowledge. It seems clear that whatever and however this gift is employed, the “knowledge” and insight spoken comes from the Holy Spirit of God, the giver of all spiritual gifts.

□ **FAITH** /// This spiritual gift mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:9 may be the most difficult to understand because of its ubiquitous use throughout the New Testament as the only condition for salvation. As in John, Romans, Galatians and the rest of the New Testament, a person is saved by God’s grace through personal faith (believing trust) in Jesus Christ. Paul’s beautiful words in Ephesians 2:8-9 contain the words “faith” and “gift” and have often been confused with the spiritual gift: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Many have misunderstood the “gift” as “faith” in this passage. But the syntax and context make it clear that “salvation” is the gift, not faith, the only condition of salvation.

The spiritual gift of faith seems to be faith of a different level or application. The grace gift of faith suggests a Divinely given, powerfully manifested, overwhelming and living faith in a person’s sanctification or spiritual journey that allows them to face extreme circumstances, trial, persecution or a particularly difficult calling. Thus it is not the same as faith *unto* salvation. It is faith *within* salvation; sanctification faith, a Spirit-led boldness of trust that urges someone into places or situations that require great faith.

□ **HEALING** /// The specific word for healing used in 1 Corinthians 12:9 is only used three times in the New Testament, all in this chapter of Corinthians. As seems obvious by its context and usage, this grace gift describes a Spirit-wrought ability to bring miraculous healing, a remedy to illness or health to a sick person. This is clearly a manifestation of God's power through the gifted person, not some innate or learned ability. This would be counter to the nature of a gift. We see this gift in action several times through the Book of Acts at the hands of Paul and the Apostles.

□ **MIRACLES** /// This double-noun Greek phrase used in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is literally the "activity of power." The second noun, *dunamis*, is used 119 times in the New Testament and is most often translated *power*. It's the root of the word *dynamite*. The phrase describes or introduces a grace gift whereby the Holy Spirit allows the gifted person to bring about miraculous, supernatural signs or wonders of healing. In this way, this gift seems close to the previous gift of healing. However, the gift of miracles likely refers to impersonal signs and wonders as well.

□ **DISTINGUISHING OF SPIRITS** /// This double-noun phrase in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is almost perfectly self-explanatory. It describes a Spirit-led ability to differentiate, divide, separate or distinguish between different spirits. The term for spirit, *pneuma*, is used almost 400 times in the New Testament, often for the Holy Spirit, but also the human spirit and angelic or demonic beings. Thus this gift is a Divine ability to differentiate between spiritual beings or influences and perhaps their character and purposes. We must remember that Satan, the accuser of the brethren, disguises himself and his work. Consider the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:14-15, the chapter just before the use of this phrase as a spiritual gift. In a discussion of men who are pretending to be servants of the church, he says, "*For [some] such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.*" It makes perfect sense, then, that God would equip the church with men and women specially gifted to distinguish between spirits.

□ **TONGUES** /// This grace gift has received a lot of attention through the life of the Church, and particularly over the last century or so. Paul's extended discussion on the gift of tongues in First Corinthians keenly suggests a misunderstanding and perhaps controversy even in this very young context. Taken all together, the biblical revelation suggests the gift of tongues is the special Spirit-wrought ability to speak in a language otherwise unknown to the speaker (which is the gift aspect), and sometimes known to others.

First Corinthians 14 is very helpful in understanding this gift. There, Paul says that *"one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries"* (14:2). Whereas in Acts 2, at the birth of the church, and the prime example of speaking in tongues, people from all over the Mediterranean world were hearing the apostles *"speak in his own language... in our own tongue, speaking of the mighty deeds of God,"* the Corinthian insight suggests that this does not always have to be the case. This insight is also the biblical basis for what many have called a "prayer language" or a "private tongue," which seems legitimate and purposeful. Paul continues this personal aspect of the gift with *"one who speaks in tongues edifies himself"* (14:4). This is unusual but noteworthy. Whereas all grace gifts seem to be directly employed for others (think of service and giving), the gift of tongues also has a personal aspect and benefit. However, the next spiritual gift, interpretation, reminds us that interpreted tongues as a benefit to the wider church family should remain a balancing and central focus of this gift.

Paul develops tongues and prophecy much more in First Corinthians 14:6-33, giving proper weight, orderly cautions and freedoms for both. He concludes with *"do not forbid to speak in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner"* (14:39-40). Remember, all the gifts are given to build up the church and help fulfill her mission. The New Testament records several occasions where the spiritual gift of tongues was powerfully employed, beginning with the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost (see also Acts 10:46 and 19:6).

□ **INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES** /// Mentioned three times by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, this grace gift is the supernatural ability to accurately interpret a discernible language otherwise unknown to the interpreter (which is the gift aspect). As such, it forms the counterpart to the gift of tongues. Together they function to edify the church and as a sign to unbelievers. (1 Corinthians 14:5-19; 22).

□ **APOSTLE** /// Like prophet above, there seems to be both a technical (meaning a very strict application and interpretation of usage) and non-technical (more general) use of the term “apostle” in the New Testament. Technically, this was an individual who was called by Jesus Christ (either in person or after His resurrection as in the case of Paul) and then “sent out” on mission. This person walked with Jesus throughout His ministry and was a witness to His resurrection (see the replacement of Judas by Matthias as an Apostle in Acts 1:15-26). But the spiritual gift of apostle seems to be wider than this technical use, simply because the gift is spoken to local church members who were not able to physically follow Jesus during His early ministry. Therefore, a person gifted as an apostle seems to have a Holy Spirit given passion and ability to “go out” with the message of Jesus, perhaps analogous to missionaries and evangelists. Thus this gift may overlap with the gift of leadership, pastor/teacher and others. In First Corinthians 12:28 Paul offers a shorter list that somehow reveals a priority or weighting of gifts within the local church. If that is the intent with “*first*” and “*second*,” it is important to note that apostle is the gift of highest priority. Prophet is second. Teachers are third.

□ **HELPS** /// This word is only used in 1 Corinthians 12:28, as is the next in our survey. Because it is only used once in our Bible, it is hard to define precisely. It suggests assistance in times of difficulty, giving a hand and perhaps even defense. This gift seems to be very relational and supportive.

□ **ADMINISTRATION** /// This word is also used only in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Outside of the Bible, it has a background in the image of a ship’s pilot at the helm. This suggests a Spirit-led grace gift concerned with leadership, governance and administrative guidance.

□ **EVANGELIST** /// Although the concept is clear, this specific noun is only used three times in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11; as a description of Philip in Acts 21:8; in a command to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5). An evangelist is a person who announces information and good news, specifically the good news or gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith in Jesus. Thus this grace gift is given to divinely enable a person to boldly, passionately, intelligently, biblically and relationally share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the lost and with the believing church, as a worshipful reminder of our redemption.

□ **PASTOR/TEACHER** /// These two words are often kept together as one gift because of a unique Greek construction, even though “teaching” is separated elsewhere. It seems most likely that Paul intended them not to be seen as one, but as a compound unity. A pastor is a shepherd, and the often-used image of a shepherd is the image behind the concept of pastor. Instead of a flock of sheep, the pastor shepherds a family of people in a local church or group of churches. The noun shepherd is used 18 times in the New Testament, often in the words of Jesus. The role of shepherd is also the chief job description of church elders in 1 Peter 5:1-2, which is the biblical basis for many churches seeing pastors and elders as the same office. The gift of teaching has already been covered. The same word is used here as previously studied. Here in Ephesians 4, Paul links the two, pastor-teacher, in description of a grace gift of the teaching pastor or shepherding teacher; one who leads, protects, defends, instructs and cares for other followers of Jesus.

□ **SPEAKING** /// Peter likely refers to this grace gift in 1 Peter 4:11 as a larger grouping of multiple specific gifts of speaking such as teaching, prophecy, exhortation or words of wisdom and knowledge. In short order, Peter only mentions speaking and serving in his writing on gifts.

...

This completes our intentional survey of the gifts listed in the four main New Testament passages on spiritual gifts. However, in some discussions, writings, sermons and spiritual gift assessments, gifts other than the ones listed above are mentioned. These gifts often include hospitality (which is possibly mentioned in this context in Romans 12:13 and also in the context of 1 Peter 4:7-11), worship or musical gifts, other artistic or creative gifts, intercessory prayer, discernment, poverty, celibacy and gifts related to the mission field. Let me be very clear on this point. These gifts are not necessarily invalid because they do not appear in the four texts we have studied. Many or all of these are referenced or alluded to elsewhere in the New Testament and therefore, if exercised in truth, have a place in the spiritual growth journey of believers and the mission of the local church. For the sake of this study we will expand only on the gifts listed in the four texts we have surveyed. But please keep these other possibilities in mind as you pray and study.

## Wrangling the Gifts

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Well, there you go. A beautifully diverse palette of God's spiritual gifts, directly from the four major New Testament texts listing them. Don't miss His creativity. In all of His infinite wisdom, artistry and brilliance, your Father handcrafted a set of grace gifts for His children. With these colors He will paint stories too beautiful to describe with words.

As we continue our journey towards a fuller understanding and experience of God's gifts, is it possible to organize these gifts into helpful categories or classes? Perhaps like a color wheel helps wrangle an infinite palette of colors. Let's try to cut down on the dizzy. While this is not explicitly laid out in Scripture, it may be worthwhile and beneficial to group the grace gifts into three practical categories: service/support gifts, shepherding gifts, and miraculous sign gifts. Please note, because this is somewhat artificial, there may be overlap of specific gifts into another category.



The chart below is not inerrant or inspired. It is crafted only to be practically useful in our understanding of the Spirit's gifts and how they might be employed in the local church. Take some time to consider the categories and the gifts included.

<b>Service/Support Gifts</b> <i>within the Body of Christ</i>	<b>Shepherding Gifts</b> <i>within the Body of Christ</i>	<b>Miraculous Sign Gifts</b> <i>within the Body of Christ</i>
faith	prophecy	healing
helps	apostle	miracles
administration	speaking	tongues
service	teaching	interpretation of tongues
giving	exhortation	distinguishing of spirits
showing mercy	pastor/teacher	word of knowledge
leadership	evangelist	word of wisdom
speaking	word of knowledge	
	word of wisdom	
	leadership	

Do you find this helpful? Think about it for a second. How would you organize or group these gifts differently? Is there a better term or heading for any of the lists? Our goal is to organize the gifts with a biblical view to God's purpose in them. It is critical to understand the individual gifts themselves but it is equally important, if not more so, to recognize their role in the local church. Remember, there is direction and purpose behind it all. Diversity and unity.

*"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." –1 Corinthians 12:12-13*

## The Glue That Holds the Gifts Together

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There is one more beautiful thing I want you see. Right in the middle of the longest text we have on spiritual gifts, First Corinthians 12-14, we have First Corinthians 13, the "love chapter." While it's usually reserved for weddings, this elegantly poetic passage is actually the heart of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts. It is the glue that holds the gifts together.

The word Paul chose to reflect this truth is *agape*. This is God's style of love, distinct from family love, passionate love or friendly love. *Agape* love is secure, robust, persevering, constant, loyal and rooted in the heart of God Himself. This is why Paul uses it so often in this short chapter. Paul brings to bear all of what *agape* love is as the anchor to his discussion on spiritual gifts. Don't miss this.

Without *agape* love, none of the gifts profit anyone. *Agape* love is the marrow, the substance and the fuel of all the grace gifts. Without love they are empty. This begs a personal question. How are you walking in God's kind of love? How are you embodying *agape*? Is your gift discovery process rooted in love? Is the hope of employing your spiritual gift in the church colored and controlled by

agape love? Remember, earlier in the same book Paul says “*knowledge makes arrogant, but love (agape) edifies*” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Most recall the NIV version of this verse: “*knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*”

This love interruption should stop us in our tracks. That is why Paul constructed the gift chapters in this way, in this order. He begins the discussion of gifts and then interrupts himself and the church audience with the heart of the matter, the glue. Then Paul goes on to say something even more surprising and enlightening.

*“Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

–1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Every spiritual gift is temporary. Do you see it? Each grace gift serves a God-ordained purpose in His church now, but not forever. “*When the perfect comes*” they will be done away with. Paul doesn’t specify what “*the perfect*” is, but I can’t imagine anyone or anything more perfect than my Savior Jesus. He is perfectly beautiful, magnificent, strong, good. When He returns and sets up His eternal kingdom, things will be different. When history is transformed into eternity, when the earth and heavens are remade, then we will see fully. Our faith will become sight. And spiritual gifts will not be needed. They will be finished. Old hat. Unnecessary. But love will remain. Agape love. God’s style of love. The kind of love that is best seen in the words and works of Jesus, God incarnate and love incarnate. Grace and truth wrapped in flesh. When all spiritual gifts run their course, we will still have Jesus. And He is all we will ever need.

## My Story...

"When obedience is put into practice, it puts us on the FaithPath to discipleship and develops within us an attitude of stewardship toward our spiritual gifts - to seek to know and put such gifts to work. One of my spiritual gifts is administration, and I have been blessed to serve my church for nearly 30 years in various ways putting this gift to use. I have a satisfying feeling of contentment when I can contribute to the church with my God-given skills. Moreover, I have been able to serve along side countless others that have enhanced the experience of being an active participant in the Body of Christ. We are made to live in fellowship, encouraging one another to remain obedient to God's Word. Exercising my spiritual gifts within the Body provides a taste of the fellowship we will enjoy in the eternal life to come."

Mike

## Personal Reflection:

- Take time to review the charts within this chapter. If necessary, review the brief descriptions of specific gifts. Which one or two gifts jump out to you? What specific gift, just one, seems to resonate with your sense of joy, nearness to God, relationships and impact in ministry the most?
- Take some time to pray through the list of grace gifts. You may want to read through the four passages again as you do so. Ask God to reveal how He has specifically gifted you. Draw near to Him in unhurried, undistracted time. Listen for Him to speak through His Word.

## Group Discussion Questions:

- 1 . How has this study challenged you so far? Share with your group.
- 2 . Which of the gift descriptions above connected with you the most? Why?
- 3 . Consider how important personal holiness and intimacy with Jesus are to fully operate in your spiritual gift. Discuss with your group. Share any Scriptures that help in this area.
- 4 . What do the truths of spiritual gifts reveal about the Holy Spirit of God?
- 5 . How might a person thwart or obstruct his/her spiritual gift?
- 6 . Why do you think God choose these kinds of gifts to serve and build up His Church on the earth? What do these gifts suggest about the principal needs of the Church?

space for notes

# Chapter 03

## Which Is My Spiritual Gift?

“These are your presents... and they are tools,  
not toys. The time to use them is perhaps near  
at hand. Bear them well.”

Father Christmas to Peter, Susan and Lucy

C.S. Lewis,

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*





P

Professor Ellis, as I recall—a brilliant, large, intimidating man sitting behind a very large, intimidating desk. As a first semester freshman undergraduate, almost all of this was new, and intimidating. I repeat that word because I mean it. I came to Professor Ellis' office to get his signature on a "force slip," the form professors could sign to allow students into their classes even if they were full. This was necessary because I was unable to sign up for his Genetics 301 class through the archaic phone system that all Aggies used at that time. I was unable because I was a freshman and that meant I entered the system last. This was a junior-level class and it filled up quickly. Professor Ellis was the best in Genetics. I wanted the class because I was a Biochemistry major at the time, which required genetics, and I wanted to learn from the best.

He barely paid me any attention. A large book on his desk was way more interesting than a scrawny freshman. He never looked at me. Staring down but speaking up, he asked what I wanted. I told him that I

needed his signature on a force slip to take his class next semester. He did this every semester, so he knew what it was. Still staring down, he asked why I wanted to be in his class. So I did my best to explain my young hopes and dreams of medical school to an intimidating genetics professor. Somewhere in my sputtering I must have mentioned that I was in my very first semester.

“Wait a second,” Professor Ellis exclaimed, finally looking up at me for the first time. “You are a freshman, and you want to be in my class?” A faint grin crept onto his large mouth. “Yes sir,” I said faintly, with a gulp. Immediately extending his hand towards me, this time not at all trying to hide a rather sinister smile, Professor Ellis said with glee, “Give me your form, I’ll sign it.”

And so began my very short foray into the world of genetics. When the class started the next semester, I was the youngest guy in the room best I could tell. I still drooled and mumbled like a freshman. The lecture and lab were wildly above me, but I loved every second of it. I worked very hard that semester, mostly because Ellis’ menacing smile still haunted me. I earned a solid B. Huge win.

In the field of genetics, there is a wide swath of atheistic humanists that see the world around them in a very different way than I do. For many of these men and women, the world is determined by laws and forces and random mutations. For a sad section of this group, the only option is a reluctant meaninglessness to just about everything. Now meaninglessness is a bitter pill at a philosophical level, but when it becomes personal it is far too heavy for the human heart to bear honestly.

## Unique Squared

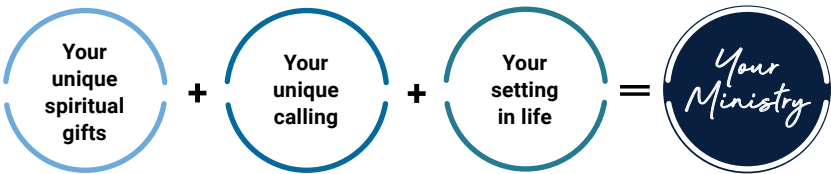
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I’m unsure of Dr. Ellis’ view on the matter, but I believe every single individual in history is more than the deterministic product of a genetic code that is the

unintended product of aeons of blind evolution. Much more. I believe we can see God’s genius and creative wisdom in the things He has made, even the intricate, ineffably brilliant design of the human genome. The double-helixed DNA strand, fully available in every cell of your body, is the richest source of information in the universe, and God designed it that way. DNA is a set of instructions. The human genome is language. And language always comes from a mind. Our God is a master designer, and He has designed each human life according to the creative genius of His will and purposes. It’s all too marvelous to comprehend.

Did you know that in God’s limitless creativity and wisdom, He has created you, then recreated you, in perfectly unique wonder? No one else is physically like you; your DNA, fingerprints and irises are each distinctive, unmatched and unrepeated throughout all of human history. But even more than that, no one else is like you as a new creation. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ [by faith], he is a new creation”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). This means you are unique<sup>2</sup>, if you indulge the expression. Unique as a physical creation by your birth, and unique as a spiritual recreation by your re-birth in salvation. No one is like you on the planet. No one is like you in the church. This is cause for celebration, gratitude and worship. Wisdom also suggests concentrated attention on your uniqueness in order to determine all of the beautiful reasons your Heavenly Father has created and recreated you just so. What an adventure of discovery.

Remember, a personal understanding and practical expression of this compound truth is what we are chasing. It has a distinct and specific application in your life.



## Five Steps Forward

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As you begin to zero in on your spiritual grace gift(s) from the Father, there are some good and not-so-good ways of going about it. This chapter is all about how to practically, biblically and wisely determine the spiritual gift of grace God has given to you. There will be others with a spiritual gift of the same name or type, but there is no one like you.

As you proceed in this wonderful process of discovery, it is important to take the next steps appropriately, patiently and humbly. There are several common missteps, but there is also a well-worn path of wisdom and joy. There is a lot at stake. I have found the following encouragement of Charles Swindoll particularly helpful. He's talking to you about discovering your spiritual gift.

"The first step is to be informed. Research the gifts to know the parameters of each one. Second, be open. Don't be too quick to zero in on one gift to the exclusion of another. Third, be available. Be willing to be used by God in different areas of ministry even though you feel you're not quite ready for that task. Fourth, be sensitive. Carefully evaluate the effect your gifts have on others. Finally, be sensible. Don't force yourself to fit into a certain gift if it doesn't appear to be the one given to you."<sup>1</sup>

I hope you're encouraged to realize you're already down the road a bit. You've read a lot of Scripture. You've done some homework. You have prayed. You've discussed some of your thoughts, conclusions and questions with a group. But how exactly do you proceed from here? Let me organize and adapt Swindoll's counsel and invite you to explore five simple steps to identify your spiritual gift. These steps are sequential and prioritized.

1. **PRAY**
2. **READ**
3. **ASK**
4. **CONSULT**
5. **SERVE**

Sounds simple, doesn't it? And it is simple, in truth. But let's look at these steps a bit more closely. Sometimes the simple things are the things overlooked, dismissed and forgotten.

## **Step 1: *Pray***

You have already been engaging in specific prayers through the first two chapters of this study. You have asked God to reveal Himself, His will and the unique design of your spiritual gift(s). Continue to do so, not just in this process of discovery, but throughout the rest of your life and ministry. Maybe you can pray this prayer. Better yet, let your heart write its own.

Father,

I know You love me. It is a marvel, but I know it's true. You fully know me and fully love me. You value me. And for reasons that I don't fully understand yet, because of my faith in Jesus, You have uniquely prepared me for usefulness and joy as an integral part of Your family and kingdom. Through Your Word and Your people, show me Your design for my life. Reveal Your unique gifts, given through Your Holy Spirit. Help me develop my gifts so that I can walk in the fullness of Your design. Allow me to serve You well, follow You closely, be a blessing to Your heart and Your people. Show me the way. I love you. I trust You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

As you continue to pray, keep one important tension in mind: just because you may not have one of the specific spiritual gifts, you are not therefore exempt from engaging Jesus' commands as a disciple in that area. Many of the spiritual gifts have corresponding general commands applicable to all believers, such as the command to pray, to share the gospel, to give, to worship, to encourage, to speak truth to one another, etc. You may not have the spiritual gift of magnanimous financial giving, but you are still commanded to give financial resources to the local church you are a part of. Even if you do not have the gift of an evangelist, you are still commanded to go and share the good news of Jesus Christ with those God places in your life. You cannot claim you are excused or released from specific discipleship actions fitting for all believers just because you are not specially gifted by the Holy Spirit in that area. Keep this in mind as you pray and seek.

## **Step 2. Read**

It is absolutely critical to read your Bible and understand the truth about God's grace gifts. This is the critical next step. You must be guided by God's Word in this process of discovery. Without the truth of God's Word, a search for spiritual gifts can quickly become a hopelessly diluted, self-fulfilling wish list, layered with pride, selfishness and glory-seeking. You don't want that, trust me.

You have also already started this journey by reading, studying and meditating through the four main biblical texts on spiritual gifts and asking the three big opening questions. Recall those texts and questions often. Revisit God's Word regularly as the perfectly true standard of abundant life and revelation of God's character and will. Stand firm on the foundation of truth you have already built.

## **Step 3. Ask**

The next step is to ask three believers who know you very well what they think your spiritual gift is. Yes, that's right, ask at least three other mature, informed Christians what Spirit-led giftings they see in you. Of course, they will need to have studied the biblical texts that designate these gifts.

This is one of the most important steps in gift discovery and it is sadly and often overlooked. Asking others at precisely this point in the discovery process will protect you from blind spots and the subtle lure of chasing certain gifts you might feel are more exciting or glorious than others. The honest and gracious input of others that know you well will help bring weight and balance to this process of discovery.

So now is the time to prayerfully consider candidates for this important step in the process. Take your time. These people need to be close to Jesus and close to you. Of course, they should be biblically knowledgeable and will need to have studied the biblical texts that specify these gifts. When you have three names, call or meet with them and invite them into your journey as a voice of insight and counsel. Explain this study and the discovery process (show them a few of the gift charts in the previous chapter to help them). Give them some time to pray and consider. I promise they will be delighted to help you. When you are both ready, ask them questions like these:

- *Which of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit do you see active in my life, my relationships and my walk with Jesus?*
- *Is there a specific spiritual gift that you think God has given me but that I haven't fully explored yet? Why?*
- *Is there a specific spiritual gift that you think God has given me that I am running from, hiding or misusing in some way? How?*
- *Is there anything else that God has laid on your heart to share with me about my spiritual gifts?*

As they respond to each of these questions, focus on listening to both their specific insight and the heart behind it. This is not about specifying the torque of gears and cogs in an impersonal machine. This is not a puzzle to solve. It is a deeply unique and personal soul-shape that you are trying to discover. You are a life, a soul, a body, gifted by the Holy Spirit of God to serve the church and bless the world. I pray you feel both informed and encouraged

by these conversations. Your heavenly Father is not trying to hide your grace gift from you. He is actually putting it on display in ways that you may not be able to see yourself. Since your gift is intended to bless others, it follows that others will see it at work in you. Asking a few wise men and women directly is the best way to gain this insight.

## **Step 4. Consult**

Next, consult a good biblical spiritual gift assessment tool as a way of validating or confirming what you have discovered in prayer, study of God's Word and counsel from God's people. This is step four, not step one. When it comes to spiritual gift discovery, many people simply take a test. Beginning and end. Either online or in print, the test is usually simple and quick. But this is not the full story. Without the previous steps, what you give and receive in a gift assessment or survey may be misleading.

While I have employed some of these tests myself, as you may have, I must offer a simple but important warning. These assessments can be subtly, sometimes unconsciously, manipulated into a wish list. Sometimes a person knows what gift they desire, and a careful engagement with an assessment reveals what they hoped for. For this reason, I recommend assessments after significant engagement in prayer and reflection, the insight and counsel of people that know you well, and overlapping periods of ministry service or exposure to various ministries utilizing different spiritual gifts.

In the personal reflection section at the end of this chapter, you will be guided towards several assessment tools. But, for now, consider the list of questions below as a start. They represent the kinds of questions that you will encounter in a survey. Read slowly. Think and pray. These are diagnostic questions intended to help you with discernment. Scribble some answers to each question in the margin.



- *What do you enjoy the most about relationships with other believers?*
- *Where and how has God used you in significant ways in the lives of others?*
- *What specific aspects of following Jesus as a disciple give you the most joy?*
- *When you are on a project team, what role in the team do you typically take/enjoy?*
- *What aspects of spiritual discipline (growing in Christ) are the most enjoyable for you?*
- *On a typical Sunday, as you gather with the church, where do you gravitate?*
- *What spiritual burdens are most commonly heavy on your heart?*
- *What aspects of the life of the church do you think about and pray about most?*
- *Do you enjoy being generous with others?*
- *Do you find great joy and sense the pleasure of God when you serve others?*
- *How have you seen or sensed God powerfully work through you to influence others?*
- *If you were given a free choice to choose any ministry in the church in which to serve, which one would it be? Why?*
- *How easily do you empathize with the needs or afflictions of others?*
- *When have you felt the special leading of the Holy Spirit?*

If you choose to engage a grace gift assessment, these are the kinds of questions you will likely be asked. Thoughtful, prayerful, honest answers will help you greatly. A step like this can serve to confirm, validate or even gently challenge your thoughts about God's gifting. Sometimes God surprises you. There will be more direction below in the section for personal reflection.

It is important to understand that God may have given you more than one grace gift. As you saw in Chapter 2, some of the gifts are similar and may overlap. But the Scriptures seem to suggest that each believer has one or a small number of gifts. This means every Christian has at least one grace gift but probably won't have seven. Paul offers a give-and-take in First Corinthians to prove this point. *"All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they?"* (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). Each question is a teaching point. And it is crystal clear in the original language that each question is to be answered in the negative. Not everyone is gifted as an apostle, and so on. His point is that each one has a specific gift. But keep your eye on a "gift mix" of perhaps three spiritual gifts. This will help your heart and mind stay open as you continue to pray, read, ask and consult.

## **Step 5. Serve**

Your discovery process is not complete without this step. Simply knowing is not the end. Remember the goal of every spiritual gift is to be a blessing to the local church and the Kingdom of God. If you have identified your spiritual gift or think you have, jump in and begin using it in the local church. Start walking in it. This is the best way to confirm whether or not you are hearing God correctly. But as you do, remember that all of the grace gifts God bestows must be nurtured into full maturity over time.

Spiritual gifts are given by God. They are a divine deposit of grace. But the deposit is also developed and matured over, in service and intentional practice. If you are gifted by God as a teacher, that does not mean you will be excellent at first, or that you'll find the perfect spot for your teaching on your first try. Get to it. Serve. But remember you'll grow into your gifting as well.

All spiritual gifts are given by God to build up the local church and help accomplish her mission. It follows that using, and therefore developing, your gift in the local church is a good way to confirm the gift(s) God has given you. This means you can start serving where you think your gift will be a blessing. Right now. Look for opportunities. Be patient. Be humble. Ask questions about your gifts. Listen. Learn. Volunteer. Get to know ministry leaders. Offer your gift in service. Accept that the expression of your gift will grow as relationships grow. That's how it works. Show up early and help out. Stay after and clean up.

We see this patience-action truth in Paul's encouragement to Timothy in First Timothy 4, which again, is in the explicit context of developing spiritual gifts. *"Take pains with these things," he says, "be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all"* (4:15). Remember, you are seeking progress, growth, maturity and opportunities to bless God's church, not personal prominence or position.

This point is important enough to repeat. As you jump in, commit to being patient, because your goal is progress and blessing through service. All areas of ministry and service in the local church are hard. Each has its own set of challenges. Persevere. You'll meet many bumps on the way. Just because you are serving in the right spot with the right spiritual gift does not mean it will be smooth, frictionless and effortless. This process of discovery, confirmation and establishment will take time. Be patient. Frustration and even some failure is all part of the training. Keep your eyes tuned to see the joy and impact which are plentifully available even in this phase of experimentation and discovery.

I have been repeatedly blessed by seeing the truth of a simple Proverb of King Solomon play out in my life and the lives of many around me, but not without difficulty and challenge. I pray that it deeply encourages you as well. The proverb says, *"A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men"* (Proverbs 18:16).

Operating in your gifting will make room for you. It will lead you exactly where God wants you to go. It's His gift and His plan in His child to bless His church. He makes the way. This doesn't mean it won't be a challenge, but it does mean that you shouldn't have to continually fight for an opportunity to express your gift. Be sensitive to His calling and follow Him one step at a time. Be patient. He will open doors. Follow. Grow in humility. Remember the goal of every spiritual gift is to bless the local church and the Kingdom of God, not make you famous.

There it is. A clear, step-by-step plan to discover and employ your spiritual gift. I know *clear* doesn't always mean *simple*. These steps and the pitfalls that surround them are not easy. Because spiritual gifts are so powerful in our world and so beneficial to the church, the enemy of Christ, Satan, the accuser of the brethren, wants nothing more than to distract, discourage and deceive you about God's spiritual gifts. There is much to lose if you disregard, misconstrue or misuse your gifts. There is much to gain if you understand them biblically and walk in them joyfully. True gain and joy remain our goal.

## The Best Gift?

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Let me offer one, final, very important warning in the form of a thought question. *Which spiritual gift is the best?* Think about it. This question and its true, honest, vulnerable answer can provide a penetrating look into your heart, as well as the wide range of consequences in any discussion of spiritual gifts. I wonder if it isn't also a hook that the devil uses to drag us off the path of truth and joy.

Which spiritual gift is the best? Leadership? Apostle? Prophet? Tongues? Speaking and Teaching gifts? If you've asked this question, even silently to yourself, you are not alone. In fact, there seems to be something wired into our fallen flesh that regularly guides our thinking to matters of comparison, superiority, supremacy and victory. We all want to be the best. We all want to win. We continually "one-up" each other in conversation and action. In the current

competitive technological and social-media culture of the west, it feels rampant. Nearly two millennia ago, the by-now familiar young church in Corinth struggled with the same off-center inquiry. As a careful counter to this dangerous divergence of thought, Paul employs the image of the human body as an illustration of a diverse church body with diverse gifts. He says:

*"But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." –1 Corinthians 12:18-26*

Paul warns his readers and we should heed his ancient warning—no spiritual gift is lesser or unnecessary. Just like all members of the body are required for healthy function, so all God's gifts are needed in the church. It also means there is no best. There is no supreme gift which functions as the envy of all other gifts. But as we've seen before, there does seem to be a priority of gifts. Recall the next passage after the one quoted above.

*"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not*

*prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.” –1 Corinthians 12:27-31*

If there is no “best” gift, why does Paul suggest a priority? If all of the gifts are essential in the church, what does it mean to “earnestly desire the greater gifts?” Do you see the tension in Paul’s words? It’s undeniable. Two truths converge. Every gift is necessary. Every spiritual gift plays a vital, irreplaceable role in the body. In fact, those gifts we might deem less desirable or honorable are therefore deserving of more honor. Then Paul gives a “first” and “second” priority, and advises the whole church to “desire the greater gifts.”

The answer is found in Paul’s analogy of the body. The human body is a perfect illustration for Paul because it is a unity, made up of diverse parts, with a priority in function among the parts. One of his chief points is that the priority or order in function does not and should not fragment the truth of unity. Diversity is to be celebrated and *protected*. No allowance should be made for dishonor or dismissal of certain spiritual gifts within in a church family. When this happens in a local church, that family will undoubtedly be limited in its impact and its health. But even without a “best,” there is indeed a priority and order among the Holy Spirit’s grace gifts.

Compare the prioritized list in 12:27-28 above with the following rhetorical “*All are not...*” questions in verses 29-30. Cross out the ones that are mentioned in both. What do you have left? If this observation is important to Paul’s meaning, then it is likely that the “greater gifts” are the two gifts left untouched in the comparison. Two gifts that many would mistakenly deem “lesser” or at least “less important.” Paul surprises his original audience and us today by suggesting these are actually *greater* in the function of a unity comprised of diverse parts. Go ahead. Read the passages. Discover the two left over. You’ll be surprised.

Through it all, it is clear that Paul, as he writes through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, is intentionally keeping us aware of unity, diversity and priority. And he does so in a way that startles us with unexpected conclusions. The shock is intentional. It makes sense that humility would be a main ingredient in a healthy church operating with a full complement of gifts. It also makes sense that Paul would immediately transition to *“a still more excellent way”* with his very next words in Chapter thirteen. Love. But we’ve seen this before, haven’t we.

There is significant discussion in the church today about the continuance of some of the spiritual gifts, particularly the sign or miraculous gifts. This conversation is kind, respectful and bible-based at its best, but at its worst it can be angry and divisive. It sadly smacks of devilish influence when the very gifts the Holy Spirit gives the church for her maturity and growth become fuel for division, conflict and condemnation. We must carefully guard our hearts against such disunity and continue to strive for biblical integrity and relational grace.

Of the different views, there are some who believe the sign and miraculous gifts were only operative in the transitional period of the church’s infancy, roughly the first century AD or so. This view sees these gifts functioning to authenticate the apostles and the birth of the church under their leadership. As the church grew, expanded and matured, the sign gifts faded. Those who hold this general view are diverse in their understanding of the particulars.

There are others who maintain that all of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament remain available and operative in the church today, including the sign and miraculous gifts. This view, as its alternative, has great diversity in its particulars, especially regarding the place and practice of the gifts within

worship services and the fuller life of the church. As a reminder, we've already seen Paul maintain that all gifts be exercised "properly and in an orderly manner" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Personally, as I have read and studied the New Testament and spiritual gifts at length, I find the biblical arguments for a continuation of all gifts more convincing than the arguments for a cessation of certain gifts. My experiences with hundreds of believers on diverse mission fields and in churches around the world seem to confirm this interpretation. But I also believe that the Scriptures specifically prescribe why and how the gifts are to be employed, as Paul reminds us generally and specifically. Ultimately, faithfulness to the biblical revelation and the revealed power and purposes of the Holy Spirit's grace gifts should be our continual goal.

Within many of the resources cited at the end of this study you will find ample reading to fill out the details of these views and others.<sup>2</sup> Let me remind you that agape love is still the glue that holds the gifts and the church family together. Whatever your view, I encourage you to protect the unity that we have in the Spirit and to graciously stand firm for the unifying and edifying purpose behind all of the spiritual gifts.



## The Miracle of Together

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Generally speaking, I'm a big fan of Disney movies. There are some great ones, and some less than great. But for me, there is one that sticks out about the rest. The first reason I love it is because its a true story. The second reason, it's a sports movie. I love true sports movies. Like *Rocky IV*. I'm talking about the Disney movie *Miracle*, the story of the 1980 U.S. men's Olympic hockey team. I know, I know, it's your favorite too.

Centered around coach Herb Brooks and his innovative style of play and leadership, a sweaty group of college hockey rivals come together to defeat the seemingly invincible Soviet team, winners of the gold medal the previous four Olympic games. The heart of the story is the transformation of the team, not their victory. They begin hopelessly divided, suspicious, bickering and protective, clearly more concerned with personal dreams and allegiances than anything else. The formation of the *Miracle* team is brutal. It takes a long time. But when these young collegiate men finally understand the beauty of team, which required much more heart than they originally suspected, they were able to take down the impossible giant.

Now I'm a south Texas boy; ice hockey may as well be played on the dark side of the moon. I just don't get it. But in *Miracle* it is breathtaking. Lightning fast, agile, brutal, exhausting, acrobatic. From my untrained eye, the players on the rink move in random lines, purposeless and irrelevant. Everyone is just trying to get the puck in the net. But that's not reality. Even in the high speed turns and turnovers, there is strategy. Each player has a role. It's full of purpose, design, intention, skill, choreography. It takes a team of unique individuals to win at a high level. And that *Miracle* team did just that.

I realize the story breaks down as an analogy for our discussion. It can quickly decay into the dangerous matters of competition and winning we just discussed. I accept the risk within a mutual warning. But stories like this one remain a sober warning of the ever-present stumbling blocks within

an exploration of spiritual gifts: arrogance, isolation, selfishness, ignorance and sloth. All the things that almost ruined the *Miracle* team. They also remind us of the unforeseen beauty and impact that can result in the unity and focused impact of gifts. I find it fitting that the title of the movie is *Miracle*, not *Hard Work*. Although unintended, it does remind your heart to look up more than down.

The Scripture refers to the church as a body, a family and a building. We've explored one of these images before. The New Testament authors might also have used the image of a sports team, if they would have written in our day. Like a team, a family and a building, each person in the local church has a role that helps advance its mission or purpose. Each one has a place. And that place is specific, based on the uniqueness of God's creation and re-creation.

The Body of Christ will only be maximally effective in its mission when every member of the Body is functioning and co-laboring in their distinct role, under Jesus the head. The building will only stand if each part of the structure is properly placed on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what position you play? Are you confident in your role? To be clear, the local church is not playing a game. We don't strive for a hollow trophy. There is much more at stake than a gold medal. We strive for the love of those around us. We labor to see redeemed hearts and stories and families. We run this team race for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. And we run this race best when each member is operating in their supernatural grace gifts. And if I may speak personally, I love it when we run together.

## My Story...

“My spiritual gifts are teaching and leadership. When I discovered this, I had a very distinct picture of those two words.

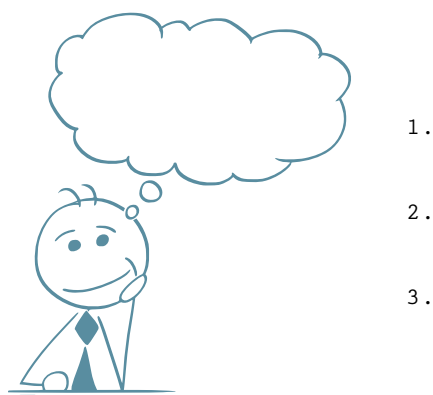
However, through serving in marriage ministry and as a student ministry small group leader, God guided me in using my gifts in unexpected ways. Teaching didn't look like imparting knowledge and wisdom, but rather simply sharing what God had done in my life; pointing people back to Him.

In the marriage ministry, I saw that leading by example and being vulnerable made an impact on those around me. To fulfill whatever God had for me in those two ministries meant I had to completely rely on Him. This has led to a deeper relationship with my Savior. When I follow where He leads me to use the gifts He's granted me, I get the blessing of more of Him.”

Emily

## Personal Reflection + Gift Assessment

Step 3 in this chapter is *Ask*. What three mature believers will you ask to help you by giving you their insight into your spiritual gift? Brainstorm some names here, as you work to a top three.



Call or text and set up a time to chat with them briefly. A face-to-face meeting is best, but it doesn't have to take long at all.

After you hear back from these people, you may want to engage a gift assessment, step 4. There are many available, each with specific nuances, leanings, perspectives and backgrounds. Be careful with short, rapid online searches. Take some time and do your homework. Look for the biblical language that you've already developed during this study. Be critical as you explore. Remember, the creators and translators of each website and test will have specific theological backgrounds and perspectives. Some may be different than the ones shared in this study.

**Parents:** Even young kids can engage a suitable survey or assessment to begin helping them discover and develop their spiritual gift. Teenagers, depending on their maturity, can likely engage the same ones you did above.

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# GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

## I Corinthians 12:1-11

word of wisdom  
word of knowledge  
faith  
gifts of healing  
miracles  
prophecy  
distinguishing of spirits  
tongues  
interpretation of tongues

## I Corinthians 12:1-27-31

apostles  
prophets  
teachers  
miracles  
gifts of healing  
helps  
administrations  
tongues  
(interpretation of  
tongues)

## Romans 12:1-13

prophecy  
serving  
teaching  
exhortation  
giving  
leading  
showing mercy

## Ephesians 4:1-16

apostles  
prophets  
evangelists  
pastor/teacher

## I Peter 4:7-11

speaking  
serving

*Consider the following online tests:*

**S.H.A.P.E. test:** [freeshapetest.com](https://freeshapetest.com)  
[spiritualgiftstest.com](https://spiritualgiftstest.com) | [gifts.churchgrowth.org](https://gifts.churchgrowth.org)

As you take an assessment and review your results, take the time to build your "profile" or "gift-mix" using the space on the next few pages.

Before an assessment, from the first three steps, I believe my spiritual gift is one or more of these three gifts:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

The assessment results identified these top three gifts:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

## Group Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the five steps revealed in this chapter was the most challenging to you? Why?
2. Share with your group what you have discovered about your spiritual gift or “gift mix.”
3. How did you come to this conclusion?  
Explain it to your group.
4. Share with your group what your three counselors revealed about their insight.
5. Did you take an assessment?  
Share with your group what it revealed.
6. Into which of the three categories of gifts in Chapter 2 (support, shepherding, miraculous sign) does your gift fall?  
How does this help you consider how your gift should be utilized?
7. What are your next steps for “getting to it”?  
How will you proceed with this new knowledge?



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# Chapter 04

## Called to a Calling

“True spirituality does not consist in what one does not do, it is rather what one does. It is not suppression: it is expression. It is not holding in self: it is living out Christ.”

Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*



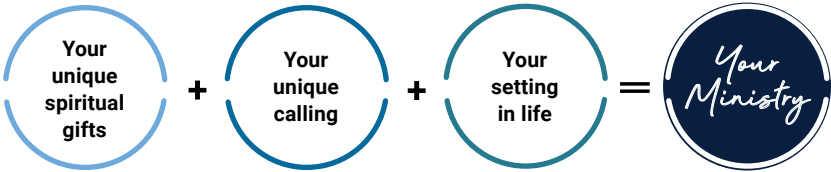
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Bishop Wright brought home a secret and special gift for his sons. He worked hard serving the church, but the family didn't have much to spare on trinkets, especially with seven kids. This simple, fragile gift would have cost only a few cents, but even that was a sacrifice. With an unusually playful grin he called two of his sons into the room and asked for their attention. Turning around to shield their view for just a second, the Bishop quietly wound a rubber band that spun a rotor of wood, paper and cork. It weighed very little although it was almost a foot long. The rotor turned a dowel connected to small propellor blades which formed a *helicopter*, based on a French invention. The Bishop whipped around, released the toy in front of his boys and it gracefully took to the air. The delicate trinket seemed to defy physics as it bounced against the ceiling of their small home. Gasps and gawks all around. The two boys had never seen anything like it. And they would never be the same.

Years later, when Wilbur and Orville Wright achieved the first motor-operated flight on December 17, 1903, on the beach of North Carolina, one must wonder if the small

toy from their father so many years before had something to do with it. Inspiration. Awe. Perhaps a sense of calling motivated them to introduce a quantum leap in travel, adventure and quality of life for humanity. In their late years, Wil and Orv, as their friends called them, confirmed the power of their father's theatrics that day as kids. That small wooden *helicopter* was the spark of their passionate pursuit of motorized flight. And the influence of the Wright Brothers lives on. The three-axis control system they developed is still the standard for fixed-wing flight today. A powerful influence to say the least.

As fascinating as this behind the scenes story is, your Father in Heaven has a calling on your life that is dramatically more personal, weighty and urgent. Our Almighty God is constantly working, constantly on the move, constantly approaching the fulfillment of His perfect will for creation. It is astounding that He includes His sons and daughters, all adopted into His family by faith in Jesus, His Son, in the work that He is doing. He called you in and gave you a calling. As we have already begun exploring, your calling collaborates with your spiritual gift and the specific place and time that God has placed you to reveal your ministry. It works like this.



You've already spent some time exploring and understanding God's grace gifts. You've prayed, read, counseled and assessed. Hopefully you're already beginning to experiment with service. Your next step in the journey is to explore your calling. While the concept of calling may seem distant and ethereal, we will work together to make it clear, practical and illuminating. Your Father is working to do the same good work in your heart.

## Let's Talk Influence

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They are the last words of the Apostle Paul that survive to this day. He writes to Timothy, a man into whom he poured his heart and soul. It is a letter written with passion. You can almost see the tears in his eyes as he writes. Near the end of that letter, Paul says this about calling:

*"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." –2 Timothy 4:1-5*

These words are palpably charged with weight, poignancy and authority. Notice the first words, *"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,"* and the last words, *"fulfill your ministry."* This is Paul's final reminder to Timothy about his calling and its significance in God's plan. You, like Timothy, have a ministry to the people of God. It is guided by your spiritual gift and your calling. Let's keep taking steps towards *"fulfilling your ministry."*

Almost anywhere you go in the Bible, both Old and New Testament, you find stories of calling. With a simple "follow me" Jesus expressed a call to his disciples. As they responded, many left jobs and family. They had a new path to walk. But calling is more specific than what is left behind. It is about a specific direction ahead.

Now bear in mind where Jesus led His disciples, and to what He called them. Think about it. Weren't people His constant goal? Stories. Lives. With eyes to see this, it becomes obvious everywhere. Jesus would travel out of the way to have a midday water-well-conversation with a Samaritan woman. He invaded Gentile territory to set possessed men free. He labored for hours to see, hear and touch "many" in a crowd of hundreds, perhaps thousands. He was always and constantly focused on people.

Perhaps John's Gospel captures this mission the best. *"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God [the unique divine Jesus] who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him"* (John 1:18). Jesus became incarnate, put on human flesh, to reveal God to people in intimate fashion. To exegete God to ordinary men and women. Ultimately to bridge the impossible gap between God and people. This was His calling. Now, following in the model of Jesus, let us simplify our understanding of calling to its most important factors. I invite you to begin understanding calling as *a people to influence*.

Now that four-word definition may have slipped past you just now. Please don't miss it. You may think it is too reductionistic. It is squarely and intentionally focused on people. But, as we will see, in all of the biblical narratives of calling, God invites men and women to a particular influence, to a specific group of people, for His purposes. God's calling is always directed at the influence of His Kingdom purposes; His righteousness, His love, His grace, His justice, His invitation to salvation. Calling is *a people to influence*. It is a specific and unique path He calls you down, a path towards people. Let's see how the Scriptures bear this out. It is a commission from God. It is a passionate assignment.

## The Saul Before Paul

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Perhaps the most dramatic story of calling in the New Testament is the Apostle Paul's commission. We first meet the famous Apostle Paul when his name was Saul in Acts 7. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, is being stoned for his testimony and vision of Jesus. Those listening, in livid, mob-like vitriol, rushed at Stephen and took him outside of the walls of Jerusalem. There they stoned him to death *"and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul"* (Acts 7:58). Just a few verses later we read,

*"Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ...But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."* –Acts 8:1-3

We don't know it yet as we read the Book of Acts, but God is about to interrupt Saul's life in a dramatic way. And the interruption is all about calling. With almost 40 verses of text in between, Luke finally brings us back to Saul at the beginning of Acts 9. What happens next is amazing and difficult to imagine. I'll let Luke tell the story.

*"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way [what people first called the Christian movement], both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I*

*am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

*Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”*

*So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”*  
—Acts 9:1-20



This story is often referred to as the conversion of Saul, and it is surely that. But it is also about the commissioning of Saul. It is about calling. We see it first in Jesus' interaction with Ananias, a follower of Jesus that we know very little about. Jesus' words reveal a personal and rather chilling calling on Saul's life and ministry. *"He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake"* (9:15-16). Do not miss the goal: Gentiles, kings, the sons of Israel.

Now up to the moment of the light and voice from heaven on the Damascus road, Saul clearly thought he was serving God. Harassing and imprisoning the rebel threats to the sanctity of the Jewish religion was clearly a noble task. But he was wrong. He misunderstood. Jesus Himself met Saul, called him by name, revolutionized his understanding and corrected his course.

A majority of the rest of the New Testament is a joyful testimony to this calling. Saul's name would be changed to Paul. Paul will spend many long years in study, prayer, and meditation on God's Word [the Old Testament], submitting to the counsel of other Jesus followers, including some of the disciples. He went on to fulfill all of God's calling on His life. He stood before kings. He took the gospel to Gentiles. He labored with the Jews. He suffered greatly. He wrote at least thirteen letters, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God and kept for us today as Holy Scripture in the New Testament, far more than any other single human author.

It all began with a calling. *"He is a chosen instrument of Mine* (a commission from God), *to bear My name* (a passionate assignment) *before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel"* (a people to influence). Throughout the narrative accounts of Paul's journeys and perils and conflicts, this simple calling is a source of great comfort, guidance and strength. These are the many blessings within the gift of calling.

## The 40-year Prophet

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The prophet Isaiah must be a stop in any discussion of calling. His calling came at a time of national crisis and mourning. The King of Judah had just died. The political, social and spiritual climate were rough to say the least. God's people were struggling, failing, falling, hurting. Part of God's answer to cries of the faithful few was an invitation of influence to one man—Isaiah. He was young at the time of his calling. But he faithfully followed God through some of the hardest seasons in our Bible, and he did so for more than 40 years. We see his call in Isaiah 6.

*"In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim [a type of burning angel] stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."*

*Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go..."*  
—Isaiah 6:1-8

Reading this you might begin to understand why almost everyone who ever encounters the presence of God, a vision of God or an angel of God in the

Scriptures falls to the ground on their face. Eyes squeezed shut. Shoulders tense. Lips pursed. Can you imagine?

Isaiah has this exchange with God in a vision. Seeing all of this wonder and awe, Isaiah hears the Lord ask the question, *"Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?"* Astonishingly, Isaiah raises his hand. I don't know if it was slowly and sheepishly or quickly with a bounce. I assume the former, but will delightfully embrace the latter. *"Here I am. Send me,"* Isaiah says.

What follows in more than four decades of Isaiah's interaction with God is hard. His calling to influence was extremely difficult. The world Isaiah lived in had suffered from the ravages of sin, idolatry and unfaithfulness for a long time. It would get much worse during Isaiah's ministry. But Isaiah's long story reveals a critical truth about God's calling: everything needed to fulfill the calling, God would supply. The same truth is reiterated in story after story throughout the Bible. Jeremiah's calling, for example, begins with a promise from God to equip him with all he needs.

*"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.'"*

*Then I said, 'Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.'"*

*But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,' declares the Lord. Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'" – Jeremiah 1:4-10*

We see the same things in Paul's story, Isaiah's and Jeremiah's. From God, they each had a unique calling of people-focused influence. Each were fully equipped to fulfill their calling. In fact, in Jeremiah's case, it seems the Lord rebuked him. *"Do not say, 'I am a youth,'"* was God's way of saying, *"Make sure all your human rebuttals are washed away in the power of My presence, calling and equipping."* Take a moment and let this reality of God's grace rest on your heart. God calls. God equips. God sustains. The whole journey is a gift of grace, fueled and fanned by the Holy Spirit. All of this is true for you also.

## A Word of Caution

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At this point, a consequential error may cause you to lose your footing. Take care. If you think only men like Paul, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Samuel and Abram or women like Esther and Ruth are candidates for God's calling, you are mistaken. God's calling is not always loud, big, prophetic or filled with miraculous visions. While that may be true for some, many others experience a simple, quiet call, but no less powerful or influential. Consider the often overlooked Epaphroditus, for example. As an otherwise unknown church member, God called Epaphroditus to great work from within the young church at Philippi. He carried provisions to Paul, somehow nearly dying along the way, and then carried Paul's letter to the church back home. And these are only the elements of the story that we know, assuredly there were many more aspects to Epaphroditus' calling. Its record for us in the living Word of God reminds us that not all callings from God are boisterous. Many, if not most, are discreet and inconspicuous while still being powerfully strategic in the plan of God. Other men and women in the New Testament like Priscilla, Aquila, Phoebe and Barnabas confirm this protective truth.

Let's finally bring our discussion to a personal level. In the context of our discussion of calling, where is your heart at this moment? Can you identify with Paul or Isaiah or Epaphroditus or Priscilla? Do you have a notion of the people God has called you to influence? Perhaps it's a task force at work?

Your children? A Sunday school class of fifth-grade girls? A weekly small group Bible study comprised of diverse stories and generations? Those trafficked in modern-day slavery? The spiritually lost families that make their home in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia? Young women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant? People imprisoned by addiction or depression? Lonely young mothers? Irreligious fathers? Struggling marriages?

## Your Unique Calling

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My friend, you have been called into the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But you were called to a calling. You have a calling to influence people for the glory of Jesus Christ. It's a passionate assignment, a commission from God. You have a lifetime of "good works" that God has prepared for you to walk in. These are the personal intersections of your unique calling. Walk into them by faith.

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." –Ephesians 2:8-10*

Putting all of these things together, what do you think God has called you to do? I know that's a very big question. It may take some time to answer. It may take years to clarify. But like the stories and Scriptures we've read, God has called you to influence. He has gifted you for it. He will supply all you need. It is the path to your ministry.

As a way of clarifying your calling from God, spend some time thinking, praying and answering these questions:

1. What are your spiritual burdens? Those areas of ministry to specific people that are always on your heart and mind?
2. What people do you typically gravitate towards? Who has God placed on your heart in a sensitive and unshakable way?
3. What are the cultural questions or needs that stick to your spirit and align with your spiritual gifts?
4. What about God's heart for the nations makes you cry? What about His mission keeps you up at night?

These are big questions. Take your time. Take your answers to God. Offer them to Him. He already knows your heart. He created you with these burdens and passions. Ask Him to speak through His Word. Ask Him to clarify your calling. To lead you in it. To show you the path.

*What if God is calling you to disciple young mothers? Or young fathers?*

*What if God is calling you to be a voice for racial reconciliation in your city?*

*What if God is calling you to pour your life into junior high students?*

*What if God is calling you to bring a peaceful end to abortion in your county or state?*

*What if God is calling you to nurture your kids into fearless, equipped disciples of Jesus?*

*What if God is calling you to lead your business or your team as a bold evangelist?*

*What if God is calling you to...*

## Your Setting in Life

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Stop for a moment and think about all you have to do today. This week. It's probably a long list. There are items on it for work, school, perhaps for your kids, perhaps your spouse, your quiet time with God, grocery shopping, errands, projects, small group Bible study and ninety-seven other things. All of these things are attached to your setting in life. Where you are. Who you are with. Where God has placed you right now. Whether you know it or not, these details are powerful ingredients to the ministry identification we are chasing. On the subject of God's sovereign placement of our setting in life, Paul spoke to the wise philosophers of Athens.

*"The God who made the world and all things in it... gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist..."* –Acts 17:24-28

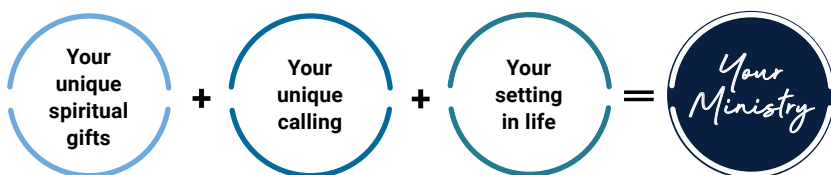
Even though God may move you somewhere else at some point, you are here now. He has appointed this time and place, these details—just for you. God wants to connect your gift and your calling and apply them right here. This is where your ministry is. And until God directs you elsewhere, this is where your ministry will be. So take a good look around. Notice your neighbors, your friends, family, the needs of your city, the big questions and problems of your culture, the beautifully complex web of relationships and Jesus at the center of it all. He has placed you here for a reason.

*"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things*

*which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"*

–1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Do you feel inadequate for the task? Good. That's a very good thing. Humility is required to see the beauty of what God wants to do through you. Embrace that humility. It is God who works in and through you. And in Christ, you have some great work to do. You are God's workmanship. You were created for great ministry. Remember, this is how God has organized it. Each space is unique and glorious.



This is the recipe for maximum life in the local church. It connects the most significant gifts of God's grace after your salvation from sin. It is a picture of purpose.

Now I know what you might be thinking. *Ministry? Do I really have a ministry? I'm not a pastor. I can't carry a tune in a bucket! I haven't been to seminary. I don't know the first thing about leading a small group.* Take a breath. It's going to be okay. The word ministry has a bit of a stigma to it. I get it. But *ministry* is just another word for *service*. Ministry is service in the name of Jesus. Ministry is service for the purposes of God, directed by God's Word, in the power of God's Spirit. Ministry is a family word. Ministry is supposed to be done by every member of the family of God. It is not reserved for the professional few.



Sure, there is a place for those specifically trained, but everyone in the family of God, despite education and experience, has a ministry. We're going to look at this more closely in the next chapter.

## The Bible and People

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As a young freshman in college, when I first understood the gospel and trusted in Jesus for salvation, I knew almost nothing about the Bible, about ministry, about calling. I had never met an evangelical church pastor. I only knew a handful of Christians. But God found a way to communicate His specific calling to me.

Moments after I placed my faith in Jesus, in conversation and bible study with the man who shared the gospel with me, I distinctly remember a sense of calling. I had an undeniable feeling in my heart, in my literal chest, that the course of my life had just dramatically changed. I can't explain it any better than that.

The problem was, I didn't have the vocabulary to understand a robust and descriptive calling. I didn't have the background. What I did sense was God telling me that His calling for my life involved the Bible and people. That's it. That's just about all I could understand. My shallow experience and vocabulary could grasp those words, the Bible and people.

After significant discussion, prayer, bible study and confirmation, and for almost three decades since, with lots of fumbling and failing, I've been overwhelmed with the deep joy of chasing those simple words. The Bible and people. That remains my calling. The book you're now reading is an expression of that calling and God's gracious equipping.

God has a specific, lifegiving calling for you as well. It will be different than mine. It may not be as simple or concise. It may be nuanced or very specific. But I know this for sure, your calling from God is filled to the brim with joy, adventure, growth and impact. You may have already begun, but once you start walking in your calling and employing your gifts in the setting God has placed you, your heart, your family, your church and your city will never be the same.

## My Story...

"It is such a blessing and joy to be able to serve the body of Christ through the spiritual gifts God has given me. I can be in a very difficult season or be struggling personally, but when I serve using my gifts it encourages me, draws me closer to God, and gives me a deeper love and passion for the body of Christ. God reveals himself often when I serve because I am able to see his activity in things around me that I would have completely missed otherwise. Serving using my gifts fills me with a joy and fulfillment that is difficult to describe. It's like a spiritual high to be filled with a passion and then be able to channel that passion in the way God created me, and ultimately come away in awe of God because of how I see him at work."

Joan

## Personal Reflection:

Spend some time reading and reflecting on a biblical story of calling. Here are just a few of the many biblical examples:

- NOAH                      Genesis 6:1-22
- ABRAM                    Genesis 11:27-12:9; 15:1-21
- MOSES                    Exodus 3:1-4:17
- JOSHUA                   Joshua 1:1-9; 3:1-17
- RUTH                      Ruth 1:22-2:23; 4:13-22
- ESTHER                   Esther 2:8-17; Chapters 7-8
- ISAIAH                    Isaiah 6:1-13
- JEREMIAH                Jeremiah 1:4-10
- JONAH                     Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10  
*(a warning story of rejecting your calling)*
- PAUL                      Acts 9:1-31
- EPAPHRODITUS        Philippians 2:25-30
- TIMOTHY                Acts 16:1-4; 1 Timothy 1:1-7; 4:11-16  
2 Timothy 1:1-14

If you so desire, you'll also find incredible accounts of God's calling on Ezra, Nehemiah, Elijah, Elisha, David, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Haggai, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila. Choose one or two and read them for yourself (the concordance at the back of your Bible will help). Take some time to meditate on what you discover. Jot down any notes.

Secondly, I'd like you to think about the end of your life. Without being morbid, the Scriptures say that there is great clarity, sobriety and focus around these thoughts, when engaged faithfully. *"A good name is better than a good ointment, and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart"* (Ecclesiastes 7:1-2). Only God knows when that will be and it is entirely in His hands, but the Scriptures repeatedly say that we should consider the end of our life. *The living take it to heart*. When your final day comes, what do you want to be remembered for? What will your legacy be? Take some time to write out your thoughts. Your answers might help you clarify your calling.

You might have noticed in the stories of calling and the Scriptures shared, there are some things not included in a calling from God. Things like comfort, convenience, personal fame or spotlight. Take some time and expand on this list of things *"not included"* in God's calling. It will protect your search for calling.

## Group Discussion Questions:

1. What in this chapter challenged you the most?  
What surprised you the most?
2. How would you define calling?
3. Which of the biblical stories of God calling people to a specific ministry in the Scriptures impacted you most?  
Why? Share with your group.
4. How would you describe your heart-level burdens?  
Share with your group?
5. When have you experienced significant joy in serving someone else? Share a story.
6. What comes to your mind when you consider the idea of having a specific ministry?
7. What are your current thoughts on the "ministry formula":  
spiritual gift + calling + setting = ministry?

space for notes

# Chapter 05

## Serving Joy

“It’s a biblical theme that needs to be studied, taught, and brought to memory again and again because it is so radically counterintuitive. The most often used term for a spiritual leader in Scripture is servant.”

Paul David Tripp, *Lead*







*There's no "I" in Breakfast.* A clever play. That's what was screen-printed on the front of the black chef-style aprons, each with an embroidered name in the upper left hand corner. We were the "cook team" and the snazzy aprons said so. Very early, every Sunday morning, we would arrive at the comfortably outdated church kitchen and cook a full breakfast for all of the junior high and high school students. Pancakes. Bacon. Eggs. Fruit. Orange Juice. Coffee. You name it. Of course, all of this had to first be shopped for. Transported. Stored. Only then was it cooked. Served. Eaten. Cleaned up. Everything back in its place. And then, rinse and repeat next week. Every week.

Years ago, when we did this, there were many who were shocked that we would serve a full breakfast to students at church. No adults got a full breakfast. There were many who thought it a waste. Some an extravagance. But not the cook team. We loved it. It was an intentional and strategic investment. It was also an incredible place to serve. We looked forward to arriving early and making it all come together. We savored the look on the faces of the students and their leaders. We relished the look

on the faces of first-timers. Newbies always identified themselves upon entrance to the basketball gym filled with round tables of rowdy teens, the air filled with the sweet smell of bacon. You could tell by their face. *"Who does this?" "Is it some special occasion?"* Nope. Just a Sunday. Welcome. Pancake?

Even as a church staff member called to serve and influence teenagers, one of my favorite parts of every Sunday morning was the coordinated cooking; the kitchen teamwork, the hour or so when we were just doing our thing, talking, laughing, working together. What made the doldrum of work exciting was the diversity of the group. There were a few couples that served together. Some young. Some old. One oil and gas executive. A homeschool mom. A single guy that just loved pouring his attention into students. A contractor. A retired, successful businesswoman. A day-trader. A land man. The backgrounds and vocations were so scattered it was almost a joke. None had gone to culinary school. None were educators specializing in teenagers. None had been to seminary, with the exception of me, and even that was in process at the time. What brought us together was the gift. Serving students in a way that couldn't be reciprocated or paid back. That's why we were there. Sure there was a moan when the alarm clock went off each Sunday morning. But there were only smiles afterward.

Now, would any of these people have said that cooking bacon was their spiritual gift? Or that flipping pancakes was their unique calling? Probably not. I know bacon is one of God's most precious gifts, but I don't see cooking it on the list in 1 Corinthians 12. But, was cooking a hot breakfast for teenagers a way people served the family of the church? You better believe it. It was simple. It was relatively easy. But it had a tremendous impact. It brought students back week after week. They were engaged in relationships, taught the Bible and equipped for ministry. And the breakfast, formed by the vision of the student ministry team, created an opportunity for people to serve. For many, that cook team became their ministry. A small but important part of the vision of student ministry at our church.

## The Equipment Necessary for the Build

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In one of our four central texts on spiritual gifts, Paul spoke to the church in Ephesus on the purpose of God's grace gifts and dwelt on the idea in an expansive way. We've already seen this several times, but as a way of exploring the idea of ministry and service a bit more, let's revisit it and go deeper. Paul said,

*"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."* –Ephesians 4:11-13

Notice again, right in the middle of this text, *"for the equipping of the saints the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."* This is the goal. The purpose. The intended trajectory of God's gifts is equipping. Work. Service. Building up the church. Fulfilling the church's mission to the world. But let's put this verse under the microscope for just a second. When we do, we'll detect at least three things that will greatly help our progress in this study.

First, this specific word for *equipping* is only found here in the New Testament. Elsewhere it is used medically of setting a broken bone, which is a vivid and helpful image. Here, for Paul, it is obviously used to speak of the training and discipline necessary for a task. These words are perfectly accurate to describe the journey you've been on in this study. Not only have you labored to discover your spiritual gift(s) and identify your unique calling, but now you have to train, with discipline, to combine these discoveries with your unique setting in life to reveal your ministry. This is all part of your equipping.

Second, the term used for service is the same we've seen before, *diakonia*. It is where we get our term *deacon*, the servants of the church first identified in Acts 6:1-6. It is exactly the same word for "ministry." This term is used specifically in connection with spiritual gifts but also in other ways that really help our understanding of the goal of God's gifts. Let's do a simple word study (the translated word for *diakonia* will be in **bold**) and see how this term is used. It is used to describe:

- **MARTHA'S PREPARATIONS**: *"But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the **servicing** alone?'"*  
–Luke 10:40
- **CHURCH FOOD DISTRIBUTION**: *"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily **servicing** of food."* –Acts 6:1
- **THE WORK OF THE APOSTLES**: *"So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 'Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 'But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the **ministry** of the word.'"*  
–Acts 6:2-4 (See also Romans 11:13; 1 Corinthians 12:5; 16:15)
- **FINANCIAL GIFTS AND RELIEF**: *"And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the **relief** of the brethren living in Judea."*  
–Acts 11:29 (See also 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1; 9:12-13)
- **THE WORK OF A MISSIONARY**: *"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their **mission**, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark."* –Acts 12:25
- **THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**: *"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through*

*Christ and gave us the **ministry** of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” –2 Corinthians 5:18-19.*

- **A GENERAL WORD FOR CALLING AND MINISTRY SERVICE:** *“Say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the **ministry** which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’” –Colossians 4:17.  
(See also 2 Timothy 4:5)*
- **A GENERAL WORD FOR SERVICE:** *“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into **service**, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.” –1 Timothy 1:12-13.  
(See also 2 Timothy 4:11; Revelation 2:19)*
- **THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS:** *“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render **service** for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?” –Hebrews 1:14.*

I hope you find this surprisingly diverse list rather refreshing. In the language of the New Testament, service has a much wider meaning that many would suspect. It includes generosity, specific duties like relational reconciliation, mission work and setting tables. This is the broad “*work of service*” for which the saints are equipped. This is their ministry.

Finally, back in that central phrase in Ephesians 4, we see the phrase “*building up*.” “*Equipping the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.*” This phrase is one beautiful word in Greek that has both a literal and figurative meaning. The literal meaning applies to the world of construction; the raising of a building, simple house or other structure. The figurative use of the word takes this image and applies it to relationships, where it means to build up another person, or to edify and encourage. We find this word in Romans 14:19; 15:2, and spiritual gift texts like 1 Corinthians 14:3-5. Paul seems to like the word in Ephesians, using it three times in Chapter 4.

*“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the **building up** of itself in love.” –Ephesians 4:14-16*

*“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for **edification** according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” –Ephesians 4:29*

Paul, the part-time tent-maker, seems focused on, if not fascinated by, the family-construction process. He sees God’s spiritual grace gifts as one key ingredient in the building up of the family of God; a type of *building up* that assuredly has the church’s mission to the world in mind.

All of this biblical insight leads you to a familiar question: *What is your ministry?* How are you using your spiritual gifts to fulfill your calling? Who has God called you to influence for His purposes? How are you doing this right where you are? The first place you should look is the local church.

## The Local Family

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Consider the local church. Think about it as a collection of people, a family. This is what it is. The campus and building don’t matter much ultimately. Offices and titles do not comprise a local church. These things serve a purpose but are not the “church” as the Bible describes it. The church is people. People gathered in the name of Jesus to fulfill His purposes for the Body of Christ. People saved by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

People called to a calling of influence. The collection of people is the church. Unified by one faith in one God.

In this way, the church is entirely dependent upon God for its very identity. The church is only the church because God has rescued each individual member by His grace, through each person's faith in Jesus Christ. The church only exists because of God, and the church exists for God, to fulfill His purposes. This includes, at a foundational and central level, being disciples that make disciples. We do this one conversation at a time, one life at a time. We do this by living out our faith in holiness and intentionality, by sharing our faith with others. We do this by word and deed. Being and doing. We do it in our Jerusalem first, then our Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

After its complete and total dependence upon God, the local church is also dependent upon its own people, by God's design. This is how God extends His grace and presence into the lives of people. He does so through the church. His people. For financial resources, the church is entirely dependent upon its own people. And, as you probably guessed, for service, the local church is entirely dependent on its own people. Yes, many churches employ various staff for specific, specialized or skilled work, and for many this is precisely where things begin to break down.

Because the church has a pastor or perhaps a team of pastors, some begin to think, either consciously or unconsciously, that it is the job of the pastor to do the work of ministry. *"I don't need to do that, they have a paid staff for that."* *"I'm sure they have that covered, that's their job after all."* Yet again, this brings us back to our text at the beginning of this chapter, Ephesians 4:11-13, and the operative phrase that most overlook right in the middle: *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."*

In this text, Paul makes one final point very clear but far too many Christians miss it altogether or misunderstand. We've looked at equipping, service and building up, but there is one more important point tucked right in the middle. Who is equipped? Who does the work of service that builds up the church? Do you see it? It's the saints.

Many continue to think and assume that only men and women with titles and salaries in the local church are to do the work of ministry or service, to build up the Body of Christ. But that simply is not true. This equipping is directed toward "the saints." In the New Testament the term "saint" is consistently used to describe every member of the family of God. Every believer. The whole church. Note this truth in your mind as a marked difference from the concept of saint as a special class of highly-spiritual, uniquely dedicated Christian ascetics. "The equipping of the saints" is the equipping of the entire church family.

Paul says, with crystal clarity, that every believer, every member in the local church is responsible for the work of ministry. Not just the pastor. Not only the deacons. Not just the receptionist-secretary-administrator-bookkeeper superhero. Not just the paid staff. Even in Paul's day we have evidence that some of the church leaders were paid. To this point, Paul spoke so forcefully and directly that one might confidently assume he was correcting the same misunderstanding in his day. Hopefully, his enduring words continue their legacy in ours.

## Steps Into Service

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So how do you begin to serve? What are your options? The average church size in America is about 150 people total. In a church of that size, everyone is needed. And in a church ten or a hundred times that size, everyone is still needed. In an average-sized church, you may not have every option



mentioned below. But if there is a need, consider starting a ministry. Even in a larger church with more paid staff, there are dozens of ministry opportunities and open doors.

The church never, let me repeat never, outgrows its need for its own people. In fact, as we've seen, part of the church's mission is to *equip the saints for the work of ministry*. If a church fails to do this, dismisses this command or gives up because it is hard (and it is hard), then that church family will be inevitably limited in its missional impact.

With that exhortation and invitation, let's survey the potential options of service in the local church. Each of these options represents a possible field into which you can sow your spiritual gifts for the glory of God and the maturity of His church. Remember, ask God to guide you. Ask for counsel. Be patient. Build relationships. Check your humility. Then dive in.

- **KIDS MINISTRY**: Diverse gifts needed to serve kids and parents in worship, teaching, facilitation of groups, infant care, mission work, special events, behind-the-scenes service, discipleship, mentoring and more.
- **STUDENT MINISTRY**: Diverse gifts needed to serve junior high and high school students and their parents in worship, teaching, facilitation of groups, creative arts, special events, behind-the-scenes service, mission work, discipleship, mentoring, and more.
- **ADULT MINISTRY**: Perhaps the widest single realm of church ministry, this field needs all spiritual gifts to serve adults in diverse times of life, in diverse circumstances and within a wide range of needs. While many primarily think of teaching, also consider the deep need for prayer, counseling, facilitation, administration, hospitality and mercy, discipleship and mentoring, pastoral care and various hands-on service options.

- **DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY** : Usually an aspect of the three ministries mentioned above, discipleship needs a wide range of spiritual gifts. While most think of teaching and speaking gifts in this area, there is actually more need for facilitation, hospitality, one-on-one mentoring, pastoral care, exhortation, mercy, prayer and administration.
- **COUNSELING AND RECOVERY MINISTRIES** : Largely, but not entirely, directed toward adult disciples (see the two categories above), these diverse ministries need diverse gifts of mercy, teaching, administration, exhortation, leadership and many more. Consider also teen and child mentoring and counseling, financial counseling, marriage mentorship, etc.
- **MISSION MINISTRY** : Diverse gifts needed to meet pressing and felt needs as a way of meeting spiritual needs, sharing the gospel, planting churches and making disciples; including administrative gifts, speaking, teaching, leadership, service gifts and more.
- **WORSHIP MINISTRY** : Diverse gifts needed usually within the realm of musical ability, either vocal ability or instrumentation but also song-writing, arrangement, prayer and other creative expressions. There is also a hefty amount of organizational, communication and administration help needed in the worship ministry of almost every size church family.
- **AUDIO/VISUAL/PRODUCTION MINISTRY** : Largely as a support to worship ministry above, diverse gifts of service needed to organize, prepare and produce great worship services and special events including technological gifts and abilities. But also consider many off-Sunday and smaller group applications where many diverse gifts of leadership, administration and service as needed.

- **PRAYER MINISTRY** : Devoted, persistent, persevering prayer is difficult for many, so this ministry needs diverse gifts such as mercy, exhortation, leadership, speaking and perhaps some of the sign gifts.
- **CREATIVE ARTS** : Some large churches have the ability to engage creative arts in the other ministries listed above and can be a place where various gifts find a place of belonging.
- **WELCOMING/ENGAGEMENT** : Diverse gifts are needed to welcome, invite, care for and assimilate people into an active church family, including hospitality, mercy, exhortation, leadership, service gifts and more.
- **SERVICE** : Every church family needs an army of men and women who simply want to serve with their hands and hearts behind the scenes, showing up early and staying late to get the job done. Diverse spiritual gifts can find a place inside various service opportunities in the church. Think of the cook team I mentioned earlier.

Now that we've perused available options, let's flip the script and approach your potential ministry based on your spiritual gift. As we've seen, your unique grace gift can have some beautifully unexpected applications depending on your calling. I hope you've begun to notice this in the ministries listed. A wide spectrum of gifts are needed in every area. God loves to surprise you in these ways. So, from the discovery and identification of your unique spiritual grace gift(s), consider how you might take the next step in finding your unique ministry in the local church. Locate your top three gifts in your gift mix and consider just some of the service options listed there.

# SUPPORT GIFTS

## faith

Consider areas where incredible and unusual faith in God and His promises can bless the church, such as prayer ministries, mission work or particularly hard or specialized ministries.

## helps

Consider areas in which you can help behind the scenes. This can be administratively or actively. Consider teams or committees in the church that need administrative help.

Consider teams such as the Audio/Visual team, deacons or other hands-on service groups.

## service

As we have seen, this gift offers a wide range of possibilities, from hospitality and hands-on service to leadership and mission work. Consider asking God to show you where to serve, then just jump in.

## administrations

Much like the gift of “helps,” consider asking the leader of operations at the church where he/she might need help. Consider volunteering in the church office during the week or asking a ministry leader how you can free them up to focus on relational ministry by doing some administrative work for them.

## giving

Consider how you can help meet specific financial, ministry, mission or vision needs within the local church. Consider getting to know lead pastors, elders or others that are aware of needs or set ministry vision. Consider serving on teams that help with finance oversight or fundraising. Consider serving in the mission ministry.

## showing mercy

Consider serving in local mission or areas where the local church meets felt needs of the community. Pray that God would connect you to specific families within the church that need the kind of persevering presence and care that your spiritual gift can provide. Consider serving in a support group, pastoral care or intercessory prayer.

## leadership

Remember there are different leadership styles and different leadership occasions. Not all leaders are loud, dominant, up front, and not all needs for leadership look the same. Almost every church ministry and function needs good, wise, godly leaders to bring their gifts to bear. Look for small but critical ministries that may get overlooked by most leaders.

## speaking

Speaking gifts are not limited to authoritative and trained Bible teachers. Student and Kids ministries need great communicators in lots of areas, as do adults. Consider ministry teams that have diverse communication needs, up front or even behind the scenes.

# SHEPHERDING GIFTS

## prophecy

Prayerfully consider areas in the local church or even mission field that would be blessed by encouragement, speaking gifts and leadership. There are diverse applications for this gift in diverse types of ministries and settings.

Get to know current church leadership and seek their counsel on where and how you might employ this gift.

## apostle

Prayerfully consider areas in the local church or mission field that need vision, enduring leadership and persevering faith. Do not overlook smaller or specialty ministries that may fit your calling and setting in life. Ask for the counsel of current church leaders and patiently start in a ministry area by serving, praying and waiting for God to open doors to express this gift.

## teaching

Teaching as a shepherd should be primarily focused on teaching God's Word but can be employed to a wide range of topics and in various contexts. Consider ministries such as kids, students, small groups, evangelism, missions, men's ministry, women's ministry and even writing or one-on-one discipleship contexts.

## speaking

Shepherds with speaking gifts can be powerful in the local church, but they often look for or long for large platforms or large numbers of people. Think about starting small. Speaking gifts are also not limited to Bible teaching. Communicators of diverse kinds are needed in almost every ministry context.

## exhortation

Consider employing this gift in relational ministry contexts, such as prayer ministry, one-on-one discipleship or mentoring, welcome and assimilation ministries.

## **pastor/teacher**

This gift can often result in a vocational ministry but doesn't have to necessarily. Consider

developing a relationship with a pastor you would like to emulate or learn from, volunteer and spend time helping him/her, getting to know their gifts and yours.

Wait for God to show you opportunities or open doors and then trust Him to provide and equip you as you walk through them.

## **evangelist**

Consider getting great training in sharing a clear and biblical gospel message, inviting people to respond and then look for opportunities every day to do so. Don't just consider "cold calls," but also look at long-term relational evangelism. Seek out opportunities in both local and international mission.

## **word of knowledge**

Much like both speaking and exhortation, consider ministry areas like prayer, discipleship and even evangelism to exercise this gift.

## **word of wisdom**

Much like the gift of knowledge, consider how you can use this gift in discipleship and mentoring ministries, some teaching opportunities and even creative and worship arts.

## **leadership**

Every ministry context and local church needs committed leaders. Follow your specific passions and engage the current leaders in those areas to assess needs, or conversely, draw near to current leaders and ask where they might need help in leadership. Follow as God leads.

# SIGN GIFTS

## tongues

With Paul's helpful instructions, warnings and freedoms in 1 Corinthians 14, the person with this gift should consider ministries such as intercessory prayer and perhaps some forms of creative and worship arts.

## interpretation of tongues

Along with the gift above, this gift helps translate the previous gift into the worship and community of the local church. Consider ministries such as those where the above gift would serve such as intercessory prayer.

## distinguishing of spirits

Consider ministry areas that engage and require great wisdom, discernment and leadership decision making. This gift is an ability to determine what things are from God and what things aren't, which makes this gift relevant in many contexts.

## word of knowledge

Much like both speaking and exhortation, consider ministry areas like prayer, discipleship and even evangelism to exercise this gift.

## word of wisdom

Much like the gift of knowledge, consider how you can use this gift in discipleship and mentoring ministries, some teaching opportunities and even creative and worship arts.



## healing

If you feel you have the spiritual gift of healing, consider strongly the prayer ministry of your local church.

Share this with church leadership and work together to utilize your gift to serve and build up the church family. If

your church has a pastoral care team that makes hospital or home visitations, consider asking to be a part of this team. If these teams do not

yet exist, consider asking church leaders how you might help start them. I would add

that as you go and pray, trust God to do what He wants to do, how and when. He is the

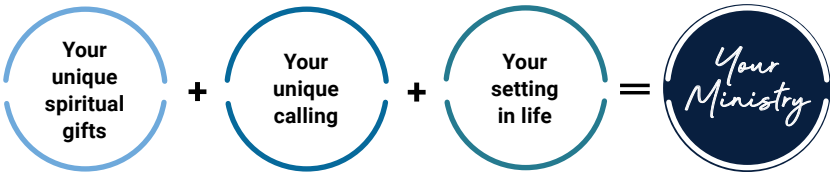
giver of your gift. Rather than announcing your gift, which

is unnecessary, trust God and pray for all kinds of healing with great faith in Jesus Christ.

## miracles

Much like the gift of healing, consider joining or starting an intercessory prayer, visitation or pastoral care ministry. Whereas the gift of healing seems to be directed to people, the gift of miracles may have context outside of the personal. And as with the gift of healing, you need not announce your gift. Simply trust God and pray with great faith that the power of God would be revealed when and how He chooses. Communicate with your church leadership and together decide where your spiritual gift might best be used to serve and build up the local church.

The previous pages are intended to provide initial guiding considerations and potential next steps. There is much more than can be said. God has carved out a space for you in His family. No one else can fill it. No one else is created like you. Remember why you are asking these questions and what goal you are seeking.



## Three Final Words

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The path you walk leads you where you're going. So simple it is almost absurd, isn't it? But consider how many people are surprised to end up where their decisions have led them. For many there is an honest sense of shock and dismay.

Now consider the full path we have walked together. It has been guided by foundational questions, deep investigations of God's Word, correlations of themes and practical steps of application. As you continue to walk, I do not want you to wander off. I do not want you to stumble. I don't want you to give up. So, in the pattern of many famous quest stories, let me offer three tools for your journey. Hold them close. Remember to use them when the need arises. It won't take long, I assure you.

These three tools are three words that are far too simple to be taken seriously by all. Their simplicity and ubiquitousness is often their downfall. They get tossed around too much as punchlines or thinly applied fixes to be meaningful or powerful. Yet they are. They are three words that perfectly describe the character of God, as well as the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Three final words. In them is great safety, protection and enduring strength.

**HUMILITY.** Repeatedly and consistently through Old and New Testament, God reveals that He “*opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” Think a moment about God being opposed to you. Yes, you, even His child. Now make no mistake, He will never abandon you, forsake you, orphan you, un-adopt you or let you go. Never. But your Heavenly Father, who perfectly loves and knows you, can be opposed to you because of arrogance and pride. This is how a good Father loves His children. It is an aspect of His discipline.

Humility is the way forward for every follower of Jesus. According to Solomon, perhaps the wisest man to ever live, humility begins with remaining teachable, open to rebuke, correction and counsel. Humility is a heart that remembers its place, its blessings, its purpose and its source. It is a heart that doesn't fully trust its own justifying self-image. This critical attitude somehow approaches what Solomon and others call “*the fear of the Lord,*” which is the beginning of true godly wisdom. And this kind of wisdom is protective. It becomes a great shield from many self-imposed pitfalls and outside attacks. This godly wisdom is also the doorway to many of God's blessings, including long life and peace, according to Solomon. Humility is the key ingredient in this entire family tree.

Sadly, far too many men and women see service in the local church as their pathway to attention and prominence. This seems to happen particularly in ministry roles that are often in the spotlight of a stage, but no ministry role or spiritual gift is immune. Many lose their sense of serving the glory of Jesus and have turned to seek their own glory. I feel the regular tug myself. For almost all it begins subtly. Quietly. Privately. But this is far from God's design for the local church. God's spiritual gifts are given ultimately to glorify the Giver. Only He is the hero. Only He is ultimate. When we all gather around the throne in eternity, there will be no worship leaders or preachers. No super-missionaries. No pastors. There will only be worshippers. Jesus, the lamb that was slain, is the only one worthy of glory. Keep that future end in mind as you walk these daily paths in service

and ministry. Don't let the snare of pride and self-glory turn God's great grace into His loving discipline. Humility. Hold fast to it. Develop it. Employ it regularly in heaping measure.

**PATIENCE.** We've explored this before but it deserves repeating and expanding. Serving in the local church is rarely easy. In fact, it never is. It is riddled with challenges, relational issues and the never-ending pressure of time. Walking in your spiritual gift takes patience. It requires a commitment to the journey and the Author of the journey. And as you walk, you will have ample opportunity to give up and opt out. You will likely have good reasons. You'll get frustrated. Frustration can turn into anger. Anger can rot into bitterness. But be patient.

The path you are walking is too often abandoned in the haste of exhaustion or conflict. Don't give up. Remember you have an enemy who wants you to give up and give in. He doesn't want you to arrive at a place of ministry, service, joy and maturity. He will use your sin, fear and flesh against you. He will turn others' sin against you. But be patient. Exercise your faith. Trust God to work within human relationships. Forgive. Give grace. Focus on the sacrifice of Jesus. He died to save you. He called you to this task. This was His idea. Trust Him. If you press through, there will be great joy. I promise. What is more, God promises.

**LOVE.** As we've seen before, it is not inconsequential that 1 Corinthians 13 falls right in between Chapter 12 and Chapter 14. All of them, including the chapter on love, relate to the exercise of spiritual gifts for the service of the church. It is not without reason that Romans 12:9-13, all relational love commands, comes right on the heels of the verses about spiritual gifts. Love is required. Without love, the gifts are empty and never complete their purpose. It is the glue that holds all the gifts together. This love is committed love. It is sacrificial. It is God's brand of love. *Agape*. This love reminds you of the goal of ministry: the other person. It's not about you. It's about Jesus and the person in front of you. You get to represent Jesus.

You are invited to serve. Your Heavenly Father includes you in His plan. He is love. You should walk in love.

This is how you are to walk in your grace gift, dear Christian. Humbly. Patiently. Lovingly. These three simple words can rescue you from the destructive wiles of the grotesque imposters that follow each of God's spiritual gifts around. Oh yes, they are out there. Beware. Like shadowy ghosts, each one looks like the corresponding grace gift from God. But they are instead filled with greed, vainglory, pride, conceit, impatience, narcissism and vanity. Three big ideas can keep you safe: humility, patience, love.

## You Write the Ending

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Indulge me in a thought exercise. Imagine a church family of 5,000 people. I know it's not easy to do, as that is an extremely large church family. But try to picture it in your mind. Diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, ages and stories. Every gift God has given to the church is available somewhere in this church family. A great deal of activity is being produced by this church family. Now imagine that almost all of this activity is being done by just 500 people, most of them paid staff and high level volunteers. What is that church family able to do—not *willing*, but *able* to do—with just 10% of its people serving? Imagine.

Now imagine the same church of 5,000 people. The same diversity of stories and gifts. But imagine that everyone - every single man, woman and child - is in the process of discovering their spiritual gift; or already knowing it, they are in the process of finding the right place to serve. Most of them have already found that place and are experiencing the vast amount of joy that comes with doing so. Imagine 100% of the church family is serving in their gift. Imagine what that church family is able to do for God's kingdom. Imagine what that church is capable of doing for each other, for the city in which they are planted, for the Gospel. Imagine the incredible and tangible

joy in their regular family gatherings. Imagine the care and support that every single person would feel. Imagine the humble sense of ownership as every man, woman and child walks daily in the knowledge that they deeply belong to the church of the Living God. That they have a role. That they are irreplaceable.

Which church family would you like to be a part of?

## My Story...

"Serving the Body of Christ with my spiritual gifts has blessed me personally by knowing that those who had not believed, believe! The joy that this brings is beyond words, and I am so thankful to be part of God's awesome plan to bring more and more brothers and sisters into the Kingdom! There's nothing like looking into the eyes of a person and seeing that moment of understanding that He is real and that they are loved beyond their wildest imaginations, that their sins are forgiven, that they are cleansed and free of the guilty verdict, that the very Holy Spirit of God will live in them and that they will enjoy the unbelievable pleasure of seeing their God face to face and spending eternity adoring Him! I really could go on and on. Serving others with my spiritual gifts is one of the most amazing and joyous parts of being a believer! I am honored to serve in my Master's house!"

Sadie

## Personal Reflection:

- Take some time to journal and identify three to five areas that you will investigate to potentially serve in your gift and calling. Even if you are already serving in one or more areas, approach this reflection time as if you are starting fresh. Pray. Take your time. Hear from God. Follow His lead. Write down what you are thinking and praying.
- Next, write the next steps you will take for each of the areas you identified. Who will you contact? When? How will you begin?
- Finally, write down a time-based marker for each step. This is probably the one way these things will really happen. It's all about personal accountability. Then, start on step one.



space for notes

## Group Discussion:

1. Share with your group your discoveries from this chapter. Specifically, relate the areas of service that seem interesting to you or have you most excited.
2. How has God connected your gift, calling and setting in life to reveal your ministry? How has this combination of ideas and their relationship helped you?
3. Play along and discuss all of the reasons why you shouldn't serve your church or why you don't have enough time and energy to do so right now. Share with your group.
4. Now, take some time to encourage each other through those same reasonings, trying to see how the same reasons and excuses can be either false, empty invitations to a specific kind of ministry.
5. Share with your group some of the revelations from your personal reflections above.
6. What will you do next? How will you take the next step into your ministry?

space for notes

## Discover More

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Thank you for engaging this FaithPath study. We pray it has been, and continues to be, revolutionary in your personal pursuit of nearness and submission to Jesus. We invite you to continue to engage the FaithPath map as you pursue intentional discipleship in all areas. We have several other studies and resources available in print and electronically. Digital copies can be found on our main church website: [faithbibleonline.org](http://faithbibleonline.org), under Resources.

If you are near The Woodlands, Texas, and do not have a church home, consider joining us on a Sunday morning. We would love to meet you. From anywhere, you can join us online for Sunday worship services by streaming through Facebook, our app or church website. You can also access a large library of sermon podcasts anytime.

Other available FaithPath resources include:



**Grace** /// This short and concise six-chapter study explores the foundational beauty and power of God's grace in salvation, works of obedience, assurance of salvation, eternal security, relationships and personal identity. After each brief chapter there are questions that help promote small group or family discussion.



**Sit With Me** /// This resource will take you on a six-week journey of developing comfort and familiarity in God's Word. You will have six daily readings each week, focusing on rhythm, discipline, praying God's Word, reading worshipfully, reading intentionally and reading for application. In a workbook style, this resource will help any believer enjoy the riches of regularly engaging God's Word on their own.



**Sit With Me: Volume 2** /// This resource takes the original study and adds significant depth as you explore the basic steps of bible study methods. In another six-week, six-days-a-week study, you will explore discipline, observation of God's Word, correlating what you see in the Bible, interpretation and application. In a workbook style with loads of

helpful insights and practice, this resource will help any believer develop life giving Bible study habits for a lifetime.



**Tell Your Story-Tell The Story** /// This six-week resource focuses on two journeys: crafting your own story of faith in Jesus as a way of sharing it with others, and the ability to clearly and biblically share the simple Gospel of faith in Jesus. With weekly exercises and journaling homework, this study will help any believer gain great confidence and security

sharing their faith with others of all kinds, backgrounds and stories.

Lord willing, be on the lookout for more resources as we continue to build out our efforts to equip and train our church family to be disciples that make disciples.

*"...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."*

—Ephesians 4:12-13

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