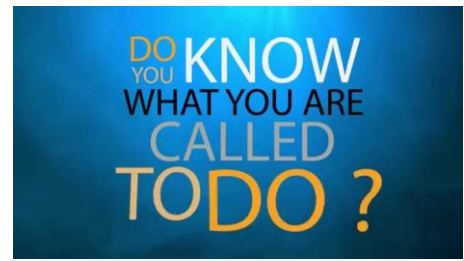


New Hope Sermon - Finding Our gifts



We are committed as a church to equip and nurture each member so we can all be living on the supernatural plane where God is able to touch the world through us. I long for people to come into our fellowship and experience God here – among us in how we welcome and honor and serve one another and in each of us individually. We are NOT a holy huddle or even just a caring family in Christ. We are to be a living model of God’s multicolored grace.

So the question we can to answer today is: Do you know what you are called to do? I believe each of us wants to serve from our heart so we need to find our gifts. Bruce Bugbee helps people do that by talking about SHAPE. He says what you will do best happens when the 5 attributes of SHAPE come together – our spiritual gifts, our heart (what we have passion for and love to do), our abilities (natural talents and skills), our personality (with its unique strengths, communication and processing styles) and our experiences (which create the lenses through which we see the world and react to God and others).

Today I want us to unwrap our spiritual gifts—the main way we can live and serve supernaturally.

Why is this so important? Because Christians get burned out and can act from their fleshly rather than spiritual nature when they serve and fill in the gaps in situations where they are not supernaturally gifted. They have good intentions and are trying to serve others, but they end up stressing themselves and others when God’s power and anointing is not involved. Often cultural or church expectations may pressure people to step forward to fill a gap in a church program without regard for a person’s spiritual gifts. As a result, people step forward to meet a need or fulfill a certain understanding of a cultural role without Holy Spirit empowerment.

At one time in my church ministry in Baltimore Maryland our Mission Coordinating Fellowship decided to sponsor a world hunger banquet. World Vision has excellent materials to help church leaders run this program at the congregational level. Our team had been approved by the elder board to run such a banquet at our church of 700+ members. Initially, we couldn’t find anyone to administer the details of the program. So, one of our gifted leaders in mercy ministry, research, and leadership volunteered to chair the event. She felt the press of the moment and stepped up to be sure the program would go forward. But, as she continually fretted over details and various aspects of the program, she not only had internal stress, but she unintentionally brought that stress onto everyone around her. She was not ministering out of the flow of Holy Spirit energy that characterizes the use of spiritual gifts. The program did go forward but not with the peace and joy of God.

In addition, when we are serving in our own strength this is what the Bible actually calls walking in the flesh. In that context other aspects of our flesh nature come out – we can get judgmental of others whom we think aren’t doing their share; we can get jealous or demanding or argumentative or defensive or unkind – all traits which tear down individual relationships and a whole fellowship rather than building it up. We detract not add to the impact of God’s kingdom.

Henry Blackaby in his excellent book *Experiencing God* says:

Too often we’re content to serve God by giving our own greatest effort. What is that, however, compared to the power of the Holy Spirit? . . . When it comes to serving God, we tend to evaluate what we’re good at and what we like to do, then serve according to our ability, . . . all the while asking God to bless our efforts . . . The result of this approach is that we don’t need or rely on the Holy Spirit . . . The world, therefore, looks at the church and sees good people doing good things for God, but they don’t see the power of God working through His people to accomplish *what only He can do*.¹⁴

In fact, all political in-fighting in the church comes out of these fleshly traits and the casualties are the multitudes who no longer walk with God and who don’t want anything to do with the church. They have been wounded by or seen the effects of sinful human nature and have lost sight of Jesus and the

power of the gospel in transformation. People who are not living in the Spirit won't bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Last week we said that God gives each believer spiritual gifts so God can accomplish his purposes in the body of Christ and in the world with His methods and His power. We looked at I Peter 4 and the speaking and serving gifts that we steward before God to bring God glory. This week I want us to notice a few guidelines from I Cor. 12. Notice #1. That every believer is given spiritual gifts. They are part of God's grace and blessing to each one who calls Jesus Christ Savior and Lord. These gifts are manifestations of the character and power of God in the world. #2. They are given to serve others—for the common good. This truth directly contradicts the misconception that it is self-promotion to seek to use one's gifts. Just the opposite is true. The gifts are part of a person's calling. They ought to determine the person's direction. Using the gifts is an issue of stewardship—faithfully fulfilling the calling God has given a believer. A Biblical rule of stewardship is: *"It is required in stewards, that a man [or woman] be faithful"* (I Cor. 4:2, KJV). The Body of Christ will thrive as each one seeks to serve according to God's gifting.

#3. Then v. 8-10 itemize some of those gifts – wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, tongues and interpretation of tongues.

Let me share an example of faith and miraculous powers together when Billy Graham was holding an evangelistic crusade in New Jersey. The night before the crusade started, all the church leaders who would be counseling new believers were there at the stadium but it was very hard to hear and concentrate on the task at hand because of the noise of all the planes flying overhead. Turns out the stadium was on the flight path to Newark International Airport. Billy stopped the meeting as he looked up at the sky and said, "This will not do. Let's pray." And he asked God to change the winds over Newark for the next week so the planes would be routed on a different flight path – away from the stadium. And it happened. That's operating the gifts of faith and miraculous power to shift weather. (Now I know some of you want to see this happen in Chicago as the cold weather is descending on us for the next few months. Feel free to pray and try to change that pattern, and maybe God will show us mercy and favor. But the principle here is that God answered Graham's request because it involved the salvation of so many thousands at the Crusade – he had prayed according to God's kingdom agenda and so God answered!)

Final principle from I Cor. 12 - #4 – the gifts are chosen for us specifically by the Holy Spirit. God knows how He wants to use each of us and gives us gifts to equip us for those tasks and ministry.



So how do we find our gifts? Two ways – one is a spiritual gifts survey we will take during this service and the other is a set of 5 E's: Explore the options. Experiment with as many as possible. Examine your own feelings as you test out a certain gift. Evaluate the spiritual result. Did God show up so someone or a group experience God's reality in some way? And finally expect confirmation from the Body – others telling you how God blessed when you did such and such. Remember, that confirmation and encouragement is not about you. It is about what God gave you and empowered you to do – so the glory is all His. You were only His obedient servant.

This is why, before we each take a spiritual inventory to discover the gifts in our own lives, we will sing together Make Me a Servant. We are equipped for our calling SO THAT we can minister to others. We are called to serve. This keeps us in proper focus as we go forward. Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 10/29/17

Song: Make Me A Servant, Spiritual Gifts Survey from Lifeway Christian Resources (pictured above).