

Message: Shape of your life

(Based on “Discover Your God-Given Gifts” by Don & Katie Fortune)¹

I want to start with good news today: you all have spiritual gifts!

1 Peter 4:10 is our key verse, “*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms*” (NIV). Robin Billings-Reyes, our choir director, gave us a memorable thought during our Bible devotion at choir practice, “It’s not a question of ability, but avail-ability.” Each and every person who believes in Jesus receives ability in the form of spiritual gifts. The question is, “are you willing to follow where Jesus is leading you?”

Today, we’re going to spend some time looking at where and how Jesus is leading us through our gifts. First, as a reminder, there are three types of spiritual gifts. Nine manifestation gifts: ways God’s supernatural power works through us. Five ministry gifts: ways God equips the church. Seven motivational gifts: ways God shapes and forms us for life and ministry. The seven motivational gifts are perceiver, server, teacher, exhorter, giver, administrator and person of compassion. Many of us did a brief inventory of our spiritual gifts this week – forms were handed out when you came in today as a help.

How do spiritual gifts help us in our daily life? They’re working to make us more like Christ, who is the model for each and every spiritual gift. The spiritual gifts we received when we were baptized shape and form us as children. As baptized adults, the spiritual gifts we receive transform and change us. Here’s an example.

Have you every tried sunglasses that are a different from the ones you normally wear? Sunglasses come with different tints: grey, green, blue, even yellow. Some have different polarizations to help with glare. Things look different depending on the type of sunglasses you have. For example, when I wear my sunglasses, I can’t read the screens at ATMs or gas stations due to the polarization. It’s not a question of right or wrong. It’s just different.

¹ Don & Katie Fortune, *Discover Your God-Given Gifts*, Chosen Books, 2009

The same thing is true for motivational spiritual gifts. Suppose you had seven people over for dinner and each happens to have a different gift. You’re bringing three salad plates to the table when one slips and crashes to the floor, scattering bits of glass and salad in a mess.

“How will each person react?”

- **Perceiver:** “That’s what happens when you try to carry too many plates.”
- **Server:** “I’ll clean it up.”
- **Teacher:** “The reason you dropped the plate was because it wasn’t balanced properly.”
- **Exhorter:** “Next time, let someone help you carry the plates.”
- **Giver:** “I’ll be glad to help you make another salad.”
- **Administrator:** “Joseph, get the broom and dustpan. Sally, bring the mop. Marie, help me fix another salad.”
- **Compassion person:** “Don’t feel embarrassed, it could have happened to anyone.””²

Note: we all minister in the areas of all seven gifts. Just because we’re gifted in one area shouldn’t keep us from ministering in other areas. **If you’re gifted with teaching and the person next to you is crying, please don’t say “don’t expect me to help you. Go find someone with the gift of compassion.”** There’s a big difference between ***being*** (who our gift makes us) and ***doing*** (following and serving Jesus). Even if you’re uncomfortable, remember Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. God’s grace is sufficient in all circumstances.

Let’s review the seven motivational gifts. Please see the back of the spiritual gifts inventory for a definition and Scripture.

“A **Perceiver** is someone who is especially sensitive to perceiving the will of God and proclaiming it. The perceiver is one who perceives, prays about, proclaims and promotes the will of God.

Note: different from prophetic speech, which is a manifestation gift.

Description of perceiver: quickly identifies good and evil and hates evil. They see everything in black and white. Easily perceives the character of individuals and groups. Encourages repentance to change the heart.

² *Ibid*, p. 27

Believe accepting difficulties can produce positive personal growth. Have few close relationships. View the Bible as basis for truth, belief, action and authority and boldly follows spiritual practices. They're frank, outspoken, persuasive, grieve over sins of others. Want to discover own blind spots. Called to intercession. Have strong opinions and convictions, strict personal standards and want to obey God, no matter what the cost may be.

Biblical examples: John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Jonah.

Today: Dr. James Dobson.

Best practice for perceivers: rather than confronting others with truth, lift them up in prayer, interceding for them; ask for God's will to be done.

A **Server** is someone who does practical things to serve others. Server receives joy in helping, assisting, carrying out instructions and being of use in a wide variety of ways.

Description of server: Recognizes practical needs from a mile away and is quick to meet them. Likes manual projects and jobs, preferably short-term. Keeps things in order and is a detail person with a good memory. Enjoy showing hospitality. Will stay with something until it's completed. Have a hard time saying “no.” More interested in meeting the needs of others than their own needs. Show loves for others in deeds and actions, more than words. Need to feel appreciated. Tend to do more than asked and find joy in being helpful. Don't want to lead others. Have high energy level, cannot stand clutter and are a perfectionist. See serving as top priority. Prefer to do the job rather than delegating. Support leaders.

Biblical examples: Stephen, Martha, Philip, Jacob.

Today: Mother Teresa

A **Teacher** is someone who finds joy in teaching or giving instruction to others, including research and writing, fact finding and biblical illustrations.

Description of teacher: Focused on head. Presents truth in a logical, systematic way. Love to study, do research, check facts, do word studies. Prefer biblical illustrations to life illustrations. Get upset when scripture used out of context, want to see truth established in every

situation, check other's sources. More objective than subjective. Like facts, accuracy, vocabulary. Prefer teaching to evangelism, see Bible study as foundation of all gifts. Self-disciplined and emotionally self-controlled. Have a select circle of friends. Strong convictions and opinions based on investigation of facts. Believe truth has power to change.

Biblical examples: Timothy, Luke, Thomas.

Today: Dr. Ravi Zacarias

An **Exhorter** is someone whose efforts are geared toward building up and encouraging other people. Could be called an encourager. All gifts can teach, but exhorter makes the most interesting and palatable teacher.

Description of exhorter: Aims for the heart. Love to encourage others to live up to their full potential. Want a visible response to preaching or teaching. Prefer information with practical application. Love to prescribe precise steps to aid personal growth. Focus on working with people. Encourage others to develop in their personal ministries. Find truth in experience and then validate in Scripture. Love personal counseling, but will discontinue if no effort is made to change. Fluent communicator. See trials as opportunities for personal growth. Accept people as they are without judging. Well liked because of positive attitude. Prefer to witness with personal life, rather than verbally. Make decisions easily. Always complete what's started. Want to clear up conflicts quickly. Expect a lot of self and others. Need a sounding board for bouncing off ideas and thoughts.

Biblical examples: Titus, Aaron. Today: Joel Osteen or Rick Warren.

A **Giver** is someone who gives or shares resources with simplicity, sincerity and liberality and finds joy in doing so. Of all gifts, least likely to be identified by one who has it. Shares traits with server, love Bible like perceiver and teacher.

Description of giver: Gives freely of money, possessions, time, energy and love. Love to give without others knowing about it, in support of others or to advance a ministry. Want to feel a part of ministries which he or she contributes to. Intercede for needs and salvation, like when gift is answer to specific prayer, led by Holy Spirit. Want gifts to be

high quality. See hospitality as an opportunity to give. Handle finances with wisdom and frugality. Very industrious with tendency to success. Quickly volunteer to help where need is seen. Seek confirmation on amount to give, not gullible and look for value. Strongly believe in tithing and giving above the tithe. Focus on sharing gospel, believe God is source of their supply. Have natural and God-given wisdom, natural and effective business ability.

Biblical examples: Solomon, Zacchaeus, Cornelius, Paul.

Today: Joni Erickson Tada or Nick Vujicic.

An **Administrator** is a born or emerging leader, facilitator or organizer.

Description of administrator: Highly motivated to organize the things he or she is responsible for. Communicate ideas and organization in clear ways. Respect and handle authority well. Won't assume leadership unless delegated by those in authority and will assume leadership where no specific leader exists. Like working on long-term goals and projects, are visionary with broad perspective, has zeal and enthusiasm. Easily bring people and resources together to accomplish tasks and find joy in working to accomplish goals. Enjoy delegating and supervising others. Will endure criticism to accomplish ultimate task. Willing to let others get credit to get job done. Prefer new challenges, keeps note and know when methods are not working and when to introduce new ones. Enjoy working with and being around people. Don't enjoy repetitive or routine tasks, want to work effectively and quickly.

Biblical examples: Joseph, Nehemiah, Deborah, David, James, Jairus.

Today: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A **Compassion Person** is someone who shows compassion with cheerfulness, bringing light into sick room and joy to hearts of those afflicted. Most frequently bestowed of all primary gifts, most likely because so many people hurting and in need. Not a position of weakness, but vulnerable.

Description of person of compassion: Great capacity to show love. Always looking for good in people, typically cheerful and joyful, ruled by heart rather than head. Sense spiritual and emotional condition of groups and persons. Attracted to people hurting or in distress and take

action to help remove hurt or relieve distress. More concerned about mental and emotional distress than physical needs. Motivated to help people have good relationships. Love opportunities to show preference to others (open door, best chair, etc.) Careful with words and actions, easily detect insincerity or wrong motives. Drawn to others who are compassionate. Love to do thoughtful things for others. Trusting and try to be trustworthy. Avoid conflicts and confrontations. Don't like to be rushed. Crusader for good causes. Rejoice when others blessed and grieve when others hurt. Intercede for hurts and problems of others.

Difference between sympathy, empathy and compassion:

- Sympathy: “I’m sorry you hurt”
- Empathy: “I’m sorry you hurt and I hurt with you”
- Compassion: “I’m sorry you hurt, and I hurt with you, and I’m going to stay right here with you until the hurt is gone.”

Biblical examples: Ruth, Jesus’ father Joseph, Rachel, Rebekah.”³

Today: hospice chaplains.

If you put on sunglasses, everything you see is colored accordingly.

“The same is true with a person’s motivational gift.

- A perceiver will look at life through a perceiver’s eyes. Everything will look good or bad, right or wrong, in God’s will or out of God’s will. It’s impossible for the perceiver to see life in any other way.
- On the other hand, a server will approach reality with the question: “what can I do to help this situation?” He constantly notices opportunities to do things for others.
- A teacher will search for truth in everything she encounters, investigating, seeking and researching.
- An exhorter will see opportunities to encourage people at whatever they do.
- A giver will look for ways in which he can invest his time, talent and money in providing for the needs of others.
- An administrator, with her broad vision, will grasp the overall dimensions of a situation.
- A compassion person will recognize hurts and wounds that need to be healed and see endless opportunities to express love.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 55-205 (excerpts)

And each one may think, ‘Why don’t others see things the way I see them? It’s clear to me!’”⁴

We can encounter some problem tendencies with spiritually gifted people:

- **Perceiver:** judgmental, intolerant, critical, prideful, domineering, controlling, unforgiving and have poor self-image.
- **Server:** perfectionist, critical, interfering, over-dependent on appreciation or won’t cut apron strings.
- **Teacher:** prideful, intolerant, legalistic, dogmatic, opinionated, aloof, unromantic or have know-it-all attitude.
- **Exhorter:** opinionated, interruptive, compromising, over-talkative, pushy or stretches the truth.
- **Giver:** stingy, manipulative, too focused on money, workaholic, overly frugal, spoils children or steals.
- **Administrator:** bossy, domineering, insensitive, callous, over-zealous, procrastinates or neglects routine work.
- **Compassion person:** easily wounded, over-emotional, compromising, indecisive, undependable, tardy, illogical or overly empathetic.

Please note I’m not saying you do (or will) have these tendencies, but they can happen if we use our gifts with the wrong motivation.

No matter what gift or combination of gifts you have been given, the most important thing is that it should operate in love – always!

Keep in mind, it’s not our ability, but our avail-ability to God that matters. God is doing the heavy lifting.

How are we available? For example, how do we care for others given our different gifts? “Suppose and illness kept someone in bed for a month. How could we express our love?”

- **Perceiver** might pray both privately and at the person’s bedside for healing, strength and endurance.
- **Server** might take over meals, offer to do housework, run errands or mow the lawn.
- **Teacher** might find it hard to relate, but will finally take some good books and tapes to person.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 27

- **Exhorter** might go right over to encourage and share uplifting Scripture.
- **Giver** might bring food and other gifts, spend time talking and listening.
- **Administrator** might find out what the person needs and organizes the neighborhood to meet those needs.
- **Compassion** person might ask how person feels, empathizes, hugs them, weeps and stays at bedside.”⁵

The human body is commonly used as description of motivational gifts. In Romans 12:3-5, the apostle Paul tells us, “... *not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*” I have news: we aren’t entitled to spiritual gifts. There’s nothing we’ve done to earn them. They’re freely given by God through grace. That means we’re to first consider God’s will, the needs of others and then act in love.

There are **three things to keep in mind** when we consider our spiritual gifts and how they apply to our lives:

- **“We’re to have unity through diversity.** The body represents completeness, a whole, a totality, but a totality made up of different parts. Not all parts of the body of Christ are the same. We have different functions, different ways of working. Just as our body needs all its parts to function properly, the body of Christ needs those with different motivational gifts to function properly.
- **We don’t have to do it all by ourselves.** We do our part. Others do their part. God does a big part. Together we get the job done. Together we do the work of ministry.
- **We really need each other.** Paul emphasizes our mutual dependence. No one can go off on their own and be a victorious Christian all by themselves. God has intentionally made us so we are

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 90

incomplete without the interaction and ministry of our brothers and sisters in Christ.”⁶

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “...*Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken*” (NIV). We are each unique, different and blessed, but we’re not alone or made to live apart. The words we speak during communion came to mind as I reflected on the wonderful gifts we each receive by grace: “*By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet*” (BOW, p. 38). As we finish our preparations for Holy Week and gather for Palm Sunday next week, it’s my fervent prayer that each of you embraces the wonderful gift you are to our church. I pray you embrace your spiritual gifts and you’re filled with joy as you practice them. I pray you embrace Jesus’ mission to share the good news of God’s love and salvation with the world in the way you’re made to do so.

Don’t let your light remain hidden any longer. Say “yes” when the Holy Spirit prompts you. That’s the way to a life lived fully, wholly, completely and with joy.

Let us pray:

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn’t be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may serve others with that same love. Help us to share our faith and hope with others through love so they will join us in hope. Lord, thank you shaping and forming us from birth to today. Thank you for giving us gifts that do not tarnish and fade, but we make us better people, better brothers and sisters in Christ, and better able to serve you and your church. We commit ourselves to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 33

Romans 12:1-5 (NRSV)

So, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is - what is good and pleasing and mature.

Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. We have many parts in one body, but the parts don’t all have the same function. In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 12-19; 24-26 (NRSV)

There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.

Christ is just like the human body - a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly the body isn’t one part but many. If the foot says, “I’m not part of the body because I’m not a hand,” does that mean it’s not part of the body? If the ear says, “I’m not part of the body because I’m not an eye,” does that mean it’s not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body?

The parts of our body that are presentable don’t need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won’t be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.