

THE BIBLE TEACHING

None of us, not even the ones most committed to Jesus Christ, see ourselves clearly and accurately. That is why we place ourselves under spiritual leaders and in the company of fellow Christians. Often others see our spiritual usefulness more clearly than we see it ourselves.

We have two goals this week:

1. To *identify*, by ourselves and in the group, our personal talents, our gift to the fellowship.

2. To *commit* ourselves, with the encouragement of the group, to serve God in a specific capacity in the days ahead.

Others in the group will be waiting to receive your thoughts about their gifts, trusting your judgment and your spiritual insight. Spend as much time thinking and praying about their gifts as about your own. They too will be ready to decide their specific ministry for the days ahead.

In addition to studying the Bible passages, think about the needs of your congregation and the hurts of the world. Think carefully about children and their needs, about youth and ways to reach them, about adults and their pain. Think of physical, spiritual, financial, and emotional needs of people you know. Think of the least, the last, and the lost; the wealthy and the self-satisfied. Remember the sick, the poor, and people who live without faith or hope. Think of individuals who, like the Samaritan woman, are cut off from the community or discriminated against.

Think of ways you can train others, build others up, guide and direct other disciples to empower the fellowship.

Biblical Guidance

We need to remember some things we have learned. Look up the related Scripture references to refresh your memory:

- God works in unusual, surprising ways to accomplish spiritual tasks. Remember Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 18:9-15).

- Sometimes God uses weakness to show that power belongs to God. Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

- God can do much through people who willingly turn themselves and what they have over to God. Remember Barnabas, the “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36-37).

- God does not reveal the divine will to the curious, but to the obedient. Remember Peter (John 21:15-19).

- Talent is varied. So are gifts. You are uniquely a part of the body of Christ. No one can take your special place. Remember 1 Corinthians 12:27-31.

- Leadership in the church requires unusual humility and a willingness to serve without glory. Remember Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17).

- No one has enough power to achieve spiritual ministry alone. You will need God’s help. Copy as your text Philippians 4:13.

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Disciples use their gifts in ministry to others.

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How do you determine what your “gifts” are? Older people know through experience what they enjoy, what “they are good at,” what others compliment them on, what gives them a sense of satisfaction, what seems to be helpful or useful to other people, and what God seems to be pushing or pulling them to do.

However, even experienced adults are often novices in spiritual ministries and timid about trying new or different work. Vast opportunities for service or unexplored ways of serving are yet untried. Fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit can make available surprising gifts to older people.

Younger people are often feeling their way. Lacking a great deal of experience, they can try new things—sometimes working alone, sometimes with supervision. Many an excellent teacher began as an assistant. Many disciples are asked to be helpers, then turn into prophets and preachers.

Sometimes persons receive or discover new gifts when they find themselves in new situations. The death of a loved one may show a person to be a healer through the consoling of other family members. Discussion of a social issue with friends may cause someone to respond as a prophet.

Gifts differ from talents. Talents are God-given, natural, a part of the created order. Gifts are received through the Holy Spirit. Both talents and gifts can be used to serve God.

Gifts are also different from the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruit of the Spirit is for everyone and grows with varying degrees in each disciple. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Let these qualities grow in you like wildfire.

Gifts are roles or special abilities, different and distinct and achievable through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit distributes these gifts diversely to each disciple. Many are listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, but we will focus on only seven. They are gifts to be apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, and administrators (1 Corinthians 12:28-31, RSV). (We discussed speaking in tongues in our study of Corinthians.)

Apostles

This gift is to exercise general oversight and leadership in the church. A person called to apostolic ministry shows signs of spiritual power to lead

others to Christ, to encourage, and to build up others in faith and love. Pastors are apostles ordained to preach the word, maintain order, and administer the sacraments. Paul said that he was “called to be an apostle.”

Do you feel that you are being called into the full-time apostolic ministry of the church?

Are there persons in the group who exhibit evidence of this gift and who, you believe, are being “called to be an apostle”? Name them.

Prophets

A prophet is one who speaks for God. The spiritual gift is to receive and communicate a message of God to the people. Such disciples may witness quietly in private conversations. They may testify, speak, or preach in public. Some become lay speakers; others give lay testimony. Some prophets are social activists, writing or speaking a Christlike word on public issues. Some may serve in political life or in community service. Even though they may receive criticism, prophets express a biblical truth in a chaotic, selfish world.

Prophets may focus on exhortation, encouragement, consolation (Isaiah 40:1-2), or on conviction, confrontation, social change (Acts 4:19-20).

As you think about the group, which persons, if any, seem suited to be prophets?

What forms might their ministry take?

Do you have the gift of speaking for God?

In what ways might you use that gift?

MINISTRY

Teachers

While it is true that not everyone should be a teacher (James 3:1), the church always needs Christlike teachers. Some people who are professionally trained can be inadequate as teachers in the church or can be splendid teachers. Some people who have no formal training are gifted teachers.

Keep in mind the variety of teaching. Some teachers are excellent as lecturers, others as small group discussion leaders. List times, places, groups, and ways teaching can be done with children, youth, and adults.

Children

times, places

groups

ways of teaching

Youth

times, places

groups

ways of teaching

Adults

times, places

groups

ways of teaching

Jesus is called the great Teacher. He imparted knowledge, but he also trained disciples. Learning and training in the faith go together. Read 1 Timothy 1:3-7. Remember, too, the DISCIPLE study program will grow and touch the lives of countless

numbers as some teachers are identified in each group to guide new study groups.

Do you think God has enabled you to be a teacher in the church?

Do you think that some members of the group are gifted teachers? Name them. (If you identify an age group for which they are uniquely suited, mention that.)

Who in the group could suitably teach DISCIPLE?

If asked to teach, would you be willing?

Miracle Workers

Some people seem gifted with power to perform miracles, signs, and wonders. Peter's prayer restored Tabitha to life (Acts 9:36-41). Sometimes tormented individuals are released from fear or guilt or grief by people who work wonders. In the early church it was a miracle when Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians sold everything and shared it "as any had need." Many incredible things took place, called "wonders and signs" (2:43-45).

In a group, sometimes gifted people work wonders—speaking a soft word to ease tension, showing a fresh way to overcome an impasse, introducing a new inquirer to grace. Such Christians can serve as lay leaders. Some people pray for others and invite them to come to Christ. Other Christians, with a word, a deed, or a gift, mobilize the whole church for action. They become "miracle workers."

Have you spotted someone in the group who is a worker of miracles?

Healers

Some people walk into a sick room, and patients feel better. Countless Christians testify that the prayers of the church helped heal them, sometimes with laying on of hands, receiving Holy Commu-

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nion, or anointing with oil (James 5:13-16). Have you ever felt the healing power of God when people were praying for you?

Do not discount professionals. Doctors, nurses, aides, psychologists, social workers, paramedics can be spiritually gifted as well as technically trained. Some have healing in their hands, their voice, their compassion.

Healing of the soul is the ministry of some. Remember that illnesses can result from unresolved grief, guilt, or unfounded fear. God uses special persons to heal the soul and thereby heal the body.

Healing or reconciliation between persons or groups is a powerful spiritual force. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Remember also that even people with the gift of healing do not heal every time (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Healings do not always depend on the sick person's faith or on the faith of the persons praying (John 9:3).

Identify persons in the group who might be healers. The gift of healing is similar to the gift of miracle working, but don't worry. We are not concerned about sharp definitions; we are praying for spiritual power.

Has God used you in the ministry of healing?

When?

Might God use you as a healer?

Helpers

No gift is more important to the church. "Helping" lubricates the gears, making church life active, abundant, and joyous. To be called a "son [or daughter] of encouragement" is to be highly praised. The seven Hellenists who took over the feeding of the widows were helpers (Acts 6:2-6).

But be careful. Agreeing to "help" may be ducking responsibility. Help when? Help where? Help whom? How often and how much? A gifted helper says yes even at some sacrifice or inconvenience. Willingness to serve is a precious spiritual gift.

Everyone is a helper of sorts. Are you an especially gifted helper?

Indicate some places where you could be unusually helpful.

Who in the group stands out as a Barnabas, always willing to help?

Administrators

The gift of administration is the ability God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to establish goals and to devise and execute plans to accomplish those goals. Ability to organize a team; grace to inspire, encourage, and delegate; willingness to hold people accountable with courtesy—these are the talents and gifts of administration.

Many businessmen and businesswomen do not think of themselves as spiritual. Yet they steer the church wisely in matters of planning, finance, building projects, and service and relief programs. The ability to listen, the ability to communicate clearly, and the ability to make decisions are necessary signs of this gift. Jethro helped Moses become a better administrator (Exodus 18:13-26). The Twelve wisely turned the feeding of the widows over to "men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Bishops are expected to be good administrators (1 Timothy 3:1-7). A superintendent of the Sunday school is as important as a teacher.

If a congregation is to work smoothly, some gifted people must organize and administer. Who in your group, including you, is a gifted administrator?
