

THE CHURCH

Do you have any idea how gifted you are?

“Strange isn’t it? One man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”

My favorite movie all time is, 'It's a Wonderful Life.' Clarence the angel (“Angel Second Class”) said these words to George Bailey. The angel had been sent by God to keep George from committing suicide. He succeeded by showing him how his life affected so many others around him.

As a part of the Body of Christ, everything you do is important because it affects all the other parts of the Body. Each person is necessary, and no one can do another person's job for God. And no one can reach their potential without the love and support of the other members of the Body.

The Church is not a "spiritual restaurant" where a few people do all the cooking of the food and a few wear themselves to the bone serving the food, but most just eat, put on weight, and tip the help on the way out! It should be more like a *potluck* - everyone brings something to the table.

Speaking of potlucks, our church was having one, and I was greeting people at the door as they arrived. A young man named Jeff started through the door when I noticed he didn't have anything in his hands. “Where’s your food?” I asked him. “I don’t have any.” Jeff wasn’t too poor to bring something, he was just a little lazy. I felt the presence of a “discipleship moment,” and said to him, “You can’t come in here without bringing something. Thus, the term, *‘potluck.’*” “Really?” “Yeah, really.” (I know it sounds like I was being mean or stingy, but I really did feel that a spiritual lesson was at stake.) When he turned and left I hoped I hadn’t blown it and been too hard on the boy. The dinner began and I was seated among family and friends, when Jeff approached me with a huge smile. He was holding up a gallon of apple juice in each hand (you know the glass bottles with the handles big enough for one finger?). I got up, hugged him, and we celebrated his contribution! From that day on, every time we had a potluck, Jeff would bring the same thing, two gallons of the same apple juice! He’d always come over and make sure I saw him with it.

That was almost 30 years ago now, and when I spoke to Jeff on the phone last year, he brought up the apple juice story, and we shared a laugh. Ironically, I was attending a potluck recently and realized I hadn’t planned what to bring. I had told the apple juice story to so many people so many times over the years that I just couldn’t come without something. When I arrived, many of my friends chuckled at the sight of the glass jugs, one in each index finger! We all have something to bring to the table, even if it’s only apple juice.

In Foundations 101 we gave a general overview of why you need the Church and why the Church needs you. One of the things we mentioned in passing is that as a member of Christ's Body, you are gifted. You are an integral part of the Church, a part called to specific places of service, a part resourced by the Head of the Church Himself - the Lord Jesus!

In the church,
we don't have
"gifted people"
and "un-gifted" ones!

We don't attend church just to get blessed, but to learn how to be a blessing to others (inside and outside the church). Picture a man with a normal head, but because of some genetic deficiency, has the undeveloped body of a child. That is what an immature Church looks like to God. It's a Body mismatched with its Head. What we're trying to learn here is how each of us can find our gifts, so that we can mature in the faith in such a way as to be able to live up to the title, "the Body of Christ!"

THE MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage, if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Romans 12:3-8

For the remainder of this paper we'll be talking about the gifts listed in this passage. These are not the only gifts mentioned in the New Testament. The others are found in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. But these, which we'll call "*Motivational (or Ministry) Gifts*," are the subject of our discussion here.

• What the Gifts Are and How They Fit



We'll identify, from our study of Scripture and from personal observation, some general characteristics of each of these gifts.

The Prophet - This person is motivated to declare truth, usually with directness and frankness. It could be called the 'gift of insight.' The Prophet is a person who tends to see what needs to be said, and makes no bones about saying it!



The Server – This person's motivation is to give practical assistance to people. They're not afraid to get their hands dirty while helping others. They're usually the first people to pitch in to clean up after the potlucks!



The Teacher – He/she has the drive to clarify the truth, and tends to be fact oriented, and accuracy insisting. The way the teacher serves God is to help people understand God and his kingdom. They love to introduce people to a systematic way of viewing the Bible and its Author.



The Exhorter – These are people who like to help other people grow in their faith. They like encouraging others toward progress, and really enjoy inspiring people to greatness in the kingdom. They're the "cheerleaders" of the church.



The Giver – This person has a unique motivation to share what they have with others. They extend God's love by giving their time, funds, energy, etc. They may or may not have a lot of resources to give, but what they have, they're happy to share.



The Administrator – These are individuals who like to organize others in the most strategic use of their abilities. They see the entirety of a task and are apt in delegating and organizing others for the achievement of the task.



The Mercy Extender – This person is inclined to empathize with the hurting. He/she is a person of much internal concern for others, particularly the “underdog.” He/she attracts people in misery and loves sharing God’s compassion with them.

• What the Gifts Are For and How They Function Among Us

You can see how that each one of these gifts represents one's basic motivation in life (thus the term "Motivational Gifts"). Your gift is the channel through which you are fundamentally stimulated by God to demonstrate and practice Christ's life and love to other people. In other words, at least one of these gifts is YOUR particular way of showing God's love to others. When you see a need and are moved to meet it, it's through the lens of your gift that you concoct a solution. ***Your Motivational Gift is your particular perspective on human needs and your way of meeting those needs!***

Just to illustrate, think of a room with seven people in it, each representing a person with a different Motivational Gift. A child walks through the room carrying a glass of water. He drops the glass, breaks it, and spills water all over the floor. The way each person responds is reflective of their gifting.

The Prophet says to the child firmly, *"You should be more careful. You can do better than that!"*

The Mercy Extender pushes the Prophet out of the way, gets on one knee, and with a tear in his eye consoles the child. Softly he says, *"I remember a time when I embarrassed myself by breaking something in front of others. Don't feel too bad. You're not alone."*

The Teacher steps up to the boy, *"The reason this happened was that the span of your hand is so and so centimeters, while the circumference of that glass was so and so. Furthermore, condensation formed on the glass as a result of the cold water and the warm air of the room..."*

The Exhorter chimes in, *"I want you to know I've been watching you, and I personally think you have great potential! In fact, you may be a waiter some day, and a great one!"*

The Server dives into the broken glass and spilled water with mop and waste can - the first to clean it up so the others won't be inconvenienced.

The Administrator says, *"OK, Joe, you get a mop. Sue, you take care of the boy. Mary, you get some more water. ... "*

The Giver says, *"Here, take my glass! In fact, here's ten bucks, go buy yourself a few more in case you break any others!"*

Your Motivational Gift is your particular perspective on human needs and your way of meeting those needs!

Get the point? When a person has a certain gift, that gift is part of their personality. It's the grid through which they view the needs of people around them. Your gift forms a perspective you have about expressing the need-meeting love of God. Look at it this way:

- *If you're a Prophet, your perspective is to confront someone.*
- *If you're a Server, your perspective is to serve someone.*
- *If you're a Teacher, your perspective is to instruct someone.*
- *If you're an Exhorter, your perspective is to encourage someone.*
- *If you're a Giver, your perspective is to share something of yours with someone.*
- *If you're an Administrator, your perspective is to organize someone.*
- *If you're a Mercy Extender, your perspective is to show sympathy to someone.*

• **What we learn from these gifts**

We learn that all believers are gifted. (Romans 12:3, 1 Peter 4:10-11). Therefore, don't underestimate your significant contribution to other people. In the church, we don't have "gifted" people and "ungifted" ones! Everyone has a gift.

We learn that no one person has it all, but is only a "part" of the entire ministry of the Church (Romans 12:3, 10, 16). This indicates the necessity of our learning to appreciate our brother's "way" of extending God's love. We must not deem our gift as the most important one! What you have is important, but no more important than that of your brothers.

We learn that each of us should practice all of these qualities at one time or another, yet "specialize" in our obvious gifts. That is, be sure to focus on doing what God has uniquely gifted you to do, rather than struggle doing what you're not gifted for.

Offensive tackles on a football team seldom score touchdowns. It's simply not their assignment to do so. Then again, if they look down and see the ball in their hand, they'd better run for the goal line with all the speed they can muster!

The Church is NOT a "spiritual restaurant" ...

We learn to recognize that there are positive and negative aspects of each gift - strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, it's vital that we work on those weak aspects in our own motivation, allow others to take up the slack due to our lack, and be loving about our brother's weakness.

- The Prophet may have a tendency to be a bit harsh.
- The Teacher may have tendency to bore people with too many facts.
- Paul hints that the Mercy person may tend to lack cheerfulness (see Romans 12:8).

This is one of the reasons we so desperately need one another. *"None of us has it all together, but together we have it all!"*

We learn that none of these gifts need be "public." We may function in anyone of these "drives" and not be public speakers, or never stand in front of a group in order to use our gift. Even the teacher, prophet or exhorter is not dependent on the "public eye," yet may minister on an individual and personal basis. Some people are much better one-on-one. They're just as gifted as any public teacher or preacher.

• **How to discover your gift**

You may be the humble type and say, *"Well, I try not to think about myself too much."* That's probably a good thing, but Paul does say, " ... think of yourself (with sober judgment)... " In other words, God *does* want you to think about yourself only insofar as to help you discover how He's put you together. You really do need to get a handle on your giftedness so you can be more focused on what you were eternally ordained to do for God and for others. *"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."* Ephesians 2:10 Here are some things that might help you get started in figuring out what Motivational Gift you're strongest in.

Explore the possibilities.

No one ever yet discovered their gift sitting in front of a TV! That is, in order to discover your gift you'll have to get involved with people, develop relationships, notice needs and begin serving!

Experiment with as many as possible.

Gifts are need-oriented, they're not just for show. You'll have to take some risks and try some things which may not seem to be 'you' at first. Try lots of things and see if you don't get a better picture of what 'you' really are as a Kingdom person.

Examine your desires.

David wrote, *"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."* God often speaks to us in our desires. One of the ways you might discover your giftedness therefore is to see what you like doing for God.

Evaluate your effectiveness.

Get involved in serving others, look over your shoulder and see what's in your wake. If others were helped in some God-glorifying way and brought closer to Christ, then you were probably operating within your gifting. Someone once said, *"When the gifts are in operation, whatever is supposed to happen will happen!"* Anointing (power from God) usually comes with gifting.

Expect confirmation from others.

Others in the church will usually recognize about you what you may not be so able to recognize about yourself. They will most likely be able to see an ability in you to which you may be blind. Ask your friends and fellow church members what they see about your gifting.

Answer these questions to get an idea of the areas in which you might be gifted. See if you can identify which gift is being referenced in each.

- 1. Do you often find yourself sensing God's heart in a situation and speaking it out directly and frankly?*
- 2. Do you love getting your hands dirty serving others? Do you tend to wash dishes at other people's houses?*
- 3. Are you good at explaining things (especially Biblical truths) to others so that they go away understanding them?*
- 4. Do many of your friends tell you that you have a real encouraging and challenging affect on them?*
- 5. Are you one of those people who give a lot of things to others who seem to need them more than you do - loving every minute of it?*
- 6. Are you the one people always look to when an event (party, banquet, production) need to be organized?*

7. Do you often find yourself seeking out pitiful or hurting people and empathizing with them?

- **The Gifts and the Church**

INSIDE THE CHURCH:

How does your giftedness relate to your church's program? Will you always express your gift primarily in the context of the church's programs (i.e. Sunday School, ushering in the services, organizing church events, counseling church members, singing in the choir...)? Absolutely not. I think we are gifted to do more serving in the street than the sanctuary. More on that later... But you are, or should be, an active member of some gathering of Jesus followers (I'm talking about "church"), and should use your gifts among those with whom you fellowship. The following might help you see the variety of perspectives God provides his Church in their varied gifting.

When the gifts are
in operation, whatever
is supposed to happen
will happen...

Seven Christians met to organize the perfect church (there is no such thing, because if there were, you wouldn't be able to join it without ruining it!). Anyway, each of these seven (the number sound familiar?) have a different Motivational Gift. Here's what each said the new church needed:

The Prophet: *"We need sermons that expose sin, warn of judgment, and proclaim righteousness"*

The Server: *"We need to mobilize a team of people to do yard work and housecleaning for the elderly in the church and community... "*

The Teacher: *"We need systematic Bible teaching, Bible studies, Bible classes before church... "*

The Exhorter: *"We need a good discipleship program to help people grow to their potential... "*

The Administrator: *"We need a smooth organization in our church throughout, with a flow chart depicting clear lines of authority and responsibility..."*

The Giver: *"We need programs to give to the needy and to overseas missions..."*

The Mercy Extender: *"We need counseling for the hurting and lots of prayer times for the sick..."*

Can you see how the church gets its ideas about what to do? It's because of the various gifts in the Body. Each person has an idea of what the priorities ought to be in the church due to their varied perspectives rooted in their giftedness. The local church ought to be representative of all the perspectives as much as possible, not just of the leader's personality. It's not the church of *Pastor So and So*. It's the church which belongs to Jesus, and consists of all of its members.

And because this is true, each member of the church needs to then pull his/her own part of the load by doing one of two things. Either they must find what program in the church fits their gifts and calling from God, or innovate new things in the church not currently being done.

I'd say that 90% of ministry is done through daily life, and has nothing to do with the church's formal program. I'm referring to the multitudes of serving opportunities in the home with family; at work with co-workers; in our places of recreation; in our neighborhoods; and with our friends and extended families. The program of the church (teaching Sunday School, receiving offerings, teaching Bible studies, organizing events, etc.) comprises only about 10% of what most of us do for the Lord. I think of our service in the church as "Practice for the real-world" ministry opportunities.

**Our fellowship is not
an end in itself.
It's outreaching...**

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH:

God didn't give you gifts so you can just "go to church" with them. Sometimes I think about the Church in our day as a candy store that we open up just long enough for the "Members of the Candy Store Club" to get in. Then we spend our time together selling candy to one another, locking up when we're done, and go home with a huge sugar high! We'll eventually "come down" from our high and want to do it all over again next

week. What we've forgotten to do is let the neighbors in, better yet, go out to where they are with our candy and give it to them for free!

Let's take a look at how our Romans 12 gifts might be used outside the walls of our church building and beyond the confines of our church programs.

Motivational Gifts are outreaching in two ways:

1) We are being outreaching with our gifts when we practice them among ourselves in the church in such a way as to produce a compassionate, welcoming, need-meeting community. People outside the Church are then able to look in and see Jesus in us! We're His "Body," and as such, we're supposed to model to the world what He's like. When we understand our individual places in the Body and function there, when they look at us, the world around us is more likely to see Jesus. Pre-Christians are often drawn first to Christians, then to Christ. Our fellowship is not an end in itself. It's outreaching. It results in reaching out to people who still need Him.

2) We are being outreaching with our gifts when we actually practice them among pre-Christians. That is, you need to do what you do best (i.e. function in your gifting), not only when among Christians, but with non-Christians. And do it until they ask you why you do it! Then you might get to tell them about Jesus. *"They'll see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Let me list some ideas about how each of these gifts might function while showing and sharing God's love with pre-Christians:

If you're a Prophet you'll tend to be incensed by social/spiritual injustice among unbelievers. You'll call sin, 'sin,' and witness bluntly and boldly.

If you're a Server you'll tend to see tangible needs of pre-Christians and give your time to help meet them practically. You'll want to help clean a disabled neighbor's house, or work in an AIDS clinic, and show and share Christ through these means.

If you're a Teacher you'll be good at debate and defending the faith on a philosophical level. You'll have a talent to explain the essentials of Christianity to seekers more capably than most.

If you're an Exhorter you'll find potential in people (including pre-Christians), encourage them toward that potential, and thus model the love of the greatest Encourager in history.

If you're a Giver you'll probably be very hospitable with unbelievers and believers alike. You'll be the first to give money to the needy in your community and beyond.

If you're an Administrator you might want to join community service groups, help organize them, and model Christ's love through the opportunities this affords.

If you're a Mercy Extender you'll be moved to listen to, and weep with, pre-Christians who have great needs. You'll show the love of God by means of your emotional support of the hurting.

In Conclusion

I want to say that with this teaching on gifting, I have no intent to label or pigeon-hole you. I'm saying that God has so constructed each of us as to function differently. We each have a certain strong point in the way that we minister to others. It's important to identify that strong point and use it for the glory of God and the good of people. But this doesn't mean that you should categorically reject places and situations of service that lie outside your gifting. This is especially true if you encounter a situation that's either a crisis where no one else is available, or you know that God is pointing you to serve in this particular way on this particular day, even though you haven't the "gift for it." Otherwise, my counsel to you is, once you discover you're primary gifting, that you serve within that particular gifting more often than not.

This paper has been written briefly so that you can read it at least a couple of times, meditate on its contents, and respond to its challenge. There are many other things that could be said about living lives of service to God and people, about the gifts we find in Romans 12, and about the other sets of gifts listed in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. But with this introduction to this one set of gifts, the challenge I give to you is to **discover** your gift, **develop** your use of it, and **do** it for the glory of God and good of people. You'll certainly benefit from studying and understanding the gifts in those other chapters. The *Equipping Gifts* (Ephesians 4) are gifted people who help equip you to find and function in your own gifting. The *Spiritual Gifts* (1 Corinthians 12) are supernatural anointings that enable you to use your *Motivational Gifts* with Holy Spirit power. Study, receive, and take advantage of these gifts as soon as possible. But in the meantime: take some time to figure out what *Motivational Gift* you most likely have, practice developing that gifting, and begin right now!

SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK & WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Based on what you've read here, what do you think is your most prominent Motivational Gift?

Why do you think that?

Ask some of your friends to either confirm or question your hunch.

Ask a mentor, pastor, or other spiritual leader what he/she thinks is your primary gift.

What are you currently doing with that gift (inside and outside the church)?

Read about the *Equipping* and *Spiritual* Gifts in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians so that you can be even more effective in the use of your *Motivational* Gift.

Read the chapter in Foundations 201 on "The Spirit" and His gifts for an introduction into how the Spiritual Gifts work and how you can access them.