

1 Peter 4: 9-11

The Right Time and Place

(Part 4 of a Four-Part Series on Discovering your Spiritual Gifts and How to use them to Serve God and Others)

We have been talking about discovering our spiritual gifts and how to use them for the past month or so. This is the last sermon in this series, but we won't stop talking about them. I have just this week started in-home classes so that I can personalize this information more, and to give you a chance to ask questions and have more time to apply this information to yourself.

This is important, in fact crucial, information. Without knowing our spiritual gifts and how to serve God using them, we are not being good stewards of all that God has given us. Without using our spiritual gifts we are not functioning well as the Body of Christ.

To be all that God calls us to be, we need to know this. We need to discover what our spiritual gifts are and we need to serve God by using them.

Otherwise we are wasting the best gifts we have ever gotten. We have piled them up in the closet, unopened.

What is the point of that? When opening them means we can live life more abundantly, more joyously, with purpose and meaning?

What is the point of having something and never using it? When using it means we can make a difference in the world?

I believe that the failure of Christians to know their spiritual gifts and how to use them is the reason that the Church has less influence, less respect, and less power in the world than God intends for her to have.

I believe that if all of us start using our gifts in the ways that God calls us to do that we will fulfill our mission to make disciples for the transformation of the world!

And the world is in desperate need of transformation, isn't it?

Scripture tells us that every one of us has received spiritual gifts from God through the Holy Spirit, and that we are all called to use them "for the common good," that the Body of Christ needs all of us working together ---

that we all need to use our spiritual gifts for the Body of Christ to be effective----to do and be everything we are called to do and to be.

There are at least three ways to look at being the Body of Christ.

One is as the Body of Christ in this place---based at 6869 Tait St. San Diego. Unless all of us together are using our spiritual gifts, we won't be as strong, as useful as we are called to be as the Body of Christ here in this place.

Without all of us serving the way we are called to serve, we can only do a few things. But if we are all working together as the Body, we can do so much more to make a difference in the world.

A second way to look at it is the way that our annual conference has recently organized us---as clusters of churches that are called "Mission Areas." We are one of 7 or 8 churches in this general area---from Point Loma to La Jolla to Clairemont Mesa to Mission Hills--- who are looking for ways to work together to serve this area.

The way that this might take shape is that one church might focus on feeding the hungry. Another might emphasize theater arts and music as a way to reach out to the community. A third church might be the place where missions are organized and planned, etc. etc. This kind of teamwork will make us more effective as the Body of Christ in the west end of San Diego.

A third way to look at the Body of Christ is that it is the Church Universal---that all of the Christians in the world together are the Body of Christ and we all need each other. So the spiritual gifts are spread around the world and every Christian everywhere needs to serve in order for the Body of Christ to be fully present all over the world.

So every single one of us using our spiritual gifts adds to the worldwide Body of Christ, and by doing this, we can play our own part in fulfilling the Great Commission----to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, to all people everywhere!

Individually, I don't think that anyone is capable of spreading the love of God all over the world. Even as a congregation we have limited resources and cannot go everywhere as missionaries or send help everywhere.

So how else can we answer Christ's commandment to go into all the world with the power of the gospel other than to become a fully functioning part of the Body of Christ, using our spiritual gifts together with every other Christian on earth?

This is why we should discover our spiritual gifts, and we have talked about the definitions of some of those gifts, and we have talked about

reflecting on our life experiences and listening to those who know us as ways of beginning to identify our gifts.

Looking at what we have done in life that has brought us a great deal of fulfillment, and listening when others tell us that there is something extraordinary about certain things we do and are----these are major roadsigns on our journey of discovery to finding our spiritual gifts.

There are also questionnaires called Spiritual Gifts Inventories that will name our spiritual gifts based on things we have done in life, things that are important to us, and times and ways we feel closest to God.

As part of the in-home classes I will have people fill out these spiritual gifts inventories. I think it's important to be able to talk about the results and have a chance to ask questions, so I don't want to just hand them out and then you won't have any direction about what they mean to you.

If you cannot attend an in-home class, let me know and we will make arrangements to talk about it some other way.

What I want to talk about this morning is the final, important piece of all this----once you know what your spiritual gifts are, how do you find the appropriate way---or ways---to serve God and serve others with those gifts so that it's for the glory of God and to the most benefit for the Body of Christ?

It is really important to take into consideration your personality and your passions!

One difference in personality that most of us are more or less familiar with is whether you are an extrovert or an introvert. This is related to but not exactly the same as being either outgoing or shy. It's a matter of where you find energy.

I have a friend named Deb. Deb is an extrovert. I am an introvert. We met while we were hospital chaplains together. After our shift at the hospital, we would drive home together, both exhausted. And she would be planning to go to a party in the evening, while I would be thinking about doing nothing but going to bed and sleeping for about 9 or ten hours!

Extroverts get their energy from being with people. Introverts get their energy from being alone.

There are many other personality traits that can provide clues to the ways you will be most effective in using your spiritual gifts.

Whether you work best to a deadline or open-ended. Whether you rely more on facts and data or on intuition. Whether you are a team player or prefer to work on your own. If you like to make decisions quickly or if you like to gather as much information as possible first.

God made each one of us just the way we are and it doesn't really show good stewardship of our personality traits and characteristics to try to serve God in ways that want to force us into a different mold. That's not the fulfilling, abundant life that Christ came to bring us!

We need to find a good fit for us, a way to serve that will bring us joy and satisfaction, a place where we can be effective and want to serve for a long time.

In addition to our personality traits, we each have our own passions and dreams of ways that we would like the world to be different. We have our own concerns that have been shaped by our individual life experiences.

We each have our own focus, and this is the way we should serve God with our gifts, because that focus is where our motivation, our determination, and our persistence come from.

If we try to use our spiritual gifts in some other way, serving someone else's passion, we will burn out quickly. The fulfillment and the joy won't be there, and we will end up feeling discouraged and disillusioned.

What kind of personality do you have? Do you love being in a noisy, busy group or do you prefer a quieter atmosphere? Do you work slowly and step-by-step, or do you do everything quickly? Do you like to be outdoors or in? Do you work best with deadlines and structure or more at your own pace?

Think about it this way---- If you could have any job in the world, what would it look like? And then when you are considering how to use your spiritual gifts, try to fit your "dream job" into that. Because using your spiritual gifts should not be a chore. It should be all joy!

Add to that dream job set-up what it is you are passionate about! What is most important to you? Education? health? everyone having

enough to eat? Is there a group of people you are drawn to---little children, senior citizens, people without homes, young mothers?

Is there a cause that you would dedicate yourself to? Is working for social justice important to you? Or environmental issues? Or sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others?

I am just listing a few of the possible passions you might have! For every passion added to every personality, there is a way to serve God using your spiritual gifts!

Finding that way, that place where you belong, is the key to using the spiritual gifts that God has given you.

Remember how the apostle Paul described using our spiritual gifts as being the different parts of the body? If we are an ear, we shouldn't try to be an arm. It just won't work. That's why it's important to find the place where we fit, the place where our passions and our personalities meet up and provide the perfect way to use our gifts!

All this is more complicated than saying ----“my spiritual gift is such and such, so I need to be on a certain committee.”

For one thing, all of this **can** be connected to serving on a committee, but even if committee work is for you, there is more to it than that.

What I am talking about is more pervasive in your life---a bigger part than just a couple of hours every other month. I'm talking about something that could change your life! It could change what you do for a living, or what you do with your free time, or how you spend your weekends!

I'm talking about a way to live for God and in God and with God----to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength---to worship God with your time, talents, gifts and service!

Please ---join an in-home study if you possibly can. If you can't, let's talk and I will try to help you find a way to serve God using your spiritual gifts.

When we are all using our spiritual gifts together, we will be disciples of Jesus Christ who are undertaking the task of transforming the world!