

What are Your Spiritual Gifts?

As our church discussed the need to get others involved in congregational development, we became concerned about asking people to volunteer for various activities without first identifying their gifts or desires for those particular ministries. We are realizing that we are not yet very effective in identifying, developing, using and supporting spiritual gifts and calling people into mutual ministry.

A recent survey found that eighty percent of Christians do not know what their spiritual gifts are. This is a catastrophe for church development because we all depend on the gifts of others to complement our own gifts and to build up the body of Christ (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). As the human body has a variety of members, so the body of Christ has a variety of Christians, each with his or her own special function. When each of us discovers and exercises our gifts, the church body thrives. St. Paul says we grow up in every way into Christ, joined together so that each of us promotes the growth of the body in love.

Identifying gifts and implementing a fully shared ministry in a congregation takes time and focus. Some congregations are beginning gifts discovery courses. A gifts discovery course explores the direction, purpose and meaning of one's life, identifying individual gifts and focusing primarily on ministry in daily life and secondarily on ministry within the congregation. Several courses are available, including the *Network* series from Willow Creek and *Created and Called: Discovering Our Gifts for Abundant Living* by Jean M. Trumbauer. The challenge beyond these courses is responding to individuals' gifts discoveries with opportunities, training, coaching and leadership.

The body of Christ is incomplete unless each of us is involved. We each also have a personal need to understand how God has uniquely made us and who God is calling us to be. Because God has made me, God knows me better than I know myself; I am most authentic when I use the gifts God gives me to become the person God calls me to be. To find my true identity, it is helpful to pray and to regularly ask several questions.

What brings me joy? What are the desires of my heart? What am I passionate about? What motivates, energizes, animates me? What do I long for? Jesus said, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). We respond to God by becoming joyful in our own unique ways; the desires of our hearts are not something to be denied or deferred to another. Another way to ask this, is would I grieve if I didn't do this?

What are the talents and abilities that God has given me? What can I do well and in a way that pleases God? What are talents, competencies and capacities might I make available to God and nurture by education and practice?

What is my unique situation and what are the opportunities that I have? Where am I in the world? Where can I go from here? What are my background and experiences? What are

the limitations, responsibilities and possibilities I have? God will grant me a sense of who I am in response to the particularities of my time and place.

What is my personality? What is my way of acting and responding to others, to my world and to myself? The Myers Briggs Temperament Inventory is one way to consider and accept my unique temperament, perspectives and contributions in my relationships with others.

What are my spiritual gifts? God gives us spiritual gifts to support our ministries. Gordon T. Smith suggests that we can identify our gifts by understanding how we feel the need to respond to the brokenness of the world. Perhaps I feel that what the world needs most is prayer or hope or teaching or prophecy or faith or giving or encouragement or leadership or service. Of course, the world needs all of these gifts but I have been given a particular gift to add. Some writers identify as many as 38 different spiritual gifts and God may give others. Prayer, experimentation, survey tools, opinions of others and a gifts discernment course can help in discovering your spiritual gifts.

Healthy churches adopt discernment processes to help people identify their gifts and passions, and then provide affirmation, training, coaching and resources for people to live into their ministries.

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