

One of my favorite authors is Wallace Stegner. For years he was a Professor at Stanford and a resident of my home town, Stegner writes about the relationship between people and the places they live. I enjoy his writing because most of his stories take place right here in Northern California. One of his books I like just for its title - *The Spectator Bird*. It's about a man who lives his life as more of a spectator than a participant until he comes to grips with his fundamental identity through a trip to his homeland.

This is the same kind of experience many have with the church. Many remain "spectator birds" because they're not really in touch with their fundamental identity as members of the body of Christ. The Scripture is clear the ministry of the church belongs not to a few paid professionals we call ministers or clergy but rather to all the people of God.

This is how I believe God is using the COVID-19 crisis here at CPC and in other churches. I mean, here we are, talking about how we're all equipped for ministry inside and outside the walls of the church, and then this thing happens that forces us to do ministry in our homes and neighborhoods all over the Peninsula! We know the early church met in homes. We know the persecuted church in China has met in house churches for decades, and they've born amazing fruit. So what if God is using this virus to shake things up in the complacent American church? What if God is using this to move more people from being a spectator to a servant? What if God is moving ministry and ministers out of big-box churches and into neighborhoods and family rooms? What if God is calling you to do ministry you never thought possible? Andy Crouch wrote this week, "This crisis presents an extraordinary opportunity to fortify small communities of love and care for our neighbors. That will only happen if we lead in a way that reduces fear, increases faith, and reorients all of us from self-protection to serving others."

Let me give you one example of how a CPC'er, Colleen Nguyen, is taking action. A college friend of hers is an ER physician at a local County Hospital. She's not a believer yet, but Colleen has already invited her daughter to our Summer XP, and she's coming! But she texted Colleen about the stress and morale of her team as they scramble to respond to the pandemic. So, this prompted Colleen to ask if there's anything we as a church could do to help. She responded by telling Colleen supplying meals would encourage and uplift the spirits of the staff and nourish them to

keep doing what they're doing as many of them have to work beyond their normal shifts. So Colleen worked with Jen Marshall, our Outreach Director, and started a meal train for those workers at the hospital. (mealtrain.com) What an awesome response!

You see, this crisis is presenting us with new opportunities for ministry. But here's the problem: Sometimes we don't feel adequate to do ministry. Maybe you don't feel equipped. You're willing. You're available. But you're not sure you have what it takes. Well, in one sense, you're right — you don't have what it takes. No one does. We're all inadequate. We're all fragile and broken. But once you know that, you also need to know God loves to work in and through those who are broken and utterly dependent on him. And God has promised to equip us to do the ministry he's called us to do.

Our text today is Romans 12:3-8. This is a passage that addresses how God equips us to do his work.

Know and Use Your Gifts

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. Romans 12:3

Notice this appeal has the weight of apostolic authority behind it. That's why he says, "For by the grace given to me..." He's talking about his gift and calling as an apostle. With that authority, Paul tells us how to think about ourselves.

First, don't think too highly of yourself. Lots of people have an overestimation of themselves and what they can contribute. We think too highly of ourselves when we think we can do everything, or when we think what we do is more important than what others do. If I said my place in the body of Christ is more important than yours, I'd be thinking too highly of myself.

On the other hand, we can think too little of ourselves. Instead, he says we should think of ourselves with sober judgment. Many think real Christians should never think of themselves; they should just think about others. But we're told here to think about ourselves but to do so soberly and realistically. He says, think of yourself "in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." Literally, this should read, "in accordance with the measure of faith God has measured to you." He's talking about the particular measure of faith he's given to each of us to carry out our various callings in the church. We're each given a unique

capacity to serve, and we should function within that capacity. Sometimes I'll hear an athlete say, "I just need to play within myself." What does that mean? I think it means what Paul means: don't do more or less than you're capable of.

This leads Paul into a discussion of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to every believer to use for building up the body of Christ. Look what he says.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. vv. 4-6a

We're part of the body of Christ. Just like our body is one but has many different parts that function differently, the body of Christ has many members with different functions. Every part is needed, but we're all still one. There's both unity and diversity within the body of Christ.

Watch a soccer match sometime. Watch as the center forward slips between two defenders, leaps high in the air, traps the ball on his chest, drops it on his left foot, flips it on to his right, glances at the goal, and with tremendous power from his hips and legs shoots into the far left corner of the net out of the goalie's reach. How many members of his body were utilized in scoring that goal? His chest, feet, eyes, hips, legs, and countless muscles allow him to rifle the ball at over 100 mph into the goal. We marvel at the wonder of the human body, each part working together in perfect coordination, and that's how the body of Christ functions.

There are a few things you should know about how spiritual gifts work within the body of Christ:

First, every member of the body has at least one spiritual gift. Everyone has a part to play. The church was never meant to be run by paid professionals. For over 50 years, that's been a core value of CPC. We're all called to ministry; we're all gifted.

Second, God is the One who distributes these gifts. In other passages, we're specifically told it's God the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts as he wills. So we don't choose our gifts any more than we get to choose our brothers and sisters; they're given to us by God when we become a part of his body through faith in Christ.

Third, the purpose of the gifts is to build up the body of Christ. It's not just so we can draw attention to ourselves or feel good about ourselves, although I believe we will feel a lot of satisfaction in using our gifts. The focus or the attention should never be on us, but on God and how we can glorify him through building up his people.

Paul lists seven spiritual gifts

If your gift is prophesying, then prophecy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. vv. 6b-8

Seven different gifts are mentioned here: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouragement, giving, leading, and showing mercy. This particular list isn't exhaustive. As we saw last week, Ephesian 4 adds the gifts of apostle, prophet, pastor-teacher, and evangelism. 1 Corinthians 12 adds gifts of administration, knowledge, wisdom, discernment, faith, helps, healing, miracles, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

Finally, in 1 Peter 4:10-11, Peter just divides all the gifts into two categories. He says,

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

So there are speaking gifts and serving gifts.

All of us should have a basic understanding of what the gifts are and how each of them functions. The gist of what Paul says here is, whatever gift you have, put it to use. That's why he says, "If it's serving, then serve; if it's teaching, then teach; if it's to give encouragement, then give encouragement." We read that and go, "Well, duh!" But if you're not somehow serving in the body of Christ, you need to hear this. Put your gifts to use!

Paul also says, whatever gift you have, use it wholeheartedly. He says, "*If your gift is prophecy, then prophecy in accordance with your faith... If it is giving, give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*" We can allow our flesh to get in the way when it comes to our gifts. We can prophesy, but not in a way consistent with the faith. We can give but hold something back. We can lead but get tired and sloppy. We can show mercy, but let the problems of others drag us down. The gifts of the Spirit without the fruit of the Spirit are dangerous.

One of the assumptions Paul makes is that we're aware of what our gifts are. Why else would he say, "If your gift is this or that, use it well." You might be wondering how you can know what your gifts are. For all of us, it's a process; sometimes a long process, but you can start by thinking through four things:

First, what do I love to do? If God has given you a gift, you'll be passionate about doing it. It'll be your sweet spot. It won't feel like serving; it'll feel like doing what you're made to do. It's like Eric Liddell said in *Chariots of Fire*, "I know that God has made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure."

Second, what am I passionate about? Someone put it this way, "What makes you pound your fist on the table?" When you look at the church or the world, what do you feel compelled to do? That's probably a good clue as to what your gifts and calling are.

Third, what am I good at? You may have to develop the use of your gift, but somewhere along the line, you discover you're good at it. Not only do you enjoy it, but others are blessed by you doing that.

Fourth, what do others say? God gives us gifts, not for ourselves but to build up the body. So ask others, what do I do that builds others up? What do you think my gifts might be? Spiritual gifts are always discovered in community.

Finally, have I prayed about this? Ask God to make it clear to you. And don't get discouraged if you don't know what your gifts are right away. Again, it's a process.

In many ways, you discover your gifts in the same way you discovered your natural talents. If you're a musician, how did you discover your talent? You athletes, how did you discover your athleticism? You techies, how did you discover your techie-ness? Usually, it started by just being attracted to what someone else was doing. You're drawn to it; it interests you; you like what you see. You want to try it. And then as you begin, you may stumble at first, but you find you're good at it. Then others see that. They affirm you, and maybe you find a way to sharpen that talent. Then opportunities come, and you're in circulation.

It's the same way with spiritual gifts. I remember, as a young man, I was in awe of good teaching and preaching. Then I had a chance to teach a Bible study, and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. At that point, I thought I might have had the gift of teaching, but I don't think anyone around me had the gift of listening! But the more I taught, the more it was apparent this was my gift. So I worked to develop the gift, and God opened doors for me to use it. That's how you discover your gifts. Don't wait until you know your gifts, but jump into a ministry and try different things, and God will make it clear to you.

This brings up something I think is important to mention: just because you don't have a particular spiritual gift doesn't mean you shouldn't serve at times in that capacity. For example, you can't say, "Well, I don't have the gift of giving, so I don't have to give." Well, we're all called to give, but those with the gift of giving are especially good at it. Or, "I don't have the gift of helps or service, so I'm not gonna help set the chairs up for that meeting." We're all called to serve. Or, "I don't have the gift of evangelism, so I'll never share my faith." But we're all called to be witnesses. It's true that those things might not be our primary ministry, but we're still called to be available to God and respond to opportunities that come our way.

One helpful tool we have on our website at cpc.org/serve is an assessment called S.H.A.P.E. What I like about this is it looks at

your entire profile, not just your spiritual gifts. S.H.A.P.E. stands for:

S - stands for Spiritual Gifts; supernatural endowments given to you by Holy Spirit when he enters your life.

H - stands for Heart. In other words, what are you passionate about?

A - stands for Abilities. What are your natural talents? What are your skills? Those are given by God just as your spiritual gifts are.

P - stands for Personality. This is also helpful to know. Am I an extravert or introvert?

E - stands for Experience or maturity. As a new believer, you have the gift of teaching, but you may not have the experience or maturity quite yet to lead a community group.

The S.H.A.P.E. assessment is easy to take and will help you identify not just some of your possible gifts but also where you might best use those gifts in the body based on all the other factors as well. I'd encourage you to take it and talk about your assessment with a friend, one of our pastors or directors, or your community group leader.

I've thinking about all of this as it relates to the COVID-19 crisis we're in now. The different ways people respond to a crisis like this in the body of Christ illustrates how God uses all of us differently to accomplish his purposes.

Say one person responds to this crisis and says, "We need to have a Bible study to see what God's Word says about a crisis like this." What gift does that person have? That person most likely has the gift of teaching. Somebody else says, "What we need are generous programs of financial assistance to people out of jobs." What gift would that be? That's the gift of giving. Somebody else says, "This is clearly God exposing our sin and warning of judgment to come. We all need to repent!" What gift is that? That is most likely the gift of prophecy. Somebody else says, "What we need in our church is practical assistance to people in the church and the community who have needs." What gift is that? That is the gift of serving.

Somebody else says, "We need to come alongside people and encourage them to wash their hands and get tested." What would that gift be? That would be the gift of exhortation or encouragement. Somebody else says, "What our church really needs is to be a smooth-running organization so that every aspect of the church will be carried out effectively." What gift is that? That is the gift of leadership or administration. Somebody else says, "What we need is a special outreach and concern for the feelings of individuals and the readiness to meet their emotional needs." What gift is that? That is the gift of mercy.

So you can see how God has put together the body of Christ in such a way that we need each other to accomplish all Jesus wants us to do in this situation.

Let me just put it very simply. You've been given a gift. God, the Holy Spirit, is the One who gave this to you. Inside this gift box is something the body of Christ, the church, desperately needs you to put into use. Open the gift and use what's inside. This church, and the people we're trying to reach, need you to do that. I don't say this to lay a guilt trip on you. I'm concerned about much more than just filling slots here at CPC. I'm concerned more about your growth and your maturity and even your joy as a follower of Jesus. There's an adventure waiting for you, and it starts with you discovering your gifts and how God wants to use you to bless others.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2020 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1444-3FC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, March 15, 2020 at Central Peninsula Church.

www.cpc.org