

GIFTS AND CALL AS THE BASIS OF MINISTRY

Understand God's Call

Christians go into the world to make disciples and to minister to people because God graciously calls us to do so, not because we are better than other people. In a letter to a divided congregation, Paul wrote: "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God." (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). We are sent out into the world because we are from the world, to give witness to God's transforming love and grace to people just like us.



In the beginning God's people were called out of slavery to be a free nation so they could be witnesses to God's power and love. Over and over in their history, Israel was unfaithful to God and suffered spiritual and national decline; and each time God rescued them, they were called anew to be God's witnesses in the world. Likewise, those who follow Jesus are forgiven, reconciled, and given new life, then called to go and give witness to God's gracious salvation.

This is our call – to make disciples, to be witnesses, to help the poor, to serve others, and to love the world as God has loved it. Our call is to proclaim the good news, by word and action, that God has reconciled the world and made all things new through Jesus Christ. Our call is to be in the world as servants, continuing to make God known throughout the world.

Know our Gifts

To that same divided congregation, Paul also wrote: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). We use the term *spiritual gifts* to refer to various ways the Spirit of God works through us to fulfill God's call in our lives.

F O C U S
How can you help members of your church discover their gifts for ministry?

Whatever our ministry or gifts, they have come through the grace of God. Humble service is our appropriate response. Whether our ministry is preaching, teaching, singing, helping others, maintaining the church building, tutoring, serving meals, or anything else, we serve by God's gracious choice and because of God's gracious call. No gift or ministry is more or less important or more special than any other gift or ministry. Paul went on in that letter to describe the church as members of a single body, and he said the whole body is important. We would not be as healthy or whole without both eyes and both ears. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" So every member of the church, every person whom God has called, is important to the work and ministry of the whole body, the congregation.

The Bible includes three lists of gifts—in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4. No list is meant to be all-inclusive, many other gifts are suggested in other places in Scripture, and no definitions are given anywhere. Many resources include gift inventories that help people discover what their gifts are and offer suggestions for using those gifts in different kinds of ministry.

What are these gifts? Spiritual gifts are defined and grouped in a variety of ways. The following model (on the top the next page) comes from *The 3 Colors of Ministry* by Christian Schwarz, founder of Natural Church Development (Chicago, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2001).

Artistic creativity	Apostle	Deliverance
Giving	Evangelism	Faith
Hospitality	Helps Leadership	Healing
Knowledge	Missionary	Interpretation
Mercy	Service	Miracles
Music	Shepherding	Prayer
Organization	Singleness	Prophecy
Voluntary poverty	Teaching	Suffering
Wisdom		Tongues

One common obstacle to effective ministry in our churches is that people either do not know what their gifts are or are simply not serving according to their gifts. When we place people in positions of responsibility and service for which they are not gifted and for which they have no sense of calling, they will not be effective. They may be dedicated and conscientious. They may work very hard to do what they have been asked to do. But there will be no joy in it. Their work will not be as successful as they want it to be. God has given various gifts for the common good, and we will accomplish far more in our work together if we know our gifts and serve where God has called us.

Engage in Ministry

As we understand our calling and our gifts, we will be more fully prepared to engage in ministry. The word “ministry” is synonymous with “service” in the New Testament, therefore, to serve is to minister. Some people say, “Oh, I’m not a minister,” but all are ministers – all are called to serve one another in the church and to serve the world together. Jesus was clear that there is no place in the church for those who want a place of honor above others. For instance, when James and John wanted Jesus to promise them a place in the kingdom on either side of him, he said, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (*Mark 10:35-45*).

Pastors and deacons are no more important to the ministry of the congregation than are the ushers and greeters, or the custodian or nursery attendant. There is no greater honor in a public role during Sunday worship services than in the “behind-the-scenes” role during the week to keep the furnace in good repair. If we seek a place of honor at all, according to Jesus’ words, we should seek a place of ministry where others will benefit from our efforts, but will not see us nor know that we are responsible. Humble



service, whether in a public or private role, is the key to greatness in the kingdom.

One congregation decided to be servants in their community. The members went out individually or in small groups to clean public restrooms, wash car windows, carry groceries or to do any small, often unpleasant, task they could find in the community. They accepted no payment for their services. If asked why they were doing these things, they offered a low-key response of witness to God’s love. These public acts of service were done with great humility and love.

We share a common calling to go into the world as witnesses to God’s love. Our individual spiritual gifts help us identify our specific call to service in the church and the community. Then we engage in ministry in the church and out in the world with humility and love for God and people. Through these efforts, the disciple-making congregation experiences transformation within itself and transforms the world around it.

LOS DONES Y EL LLAMADO COMO LA BASE PARA EL MINISTERIO

Encontrar el lugar de servicio para cada discípulo(a) es lo que motiva el trabajo en el discipulado. En este lugar, un discípulo(a) fielmente y gozosamente suple la necesidad que el mundo tiene del amor de Jesús. Esto nos lleva a descubrir los dones que Dios nos ha dado y discernir las maneras en que podemos poner en práctica los dones, respondiendo al llamado de Dios al ministerio en el nombre de Cristo.



Lastimosamente, en muchas iglesias la enseñanza del Nuevo Testamento sobre los dones no se ha movido todavía de las páginas de la Biblia para formar la vida de la comunidad. Pensamos que debemos llenar posiciones en los comités, en vez de celebrar y poner en práctica los dones. Muchas veces, aun cuando consideramos los dones, la pregunta principal es cómo los usamos en los diferentes roles en la iglesia, en vez de ministrar en el mundo. Confundimos las profesiones con los dones y ponemos a contadores como tesoreros(as) y a carpinteros como síndicos, en vez de ayudarles a que discernan cuales son sus dones y llamado.

ENFOCAR
¿Cómo puede usted ayudar a los miembros de su iglesia para que descubran sus dones por el ministerio?

Dos perspectivas acerca de los dones son básicas en nuestra práctica. Primero, todo(a) creyente ha sido dotado por Dios con un don para el ministerio. Segundo, Dios provee a la comunidad de fe de todos los dones que necesita. Dios provee los dones necesarios para el ministerio.

La comunidad discierne los dones, porque es necesario que otras personas los vean, los identifiquen y los reclamen. Los dones se pueden percibir como una parte de lo que somos y es por eso que no los reconocemos como algo especial. En la comunidad de fe, en donde somos conocidos y donde podemos confiar otros(as) lo suficiente como para escuchar atentamente, podemos encontrar nuestros dones. Esta misma aceptación y afirmación provee un lugar seguro para ponerlos en práctica.

El llamado de Dios es a la verdad individual pero, en muchos de los casos, es la comunidad de fe la que lo hace real. La comunidad actúa como la voz de Dios, dando el llamado. El llamado es probado en la comunidad de fe para evidenciar su autenticidad. La comunidad puede proveer el apoyo necesario para vivir el llamado. Dios, muchas veces, nos llama a lugares difíciles o situaciones arriesgadas. Sin el apoyo de la comunidad de fe, realizar el llamado es imposible.

Al ayudar a sus miembros a discernir los dones y responder al llamado de Dios al ministerio, la congregación se convierte en una comunidad discipuladora.

