

Message: Follow Your Heart to God!

Have you every watched children open gifts on Christmas morning? It’s fun! When I was growing up, the five of us would get up as soon as the sun rose. We knew we weren’t allowed to go into the living room where the tree was until Mom & Dad got up. But that didn’t stop us from being in the hallway, whispering and trying to peek into the room.

When Mom & Dad came out, they’d tell us to wait and then call us into the room. Wow! It was amazing! After a quick breakfast, we’d gather around the tree. We could see mysteriously wrapped packages, all sorts of different shapes and sizes, with our names on them.

Mom and Dad would sit back and enjoy the moment. Our excitement as we discovered what was in store for us was at an all time high. Their greatest satisfaction was when we asked them to show us how to use our gifts.

Now picture that same wonderful scene, only with spiritual gifts. When God planned the masterpiece God would make of your life, God decided to give you certain gifts. These gifts came in different shapes and sizes. They all had your name on them. And God is greatly satisfied when we ask God to show us how to use our gifts.

God’s gifts are different than the gifts parents and loved ones give. God gives each of us certain gifts that help us to share God’s love with others and make our own, unique contribution to God’s kingdom. I hope you are just as excited to discover what God has given you, looking for the gifts with your name on them.

Leslie Flynn says this in his book “19 Gifts of the Spirit”:

“You are a gift, child of God. Since you are also given an outlet for your gift, you are a minister too. For every gift given, the Holy Spirit has planned a sphere of service. So no child should have an inferiority complex.”¹ Know that you are a gifted child of God with an area of ministry. You are wanted, needed and are worthy.

¹ Erik Rees, S.H.A.P.E., Zondervan, 2006,p. 32

Too often, people are loaded down by frustration because they’re trying to serve in areas where they have little or no ability. On the other hand, the most fulfilled and effective people are those who are serving in areas that precisely match the gifts God has given them.

It’s important to look at what you do through a spiritual lens.

For example, I’ve heard some people say, “We’re just parents. We don’t have a lot of time to make a contribution with our lives right now.” Yet, if you examine your gifts, you may be thrilled to realize how God has shaped you to help your children become everything God planned for them to be.

Paul tells us not to be ignorant about our spiritual gifts (1

Corinthians 12:1). Paul isn’t saying we’re unintelligent or naïve. He is saying that if we’re uninformed, we’re missing out on a lot of wonderful things God has planned for us. God wants us to be fully informed so we can unwrap every single gift we’ve received. Our spiritual gifts are key to finding our unique purpose and the fulfillment and satisfaction that will come from honoring God as we use them.

Let’s talk for a minute about what spiritual gifts are not. First of all, your spiritual gifts aren’t your personality traits. Your personality is a good vehicle for using your gifts, but we’ll talk about that in a couple of weeks. Second, your spiritual gifts aren’t the same as natural talents. You can be great in sales, as a manager, lawyer or mechanic, but those are not spiritual gifts. Third, your spiritual gifts aren’t the same as the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit reveal Christ’s contribution to our character, while our spiritual gifts reveal the contribution we make to God’s kingdom.

What are our spiritual gifts? For our purposes, let’s define them as “a special ability given to every believer by God to share and strengthen the body of Christ.”² Everyone who believes Jesus is our Savior receives gifts from the Holy Spirit. We’re given gifts so we can do good things together. Our gifts are given to us to use for others, not as a reward.

² *Ibid*, p. 34

Over the next three weeks, we’re on a journey to discover our spiritual gifts and put them to use. Our journey is one of discovery with guideposts to help us. They form an acronym, S.H.A.P.E., which stands for Spiritual Gifts, Hear, Abilities, Personality and Experience. Last week, we provided a spiritual gifts assessment. I invited you to take it home, take it and share it with everyone in your family.

What did you learn about your spiritual gifts? Just for fun, let’s do an experiment. When you have a gift, raise your hand and then keep it up. Who has the gift of administration, apostleship, craftsmanship, communication, discernment, encouragement, evangelism, faith, giving, helping, hospitality, intercession, knowledge, leadership, mercy, prophecy, shepherding others, teaching or wisdom? Look! We all have gift and lots of different kinds of gifts. God gave us all we need.

Knowing our gifts is the first step. We’ll spend more time learning about them in the months to come. Erik Rees book “S.H.A.P.E.” is a great resource. There are some traps I need to warn you about when it comes to spiritual gifts. These traps take the form of comparison, projection, rejection and deception. God’s works are masterpieces. You are one of them. So, no matter whether your gift is public and visible or not has no bearing on it’s beauty and worth. Don’t compare yourself to other. Also, when we expect others to be good at the same things we are, that’s when we’re projecting our gifts on others. Each of us has the freedom to discover and serve in our unique way. You are all ministers, regardless of your title or role. Don’t reject your gifts because you don’t feel like you’re in the right place or role to use them. Don’t wait to fully understand them. Begin using them now. Finally, be wary of Satan’s desire to deceive us. We may be misled into believing we have a gift that we don’t actually have. It doesn’t happen often, but it can happen.

You have discovered you have amazing spiritual gifts. What do you do next? The first and best place to look for an answer is in our heart. God gives us supernatural gifts through the Holy Spirit. These gifts form and shape our heart. Our heart is our passion, inspiration and energy in life. It’s where you are centered. Heart refers to empathy,

attraction or the way you are drawn toward a group of people, a field of expertise or a particular type of service. That leads us to a question.

What do I have passion for and love to do?

“Passion is the fuel of life. It’s the great source of energy and drive. It’s what makes us explore new places, develop new relationships and seek new solutions to perplexing problems.”³ The apostle Paul taught everyone to follow their heart saying, *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for humans, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is Christ you are serving”* (Colossians 3:23-24).

Listening to our heart helps us learn where we might best use our gifts, where we wish to serve, and whom we wish to serve. Another way of saying it is “to let our heart beat for God.” When we do, we find five, passion principles that can inspire us to dream big dreams and see beyond our fears. These principles are:

- **Know what drives you.** What do you really want to do for God? Instead of asking how God can help you, ask how you can help God.
- **Know who you care about.** Who do you feel you can most profoundly influence for God?
- **Know the needs you will meet.** What spiritual, physical, relational, emotional, educational and vocational needs can you meet?
- **Know the cause you will help to conquer.** What issues make your heart race? If time wasn’t an issue, what cause would you serve?
- **Know your ultimate dream for God’s kingdom.** What God-centered dreams have been buried by life? What would release your passion for God in life?

Connecting with your God-given passions transforms everyday life. Passion makes work seem like play. Our gifts combined with our passions are like spiritual rocket fuel and a spark. They send us to new heights. Want to listen and know your heart? We’ve included some questions to get you started this week. **Follow your heart to God!**

³ *Ibid*, p. 53

Let us pray...

“Dear God, you call us give ourselves to you and to others. Help us to overcome our fears and embrace our dreams so we live passionate lives filled with joy and confidence. Today as we listen to our heart, help us to be honest and open. Give us a heart for people and call us to a cause which allows us to do amazing things with your spiritual gifts. Remind us that all things are possible with Christ. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.”

Colossians 3:12-17 (CEB)

Therefore, as God’s choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.