

Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015
WEEK 8: DO NOT NEGLECT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Interpretive comments on 1 Tim. 4:14 & 2 Tim. 1:6

Twice, Paul exhorts Timothy to use the spiritual gift that God gave him. He should “not neglect” this gift, but rather “rekindle it.”

These passages emphasize that leaders should know and use their own spiritual gifts. Other New Testament passages teach that leaders should mobilize the spiritual gifts of their flock.

Spiritual gifts are an important aspect of God’s grace.

The Greek word for “grace” (*charis*) is often used to refer to spiritual gifts (*charisma* - cf. 1 Cor. 12:4,31; 1 Pet. 4:10). Spiritual gifts are not synonymous with the fullness of God’s grace; they are one important aspect of it. See this explicit emphasis in Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12:6; 1 Pet. 4:10. What amazing grace it is that God would not only save us from judgment, but also give us the privilege of playing unique roles in His church—and then also give us special abilities to play those roles!

Spiritual gifts mediate God’s grace to us in other ways. Positively, we experience confidence in God and joy in the Lord as we serve with our gifts. Negatively, we are freed from feeling guilty or inadequate about many ministry areas in which we are not gifted. This enables us to rejoice in our own and others’ roles in Christ’s church instead of comparing and competing with other members (1 Cor. 12:14-18; see also 2 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 5:26).

We should appreciate all of the grace-gifts that God gives all of His adopted children. We need all of God’s grace we can get—both individually and corporately—in order to be fruitful for the Lord!

Spiritual gifts are an important resource for the healthy growth of the church.

The New Testament authors explicitly teach that a crucial aspect of healthy church growth is every-member ministry—which includes Christians developing ministries related to their spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 1 Pet. 4:10,11).

This is the main point of the “body” metaphor. Like the members of a human body, Christians should be interdependent—both *relationally* through love relationships (Col. 3:14,15) and *functionally* through the exercise of diverse gifts (Rom. 12:3-8).

We should therefore teach all Christians to evangelize, love one another, disciple other Christians, *and* exercise their spiritual gifts. If we do not emphasize *all* of these forms of ministry, we will impoverish our church. We should speak of “having a ministry” not only in terms of evangelism, discipleship, teaching, or leading, but also in terms of using our spiritual gifts.

Christian theologians’ and leaders’ comments on this point:

John Stott says concerning Eph. 4:11-16: “So Christ’s immediate purpose in the giving of pastors and teachers to his church is through their ministry of the word to equip all his people for their varied ministries. And the ultimate purpose of this is to build up his body, the church. For (one) way the whole body grows is for all its members to use their God-given gifts. These gifts are so beneficial both to those who exercise their ministry faithfully and to those who receive it that the church becomes steadily more healthy and mature . . . To recapitulate, we have seen that it is the exalted Christ who bestows gifts on his church, that his gifts are very diverse in character, that the teaching gifts are primary, and that their purpose is to equip God’s people for their ministries and so build up Christ’s body.”¹

Richard Lovelace says: “Each local congregation must seek the full release and development of spiritual gifts in every member . . . The church’s task is to locate and call forth the spiritual

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979), p. 168.

gifts of each church member, so that every individual is aware of the grace and strength she or he has to give to others.”²

Dwight Smith says: “. . . (one) task of leaders in the church is to *model* and *create a culture* in which everyone naturally expects to find their gift and use it . . . The success or otherwise of leaders in mobilizing the giftedness of the whole church is the single biggest factor in determining the effectiveness of the church in mission . . . Mobilization takes place most effectively when people are using the gifts that God has given them. Members become mobilized when their internal motivations are recognized and used. This is a key element in personal transformation. Personal motivation is intimately connected to the gifts that people have within them.”³

NOTE: Smith may be over-stating when he says that “the success or otherwise of leaders in mobilizing the giftedness of the whole church is the single biggest factor in determining the effectiveness of the church in mission.” It may be that mobilizing the church in evangelism, Body-life and discipleship is the biggest factor of church effectiveness. It may be that this is also what provides the context for members to discover their spiritual gifts. But Smith is right that mobilizing members’ gifts is important in church effectiveness.

Practical implications for home group leaders

In *home group leadership teams*, we should seek to know and affirm one another’s different spiritual gifts. A good home group leadership team is a miniature version of the home group—reflecting its diversity of gifting (as well as temperament) and unified appreciation of this diversity. “Leadership (should) reflect the gifts given to the whole body.”⁴

In the early 1980’s, we used to use the acronym “P.E.L.T.” to remind us that it was desirable for home group leadership teams to have Pastoral, Evangelistic, Leadership and Teaching gifts among them. It also helps to have at least some administrative gifting in leadership teams.

We should urge one another to use and develop our gifts (especially but not solely) in the home group context, while not neglecting other ministry and leadership responsibilities. For example, gifted pastoral home group leaders should be encouraged to regularly pastor home group people beyond their ministry spheres. Gifted administrative home group leaders should be encouraged in their administrative work in the home group, etc. We may need to counteract home group leaders’ natural inclination to think they must teach as much as gifted teachers—especially if we have enough people who are gifted to teach.⁵ If leaders neglect the use of their gifts, they will deprive the church of this important ministry, and they may have less energy and confidence in their other leadership responsibilities (see 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6,7).

In *personal discipleship*, one of our priorities should be to help one another to discover our gifts, to embrace them as good (especially if they aren’t highly esteemed by our home group), and to faithfully use them to serve others.

“As we train young Christians to become disciples, one of our . . . objectives should be to help them discover and develop their gifts, since every believer has gifts which God holds him

² Richard Lovelace, *Renewal As a Way of Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity press, 1985), pp. 179,180.

³ Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2003), pp. 135,103,115.

⁴ Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space*, pp. 133.

⁵ Simply being gifted to teach is not enough to teach regularly in home church. Gifted teachers should be deeply involved in the Body-life of the home church – including its discipleship ministry.

accountable for developing and using for the sake of the Body. In making disciples we are not trying to produce proficient technicians who are able to reproduce themselves by a prescribed methodology, rather, we are seeking to develop men and women who are disciples diligently exercising their particular gifts and abilities . . . (Therefore) it is imperative that early in the discipling process the man begin to look for his gifts and develop them . . . Whatever else the training of a disciple should include, helping him to discover and develop his gifts must be a part of it.”⁶

Therefore, while we should help disciples develop fundamental ministry skills (evangelism; “one another’s;” discipleship), we should rigid “sequentialism”—i.e., that one must first learn fundamental ministry skills *before* seeking to discover and use his/her spiritual gifts. Some people (including myself) learn where they are gifted early on, and this motivates them to learn other fundamental ministry skills.

God sometimes sovereignly leads similarly gifted people to us for discipleship because we can help them develop especially in this gift. But when we are not gifted similarly, we should intentionally help them see their own gifts—lest they assume they must be gifted like us to be effective (EXAMPLES).

Our gifting will naturally affect our discipleship style. Teachers will naturally emphasize biblical knowledge, counselors will naturally emphasize counsel, etc.

We should be aware of this, and seek to be as balanced as possible—by consciously trying to develop disciples holistically (Bible knowledge; personal sanctification; ministry; prayer), and by deliberately exposing them to others who are gifted in their gifted areas.

We should also avoid “standardizing” our discipleship gift-emphasis, or we may create an imbalanced view of discipleship that de-motivates those who aren’t similarly gifted (EXAMPLES).

We should urge them to use their gifts in the home group context, to creatively serve its members. We may also need to help them find outlet for their gifting beyond the home group. Sometimes this is because there is little outlet for their gifting in the home group (e.g., SERVICE GIFTING FOR SUBURBAN HOME GROUPS; CHILDREN’S MINISTRY IN CHILDLESS HOME GROUPS), or because God wants to expand their ministry to bless others beyond the home group (e.g., GIFTED TEACHER TEACHING CT OR CLASSES; GIFTED COUNSELOR DOING PASTORAL COUNSELING; GIFTED MERCY SERVANT WORKING WITH AGED OR HANDICAPPED OR HOSPITAL PATIENTS, ETC.).

We should urge members to use their spiritual gifts evangelistically. Joel Comiskey says: “Effective cell leaders encourage everyone in the cell to use their particular gifts so the body might be edified *and* non-Christians might be won to Christ.”⁷ Our gifts not only “build up Christ’s body” (Eph. 4:15,16) by edifying Christians, but they also help us to reach out to non-Christians (e.g., DORCAS IN ACTS 9). God will show us how to use our gifts evangelistically if we ask Him. And we may share Christ with more confidence when we are using our gifts in outreach.

This insight allays the legitimate concern that when Christians get focused on their own gifting, they may neglect evangelism.

God seems to give many service and mercy gifts—yet there is comparatively little need for these gifts if our home church is relatively young and/or affluent. But there is tremendous need for these gifts among the lost people in our city.

⁶ Walt Hendrichsen, *Disciples Are Made-Not Born*, pp. 132,133,138.

⁷ Joel Comiskey, *Cell Church Solutions*, p. 142.

The importance of service gifts & ministries

Peter divides spiritual gifts into two general categories—word and service (1 Pet. 4:11). Paul's representative list of gifts in Rom. 12:6-8 can easily be placed in one of these two categories (WORD: prophecy, teaching, exhorting, leading; SERVICE: serving, giving, showing mercy).

Historically, Xenos has done an excellent job of esteeming and mobilizing “word” gifts. This is important, since the New Testament teaches that “word” gifts are “first” (1 Cor. 12:28) because of the foundational importance of sound doctrine (see also 1 Tim. 5:17). Within this emphasis on “word” ministry, we should also properly facilitate “service” ministries in order to fully mobilize our church to accomplish its mission. We should do this for several reasons:

Service ministry opportunities can aid in the development of younger Christians into “givers” (people who learn to thrive off of serving others). Keller's point is instructive: “Most of our evangelical churches are so ‘word-oriented’ that virtually all the volunteer positions available are for teachers, counselors, evangelists. It takes a good measure of Christian maturity and experience to fill such slots. However, mercy (and service) ministry can use all Christians immediately!”⁸

Many non-Christians who are beyond the reach of “normal” outreach strategies can be reached through service/mercy ministries. “Most churches reach only “churchy” non-Christians (through advertising, radio, etc.) and “distant” non-Christians (through missions). Some churches (including Xenos) reach “webbed” non-Christians through friendship evangelism. But most non-Christians are “unwebbed”—and will remain unreached unless we devise intentional and credible ways to get involved with them. Mercy/service ministry is the main way to form relationships with these people who are far from but greatly loved by God.”⁹

Service/mercy ministries greatly enhance the credibility of the church and the gospel. It may be the “best advertising a church can have.”¹⁰ We will never eliminate all opposition to evangelism (Jn. 15:18-27)—but we can make our message more attractive by showing Jesus' love to non-Christians. This is why Paul reminds Timothy to command Christians to be active in good deeds in the community—this “adorns” the gospel (Titus 2:10). Keller's question is worth pondering: “Are we the kind of church of which (our community) says: ‘We don't share a lot of their beliefs, but I shudder to think of this (community) without them. They are such an important part of the community. They give so much! If they left we'd have to raise taxes because others won't give of themselves like they do.’”¹¹

“Service/mercy” ministers typically need to be esteemed by “word” ministers in order to develop and thrive (see 1 Cor. 12:23). “. . . We must . . . plant seeds for mercy ministry among the members . . . Word ministries can flourish somewhat in a church without this emphasis; deeds ministries cannot grow without this theology sown like seed throughout the congregation.”¹²

This is why, without in any way decreasing the priority of “word” ministries, we also should promote and affirm “service” ministry. EXAMPLES:

Volunteering in Xenos ministries to the poor (e.g., CLINICS; RENEGADE), community service (e.g., GODMAN GUILD) and civic organizations (e.g., PUBLIC SCHOOLS).

⁸ Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, p. 143.

⁹ Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, pp. 211-216.

¹⁰ Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, PAGE NEEDED.

¹¹ Tim Keller in John Piper & Justin Taylor (general editors), *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 122.

¹² Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, p. 156.

Home group community service projects (EXAMPLES). Such projects are fun, enhance serving together, and non-Christian friends will sometimes join us.

Home groups having a service ministry leader/champion. This person should be a respectable member, but need not be a home group leader. He/she can draw people's attention to service needs, organize home group service projects, help other service-gifted members develop in this ministry, etc. Having this role is one way to esteem "deed" ministries.

Formation of service-related ministries that meet genuine community needs and mobilization of gifted/burdened home group members to serve in these ministries should be encouraged (e.g., MEDICAL CLINIC; RENEGADE; FINAL HOPE; HOPE MINISTRY).

NOTE: Service/mercy workers should be trained and reminded to winsomely share the gospel when people thank them for their service.. They should also have close, Christ-centered relationships within the home group, and not be functional servants only.

Thoughts on discovering spiritual gifts

The New Testament neither commands Christians to discover their spiritual gifts, nor tells them how to do this. We know that Timothy's gift was revealed by a prophetic utterance (1 Tim. 4:14), but this is probably not normative. Therefore, we should be wary of prescribing any particular way to discover our (or others') spiritual gifts (e.g., SPIRITUAL GIFT TESTS). The epistles' emphasis is almost entirely on our responsibility to *use* our gifts to build up the church. We should probably conclude, therefore, that in a healthy church culture, people will (in various ways) naturally discover their gifts over time. Key ingredients of such a healthy church culture include:

Leaders give sound biblical instruction on the primacy of pursuing a lifestyle of serving love. This should include emphasis on every-member ministry, and on spiritual gifts as one important way to serve.

Leaders model this teaching by esteeming one another's diverse gifts, and by affirming other members' diverse gifts—especially "unseemly" members.

"Unseemly members" (1 Cor. 12:21-25) probably refers not to people with more-than-normal brokenness, but to members whose spiritual gifts are not esteemed by that church. This is because the immediate context is about spiritual gifts, not levels of brokenness. Often, these "unseemly" members are people who have behind-the-scenes gifts. Those of us who have more public gifts should use our roles to honor the others by thanking them publicly and reminding how their ministries are vital to the work. This overtly encourages the "unseemly" members, and vicariously encourages others with similar gifts (EXAMPLES).

Members take primary responsibility to prayerfully identify their gifts and use them in and beyond the home group to serve others and glorify Christ.

Members discuss one another's gifting, and pray for insight into their own and each other's gifting.

Leaders help members find ways to use their gifts in and beyond the home group. (Leaders should be "stone-masons" rather than "brick-layers" in this regard.)

Consider the following additional principles which are implied (not explicitly taught) from the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts.

Probably the most common way God reveals our gifts is through a pattern of feedback from those who have been built up by our gifted service. Since God gives us gifts in order to build up His church, this implies that committing oneself to a serving lifestyle in the context of Christian community is normally necessary for discovering our gifts. *This is the most important principle.*

Spiritual gifts often come with their own “set of eyes”—the ability to notice ministry needs in the area of giftedness. Teachers and mercy-servants, for example, often see very different needs in their home group (and/or how to meet the same need). Noting what needs members pray for and champion is also often an indication of their gifting.

Spiritual gifts often create an “itch” that demands to be “scratched.” God often gives us unusual passion to serve in areas in which He has gifted us (EXAMPLES). This sustained passion may therefore be an indication of gifting. However, this should be confirmed by the first indicator above. Sometimes Christians have a sustained passion to serve in certain ways because they perceive this will give them the praise of people!

Spiritual gifts often create a special attraction to more experienced Christians who are similarly gifted (EXAMPLES). Therefore, this kind of attraction may therefore be an indication of gifting. However, this should be confirmed by the first indicator above. Sometimes Christians have this kind of attraction because they want attention from popular Christian workers!

Cautions concerning spiritual gifts

Watch out for having a limited number of “labels” into which people’s gifting must fit. The New Testament lists are not exhaustive but representative, because gifts on one list are absent from other lists. Furthermore, we’re not sure what some of these gifts are because we know virtually nothing about them. (For example, is “word of knowledge” knowledge about the Bible, or knowledge about someone’s thoughts or motives?) Paul implies that there is great diversity in gifts, degrees of gifting, and gift-mixes.

What do you call someone who isn’t a gifted teacher, but whose sharing in home group meetings is consistently uplifting? Is this the gift of exhortation, prophecy, etc.? Does it matter? The point is that they edify/impact others in this way, so they should realize this and look for ways to serve others consistently. (This is one of the problems with spiritual gift tests. By limiting the number of gifts, they tend to promote this “labeling” problem.)

Watch out for gift over-specialization as an excuse for autonomy and/or selfishness. (e.g., service ministers saying: “I don’t evangelize—others should do this.”)

“The biblical doctrine of gifts is being greatly abused today because it is not being considered alongside the biblical doctrine of the cross.”¹³ Christ-like ministry is first of all doing what needs to be done (even and especially when it is sacrificial)—not just when it is enjoyable, fulfills my need to be unique, etc.

“Our lopsided teaching on gifts has resulted in a lot of overspecialization, especially in the West . . . Some people spend most of their time exercising their primary gifts. So an outstanding preacher may not spend much time visiting church members and caring for the leaders of his church. The result of such specialization is a high amount of quality output by this person. But the impact of this person may be less than hoped for. To impact people we need more than technical excellence. We need depth-producing frustration that comes out of an incarnational lifestyle lived among the people we serve. *We should use our gifts out of a lifestyle of caring for people. We should do a little of a lot of things and also try to give time to work on our areas of giftedness.*”¹⁴

“*Christian workers must specialize out of a generalist background.* That is, while they do many different types of ministries, they also take time to exercise their special gifts. I have come to believe that if we really like about 20% of the work we do and generally find about 40% acceptable, then we can handle the 40% we do not like. But . . . the 40% that we don’t like may be vital in giving relevance and depth in our ministry. If, however, we find that in the

¹³ Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), p. 78.

¹⁴ Ajith Fernando, *The Call To Joy & Pain* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 130.

exercise of our responsibilities, there is almost nothing that we like and feel competent at doing, perhaps we are in the wrong work.”¹⁵

Watch out for “centrifugalism” or “centripetalism.”

“Centrifugalism” means too much time and energy invested in ministry outside the home group or gift-related ministry. This will result in insufficient focus on winning new people to Christ, establishing them in home group Body-life, disciplining them into workers, and planting the home group.

“Centripetalism” means discouraging any ministry that does not directly contribute to the planting goal. This is more understandable during rapid growth periods. But part of maturing our people is helping them develop their spiritual gifts, and this can mean serving in ways that are not directly connected to the home group. As long as members are truly engaged in the ministry of the home group, such outside ministry will contribute to their own spiritual health, and their health will contribute to the health of the home group.

NOTE: Since the goal of a home group is to multiply itself, home group leaders will need to focus much of their ministry time and energy on this goal. They will also need to encourage other prospective home group leaders to have a similar focus.

For more on integrating spiritual gifts and home group multiplication, see Gary DeLashmutt, “Home Group Multiplication and Spiritual Gifts.”

Watch out that serving non-Christians does not replace verbal witness to non-Christians. “The Great Commission would be meaningless if those who obeyed it did not also obey the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbor. And we must continue to challenge people with the dual responsibility to live the gospel in society and to take the gospel to the unreached.”¹⁶

Don’t call good deeds “doing the gospel” and sharing the good news “speaking the gospel.” The gospel is a *message* that must be *proclaimed*. Quotes like “Preach the gospel at all times—and use words when necessary” are pithy hyperbole—but they are unhelpful because they create confusion on this crucial point. We need to do good deeds *and* we need to proclaim the gospel.

Watch out for “charismania.” Take heed to Paul’s warning, not against the exercise of more overtly supernatural gifts, but against using them for selfish grandstanding, or seeing them as more important than other (especially “word”) gifts, or as more indicative of spirituality than love (1 Cor. 13,14).

Perhaps Rom. 12:6-8 is a “normal” spectrum of gifts in the local church. It is striking that only the Corinthian “list” contains so many “sign” gifts, while they are not mentioned at all in Rom. 12; Eph. 4; 1 Pet. 4.

¹⁵ Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry*, p. 223.

¹⁶ Ajith Fernando “Getting Back on Course,” *Christianity Today*, November, 2007.