

# Missionary Training School

## “Discovering God’s purposes for us in His service”

### (Spiritual gifts)

#### Introduction:

1. When we know who we truly are, and believe this truth -- and hold to it, this meets our basic need of SELF-WORTH -- to be regarded and treated as a person of worth and value.

2. But this is not the whole story. Becoming a free and mature person begins at the point when we discover to our IDENTITY in God’s sight as people of great worth. But it doesn’t stop there. Our identity is also closely linked with two other basic human needs: A SENSE OF BELONGING and COMPETENCY.

a) Who we are as individuals cannot be separated from who we are “in community”. OUR SENSE OF BELONGING is a God-ordained need and He intended for this need to be met within our families, our communities, and in the deepest sense, within the community of faith, the body of Christ -- among God’s people. See Romans 15:7 -- discovering and experiencing ACCEPTANCE by our brothers and sisters in Christ as well as our reaching out to accept others.

b) Who we are also cannot be separated from what we do -- that is, what we are competent to do, i.e. our COMPETENCY in our life’s work and ministries. In other words, our “being” is closely linked with our “doing”. God has made us to do good works -- see Eph.2.10. God calls us “His fellow-workers” -- see 1 Cor.3:9. He wants us to discover the work that He has called us to do. And as we work and serve Him in this sphere, then we experience a deep sense of inner joy and freedom.

3. So God has made us “new creations in Christ”. But He has made us for a purpose. He has made us to be His holy servants -- to work together with Him in carrying out His will on earth. In other words, God calls us to know who we are BOTH in our inner being, AND also in what He has called us to do. “Being” and “doing” must go hand in hand -- one cannot be

separated from the other. God's calling upon our lives -- the work He has given to us to do -- is inseparably linked with our identity. In other words, GOD HAS MADE US FOR A PURPOSE.

Task: Write down some answers to the question: Who was & is Jesus Christ? What does God's Word say Jesus was and is?

Our answers: "Jesus is God's Son"; "Jesus is the Good Shepherd", "Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life"; "Jesus is the Saviour of the world"; "Jesus is our great High Priest" etc.

Question: What does these mean? Some of these answers speak about Jesus' identity in relationship to God, His Father, while others speak about Jesus in relationship with us, His people. But others refer to Jesus in His work -- His saving work through the cross, His present work of guiding and keeping His people etc.

4. So this week would be very incomplete and unbalanced if today we didn't speak about who we are as God's "servants" and "fellow-workers".

Question: If someone today on the street would ask you: What do you do? What is your work? how would you answer? In other words, who are you really?

Write down possible answers on the board, e.g. "I am a missionary".

5. These answers are often very big and too general. Here's the issue: If our sense of well-being is closely and inseparably linked with our COMPETENCY, then our task isn't just to find a "job" so that we can keep busy and be feel useful around people. Rather our goal should be to find the specific task(s) and roles that GOD has prepared for us -- or that He has prepared us for/to do. And then to pursue these. When we do, not only do we experience a deep sense of personal self-fulfillment in our work, but we honour God and have fruitful, useful lives.

6. So here's the big question: How do I find and know the work that God has called me to do?

Task: In small groups of three (in different languages), discuss the answers you would give to this question. Discussion. Write some of the answers on the board.

The key truth is: Not only has God made us for fellowship with Himself. He has also created us for specific works or tasks. And from an eternal perspective, we have been created to serve Him forever. Not just to marvel and meditate upon how wonderful is His gift of life to us, or how

great is His plan of salvation -- but just as importantly, we have been created for the service of the King.

Illustration: A prince isn't born just to enjoy the beauties of living in the palace and all his riches and future inheritance. He in reality was born to rule and reign.

Thus we can only know who we are in truth as we discover and know His higher plans for our lives -- our calling to reign and to rule with Him. See Rev.3:21.

7. God has made us for specific works -- see 1 Cor.3:5; Eph.2:10. Tasks assigned by God. And if God gives us something to do, then He prepares us specifically for that work/task. Quote: "Whatever God tells us to do, He also helps us to do" (Dora Greenwell). This means that when He created us, He already had in mind the works that He had for us to do -- by giving us our personalities, temperaments, and planning our family environments, our educational background and experiences et al. All was included. He designed us to be COMPETENT in whatever works He had planned for us.

8. In a sense, this is a life-long discovery. It is not just something that we discover in a short space of time. It is dangerous for us to give very superficial answers -- "I'm good at this, and I'm not good at that." Some of this might be linked with the deceitfulness of our own hearts -- wanting to be somebody that God never intended for us to be. cf. our youthful and immature desires for greatness.

Testimony: Firstly, to become a great evangelist, but then God's calling to become a missionary teacher.

9. Before we go further with this discussion, briefly, what are "spiritual gifts"???

- There has been much confusion and unbiblical teaching concerning "spiritual gifts". The very term in the NT Greek for "spiritual gifts" ("charismata") has become the name given to a whole movement in the church, i.e. "the charismatic movement". Especially in the earlier days of this movement as well as in certain circles, some of the spiritual gifts have been given more prominence than others. This has in turn led to a great deal of controversy and conflict among believers. We need to REPENT of the sin of rejecting other believers because of their convictions, or of causing disunity because of what we believe in this particular matter. Ask God to restore to us a unity of mind, spirit and purpose (cf. Phil.2:1-5).
- The following passages are where we will find the New Testament teaching regarding "spiritual gifts": Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Eph.4:7-16; Heb.2:1-4; 1 Peter 4:8-11.

- The term “spiritual gifts” (the Greek word for spiritual gifts is “charismata”) clearly focuses upon two key words: “grace” and “gift” (“charis” meaning “grace”). Behind every “gift” is a “Giver”. And with spiritual gifts, the Giver is God who dispenses His gifts by grace alone. We can call them “grace-gifts”, special spiritual abilities that God gives freely to believers on the basis of His kindness and love, never as “rewards” for being more godly or spiritual than other believers or having done enough “good works” to deserve or merit them.
- Implications: a) Believers receive any and all spiritual gifts from God the Giver by His grace alone. No spiritual gift is given or received because the individual believer is better than or more spiritual than other Christians or has proven himself/herself to be more worthy of having more gifts. b) Also we cannot and must not boast about spiritual gifts as if they belong by right to the individual believer. As if a spiritual gift is “mine” or like “something I own”.
- Spiritual gifts are for ministry, not performance. Thus we may call them “MINISTRY GIFTS”. They function like “power tools” so that we accomplish God’s work effectively and powerfully. cf. Having the spiritual gift of teaching versus having the training and professional qualifications as a teacher -- the one “ministers” so that others are spoken to by God, while the other teaches or passes on information that is interesting and useful but not of any spiritual nature.
- Three different types or areas of gifts or giftings: manifestation gifts (1 Cor.12:7-10); ministry gifts (related to offices or functions of ministry -- Eph.4:11); and motivational gifts (Rom.12:6-8). (Taken from Discover Your God-Given Gifts by Don & Katie Fortune, pp.15-18.) ALL are important and all have their place. But for our particular purpose in our missionary training program, we will later focus attention on the motivational gifts -- those God-given gifts that turn us on and have much to do with such questions as: how we relate to other people, what makes you think and act the way you do etc.

10. In a particular sense, God’s preparations for us to serve Him are related to the special “gifts” that He has given to us. What are these? How do we find out the specific gifts He has given to us? And how can we develop and use them?

Key truth: Romans 11:36 -- all these gifts are from God, through God and for God.

Look at Romans 12:3-8 and make notes on the following three categories:

A. Our spiritual gifts are “from God”

See 1 Cor.12:7 & Eph.4:7.

B. Our spiritual gifts are exercised or use “through God”

They are gifts of the Spirit -- ministry gifts that we can only effectively use through the enabling and empowering of the Spirit. See 1 Peter 4:11.

C. Our spiritual gifts are “for God”

They are for God’s glory -- see 1 Peter 4:11; and also for God’s own higher purposes (for the building of His kingdom):

- for the building up of the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:7); and
- for the expansion of His kingdom.

All spiritual gifts are significant and related to the ministry of evangelism.

cf. “The Church as God’s Agent in Evangelism” by Howard A. Snyder, taken from Let the Earth Hear His Voice, World Wide Publications, 1975, page 335:

*“Not only the gift of evangelist, however, but all spiritual gifts are relevant for evangelism in one way or another. Although not all Christians are called or gifted to be evangelists, spiritual gifts contribute to evangelism in at least five ways. First, several of the God-appointed leaders -- particular apostles, prophets, and evangelists -- do essential evangelistic work in the world. Second, many individual believers use their gifts for evangelism as they are equipped spiritually to do so by the equipping ministers. Third, those who exercise the more ‘inward’ gifts of teaching, encouragement, contributions, etc., provide the continuing spiritual support (and sometimes even economic support) for those who carry on evangelism in the world. Fourth, those who exercise their gifts within the community to sustain its inward life contribute to evangelism through the training and integration of new converts into the Church. Finally, this harmonious overall functioning of the Christian community is itself a demonstration of the truth of the Gospel and thus a witness in and to the world, preparing the way for evangelism.”*

If our spiritual gifts are given by God for HIS purposes, then we must guard against just thinking of how the spiritual gifts of different members can be used for the advancement of our church or organisation.

D. Practical questions and considerations

What are some of your questions concerning spiritual gifts?

1. WHO ARE GIVEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

- God gives His spiritual gifts only to believers.
- All God’s people have received one or more spiritual gifts. See 1 Cor.12:7,11. No believer has all the spiritual gifts and no believer is without a spiritual gift. This means that both new believers and older, more mature believers, both young believers (even children who are “in

the Lord”) as well as older Christians, both church leaders as well as the regular members of a church -- have all been given or blessed by God with various spiritual gifts.

## 2. HOW ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS RELATED TO NATURAL ABILITIES?

- God gives us our natural abilities and talents. They are also “gifts” from God and to be used for His glory, e.g. some are more gifted in technical things, some are gifted with musical or dramatic gifts etc.
- These are not spiritual gifts, but they are also a part of who we are, and also can help us in carrying out God’s ministries, e.g. car mechanics, computer skills etc.

## 3. HOW DO WE FIND OUT WHICH GIFTS WE HAVE?

- We don’t discover them by doing a spiritual gifts inventory or test. These may help, but they are just a very minute part of the whole. (We will be doing a test on our motivational gifts this morning.)
- We learn about our ministry gifts by ministering. God gives us a desire; He opens the way or gives us the opportunities; we minister and discover what we are gifted in and also what we are NOT gifted in.
- We discover more about our gifts by observing how God uses us in ministering to other people. Other people are “blessed” if spiritual gifts are used; while people are merely “impressed” when we try to serve God with our human will and energies and desires. cf. a ministry gift of building up the saints through using a teaching gift versus impressing believers with our knowledge and learning.
- We discover our God-given gifts in a process -- over many years. It is probable that most of you still have very much to learn about who God has made you to be and which gifts He has given to you. For that reason, we need to guard against the attitude: “I don’t want to do that. That isn’t in the area of my ‘gifting’.”
- We discover God’s gifts in the context of the church. As other believers, especially our leaders, observe our lives and see us in ministry, they encourage us with their helpful comments and also with open doors given to us. (We have to be careful in the way we listen to and respond to any comments that make us feel “proud”.)
- This implies that God’s people should be not only looking after their own gifts but how they can help and encourage other believers in the exercise and development of their gifts -- so that all believers grow up into Christ and into spiritual maturity. We all need the the safe and loving environment of God’s family to help us develop our gifts. See Romans 12:6-8.

- We learn more about the gifts God has given through just a strong and ongoing desire (inner motivation) to use our gifts to minister to others. One clear indicator is that we are truly “turned on” or “motivated” rather than dragging our feet or feeling very frustrated in our ministry.
- We discover spiritual gifts by the sheer joy we have in using them for God.

#### 4. WHICH ARE THE IMPORTANT OR MOST SIGNIFICANT GIFTS?

- All gifts are significant and needful for God’s purposes. None must be looked down upon. See 1 Cor.12:14-26. The key word is: INTERDEPENDENCE -- we all need one another.
- Some gifts seem to have a more predominant place in the ministry of the church. Example: The gift of leadership has an important function for the well-being of the whole body -- see 1 Cor.12:28. However, this also means that those who have such gifts carry a weightier responsibility. See James 3:1.
- Guard against the natural tendency to be jealous of the spiritual gifts of others, or to give particular prominence in ministry to people who have gifts that we consider to be most special and outstanding.
- Our sinful nature will sometimes cause us to think that our particular gifts are more important than the gifts of others. And with this sinful desire, we may be tempted to push ourselves forward or want to minister only in particular ministry areas. We must be open to allow God’s Spirit to lead us into ministries that are outside our particular normal sphere of ministry.

#### 5. MAY WE ASK GOD FOR OTHER SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

- The clear message is that God is the sovereign who dispenses our gifts. See 1 Cor.12:7; Eph.4:7,11.
- The Bible also says that we may seek for spiritual gifts -- 1 Cor.14:1. In particular, if we are placed into a particular ministry that we feel most unprepared or not gifted for, seek the gifts that we need in order to carry out that ministry. And God will give them to us.
- Occasionally we find ourselves -- by God’s sovereign working -- in a situation of ministry that is clearly very unique and difficult. Example: In our ministry, we are asked to minister to a person who is very sick, or we encounter a person who has fallen into the hands of some dark spiritual force (= afflicted by a demonic spirit). Are we to just stand by and say: “I’m sorry I/we can’t minister in this situation. We don’t have the right spiritual gifts.” Rather asking God for the “ministry gifts” we need for that very moment, we should launch out into the deep and ask God to do miracles for His praise and glory.

## Conclusion:

1. With what spirit or attitude are we to exercise or use our gifts? With a genuine spirit of HUMILITY. They are NOT our “possessions” or given primarily for us to find self-fulfillment or even employment. Rather they are God’s gifts to us. Like with all gifts, we receive them with thanksgiving and offer them up to Him to be sacrifices for His praise and glory.
2. This means that we surrender or let go of these gifts into His hands. If He wants to use only some of them at any one particular time, then may His will be done. Let Him guide and overrule all matters related to how and when and where our gifts are used. He is the SOVEREIGN LORD. Don’t be anxious or worried if we aren’t asked to minister with some of our very special gifts. Example: A pastor or a teacher from another country -- going out as a missionary – his or her gifts may not be quickly observed and hence there may be some years when they are almost put aside. A very difficult time, but at the same time, a rich learning time. We must commit such times to God and allow HIM to open the doors for us. Trust Him to lead others to open doors for us -- it will be a humbling, learning time but God can be trusted to accomplish His higher purposes in and through us.
3. Be open to correction, counsel and opportunities to receive further training. Mission leaders need to help train their workers in the development of their spiritual gifts. But it is also the individual’s responsibility to seek and do training so that their spiritual gifts can become increasingly useful for the body of Christ. If they are neglected, it is possible for them just to atrophy like a muscle that isn’t used.

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October 2, 1997