

Discover Your

PERSONAL MISSION

Finding Your Piece of the Action



Ron Sheveland

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION: God Has a Special Mission for You

Learning Exercise: Your Place on God's Team

2. PREPARATION: The First Step of Mission Discovery

Learning Exercise: A Spiritual Growth Tool

3. INSPECTION: Inventory Your Gifts and Resources

Learning Exercise: Your Investment Portfolio

4. EXPLORATION: Explore Your Ministry Options

Learning Exercise: Mission Exploration Worksheet

5. CONTRIBUTION: The Joy of Gift Giving

Learning Exercise: The Spiritual Gifts List

6. EVALUATION: Field Testing Your Mission

Learning Exercise: Ministry Evaluation Tests



1. INTRODUCTION: God Has a Special Mission for You

Mission Impossible. Before the popular movies starring Tom Cruise, there was the television series with Peter Graves. Each episode began with the challenge, “your mission, should you choose to accept it is...” At that point, an exciting new adventure would begin.

Would you like more excitement in your Christian life? A true adventure? Then choose to accept the mission God offers you. And count on it, He will. The Lord has a personal mission picked out especially for you. And with His might, it won’t be “mission impossible.” The same Jesus who died and rose again to accomplish His mission will empower you to accomplish yours.

Here’s the bold premise of this study: If you are a Christ-follower, God has one or more personal missions picked out for you. If you discover a mission and accept it, your life – and the lives of others – will be transformed. You will transcend the routine ordinariness of everyday life and be activated into a role that can make an eternal impact. God will position you on the frontlines of a redemptive movement that has swept through human history and will soon culminate in the glorious zenith that will accompany Christ’s return and reign.

God has a special mission for every Christian of every age level in every situation. There is one for that teenager in ninth grade and another for the grandmother that can’t get around without a walker. There is a fresh mission for that missionary that just retired from full-time overseas service. Oh, she has been on a number of daring missions in the past, but God has a new one for her now. God has one for the pastor in his seventh year at his church who now needs to now lead it in a new direction. A middle-aged couple may discover that God has just given them a new assignment that they can do together.

If you are already on your mission, this guide will bring confirmation and customization. But I challenge you to explore the possibility that God has a fresh endeavor coming your way.

When you do discover your personal mission, you will also discover it is fruitful for God’s kingdom and fulfilling for you personally. Sound good? It is. Really good. Sadly, many people have not found their mission and as a result have missed out on God’s best for their lives.

Hopefully, the biblical principles of this book will guide you in your discovery process. But, first, here are some things that apply to all of us regardless of our unique callings.

Your Personal Mission is Part of the Mission of the Church

Visualize God’s work as a large puzzle and you as one of its pieces. There is a niche God has carved out just for you. He handcrafted you to fit into that niche and to serve Him there.¹

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This verse and the ones preceding it show that we are not saved “by” good works but “to” good works. When God spiritually created you anew, he made a masterpiece out of you. The Master Craftsman did a special work in you so you could do special works for Him.

And those works are done in harmony with Christians who are engaged in their own projects. The apostle Paul often pictures the church as a body with each of us as parts, or members. Active believers mobilize it; non-functioning Christians cripple it.

Every Christian should be serving so the church can have maximum impact. But unfortunately, that is not the case. A George Gallup survey revealed that only ten percent of American church members are active in any kind of personal ministry. This leaves those who are working exhausted and pleading for help. What is your opinion? Why are so many Christians not active in a Christian ministry?

Too busy? Lack of confidence? Non-committed? Don't know how or why? The Gallup survey indicated that forty percent of all members have expressed an interest in ministry and might get involved if they were asked or knew how. That still leaves fifty percent in the spectator seats. Where are you right now -- in one of those seats or on the field?

Part of the problem might be that many think only the “clergy” deserve to be designated as “ministers.” But Ephesians 4:11-12 states Christ “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...” (NKJV). If you are a Christian, you should be a minister. In Ephesians 4:16, Paul wrote, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Each part. What do you think happens when some part doesn't do its work? Can you imagine what would happen if each part did? According to Rick Warren,

Today the American church is a sleeping giant. Each Sunday, church pews are filled with members who are doing nothing with their faith except “keeping” it. The designation “active member” in most churches simply means those who attend regularly and financially support the church. Not much more is expected. But God has far greater expectations for every Christian. He expects all Christians to use their gifts and talents in ministry. If we can ever awaken and unleash the massive talent, resources, creativity and energy found in the typical local church, Christianity will explode with growth at an unprecedented rate.²

Hopefully, we have established that all Christians should be active in ministry and that they each have an important part in God's larger mission for the whole church. Matthew 28:18-20 is often called “The Great Commission.” It is a mission God has assigned collectively to all Christians. It is “our” mission -- our “Co-Mission.” As you read it, recognize you have a vital part in fulfilling it. “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Your Personal Mission is Totally Unique

In a general sense, we are all in on God's mission and each of us should be serving. But in addition to that, we each have a particular personal mission. You have been assigned a special position to play on God's team. You are a uniquely shaped puzzle piece that will only fit in its special place. Your unique role in the body of Christ can be called a "ministry niche." A *Ministry Niche* is a sphere of Christian service for which a believer has been designed and equipped to be particularly effective.

You have not just been called to be involved in the Lord's work, you have also been entrusted with an exclusive ministerial role no one can do as well as you. There are a lot of places you could be serving but you will be more successful and satisfied if you operate in the sphere of your "special call." Certainly, every Christian has a general call to share our faith and minister to the needs of other but I also believe that God has a "designer" role for each of us.

That knowledge builds confidence. In J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, we find Frodo questioning why he was the one tasked to carry the magical ring on such a perilous journey. Like us, Frodo is filled with self-doubts. "But," Gandalf reassures him, "you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have."

You will want to discover your niche and devote yourself to it. Arthur McKay stated, "We must learn to ask ourselves, just which of the demands represent God's call to invest our abilities. The first question is always: Where am 'I' to serve?"³ Where has God assigned me?

Two Biblical Examples: *Paul & Apollos*

In the context of telling the Corinthians to call off their popularity contest between Paul and Apollos, Paul talks about the "ministry niche" concept in 1 Corinthians 3:5, "What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe -- as the Lord has assigned each his task." Did Apollos and Paul have the same assignments? No, and neither do we. When you discover your niche, you find a task that God has commissioned directly to you.

In 2 Corinthians 10:13, Paul returns to this theme. "We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us..." Paul is claiming that God had assigned each of them a "field" or sphere of ministry. The Greek word for *limits (kanon)* "has the sense of the area measured out and allotted to Paul."⁴

Picture God's mission as a large, productive farm. In accordance with His wisdom, the Lord placed Paul in one field and Apollos in another. Perhaps He even gave them different tools and crops. Due to the difference in the assignments, it was unfair to compare them with each other. Their success was only dependent upon how well they served within their sphere of responsibility. In the same way, God has a particular field for you to serve in. Find it and enjoy your God-given assignment.

Two Biblical Principles: *Stewardship & Design*

Two major principles support the proposition that every Christian can have a ministry niche. According to the **Principle of Stewardship**, believers are expected to be wise investors of the resources God has entrusted to them. Secondly, the **Principle of Design** shows that Christians have been crafted by God to fit into a niche in the body of Christ.

As a steward, every Christian is accountable for the proper use of the resources God has entrusted to him or her. Marlowe Embree says, "To a certain extent God has left His work in our hands. First Peter 4:10 exhorts each of us to 'use whatever gift he has received to serve others,

faithfully administering God's grace. ' Our resources and gifts are, so to speak, 'on loan' from God. We should use them wisely, for one day the loan will be called in."⁵

When it comes to the principle of design, we know God makes no clones. He has created you to be a "one of a kind." This is equally true of your ministry role. With your special blend of spiritual resources, you are designed to carry out a particular ministry like no one else. Think of each resource as a specific color. Stirred together, they form their own definitive hue. Or picture yourself as a flower bouquet. When God made you he picked a certain assortment of spiritual flowers and then uniquely arranged them so you would be a special gift to the world.

Physically, nobody has your fingerprints, ear shape, or brain waves. Even identical twins are not exactly identical. Spiritually, no one possesses your unique mix of gifts, strengths, opportunities, and calling. Appreciate the creative hand of God as you contemplate your place of service.

First Corinthians 12:4-6, 11 states, "There are different kinds of gifts... different kinds of service... different kinds of working... All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." In a later chapter we are going to study these three terms: gifts, service and working. For now, let's simply note they are not synonyms. They are three different aspects of your God-assigned combination.

Many schools have hundreds of lockers -- each kept secure by a combination lock with a unique three-digit combination. The combination of gifts, service and workings combination in your life makes your ministry very special and distinctive.

Commenting on these verses, John MacArthur explains, "You are a snowflake. The combination of gifts, energizings, and services that God has given you is unlike anything that He has given to someone else."⁶

Take a good look at another believer -- any believer. Does he or she look just a little different? Okay, we are not talking about being different in an odd sort of way but in a wonderful way. You are looking at a God-designed, Spirit-gifted, uniquely resourced, one-of-a-kind Christian servant. Shake their hand and say, "You are something special." And you are, too.

You weren't produced on an assembly line. After God created you, He broke the mold. That makes you a collector's item. You are an original production with a special purpose in the body of Christ. Your unique design allows you to carry out a distinctive, fruitful ministry.

Personalize this! You have been custom crafted for ministry. Your Creator fashioned you uniquely and then entrusted you with a distinctive blend of spiritual resources. Because of this special treatment, you can make major contributions in the field of service to which God has assigned you.

In *To Tame a Land*, one of Louis L'Amour's classic westerns, the main character says, "Some men are built for this kind of country, and some aren't. I guess my Maker shaped me for the land we had to shape. I liked it."⁷ I never thought of Louis L'Amour as a theologian, but I concur with his concept that God shaped us to shape our target assignments.

Highlight this biblical principle: While it is true all Christians are responsible for carrying out general spiritual duties, it is also true God has designed and equipped each individual believer so he or she can be effective and fulfilled in a particular "prime-time" ministry emphasis. Bill Hybels, the founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, states, "We discovered years ago that believers flourish in their service to Christ when they are serving in the area of their giftedness, and in conjunction with their God-given uniqueness."⁸

This is exciting stuff. When you find your ministry niche, you will have a Eureka feeling that says, "This is great. This is what I was made to do!" You will also enjoy a sense of

significance. Since God is going to use you to bear eternal fruit, you are living a life that really counts.

Your Personal Mission May Occasionally Change

David had different roles: shepherd, soldier, musician and king. And in each case he was at the center of God's will. Paul went from being a pastor-teacher in Antioch to being sent out by the church as a missionary. And then, since the nature of that position kept changing, you could divide up his mission work into a smaller series of unique missions.

Our different assignments might have similarities because we are working with a continued set of particular spiritual gifts, but many things do change – our interests, opportunities, education, age, and spiritual resources. In my case, I find my blend of gifts and design normally keeps me majoring in ministries where I communicate God's Word. But beyond that, I've been a youth pastor, church planter, senior pastor, denominational leader, writer and missionary (some guys just can't keep a job!). God keeps some people in the same spot for a long time but others get shifted around to new projects.

I think of my friend, Eldon Brock. After pastoring for twenty years he became the director of Lake Ann Bible Camp. At the time, I was traveling around the Midwest serving as a speaker for the Outreach Evangelistic Team. That sounds more impressive than it was; I was just a college kid who'd partnered up with two talented peers who provided music and art. My week speaking at the camp allowed me to get to know and respect Eldon. But then we went into different orbits.

Years later we reconnected and he brought me up to date. After he had "retired twice" and his first wife had died, God told him Christians never really retire; they should always be serving by allowing God to use the gifts given to them. As he faced an unknown future, he read my book, "Discover Your Ministry Niche" (the predecessor to this one), prayerfully went through the "Personal Mission Discovery Process" and found his new ministry adventure. He is now the president of "Ethnic to Ethnic," a ministry whose vision is to see U. S. church congregations reflecting the ethnic diversity of their local community, united in Christ to reveal God's glory to the nations. At an age when many pack it in, Eldon is going strong.

The bottom line? God wants you to be actively serving Him in His kingdom work. He has a personal mission He wants you to accept. Since that mission might be fresh and new, you will want to seek out what God is calling you to do *today*.

Your Personal Mission is Waiting to be Discovered

It is at this point many Christians become very frustrated. They don't know WHAT their personal mission is and they don't know HOW to find it. This is true of some who are pursuing professional ministries and many who are unpaid volunteers in their local church or para-church ministry.

I can relate to how they feel. Several of my friends at the Christian college I attended spoke with certainty about the nature of their future ministries. Mike and Ed were going to be missionaries. Jack was going to be a youth pastor. Kathy was headed for religious broadcasting. But I struggled with what I should do. I felt pulled toward full time Christian service. I sensed preaching should be part of my role. But beyond that, everything was fuzzy. An evangelist? A missionary? Possibly a pastor? I prayed God would allow me to make a major impact for Him.

But without knowing where I was to serve, I didn't know how to plan or prepare. I longed to discover my ministry niche.

People in local churches sometimes agonize over the same type of dilemma. Where, when and how should they serve? Is there something else they could be doing that would have greater eternal consequences? Lacking answers, there are many who don't grasp the nature and importance of the unique ministerial roles they and others were designed to enjoy. Though it's impossible to rigidly classify people, some of these Christians fit into the following categories:

The "Misfits"

That description sounds more negative than I intend. I'm simply talking about a puzzle piece that doesn't fit its niche. Some church members have reported in hindsight they felt maneuvered by nominating committees or other recruiters into positions where they lacked motivation and spiritual giftedness. This led to frustration and ineffectiveness. Those who, out of duty, have persevered in these fruitless situations have surely lost some of the joy in service God desires for them.

The Timid

Others have lacked the confidence to even attempt a ministry adventure. Looked down upon as mere "pew-sitters," these non-participatory Christians squandered their spiritual resources and stifled their spiritual growth. The assumption that their problem is laziness or rebellion may be erroneous. When questioned, some indicated that the root cause of their inactivity was a lacking comprehension of their unique calling and qualifications.

The Confused

The common "Find your Gifts/Find Your Mission" approach to ministry placement has led to a lot of confusion. Take Karen for example. She is sitting in the same chair she has sat in every Sunday for the last six years. She is listening to a sermon that is quite familiar. Though it has come in different forms, the basic theme is that the church is the body of Christ. In order for it to operate effectively, each member needs to exercise his or her spiritual gifts. The message is quite motivational and Karen leaves the church with a committed heart. But she also leaves frustrated. She doesn't know what her spiritual gifts are. Oh, she's taken a couple of "spiritual gifts tests" but she questions their validity and wonders why each test indicated she had different gifts.

The Stereotyped

People that get typecast in a certain avenue of service sometimes lose the opportunity to explore other opportunities. I think of a conversation I once had with my friend, Larry. Since he ran a construction business, his skills made him a "natural" trustee in his church. He was elected to this post term after term. It was drudgery for him, but he did it with a servant's heart. But finally he volunteered to serve in a children's club ministry called AWANA. He had a deep love for children and was thrilled over his new role. There are "Larrys" in every church who have been restricted to particular forms of service due to stereotyping. They need to break out.

The Mass Produced

Some ministries have such rigid training programs and job descriptions that all of their participants are expected to witness, teach or administer exactly the same way. Such programming has advantages. Continuity and group-owned expectations are reinforced. But the contributions that could be had by emphasizing the uniqueness of individuals are minimized. Square pegs shouldn't be forced into round holes.

The Stretched

Not only do the people in the above categories miss out on the joy of reaching their ministry potential, they also cause negative ramifications for others in the church. The body is robbed of the contributions these misplaced and inactive Christians could offer. The consequence is those who are already doing their "fair share" are often pressured into carrying the loads others should bear. This is especially true in churches that are experiencing a steady influx of new people. New members and attendees place a variety of new responsibilities on the church body but they often lack the knowledge, inclination or training to effectively lend a helping hand.

The result? Some workers admittedly feel burnt-out and even resentful of the pressures associated with growth. These workers are stretched too thin. If such servants could discover their individual niches, they would also find some natural boundaries that would keep them from being overextended.

These are just some examples of people who *really* need to discover their personal mission...

The P.I.E.C.E. Plan

In the following pages, you are going to be introduced to a five-step biblical process that will help you discover or confirm your personal mission. This guide has helped many and I pray you will also find it very profitable.

It is called the *P.I.E.C.E. Plan* and its goal is to help you find the place in the big picture where your piece of the puzzle fits snug. The five steps are:

- Preparation
- Inspection
- Exploration
- Contribution
- Evaluation.

Think of these as a set of stairs. In each stage you will take one step up toward your goal of discovering your personal mission. When you reach the top, your adventure will take off... if, of course, you accept God's mission.

Before you go to the next chapter, please stop and do the following Learning Exercise. These practical exercises, found at the end of every chapter, will help you make steady progress through the P.I.E.C.E. Plan.

Learning Exercise:
YOUR PLACE ON GOD'S TEAM

This first learning exercise is a simple, stretching activity meant to head you in the right direction. You can do it all by yourself but it also serves as a great discussion guide that you can use with a friend or a small group.

“Warm-Up Exercises”

On what teams (athletic, musical, speech, etc.) have you been a member?

Which ones did you enjoy most and why?

“On the Team”

Comparing your church to a team, which descriptions best fit you:

- Uninterested in being an active part of the team
- Trying to find the position that is right for me
- Wanting to play a position that others wouldn't choose me for
- A rookie, having talent but not enough experience
- Comfortable with parts of my role but needing improvement
- Enjoying my spot on the team
- Wishing to be traded
- A Utility Player
- Team Captain
- Player-Coach
- MVP
- Other:

“Game Time”

If you were to compare your ministry involvement to a game, where would you be presently?
Put an “x” by the items that best describe you:

- In training
- In the heat of the game
- On the injury list
- Winning
- Losing
- Waiting for directions from the coach
- Playing catch-up ball
- In half time

- Playing offense
- Playing defense
- Sitting on the bench
- Weary but determined to keep giving it all you've got
- Out of shape
- Happy that you've just scored
- Ready to call it "quits"
- Other:

“Past Positions”

God's Team, like many teams, requires people to specialize in different positions. Before you try to decide what positions you should play in the future it will be helpful to review the positions you have already played in the past. Examples include ministry roles like serving on the Worship Team, helping in the nursery, working in a homeless shelter, being involved in an evangelistic outreach, or teaching a Bible class.



2. PREPARATION: The First Step of Mission Discovery

The year was 1853. A small, three-masted clipper slipped quietly out of a Liverpool harbor and began its sail to China. On board was a gaunt twenty-one year old man named Hudson Taylor – someone now remembered as one of the greatest missionaries of all time. He spent fifty-one years in China and during that time about eighteen thousand people came to Christ and one hundred and twenty-five schools were founded.

After Taylor had served for a while in China he became convinced that many more missionaries were needed if the inland areas of the country were to be reached. So he decided to form a new mission society and recruit twenty-four missionaries: two for each of eleven inland provinces of China that were without a missionary, and two for Mongolia. Considering that there were only about a hundred Protestant missionaries in the whole world at the time, this was a bold, visionary plan.

The audacity of the goal filled him with fear and doubts. The burden became so heavy that he struggled to sleep; most nights he only got in about two hours. He agonized about the millions of Chinese who lacked the gospel and the seemingly impossible task of recruiting so many new missionaries. One morning while he was at the Brighton conference center back in England, he slipped out after a worship service. Brighton is on the coast of Southern England and the proximity of the conference center allowed him to stroll down the beach and pray.

He later said, “Unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony. There the Lord conquered my unbelief, and I surrendered myself to God for this service. I told him that all responsibility as to the issues and consequences must rest with him; that as his servant it was mine to obey and to follow him—his to direct, to care for, and to guide me and those who might labor with me. . . .” With that, God gave him peace and he wrote these words in the margin of his Bible: “Prayed for 24 willing, skillful laborers, Brighton, June 25/65.”

God gave him the twenty-four workers he requested. In 1881 he had the temerity to ask for another seventy missionaries by the close of 1884—and he got seventy-six. Late in 1886, Taylor was praying for another hundred missionaries by 1887. By early November 1887, Taylor announced that one hundred and two candidates had been accepted for service and that enough money had been given to pay for their passages to China!

Taylor didn’t accept just anyone who applied; he only approved those who were totally committed to the Lord and His mission. He said, “China is not to be won for Christ by quiet, ease-loving men and women. . . . The stamp of men and women we need is such as will put

Jesus, China, souls, first and foremost in everything and at every time—even life itself must be secondary.”

It is easy to grasp why a complete spiritual surrender would be mandatory for missionaries on such an important and dangerous mission... but we are going to see that that same kind of commitment is necessary for every Christian serving God in any mission whether that be witnessing in the heart of China or in your neighbor’s living room, whether you are preaching to thousands in a coliseum or working with one crying baby in your church nursery.

I recognize that many of us might not relate to such an “out-there” mission like the one God gave Taylor and his mission partners. But God has a mission for you that still begins with the same kind of spiritual preparation.

With the goal of learning how we can discover our personal missions, you will remember that we are progressing through a five-step process called the P.I.E.C.E Plan. The five steps are: *Preparation, Inspection, Exploration, Contribution and Evaluation*.

Are you ready to take your first step? We begin with *preparation*. This will describe the spiritual preparation that is needed before you can go any further on your adventure of discovery.

Here is the "big idea" of the *Preparation* step: In order to discover your personal mission, you need to first surrender your life to the Lord.

You must have a right heart before God will lead you to the right part. Romans 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Did you notice the word “Then?” There is a progression here. “When” you consecrate yourself wholly to God, “then” you will be able to detect God’s will. And in the context of Romans twelve, “God’s good, pleasing and perfect will” includes His plan for your place of service in the body of Christ. In his book on finding God’s will, M. Blaine Smith says,

In this passage Paul exhorts believers to ‘prove what is the will of God.’ In the verses which immediately follow this exhortation, he commands them to have a clear view of their own distinctiveness, then proceeds to encourage them to make use of the unique spiritual gifts which they possess (vv. 3-8). Paul is indicating that the will of God which we are to prove is discovered in part through the individuality which God has put within us. It suggests that God has created us each differently, that we are to serve Christ in light of this individuality, and that we are to recognize our individuality as an important key to understanding God’s will for us. All of this points, then, to God’s having not merely a universal moral will for all believers but also a distinctive will for the service of each Christian.⁹

If what Smith is saying here is accurate, then this passage is not just talking about the moral or ethical dimensions of God’s will that are the same for all Christians, it is also speaking to the specific will of God that He has for individuals. I think he is right on target. To think otherwise ignores the text’s wider context and the chain of thought that continues with the following verses. Consider the comments given by two theologians in their commentaries on Romans:

- Everett Harrison: “The will of God, concerning which Paul has just spoken, is identical for all believers in respect to holiness of life and completeness of dedication. But what that will involves for each one with respect to special service in the church may be considerably diverse... ”¹⁰
- William R. Newell: “This passage involves two facts: first, that God has a plan for our lives, which He is very willing and desirous we should discover; and, second, that only those who surrender themselves to Him, rejecting conformity to this age, can discover that will.”¹¹

This simply means that before you receive the discernment to test and approve God’s will as to where you should serve, you must first be totally devoted to God. The spiritual preparation for doing this has three stages:

- 1) The Motivation of the Heart
- 2) The Dedication of the Will
- 3) The Transformation of the Mind

The Motivation of the Heart

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers,
IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY,
to offer your bodies...*

This study is designed to help people discover their personal mission. But it could be that such a goal isn’t a great priority to you right now. You know, perhaps, that it should be. But honestly, volunteering for God’s service may have no great appeal. How, then, do you get the passion... the drive... the motivation for a glad-hearted surrender to ministry?

That is Paul’s first objective in Romans twelve. Through the first eleven chapters he has been leading up to this appeal. The word “Therefore” is the hinge connecting the doctrinal section (chapters 1-11) with the practical section (chapters 12-16). The first section presents a panoramic view of God’s gracious gifts to undeserving believers. Gazing at these examples of God’s mercy provides all the impetus one needs to strive for the life of service described in the second section.

Paul could have used his authority as an apostle to command Christians to serve God. Instead, he simply chooses to “urge” them to offer their “bodies as living sacrifices.” Pushy imperatives were not needed. The incentive for all-out surrender comes naturally when believers “view... God’s mercy.”

Go through the earlier chapters of Romans and take the time to ponder God’s infinite compassion toward believers. He has forgiven your sins, rescued you from eternal punishment and adopted you as His dear child. Jesus Christ intercedes for you in Heaven. The Holy Spirit now lives within you and you have the guarantee of eternal security. God gives you the power to defeat indwelling sin and live a life of victory. You can live with the confidence of knowing that all things work together for your good, and that nothing can ever separate you from God’s love. You will have a part in the glorious consummation of history that God is directing. All this is yours and far more! So reflect on the mercies of God and let your gratitude be the stimulus to a life of wholehearted, unselfish service.

When I was a young teenager, I was reading through the Old Testament when I came upon a verse that has made a lasting impact. I Samuel 12:24 states, “Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart, for consider what great things He hath done for you. (KJV)” As I reflected on the verse, I rephrased it into this question: “After considering what great things He has done for you, what will you do for Him?”

That question challenged me spiritually and I dedicated my life to the Lord. Whenever that commitment has faltered during the decades that have passed, I have found that it can be re-ignited by simply focusing again on the “great things” God has done for me.

In the classic chorus, “My Tribute,” Andre Crouch asks, “How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me? Things so undeserved yet you gave to prove your love for me.” Along with giving God glory was this answer: “Just let me live my life and let it be pleasing Lord to thee.”

Our generous God has given us so many wonderful gifts. And they are all free! Free to us, that is... The cost that Christ paid to purchase them for us was great -- His own blood. Close your eyes and visualize the physical and spiritual sufferings that Jesus endured during the crucifixion. If that doesn't move and motivate us, our hearts are tough and calloused.

After meditating on the atonement, how can we not give ourselves totally to the Savior? I am reminded of the closing words of the hymn, "*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*":

*Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

When interviewing new missionary candidates, Hudson Taylor would ask them why they were going. He wanted to discover their deep, underlying motivation. After hearing their responses, he would stress that the only thing that would keep them going was love. He would then quote the verse, “For the love of Christ constraineth us.”

Why does motivation precede dedication? Because Christ's sacrificial death for us provides the incentive to live sacrificially for Him.

The Dedication of the Will

*OFFER your bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God –
this is your spiritual act of worship.*

As an act of your will, you will want to make a presentation of yourself to the Savior. The phrase “to offer” is a proper term that was used of bringing an offering to the Lord (Lev. 16:7). Here the sacrifice is “*your bodies.*” This concept is similar to Romans 6:13, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” These verses describe a whole-life dedication to God.

As we give ourselves to God, we will want to make sure that our sacrifice is “*living..., holy and pleasing to God.*” Note the three characteristics God demands of our commitment.

- Our sacrifice is “*living*.” In contrast to the dead animal sacrifices, Christians offer a life of service to God. In Philippians 1:21, Paul states, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”
- Our sacrifice should be “*holy*.” Just as the Old Testament sacrifices were to be without blemish (Malachi 1:8-13), Christians are to be pure and set apart for God. Since God uses clean vessels to pour out His mighty deeds, we must be committed to personal righteousness.
- Our sacrifice ought to be “*pleasing*.” God is pro-pleasure. He loves to give it and receive it. Verse two shows that His will for us is designed to bring us pleasure. And verse one teaches that when we offer ourselves to Him as living, holy sacrifices, He gets pleasure. Is pleasing God your #1 ambition?

Dedication is described as an act of “spiritual worship.” The word “worship” is rendered “service” in the King James Version and “service of worship” in the New American Standard Version. We often equate worship with expressions of adoration toward God. As important as praise is, it is not a synonym of worship; it is only one form of worship. Surprisingly, the essential concept of worship in both the Old and New Testaments is “service.” In the Old Testament, a key Hebrew word for worship is “aboda.” In the New Testament, a crucial Greek word is this term “latreia.” Both signified the labor of servants.

Genuine worship occurs when we see the greatness of God and respond by giving everything that we have and are to Him. This goes beyond a spirit of reverence or words of praise. It culminates in an instinctive response of dedicated service. And that is your joyful privilege. David Livingstone once said, “If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, how can a commission by a Heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?”

Surrender your whole life to His Lordship. Such consecration is the first priority for personal involvement in ministry.

In review, Romans 12:1 shows the preparation of heart that should be made. Motivated by the “view of God’s mercy,” you will want to surrender yourself to worshipful service to the Lord. Before you can be effective in your appropriate sphere of service you must first dedicate yourself totally to God’s service.

The Transformation of the Mind

Such dedication is foreign to this world’s “me first,” consumer mentality. Our minds need to go through a spiritual reprogramming. How do we realign our thinking? First, we must make sure that we “do not conform” to the perspectives of our surrounding society. Second, we must be “transformed by the renewing of the mind.”

“Do not conform...”

A literal translation of the phrase, “do not conform,” would be “do not be schemed-together-with.”¹² It could also be rendered, “do not be fashioned.” To be conformed to this age means that you have allowed the patterns of this ungodly culture to mold your thoughts and behavior. You have been roped into the “scheme” of the “god of this age” (II Cor. 4:1).

In the phrase, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world,” a term used for “this world” is “age.” Conformity to this world means to be dressed in the styles of this fleeting, temporal period in which we live.

When I was in High School, a particular fad quickly came and went. Do you remember the Nehru Jacket? Those of my friends who were wealthy enough to afford them only wore them for a short while before they were “out.” As it relates to spiritual matters we must be careful not to follow the fashions of the children of this age. We cannot allow it to squeeze us into its mold. Instead, we are to remember our lasting citizenship in the eternal spiritual kingdom. With this in mind, we must reject the world's trends and align ourselves with the changeless principles of the Bible. God's fashions are always in good taste. This is highly relevant when it comes to our attitude toward service. Ray Stedman said,

Everyone in the world lives to advance himself. “What do I get out of this? What's in it for me?” ...The spirit of this age includes also the methods of the world. You have only to look around to see what these are: rivalry and competition, getting ahead of the other guy, grabbing what's mine before someone else gets it, hanging onto everything I've got no matter what it costs in terms of hurt or pain to someone else. The pressure to conform to these methods pervades all society. Around us the whole climate of life is squeezing us, insisting that we conform and making it costly if we don't. But God says, “Don't let the world around you pressure you into thinking this way any longer.”¹³

“but be transformed...”

Our word “metamorphosis” is the same word, letter for letter, as the Greek word for “transformed.” In Matthew 17:2 it is used of the glorious transfiguration of Christ.

Sanctification involves the process of revolutionary change in the mind. The mind is the center of man's consciousness. It is there that your reasoning, attitudes, thought patterns, memories, and choices dwell. Transformation takes place as your mind is renewed.

Used only by Paul, the word for “renew” means to “grow up new, afresh” like foliage in the spring. At the point of salvation, your spirit is created anew and joined to the Spirit of God. Springtime enters your life and your faculties are now to be renewed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) so that your mind, tastes and disposition progressively conform into all that is involved in being a new creature.

Leave your caterpillar existence behind. Abide in Christ, meditate on His Word, think His thoughts and be transformed into His image. Be a butterfly and soar in the heavens.

Spiritual preparation (consisting of motivation, dedication and transformation) is essential for ministry discovery and productivity. Have you dedicated your entire life to God? Is your thinking being realigned as your mind is being renewed by the Holy Spirit? A heightened spiritual mindset is necessary for you to ascertain and appreciate what particular area of service God has for you.

Grasping God's Will

After this personal preparation takes place, “then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:2)”

With your heart motivated by meditating on God's mercy, you can willingly surrender yourself totally to God and His service. This dedication should be accompanied by a continual transformation of your mind. If you experience this kind of motivation, dedication, and transformation, you will be in a position to discern God's will.

Recently my friend George said, "I served in the army for twenty-three years. Now I want to serve in God's army. How do I find my place of service?"

I asked, "What was the first thing that you were required to do when you enlisted?"

"I made an oath of allegiance," George said. "Here was my pledge: 'I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.'"

"George," I responded, "in order for you to enlist in the Lord's army and find your personal mission, you also need to make an oath of allegiance – but this time to God, our true Commander in Chief."

Two questions: Are you willing to serve God wholeheartedly? Will you actively seek out the ministry niche that is right for you?

Please say *yes* to both these questions. If you don't, you will miss out on God's plan and God's blessings.

"I will say yes," you say, "I am willing to serve God and I will seek the special role He has for me. But where do I look? How do I discover my personal mission?"

That's where we are going next. In the second step of the PIECE plan you will begin the inner journey of *Inspection*. As you, in self-discovery, delve into your God-given design and resources, you will marvel on the grace that God has given you.

When you do discover your mission and carry it out for God's glory, the Lord will use you to make a huge difference in the lives of others. When Hudson Taylor died in 1905, a young Chinese evangelist looked upon his body and summed up Taylor's most important legacy: "Dear and venerable pastor, we too are your little children. You opened for us the road to heaven. We do not want to bring you back, but we will follow you."

What kind of legacy will you leave?

Learning Exercise:
A SPIRITUAL GROWTH TOOL

1. “**MOTIVATION**” for dedicated service comes from viewing God's mercies. After studying the first eleven chapters of Romans, consider the blessings of your spiritual position (justification, identification, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, your coming glory, etc.). Also meditate on the various gifts that He has poured into the other dimensions of your life (family, job, church, health, protection, answers to prayer, etc.). This should lead to prayerful gratitude and a desire to live for God.

2. Use the space provided to make a personal statement of “**DEDICATION**” to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Most readers will simply write out a prayer of surrender or a “pledge of allegiance” to God. But you may want to make your presentation of self to God in a way that is unique to you. One person drew a picture of a blank check signed by himself and made out to Jesus. He told God to fill it out as He willed. Another individual wrote down the words of the hymn, “I Surrender All.” A woman modified the words of a traditional marriage vow to declare her “vow of commitment” to the Lord.

3. As a growing disciple, it is your responsibility to strive for and eventually model spiritual maturity. Utilizing the spiritual disciplines listed in the “**TRANSFORMATION**” section will help you “renew” your mind and become more like Christ. Try to assess how well you are presently applying each discipline. Are you just beginning, experiencing steady growth, or doing well enough to model the discipline for others? Then write down a personal growth strategy that will help you improve. For example, a growth strategy for the discipline of “prayer” might be to start a prayer journal. *Finally, since the list of disciplines is just a sampling, ask yourself what other disciplines would help your spiritual growth.* Knowing that the use of the disciplines in a legalistic way will bear little fruit, seek the Lord's presence and ask for His power.

1. MOTIVATION: Meditating on God's Mercies

The following passages from Romans 1-11 describe many examples of the gifts that God in His mercy has generously lavished upon believers. Gratefully list these demonstrations of His benevolence. You may also want to underline the words or phrases in your Bible that are especially meaningful to you.

- Romans 1:6-7
- Romans 1:16-17
- Romans 3:21-26
- Romans 4:7-8
- Romans 4:25-5:2
- Romans 5:5-11
- Romans 5:15-17
- Romans 5:20-21
- Romans 6:4-8
- Romans 6:14

- Romans 6:18
- Romans 6:22-23
- Romans 8:1-4
- Romans 8:6
- Romans 8:23
- Romans 8:26
- Romans 8:28-39
- Romans 9:23-24
- Romans 10:9-10
- Romans 10:12-13
- Romans 10:17
- Romans 10:20
- Romans 11:33-36

2. DEDICATION: Express your commitment to the Lord by writing your own pledge of allegiance to Him:

3. TRANSFORMATION: Nurture your spiritual disciplines

A. Prayer

- Beginning
- Growing
- Modeling

My growth strategy is:

B. Systematic Bible study

- Beginning
- Growing
- Modeling

My growth strategy is:

C. Scripture meditation

- Beginning
- Growing
- Modeling

My growth strategy is:

D. Faithful church attendance

- Beginning
- Growing
- Modeling

My growth strategy is:

E. Stewardship giving

- Beginning
- Growing
- Modeling

My growth strategy is:

What other spiritual disciplines might aid your spiritual growth?



3. INSPECTION: Inventory Your Gifts and Resources

When it comes to ministry, what is *success*? How do you know if or when you have achieved it?

For years Cloyde Shirk felt like a failure. He longed to serve Christ but struggled to find a ministry niche where he believed he was fruitful and fulfilled. Shortly after I became his pastor he wrote me a letter that gave an overview of his life. In it he described his "call to the ministry," his education at Moody Bible Institute, and his marriage to Gerry, his precious wife.

Then, with surprising candor, he also described his frustrations. "We applied for missionary service in Mexico but I failed to pass the physical exam. Since that time we have applied to or sought service in many Christian organizations, but always the door closed in one way or another."

For many years Cloyde sought to discover his personal mission. He longed to be in a place of service where he would have an effective ministry that really made a difference in the lives of others. But, although he was always actively laboring for the Lord, he still felt he wasn't accomplishing what he should for God. As a result, he often doubted that he was a successful Christian worker.

The goal of this study is to help you discover a mission where you can be really successful. In order to do that, we need to do two things: 1) describe a process for discovering your mission, and 2) get a biblical yardstick for measuring success. In just a bit we're going to study a parable that will help us do both. But first, let's review our P.I.E.C.E. Plan.

In our introduction, we saw that God has a personal mission picked out uniquely for you. The first step for discovering that mission is *Preparation*. Spiritually, you'll want to completely surrender your life to God and His service. Until you do this, you'll lack the discernment and power to go any further.

Step two is *Inspection*. Here you will want to inventory the traits and resources that God has given you to invest in His work.

Do you remember the principles of *design* and *stewardship*? God crafted you with a special design that is custom made to allow you to effectively do particular tasks. Then He gave you spiritual resources that are to be matched up with the opportunities that He provides. So do a self-audit. Consider how God made you and what He gave you and then you will start to understand what kind of mission He has for you.

Start by asking, "What ministries match my design?" According to Dick Staub and Jeff Trautman, authors of Interchristo's *Career Kit*, "Because God is a designer, you are equipped with a purpose. This simply means that God, your Creator and Craftsman, has equipped you to do certain tasks well." They go on to stress that "satisfaction will come when you accept and

understand your unique design, then find the niche that fits your unique design. And when you excel in the expression of your design, you will bring glory to your Designer!"¹⁴

Now ask, "What ministries match my resources?" Marlowe Embree says, "One key to finding our calling is to examine the interests and gifts God has built into us. Since God is consistent, it is logical to assume that he made each person with a set of personal characteristics that fit the purpose He has for him or her."¹⁵

If you went to a construction site and the foreman were to hand you a saw and say, "go do something that needs doing," isn't it safe to assume that you might end up cutting something? Let me illustrate the same point with two screwdrivers: one a Phillips and the other a flathead. I hand one to you and the other to a friend at your side. Then I hand each of you a screw and a board and challenge you to a race. "Let's see which of you can put a screw into this board the quickest?"

Since both screws are flatheads, having just one groove in the surface, only one of you will be very successful. The analogy is simple: God will give you tools to match your assignment, so examining your tools will help you discern that assignment. And if your tool doesn't match a task, you will be clumsy doing it.

The step of *Inspection*, then, is simply this: God has crafted you with a particular design and gifted you with a special blend of spiritual resources. So you will want to inventory what traits and tools God has entrusted to you.

This is all pictured dramatically in a parable found in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. In this vivid story Jesus tells of a wealthy businessman who, going on a long trip, entrusts significant capital to some of his employees so they can invest it while he is gone. The parallel for us is that while we are awaiting Christ's return, we are responsible for wisely investing the spiritual resources that He has placed under our stewardship.

GOD HAS ENTRUSTED YOU WITH VALUABLE ASSETS

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey." (Matt. 25:14-15)

The master distributed different amounts of talents to his servants. A talent was not a coin, it was a weight. Its value was dependent upon whether it was gold, silver or copper. No one can be definitive about this, but some have estimated that a typical talent would be the equivalent of about \$1000. On the other end of the spectrum, a gold talent was worth about \$30,000. Regardless, we're talking about a considerable amount of money.

Take Inventory of Your Assets

The different measures of talents illustrate the principle that the Lord distributes differing assets to his followers. By an asset, we're simply referring to any resource that has value and usefulness.

Examples would include natural abilities, supernatural abilities (spiritual gifts), income, material possessions, time, education, relationships, positions of influence, or experience. Since your family members may influence your ministry, I'd factor them in, as well.

You may find various tools that might guide you in this inventory process. One of my favorites is called the *StrengthsFinder Profile*. It is the product of a 25-year multimillion-dollar effort by the Gallup Organization to identify the most prevalent human strengths. The program introduces thirty-four dominant “themes” with thousands of possible combinations and reveals how they can best be translated into personal and career success. Understanding your strengths can help you in your personal development and life accomplishments.

Two assumptions guide the *SF Profile*: 1) Each person’s talents are enduring and unique. 2) Each person’s greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength.

After taking an online survey, your top five dominant themes are revealed. These signature themes are powerful sources of strength. By refining these you will be in the best position to play out your own strengths to the fullest. To ignore these strengths would be tragic. Wasted strengths are, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, “sundials in the shade.”

After special training by the Gallup Organization, I was licensed to become a SF consultant. I’ve used this in coaching pastors and church planters. The profile has also been utilized in vocational placement.

The simplest way for you to take advantage of *StrengthsFinder* is to purchase the book, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* by Tom Rath. Included will be a key for taking the online survey and help in interpreting the results.

While I like this tool, I am just using it as an example of one way to discover some of your assets. There are many other resources to help you in this pursuit – including simple, prayer-driven introspection. And while you are listing your various assets, don’t forget to take note of painful experiences in your past. They can equip you with empathy and understanding.

I remember a difficult situation as a pastor when I needed to help a family in which a young girl was the victim of incest. In our first session, I enlisted the help of a godly woman in our church who was also a trusted neighbor of the girl. This lady, though not a trained counselor, was amazing with her empathy, listening skills and advice. When I affirmed her later, tears came to her eyes and she softly said, “Ron, I’ve never shared this in the past, but when I was a child, I was also a victim of incest.”

Paul told the Corinthian church that God comforts us so that we can comfort others. So add past hurts and failures to your list of assets.

Before you can wisely invest your spiritual resources, a prior step should be to carefully inventory them. Prayerfully ask God to reveal to you and those who know you as many “talents” as possible. Try to build an extensive list. Then view this list as your personal “investment portfolio.” The *Learning Exercise* at the end of this chapter will help you build this portfolio.

After taking inventory of your assets, you will need to consecrate them.

Recognize God's Ownership of Your Assets

Good stewards recognize that all their assets belong to God. They are to be good managers of what has been entrusted to them. This concept should enable us to resist the temptation to be envious of those who have more “talents” or the temptation to be haughty around those who seemingly have less.

You may want to walk through the rooms of your home and say, “This is the Lord's house.” Pick up your checkbook and proclaim, “This account belongs to God.” If you are a gifted singer, you could pray, “Thank you for placing this musical instrument within me. I will use it for your glory.”

There is a necessity to constantly dedicate all that we are and have to God. Genuine consecration is not so much giving what you have to the Lord as confessing that what you have already belongs to Him. Then you can take your role as a steward more seriously. It's your ultimate purpose in life.

YOUR ASSETS CAN EITHER BE INVESTED OR BURIED

“The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.” (Matt. 25:16-18)

You Can Choose to Invest Your Assets

After taking inventory of your assets and consciously determining that they are God's possessions in your hands, it is time to volitionally choose to invest them for the Lord. In so doing, you can have lasting consequences. “Only one life will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last.”

It is transforming to consider how even the most "average" assets can earn eternally compounding interest when you choose to invest them in the kingdom of God. For example, you can use your (God's) time to pick up some children with your (God's) car to bring them to your (God's) church where you can teach them in your (God's) Sunday school class. Through such simple stewardship, lives may be affected forever.

When I was twenty-six, I became the first pastor of a baby church in Gunnison, Colorado. Because we grew quickly there were many jobs to be done by people who didn't feel qualified to do them.

Betty was one such person. We needed a pianist and she was the only one with any ability. She protested that her talent was limited and that she was particularly nervous in front of people. But she consented, "until," in her words, "a real pianist is found!" Every week she would pick out three hymns, practice them daily, and then on Sunday, play them with quivering, shaking hands. The church was blessed and the Lord was honored by her willingness to invest a small talent.

Even a small pebble thrown into a pond makes ever widening rings of ripples. Dare to make waves!

Try to discern where and how you can make the best possible return on your investments. Servants who love their Master will strive to practice strategic stewardship.

You Can Choose to Bury Your Assets

Sadly, too many Christians are like the servant who buried his talent. He didn't lose it through a high-risk investment that went sour. He simply did nothing with it. By burying it, he treated it like something that was dead. If he had at least allowed it to earn interest, it would have had a living contribution.

Christians bury their assets when they don't use them. They let them rust. They also waste their resources when they invest them in their own kingdom instead of God's.

In his book, *Why Settle for More and Miss the Best?* Tom Sine states, "I believe a major

reason so little of our total resources or time are invested in the mission of the church is that we have such heavy demands on our lives to carry out another mission. Other peaks and mountains have our attention, resources, and commitment."¹⁶

THOSE WHO INVEST THEIR ASSETS WILL ENJOY GREAT REWARD

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matt. 25:19-23)

Wise investing demonstrates high character and results in great reward. By bringing profit to their Master, these "good and faithful" servants also brought profit to themselves. They received at least three types of reward.

First, they obtained "praise" from their Master. They each heard the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Praise may be the highest prize you can receive from one whom you really love and admire. The heart of every Spirit-filled saint longs to hear these same words from his or her Savior.

Second, they received higher position. “You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.” Some may groan, “But this is just more responsibility.” That’s correct! But the privilege of greater service is a delight to the one who truly loves the Lord.

D. L. Moody was a simple shoe salesman who asked a Sunday school superintendent if he could teach a children's class. Doubting Moody's ability, the superintendent declined to give him a class but he did offer him a room if Dwight could recruit his own students. Most would have become discouraged and not accepted such a challenge. But Moody went out into the streets of Chicago and invited so many children that his class far exceeded the size of any of the others. Due to his faithful stewardship God raised him to positions of greater responsibility and he became one of America's most famous evangelists.

The third reward the wise investors experienced was greater happiness. “*Come and share your master's happiness.*” A non-serving Christian is an unhappy Christian. As the old chorus says, “there is joy in serving Jesus!”

THOSE WHO BURY THEIR ASSETS WILL SUFFER GREAT LOSS

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matt. 25:24-30)

According to the text, foolish investing reveals low character and results in great loss. By his poor stewardship, the unwise investor demonstrated that he was wicked, lazy, worthless and ignorant. His wickedness was shown by his disobedience. His laziness was confirmed by the rebuke that he could have at least banked his money and received interest. The word "worthless" could be rendered "useless." He was a big “zero!”

Worst of all was his ignorance of the nature of his master. Bible scholar Charles Erdman comments, “He declared that he feared the severity of the master. He showed that he had no conception of the true character of his lord. It is sometimes true that those who have small ability neglect their opportunities for service, because they do not realize the grace and kindness of the Lord who gives, with every talent, grace for its proper use and never allows any real effort for him truly to fail. All he expects is that one shall do his best.”¹⁷

Paralyzed by fear, the one-talent servant hoarded the talent, not giving it, or himself, a chance. Are we ever like him? How about the Christian who avoids witnessing because he is afraid that if he “blows” it, God will be angry with him?

This foolish man lost out on two counts. First, he experienced the loss of true valuables. His talent was taken from him and given to the one who had ten. Second, he lost his Master's presence. The command was given to "throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." On the day of accountability (Matt. 25:31-33, 46), the books will be opened and true followers will be revealed. While salvation is by faith, Scripture also says "by their fruit you shall know them." (Matt. 7:20)

THE BIG IDEA

John Bradley and Jim Carty summarize the major lesson of the parable with these words, “Perhaps it may help you to think of excellence as *maximizing God's endowment in you...* This parable shows us that excellence means *doing your best with what you've been given* -- not living up to some arbitrary, across-the-board standard of achievement.”¹⁸

Fred Smith wrote an article in *Leadership Journal* titled, “Giving People Permission to Succeed.” In it he said that many Christians think success is not to be pursued. They look at passages like "the first shall be last," and conclude that success is a taboo. In the following quote he defines true success and urges us to pursue it.

The person who's doing the most with what he's got is truly successful. Not the one who becomes the richest or most famous, but the one who has the closest ratio of talents received to talents used. An unsuccessful person, on the other hand, is one who didn't use the chances he or she had. He could have developed himself, he could have made a contribution to life, he could have become a mature Christian, but he didn't... The Bible says that to whom much has been given, much will be required.¹⁹

The bottom line? *Success comes when you inventory your God-given design and spiritual resources and invest them where the greatest profit can result.*

CONCLUSION

Let's get back to Cloyde Shirk's story. He tells it himself in *My Vision*, an autobiographical poem:

Long years I waited on the Lord,
That He might guide by His word.
So long I sought His will and way,
Praying for guidance day by day.

When I was young, I gave my heart;
Yearning then His service to start.
I prayed, "O Lord give me a call,
That I may use for thee my all."

He called me, a shy farmer lad,
To give to Him all that I had.
"Son, come put your hand to the plow,
And don't look back, fulfill your vow."

Soon he opened up the door,
To go to school, though I was poor.
He led me to a Bible School.
His word became a sharpened tool.

Then He also gave me a wife,
Who has richly blessed my life.
Now I began to seek His plan:
"Where shall I serve both God and man?"

I felt a call to Mexico,
And said "Lord, that's where I'll go."
I did not pass the "health exam,"
So that door closed, as with a slam.

Since that time over many years,
I truly sought God's will with tears.
Full time service I often sought,
But all my efforts came to naught.

At last it seemed God spoke to me,
Through Habakkuk 2:2 & 3.
"I have a work for you to do,
It will be writing, that is true."

I consider Cloyde Shirk to be one of the finest Christians I ever knew. He had a transparent

love for God and others. He was a man of exceptional wisdom and sweet gentleness. He was an amazing prayer warrior and a great servant.

Orally, he wasn't a gifted communicator. His words, however wise, tended to come out slow and staggered. But God designed him and equipped him to be particularly effective in conversing with a pen. He started to write hundreds of letters, many of them with personalized poems, to those needing comfort or encouragement. No one will ever know how much those notes ministered to people. *They sure touched me!*

When I conducted his funeral, I asked how many had ever received help from Cloyde's writing. I was amazed at the response. Throughout the auditorium, hands went up and tears flowed.

After taking *inventory* of his spiritual resources, he wisely *invested* them in the needs of others. As a result, his life was a great *success story!*

Learning Exercise:
YOUR INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

An Application of the Parable of the Talents

1. **Natural Abilities and Acquired Skills:** List as many of your talents and abilities as you can think of. Some examples would include skills in such areas as music, drama, mechanics, secretarial, writing, photography, etc.
2. **Supernatural Abilities (Spiritual Gifts):** Spiritual gifts are listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. List your spiritual gift(s), if you know them. If not, you can return to this section after our study of the gifts.
3. **Possessions:** What possessions could you use for the Lord? Car? House? Camera? Computer?
4. **Relationships:** What friends, relatives, neighbors, work associates, or fellow workers might God want you to minister to? How might your spouse or children play a part in your ministry?
5. **Positions:** What positions of influence could you use for God's glory? They could be in your school, community, club, workplace, etc.
6. **Opportunities:** Sometimes God opens doors and provides special opportunities. It could be a short-term mission trip, a chance to help a neighbor through a tragedy, etc.
7. **Time:** What time slots could be made available for service? Wednesday nights? Saturday mornings? A week off in the summer? What "prime time" slots will you surrender to God?
8. **Trials:** Those who have gone through painful experiences in their past often have more expertise and a greater empathy when working with others going through the same kind of trial. What hard times have you endured?
9. **Passions:** Has God given you some special burdens? Perhaps you are horrified about the abortion issue. Maybe you have fervor for using music to lead others into greater worship. Are there particular spiritual needs or hurts that you are passionate about?
10. **Personality Characteristics:** Perhaps a personality test has shown you that you are more of a "sprinter" than a long-distance runner. Then you may be better at working on short-term projects than on-going ministries. Perhaps you work better with individuals than groups? Maybe you do better working on tasks alone than with a team? Are you a designer? A developer? An implementer? A sustainer? What personality styles do you have that might equip you more for some ministries than others?
11. **Experiences:** One's past experiences in different dimensions not only provides some expertise and wisdom; often a deeper, heart-felt sensitivity is also gained. Have you been part of

a church plant, been on a mission trip, traveled with a music team, etc.?

12. **Communication Styles:** In what ways do you communicate best? Public speaking? Conversing? Teaching? Preaching? Writing? Speaking on the telephone? Broadcasting? Acting? Moderating? Maybe you communicate through artistic expression? Photography? Music? Painting? Posters? Newsletters?

13. **Others:** The previous categories have been used to spur your imagination. What other spiritual resources can you think of?



4. EXPLORATION: Explore Your Ministry Options

Edgar had a knack for getting fired. He got fired as a cowboy, fired as a law clerk, fired as a railroad policeman and fired as a stenographer. It finally dawned on him that maybe he wasn't good at working for others. So he tried to make a living going door-to-door as a salesman – and failed. Then he started up his own advertising agency – which went bankrupt.

After that (and I love this part!) he started a correspondence school to teach people how to succeed in business. Isn't that a kick? Guess what, that failed too.

What he was good at was fantasizing, so at age thirty-seven he wrote a story about a man who had adventures in the jungles of Africa. A couple years later it was turned into a book called, *Tarzan of the Apes*.

It wasn't easy, but Edgar Rice Burroughs had finally found the career niche that was just right for him... a career that sold over 36 million books in over thirty languages.²⁰

In some cases God quickly directs you to your personal mission. In most, however, you will need to explore your options, try them on to see if they fit, or test drive them and see how they feel, and then get the evaluations of other Christians.

Discovering your “just right” ministry may not be easy. That might be God's plan. You may have a long journey through trials and growth experiences before you find your groove. But whatever God's timing, *an important part of the discovery process is exploring your ministry options.*

I want to challenge you to be an explorer. That is the third phase of the “Discover Your Mission” P.I.E.C.E. Plan. Are you at the point where you can close your eyes and recite each of the steps from memory? Give it a try. Well, just in case you missed a few, here they are: *Preparation, Inspection, Exploration, Contribution and Evaluation.*

The discovery process begins with the heart *Preparation* of looking to God and saying “yes!” to His plans for your life. It is unlikely that God will show you His will until you express a willingness to walk in it. Do this with the enthusiasm of knowing that your lovingly Heavenly Father has prepared a wonderful journey for you.

In step two, *Inspection*, you began to look at your God-given design and the resources God has given you to invest for Him. Here is where you listed your many assets in your Investment Portfolio.

In this chapter, we will look at step three: *Exploration*. It is here that your adventure really takes off. You are going to learn how to explore the ministry options that best match the resources and burdens that God has given you.

But here is a big question: Where should you explore? There is a world of hurt out there that God wants to touch through His people. There are myriad ministries you could check out. Where should your journey of exploration begin?

START HERE: Explore some ministries at the point where your burdens and resources intersect. Your personal mission will be found in that vicinity.

Here is a mental image that may help you. Think of two roads that intersect. One avenue is named “Burdens” and the other, “Resources.” Somewhere in the neighborhood where they cross is a ministry that you want to claim. So use this Ministry GPS to move towards your mission destination.

Explore Ministries that Relate to a Need You Are Burdened About

In his excellent book on discerning God’s will, M. Blaine Smith says,

Ultimately, the only way I can discover whether or not God wishes to gift me in a certain area is to experiment. As I try out an area of service, I discover through the results and through the confirmation of others in the body whether I truly do have a gift in the area. If I’m interested in finding out about my gifts, it’s essential that I have regular involvement in a Christian community, where I can receive feedback from others as I endeavor to meet the needs in the fellowship. In this context the most important question becomes not, “What is my gift?” but rather, “How can I be of service?” My thinking should not begin with myself but with the needs of others in the body.²¹

Find a need that you are burdened about and see if God might want to use you to fill it. How do believers get burdens from God? The book of Nehemiah tells the amazing story of how God took a man out of his comfort zone and thrust him into a successful ministry that he would never have previously even dreamed about. The first chapter of Nehemiah displays the godly art of “burden-catching.”

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

“O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’

“They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

I was cupbearer to the king.

When Nehemiah’s brother returned from Jerusalem to Babylon, Nehemiah learned that the people in Israel were living in constant danger and disgrace. The walls around Jerusalem that had been torn down a hundred and fifty years before were still scattered rubble, and charred pieces of wood were the only evidence of the once mighty gates. The Israelites had no protection. They lived in constant fear of raids by their marauding neighbors. They also lived in shame. A saying of that time was “a city without locked gates and lofty walls is no city at all.” Jerusalem was the punchline of many a joke.

Nehemiah questioned Hanani and his companions way into the night and, as he collected more information, a burden for the people grew heavy in his heart. Their need became his fixation and for days he mourned, fasted and prayed. It was in those prayers that he shared his burden with God. With confidence in His greatness and unfailing promises, Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people and asked for the Lord’s restoration and help. During those prayer meetings, God showed him that he was to become involved in rebuilding the walls. With that sense of call, Nehemiah asked God to help him be successful in carrying out his mission.

From Nehemiah’s example we discover that we obtain burdens when we prayerfully probe needs. And burdens are prerequisites to ministries that matter. In the words of Alan Redpath, “Let us learn this lesson from Nehemiah: you never lighten the load unless first you have felt the pressure in your soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are.”

What are you burdened about? One of my burdens is that many Christians are missing out on the joy and impact they could have if they were serving in the area of their ministry niche. They either aren’t serving or they are not serving in the ministry zone that is right for them. That is why I am providing this material on how to discover your personal mission. Now how about you, what are some needs out there that you are burdened about?

Catch a burden from God by allowing your attention and your heart to get close to the needs of others. Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, was known to say, “Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.”

Explore Ministries that Utilize Your Spiritual Resources

Meditate on the words of the popular Christian song *Let Your Heart Be Broken* and you will notice that the song starts with this line: “Let your heart be broken for a world in need” and ends with this one: “Share your rich resources – Give and give again.”²² We are back at the intersection of burdens and resources.

Being burdened about a need is not sufficient for exploring a new ministry. You must also have the resources required to meet the need. Nehemiah must have thought that his position as a

"cup-bearer to the king" (1:11) was a roadblock to his personal involvement. But when God, in answer to Nehemiah's prayers, touched the heart of the king, Nehemiah's role became a position of influence.

As we saw in the second step of the discovery process, God will give you a personal mission that corresponds with your design and resources. You were urged to build an investment portfolio that listed these various assets. Pray over that list and then look for a ministry that you are equipped to do.

Please be careful here because sometimes we don't have an accurate read of our own resources. Some overestimate their talents. If you have ever watched some of the television talent shows, you know what I mean. Some have talent and some only think they do. If you are tone-deaf, you may not want to join a choir (and others may not want you to, either!).

Most people, however, underestimate their spiritual resources. We may think we know our limits but much of what we "know" isn't knowledge at all but perception — faulty, self-limiting perception. And self-limiting perception can be a major barrier to God-sized dreams.

For many years the experts "knew" that running a mile in less than four minutes was "impossible." Articles published in physiology journals "proved" that the human body couldn't do it. Then, in 1954, Roger Bannister broke the four-minute barrier. Within two years ten other athletes had repeated his accomplishment.

Break a barrier. Do something "impossible." Faith-running Christians can boldly claim Paul's great affirmation: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). According to Major Ian Thomas, of the Torchbearer's Association, "We are only limited by all that God is."

Don't limit God's ability to do great things with you. God took a timid, "I could never do that" Moses and used him to lead a nation. Because of his shortsightedness, he was oblivious to all the spiritual resources that the Lord had been equipping him with over his lifetime. God had given him forty years of preparation in the palace and another forty in the wilderness, but all Moses focused on was his deficiency as a speaker. So, look at your resources, big and small, "supersize" them with God's power and then brainstorm about the various ministries in which they could be put to use.

Let's review. Where should you explore? You will want to explore your ministry options in areas that utilize your spiritual resources and relate to needs you are burdened about. Here is a simple equation:

Exploration Equation: *Burdens + Resources = Potential Ministry*

When you cruise an area where you're burdened about a need and you have some helpful resources in the trunk, pull over! You are in a neighborhood where your personal mission resides.

That may not mean that your search is over. You still need to explore the various ministry opportunities that exist in that vicinity. But isn't nice to know you are in the right area?

"Now is the time to 'explore' the possibilities of ministry," advises Marcia Mitchell. "Stretch yourself and see where God leads you. Try things you've never done before. Don't limit yourself or God. He may start you down a 'generic' path and suddenly send you off into a hidden lane where exquisite rare roses bloom."²³

When I was a young man, God used my heart's desire and the confirmation of other believers to guide me toward full-time Christian service. It appeared that I possessed the burden and

resources to serve in such a way. But as I mentioned earlier, I lacked more specific direction. Should I be a pastor? An evangelist? A missionary? To help me get focus, I intentionally determined to use my college years to experiment in various avenues of service.

I served as a part-time youth pastor in a couple of churches. I traveled as the preacher on an evangelistic team. One summer was spent overseas in short-term missions. I thought that this 'try it, you'll like it' approach would allow me to locate the exact ministry that was perfect for me.

I was wrong. After a series of positive experiences in each endeavor, I found that I wanted to be a youth pastor, a pastor, a missionary, AND an evangelist.

Was my experimentation a waste of time? Definitely not! While it didn't isolate one ministry where I should spend my life, it did allow certain ministry strengths, desires, and burdens to surface. They were the common denominators that were inherent in all the significant ministries that I have since enjoyed. I discovered that I could be fulfilled and fruitful in many ministries, as long as I was free to utilize those basic skills and yearnings. It also showed me that although my life would follow a distinctive ministry track, along the way there would be a series of particular missions: Church planter, leader of a network of churches, author, pastor and missionary.

Experimentation may not limit your choices; it may expand them. You might have a choice of ministry options. But they'll all be clustered around your design and resources. They will all be part of your mission. God has called me to use my leadership gifts and communication skills to build disciples and churches. For years I did that as a youth pastor, then as a church planter, a pastor, as the leader of a network of churches and now as a writer and international trainer. I have loved each phase of the journey and I urge you to think out of the box and experiment broadly.

Please note that I am using the term "mission" in the full spectrum of ministry perspective. For example, I am now serving as a missionary; that is my big mission. But I am also scheduled to teach in Mexico, Nepal and India in the next four months. They are short-term, smaller missions under the umbrella of my bigger mission. The principles for finding your mission are the same for finding any mission, big or small, short-term or long.

Follow a Path *OR* Blaze a Trail

As you ponder what ministries in which to experiment, consider both conventional and new, creative ministries. By conventional ministries I am referring to existing positions that you can volunteer for. Are you interested in teaching children? Perhaps you could start out by teaching a week of Vacation Bible School. Do you want to minister in music? Why not join the choir or a worship team?

New creative ministries may require an entrepreneurial spirit. If this doesn't describe you, then team up with someone it does. I love to hear about the novel methods that people design to touch others for Jesus.

In one church, a handful of men started praying about some of their unsaved buddies. Realizing that bow hunting was one of the things that they had in common with many of them, they set up an impressive target range at a home in the country. On Saturdays they would invite their pals to come and practice. After this time of strengthening their friendships they hosted a deer hunters' retreat that included informal times of sharing their testimonies. These men took an ordinary "resource" like a love for hunting and transformed it into an evangelistic hunting expedition.

Jon and Leigh provide another example. After Leigh's first husband, Jim, died from cancer she married Jon. She had talents in writing and calligraphy; he, a talent for photography. They combined these resources with their compassion for people in pain. They began to make beautiful plaques and cards that they would then bring to people who were bedridden or in hospitals. This built relationship bridges that allowed them to share about the comforts of Christ.

Be an Impact Player

What if you discover a number of ministry opportunities that match your burdens and resources? How do you choose which option to major in? Ask yourself where you can have the greatest impact. A study of the "parable of the talents" reveals that stewards should strive to get the best possible return on their investment.

Like Jabez, you can boldly pray, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory!" (I Chronicles 4:10) God called him honorable and granted his request. Our Lord wants to expand your influence as well. You may feel that you don't have many resources to invest but God can provide greater returns than you can ever imagine.

Delineating your sphere of "greatest impact" is not as simple as it may seem. To help you clarify the issue, ask yourself three questions:

- Where can I have the widest impact?
- Where can I have the deepest impact?
- Where can I have the longest impact?

A radio ministry might provide you with a *wide* impact. The size of your listening audience might be vast in number. A discipling ministry may give you the *deepest* impact. Your personal one-on-one mentoring might be used by God to be a major influence on a particular life (and others through multiplication, II Tim. 2:2). A Christian author might produce a book that spans the years, yielding a *long lasting* impact. Today's readers are still moved by John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* – a book written in 1678 (one friend recently told me that he still reads it once a year).

You may be able to collate your answers to these different questions into one unified direction. Or you may have to just choose the dimension that is most consistent with your spiritual resources and heart-felt fervor. But whatever you do, prayerfully seek to be used by God in the greatest way possible.

Only heaven will reveal the amount of fruit that God will produce through the faithful servant. Let me give you an example that is very special to me. Follow this flow of influence:

- In 1858 a Sunday school teacher led a Boston shoe clerk to the Lord. That salesman, D. L. Moody, became a famous evangelist who preached around the world.
- While speaking in England in 1879, God used him to awake the evangelistic zeal of F. B. Meyer. Years later a college student named J. Wilbur Chapman was saved through Meyer's ministry at his campus.
- Chapman became an evangelist and one of the early pioneers with the Young Men's Christian Association. He mentored a young baseball player named Billy Sunday.

- Sunday held a revival meeting in Charlotte, N.C. The effect on the community was so great that they scheduled another one, this time with a preacher named Mordecai Ham. In that second set of meetings Billy Graham yielded his life to Christ.
- Graham's crusade ministry really took off when he was the president of Northwestern Bible College. His passion for the lost made an impression on a young man who served on the student council.
- He, in turn, also became an evangelist. Through his ministry many thousands of people came to know the Lord. His passion for souls was contagious and his children caught it. His oldest son has pastored large churches and is now a national leader of a conference of churches. His daughter is married to a pastor. I am the other son... I pray that God will continue this on-going story of God's work through my life.

Do you think Mr. Kimbell, the Sunday school teacher that started this chain of events, had any idea what the Lord would do through his simple act?

God wants to make a great impact through you as well! He desires to give you the power and wisdom to find your ministry niche and then be fruitful in it.

In summary, you will want to catch a burden by prayerful involvement with needs. Add in the resources that God has given to you and then look for avenues of service where you can make a major impact. In God's timing, He will guide you to the place of service that is just right for you. As we will see in Step Four, God gives us spiritual gifts so that we can make a significant *Contribution*.

How will you know you have found your personal mission? Step Five, *Evaluation*, will make it clear. There you will be given a set of diagnostic tests that will help you determine if you really have discovered your personal mission.

Learning Exercise:
MISSION EXPLORATION WORKSHEET

Introduction: Your answers to the following questions will give you the information you need to move from brainstorming to actually beginning a ministry adventure. Make each answer as specific and concise as possible. If you are uncertain about which ministries to explore, you may want to peruse the "Ministry Menu." It provides a *small* sampling of various areas in which Christians can serve the Lord. Since churches vary in their ministries, many items on the menu may not relate to your situation. You can pick something from the menu that looks delicious or you can cook up your own recipe.

1. Three ministries that I think I would like to explore are:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. Of these, the one I will "experiment" with first is:
3. It will be aimed at these particular need(s):
4. This ministry will require the following resources:
5. To obtain further training, I will:
6. To obtain further experience, I will:
7. I will get past the following obstacles in the following ways:
8. I will be accountable to and supervised by:
9. Those who will help me evaluate my progress are:
10. I will strive to be active in service by this date or period:

MINISTRY MENU

TEACHING:

- ADULT BIBLE FELLOWSHIPS -- Teaching biblical truths while developing a community atmosphere.
- CHILDREN'S & TEENS' SUNDAY SCHOOL -- Teaching biblical truths at an age-appropriate level.

- ADULT BIBLE STUDIES -- Leading men or women through studies of God's Word.
- CHILDREN'S CLUBS -- There are various club programs for boys and girls that need workers to share biblical truths through lessons or stories.
- DISCIPLESHIP -- Mentoring Christians toward spiritual maturity.
- SUBSTITUTE TEACHER -- Temporarily replacing a regular teacher.
- WRITING -- Teaching biblical principles through articles or books.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:

- CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TASK FORCE -- Establishing policy, making decisions, and determining the direction of your church's training program.
- SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR -- Recruiting and leading Sunday school teachers toward effective teaching.
- CHILDREN'S CLUB DIRECTOR -- Recruiting and leading workers to serve in a boys and girls club program.
- LIBRARY WORKER -- Cataloging inventory, working to expand resources and services, and promoting use of the library.

CHILDREN:

- CHILDREN'S CLUBS -- Leading or helping with children in the following ways: being a grade leader, listening to memory verses, leading game time, giving a short lesson during council times, being an age group director, and balancing and recording finances.
- CHILDREN'S CHURCH -- Leading or helping with children during Sunday services.
- NURSERY -- Coordinating nursery workers or personally caring for babies and toddlers during Sunday services or other weekday programs.
- CHILDREN'S WORKER SCHEDULING -- Recruiting and scheduling workers for specified children's age groups during church services.
- CHILDREN'S CHOIR -- Directing a children's music group.
- VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL WORKER -- Working with children in various capacities for one week in the summer.
- CAMPS -- Serving as a counselor, activities' coordinator, cook, maintenance worker, or camp director.

CARING:

- YOUTH SPONSOR -- Interacting with and caring for teenagers by attending their weekly programs and special events and by making personal contacts.
- PRAYER CHAIN -- Receiving, passing on, and praying for prayer requests that come through a structured calling system of people.
- LAY COUNSELOR -- Counseling those with special hurts or needs.
- CARE GROUP LEADER -- Recruiting and leading a small group of people to develop caring, nurturing relationships with one another.
- CLASS SHEPHERD -- Keeping record of new and regular attenders of your Sunday school class, caring for those people through personal contacts, following up on absentees, and planning fellowship events.
- VISITATION -- Contacting those who are ill or discouraged.
- ALTERNATIVE PREGNANCY CENTER -- Helping women through a crisis pregnancy and working to prevent abortions.
- SOCIAL CONCERN -- Impacting society by influencing schools, town councils, political trends, moral standards, etc.
- COMMUNITY SERVICE -- Helping in a food kitchen, "meals on wheels," nursing home, victim assistance, hospital aid, etc.

MUSIC:

- CHOIR OR WORSHIP TEAM -- Directing or singing in a music group.
- WORSHIP TEAM -- Leading congregational singing with a team of singers and instrumentalists.
- SPECIAL MUSIC -- Providing special music through solos, ensembles or instrumentals.
- SONG LEADER -- Leading the congregation in singing during church services.
- ACCOMPANIST -- Playing an instrument such as piano or organ along with congregational singing or special music.
- MUSIC COMMITTEE -- Planning and scheduling participants for all aspects of the music program for church services or other events.

- COMPOSING -- Creating new worship music.

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES:

- ACTS OF CARING -- Caring for people through cards, flowers, meals, hospital visits, food closet, grief counseling, etc. as well as giving baby Bibles for new babies, etc.
- WOMEN'S MINISTRIES TEAM -- Planning and implementing regular ministries and special events for women.
- MENTORING -- Pairing a mature woman with a younger woman to encourage and pray together on a regular basis.
- DISCIPLESHIP -- Meeting regularly one-on-one with women who desire a study of basic Bible truths.
- TARGET GROUPS -- Various groups held together by a common interest (mothers of preschoolers, professional women, senior adults, etc.) often need workers to minister in some of the following capacities: director, speaker, craft committee, hospitality coordinator, table leader, finance manager, and children's worker, etc.
- SPECIALTY INSTRUCTOR -- Leading classes in crafts, exercise, teacher training, cooking, self-defense, etc.

MEN'S MINISTRIES:

- DISCIPLESHIP -- Meeting regularly one-on-one with men who desire a study of basic Bible truths.
- BUSINESS MEN'S BREAKFASTS -- Meeting together at a restaurant early in the morning for prayer, Bible study, and/or fellowship.
- ACCOUNTABILITY GROUPS -- Meeting periodically for Bible study, prayer and sharing about spiritual progress.
- NETWORKING -- Being part of a larger men's movement.

OUTREACH:

- OUTREACH AND ENFOLDING TEAM -- Working to reach your community for Christ and helping new attenders feel welcomed.
- MISSIONS TEAM (Global Outreach Team) -- Promoting missions emphases and corresponding with individual missionaries.
- NEWCOMER FOLLOW-UP -- Calling, visiting, or sending mailings to newcomers.

- PUBLIC RELATIONS -- Writing news releases, planning special promotional strategies, making posters, designing fliers.
- PRISON MINISTRY -- Visiting inmates, witnessing, leading Bible studies, counseling, and encouraging them.
- ADULT CARE CENTERS -- Visiting, witnessing to, and encouraging the elderly who are shut in.
- SHORT TERM MISSIONS -- Participating on a missions trip to another land or culture.

OTHER AREAS OF SERVICE:

- ELDER OR DEACON BOARD -- Giving overall vision, policy, and spiritual guidance to the church.
- FACILITIES AND GROUNDS TEAM -- Taking care of the needs of the church facilities and grounds.
- FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE -- Planning and implementing fellowship events.
- DRAMA -- Writing, directing, acting, or working behind-the-scenes to present skits, dramas, etc.
- SOUND TECHNICIAN -- Operating the sound system for the services and programs of the church.
- POWERPOINT OPERATOR -- Managing visual presentations during services or classes.
- FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE -- Tracking church income, general accounting and bookkeeping.
- WEDDING COORDINATOR -- Acting as liaison between the bridal party and the church, communicating necessary details about policies, protocol, and suggested procedures.
- ATHLETIC COORDINATOR -- Organizing and overseeing athletic teams within the church.
- WORK DAY VOLUNTEER -- Assisting the Facilities and Grounds Committee in special projects or regular maintenance.
- SINGLES MINISTRY -- Ministering to singles (college-age, professional, single-again, single parents, etc.) through a Sunday school class, Bible study, and special events.
- USHER -- Dispensing bulletins, receiving offerings, and generally assisting people during

Sunday services.

- GREETER -- Welcoming people as they arrive for Sunday services and orientating newcomers to the building and available programs.
- OFFICE VOLUNTEER -- Assisting with special projects or regular tasks on a part-time or as-needed basis.
- HOSPITALITY -- Housing special speakers, music groups, etc.
- STEWARDSHIP TEAM -- Supervising the finances and funds of the church.
- SCHOOL VOLUNTEER – Helping the school at various points of need.
- SPECIALTY ACTIVITIES -- Providing help in an area of personal proficiency. Examples include photography, interior or exterior decorating, graphic design, computer skills, handicrafts, etc.
- PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS -- Pastor, missionary, evangelist, counselor, para-church worker, denominational leader, professor, Christian school teacher or administrator, camp director, etc.



5. CONTRIBUTION: The Joy of Gift Giving

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Father Christmas gave Lucy a special gift – a gift that she could use to help others. It was a vial of medicinal cordial made from the juice of fire-flowers that grew in the mountains of the sun. A single drop would cure almost any illness or wound. With it, she healed many people, including her brother Edmund and her dear friend Reepicheep. In a similar way, your heavenly Father has given you gifts that you can use to help others.

Repeatedly we've discussed the ministry resources that God has given to you to invest in the sphere of your personal mission. God has generously given them to you so that you can have the joy of sharing them with others. In your *Investment Portfolio* you have already listed many of them – talents, time, knowledge, money, passions, etc. But now we will focus on the resources that are most essential for your ministry effectiveness: your spiritual gifts. Most Christians have a lot of questions about this topic so we are going to look at the “top ten” questions you may have.

Before we get into spiritual gifts, though, let's once again review. We have been stair-stepping up a five-step discovery process called the P.I.E.C.E. Plan. So far we have studied the first three steps of *Preparation, Introspection, and Exploration*. Now in step four, *Contribution*, we determine that we will generously contribute our spiritual resources in God's kingdom work.

Among all the resources that you can invest in your personal mission, the most dynamic are your spiritual gifts. Chuck Swindoll says, “The orchestration of the Body is something beautiful to behold. Christ Himself selects who will play each instrument. As the conductor, He determines the selections and then decides which parts will play. Because He is also the composer, the music He writes is perfectly designed to impact the world as well as encourage the members of the orchestra. It's a phenomenon duplicated nowhere else. Did you know that as a child of God, you are a member of this vast orchestra? Were you aware that the Lord has placed instruments in your hands that play a vital part in His composition? Those instruments are called ‘spiritual gifts’ in the New Testament.”²⁴

There are three main passages that deal with spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. This section, based primarily on 1 Corinthians 12, deals with the special gifts that your Father wants you to share with others. Most people who focus on this subject tend to quickly ask, “What are the spiritual gifts and which ones belong to me?” But the bigger question, according to this text, should be, “How will I, if I am spiritual, use my gifts?” This chapter gives

the answer. You should use your gift or gifts to exalt the person of Christ (vss. 1-3), edify the body of Christ (4-11), and unify the work of Christ (12-31).

The first emphasis is the exaltation of Jesus. Prior to their conversion, the Corinthian believers had been devoted to idol worship. Due to the demonic power behind these idols (10:20), the people had been “influenced and led astray.” In marked contrast to this past evil spiritual activity, the Holy Spirit leads them to Jesus Christ. The Spirit enables believers to wholeheartedly confess Jesus as Lord. Before you go on to focus on spiritual gifts, you must stop and ask yourself if you are devoted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Is He the Master of every dimension of your life? Genuine spirituality is evidenced by the exaltation of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, with the goal of exalting Christ, building up others, and unifying God’s family, let’s study 1 Corinthians twelve and look at ten key questions:

1. What are spiritual gifts?

William McRae gives this definition of a spiritual gift: “It is a divine endowment of a special ability for service upon a member of the body of Christ.”²⁵ Gifts are God-given capacities for exceptional service to the Church.

2. How are gifts different than talents?

They are more than talents. Both gifts and talents are presents from God. Both can be developed. Both can be used to serve God. But gifts are given just to Christians while talents are also given to unbelievers. Talents are natural abilities. Gifts are supernatural ministry capacities. For example, a “talented” public school teacher may not be a “gifted” Bible teacher.

3. Where do I use my spiritual gifts?

Verses 4-6 refer to different kinds of “gifts,” “service” and “working.” Each term has a distinctive shade of meaning. The “gifts” refer to spiritual endowments for ministry, “service” speaks of various avenues of ministry, and “working” talks of the results of ministry.

I believe that my father had the “gift” of evangelism. His particular avenue of effective “service” was evangelistic meetings held in churches across America and overseas. The “working” that God produced was a harvesting of thousands of people who accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Another person (let’s call her “Sue”) may also have the “gift” of evangelism, but her sphere of “service” is not public speaking and preaching. Rather, God has directed Sue to focus on personal friendship evangelism. The “working” may also be different. Perhaps God uses her to be more of a sower than a reaper. As a result, she may not get the opportunity to see a lot of people immediately make a profession of faith. But under God’s direction, many of these people do eventually get saved.

Personalize this concept. God has given you a field to work in (service in your ministry niche). He has also given you the tools (gifts) you need to tend that field. And He will produce a harvest (God’s working) through your efforts.

4. Who receives the gifts?

The recipients of the gifts are believers (vs. 13). At the point of salvation, every believer receives one or more gifts. Notice the "each one" in verses 7, 11 and 18. Think of them as birthday gifts. But until they are discovered and used, they still lie wrapped.

A Christian cannot choose his or her gifts. That decision is made by God alone. The Spirit gives them to each one "just as he determines" (vs. 11). The phrase "eagerly desire the greater gifts" (vs. 31) is not an invitation to individuals to seek certain gifts; it is a mandate to the church to give highest value to those gifts that best edify the body.

5. How many gifts are given?

Every Christian receives one or more gifts. When there is a gift mix, some may be more prominent than others. This adds to your uniqueness. Just as several colors mixed together will form their own distinct hue, you, too, are distinct and colorful. Another example would be a bouquet of flowers. The different flowers and the arrangement make each bouquet one of a kind.

6. Why are gifts given?

They are not designed for self-edification, but rather for "the common good" (vs. 7). The gifts given to you are actually gifts distributed through you to the rest of the body. They are to be exercised by you for the benefit of your spiritual family. 1 Peter 4:10 states, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." Here is the joy of gift-giving. God joyfully and generously gifted you with gifts that you can give with matching joy to others. It's like treating every day like Christmas.

7. What gifts are mentioned in Scripture?

The list of spiritual gifts mentioned here in 1 Corinthians 12 is not complete. It is merely representative of the diversity of the gifts distributed to members of Christ's body. Further gifts are mentioned in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. It might be possible to simply compile the various lists, but there is no concrete evidence to specify the quantity of gifts. John MacArthur said,

This list in 1 Corinthians is not necessarily exhaustive. There is a different list in Romans 12, and there is a suggestion of a list in 1 Peter 4. There is no reason to assume that this is all there is. I read one book that said that there were only four gifts. I read another one that said there were nine, another one said that there were eleven, another one fourteen, another one seventeen, another one nineteen. How many are there? I don't believe that is the point. I don't think we need to take a test on the gifts, put the results into a computer, and say, "I'm a _____ according to the computer."²⁶

The lack of definitions in these passages also makes it hard to give conclusive descriptions of each of the gifts. If you read various books on spiritual gifts, you will find widely differing definitions for the same gift. Though some of the gifts are easier to peg than others, about the best we can do is study the etymology (the study of the origins of the Greek words) and usage of each gift, and try to gain an approximate understanding as to its nature.

In the Learning Exercise, *A Spiritual Gifts Chart*, there is a list of the gifts mentioned in the New Testament and the biblical references where they are found. I urge you to study the texts with the use of some good commentaries and craft definitions for each gift. If you go to my website you can find my results, but I didn't put them here because I want you to work through this on your own first.

If you do study the conclusions on my chart, you will see that I don't believe that all the spiritual gifts are still in existence today. In my view the scriptural evidence indicates some of the gifts were for the birth of the church while others were for its continued growth. You may differ with me as to the definition or duration of each of the gifts. That's okay. I just urge you to study the chart and the related Scriptures and come to your own conclusions. You don't want to inherit your convictions from a book, a denomination, or even a memorable experience. Only God's Word is a reliable source.

8. How do I discover my spiritual gifts?

It is in the context of ministry that gifts are discovered. And when you are operating in your ministry niche you can be confident that you are using your gifts – even if you can't label them yet. It is likely, however, that when you have reached this stage, you may be able to deduce which gifts you probably possess. This result becomes even more probable when, over a span of time, you note which gifts may have been the common denominators behind the various ministries in which you have felt fruitful and fulfilling. In the words of Billy Graham, "The process of discovering our spiritual gifts may be a lengthy one, and we may even find gifts emerging as the years go by and we confront new opportunities and challenges."²⁷

Reflect on your past ministries and note which gifts were common to each area of fruitful service. They are apt to be your unique gift mix. After you have made this discovery, pray about how you can use them in future ministries.

This is the reverse of the process recommended by those who advocate discovering one's ministry niche by first discovering one's gifts. Often, some form of test or inventory is used to discern which gift one possesses. And then, a ministry is chosen in which that gift is utilized.

In his book, *Sharpening The Focus of the Church*, Dr. Gene Getz debates this strategy. He notes that...

...when local church leaders were to be appointed, Paul did not instruct Timothy and Titus to "look for spiritual gifts"; rather to look for "spiritual qualifications." It is interesting to note that in all of the qualifications listed for elders, the closest reference to a gift is when Paul states that these men are to be "able to teach." Even here, however, it does not say he must have the "gift of teaching." but rather he must be able to communicate the Word of God effectively (compare Titus 1:9). If having obvious spiritual gifts is a prerequisite for serving in the church -- as some people say it is -- it is very interesting that Paul himself did not make this stipulation for New Testament church leadership.²⁸

I believe that gifts are discovered through ministry rather than ministry discovered by gifts. In the words of Rick Warren,

Most churches say, 'Discover your spiritual gift and then you'll know what ministry you're supposed to have.' This is backwards. I believe the exact opposite: Start experimenting with

different ministries and then you'll discover your gifts! Until you actually get involved in serving, you're not going to know what you're good at. You can read all the books in print and still be confused about what you are gifted to do.²⁹

Although I have talked to many Christians who feel that gift tests have helped them, I am unconvinced that spiritual gift tests are the best guide to discovering a ministry niche. Not only is there no proof that their methodology is valid, they are based on gift definitions that are assumed to be reliable. If such reliability is questionable, the validity of tests results will always be potentially flawed and there is a danger of misleading the test-takers. I am again in alignment with Warren when he says,

I do not place much stock in the many 'spiritual gift inventories' or tests that are available today. In the first place, inventories and tests require standardization, which denies the unique way God works in every life. Those who have the gift of evangelism in our church may express it much differently than Billy Graham expresses his gift of evangelism. Second, there are no definitions of most of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament, so today's definitions are arbitrary, highly speculative, and usually represent a denominational bias.³⁰

I have taken several gift tests, only to discover that each test indicated I had different gifts. I won't tell anyone to avoid tests, but I would discourage them from resting too much weight on their results.

The Church Growth Institute produces a tool called the "Spiritual Gifts Inventory." If you decide to use such an instrument, please consider this statement that is in their instructions:

Remember this is not a test to tell you what your spiritual gift is. But rather, an inventory showing your strength and weakness in each of God's gifted areas. Its purposes is to offer you guidance as you actively serve in your local church -- which is the only true way to determine your spiritual gift(s).

Do you want to discern your spiritual gifts? In the words of Dr. Clyde McDowell, "Concentrate on ministry to others. Spiritual gifts surface in the context of ministry and availability to others. Ask God for opportunities to minister to others. As you seek to meet needs and minister, your spiritual motivations will come to the surface and your gift will be obvious in time."³¹

9. How do gifts strengthen the church?

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 shows that we are to use our gifts to unify the work of Christ. In verses 12-13, Paul compares the church to a human body that has many diverse members all working together in a coordinated way. The Holy Spirit has immersed us into a single, unified body. As each member does its work, the whole body functions as God intended.

10. How are gifts sometimes misunderstood?

The Corinthians' misunderstanding of the gifts resulted in three forms of erroneous perspective: false pity (vss. 14-20), false pride (vss. 21-26), and false priorities (vss. 27-31). Each

of these mistakes could be remedied with a proper understanding of the oneness that believers share in Christ.

Starting in verse fourteen, the Apostle shows how our “oneness” prevents false pity. The Corinthian believers were exaggerating the importance of some of the conspicuous gifts. Those that possessed these gifts received more prominence; those that didn't, felt inferior. They believed that their ability to contribute was diminished and their importance to the body was small.

Paul challenges this false pity and the envy that accompanied it. He shows that just as every part of the physical body, even those that may lack beauty, is crucial for the healthy functioning of the body, so is the importance of every Christian's participation to the health of the church.

The second error, arrogance, was just as foolish. Verses 21-26 shows how our "oneness" suppresses false pride. One organ cannot despise another and claim it is not needed. The body is interdependent. Paul attacks this same pride in Romans 12:3-5.

The gifts do not belong to individuals. They belong to the church. Swindoll states, “Superiority and inferiority complexes have the same root: preoccupation with self. In the body of Christ, every member is important; every gift is essential.”³²

Verses 27-31 show that, while all the gifts are important, some are of greater importance. The use of those that bring greater edification are to be desired most by the body. Apparently, the Corinthians were highlighting the "showy" gift of tongues. Simultaneously, they were not showing proper respect to Paul and the other apostles. Paul tells them that the proper priority listing of the gifts is the opposite of their faulty perspective.

We, too, must determine to use our gifts for the edification of the body, not ourselves. Then, as a body, we must give greatest attention to the exercise of those gifts that build up the Church.

In summary, Christians have the responsibility to use their gifts in such a way that the person of Christ is glorified, the body of Christ is edified, and the work of Christ is unified. How are you using your gifts? There is great joy in knowing that when you use your gifts you are being a great blessing to others.

Earlier we saw how Chuck Swindoll used the instruments of an orchestra to illustrate spiritual gifts. Being totally unmusical, I don't relate to musical analogies as well as you probably do. My experience is pretty much confined to the flutophone that I was given in grade school. While other students were practicing with their little white plastic toys, I would just pry the end off and whistle. And so, when it came time for our class to give a concert for parents, I had nothing to contribute. I had to fake it! I moved my fingers but I didn't dare to blow a note. Don't be like me. You can make beautiful music. Be part of a concert that blesses others by joyously using the resources and gifts God has given you.

Learning Exercise:
THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS LIST

Introduction:

- The following list of gifts comes from Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.
- Many disagree as to the number, nature and duration of various gifts. For example, while some believe that all the gifts are operational today, many are persuaded that apostleship and some of the sign gifts were only for the birth of the church. On my website is research from a number of theologians and my own definitions. But before going there, you will want to read the references and some good commentaries and write your own definition for each gift.
- In light of those ministries in which you feel fruitful and fulfilled, indicate which of the following gifts you may possibly possess.
- At the end of your list, record those gifts you think that you may possess. List them in order of their prominence in your life. This will give you a sketch of the particular make-up of your unique gift mix.

1. **PROPHECY** (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 14:3)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

2. **SERVING** (Rom. 12:7; Helps: 1 Cor. 12:28)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

3. **TEACHING** (Rom. 12:7, 1 Cor. 12:28)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

4. **ENCOURAGING** (Rom. 12:8)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

5. **GIVING** (Rom. 12:8)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

6. LEADERSHIP (Rom. 12:8)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

7. MERCY (Rom. 12:8)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

8. COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE (1 Cor. 12:8)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

9. COMMUNICATING WISDOM (1 Cor. 12:8)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

10. FAITH (1 Cor. 12:9)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

11. HEALINGS (1 Cor. 12:9, 28)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

12. MIRACLES (1 Cor. 12:10)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

13. DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS (1 Cor. 12:10)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

14. TONGUES (1 Cor. 12:10, 28)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

15. INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES (1 Cor. 12:10)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

16. ADMINISTRATION (1 Cor. 12:28)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

17. APOSTLESHIP (1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

18. EVANGELISM (Eph. 4:11)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

19. PASTOR/TEACHER (Eph. 4:11)

Your Definition:

Do You Think You Possess This Gift? ___ Yes ___ No ___ Maybe

To get a picture of your gift mix, list the gifts that you believe you may possess in the order of their prominence in your life and ministries:

1.

2.

3.

Others?



6. EVALUATION: Field Testing Your Mission

When I was a kid taking a family vacation in Washington, D.C., I climbed the stairs to the top of the Washington Monument. At 555 feet and $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches, the marble, granite and bluestone gneiss obelisk is the world's tallest stone structure. Climbing its 897 steps and 50 landings felt like quite the feat.

We are now on the top step of our five step P.I.E.C.E. plan for finding your personal mission. This also is quite an accomplishment because you may have found that some of those steps are pretty steep.

The discovery process began with the heart *preparation* of looking to God and saying “yes!” to His plans for your life. In step two, it continued as you, in *inspection*, examined yourself and the resources God has given you to invest. In step three, you *explored* ministry options that match the resources and burdens that God has given you. Then, when you located your ministry zone, you determined to make a major *contribution* by generously sharing your gifts and resources. Now in step five, after you have actually served in some of the ministries you are exploring, it is time to *evaluate* whether you have found your personal mission.

How do you know you are in the right slot? Let's suggest that you decide to experiment with the ministry of teaching. You volunteer to teach a six week series in an adult Bible study class. When the series is finished, you wonder whether teaching is something in which you should specialize in the future. Could it be a ministry niche for you?

Let's return to the *exploration equation*: “Burdens + Resources = Potential Ministry.” The word “potential” is important. You may be in a place where you are burdened about a need and using your resources and yet still not be in your best niche. What are needed are some criteria for making a judgment call. And they are found back in Romans chapter twelve.

You may remember that we started this series in this passage. The opening verses describe the important first step of *Preparation*. Before we can get the discernment to “test and approve” God's will for where we should be serving, there needs to be a “Motivation for the Heart,” a “Dedication of the Will,” and a “Transformation of the Mind.” And now we return to Romans 12:2-8 to learn how to discern God's will and evaluate where we should be serving in His body.

The text reveals three diagnostic tests that you can use as a grid to indicate whether a ministry is the right one for you. Think of them as a set of landing lights that, once aligned, lets you know you can set down. Years ago my wife, Jodi, and I lived on a picturesque lake in

Michigan. Close by was a cottage owned by a young couple who used it as a vacation home. They would occasionally fly down in their private plane from Chicago and spend the weekend. One Friday night, they packed us into their plane and flew us to another town for a late supper. As we came into the small airport, we were guided onto the landing strip by the lights along its edge. Gary, the pilot, explained the importance of only landing when those lights were in perfect alignment.

Though you won't find these terms in the text, I call these diagnostic tests the "taste," "vision," and "coordination" tests.

THE TASTE TEST: God gives committed Christians inner inclinations toward those ministries in which He desires them to be active.

As we saw earlier, Romans 12:2 speaks about God's will as it relates to your place in Christian service. His will is described as "good, pleasing and perfect." From this it can be assumed that when the surrendered Christian discovers a ministry niche that is in line with God's will, he or she will also discover that it aligns with personal desires. In Stacy Rinehart's words, "Finding your niche of spiritual influence in the body of Christ brings a tremendous sense of personal fulfillment."³³

An example of this principle is found in 1 Timothy 3:1 where the apostle says, "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." From the terms "sets his heart" and "desires," it is clear that Paul believed that the individual who takes on the role of a pastor should have a craving to be in that position.

You probably remember the promotional campaign called "The Pepsi Challenge." It took the form of a taste test. At malls, shopping centers and other public locations, Pepsi representatives would set up a table with two blank cups: one containing Pepsi and one with Coca-Cola. Shoppers were encouraged to taste both colas, and then select which drink they preferred. Then the representatives would reveal the two bottles so the taster could see whether they favored Coke or Pepsi. The results of the test leaned toward a consensus that Pepsi was picked by more Americans.

Some argue that the test isn't fair. Malcom Galdwell, for example, in his book, *Blink*, ascribes the success of Pepsi over Coca-Cola in these tests to being a result of the nature of "sip tests." The nature of these small samples fail to account for the cloying effect of excessive sweetness and glutamate and the complementary but counter-intuitive long-term preference for an item that would consistently lose in a blind sip-test comparison.

But all of that is immaterial to this simple fact: *We all have different tastes.*

And that is true with ministry options, too. When it comes to ministry, we should all have a taste for the personal mission that God has scooped out for us. And since our ministries are different, our tastes will be as well.

When Romans twelve says that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect, we must ask for whom? God or us? The answer, of course, is both. Isn't it good to know that we have a loving Heavenly Father who likes to give His children pleasure? He blesses us while He uses us to bless others.

Some have the twisted idea that if they totally surrender themselves to God, He will make them do something contrary to their desires. "He might make me be a missionary among the snakes and spiders of Bongo Bongo!" This is a warped view of God. True happiness is only

found at the center of His will. I have a plaque that quotes this promise from Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

The point is this: your own tastes are a strong indicator of the ministry to which God has called you. M. Blaine Smith says, “God exercises his providence in creating our personalities. I may trust that he has not allowed my particular personality to develop by accident but has fashioned my inclinations and preferences as a means of motivating me in certain directions. By looking to the desires that are most basic to my personality, I can gain vital insights into where God is leading me.”³⁴ On the flip side, John Bradley and Jay Carty state, “When you are not doing what God has designed you to do, even ‘ministry’ isn’t fulfilling.”³⁵

“But wait a minute,” we protest. “There are many times when ministry is more difficult than delightful and filled with more pain than pleasure. During those times, will the right ministry still pass the *taste* test?” Maybe not always, but usually.

A missionary described this principle with a personal sports analogy. He told how, when he was a football player in high school, he sat on the bench during his first year. This role had many advantages. He was able to enjoy being with the team. He got a letter sweater. He never got hurt or even got his uniform dirty. But he was unfulfilled.

The next year he was a regular starter. For most of the season he was sore and bruised. He often dealt with the stress of playing his position well. And yet, he loved playing.

He said mission work was much the same; it was often difficult and filled with a diversity of trials. There were times he felt like quitting. And yet he felt the fulfillment of doing what He sensed he had been made for.

In Jeremiah 20, the prophet demonstrates that even when the ministry is difficult, it can still possess an inner driving force. He said “I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long” (vss. 7-8). The weeping prophet contemplated giving up. But... “But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” (vs. 9)

Paul provides another example. His ministry often involved great trials and suffering. But the apostle declared, “Even if I can preach the Gospel, I can claim no credit for it; I cannot help myself; it would be misery for me not to preach” (I Cor. 9:16 NEB).

When I speak of the taste test, I am not saying that those within their ministry niche will always be operating with pure pleasure. We are a people that have chosen to take up our crosses and follow Christ. Sacrificial service is the theme of Romans twelve.

But there is still an inner fulfillment that says, "This is what I have been designed for." Count on it, God's will for your place of ministry is good stuff.

"Getting in touch with your righteous desires provides you with knowledge of some of the most powerful forces of your life," wrote Dick Wulf in *Find Yourself, Give Yourself*; “your desires constantly guide your selection of significant tasks for the Lord.”³⁶

If you could have any ministry in the world, what would it be? What do you want to do before you die? What excites your emotions and ignites your imagination?

THE VISION TEST: Using the “measure of faith” in Romans 12:3, Christians should ask themselves if they are serving in a ministry sphere where they have a strong confidence that God will do great things.

Verse three says to “think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”³⁷ What is meant by the phrase “measure of faith?” In the words of F. F. Bruce, “Faith here has a rather different sense from that which it has in the earlier part of the Epistle; here it denotes the spiritual power given to each Christian for the discharge of his special responsibility; cf. ‘according to the proportion of faith’ in verse 6.”³⁸

When I first studied Romans 12:3, I assumed that the "measure of faith" was describing a quantity of faith. I struggled with the concept that God was choosing to give more faith to some than others. Then I discovered that I had a wrong mental picture.

I was visualizing a measuring cup. But the word "measure" is a geometric term. A better image would be a pie that is cut up into several pieces. Each piece is a measure.

In the body of Christ, each of us has our own gift mix which carries with it a corresponding measure of faith. When it comes to our particular piece of the ministry pie we each have a higher-than-average faith that sees with excitement what God can do.³⁹

This is a big plus, but for the individual it is also a limitation. We each have "tunnel vision." As it pertains to our ministry niche, we have great faith. But with regard to other ministries, we are nearsighted. This often leads to tension between believers.

Consider Jim's attitude. He wonders why Mary is not as excited as he about a particular ministry. He starts to inwardly question her spirituality and motives. But if Jim can understand that he has a different measure of faith, his perspective would radically change. He would know that his ministry of faith is needed and the faith of his sister in Christ is also important.

This concept leads to humility and the appreciation of other members. “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Rom. 12:3).⁴⁰

Here's a personal illustration. I am more excited about the ministry of preaching and teaching than any other dimension of Christian service. This is because I believe that God can radically change lives through this form of proclamation.

One of my friends, an associate pastor, is a gifted counselor. He passionately believes that God can impact people through one-on-one mentoring. Rather than debating between these two methods, we get excited that God has given us ministry partners that each have their own measures of faith. We need each other. In isolation, we will always be out of balance.

This concept can be absolutely liberating. The following note was sent to me after I explained it in a message:

Dear Ron,

I knew I would cry if I tried to talk to you yesterday. So I'm using this means to thank you for your new insight about spiritual gifts. That insight has set me free of my critical attitude towards other Christians. Now I'm free to pour energy into my "piece of the pie" and at the same time encourage others to serve their own portion of pie.

Recently I read a description of our friendship. "We don't always see eye to eye, but we do walk side by side." With our feet pointed toward Jesus we serve our unique pieces of pie and rejoice together.

*Soli Deo Gloria
Marie*

In passing the *Vision Test*, you will want to ask whether you have good vision in the ministry sphere in which you are participating. That is, do you have an above average faith that God can do big things through your service? This is not self-confidence, for the servant may often feel personally inadequate; it is God-confidence.⁴¹

In review, the first diagnostic test is the *Taste Test*. God gives committed Christians inner inclinations towards those ministries in which He desires them to be active. The second diagnostic test is the *Vision Test*. Using the “measure of faith” of Romans 12:3, Christians should ask themselves if they are serving in a ministry sphere where they have a strong confidence that God will do great things. Now, we are at the third diagnostic test.

THE COORDINATION TEST: In that Christian service is a team ministry, Christians should determine if their ministry is edifying the body and being confirmed by the body.

A Christian's ministerial role is like one piece of a large puzzle. If he or she doesn't fit naturally with the ministries of other believers, he or she is probably in the wrong spot. Paul describes us as a body with many members, each of which should be moving in coordination. Barnes states that "we are so united as to be mutually dependent; each one is of service to the other; and the existence and office of the one is necessary to the usefulness of the other. Thus the members of the body may be said to be members one of another... Thus in the church every individual is not only necessary in his place as an individual, but is needful to the proper symmetry and action of the whole."⁴²

A Christian in his or her ministry niche should expect to be in graceful coordination with, and feel the confirmation by, the rest of the body.⁴³ God has placed the members in the church in a cooperative form so that the service function could best be achieved.⁴⁴

Ralph Matteson and Arthur Miller said, “God as the designer not only has the detail of your design in mind, but also the designs of all people in their interrelated complexity. He intended a variety of interdependent designs. In the church, the ministry of each person complements the ministry of another.”⁴⁵

God has a place in the body of Christ where you will find your perfect fit. As a member of the body of Christ, you are a piece in a larger puzzle. Don't just look at your own design; ask, “Where do I fit best within the body?” And look at others with the same thought in mind. Look at their design and use affirmation to help them find their niche.

After Paul was converted, Barnabus saw his ministry potential and invited him to come to Antioch as a co-pastor. After successful service there, the Holy Spirit led the leadership in the church to commission Paul and Barnabus as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3).

This biblical precedent is quite different than the individualistic approach to decision-making that our culture advocates. It recognizes that "God's people can often sense God's direction for your life before, and/or better, than you can."⁴⁶

As opportunities arise for you to serve the Lord, you will be able to demonstrate your giftedness and effectiveness to fellow believers. They will likely confirm your ministry and supply increased opportunities to serve God in even greater ways. Or because of your lack of strength in that ministry, they may try to gently channel you in a different direction. Have you ever met people who thought they were great leaders, teachers or singers but weren't? The coordination test can guard us from self-deception.

What happens when your brothers and sisters don't affirm you in an area in which you think

you are strong? Maybe they, for some reason, have an incorrect perspective. Or maybe God is nudging you toward a different role that is even better. Many have discovered that the pain of rejection led to the joy of greater opportunity somewhere else.

But What If?

We have looked at the three diagnostic tests that will help you determine if you are serving in your ministry niche. These will usually serve as a reliable grid. There are, however, exceptions to the rule.

Your correct area of service may not pass the “taste” or “vision” tests if you are personally going through a stressful trial period. Or it may not pass the “coordination” test if your particular body of believers is sick or experiencing divisive turmoil. Dick Staub and Jeff Trautman write,

There are times when group guidance is inappropriate. Some small groups become dictatorships; others are spiritually anemic and incapable, or unwilling, to discern God's will. Furthermore, a group can never be a substitute for your own responsibility in decision-making. But viewed properly, a loving, spiritually minded community of believers can be invaluable in helping you discern God's will.⁴⁷

It is also possible that even a healthy body will give faulty feedback if it hasn't had adequate exposure to your ministry. So make sure that you have given your ministry experiment adequate time in favorable conditions before you seek out the opinions of others.

It is also wise to remember that your ministry niche may shift as your resources change. For years I loved being a youth pastor. It was a fruitful and fulfilling ministry. But then, over a period of time, my passion began to change. Simultaneously, my effectiveness in that role seemed to wane. I discovered that I now had a greater thirst for preaching and working with adults. In that I was only twenty-six and still single, I “realistically” doubted that any church would consider me for their senior pastor, so I tried to ignore my yearnings. But the more I prayed, the more they grew. And then God opened the door for me to become the first pastor of a small fellowship of believers in Gunnison, Colorado.

It was a wonderful period of my life. I loved the work. I believed in what we were doing. And God confirmed my new role with the affirmation of the people and the fruit that occurred. Within four years, we had grown four times our original size, obtained a building, and seen many people saved and growing.

There was a time when I easily passed the three diagnostic tests as a youth pastor. But my grades started dropping when God was leading me into a different ministry niche. In the senior pastorate, I was again passing the three tests. Many of my key strengths and resources were common to both ministries -- but there was definitely a directional shift.

I would urge you to avoid the extremes. Don't bounce from one ministry to another too quickly. You may be thinking you are failing the “taste” test when you are really wrestling with a trial or the disease of discontentment. Be ready to persevere. On the other end of the spectrum, don't conclude that God has given you a “life-time sentence” in a particular field. Keep open to the possibility that the Lord may want to move you around a little bit. The apostle Paul has always been a role model for me and when I have reflected on the variety of roles involved with his ministry, it has given me freedom to enjoy the different positions that I have had as a church planter, pastor, writer and missionary.

It is time to pull some concepts together. You will want to experiment in various avenues of spiritual service where your burdens and resources coexist and then evaluate your endeavor with the “taste,” “vision,” and “coordination” tests. When you find a ministry that passes all three of these tests, you can have the confidence of knowing this is a good position for you.

When you utilize these tests with a number of past and present ministries, patterns will emerge – patterns that should direct you towards future “just right” potential roles. You are on the path of either discovering or confirming your personal mission.

Where Are You in the P.I.E.C.E. Process?

Step #1 -- *Preparation*: Have you surrendered your whole life to God and asked Him to guide you toward your personal mission?

Step #2 -- *Inspection*: Have you done a thorough inventory of your God-given design and resources? They will correspond to what God crafted and equipped you to do.

Step #3 -- *Exploration*: Did you experientially participate in some ministries that burden your heart and utilize your resources?

Step #4 -- *Contribution*: Have you generously contributed your spiritual gifts and resources to make a difference in the lives of others?

Step #5 -- *Evaluation*: Have you examined your ministry to determine whether it passes the taste, vision, and coordination tests? If it does...

If it does, you’ve discovered your personal mission! You have found the piece of the action God has allotted to you. The puzzle has been solved and you can now see the important place where you fit into the big picture of God’s kingdom.

If it doesn’t, simply use the process with another sphere of ministry. In God’s perfect timing, He will reveal His plan for you.

In either case, be ready for further adventures. God may have a different mission for you in the future.

As we have seen, serving in your personal mission will be fulfilling. That is one of God’s gifts to you. But more important, it is fruitful. God uses you to touch others for their eternal good. But greatest of all is the privilege of glorifying God.

It is exciting to find your mission but it will be a greater thrill to someday declare, “Mission Accomplished!” When we get to heaven each of us will want to hear the words, “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*”

Learning Exercise:
MINISTRY EVALUATION TESTS

1. Write down one of the past or present ministries that you have explored:

2. Now, ask yourself if the ministry passed the taste, vision and coordination tests. You might want to add some notes describing how they did or didn't pass those tests.
 - The Taste Test?
 - The Vision Test?
 - The Coordination Test?

3. To help you see patterns, repeat what you did above with other past or present ministries.

4. If you have been able to list different ministries that have passed each of these diagnostic tests, ask if there are particular spiritual gifts that might be common to each of them. This will help you discern your spiritual gift mix.

5. The ministry that best passes the three tests is probably God's personal mission for you. Or it might be that the Lord has currently given you more than one mission. Now that you have prayerfully journeyed through the P.I.E.C.E. Plan, what do you think your mission might be?

*“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.”
(1 Peter 4:10-11)*

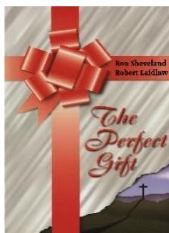
About the Author

Dr. Ron Sheveland is the director of *I-Training* (www.i-training.info), a ministry that allows him to train pastors and church leaders around the world through international teaching trips and internet resourcing. He also serves the church as an author, church consultant, preacher and conference speaker. Ron is a graduate of Cornerstone University (B.A.) and Denver Seminary (M. Div. & D. Min.). He has pastored churches in Michigan, Colorado and California. For a decade he was the Executive Minister of the *Michigan Baptist General Conference* – a ministry that specialized in church planting and church revitalization.

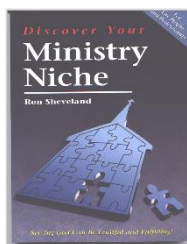
Jesus Christ is the joy of his life. In Ron's words, “It is my passion to know God better and share that knowledge with others.” Family is his next priority. Jodi and Ron treasure their marriage and partner in all their life endeavors – including ministry. They have been blessed with two children: Luke and Jessica.

You can befriend him on Facebook or contact him through RevShev@aol.com or www.i-training.info.

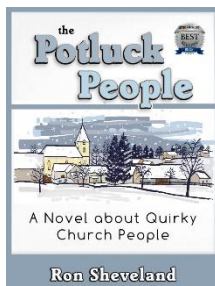
Some Other Books by Ron Sheveland



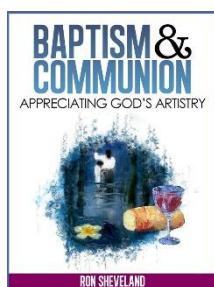
The Perfect Gift is a ten-chapter book co-written by Ron Sheveland and Robert Laidlaw. It gives head-and-heart reasons for why you will want to accept God's gift of eternal life and includes a simple description on how to do so. For a limited time you can receive a *FREE* copy by going to www.DiscoverYourPersonalMission.com.



Discover Your Ministry Niche is the predecessor to *Discover Your Personal Mission*. It is available as a paperback. For further information, go to www.DiscoverYourPersonalMission.com. *Discover Your Personal Mission* is an updated, streamlined and improved version, but *Discover Your Ministry Niche* has four more chapters and greater depth.



The Potluck People is a humorous novel that has been collecting “5 Star” reviews. Every church has some quirky people. But at Meanwhile Baptist Church, there is an overabundance of offbeat personalities -- and their antics, both funny and frustrating, are a challenge for their young, new pastor, Mike Lewis, and his fun-loving wife, Sandy. *The Potluck People* is an unforgettable comedy peppered with moments of love, tenderness, and lives being changed. Get it at www.potluckpeople.com or at www.amazon.com.



BAPTISM & COMMUNION, Appreciating God's Artistry. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two stunning pictures painted by the Master Artist. Due to disagreements within the Christian Church as to the nature of these symbols, we sometimes allow the debate to sidetrack us from gazing at their enormous beauty. *BAPTISM & COMMUNION* is a short book that clearly explains the Biblical issues, but then goes on to explore many of the facets of God's artistry displayed whenever a baptism or communion service takes place. Available at www.amazon.com.

Endnotes

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1. I often speak interchangeably of your “personal mission” and your “ministry niche.” Though this is both referencing your role in service, there is a slight distinction. Think of a puzzle piece as your mission and the empty spot in the puzzle as the niche in which it is meant to be placed.
 2. Rick Warren, *FIRST-PERSON: How Do You Get More Members Into Ministry?* (Baptist Press 2/20/02).
 3. Arthur R. McKay, *Servants and Stewards*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 40.
 4. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Tyndale Press, 1978), p. 141
 5. Marlowe C. Embree, "Help Wanted: Finding the Best Place to Use Your Gifts," *Discipleship Journal* 45 (May 1988), p. 27.
 6. John MacArthur, *Spiritual Gifts*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 59.
 7. Louis L'Amour, *To Tame a Land*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 132.
 8. Bruce Bugbee, *Networking, Leader's Guide*, (Pasadena, California: The Charles E. Fuller Institute, 1989), p. 3.
 9. M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 234-235.
 10. Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 129
 11. William R. Newell, *Romans, Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Grace Publications, Inc., 1938), p. 456.
 12. The term "conformed" is derived from the noun "skema", and refers to the outward form of a thing or person. A prefix, "along-with" (Greek, "sun"), was added to the word "scheme" (Greek, "schema" or "skema," as used in I Cor. 7:31), and made into a verb.
 13. Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory, Vol. II* (Portland: Mutnomah Press, 1978), pp. 95-96.
 14. Dick Staub and Jeff Trautman, *Career Kit, A Christian's Guide to Career Building* (Seattle: Inter Cristo, 1985), p. 7.
 15. Marlowe C. Embree, "Help Wanted: Finding the Best Place to Use Your Gifts," *Discipleship Journal* 45 (May 1988), p. 27.
 16. Tom Sine, *Why Settle For More and Miss The Best*.
 17. Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 227.
 18. John Bradley and Jay Carty, *Unlocking Your Sixth Suitcase*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), pp. 17-18.
 19. Fred Smith, "Giving People Permission To Succeed," *Leadership Journal* IX, 3 (Summer 1988), p. 52.
 20. Rodney S. Laughlin, *Landing a Great Job* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), p. 17.
 21. M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 180.
 22. Text: Bryan Jeffrey Leech; Hymn #315 in *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration*.
 23. Marcia L. Mitchell, *Giftedness: Discovering Your Areas of Strength* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), p. 167.
 24. Charles R. Swindoll, *Spiritual Gifts* (Fullerton: Insight For Living, 1986), p. V.
 25. William McRae, *Dynamics Of Spiritual Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 18.
 26. MacArthur, p. 55.
 27. Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco: Word, 1978), p. 137.
 28. Gene Getz, *Sharpening The Focus Of The Church* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1974), p. 114.
 29. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 371.
 30. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 371.
 31. Clyde McDowell, *How To Discover Your Spiritual Gifts* (Littleton, CO: Lay Action Ministry Program, 1988), p. 83.
 32. Charles R. Swindoll, *Spiritual Gifts* (Fullerton: Insight For Living, 1986), p. 33.
 33. Stacy Rinehart, "Spiritual Leadership: Who Can Lead?," *Discipleship Journal*, Issue Forty-One, 1987, p. 24.
 34. M. Blaine Smith, p. 180.
 35. John Bradley and Jay Carty, p. 13.
 36. Dick Wulf, *Find Yourself, Give Yourself* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1983, out of print), p. 152.
 37. The formula "*measure of faith*" has caused debate as to its meaning. After surveying a range of potential meanings, Cranfield presented what he believed to be the best two options, "Whereas, if 'metron' means 'measured quantity' and 'pistis' is a partitive genitive, the last clause of v. 3 directs attention to the differences between Christians, if 'metron' is taken in the sense of 'standard' and 'pistis' taken to be a genitive of apposition, the clause directs attention to that which is common to all Christians." C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976-79), p 615. Holding that the construction is a genitive of apposition, Cranfield concluded that the meaning is

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- that a Christian should "estimate oneself according to the standard which consists of one's faith in Christ..." Ibid., p. 616. I disagree, concurring instead with Kasemann, who argues that the "question as to whether a genitive of apposition or a partitive genitive is present is to be decided in terms of the similar phrase in v. 6 in favor of the second possibility." Ernst Kaseman, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 335.
38. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963, rev. 86), pp. 227-228.
39. Richard W. DeHaan, *The World On Trial* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 148. "Every Christian should assess his own capabilities without conceit or false modesty. God has given individuals varying natural capacities, and has also bestowed a 'measure of faith' upon each person. The faith of which Paul speaks here is not 'saving faith,' but an 'achieving faith,' a 'working-for-God' faith..." Every believer receives a 'measure of faith' corresponding to the task God gives him to accomplish."
40. Newel, p. 461. "The 'measure of faith' is that which sober judgment is to take into account in determining the assessment which each is to give of himself and therefore of the function or functions which he may properly perform in the church... 'Measure of faith' must reflect on the different respects in which faith is to be exercised in view of the diversity of functions existing in the church of Christ... In the church there is distribution of gift and each member possesses his own measure for which there is the corresponding faith by which and within the limits of which the gift is to be exercised... In Romans 12.3 Paul speaks by the apostolic grace given unto him, and to each believer there is also an individual differing "grace." given to each for the particular service to which God calls him. In accordance with this "grace," there is, therefore, a "gift," by the indwelling Spirit... For the... using of these gifts, there is necessary the element of faith, which is bestowed by God in exact accordance with the gift given each one."
41. John Murray, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 1965), p. 119. "But that which is here implied in the measure of faith involves, as the succeeding context shows, limitation to the sphere of activity to which each particular gift assigns its possessor. It is called the measure of faith in the restricted sense of the faith that is suited to the exercise of this gift and this nomenclature is used to emphasize the cardinal place which faith occupies not only in our becoming members of this community but also in the specific functions performed as members of it."
42. Barnes, pp. 274-275.
43. Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, Vol. II (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1978), p. 113. "Paul literally calls these gifts "graces," and I like this term because of what it says. Graces are graceful. Something graceful is a delight to watch, and this is true about a spiritual gift. A gift is an ability God has given because he wants you to function along this line. It enables you to do something so naturally, smoothly, and beautifully that others will take note of it and ask you to do it and enjoy watching you do it. And you will enjoy doing it. When you use your spiritual gift you are fulfilled. It is called a "grace" because it is not a difficult, painful thing to do; it is something you delight in doing. And you can improve in it as you do it. Therefore it makes life interesting and fulfilling."
44. William F. McDowell, *Good Ministers of Jesus Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1917), p. 245. "The Christian ministry is the science of serving and working nobly, never too nobly, but never alone, with one another, always in fellowship and cooperation . . . the ministry of cooperation will build the whole Kingdom, and if it be not doing that it is not ministry of Jesus Christ."
45. Ralph Mattson and Arthur Miller, *Finding A Job You Can Love* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982), p. 86.
46. Dick Staub and Jeff Trautman, *Career Kit, A Christian's Guide to Career Building* (Seattle: Interchristo, 1985), p. 17.
47. Dick Staub and Jeff Trautman, *Career Kit, A Christian's Guide to Career Building* (Seattle: Interchristo, 1985), p. 17.