

How To Discover and Deploy Your Gifts

The place to start is this: do you see needs among your fellow believers that you might be able to meet, even in a small way? Then ‘whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might’ (Eccles. 9:10)—no matter how small, modest, or simple it seems to be. In some ways the simpler the better. It is only in this way—as we serve others—that the nature of our gifts will gradually become clear. If there is a particular sphere of service into which the Lord is calling us, then as we serve it will become clear that we have the necessary gifts. If we are not gifted for a particular ministry, it is unlikely that we are called. An elder, for example, needs to be ‘able to teach’ (1 Tim. 3:2). If that is so, he must be able also to understand. Without this we can safely assume that, whatever other gifts we may have, we are not called to that work.

At the same time, we need to remember that we are neither the only nor the best judge of our own gifts. There is where the fellowship of the church is so vital. Coupled with a desire to serve on our part, the reception and recognition of our service by others is a vital assurance to us that the Lord really has gifted us for a particular sphere of ministry.

In addition, seeing a need and seeking to meet it marks a growth in character that makes our service trustworthy. Gifts always need to be accompanied by graces. For example, hidden away in Paul’s discussion of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, he underlines the importance of those who had the gift of prophecy also exercising the grace of self-control. Similarly, someone gifted to serve as a bishop or spiritual overseers must have the graces of self-control and personal discipline (Titus 1:8).

Using our gifts is an expression of our desire to serve. That desire is not insignificant. Sometimes people seem to hint that the sign someone is called to the gospel ministry is that it is the last thing the person wants to do. Of course there are examples of this. But this confuses a sense of inadequacy with a negative desire. We cannot draw certain conclusions from the experience of only some. We are prone to do that (‘If this is how it happened to me it should happen the same way to you!’). But Paul does not discount our *desire*, even if on its own it is not an absolute guide. To *desire* to serve in the church is a good and noble aspiration (1 Tim. 3:1). Reluctance may be a sign of humility or even apprehension. But it may also be a sign that we are unwilling to humble ourselves in the service of others.

True service is always marked by a recognition that we live for and serve others, not ourselves. Thus Paul emphasizes that his gifts were given to him *for others* (Col. 1:25). Again, writing to the Ephesians he says that he is a prisoner *for the sake of the Gentiles* (Eph. 3:1). Here is a man who was ‘externally rotated’ indeed. Self-forgetfulness and service go together in the employment of the gifts the Lord gives to us.

Thus, gifts, character, desire, and willingness to be the servant of others are keys to ministry in the church—and in any healthy church these will be noticed. The Lord’s people will not only receive our service but encourage us to use our gifts and will always find ways of enabling us to do so.

Excerpt from the book “Maturity” by Sinclair Ferguson

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