

Serving in the Church

To set the context of what we are going to be talking about this morning, I want to start by sharing our growth model. When we think about growth, we think in terms of environments of growth as well as a life of intentionality. Last week I encouraged you to take some time to work through the spiritual growth planning tool that you can find on our website. Doing something like that is part of living intentionally when it comes to pursuing God. We need to think about how we will engage God through the Scriptures and prayer and other such spiritual practices.



As far as environments of growth, we think that we are in a great environment for growth if we are **regularly worshipping** God on Sunday mornings. We believe that as we engage the Scriptures and

praise God through music that affects our minds and our hearts in ways that nurture growth. We also believe that **connecting to a community** of spiritual friends is critical. The Christian life is not meant to be a solo journey. We need each other if we are going to grow. And so that is why we offer groups so that we can make these spiritual connections. We also believe that if we want to be in the best environment for growth, we need to be **engaged in serving**. As we trust God to step out and serve, as we look outward and focus on others through our service, God changes us. Obviously, these are not the only things God uses to transform us, but we believe that these are critical environments that we each need to engage.

This morning we are going to focus on that third environment – serving. Specifically, we are going to focus on how God has designed us to serve in the context of the local church. Last week we talked about how as believers in Jesus we are to take up the basic identity of being a servant like Christ was. This morning we are going to focus on how we, as people who have taken up this basic identity of being a servant, are designed to serve in the context of the local church. And when I say “in the context of the local church” for some of us that will be primarily inside the walls of the church and for others it will be primarily outside the walls of the church in the community.

Here’s the overarching point that I want to make this morning: **When we serve in the church in the way that God has designed, our service will be fruitful, effective and satisfying.** And to serve in the way that God has designed you to serve, you need to have the right fit and the right fuel. Let’s talk first about serving from the right fit.

I. The Right Fit

By the right fit, I mean a place of service that fits how God has uniquely created you. We all have different abilities and competencies. We have different things that grab our attention. When we can serve in an area that taps into how God has uniquely made us then we are in a better place for serving effectively.

There are a number of things that go into a good ministry fit; this morning I'd like to talk about two critical things for you to consider when you look at finding a ministry fit. One is your spiritual gifting and the other is your ministry passion.

Let's look first at **spiritual gifting**. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lays out a picture for how the church is to function. Paul likens the Church to a physical body. There are many parts in a physical body – hands and eyes and arms and hearts. Each part is necessary and important for the body to function, so too in the body of Christ. We each have a part to play according to our spiritual gifting.

I'm not going to read the entire chapter, but I want to read some verses and comment on what Paul teaches here. In verses 4-7 Paul says:

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

There are a variety of gifts and God is the giver of these gifts. Paul also says that God gives a spiritual gift to EACH believer – *to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit*. And so if you are a believer, you have been given a spiritual gift. And because you have been given a gift, you are important! Your service matters!

The last thing to notice in these verses is that the purpose of these gifts is *for the common good*. As we each serve out of our gifting, there is this mutual benefit to the whole church. The church is built up and able to be the body of Christ in this world to effectively continue the ministry of Christ.

In verse 8 Paul begins to list some of the gifts that the Spirit gives. He writes:

⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

He says one person might have the gift of wisdom and another knowledge. Another might have the gift of faith. He lists a number of gifts here; some of them are the more miraculous gifts. But his point is that everyone has a gift that has been given *through the Spirit*.

Here's how we define a spiritual gift in the Network class that we teach. *A spiritual gift is a special ability given by the Holy Spirit and distributed to every believer according to God's design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ.*

There are over twenty spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture. Later in verse 28 Paul mentions several more gifts: apostleship, teaching, helps and administration. In Romans 12, Paul mentions exhortation, giving, leadership and mercy (vv. 6-8). You may or may not know what your spiritual gift is right now, but the point is that if you are a believer, you are spiritually gifted to serve in the church.

Paul goes on to explain two principles that make it clear why it is vital for each one of us to do our part in the body. He says that there is great diversity when it comes to our gifting and that no one has all the gifts. Look at verse 17:

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

How poorly the body would function if the whole body were an eye! There needs to be a diversity of gifting so the church can effectively do all that God want her to do. This makes each one important. And he adds the thought that no one has all the gifts. Verse 29:

²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

And of course the answer to these questions is, "No!" No one has all the gifts. If a few people had all the gifts we could just deploy them in serving in all sorts of ways. But no one does. And so it is important for each of us to do our part since no one has all the gifts.

Now, there much more that we could say about spiritual gifts, but the point is that serving out of your gifting is part of a good ministry fit. When you can serve out of that gifting it will lead to service that is fruitful, effective and satisfying.

And so the question is, how does one go about discerning his or her spiritual gifting? It is something that is discerned over time, but you can be proactive in this. You can make it a matter of prayer. Ask God for insight into how He has uniquely gifted you. Second, you need to know that we discern our gifting as we serve. And so don't wait until you have it all figured out before you begin to serve. It is as you serve that you begin to find out what you like and don't like, what you're good at and what you are not good at. And it is as you serve that it makes possible one of the most important ways that we discern our gifting and that is feedback from others in the body of Christ. So often others can identify how God has gifted us before we can. And so we need to invite and be open to this feedback. As you do these things, God over time will help you understand how He has gifted you and what a good ministry fit looks like.

There is a second area that I think you need to pay attention to in order to discern a good ministry fit and that is your **ministry passion**. Here is how I would define passion. *It is the heart-felt desire that compels us to make a difference for the kingdom of God.*

Paul tells us in 2 Timothy that he was gifted as a preacher, an apostle and a teacher (1:11). But in terms of his passion, he had a passion to preach Christ to the Gentiles. In Galatians 1:15-16 he says:

¹⁵ But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

Preaching Christ among the Gentiles was his passion. And out of that passion he tenaciously went about the Roman world proclaiming Christ to people who had never heard.

Obviously, God cares about all needs in the world, but no one person has the capacity to care for every need like God does and so He gives each of us a part of His heart; a passion for certain things that compel us to meet certain needs.

Your passion might be related to a certain skill – working on cars, or computer programming or doing research or organizing. Some of these things don't seem real spiritual, but God has ways of using all sorts of passions to meet needs.

Others are passionate about a particular people group. It might be people from a particular country or culture. It might be a group of people in a certain life situation – children, parents of young children, people with disabilities or under-resourced families. Or a passion might be directed to particular social needs: marital breakdown, addictions, injustice, hunger or racial issues.

You may not have a lot of clarity right now about what you are passionate, but I believe that God has placed passion within you. And understanding and serving in an area of ministry passion is a critical part of a good ministry fit. When you are able to serve in an area of God-given passion you are going to be energized and motivated. It will keep you going when things get hard.

Obviously, there are other issues that relate to finding a ministry fit, but our spiritual gifting and ministry passion are two huge areas. If you can serve in an area that you are passionate about and use your spiritual gift there, you will be in a place to serve effectively over the long haul. That's having the right ministry fit.

Now before we move on, let me make a couple of clarifying points about finding a ministry fit. First, what I'm talking about is your primary ministry. When you think about your primary ministry you need to seek to find a fit that lets you use your spiritual gift in an area of passion. But there are still times when we need to step up and serve even when it isn't our passion area or spiritual gifting area.

For instance, no one in the Anderson household has a passion for taking out the trash, but it is still something that needs to be done to keep our household in running order. It is the same way in the church; sometimes there are things that we may not feel particularly called to that still need to be done. And so out of our basic identity of being a servant we serve just because we are servants who have a willingness to help.

Here's the second clarifying point. Don't wait to have your ministry passion and your gifting all figured out before you begin to serve in the church. We usually grow to understand our gifting and our passion as we experiment and serve in different areas. And so jump in somewhere and start serving. Maybe you have a friend who is serving in some area. Ask if you can join them. Or check the little box on the Connections Card about serving and we will get you some information. Use what you know of yourself to guide you to a starting point and then as you serve ask yourself questions like: Did the ministry feel meaningful? Was your emotional energy higher or lower after you served? Did you feel effective?

Over time as you experiment and try different ministries you will gain discernment about how God has designed you and you gradually will be able to align yourself closer and closer to a good ministry fit. And **when you serve in the church in the way that God has designed, your service will be fruitful, effective and satisfying.** A good ministry fit is part of this design.

Another critical part of how God has designed up to serve relates to having the right fuel. Our service needs to be fueled by the motive of love.

II. The Right Fuel – Service Motivated by Love

Back in the 1 Cor. 12 passage, Paul says something very interesting right at the end of chapter 12. After spending a lot of time talking about how the church is designed to function, he says this in the second part of verse 31:

³¹ . . . *And I show you a still more excellent way.*

As good as it is to serve according to our gifts, there is something even better. What is this *more excellent way*? That's what he goes on to describe in chapter 13. He writes:

¹ *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* ² *If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.* ³ *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*

Paul is talking here about people who are using their gifts, but doing so without love. If one uses his or her gift, but does so without love it is a *noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*.

Gifts used without love profits nothing. And so serving matters, but what matters even more is serving with love. Love is to be what fuels our serving. And so Paul goes on to paint a picture of what love looks like in the rest of 1 Corinthians 13. We most often hear this passage read at weddings, but the original context is about serving in the church. Love must be the fuel of our ministry.

My freshman year in college I was involved in a student Christian group. One spring we were bringing in a big speaker and so we were doing a campus-wide blitz to publicize the event. This required many students going out and hanging posters. Somehow I got volunteered for this, but I really didn't want to do it. It was just hanging up some posters in the early morning hours, but I resented having to do it. I'm not sure why I said yes. I was probably worried about what people would think of me if I didn't do it. So I did it, but for the wrong reason. It was service motivated by a sense of "I have to do this." As a result I felt resentment, obligation and certainly no joy in serving. My service was not fueled by love.

If we are going to serve according to God's design, it needs to be out of love. What motivates you to serve? Are you motivated by your love for God? Or are there other motivations that drive you? Sometimes we are motivated by guilt. Sometimes we are motivated by wanting to earn God's favor. Sometimes we serve because of other people's expectations of us. We wonder what they will think if we don't serve and so we serve. What motivates your service?

If you are motivated by anything other than love for God and for people, your service will eventually turn into a "have to" draining experience. Guilt, expectations, compulsion, earning favor; none of these things are the proper fuel that will sustain fruitful, effective and satisfying ministry.

If you sense that your serving is not fueled by love, you need to address the issue. Don't keep serving out of compulsion or to meet other people's expectations. Sometimes it might be necessary to stop what you are doing in order to get there. Most of the time, however, it is something that can be addressed even as you keep serving.

For me the most helpful thing in being fueled by love is to go back to what Jesus did for me on the cross. He died for me. As I remember and consider what Jesus did for me this love motivation grows. And so, when we serve it needs the right fuel; it needs to be motivated by love. **When we serve in the church in the way that God has designed, with the right fit and the right fuel, our service will be fruitful, it will be effective and it will be satisfying.**

A couple of years ago, there was a young woman from another country who had checked the box on the connections card about beginning a relationship with Christ. And so, I made contact with a woman here at Faith whom I knew had a passion for folks from other countries and I asked her if she'd be willing to meet with this lady and process with her this whole area of beginning a relationship with Jesus. Do you know how she replied to my request? She didn't say, "I can, I guess." She didn't say, "I don't real-

ly want to, but I will.” She didn’t say, “I’ll do it to make you happy.” Here’s what she said, “This is what I was created to do!” She found joy in getting to do what I asked her to do because it fit her gifting and it fit her passion.

When we think about the environment of service here at Faith, my hope for each one of you is that you’d be able to serve in a way that lets you say, “This is what I was created to do!”