

PASSIONATE LIVING 5

“Discovering the ‘SHAPE’ of your Life”

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every word of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

Ephesians 4: 11-16

This morning we’ll spend our time trying to help us discover our “Shape” for life and ministry. A couple words of caution as we begin. First; about ministry itself. Many people have mistakenly believed that ministry is what happens in church; life is what happens outside of church. I want to blur that line of distinction today. I believe that the Christian life is nothing but ministry. Whether at the grocery store, or serving at Ruth Meier’s house, both can be viewed as ministry. Whether in Christian School or Public School, prayer happens before every test! Whether in the boardroom of MDU or Med Center One, both contain people who are following Jesus, and wherever his followers are authentically and intentionally living their lives...ministry is taking place. Just get it, ministry doesn’t happen just in church.

Second; about Spiritual Gifts. God has promised and provided tools that enable us to be effective in ‘ministry’ (life) and they are called gifts. Gifts are different than talents, but related. Gifts are not your ministry. I’ve yet to see anyone live a fulfilled life, or complete a ministry using the Gift of Tongues, as one example. Gifts are not to be sources of pride or envy or projection. We all have gifts, as Paul reminds us in this passage under study, and all our gifts are different, and all our gifts are necessary for the Body of Christ to be fully functioning.

That being said, I must admit that I am digressing from the book we have been studying, today. Breen and Kallestad have tried to define that the 5 gifts in Ephesians are the basic fundamental gifts that govern life and ministry in all God's churches. I think that line of thinking is a bit too narrow. I grew up studying Bill Gotthard and his understanding of the spiritual gifts was that the list of 7 gifts in Romans is the basic foundational, motivational gifts of our lives. Both make valid points, but both miss the larger picture, in my humble opinion. There are about 30 different gifts listed in the Bible, from servant hood, to martyrdom, from hospitality to craftsmanship, from administration to discernment, from preaching to speaking in tongues, (no, they are not the same thing!) There are a variety of gifts, we all have some of them, and none of us have all of them.

Today, I want to take a more holistic look at how God weaves us together, and prepares us for ministry, equips us for service and expects us to serve! I'm in debt for much of this message to Rick Warren who first advocated the concept of how we are "SHAPE" ed for life and ministry. Let's consider then our unique shape, and we are not going to talk about anyone's physical shape, but our unique spiritual shape that enables us to live fulfilled lives; lives actively and fully engaged in ministry, wherever it happens!

Our 'shape' to help us remember these truths today is a pentagram, a five-sided box. Warren's approach to understanding life and ministry includes 5 components, and I've blended them into Breen and Kallestad's shape for our purposes today. Let's begin.

1. S- SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Each of us possesses at least one spiritual gift, and more than likely most of us have some affinity in more than one area of giftedness. I have the spiritual gift of serving, but I also possess some giftedness in teaching. Ernie has the gift of encouragement, and musicianship. Barb is a natural leader, Pete has unusual wisdom and compassion, Carol has the gift of showing mercy,

Joy has strong faith and organizational skills. Pauline obviously has the gift of servant hood, but also has great faith. It's an interesting mix, even on our staff. Walt has strong pastoring gifts, and Judy does too.

There are a whole bunch of gifts, and you must discover yours. It's not going to come as a shock to you, because though they are 'spiritual' in origin, they are woven quite naturally into the fabric of our being. Some people search endlessly for 'their gift', because their natural affinity seems too mundane or not exciting, or not spiritual enough. Don't be surprised when God reveals your gift, and you knew it all along. Crabbiness is not a spiritual gift, by the way. This is probably not an exhaustive list, but here are most of the gifts listed in the Bible:

Prophets, Apostles, Pastors, Evangelists, Teachers, Servants, Encouragers, Givers, Leaders, Administrators, Mercy Showers, Faith, Miracles, Healing, Discernment, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Hospitality, Musicianship, Craftsmanship, Celibacy, Poverty, Martyrdom.

Two principles to close this section: 1) Don't wait till you absolutely know your gift before engaging in some ministry. Just get to doing ministry and God will reveal your giftedness. 2) You will likely discover a primary gift, but also some secondary gifts. Your primary gift will be the one you use most often, but there may be phases of your life when other gifts will play a more prominent role.

2. H- HEART

This is really the 'heart' of this series. I'm talking here about what drives you, what gets you out of bed in the morning, what deep desires do you have, what altruistic motivations compel you to live;...what are you passionate about?

God wires each of us in such a way that certain tasks, opportunities, adventures, and mysteries really trip our trigger. Have you ever sat before God, and wondered aloud about the way He wired you? I have. Let me give you an illustration.

There are basically two kinds of people in every church, there are the pioneers and there are the settlers. Do you know the difference? Pioneers are those who thrive on adventure, love new challenges, get motivated by new opportunities, get passionate about change, and new prospects. Settlers are those who settle...stuff. They like building, and putting down roots. They prefer depth of relationship, rather than breadth of relationship. Change threatens their settling, and upsets their sense of security, and their building. I know this is an oversimplification, but this church has had more settlers than pioneers. I have wondered aloud, and often, why God would send me...more of a pioneer, to serve and lead a group of settlers. I don't have an answer.

But we must learn this from each other. Both settlers and pioneers are necessary to the fulfillment of the great commission, and we must be tolerant, even appreciative of each other. The church needs both to be healthy. I'm afraid more churches split over this tension than anything theological.

Back to our Heart. What are you passionate about? When you can answer that question, the way you live your life might make more logical 'ministry' sense!

3. A - ABILITIES

This sounds so unspiritual; we often dismiss it. For example: God has uniquely blessed those of us who live in the upper Midwest, with a 'can do' spirit; not found in other places. Dakotans are especially fond of doing things their own way, doing their own things, and not needing or relying on anyone else for assistance. It is one of our abilities, (sometimes a curse...that independent spirit doesn't often impress God who prefers us to be dependant).

Some folks can sing; a talent, for sure; a gift, possibly. More than likely, some people, I'll use Susan for example; have an ability to sing, but use that ability to extend their ministry through communicating love and compassion through her singing.

Does that make sense? Francis obviously has an eye for decorating. I'm not sure I've ever met anyone who is more 'gifted' at creating beautiful spaces than Francis. She has a gift, but she also has an ability to arrange pumpkins and gourds, to make them look...well...spiritual, they draw us to God, they really do.

In seeking what your ministry might be, or where your ministry might be, don't overlook your natural abilities. Just because they are natural, doesn't mean they are unspiritual.

4. P- PERSONALITY

This harkens us back to the settler/pioneer discussion. Those are basic personality types. We most often discuss this in terms of extroverts and introverts. I am amazed at how many of my colleagues who serve, as pastors are introverts. You would think that this 'calling' would require an outgoing, gregarious, demonstrative, charismatic person. God can certainly use those types, but is not limited to those types.

Don't type cast yourself. Just because you don't like to speak in front of a group, doesn't mean that God might not call you to effect change at your work place by softly and gently speaking truth to an unjust or irrational employer. And just because you are outspoken, even obnoxious, doesn't give you license to spout your every opinion.

God's intricate; intimate design is most seen in our personalities. The vast variety inherent in the nature of the Almighty is most visibly seen in our differing personalities. I have a good friend who is a major jokester; he is the ultimate one liner, he rivals Derrick as the master of the well-placed 'pun'. In our younger years he felt his humor disqualified him from serving God as a Pastor, because all his examples had been these dour, sour, negative, dopey preachers. I'm glad he didn't give up on God's call, because God certainly didn't give up on him.

Nor does God give up on us. It ought to be exciting as we search for God's call on our lives, our ministry; to see how God has been shaping your personality since before you were born, for the exact ministry He has for you, at this exact moment.

5. E- EXPERIENCES

Lastly, we must discuss that God sometimes leads us through, and sometimes allows, and every time redeems the experiences of our lives; to make us more like his son, and prepare us for some greater service. I firmly believe God never wastes a hurt. God is able (beyond our comprehension and understanding); to use the events, circumstances, and experiences of our lives, to make us more...holy!

But God also wants those experiences of our lives to make us empathetic, more compassionate, more gracious, more loving. Who might be best able to sympathize with someone who has just lost a beloved parent? Someone who has also lost a parent? Who might be best able to help a divorced father face the uncertain future with faith? Someone who is also divorced, and surviving. You see the point? God never wastes a hurt. God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us better comforters!

We have varied experiences in this life don't we? We have educational experiences; we here in the Midwest have geographical experiences, (we have some weather experiences that might even shape us). We have family experiences, most of us have some hard experiences, even tragic ones, and we also have some spiritual experiences. All of those, put together make up who we are. We are not just the sum total of our experiences, but each of those experiences, and maybe more importantly how we handle and process those experiences, goes into the makeup of who we are! Don't discount that your experiences, and your surviving, even thriving through them, are part of God's plan to prepare you for some unique and special ministry somewhere down the road. You just never know.

In conclusion let me ask you a question? Are you not involved in ministry because you have failed to see what you are doing as a ministry, or are you trying to excuse yourself because you think you are unqualified? Neither can work anymore. You now know that authentic and intentional Christian living; is ministry. And there are no good excuses. Did you ever think about this?

Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair, committed murder and had all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. That is quite a variety of misfits, but God used each of them in His service. He will use you, too, if you stop making excuses!

John Wesley was an incredible servant of God. His motto was “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.”

Let's take the blinders off, and bury the excuses. Being a mom may be your highest calling. Being CEO of MDU might be your ministry. Being a truck driver for Fed Ex or a bus driver for Harlows can be your ministry. Being a waiter at Applebee's, or a mechanic at the Cenex could be your ministry. It's all about seeing what you do as ministry, and doing what you do for Jesus. Your shape has made you who you are, God has fashioned you uniquely, don't waste his grace! Let's sing.

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