

USE YOUR TOOLS

Employing Your Spiritual Gifts | The Other Six (Part 2)

Text: Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Ephesians 4:7-12

I

Last week I suggested that when it comes to measuring the significance of our lives as Christians, we often tend to focus on what we do with our Sundays, while God is even more interested in what we do with THE OTHER SIX days of the week.

I made the case that Jesus believed his followers could function like salt scattered on the frozen sidewalks of this world; or like a million particles of light radiating out to bring warmth and illumination to dark places (Mat 5:13-14). He urged them to go out to the highways and byways of everyday life and invite everybody to the Great Banquet of God's Kingdom (Luke 14:16-23). He told us to reach out in love to the last, the least, and the lost (Mat 25:40; Luke 15). He commissioned us to go make disciples everywhere we went (Mat 28:18-20). He asked his followers to pray that more of us would be moved to go out into the harvest fields and exert a transformative influence on our weekday world (Mat 9:36-38).

Jesus modeled this outreaching, outworking, everyday focus. He taught it, commanded it, pleaded for it. "SEE THE FIELD, I see" he said in effect. Your workplace, your social circle, your school or community matter to me, because the people who are there matter to me. You're a key part of my strategy to help those particular people and places become all they can be. So, how'd it go this past week? We had a good time last Sunday; but what did you do with THE OTHER SIX?

II

For a lot of us, I suspect, it's tricky to answer that question because we're not sure where to start. Did what I do in that space or situation count? Did the way I acted there fulfill my commission and honor God's purposes? Sometimes, I think, it's a lot easier for those of us whose main field is a church, because the Bible supplies us with some pretty clear job descriptions. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul writes: **To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:7, 11-13)**

It seems to me that there are three fairly easy-to-get ideas there. The FIRST is that to each one of us who have been called to work in the church, Christ has apportioned (which means doled out) a particular grace. In other words, we're not operating on our

own energy or ingenuity alone. We're able to make a difference in the lives of others because God has supplied some supernatural grace for that. There's a power at work through us that comes from Him and not from us. I can't overstate how often I feel that and hear other church-workers express that.

The SECOND big idea in that Ephesians text is that there are really only five roles we church-workers are going to play, though many of us fulfill more than one of these roles over time. Some of us fulfill the function of an Apostle. In the church world, these are the people who imagine, initiate, and advance life-changing works. They are the visionaries who plant new churches, or spawn new ministries, or come up with innovative ways of advancing our mission. You know an apostle because she or he exhausts you with their energy and ideas!

Other people within the church play the role of a Prophet. In biblical times, prophets were the ones who declared the truth and call of God in particular situations. They were the ones who courageously named places of sin, injustice, or brokenness and what God wanted done about this. We've got a bunch of prophets on our staff, elder board, and congregation and boy are they annoying (!) -- AND essential to us!

Then St. Paul says there are those given grace to be a Pastor. These are the people wired to guide and protect groups of people and to shepherd individuals, especially the hungry, lost or hurting. I think of so many of my staff colleagues in this regard, but also our Stephen Ministers, CAST members, and hospitality team – just to name a few. As I joked last week, you don't even have to pay these people, they are just compelled to do this stuff!

The fourth role within the church is that of an Evangelist. Like their name implies, evangelists are people who share the good news of what Christ has done and invite others into it. They have a passion to see others know Christ and enter into life abundant and eternal. So many within our youth, worship, and missions ministries exhibit this special grace.

And, finally, there are some whose vital role is to be a Teacher. These are the servants who take extra time to study God's Word and explain it to others. They are the ones who invest themselves in helping kids or adults come to love God's truth and see the pathways his Word marks out that lead us toward greater flourishing.

As distinct as each of these five roles are, they all share one common purpose: **So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:7, 11-13).** All five of the church-worker roles are aimed at building in people the faith, knowledge of God, and maturity of character necessary to live into their God-given potential. Are you with me so far?

III

OK. So, here's a wild thought: What if your calling in the world was actually very much like that? What if churchwork can serve as a template for your fieldwork in your weekday world? You see, I'm quite sure that just as Christ has apportioned the supernatural grace needed for those of us who work in a church setting, God has also poured out all the power needed to fulfill his calling in your everyday context. Jesus loves that world. The last thing he promised his disciples was: **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).**

If you are his devoted disciple, then Jesus has already poured out his Holy Spirit upon you and supplied you with what are called "spiritual gifts." In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul tells us that: Spiritual gifts are (1) supernatural endowments (2) given to every believer (3) for the upbuilding of the church and its mission in the world (1 Cor 12:1-11). In a sense, spiritual gifts are like "power tools" God has given you to advance the influence he wants you to have for his kingdom. Have you ever walked down the tools aisles of Home Depot or Menards? It's almost overwhelming to see all the powerful instruments there. My head starts swimming with the thought of all the things I could get done with these things – if my neighbor came over and showed me how to use them! Well perusing the list of spiritual gifts we find in Scripture is like that. God has provided for his people such awesome tools!

God may have endowed you with special gifts of communication, administration, or leadership. He may have filled you with unusual discernment, wisdom, or knowledge. He could have gifted you with a capacity for prayer, mercy, or healing. And that's just ONE AISLE of the tools God supplies for the fieldwork he wants to see done in the places you'll go this week! If you don't know what your spiritual gifts are, go online and search for a "Spiritual Gifts Inventory" or ask one of our staff to help you find one. It will give you some great resources for identifying how God has gifted you for your personal mission.

As an aside, I want to observe that not every endowment God gives us looks like a GIFT, at least at the start. I was talking recently with the guys in the small group I mentioned last week and the question came up: ***"How has God equipped you to play a role in his mission in the world?"*** Most of us immediately listed off the strengths, talents, and resources with which we felt we'd been graced. But one of the men silenced the group by choosing to describe instead a terrible tragedy that he and his family had suffered. ***"It's still unbelievably hard and the feelings are so mixed, but I'm coming to see that this pain and loss is also a TOOL to be used for God's good purposes in the lives of others."*** What are ALL the ways God has equipped you?

IV

As we move to a close today, let me also suggest that God has supplied you with the tools he has so that you can play roles during your OTHER SIX days, similar to the roles St. Paul identifies in the work of the church. For example, some of you are called to be an Apostle out there. You're meant to imagine, initiate, and advance works that change lives. In the early 1900's a young man named Otto Rohweder was touched by the repeated cry of women in his neighborhood about the burdensome, time-consuming, and even dangerous chore they undertook every day. To some, what these women were sighing about might seem like a small problem, but women had carried this burden for three thousand years. Selling his jewelry business, Otto embarked on a long journey of failed attempts to devise a better solution. In 1917, a fire destroyed hundreds of his blueprints for his proposed invention. Ten years later, he finally managed to produce a working prototype, but he couldn't get anyone interested in it. Only after another visionary Christian stepped in and invested in the project, was Otto finally able to mass produce a machine that took a loaf of bread and cut it into slivers, without a woman needing to do it or risk getting her fingers cut. A newspaper ad claimed that this was **"the greatest forward step in the baking industry since bread was wrapped"**—a phrase that eventually became... **"the greatest thing since sliced bread."**¹ What's the need God may fill through you?

Others of you are the Prophet needed in some field out there. There's a situation at home or in your workplace... maybe in your wider family or in your community... a sin or injustice or some form of brokenness going on. Somebody needs to declare the truth and call for the change God wants to see happen. Will you be that voice in coming days? Or perhaps you're a Pastor at heart. There are people you'll meet this week, or a group of them, who need tender but firm shepherding. Please fulfill that role. Then there are those of you whose job it is to be an Evangelist. There are people in the situations you'll enter who are overwhelmed with bad news. They need to be reminded of a light and hope they won't see without you. Be that worker. Finally, there are so many individuals and places that need a Teacher – somebody that will humbly explain the pathways to flourishing or share the practical wisdom God has given you. Where could you be a mentor to someone?

Last weekend a church member shared with me how he'd signed up this past summer to coach a second grade baseball team and didn't really know what he was getting himself into. [Randomly he picked kids for the team and overheard another coach saying: "Well, at least now we know which team will wind up in last place!"]

He was an Apostle – starting up a team that wouldn't have been
He was a Prophet – challenging bad-behavior
He was a Pastor – comforting kids that failed and needed shepherding
He was an Evangelist – sharing his faith in a winsome way
He was a Teacher – instructing the kids on the practice of baseball and life (going into the final game of the season, he gave a speech that Hollywood should have had a camera on)
Guess what second grade team won the league championship?

As I said last week, it's time for every follower of Jesus – this whole team – to come to bat! So here's some helpful homework:

1. Identify which of the five-fold offices the Bible describes is most likely yours.
2. Take a spiritual gifts inventory so you have a better grasp of the particular capacities God has given you.
3. Think further about the ministry you have in your workplace.

The HANDOUT we have for you today and posted with this sermon online will give you helpful resources for all that.

REMEMBER: Step One is to SEE THE FIELD out there. Step Two is to get more focused on how you USE YOUR TOOLS.

I love how Claude Alexander, bishop of The Park Church in Charlotte, North Carolina puts it and with this I'll end: *"There is a purpose for your being here. You are meant to answer something, solve something, provide something, lead something, discover something, compose something, write something, say something, translate something, interpret something, sing something, create something, teach something, preach something, bear something, overcome something, and in doing so, you improve the lives of others under the power of God, for the glory of God."*²) This is part of what disciples do with THE OTHER SIX.

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Wherever you go, God is sending you.

Wherever you are, God has put you there.

God has a purpose in your being right where you are.

Christ, who indwells you by the power of his Spirit, wants to do something in and through you.

Believe this and go in his grace, his love, and his power.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen

¹ Adapted from Zachary Crockett, "The Invention of Sliced Bread," *Priceonomicsblog* (11-12-14)

² Claude Alexander, "Can You Do Any Better?" *PreachingToday.com*