

# Use Your Gifts (Part 2)

## Finding Your Place

### Introduction

#### The Text

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. . . .

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31)

#### Part 2

A. This is now part 2 of what I began a couple weeks ago. We're looking at this idea of using our gifts.

1. In the first part I was just trying to lay the foundation for us. And for that I brought out six truths from [1 Cor. 12](#) in particular. We got through the first five and we'll take up that sixth one here in just a moment.
2. But, without getting too far ahead of myself, I did want to make clear that this morning, for part 2 now, the lion's share of our time is going to be given, not to laying the foundation, but to finding our place in it all.
  - a. In other words, my goal is to get quite practical and personal and help us all consider: what are my gifts, how do I go about discerning this, and how to I begin to make a go at using them in love for God and others?
    - i. For this, as you'll see, I have not six truths but six "looks"—six places you and I can look to gain more clarity on the matter.

#### Reviewing Truths 1-5

A. So that's where we're going. But let me first close up that first part. I'll summarize the five truths we looked at last time real quick and then we'll consider the sixth and final. After that we'll move on to consider these looks I'm talking about.

## Truth #1: We Are Humbled (vv. 1-3)

- A. This came off of fact that the Holy Spirit, before he ever leads us into the use of our spiritual gifts and things, he first leads us to say “Jesus is Lord” (v. 3).
  - 1. The bottom line is this: we can’t even begin to use our spiritual gifts until we’re broken of our self-rule. We are of little use to the kingdom so long as we think we are of great use. So the whole discussion of spiritual gifts starts with humility and submission to the lordship of Jesus.

## Truth #2: We Are Gifted (vv. 4-13)

- A. Here we saw that, if you are in Christ, you have a gift(s) from him in the Spirit. There are no giftless Christians, no bench-warming Christians, no sideline Christians.
  - 1. As we just read there in v. 7: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit . . . .” Not to some, but to each, to “everyone” (v. 6). To you.
- B. And we also saw here that one of the ways we can more broadly classify all the various gifts we see listed throughout the NT (cf. Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; 14:26; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11) is to organize them according to the three main offices Christ held and fulfilled in his earthly ministry.
  - 1. Spiritual gifts, you recall are essentially the way that Jesus, through the Spirit, shares something of his own ministry and power and ability with us. It would make sense, I think, that these gifts could best be understood and organized according to Jesus’ own ministerial roles and functions. So, as it has been long understood, Jesus was Prophet, Priest, and King. And the various gifts he distributes to us, therefore, can be helpfully organized in these three buckets, if you will.
    - a. Prophetic gifts are those that put an emphasis on speaking and communicating God’s word with power. These gifts equip the person to bring Christ’s truth to others.
    - b. Priestly gifts are those that put an emphasis on service and showing compassion. These gifts equip the person to bring Christ’s care to others.
    - c. Kingly gifts are those that put an emphasis on order, organization, structure, and process. These gifts equip the person to bring Christ’s rule to others.

## Truth #3: We Are Needed (vv. 14-20) + Truth #4: We Are Needy (vv. 21-26)

- A. Truth #3 and Truth #4 came off of the image Paul gave us of the church as the body of Christ composed of individual members.
  - 1. In light of this we determined that, first, We Are All Needed (vv. 14-20)—no one can say “Because I am not this or that part, because I don’t have this or that gift, I don’t belong in the body.”

2. But we also determined that second, We Are All Needy (vv. 21-26)—no one can say “Because I am this or that or that part, because I do have this or that gift, I have no need of the body.” No!

- a. We are both needed and needy. More than we know . . . on both accounts!

### Truth #5: It’s All from Grace (v. 27)

- A. For this I’d just remind you that we’re in the body, unified and empowered by the Spirit of Christ, because his body was broken, torn apart on that cross for us.
  1. We get in because he was cast out. We are gifted because he was robbed. We are energized and built up because he was drained and crushed. It’s all from grace!

### Truth #6: It’s All for Love (v. 31)

- A. And, of course, this is why, Truth #6: It’s All for Love. It’s all from grace and it’s all for love—love for God, and love for others.
  1. Spiritual gifts, they’re not about you. They’re not given so that you can put on a parade to garner your own applause and glory. Whatever gifts you have, they’re from him and they’re for love.
- B. This is why 1 Cor. 12 ends the way that it does there in v. 31: “[E]arrestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”
  1. There’s a bit of intrigue here, isn’t there? Something’s left hanging in the air, unresolved. And we’re wondering what’s coming next? “[A] still more excellent way”?!
    - a. He’s saying spiritual gifts are great and all, but there’s something even more important that I want to tell you about now. “What is it?” you ask.
- C. Well, what comes after 1 Cor. 12? 1 Cor. 13 of course—a well-known and much-appreciated portion of Scripture, often referred to as “the love chapter.”
  1. You hear it quoted in one way or another at almost every wedding you attend: “<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.<sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.<sup>8</sup> Love never ends” (vv. 4–8).
    - a. The minister or someone else in the bridal party reads these words into the mic, while the bride and groom are looking in each other’s eyes, tears gather and stream, and all in attendance feel their hearts aflutter with something light and warm, this is love, isn’t it wonderful?
      - i. Oh well certainly love is a wonderful thing. And, no doubt, these words apply to marriage and the love that spouses should have for one another.

- D. But when we extract the verses like this we miss their larger context. And what's the larger context? It's this discussion of spiritual gifts! Isn't that interesting?!
1. Both [1 Cor. 12](#) and [1 Cor. 14](#) singularly concern themselves with the matter of spiritual gifts.
  2. And then suddenly here in the middle of that discussion, Paul seems to hit pause, as it were, to talk about love.
    - a. But he's not hitting pause, is he?! No. He thrusts here in the center of this discussion that which is truly the center of the issue. Do you know what I mean? Even the way Paul has structured these chapters makes plain his main point.
      - i. Love is the center around which all these spiritual gifts are meant to turn. It's the sun around which these planets are to orbit. If you don't have love at the center, as the reason and driving force for the use of your gifts, you've missed it. And everything will fall out of order, out of line, out of orbit.
- E. That's why Paul begins [1 Cor. 13](#) the way that he does: “<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.<sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.<sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (vv. 1–3).
1. Here Paul is jealous that we see with noonday clarity that the gifts of the Spirit must be subordinated to the fruit of the Spirit—the essence of which is love.
    - a. In other words: it's all for love or it's all for nothing. Who cares about your skills and your accomplishments and resume if it's all done with love only for yourself and no one else. Who cares?! You're wasting it. You're missing it.
- F. You're in danger of succumbing to the same error committed by those in [Matt. 7](#) of whom Jesus says: “<sup>22</sup>On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'<sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'” (vv. 22–23).
1. “You had the gifts but not the fruit. You had the competency but not character. You had the hand but not the heart. You had the works but not the relationship . . . and the love.”
    - a. The fruit of the Spirit trumps the gifts of the Spirit every time. We must never get that backwards!
- G. Before [1 Cor. 13](#), he's already hinted at this fact.
1. So we saw in [1 Cor. 12:7](#): “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

- H. But then after the charged rhetoric of [1 Cor. 13](#), he goes on a holy rampage in [1 Cor. 14](#), as it were, making the gift-love nexus all the more plain. The whole chapter is given over to it.
1. So he opens: [“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts . . .”](#) ([1 Cor. 14:1](#)). And he goes on to flesh out what this means . . .
    - a. If our use of gifts is truly harnessed and directed by love, we will use them in such a way that others will be [“built up”](#) (vv. 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26); [“encouraged”](#) (vv. 3, 31); [“consoled”](#) (v. 3); [“benefited”](#) (v. 6); and [“instructed”](#) (v. 19).
  2. Two of the clearest statements to this end come in [v. 12](#) and [v. 26](#):
    - a. [“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church”](#) (v. 12).
    - b. [“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up”](#) (v. 26).
- I. It makes sense, doesn't it? This is how Jesus operated. This is what his earthly ministry was all about. Love for his Father and his neighbor. He marshalled all of his strength, all of his resources, all of his gifts, and used them to serve and bless you and me.
1. So we ought to do the same!

## Six Looks

- A. So those are the six truths that we've set like stones in the foundation underneath this idea of using our gifts. Now we're ready to get more practical and personal. Now we're ready to try to discern our own place in all of this—what are my gifts . . . and how should I use them? Now we're ready to consider those six looks I referred to at the start.
1. If we want to try to find our place in all of this, we need to (1) Look Up; (2) Look Down; (3) Look In; (4) Look Out; (5) Look Backward; and (6) Look Forward. So let's go!

### Look #1: Look Up

- A. With this I'm simply referring to the idea of prayer—of looking up to God.
- B. It shouldn't come as a surprise to us that this is really the starting point for discerning our own gifts and how we ought to best use them. After all, these gifts have come to us from God in the first place.
1. As we read in [1 Cor. 12:4](#): [“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”](#)
    - a. This is his doing, therefore he's really the first place we should look for guidance with it all. God is the one who has made us, redeemed us, and gifted us. Therefore,

he's the one who to whom we should look to direct us. He's our Commander in Chief. So we look up. We pray.

- C. It really is an astounding thing to consider that the God of the heavens and earth should have some purpose and plan for my little life.
1. It would be like me taking concern for what one little ant is up to in my backyard later this afternoon. I don't care about some little ant in my grass. I don't even really want him there. He's a nuisance. I've got much more important things to concern myself with.
  2. And I do think many Christians might feel this way about themselves as they stand in relationship with God. They imagine themselves to be too small, too insignificant, for him to attend to. "He may have plans to use some of the real bigshot Christians, but not me."
    - a. The back of Francis Schaeffer's book *No Little People* tells the story I think: "Most Christians take an honest look at themselves and conclude that their limited talents, energy, and knowledge mean that they don't amount to much. [But] Francis A. Schaeffer says that the biblical emphasis is quite different. With God there are no little people!"
- D. What a thought! It at once humbles and lifts us. You matter. And you're here on purpose. Indeed, you're here with a purpose . . . from him.
1. So of Jeremiah God says: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5).
  2. And of Paul, Jesus says: "[H]e is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).
- E. But you object at this point: "Nick, do you see what you've done? Here you are again just accenting the fact that God has something for the bigshots to do, the spiritual rockstars like the prophet Jeremiah and the apostle Paul. But this doesn't apply to me."
1. Well, with all due respect, I'm not finished. I'm still building towards the crescendo. You see, in *Eph. 2*, Paul takes this principle—that God sets apart people for good works and things—and he democratizes it, he broadens the scope of it, until every Christian is encompassed therein!
    - a. Speaking to the Ephesian church in particular, but to all Christians in general, he writes: "<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (vv. 8–10).
      - i. The Greek word translated "workmanship" here is *poiēma*, which is where, I think you can tell, we actually derive the English word "poem." It's very picturesque, isn't it?

(1) In Christ, you are God's poem, he is writing verse and stanza, carefully choosing every word, fitting it all together. And what's the whole thrust of this poem he's writing in your life? "[G]ood works . . . that we should walk in them."

F. This is why I say it all begins with looking up. "God, what is this poem? God, what are these works? You told Jeremiah. You told Paul. Will you talk to me about it? Will help me find my place in it all?"

1. All throughout the gospels we see that Jesus is praying and moving as God leads him.
2. All throughout the book of Acts we see that the early Christians are praying and moving as God leads them.

a. And it should be the same for us. If you want to begin to discern your own gifts and how God might want you to use them, begin with prayer. Look up!

G. In my own story this has been critical. I remember back when I was first considering dropping out of the landscape architecture program at Cal Poly to pursue vocational ministry in some way. I was really wrestling with it, praying about it. I'd already put three years into the program and made it through the hardest part of it all. And there were many times where God just graciously directed me, I think. I'll give you a couple examples:

1. This first one was quite odd. One of my professors—an awesome guy, certainly not a Christian by any stretch—called me into his office after the Thanksgiving break and he says: "I don't know why, but I kept thinking about you all break long. And the thing I kept wondering was: why isn't doing what he loves? I can tell you're passionate about Jesus and the church. Why aren't you doing that?" I was floored.
2. I remember another time where I was still struggling with the idea. It's a big decision. And I was asking God for some sign, you know. And, the next day, a student who had been at one of the Cru meetings we'd had a little while back where I'd given an announcement for some purity conference my Bible study was putting on, he comes up to me and says: "Hey, I was there when you gave that announcement. It was powerful. And I was just curious: have you ever thought about going into full-time ministry?" And, again, I was floored. God was answering my prayers. He was helping me discern my place. He was showing me what the gifts were that he was wanting me to use in love for him and others.

H. Listen, if you have an open heart and you're surrendered to him and truly seeking his guidance, he'll show you.

## Look #2: Look Down

A. I know this might sound weird, but go ahead and do this literally. Take a moment, if you would, and look down. What you see? My guess is you see your feet on the floor, right?

1. Now, what's the point of this silly little exercise? Well, I want you to realize that God has put your feet in this place on purpose. You are not here by accident. You are here for a reason.

- a. And by “here” I don’t just mean here on this earth. I mean here in this place in particular—not just the earth, but the America; not just the America, but California; not just California, but San Jose; not just San Jose, but at the intersection of Allen and Steinbeck, at Mercy Hill Church, on a Sunday morning, in May of 2022.
  - i. He has your feet resting upon this dingy elementary school carpet right now on purpose. You are here for a reason.
  
- B. So with this idea of looking down I’m simply trying to bring to your attention the reality of God’s providence. I want to awaken you to the fact that all around you right now there are pressing needs, open doors, opportunities to love and serve and use your gifts.
  - 1. And I’m not just talking about in this church, I’m talking about all around this city. Everywhere you walk, if you’re eyes are open, you’ll see that doors are open. There are so many things you could do to help.
  
- C. You know, sometimes, especially when we’re thinking about our gifts or our calling and where God wants us, we get so caught up in looking off to the future, looking over there, somewhere beyond the fence, as it were, that we miss what’s right in front of us . . . or right beneath us.
  - 1. God may be calling you to go somewhere else someday, that is true. But he’s called you right here, right now. And what I’ve found is that usually the way you get wherever you’re supposed to be later is by going all in and being faithful wherever you are right now.
  
- D. I still remember, years ago now, reading this helpful little collection of blog posts by C.J. Mahaney on the subject of biblical productivity. And in there he starts talking about roles and goals and calling and things. And, drawing from a book by Gene Veith, he encourages those who are trying to figure this stuff out to begin with two simple questions:
  - 1. First, “where has God placed me?”
  - 2. And, second, “where am I positioned to serve others?”
    - a. These two questions cut through a lot of the mystery and the excuses, don’t they?
      - i. We’re often so confused wondering what’s our place and what should we be doing?
      - ii. And sometimes we even use that as an excuse to do nothing.
        - (1) But here he just says start with this: where are you right now; and what are the needs? In other words: look down. God has put you in this place on purpose. Go, love, and serve.
  
- E. You know, I thought of that line that often gets cited from the book of Esther. Sometimes it’s a little cheesy the way it’s used, but it’s nonetheless true.
  - 1. You remember, the Jews there in Persia were imperiled at the time and Esther, having favor with the king of Persia, was uniquely positioned to help.

2. And so Mordecai, trying to encourage her to action says: “[W]ho knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

a. In other words: you’re here at this time in this place on purpose. Step towards the needs of the moment.

F. There’s an article written by the late David Powlison entitled “What Is Your Calling?” that I found to be supremely helpful. I’ll likely quote from it a few times before we’re done. But listen to him here. What he says fits within the contours of our current discussion about looking down: “Your calling is not simply individualistic self-fulfillment, a version of ‘follow your dreams.’ It is keyed to the true needs of the people around you, and God’s purposes for his people. What are the problems, troubles, and struggles of your time and place? In your family and home? Local church? Work place? Neighborhood or city? Nation? World? Wider body of Christ? The sons of Issachar were ‘men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do’ (1 Chron. 12:32). What are your times? What needs to be done? Abigail had ‘good understanding’ (1 Sam. 25:3, 33), and figured out what she needed to do to defuse a volatile situation. The story of the sheep and the goats addresses elemental human needs that take a thousand forms, and each of us encounters them in different ways (Matt. 25:31–46). The Samaritan in Jesus’ parable showed himself sensitive to God’s call within the exigencies of a crisis situation (Luke 10:30–37). The situational realities in any particular family, community, work place, or church are not the same. What needs godly attention in your time and place, in your church, in your community? . . .

Jesus’ calling was not shaped by the general need of fallen humankind, as if he lived, taught, healed, and died for a nameless abstraction. His life took its specific shape from a thousand particulars of the people with names among whom he walked and talked. God’s calling to you is not individualistic. He connects you to your context. Where are you located?” (p. 87). Look down!

G. Let me share a little bit more from my own story and show you how this played out for me.

1. When God saved me, I found myself longing to serve any way that I could. Naturally, one of the greater needs in any church is usually kids ministry so that’s where I began. And I loved it.
2. But then, a few years down the line, there was an opportunity in the church for an internship, and so I jumped at that. And I got more opportunities to serve, and even some opportunities to lead.
3. Through this, a door opened for me to start and pastor a college ministry in the church there. So I came back after graduating and was there in SLO for five years at that same church where I got saved.
4. Then, while pastoring the college ministry, it was put on our hearts to run regular mission trips to San Francisco with the students. So we started doing that. And that’s really where we began getting a heart for the Bay Area.
5. And, while I felt called to go get more training from a seminary in Philadelphia, both my wife and I hoped that afterward we might somehow end up back here, though we had no idea how.
6. But now here we are. And I would wager one of the reasons I was looked upon favorably when I applied for the role of lead pastor of this church is because I’d done some work in the Bay Area before.

- a. In other words: all along the way, if I had just held off because I was looking to get somewhere else, I never would've gotten there. As we try to be faithful and guided by love in the present, using everything we have to serve, that's what God uses to connect us to whatever he's got coming for us in the future.
- H. So look down. What needs do you see around you right here where your feet are located? Pray about it, sure, but get busy in love for God and others!

### Look #3: Look In

- A. With this now I'm simply encouraging you to consider your own desires and passions. How has God wired you? What do you get excited about? What lights you up? What do you like to do? What do you want to do? As I've heard Tim Keller put it: "What needs do you vibrate to?"
- 1. So you look down and you realize, yes, in this place that God has put me, there's no shortage of needs and opportunities.
  - 2. But what then? Well, certainly you look up and pray, as we've said, but you also look in and ponder: "What do I actually feel drawn to?"
- B. I used to think that desires were inherently evil. If I want it, it must be bad, or wrong, or selfish.
- 1. Now, it's true, our desires can often lead us astray and into sin (cf. [James 1:14-15](#); [4:1-2](#)), but they can also be indicators of where God has gifted us and where he may be calling us.
- C. If you need some Bible for this, consider . . .
- 1. Paul tells us an elder should "[aspire] to the office" and "he desires a noble task" ([1 Tim. 3:1](#)). You don't want a guy in that role who doesn't even want to be there. It's on his heart. He's excited about it.
  - 2. Peter gets at the same thing in [1 Pet. 5:2](#) when he says elders should "shepherd the flock of God that is among [them], exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, . . . eagerly."
  - 3. Paul, calling for the Corinthian church to help meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, says: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" ([2 Cor. 9:7](#)). Your giving comes from the heart, not from a guilt-trip or something like that.
  - 4. In [Jer. 20:9](#), the prophet writes: "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." There's a fire burning on the inside. "I've got to speak."
    - a. I could keep going, but I think you get the idea. Your desires and passions are often the way God reveals your gifts to you and connects them to the real needs of people around you.
- D. Now, I should say, this can be considered from both a positive and negative direction.
- 1. In the positive, we could talk about what you love doing (as we've just looked at).
  - 2. In the negative, we could talk about what bugs you, what you notice that's off (consider it).

E. Often we see the church and things through the lens of our own giftings.

1. So for example, because my gifts, I think, are more in preaching and teaching, when I come into a church, I'm usually most tuned in and even critical on this point. "The guy didn't even get to the gospel. He skipped over that verse. It was all surface-level."
  - a. Now, on the one hand this could simply be an indication that I'm a crusty, critical jerk, right.
  - b. But, on the other hand, it's also quite possible that I notice what's off or what's missing because that's an area that I'm passionate about, that I'm, perhaps even, gifted in.

F. Speaking more broadly then . . .

1. So the people that run in line with the more prophetic gifts, they're passionate about truth. They notice when the church seems a little lite on Bible. "They're squishy on truth. Someone needs to step in and speak."
2. Likewise, the people that run in line with the more priestly gifts, they're passionate about relationships and ministries of mercy and things. So they notice when a church is seemingly cold and dry. "Okay, they have truth here, but where's the love? Everyone's just getting beat up with the Bible."
3. And the people whose gifts track more in line with the kingly, they're passionate about order and systems and things. They notice when the structure of the church seems off and things are in disarray. "Okay, you have truth and love, but it's all a mess. We can't get anything done, because no one's organizing and leading the charge."

G. Do you see how your own desires and passions can be an indicator of where you may be gifted?

1. But hopefully you also see that in all of this we really need each other. Because you may notice one thing that's off with them, but they notice another thing that's off with you. And if you both just stand there a safe distance away, blasting the other, you miss the point.
  - a. No one person is supposed to have it all. We are "[the body of Christ and individually members of it](#)" (1 Cor. 12:27). Don't act like your gift is the one everyone else is supposed to care most about. You need them to care about what they do. And they need you to care about what you do.

H. So let me just encourage you: don't fall off the other side of your assessment of a church into judgmentalism and hypercriticism.

1. That's ultimately just Pharisaism. The Pharisees loved to point out what was wrong with others but wouldn't lift a pinky finger to help them.
  - a. On the contrary: if you see a hole, fill it; if you see a chink in the armor, cover it; if you see a wound, bandage it; if you see a need, meet it. Don't just grumble from the sidelines. Get in and do something about it!

- I. If I could share from my own story again . . .
  1. When I got saved, I was so hungry for God’s Word, it was crazy. The appetite I had, it was insatiable. I could not get enough. And so my knowledge of Scripture quickly started to outpace even guys who’d been Christians for most of their lives.
  2. And do you want to know what I did because of this? I judged them. I would call them out, speak down to them. I figured everyone was supposed to be like me—to have the same passions that I did.
  3. But then at one point my Bible study leader at the time, always gracious, said: “Bro, chill out a bit on judging these other guys. Maybe your passion for the Bible is actually an indication of how God is gifting you and where he might be calling you.”
  4. And it just dawned on me: maybe this is something God’s doing with me, and he doesn’t have to do it in quite the same way with everyone. And, looking back, my Bible study leader was right.

#### Look #4: Look Out

- A. With this I’m just inviting you to look out now and consider: up to this point, where have you been fruitful? Where has God already been using you? What do you feel skilled at? What do you think you’re gifted at? It’s one thing to be passionate about something. It’s quite another to actually be good at it, right? So look out and consider: where have you seen fruit?
- B. It’s at this point that I’d like to accent a very important principle in all of this: namely, we discern our gifts in the context of community.
  1. Self-knowledge and even knowledge of God and his will for us is a community project. Without a loving, faithful community of saints around us I fear we won’t be able to make much headway in this.
- C. I bring this up now under the call to look out because of our propensity to be self-deceived concerning where we’re fruitful and what we’re good at. You might think you’re great at something, but the only way you really know is if people start to actually recognize and affirm it.
  1. Until then we may very well be like some of those folks in the opening auditions of American Idol.
    - a. Every year the show begins with these auditions they hold in various cities around America, and people come from all over to try out and see if they have what it takes to make it to Hollywood and enter the competition.
    - b. And, of course, some are great. But then, inevitably, some are just (I hate to say it) laughably horrible. They come in self-confident, dressed like pop-stars, famous in their own mind already, sure that they’re musical gifts will set them apart from the others.
    - c. And then they go to open their mouth and you’re just left thinking: whatever gifts this individual has (and I am certain they have some), listen, singing is not one of them, alright. “Brother, you’re passionate about it. You want it. But you don’t got it.”

- d. And you're left wondering: how is it that no one in this guy's life loved him enough to tell him this before it got to this point, where he's making a fool of himself on national television? Maybe people did tell him and he didn't listen.
    - i. I share this here because it's a parable, I think, of what we're all prone to do. And we need to be careful. We discern our gifts in the context of community. So we don't just look in, we also look out.
- D. This is essentially what Paul is doing in [Gal. 2](#) where he's recounting these revelations he's received from Jesus along with a sense of his own calling, but he wants to confirm it all with trusted leaders in the church, with the apostles who had come before him.
1. So he writes: "<sup>1</sup> I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. <sup>2</sup> I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain" (vv. 1-2).
  2. But then down in v. 7 he continues: "<sup>7</sup> [W]hen they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised <sup>8</sup> (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised" (vv. 7-9).
    - a. Do you see what he's doing? He's checking in. Am I crazy here? Or am I on track? He doesn't just go barreling on. He lets in wise counsel.
- E. The book of Proverbs, you recall, is chock full of this same sort of thing:
1. [Prov. 11:14](#): "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."
  2. [Prov. 15:22](#) is similar: "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed." The idea is simple: get people around you that can confirm or deny what you're feeling and give you feedback.
  3. [Prov. 18:1](#) puts it negatively: "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment."
  4. [Prov. 20:18](#): "Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war." Don't just run off into something. Talk to people about it.
  5. [Prov. 27:5-6](#) gives us yet another layer of insight: "<sup>5</sup> Better is open rebuke than hidden love. <sup>6</sup> Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." In other words: choose your counselors wisely. Don't just surround yourself with yes-men or women. Find people who will be honest with you—not unnecessarily critical and harsh, but honest and real, in love.
- F. So, listen, certainly you want to assess things personally. Where do you think you're gifted and skilled? Where do you think you've been fruitful?

1. But don't stop there. Open the door for others in your life to share their thoughts and feedback with you as well.
- G. Allow me to say one last thing. Seen from another angle, this means that when we're in community as Christians, we ought to be encouraging and affirming one another whenever we see people using gifts God has given them.
1. We need to recognize that everyone around us right now is on a journey of discernment and discovery and our encouragement can really help them along in uncovering where they're gifted and where God's calling them. Don't just wait until someone comes to you and asks. Be proactive. Speak up if someone blessed you. Let them know.
- H. This really is the other side of that American Idol dynamic I've referenced.
1. You see, every season there are people who come to the auditions that should never be there. They're just not gifted for this. That's true.
  2. But then, on the flip side, every season there are people who are unbelievably talented, and yet the only reason they even gathered enough courage to try out is because someone else effectively dragged them there. Someone else could see their gift even when they couldn't.
    - a. So they come in all timid and embarrassed and sure that they're just going to get cut ". . . but my buddy told me I had to try . . . but my grandma told me I had to try . . . but my coworkers told me had to try . . . so here I am."
    - b. And then they open their mouth to sing, and the judges are just blown away, and America is just blown away, and that individual is just blown away, because they couldn't even imagine anyone would think they're any good. And they're awesome! And they start to grow in that gift because of someone else's encouragement.
- I. Speaking with a view to my own story once more: if no one came up to me and encouraged me, if they just assumed for whatever reason that I already knew God was using me in this or that way, listen, I very well may never have even pursued the course I did.
1. I can't tell you how many times it was a person's response to my attempts to preach or lead musical worship or whatever that kept me going. I'd be ready to quit, and then along would come some grace of God for me in the form of a simple email or text or conversation—a person saying a simple thank you, expressing how God used me to minister to them.
    - a. And suddenly fresh wind would fill my sails. Maybe, just maybe, God is with me in this.
- J. So your encouragement really matters. This doesn't mean be fake or plastic. We're not talking about empty praise or flattery. We're talking about honest feedback and expressions of gratitude for the gifts God has given a person. Who knows. Your encouragement could be just the thing God uses to lead a person into his calling and purpose for them.

## Look #5: Look Backward

- A. With this I am simply encouraging you to look back at where you've come from, where you've been. I want you to think about your own story.
  - 1. We all have a different constellation of life experiences in our background that, in many ways, gives shape to the kind of ministry God may have for us now and in the future.
    - a. Think about your family history, your education, your vocation, your ethnicity, your testimony. Think about your blessings and your hardships, your victories and your losses, your accomplishments and your failures, your joys and your sorrows.
- B. I'll let Powlison speak again to us on this point: "The true God does not inhabit some religious sector or spiritual sphere, expecting us to come to him. He works in the mundane, and comes to us in the normal activities of daily life. Daniel and Moses were educated in the knowledge and ways of the governing class, and so could rise to positions of authority while living in exile. Paul could be the bridge from the Jews to the nations because he was both an educated Pharisee and a Roman citizen. Moses and David were equipped to look out for the welfare of others by years spent shepherding sheep. Older women are equipped to help younger women by their life experience (Titus 2:4). Paul could encourage people facing any sort of trouble because of how he found encouragement in his particular trouble (2 Cor. 1:4). God uses everything. Have you worked in a factory? Learned Spanish? Battled cancer? Been disillusioned by a fallen leader? Made millions in business? Raised a disabled child? Been sexually molested? Had an abortion? Done a graduate degree? Come off of street drugs? Been fascinated by South Asia since childhood?  
Your calling almost always unfolds along a trajectory. It bears an organic relationship to how your life has unfolded, and expresses the fundamental continuities in your story" (p. 86).
- C. Your past, even before coming to Christ, is not irrelevant to your future, God invariably weaves the two together. Where you've come from will connect in some way to where you're going and it can often be an indicator of where you've been uniquely gifted and how he may want to use those gifts in service of others.

## Look #6: Look Forward

- A. With this last look I just simply want to encourage you to go and try things. Take steps of faith and look forward to what God will do.
- B. You don't have to get it perfect. You're not always going to have all these looks line up. You're not always going to be excited about serving. You're not always going to feel like you're good at it. It's not always going to correspond with your past experiences.
  - 1. But look forward, take steps, and try things anyway.
- C. This is where we let the sixth look wrap back around to that sixth truth. Let love be your guide above all else. If you have that, the other stuff will follow. He'll show you as you go and try to serve and try to meet the needs that are all around you.
  - 1. But hopefully these six looks will help you along the way.