

Section Three

Spiritual Formation: Discovering God's Gifts

SYLLABUS

DESCRIPTION:

God's "call" is something we hear, but His "gifts" are something we discover. When God formed us in the womb (Ps 139: 13-16; Eph 2:10), He carefully designed each one of us so we would be able to successfully accomplish those things He would call us to do. He knew which strengths and capacities we would need in order to play our part in His great plan of redemption. This class will engage the student in a God-guided process of self-discovery. It is designed to be a next step after taking the Hearing God's Call course. The goal is for each person to gain a better understanding of their ministry gifts, to recognize their need to partner with others and to form a plan to develop those gifts.

OBJECTIVES:

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain the concept of God's gifts.
- Be able to differentiate gifting from calling, ministry and vocation.
- Recognize the breath of resources God gives for ministry.
- Differentiate between your unique gifts and the gifts others contribute to enable you to fulfill your call.
- Identify the most impactful tools needed for your calling.
- Identify some important tools needed for your calling which you do not have now.
- Set out a plan for further development of your talents and skills.
- Develop a lifetime of daily reading, reflecting and learning from the Bible.

FORMAT

Classes will meet for one hour and ten minutes once a week for twelve sessions. Class meetings will primarily be a time for God-guided self-discovery in a small peer-group setting. Reading and study questions will be assigned each week. Students will be assigned to small cohorts which are groups of students who will regularly meet with one another and discuss what they are learning. Cohort leaders will be present to guide discussion, encourage the spiritual tone of the

session and give brief definition of terms and assignments. No regular lecture is planned or expected. The overall course will be managed by an instructor.

TEXT

Benge, Janet, and Geoff. *Christian Heroes, Then and Now* series. Seattle, WA: YWAM Pub, Various. (Select two from this biographical series).

READING ASSIGNMENTS

There are two different types of reading assignments and a total of 7 reports to be submitted to the instructor. The schedule of when each report is due is found in the Class Schedule. The first two studies are identified as Christian Heroes Studies. You will select 2 books from the *Christian Heroes, Then and Now* series and examine the cluster of gifts God provided for each hero as described in each biography. Each hero will be studied separately. You will submit a typed report for each hero including, as a minimum, each item in the study guide and your input/response.

The second type of study is found in the Course Materials under Bible Character Studies. You will read assigned passages on 5 different major characters in the Bible and study the cluster of gifts of each. Each character will be studied separately. You will submit a typed report for each character for a total of 5 reports which will include, as a minimum, each item in the study guide and your input/response.

REFLECTION AND COHORT DISCUSSIONS

You will read the Course Materials and work through the exercises as assigned in accordance with the Class Schedule. Actively set aside your own quiet time reflecting on God's gifting and sending and when and how His presence helped you in the past. Using the questions in the Course Materials as a guide, you will discuss in your cohort:

- Your toolbox
- Your reflection on your gifting
- Your plan for growth of gifts evaluating your need for further exercise, education and training
- Your gifting development plan, indicating the next steps you plan to take to develop your gifts
- Identify your gifting cluster analysis of 7 fruitful ministers

INTRODUCTION

God's call is something we hear, but His gifts are something we discover. It's surprisingly easy to overlook resources He has placed in our lives or abilities He wired into us when He formed us in our mother's womb. The Bible teaches God carefully designed each of us so we would be able to successfully accomplish those things He would call us to do. He knew which strengths and capacities we would need in order to play our part in His great plan of redemption. He also knew the circumstances of life and resources necessary for us to fulfill all He would place in our heart. So the goal of this class is not simply to examine ourselves but to look at the subject of God's gifts from a far broader perspective. Yes, God has "wired" us in certain ways, and we need to understand ourselves more deeply, but He also placed within our reach many more "gifts" than these. Each of us needs to step back and survey all that God has placed in our hands and all that can be used in our service for Him. The "parable of the talents" will help us understand this point.

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (Mt 25: 14-28)

This parable pictures a man who entrusted his possessions to his servants and then went on a journey. It is apparent Jesus was picturing Himself as that man. He would soon ascend into heaven and leave His disciples here on earth to carry on the work He had started. The point of the parable is His servants should faithfully employ all the resources He has given us so when He returns, He will receive a profit from our labors. The Greek word which is translated as "talents" can be confusing because in common English the word usually means natural abilities. For example, a person might be said to have a "talent" for music. But the Greek word originally meant a certain weight of silver. In other words, the man went on a trip and left each servant with a certain amount of money. In this case money is simply a symbol for whatever resources a person has been given. As the parable explains, some have been given more than others, but in that economy, one talent of silver was still a large amount of money. None of the servants was left with a small amount. When the man returned, each servant was rewarded based on the faithfulness they had shown in using their resources for the master's profit. When we look at the subject of gifting in this light, we soon discover all of us have been given many gifts. Not only do we find within ourselves certain natural abilities, but we also recognize we have been taught certain skills and have had experiences which have left us stronger, wiser, and more compassionate, and God has placed special people in our lives who are a great resource to us. Even the financial resources we have become an important part of the gifts left to us by Jesus. At first glance, some of our gifts may not seem to be spiritual enough to qualify as "gifts from God," but they are. And once we embrace them as such, they become very important resources to help us fulfill our calling.

KNOWING OURSELVES (Ps 139:13-16; Eph 2:10)

In Psalm 139 David marvels at the fact God knew the plan He had for him long before he was born and carefully designed him in his mother's womb with the natural abilities he would need. When David speaks about being "fearfully and wonderfully made" (v 14), he's saying God anticipated the spiritual, mental and physical capacities he would need to succeed in his calling, which in David's case was to be the King of Israel. Paul declares the same truth when he says,

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Eph 2:10).

This means God has designed each one of us to succeed in our calling. God designed us in our mother's womb to do something very well. This is an important truth to understand. To say I can't do what God has called me to do is to deny I have been "fearfully and wonderfully made." When we pursue our calling and discover our gifts, we are bringing our lives into alignment with God's great plan for us.

Some of us struggle with our own personality, wishing we could change ourselves and become like someone else we admire. Of course, all of us struggle with the negative tendencies in our "flesh," but we must be careful not to reject the particular way God designed us. We might wish some of the qualities weren't there, but in time we'll discover these qualities are actually personality traits we'll need in order to accomplish what He's called us to do. Even stubbornness can be a great asset in the service of God. So an honest and unbiased evaluation of ourselves will be essential in this process. We must not picture ourselves as who we wish we were but recognize and embrace who we are and what resources have been given to us. Only then can we move forward to maximize these gifts in the service of Jesus Christ.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

God, in His great wisdom, has chosen to give us strengths and weaknesses. He has intentionally designed us with both. By not understanding this, many people have become very frustrated with themselves. They see themselves as "flawed." For some reason they assume they should be good at everything they do, but the truth is God created us with weaknesses, as well as strengths, so we will be forced to partner with others in order to accomplish our call. God wants His people to love each other and work harmoniously together toward a common goal, each person contributing their part of all that's needed. Paul repeatedly teaches this principle using the analogy of the human body (1 Co 12:12-30; Eph 4:11-16). So as we reflect on our gifts, we need to recognize the gifts we don't have as well as the gifts we do have. To use another analogy, we need to recognize the "tools" we don't have in our toolbox, just as much as the

“tools” we do have. This means in order to build the “house” we’re called to build (fulfill our calling), we will need to recruit or join others who have the necessary tools (gifts) we lack.

INTRODUCING THE PROCESS

As we have seen, the term “gifts” includes not only the natural abilities God “wired” into us at birth but also the practical skills and available resources He has placed in our lives along the way. We will begin this process of discovery by first reflecting on our natural abilities and then trying to identify as many of these skills and resources as possible. The questions below are designed to help us observe things we have done well and remember moments in which God’s presence empowered us, and we felt He was pleased with what we were doing. In the previous course (Hearing God’s Call), each student prepared a spiritual timeline. It might be helpful to have that timeline at hand as a reference. The fact is you already express the natural abilities God gave you, whether you know it or not. The questions below are meant to help you see that fact.

NATURAL ABILITIES

Again as you did in the first course (Hearing God’s Call), please set aside time for quiet, prayerful reflection. Ask the Lord to help you remember those special moments when you knew He was present with you, helping you accomplish something. And please do not disqualify in your mind those things He helped you do, because you feel they were not “spiritual” enough or done specifically “for God.”

1. At some point in time, you probably recognized God’s presence was helping you do something. What was it?

2. Have you sensed His help in that area often?

3. If He had not come to help you, how would things have been different?

4. There are certain things you do well. Considering things or people, do you improve, grow stronger, heal, learn, calm down, get back on track, become more productive, etc.? There's probably more than one such area in your life. Name as many as you can.

5. There are certain things you do which after you do them, people tend to come up and say, "Thank you!" They're not just being polite. They're telling you what you did really made a difference. When and where has that happened?

6. You may find people often ask you to help them in some particular way. What is it they ask you to do? It may or may not be something you think of as "spiritual" or even enjoy doing, yet it is an area people keep turning to your for help. What is it?

7. Has there ever been a moment in your life when you stood back and said to yourself, "This is what I was born to do!" What were you doing at the time?

8. What do you do that doesn't feel like "work" when you do it? It may be very demanding and tiring, yet you tend to get "lost in it," and time passes unnoticed.

9. Ask your parents/grandparents/other family members who've watched you grow up what tendencies and special abilities they observed in you. Are there one or two they all seem to mention?

OTHER GIFTS

If we have the "eyes to see," we will soon recognize God has given us many other gifts beyond our natural strengths and abilities. Below are questions designed to help us identify some of these:

1. What special skills have you been taught, or learned through experience, that could be used to help others?

2. What painful or difficult experiences have you endured that left you with a special insight into the pain others may experience? In what way did that experience produce in you a deeper level of faith in God? In responding to this question, don't focus on the damage done to you, but on the way those experiences benefit you now.

3. How much time in a day/week/month/year do you have available you could use to serve Jesus?

4. If you were to regularly tithe on your income, how much would you have available to invest in the Lord's work? You don't need to write this number down, but use it as a matter of personal reflection because, according to Jesus, money is an important part of the gifts God has given us. He says our stewardship of money clearly indicates how faithfully we steward all our gifts (Lk 16:10-13).

5. Read 1 Co 12:8-10. Which of these spiritual manifestations has been expressed through you? Are certain ones given to you frequently?

6. Name some mature, gifted people God has placed in your life to help you grow in ministry and Christlikeness. It's important to recognize such people are "gifts" God has given to us.

7. Are there people with whom you are already working side-by-side within the service of God? Name some, and describe how they help you and how you help them. Don't overlook your spouse, children, or other family members.

8. Are there obstacles, adversaries, or even enemies you've had to face in your life which forced you to grow stronger, wiser or deeper in your faith?

9. You don't have to mention these by name, but are there areas of weakness in your life which have proven to you how much you need God's grace and taught you to depend on His strength (2 Co 12:9, 10)? This does not mean God sent them to you but proves He can cause all things to work together for good (Ro 8:28). Our God can turn bad things into "gifts." List one or two.

10. Is there an intense need or special opportunity confronting you at the moment which might be viewed as a gift from God because it provides an "open door" for ministry? What is it?

MY "TOOLBOX"

If my calling is the "house" God asks me to build, my gifts are the tools He's placed in my toolbox. The following list contains a wide range of natural abilities, learned skills and even supernatural capacities. As you move down this list, please circle those which you recognize as gifts God has given you so you can fulfill your calling. It is also important to recognize those gifts you desperately need but lack. Mark these by putting a rectangle around them. The terms are intentionally listed in a random order. They are not prioritized in any way. As you come to each one simply ask yourself, "Is this one of the gifts in my toolbox? Or is this a tool I lack but desperately need?"

Host/hostess	Writing
Camping	Grammar
Driving special vehicles	Faith
Proof reading	Cooking/Chef
Adoption (mother, father, grandparent)	Talking with strangers
Concentrating deeply	Reconciles/peacemaker
Organizing events/parties	Color sensitivity/taste
Recruiting people to join in activities	Visionary leadership
Boldness to go into dangerous places	Technology
Pastoring	Graphic arts
Music	Law
Art	Agriculture/Farming
Children	Encouragement
Elderly	Architect/design
Teaching	Healing/miracles
Prophecy	Service
Security/Protection	Drama
Flower arranging	Medicine
Evangelizing	Deliverance
Administrating	Helps
Gardening	Prayer
Discernment	Craftsman (male or female)
Wisdom/Problem solving	Leading
People with special needs	Accounting
Athletics/Sports	Math
Mercy/Compassion	Visual Arts
Mechanical/Construction/Repair	Comfort
Giving	Photography
Preaching	Song writing/Composing
Other _____	

Please note: These are not meant to be “labels” to be placed on ourselves, or “boxes” into which we must fit. Your true identity is that you are a Spirit-filled child of God. The Holy Spirit, the Giver of all gifts, dwells inside you, which means you can do anything He asks you to do. So the list you put together is meant to remind you of the resources God has placed in your life, not limit you. And because He who began a good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Php 1:6), this will never be an exhaustive list. God still has many more gifts He will give you as life moves on.

REFLECTION

Now as you think back on the work you have done in the past few sections, what gifts have become evident to you? Undoubtedly you discovered many different gifts, and all of them are precious, and none should be overlooked. But several may have come up over and over. When they come to mind, they feel important, and you understand them to be a significant part of who you are. In this section we want to narrow the list down to the gifts you believe are the most important. These will be the ones you feel the most accountable to God to use for Him. These are the areas in which you know you are the most fruitful and have the greatest impact on others.

I believe these are the most important “tools” (gifts) in my toolbox:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Here are several “tools” (gifts) I know I will need to do what God's called me to do but which I don't naturally possess:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

DEVELOPING OUR GIFTS

God gives us gifts, but if those gifts are not put to work, they decline. In Romans 12:3-8, Paul tells us to “exercise” our gifts. He mentions prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and mercy and says these need to be combined with faith in order to grow. He says every believer has been given a “measure of faith” and needs to apply that faith to their gifts. In other words, the more we step out in faith and use our gifts, the more they mature and the more fruit they produce. And the reverse is also true. The less we walk in faith by exercising our gifts, the less our gifts mature and the less fruit they produce. Jesus described the process this way:

For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from (Mt 13:12).

In other words, the person who energetically and persistently does the assignment God gives to him or her will be given another larger assignment, which, if he or she does that assignment

faithfully, their reward will be to receive another even larger assignment. This reflects a deep spiritual principle: Faithfulness brings increase. So we are the ones who limit our own fruitfulness, not God. He wants to expand us far beyond what we or others thought we could do. God is glorified when we overachieve, when it becomes obvious He is at work performing a miracle through us.

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Gifts grow by exercise (putting them to use), education (gaining more knowledge) and training (observing and being mentored by those who have similar gifts but more experience). Using these three categories, let's develop a plan to grow your gifts:

1. Exercise: Where are you using your gifts now?

How is God challenging you to step out in more faith, and use these gifts more?

2. Do you recognize an area where you could step out in faith and use these gifts even more?

3. Education: What education have you already received that has helped you grow in your gifts?

Do you feel God is asking you to receive further education in a particular area?

Can you name a place or program where you could receive such an education?

4. Training: Name someone who ministers effectively with the same types of gifts you have.

What do you wish they would teach you?

If you were to meet that person, what questions would you like to ask them? (List no more than 3, though there are probably many more).

Have you ever tried to meet with that person? If so, what happened?

We can be mentored by people we don't know personally by reading what they write or listening to them teach. Is there someone you admire who you would let mentor you in this way?

DEFINING NEXT STEPS

Assuming you know your calling (the people God wants you to reach) and now have a better understanding of your gifts (capacities and resources) as well as those important gifts you lack, write out a statement which says, in effect, "Here is my call; here are my gifts; and here are the kinds of people I need to have around me."

Next write out a plan to develop your gifts. This will require a different plan for each of the major gifts God has given you. We all have more than one.

Gift #1

Gift #2

Gift #3

What do you think God could accomplish through you if you were to diligently follow the plan you've laid out? Don't be modest or underestimate your potential because of fear, and don't set large numbers based on a subconscious need to compete with others. Ask yourself, "How does God want me to use my life to serve Him?" Then by faith write out your answer to that question while at the same time humbly remembering we will only know the final answer to that question when He talks with us in heaven (1 Co 4:1-5).

CHRISTIAN HERO STUDIES

Pick any two of the *Christian Heroes: Then and Now* series, and as you read each book, identify the gifts that were in that person's "toolbox" as well as obvious gifts they lacked. Who did God send to help that person? What were their gifts? Fill out the following for each book.

Title: _____

Pages: _____

Hero/Heroine: _____

I would define this person's call as:

Is there evidence of God speaking to that person about their calling? Where? When?

What compassion/loving concern do you see motivating them from within?

What necessary gifts were lacking?

List people whom God brought into this hero/heroine's life to provide resources they were missing (note the pages where you see these people assisting them and what they did).

Do you have a similar calling or any of the same gifts as the person you've read about? If so, what are they?

Did that person grow in their gifts over time? What changes did you see?

BIBLE CHARACTER STUDIES

We have provided a "Bible Reading Plan" (see class schedule). As you read, you will encounter five major biblical characters who we will study more closely: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Naomi, and David. Look for answers to the following questions for each biblical character.

Name of biblical character: _____

I would define this person's call as:

Is there any evidence of God speaking to this person about his or her calling? When? Where?

What compassion/loving concern do you see motivating them from within?

What are some of the major gifts this person had in their toolbox?

What important gifts did this person lack? Who did God bring to help him or her?

What painful or difficult experiences did that person endure that left him or her with special insight into the pain of others?

What special skills did this person learn by experience that could be used to help others?

Did that person face obstacles, adversaries or enemies that helped him or her grow stronger, wiser or deeper in faith?

Was there an intense need or special opportunity confronting that person which might be viewed as a gift from God because it provided an "open door" for ministry?

Do you have a similar calling or any of the same gifts as the person you read about? If so, what are they?

Note: Feel free to apply these questions to other biblical characters you encounter as you read the Bible. The goal of this exercise is to train your “eye” to watch for calling and gifting in other people. By recognizing these things in others, you will become more adept at seeing them in yourself.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Classes are scheduled weekly for one hour and ten minutes.

It is best to read the assigned material early in the course to help you with the process of reflection. However, all reading must be completed before the course end and book response reports submitted to the instructor.

Week 1

Class Discussion: Review sections of course materials: Introductions, Parables of the Talents, Knowing Ourselves, Strengths and Weaknesses.

Homework: Natural Abilities: Answer 9 questions and be prepared to discuss.

Bible Reading: Gen chapters 11-19.

Week 2

Class Discussion: Natural Abilities: Discuss your answers to the 9 questions.

Homework: Other Gifts: Answer the 10 questions and be prepared to discuss.

Bible Reading: Gen chapters 20-25; Gen chapters 37-39.

Week 3

Class Discussion: Other Gifts: Discuss your answers to the 10 questions.

Homework: My "Toolbox." Select the tools you have from the list and identify the tools you don't have but need.

Bible Reading: Gen chapters 40-48.

Submit: first Christian Hero report.

Week 4

Class Discussion: My "Toolbox": Analyze your list, select and add tools.

Homework: Reflection. What are the most important tools you have? What are the most important tools you don't have?

Bible Reading: Gen chapters 49-50; Ex chapters 2-8.

Submit: Second Christian Hero report.

Week 5

Class Discussion: Reflection: Discuss the tools you have and the tools you need.

Homework: Developing Our Gifts. What do you need to do to exercise your faith and grow in your gifting? Identify what is holding you back and what you can do to change this.

Bible Reading: Ex chapters 9-17.

Week 6

Class Discussion: Developing Our Gifts: Discuss your personal observations and what has held you back. Discuss what you can do to develop your faith.

Homework: Planning for Growth: Answer the 3 questions and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Bible Reading: Ex chapters 18-19; Ex chapters 31-37.

Submit: Study on Abraham.

Week 7

Class Discussion: Planning for Growth.

Homework: Defining Next Steps: answer the reflective questions. This may take some time.

Bible Reading: Ex chapters 38-40; Ruth chapters 1-4; 1 Sam chapters 16-17.

Submit: Study on Joseph.

Week 8

Class Discussion: Defining Next Steps. Share your gifts, your call, your people group with your cohort. Question: What does God want you to do for His kingdom?

Homework: Prepare to discuss what you have learned from your study of Abraham and Joseph.

Bible Reading: 1 Sam chapters 18-27.

Submit: Study on Naomi.

Week 9

Class Discussion: Discuss your observations of Abraham's and Joseph's lives, calling, gifting, and obstacles.

Homework: Prepare to discuss what you have learned from your study of Moses and Naomi.

Bible Reading: 1 Sam chapters 28-31; 2 Sam chapters 1-6.

Submit: Study on Moses.

Week 10

Class Discussion: Discuss your observations of Moses' & Naomi's lives, calling, gifting, and obstacles.

Homework: Prepare to discuss what you have learned from your study of David.

Bible Reading: 2 Sam chapters 7-16.

Submit: Study on David.

Week 11

Class Discussion: Discuss your observations of David's life, calling, gifting, and obstacles.

Homework: Prepare to discuss your Christian Hero.

Bible Reading: 2 Sam chapters 17-24; 1 Kings chapters 1-2.

Week 12

Class Discussion: Discuss your Christian Hero. How do your spiritual gifts and calling correlate?