

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Light Unit 3
Practical Issues
Week 4 – Discovering the Will of God
& Spiritual Gifts

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

Learning Goals

- Know the foundational principles involved in determining God's will.
- Know the principles of guidance.
- Know the "road-signs" and what bearing they have in determining God's will.

Introduction

As Christians, we will regularly confront difficult decisions. They are difficult because their relationship to God's moral will is not obvious. Some of these decisions will have a major impact in our lives, making them even more important.

e.g. Although it is within God's moral framework to marry a Christian, he doesn't specify which one.

e.g. God does say we must work in order to provide for our household and share in his work, but he doesn't tell us which job to take.

e.g. "Should I go back to school or not?" "Should I buy a new or used car?" "What kind of house should I live in -- where?" are examples where we don't find direct guidance.

Yet, does that mean that God doesn't guide us in these areas? That he has no opinion on the matter? That the decisions we make don't matter? That they can't impact our walk with him in any way? If he does have an opinion, how could we know what it is? God led his people in many different ways in the Bible (e.g. Gideon, the prophets, direct vision of Cornelius, Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch, etc). Does he lead us in a similar way today? If so, how often?

In this lecture, we'll address these questions and explore biblical principles that can guide us into making sound decisions.

Two important questions:

Before we discuss principles of guidance, search your own heart on these questions.

- *Are you teachable/leadable?* Will you follow God's will once you know it?
- *Do you believe that God desires to lead you?* God will lead if you will follow. See John 10 and Psalm 23 and their depiction of God as a shepherd offering guidance to the sheep.

If you can't answer both of these in the affirmative, what follows won't be of much help.

Three Foundational Considerations

1. God's personal will for your life has two dimensions:

A. *Moral/ sanctification*

(Rom. 12:2*) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

God's desire for each of us is our sanctification. He recognizes that each of us is unique and His plan for change will vary individually, but he clearly desires to see us progress spiritually.

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

It's our new identity in Christ that gives us the basis for following his will.

(Rom. 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

(1 Thess. 4:3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality

B. *Ministry purpose*

(Rom. 12:2a,3-8) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is . . . (3) For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (4) For just as we have many

members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy. . . (7) if service. . . , or he who teaches. . . (8) or he who exhorts . . . , he who gives . . . , he who leads. . . , he who shows mercy. . .

God has a particular role for us to play in the body of Christ based on the way he gifts each of us. With this role comes the opportunity to exercise our gifts in meaningful and fulfilling ministry. Decision-making for the Christian must bring these factors to bear.

2. Spiritual Maturity is associated with increased knowledge of God's will.

(Col. 1:9,10) For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God so they can make the right decisions as they face adversity. As Christians mature they grow in a working knowledge of God's will.

(Heb. 5:14)- But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

The author of Hebrews expected the audience to grow in their knowledge of God's word so they would be able to practically apply it to everyday situations.

(Col. 4:12) Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

This prayer recognizes a connection between maturity ("...you may stand perfect") and increasing knowledge of God's will ("...all the will of God.").

3. Sometimes God reveals his will specifically, but not always.

In Acts 8:26-40, an angel of the Lord directs Philip to “go to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Once there, the Spirit tells Philip to “go up and join this chariot.”

In Acts 10, God reveals his will to Cornelius and Peter.

In Acts 16:9ff, Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia saying “come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul concluded that God had called him to “preach the gospel to them.”

Qualification: *This revelation is at God's discretion and not ours.* Note that these individuals were aggressively serving God and the more dramatic revelation came.

“I believe God has an individual will for my life and for every life, but its realization depends on a true surrender of *my* will and *your* will to Him for the fulfillment of His plan as and where He sees best. He may, however, leave considerable freedom of choice within His moral will...”¹

Those are 3 "foundational considerations" with which we must always enter into decision-making. Now we will look at practical guidelines for discovering God's will: “Principles of Guidance” and "Road Signs."

Practical Guidelines for Discovering God's Will

1. Principles of Guidance (or, ‘how to be easily led’)

A. Scripture—soak your mind in it.

- *Learn what the Bible emphasizes*

(Isaiah 55:8,9) "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

We need to be humbly aware that our thinking is much different than God's.

(1 Corinthians 2:9-16) but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (10) For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (11) For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. (12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely

¹ J. Oswald Sanders, *Every Life is a Plan of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Discovery House Publishers, 1992) p. 39.

given to us by God, (13) which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (14) But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (15) But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. (16) For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

God gives us the Holy Spirit so we may "have the mind of Christ." Having his mind allows to us understand and apply his word (12b-". things freely given to us by God").

(Romans 12:2a) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is . . .

- *Memorize scripture*

"The Spirit cannot recall what the mind has not installed."

(Colossians 3:16) Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- *Apply Scripture*

(James 1:22) - But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

Qualification:

- *God leads through Scripture. He will never lead us to go outside scripture (Jeremiah 14:14,23:32 ,23:35,36)*

B. Willingness—Be willing to do God's will *before* you know it.

**(John 7:17*) "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself."
(James 1:5ff, 6-8) But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith without any doubting, . . . (7) For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

Unwillingness to do this betrays an unbelief in God's goodness for you, which must be resolved first. Many times, you must struggle before God in prayer to admit that you don't have this attitude and then adopt it.

C. Acting—Act on God's moral will that you already know about.

Heb. 3:7-19

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

Are you in revolt in an area already revealed? God will often withhold further guidance until you end this controversy.

e.g. Fornicator wanting guidance on where to go to school.

Recall what Jesus said while praying in the Garden of Gethsemene: “...not my will, but your will be done...” **(Matthew 26:39).**

Are you committed to sanctification and serving God in ministry as your highest priorities? Without these priorities, you probably won't get a whole lot of guidance, because God wants to guide you primarily in these 2 paths (see above)! If you are committed to these two priorities, you can rest assured that God will guide you and not leave you in the dark.

(C. S. Lewis) “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ ...No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”²

D. Praying—Pray regularly for God's guidance.

(Watchman Nee) “Faced with a pile of problems, we may say with our lips that only prayer can solve them, yet we talk more than pray, worry more than pray, and scheme more than pray. In sum, we put everything before prayer; other things are placed in prominent positions while prayer is relegated to last place; it is the only thing which is not so important.”

Beware of creeping autonomous dualism.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1946), p.72.

(Proverbs 3:5,6) Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Urge students to read Bill Hybels' book, *Too Busy Not To Pray*, pp. 117-121.

Conclusion: *If these "principles of guidance" are habits in your Christian life, you won't stray far.* For most of us, the absence of one or more of these principles is the reason why we are experiencing confusion.

2. "Road Signs"

"Road signs" are *additional factors that sometimes reveal God's will.* But remember, the principles of guidance and foundational considerations above must come first. When Christians neglect these important principles, they can easily misinterpret road signs and be led astray.

A. Common Sense: *The ability to consider different courses of action and the likely implications of each.*

"Spiritual expedience" *is applying common sense within a framework of biblical values and priorities.*

"What course of action will enable me to most effectively achieve biblical values and priorities?"

"Look before you leap." Don't be a fool--leaping before you look.

(Titus 1:8) ...but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled...

This kind of common sense is a qualification for eldership (*phroneo* - sensible).

Qualification: *Avoid using this to rationalize fearfulness.* Do you have a category for scary/costly steps of faith? We are promised adversity in our service of Christ and therefore should expect it.

Use a "Pro's and Con's" list, but... *be sure to prioritize the "pro's" and "con's" in the light of scripture.*

B. Spiritual counsel

Wise counsel can give you additional light on Scripture and common sense/ spiritual expedience. "Have you considered this implication?"

(Prov. 11:14; 24:6) "In the abundance of counselors is victory."

(Prov. 12:15; 13:10,18) "The wise man listens to advice."

(Prov. 15:22) "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."

(Prov. 19:20) "Listen to advice."

(Prov. 20:5) "A plan in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding draws it out."

(Prov. 20:18) "Plans are established by counsel"

(Prov. 27:17) "Iron sharpens iron"

Qualification: *Seek mature counsel (grounded in the Word and/or previous experience) from people who know you well.*

- Give them *full* information--not partial.
- Seek counsel from several mature Christians.
- Avoid people who *you* know will only see it your way ("ear ticklers").

Remember: *The advisor is not responsible for the decision.* Advisors beware: some people like others to make their decisions for them. ("What would you do?")

C. Personal desires

Avoid the extremes of asceticism ("Whatever I want, the opposite is God's will") and selfishness ("If I want it this badly, it must be God's will").

Which do you tend towards? Lean the other way!

Enjoying an area of ministry often indicates gifting or burden (e.g. "I really like working with kids.")

D. Gifts/ ministry burdens

As we grow in our gifting/ministry we gain clarity about God's will (e.g. type of personal ministry you should take on).

This raises the obvious question: "How do I discover my gift(s)?" We'll talk more about that next week.

E. Intuition

This includes leadings, prompting, impressions spontaneously emerging in our mind, especially during prayer.

If they are from God, they will be consistent with the Word, with who you are (See Bill Hybels questions in *To Busy Not to Pray*, pp. 134-137) and with an attitude of servanthood.

When they line up this way, assume they are from God and follow them. You'll often be amazed at how fruitful they are!

The more you are in the Word, understand your ministry role, and are committed to servanthood, the more this area will come into play.

ALSO: The more regularly you spend time alone with God, the more aware of these through the day you will tend to be.

F. Inner peace

This is a certain kind of intuition, deep seated calmness from God about a direction you've chosen to take.

When this is present it confirms and strengthens our resolve to follow God's will.

Qualifications:

- *We are not talking about a constantly tranquil state.* Our emotional fallenness, the fact that we're in a battle, and taking scary steps of faith will produce inner turmoil sometimes.
- *When peace is absent, re-evaluate your decision* (i.e. especially in moral areas or matters of conscience).
- *God's leading may not be obvious before we decide.*

Many times we can perceive his guidance before the situation. At other times, we may be able to look back in retrospect and see his guidance. During those times when we must make a decision even though God's leading is not clear, we can be confident that because we have presented

ourselves to him to be used as his instruments (Rom 6:13), he *is* guiding and leading our lives.

This is an important perspective to maintain, because it guards against destructive introspection and/or indecisiveness when God's guidance is not clearly perceived in advance of a decision. Since we have presented ourselves to God, and since we know that he is guiding us, we can step out in faith when the situation calls for a decision.

Joseph made many decisions without anything but moral guidance and only understood retrospectively what God intended (Gen. 39-50, especially 50:20).

Also, consider: "Is this decision giving me inner peace because I am getting away from a painful situation, or [as it should be] is it giving me inner peace because God is using the decision to move me toward a great situation."

G. Follow delegated authorities

This includes parents, husband, state, employer, church leaders.

Discussion: You are musically inclined and believe you have been led by God to be involved in that type of ministry in your home group. You ask your home group leaders if you can provide some music for the group. They think about it, and say "No, thanks." Now you wonder what to do? Should you continue to press them because you really feel led by God? Should you rally the troops to see if there is a consensus?

Qualification: *We do outgrow authority or change them at times. We may have to disobey if against the written word of God (not against your feelings, or "what you believe in your heart").*

If we choose to go against a delegated authority, we should ask "Why am I leaving this delegated authority?" "Are you aware of any character issues that God is teaching you through this person?" "Have you learned the lesson?" Can you cite changes in your character? If you can't specifically note the progress God has made in your life through the situation, then you're probably on the run.

Please note: there are more papers on this subject on the web and it is covered thoroughly in Servanthood class.

H. Circumstances

Circumstances play a relatively minor role in major complex decisions. They explain the options presently available. They play a major role in confirming after a decision is made.

Fleecing (see Gideon, Judges 6). Note that God had already told Gideon his will. This was for confirmation and encouragement. This is not the norm, so don't expect God to do it for you.

In the area of guidance, circumstances are generally more helpful when unfolding events narrow the range of options.

Open or closed doors do not necessarily mean "YES" or "NO." With Paul, they were not all yes/no. **Compare 2 Cor 2:12,13 and 1 Cor 16:8,9.** Be cautious in reading too much into circumstances or the timing of circumstances.

I. Results

What kind of results were they? Biblical or carnal?

Qualification: *Results don't in themselves confirm or deny the wisdom of the decision* (pragmatics are not the only considerations).

- *Biblically correct decisions may not yield immediate or external results.*
- *Results which followed past decisions do not guarantee the same results from similar decisions now* (e.g., church growth methods).

Learn from the results! Why did the decision lead to good/bad results? Results are helpful in determining gifted areas.

Instructors: This is a good place to stop and discuss the assignment that was due by this lecture (see the end of the week 3 lecture notes).

How often do you thank God when you get guidance (10 lepers - Lk 17)? If you don't mark God's leadership with gratitude you end up forgetting what he has done in the past and you aren't as likely to look for his leadership in the future.

Important Qualifications

- **Avoid the extremes of Christian Deism vs. "super-spirituality."**

Some tend toward an excessively subjective view--and unhealthy emphasis on feelings and experience. Others tend toward a view that makes virtually no room for God's personal guidance. This promotes a more impersonal and less prayerful relationship with God. Know your tendency, lean the other way, and teach others to do the same.

(Francis Schaeffer) “There are two things to be leaned against simultaneously: the first is living as though God did not exist and as though He could not or would not lead us; the second is living as though God's leading were almost magic without any use of the mind.”³

Example of Christian Deism: Joshua 7:2-13. A negative example of super spirituality: Colossians 2:16-23.

The key is knowing how to use them (feelings, experience) and what they can and can't do for you.

- **We can never be as certain about God's personal leading in our lives as we can be about scripture.**

We may be mistaken about God's subjective leading, but the objective Word is essentially clear in its guidance.

Saul ignored God's law and acted anyway. 1 Sam. 13:12ff; 1 Chron.. 10:14.

(Francis Schaeffer) “Another thing to lean against is [the idea]...that we can know God's leading with the same finality that we have concerning the teaching of Scripture, for example, about the deity of Christ. When we are led, we must acknowledge that since we are both finite and sinful we can be mistaken. Thus, the Lord can lead us so clearly [in a particular moment], and yet we can never say at that moment that we personally know this to be truth on the same level as Scripture.

When the Lord led my wife and myself to begin L'Abri, the leading was so clear that not to have moved forward would have been disobedience. And yet if you had asked me at that time if I was as sure of this as I was that which Scripture taught, I could not have said yes. But as the years have passed there is no doubt that we did understand the leading of the Lord [in beginning L'Abri].”⁴

³ Francis Schaeffer, *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1985), p. 163.

⁴ Francis Schaeffer, *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1985) p. 163.

- *God does not lead mechanically.*

Because God is personal and we are personal, he leads us personally, not mechanically. Therefore we should avoid any such attempt to find a formula, and be open to let God lead us in the way he chooses.

Because God guided me in a certain way does not mean that he will always guide me that way, nor that he will guide other Christians in that same way.

Apply this to yourself and in working w/ others.

(Francis Schaeffer) “Thus we face a balance--by living in a personal relationship to God, and by not living as if God were not there. But this does not mean that I must find God's leading in a mechanical and legalistic way, and perfectly in every case, or God will cast me off.

I personally could not live for twenty-four hours without looking to the leading of the Lord, and this is how I live my life, not in theory, but in practice. But I also know the freedom I have of knowing there is no mechanical formula given in the Scripture, but that it must be a day-by-day closeness to God...And I have the freedom of knowing that if I honestly miss this way somewhere, God will still deal with me gently.”⁵

- *God's leading may not be obvious before we decide.*

Many times we can perceive his guidance before the situation. At other times, we may be able to look back in retrospect and see his guidance. During those times when we must make a decision even though God's leading is not clear, we can be confident that because we have presented ourselves to him to be used as his instruments (Rom 6:13), he is guiding and leading our lives.

This is an important perspective to maintain, because it guards against destructive introspection and/or indecisiveness when God's guidance is not clearly perceived in advance of a decision. Since we have presented ourselves to God, and since we know that he is guiding us, we can step out in faith when the situation calls for a decision.

Joseph made many decisions without anything but moral guidance and only understood retrospectively what God intended (Gen. 39-50, especially 50:20).

Conclusion

**Teach others the importance of personally discerning God's will for their lives--
DON'T TEACH THEM TO FOLLOW YOU!**

This principle is important to observe in our work with younger Christians if they are to become "independently dependent on the Lord." When discussing important life decisions, it is important to tell them that God can guide them if

⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1985) p. 164.

they ask for his guidance and if they have the willingness to do his will even before they know what it is. In this way, we teach them to do what they do out of conviction that it is God's will, not merely because we told them to do it.

Avoid the extremes of “paralysis by analysis” (e.g. - people making decisions about home group or ministry involvement) **vs. “Husky Dog”** just lunging forward without consideration.

(Psalm 32:8,9) “I will instruct you and guide you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or the mule with no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check.”

Remember to apply God's grace.

“While disregarding God's leadership may result in loss, we should never feel that our lives are destroyed. God is a God of grace, and this means that when we turn back to him, he will continue to lead us from there and to bless us and use us.”⁶

Finding your role in home group ministry

Many of you are actively discipling people in your home group. How can you help them develop their own ministry? How about you? Are you using what you're learning to build up people in your home church?

(Eph 4:11,12) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

Our role as teachers is to equip you, for works of service. The Biblical model of the church relies on the work of every member and not only the pastors and teachers. This is one weakness of many churches today: an unhealthy reliance on the clergy for performance of God's work. When the people are mobilized to serve God in the church, they benefit and the Lord's causes are more greatly advanced.

Antithesis: Christianity as self-improvement-personal empowerment.

Jesus wants us to be convinced from the heart that a lifestyle of loving others is the KEY to fulfillment in life.

What happens when you don't pursue this way of life? The Word becomes dry, you experience lack of direction and purpose, etc. Everything you're learning in this class is of little use unless you put it into practice.

⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1985) p. 163-164.

During the last supper, Jesus told his disciples that LOVE should be the distinguishing characteristic of those who choose to follow him.

(Jn. 13:34,35) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In the epistles, the apostles unpack this broad command to love. They explain what it looks like in the context of Christian community in a series of **"one another" commands**. Examples include:

(Romans 12:10) "Be devoted to ONE ANOTHER in brotherly love; give preference to ONE ANOTHER in honor..."

(Romans 12:16) "Be of the same mind toward ONE ANOTHER; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly."

(Romans 14:13) "Therefore let us not judge ONE ANOTHER anymore..."

(1 Corinthians 12:25) "...the members should have the same care for ONE ANOTHER."

(Ephesians 4:32) "And be kind to ONE ANOTHER, tender-hearted, forgiving EACH OTHER, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Let's consider some of the specific areas of home group ministry everyone should be involved in. Then we'll look at unique ways you can love and serve others that are tied to your spiritual gifts.

Uniformity in Ministry (these are like "fundamentals" in sports)

The ideal is being a TEAM PLAYER who is FUNDAMENTALLY SOUND; then on that basis we could specialize. God has designed each of us uniquely, but also calls on our regular, consistent, and committed efforts in certain areas REGARDLESS OF OUR GIFTS, BURDENS, OR PERSONALITY TRAITS.

The main idea: *evangelism and discipleship in context of community*

What are the areas of ministry uniformity (areas of ministry we have in common)? THIS WILL BE ON THE EXAM!

- *Intercessory Prayer* (Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18) (Unit 3)

- *Evangelism* (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:15; Col. 3:17-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:12-3:7; Titus 2:7-3:8; 1 Tim. 6:1,2) (Unit 4)
- *Missions* (Matt. 28:19 of all nations; Acts 1:8) (earlier in Unit 4)
- *Discipleship* (Mt. 28:19; see also 2 Tim. 2:2)

Nothing could be more natural than for me to assume responsibility for helping younger Christians grow. Young. Think in terms of a perpetual day care center vs. a healthy family where all have responsibilities. Discipleship could take a lot of forms: with other leaders in a cell; one on one...

- *Financial giving* (Lk. 12:33,34; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 4:28; 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:17,18). As stewards of God's money and material possessions, we are all responsible to use these things to advance his kingdom, as well as your own needs.

It is disastrous to view any of these as options! We live in a culture that tends to specialize. Little value is given to being a generalist. We need to remain involved in these areas regardless of our area of ministry focus. We have to allow time for these provisions in our schedule-and sometimes in our heart.

Diversity in Ministry: Spiritual Gifts

(1 Cor. 12:4-6) Now there are varieties of GIFTS, but the same Spirit. (5) And there are varieties of MINISTRIES, and the same Lord. (6) And there are varieties of EFFECTS, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (See also ROM 12:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:8-11; Eph 4:7-16)

Diversity of Gifts

Definition of spiritual gifts: God-given capabilities to serve others so that they are impacted for and/or built up spiritually in Jesus Christ.

Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift.

(1 Cor. 12:7,11) But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . (11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

None of the passages concerning spiritual gifts are meant to provide an exhaustive list, but the focus is on how to use the gifts (E.G. with diligence, with love, etc.). One of your handouts includes definitions of these gifts along with distinctives to help you recognize gifts in yourself or others. The handout also provides cautions-areas where sanctification is often challenged in people with that gift.

Tonight, we will not define every spiritual gift. The Ministry Assessment Materials provide definitions of most spiritual gifts.

Note: We should view spiritual gifts as *special areas of aptitude, and not as limits on our capability to serve* (i.e. the evangelist is not the only one to evangelize).

Diversity of Ministries

Definition of ministry: The use of spiritual gifts to serve others.

We tend use the word ministry in two ways:

1. Ministry is *what you do*—the act of exercising your gift. For example, you may develop a hospitality ministry by helping newer people feel welcomed and part of the group and hosting events.

2. Ministry can refer to *the sphere in which you serve*, the group of people among whom you exercise your gifts in service. Examples of ministry spheres might include a junior high cell group, a home church, or a group of terminally ill patients.

Diversity of Effects

Definition of effects: Effects are the outcome of our ministries. We bear spiritual fruit in ministry as we impact people for Christ.

In the Body of Christ, some gifts will have a more visible, dramatic effect while others' ministry fruit may be less obvious (from our perspective, not God's). This helps us not compare ourselves with others.

It is very exciting that God has suited you and I uniquely to a role in his purpose!

Why it is Important to Discover and Exercise your Gifts

1. It gives you a greater sense of significance and purpose for your Christian life.

(2 Timothy 4:6-8) For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

You will share the sense of purpose that Paul had in this passage as God progressively clarifies your unique role.

2. Provides more insight into God's will for your life.

It is God's will for you to exercise and develop your gift(s). As you do so, there will be many practical implications for decision-making in your life.

3. Provides additional motivation toward spiritual growth.

Why did I turn away from the world? "Because it's a rush to teach." This has been called the "Expulsive power of a New Affection."

Also, it is much easier to resist sin when we replace it with the stimulation of ministry. As this happens, you will find greater resistance to the seduction of the world (1 Jn. 2:15,16), which is only a counterfeit to the real purpose for your life.

It is difficult to maintain motivation in our sanctification unless we see the purpose for it.

4. Lets you experience more consistently and to a greater degree the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the features of gifting-the Holy Spirit often empowers you with special intensity as you serve in that area. This helps you overcome fearfulness and timidity in your service for Christ. When you serve according to your gifts, you gain confidence in God because you see Him at work in your ministry. This confidence permeates other areas of your Christian life.

(2 Timothy 1:6-9) And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which was given to you by the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

5. Frees you from making unhealthy comparisons to others and increases healthy interdependence within the Body of Christ.

The devil really likes to alienate us from each other by getting us to compare. The more you discover and develop the unique contribution that you have, the easier it is to be grateful for the contribution of others. This minimizes carnal competition.

(1 Corinthians 12:14-26) For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is

not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, 24 whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

As you exercise your gift, you appreciate the genius of God's design of the body of Christ: everyone has an important contribution to make. As a result, you are more likely to seek out and receive the contribution that others have been gifted to make. You realize "I can't do it all. I need others..."

Ways to discover your spiritual gifts

It seems that there is no specific method for discovering spiritual gifts. Instead, God emphasizes certain principles that we employ as we live in the Body of Christ. As we live and function in the Body of Christ our gifts emerge.

1. Ask God to reveal your gifts.

Remember that God has sovereignly given you the gift(s) that you have. Affirm that he has gifted you for a unique and significant role, and submit in advance to whatever role he has chosen for you. Then ask him to reveal your role to you as you step out in faith to find it.

2. Become a servant. If you're not willing to serve, why should God show you your gift?

(Mark 10:45) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

(Philippians 2:3-5) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also

for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 4:11,12) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

God laid his life down to meet our needs. He commands us to follow his example, by expending ourselves in the service of others within the framework of the Body of Christ. As we serve, our gifting is manifest. Over time you have probably become aware of different needs/ tasks in home church that are being overlooked (e.g. organizing a retreat, cleaning up after HC, encouraging a new person, etc.). As you make various attempts to serve, some efforts will be fruitful and others won't. Through feedback from others and the result of your efforts, God will open your eyes to unique areas of gifting that you may have.

3. Develop foundational ministry skills in your home group.

Recall the importance of areas of ministry uniformity, including "loving one another" in the context of Christian community. We should prioritize developing ministry skills in our home group over getting involved in various ministries in the church at large. So it begins with Home Church, but eventually goes beyond. **SEEK TO BE AN EDIFYING FORCE IN THE HOME GROUP.**

4. Take steps of faith to try new ministries.

Sometimes we are pushed into a ministry by the need.

Having a gift does not mean you won't be scared to step up.

Flowing from the first four, the next four are reflective:

5. What kinds of ministry do you especially enjoy doing?

In Philippians 2:13, Paul says that God is at work in you both to create the desire for and to give you the empowering for his good pleasure—that is, for his unique purpose for your life. This promise encompasses God's ministry purpose for your life as well as his moral purpose (sanctification). Therefore, it is appropriate to ask yourself, "What areas of ministry are especially appealing to me?" What would I like to do for the Lord if I could do anything for him?

Remember the variety of gifts that God has given. Resist the tendency to assume that you must be gifted like "so and so" in order to be significant, or that if you really would like to minister in a certain area, it must not be God's will.

6. What kinds of ministry needs do you consistently notice?

Gifted often affects our perception of ministry needs. Ask God to open your eyes to the needs that exist around you. Look especially within your own home group, but also look beyond it to the fellowship as a whole and the local and global community. Are there certain kinds of needs that you tend to consistently see?

Aptitude often affects our perception of a situation; we tend to be most aware of those needs that we are most suited to meet.

7. What kinds of ministry do you experience consistent empowering for?

"I sensed God working through me." Gifted is spiritual empowerment, which is partially experiential.

8. What kinds of ministry are you effective in (others' feedback; fruit)?

What unsolicited feedback do you receive from others?

When a pattern emerges of people telling you that God builds them up through you in a certain area, this is a reliable indicator of gifting. On the other hand, we will experience setbacks in areas of gifting so be careful not to give up prematurely.

Start looking at others from the perspective of how God has gifted them. Put some thought into how THEY might be gifted; let them know when you see them being effective with you or others. This creates an environment much more conducive to the discovery of gifts

Memory Verses

Rom. 12:2* God's will for our life revolves around our sanctification and his role for our lives in his purpose here on earth.

Jn. 7:17* Learning God's will is predicated upon our first being willing to do his will, even before knowing what it is.

Matt. 13:12* As we are responsive to God's will in our lives, he will continue to unfold his will in the other areas. The reverse is also true.

Assignment

Read chapters 4 and 5 of *Loving God's Way* and answer the questions at the end of each chapter.

Church Visitation Assignment due next week!