

Spiritual Gifts Exploration – March – What spiritual gifts are NOT

In his book “Rediscovering our Spiritual Gifts,” Charles Byrant reminds us that sometimes we can begin to understand what a thing is by saying what it is not. In the list below, I am quoting or summarizing from his work. Later this spring, Pastor Kristie will be leading a workshop/study using this text to help us discover and activate our Spiritual gifts.

1. Spiritual Gifts are not learned skills or natural talents. That doesn't mean God (and the church) don't need our skills and talents, but these are the means by which God's spiritual gift is transmitted, not necessarily the gift itself. For example, a person may be very knowledgeable in a particular subject, and may have received some training as a teacher, but the gift of teaching is more complex than knowledge or skill. The spiritual gift of teaching encompasses the ability to share God's message of love.
2. Spiritual Gifts are not roles. For instance, all members of the church body have the privilege and responsibility giving money to support the church's ministry. The spiritual gift of giving is seen in those who go beyond the requirements or the tax advantages of contributing to the church. Extravagant generosity might be used to describe spiritual giving. No return is expected.
3. Spiritual Gifts are not offices. All churches have offices: pastor, secretary, lay leader, musician, youth leader, and so on. However, not all persons filling those offices have the spiritual gift that might be needed. Not all pastors are gifted for that office, and most pastors are not gifted for every office that have to fulfill. The office does not automatically guarantee the extraordinary power of the Spirit that energizes the gift.
4. Spiritual Gifts are not the fruit of the spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Gifts and fruit differ from each other, but they connect in the Spirit. We might think, that after love, the eight other fruit are the seeds nurtured by the fruit of love. Each is distinct but with the common source of power, love. The fruit of the Spirit are what we *are*. The gifts of the Spirit are what we *do*. Yet they have the same source - *agape* love. Spiritual gifts cannot function without love.
5. Spiritual Gifts are not for self-gain. While we respect and value our Spiritual gift, it is not used as a source of spiritual pride or arrogance. Gifts misused for selfish gain or pride become the worst enemies of the church. Paul reminds us that spiritual gifts are not limited to a few special members but exist for the common good of the whole church. Gifts are for service. “You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.” Ephesians 2:8-10
6. Spiritual Gifts are not divisive. If a congregation becomes divided over the use of spiritual gifts, someone is sinning (see above). The vital dynamic of the Spiritual is always to bring unity and common good.
7. Spiritual Gifts are not the same for everyone. Everybody's got one. None are exactly the same because none of us are exactly the same. The church needs the diversity and variety of gifts to make the whole. All gifts are needed to work together in our common devotion to the same Spirit, the same Lord and the same God.

In last month's ECHO, I included a link that will take you to a quick on-line survey to help you identify your spiritual gifts. You will also find more information there about Spiritual Gifts.

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/exploring-your-spiritual-gifts>.