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Please! Don't Volunteer at Your Church

During the announcements at the beginning of worship, Pastor Bob called Tom to come forward.

"He is going to ask for volunteers again," thought Mary. "Nothing like starting another worship service making us feel guilty by not working on some project at church."

"I know what you're thinking—" Tom paused. "You think this is going to be another plea for volunteers."

Mary sighed, "You got that right! They're always begging for volunteers at this church...."

"Well, it's not," reflected Tom. "Today, we are redirecting the church according to the Bible. I want to invite you to share a Saturday with me, and with other church members, to learn about how God has a unique plan for your life. We are going to have a workshop next month on spiritual gifts. No two people are going to have the exact same gifts. It will be your specific life plan, given to you by the Holy Spirit. You will take a survey during the workshop to discover God's plan for you, and you'll receive a book for follow-up that includes a Bible study. It will help you learn even more about God's direction for your life."

"That's a new one," thought Mary. "It's not about some program at church. It's about me. I wonder what I would discover?"

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MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

- ▶ The *Church Doctor® Report* is provided at no cost. Forward it to those in your network of influence and add value to their lives!
- ▶ Forward it to staff and leaders in your church, denomination, network, or fellowship.

God's Plan

Christians pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Most people think, when they pray that part of the prayer, "Of course, you want what God wants for this world, right?"

Absolutely you want what God wants for this *world*. However, there is a *personal* side to God's will, as well. It's God's will for you. Every Christian has a calling, a ministry. In the New Testament, it's called the "royal priesthood." Everyone is a minister. Every Christian has a ministry. It is your divine calling, and it's unique to you. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

There's only one way for you to know God's unique calling. Discover your spiritual gifts. You have some gifts that are dominant. They play a major role in your calling. Other gifts are subordinate. They have a minor, but important, supportive role in your calling. Together, they are your spiritual gift mix.

Even if you belonged to a church of thousands of people, your gift mix — just as it is arranged by the Holy Spirit — is likely unique, only to you. Your gift mix will tell you what ministry will give you divine fulfillment. When you find your niche, you find supernatural fulfillment.

Your gifts won't likely change throughout your life. However, there may be times when one dominant gift will not be accented as much as it used to be. Another dominant gift may arise to more prominence for a season. Or, one of your subordinate gifts may become dominant for a period of time. However, it's quite likely that your general gift mix will be with you for life. It's your unique spiritual DNA.

Your spiritual gifts define your "sweet spot" in the Body of Christ, the church. It is where you will experience divine fulfillment and have the greatest impact. When you find your niche, you are likely to find your calling. God can use you outside of your gift mix, but your greatest impact for God's Kingdom will occur when you operate in your spiritual gifts.

What's Wrong with Volunteers?

I know you may have lived for years in your church and served as a "volunteer." Perhaps you have read books about how churches develop a great volunteer program. There are also Christian companies who will assist your church, for a fee, so you can have a "great and productive volunteer ministry." These groups have studied the dynamics of recruiting and encouraging volunteers, keeping them happy with recognition and rewards. The challenge? It's just not the way the church operates, according to the Bible.

I realize this sounds like heresy. Why? Because "everyone does it." Or, "it's what we've always done." However, God's Kingdom operates differently than the world. Jesus promised that when He left the world, the Holy Spirit would be present among Christians and within the church. And it occurred just as He said. The Holy Spirit, present in the early church, gave gifts to God's people in the Body of Christ. If you want God's blessing for your church, follow God's plan!

Don't feel bad if you don't know much about spiritual gifts. Don't beat yourself up if you've been a volunteer for years. Just look at Scripture and be willing to grow and learn. It will be a fantastic help to you, your church, and the mission of your church to this world.

One of the keys to change your thinking about spiritual gifts is to realize that God does not use people. We are not slaves for God. Actually, we are called to be ambassadors of Christ, the King of the universe. We are part of the Body of Christ. Christ is the head, and all the members have different functions. If this sounds familiar, it's because you've read it in the New Testament or heard it preached or taught.

When the members of your church operate as they should, the Body grows and builds itself up in love. There are many churches today that are not growing. There could be many reasons for this — it's a complex issue for most congregations. Surely, one of the reasons is that we have not helped Christians discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts.

The Role of Staff

There are churches where the leadership describes the congregation as a “staff-led” church. Sometimes that means there is no board that controls the staff. That's great, because staff team members have a calling, a responsibility, to lead the congregation.

The staff team works, thinks, dreams, and prays about the church 24/7. They should lead the church. If there is a board, church council, session, elders, or some other group of leaders, they should support and encourage the staff, who lead the church.

However, sometimes being a “staff-led church” means the staff does all of the ministry. That is a huge departure from the biblical concept of “church.” The Bible clearly says that everyone has a ministry. In Ephesians 4, Paul says there are some gifts that are also leadership “offices”: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. They have a unique role — and it's **not** to do all the work of ministry. Their role is to “equip God's people for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). How do they do that? Well, it's not by forming a volunteer program, following some secular model. There are three key biblical elements. Together, they energize the Body of Christ. In fact, every

KEY RESOURCES

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time there is a “revival” in history — when Christianity explodes with new people — these three key biblical elements are in action.

1. Help every Christian learn that everyone is a minister. Everyone has a ministry. Every staff member will operate from this worldview. Every church member will come to realize that ministry comes from the people of the church — every person — as well as the staff. Everyone has a divine call to ministry.
2. Staff members work with every member to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts. That usually begins with a survey or a workshop that includes the survey and the teaching about spiritual gifts.
 - Once Christians discover their spiritual gifts, they take the next step and ask someone in the church — who knows them well — to take the same survey on them. This will help them get objective input about their spiritual gifts. It is part of the refinement process.
 - The next step is to study the Scripture passages that speak about their gifts. Learn more about what God says about gifts.
 - The next step is to learn how your gifts fit into the Body of Christ and how your church will store and retrieve information about gifts to help you and others find ministries that use those gifts.
 - Finally, the staff will help you translate your gift mix into your divine calling. That calling will motivate you and enrich your life. Why? Because it’s God’s plan for you!
3. The third element is when your staff (or someone with your gifts who has been discipled) discipled you into your calling. The staff will clarify and match gifts with ministries in your congregation. In some cases, your gifts may represent a ministry your church doesn’t have. What then? Your staff team should help you create the ministry or, if necessary, find another church that has such a ministry.

10 STEPS TO OVERCOME THE VOLUNTEER SYNDROME

1. Read Scripture and discover the idea of volunteers is not part of the Kingdom of God.
2. Read Scripture about what God says concerning spiritual gifts.
3. Read Scripture and discover God’s structure of the church: everyone a minister. (Martin Luther said, “Your baptism is your ordination into ministry.” John Wesley and other reformers agreed.)
4. Don’t criticize those who operate volunteer ministries. Just help them discover the biblical approach.
5. Take a spiritual gifts survey. Don’t worry, every Christian has spiritual gifts. That includes you. No one “fails” the survey.
6. Ask someone at church who knows you well to take a spiritual gifts survey on you. It will help you refine what you are learning.
7. Study the biblical evidence for each of your dominant and subordinate gifts.
8. Study Scripture about the Body of Christ and how it works when people serve in the area of their gifts.
9. Ask someone on staff who is already operating in the area of your gifts to disciple you. Don’t worry if it takes months or years — depending on your schedule. Just start the process.
10. No one has a “job” at church. Recognize that God has called you to ministry, with a divine call. Your calling is your spiritual sweet spot. You will not be overwhelmed when you are where God wants you. You will be exhilarated!

The discipleship process is not limited to teaching. It is discipling as Jesus did it. The disciples or staff person disciples you: (1) Come, follow me; (2) I do/you watch; (3) I do/you help; (4) You do/I help; (5) You do/I watch; (6) The discipler or staff person disciplines the next person. You disciple another person. And that process never ends for you until you go to heaven.

The Economy of Multiplication

Many churches today are declining or plateaued. Some of the growing congregations are actually collecting Christians from other churches. Many of these other churches have declined to a point where they don't have a nursery for the kids, or Sunday school for adults. So, families find a church that has those ministries. You can't blame them.

In the near future, few churches will have two pastors on staff. Many of the baby boomer pastors are retiring or dying. There is decreasing enrollment in Bible colleges and seminaries that train pastors. The world of church staff is going to change dramatically in the next 10 years.

Sometimes God allows changes to get our attention. Christians are forced to look at Scripture and rediscover that the ministry of the church ought to occur the way the Bible describes. The priesthood of all believers, everyone in ministry using the gifts they discover, may become a wake-up call that could, in part, be God's way to bring health and vitality to your church and revival to the nation.