

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

God gifts each of us for ministry in unique ways. Some of our gifts are obvious while others are more subtle. Many people have gifts of ministry they have never identified. Some have gifts of ministry they have been exercising for years without even realizing it. These practices will introduce you to various gifts of ministry and help you identify your unique giftedness and the giftedness of those around you. As you begin to discover and exercise your gifts you will gain a deeper appreciation for the ways God is calling you to join in the work of God's people.

About this Exploration

Throughout our whole lives we have the opportunity to discover our gifts of ministry. As we listen attentively to God's call and affirmation, identify our own passions, gifts, and skills, and participate in community where gifts are celebrated and shared, our gifts shape the unique ministry we have as we serve God and God's people. The process of discovery may involve prayer, community, scripture, nature, solitude, silence, and openness to the gentle nudging of the Spirit. We may be surprised by the Spirit, as well, and discover new and unexpected gifts along our journey.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Ezekiel 2:1-5
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Shoe Swap (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- strips of paper
- pens or pencils

One way we discover our gifts is through the other people around us. This activity may help you begin to practice recognizing gifts within your family. Gather everyone in the household and sit together in a circle. Invite each person to take off one shoe and put it in the center of the circle. Give everyone several strips of paper and a pen or pencil. Next, invite everyone to spend the next few minutes thinking about the special gifts and talents each person has and write on a strip of paper each idea that comes to mind. Then place each strip of paper inside the shoe of the appropriate person. After a few minutes invite everyone to collect his or her shoe and read the strips of paper. Go around the circle and invite each person to share the gifts that were placed in his or her shoe. Discuss surprises and affirmations that arise.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Giving Thanks

Supplies: None

Many families offer thanksgiving or prayers before a meal. This time is a great opportunity for your family to recognize their gifts by giving thanks. As you gather for your next family meal, invite each person to offer thanks for someone else at the table and that other person's unique gifts. For example, you might begin the activity by saying something like, "I give thanks for David and his musical talents," or, "I give thanks for Mom and the way she listens to me." You could also make this activity more meaningful by sharing how that person used his or her particular gift this day. If you enjoy this practice, it may become a regular fixture at your mealtimes, during which you all discover your gifts in the thanksgiving of others.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 Gift Exchange

Supplies:

- blank cards
- envelopes
- pens or pencils

One way we discover our gifts of ministry is by practicing the skills we already have in ways that are helpful to others. Invite your family to participate in a gift exchange. Give each person a card, an envelope, and a pen or pencil. Have each

person write on the card something he or she would be willing to do for someone else. These may be such things as sewing a ripped clothing item, cooking a meal, doing a household chore, singing someone a song, or even offering someone an encouraging word. After everyone has written his or her gift offerings on the card, place the cards in the envelopes, and put the envelopes in a pile so that each person can take one. Everyone should sign the envelopes so that no one takes his or her own card and so that each will know whose gift he or she received. In the minutes, hours, or even days that follow, each person should provide the gift offered to the person who received the card. As you practice serving each other, you will become more aware of the gifts of ministry you have.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Letters of Thanksgiving (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- paper
- pencil or pen
- Bible

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–9. The apostle Paul helped others discover their gifts in the letters he wrote them. As he wrote to the community of Christians in Corinth, he began by telling some of them the things about them for which he was thankful. You can begin to help others discover their gifts by writing letters to them, too. Take time to think about someone who has made a positive difference in your life. Write that person a letter telling how thankful you are for him or her. Be sure and describe the difference that person has made and why you are so thankful. The letter will likely be very meaningful for both of you, and the recipient may recognize a gift or which he or she was unaware.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



5 Soaring Spirit

Supplies:

- artwork: “Diamond Peak” Nevada, USA,
<http://www.art.com/products/p13950276-sa-i2807680/diamond-peak-nevada-usa.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bc aab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=diamond+peak>
- journal or paper and pen or pencil

Quite often the things that bring us joy or fill us with vibrancy are intrinsically tied to our gifts. Arrange to have the artwork “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA” displayed on your computer screen for several days or printed out and displayed in your office or home or school notebook. As you look at the picture each day, pay attention to the way the snowboarder soars through the air. Think about the things that make your spirit soar. Take notice of the things you discover, and ask yourself if these things are particular gifts you have. Keep a daily log of your reflection or thoughts each time you look at the photo.

Sending & Serving Activity

⑥ Listening Retreat

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal or paper and pen or pencil

Read Ezekiel 2:1–5.

God spoke to Ezekiel and revealed his ministry calling. God still speaks to us today and will reveal our ministry calling if we listen. In order to listen to God we quite often have to remove distracting noise so that we can hear. Arrange to give yourself a listening retreat. This can be a day away someplace quiet or an hour a day set aside for quiet reflection. During your retreat time, spend time in quiet just listening for God. You may not hear an audible voice and it likely won't happen right away, but over time you may begin to sense God's presence and God's leading. You might keep a journal of the thoughts or nudges that come to you in this listening retreat. After a week of daily listening, review your journal. What patterns do you notice? What might this tell you about God's leading in your life?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



⑦ People Watching (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

Have you ever gone to a shopping mall, a public square, or a coffee shop and just did some people watching? This is one way you can begin to see the diversity of ministry giftedness of all of God's people. Try taking half an hour to an hour and going to a public place. Pick a comfortable bench or table and relax. Spend the time watching people (but not staring!). Pay attention to how people help one another. Perhaps there's someone who exercises hospitality and opens doors for people. Or maybe someone cares for creation and picks up trash. Maybe someone even exercises the gift of music! If you watch attentively, you'll become more aware of how God has given each and every person special gifts of ministry.

In what ways can you use your gifts of ministry in such a setting? What would someone see if you were the object of observation?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Turn Down the Volume

Supplies: None

In the busyness of everyday life, it's easy to get caught up in all the distractions of work or school. There's so much to do, and there are so many places to be. We often are so distracted we are unaware of the ministry gifts all around us. Take a couple of days and practice turning down the volume and removing these distractions. Try not to listen to the car stereo on your way to and from work or school. Try not watching the television in the restaurants or offices you visit. When you're on a break, don't bring work along with you. Just turn down the volume so you can really listen and really see the gifts of God at work in others.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Random Acts of Affirmation

Supplies: None

It's one thing to notice the gifts of ministry in other people. It's an altogether different thing to notice the gifts in ourselves. In this activity you'll practice helping others see the gifts in themselves.

We've all heard of practicing random acts of kindness, but consider trying random acts of affirmation as well. As you notice the gifts of ministry present in others, affirm these gifts in them with surprising affirmations. You could send someone a card or offer a word of support. You could send an e-mail or call someone on the phone. It will only take a few minutes for you to tell a person the gift you see at work in him or her. As you do this, others may discover their own gifts through your affirmations.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

Life is exciting when we know we are participating in ministry with God! Scripture is full of examples that show us how God uniquely invites and equips each person to minister to others. Scripture also helps us understand how recognizing and using our gifts of ministry can be life-giving for ourselves and for those around us. These activities will introduce you to biblical practices for discovering the life-giving possibilities God has set in your midst.

About this Exploration

Scripture provides many examples of people discovering God-given talents that help them not only in their own lives but also in ministering to or caring for others. As Solomon discovered, gifts such as knowledge and a discerning mind are to be valued more highly than riches, long life, or power. Scripture, along with the community, inspires and affirms people in recognizing the different gifts they possess. Gifts of ministry allow people to play important roles in this world, in faith-related settings as well as in homes, work places, schools, and places of recreation.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 3:3-15
Mark 1:14-20

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Where Is God? (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 we find the words of the apostle Paul that are usually heard during communion services. He encouraged Christians to remember what Jesus had done as they share in the bread and wine. We can continue this tradition in a way that brings to life the ways God is working in us and through us. And we can do this over any meal we share together. As you gather for family meals, begin a discussion with those present by inviting everyone to offer a response to the question “Where did God work in you or through you today?” As you spend time sharing the ways God is working in your lives, you will become more attuned to God’s presence and more aware of the gifts God is shaping in you. This kind of activity helps us be more aware of and to give credit to God in our lives.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



2 Body Parts

Supplies:

- Bible
- Song: recording of “One Spirit of Love” by Paul B. Stenson
- “One Spirit of Love” Attachment: Activity 2
- Music player

In Romans 12:4-8 we are told that the church is a body and each person is a different part. Every part has a different function and is vital to the life of the body. Gather your family together and listen to a recording of “One Spirit of Love.” Hand each person a copy of the sheet music of “One Spirit of Love,” with lyrics. Play the song a second time and invite everyone to sing along. Afterward, ask everyone to name what part of the body they think he or she is and why. Ask each what role he or she plays in the body of Christ and why he or she believes it is vital to the life of the body.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 Sons and Daughters of Encouragement

Supplies:

- Bible

Acts 4:36 tells of a man the apostles named “Barnabas.” His name meant “son of encouragement.” By giving him this name, the apostles recognized that Barnabas had the unique ministry gift of encouragement. Although this gift is particularly strong in some people, it is a gift we all can develop. Read Acts 4:36 together and discuss what it might mean to be a son or daughter of encouragement. Invite everyone to spend the next day or two practicing to be a son or daughter of encouragement.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Lectio Divina (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

Lectio Divina is a way of reading the Bible through a spiritual lens. It can be a helpful way of discovering our gifts of ministry. Begin by reading aloud 1 Corinthians 12:4–7. Then spend a minute or two in silence reflecting upon the text. Read aloud the passage again a second time, this time paying close attention to words or phrases that stand out to you in particular. After the reading, spend one to two minutes reflecting on the word or phrase that stood out. Read the passage aloud again a third time, this time listening for what God might be calling you to do or to be. After this third reading, spend time in silent prayer listening for God’s calling through the passage of scripture.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 What Are Your Dreams?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- colored pencils, crayons, or markers

In 1 Kings 3:3–15 Solomon experienced a vivid dream in which he experienced God’s calling and God’s blessing. Sometimes dreams can be formative for our gifts of ministry. Some of our dreams are literally dreams: unconscious experiences during our sleep. Other dreams are more like visions: ideas, goals and hopes for the future. Each morning as you awake take a few minutes and make a picture of your dreams. You could make a picture that represents a dream you had while sleeping (if you remember your dreams). You could also consider making a picture of your ideas, hopes, and goals for the day or the week. This is not intended to be great art, but, rather, a representation. This is just for your eyes unless you choose to share it. You could use color, lines, images, words, or illustrations. Fold up the picture and carry it with you. As you look at it from time to time throughout the day, allow yourself to remember your “dream” and consider how you might make that dream a reality.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Count Your Blessings

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer
- spreadsheet computer program, such as Excel or similar program

In Genesis 12:3 God makes a covenant with Abraham. God promised that Abraham would be greatly blessed. Abraham’s blessing also carries a responsibility—

he will become a blessing to others. It is important for us to count our blessings and discover the ways our blessings carry responsibility also. Create a spreadsheet that lists all the resources you have at your disposal. What possessions do you have? How much money do you have? Try to think of all the ways God has blessed you. In a separate column, try listing ways you can use each resource to help others. Keep these lists going over time as you acquire and relinquish different resources. As you begin to think about using your resources to help others, you will discover that the blessings of God are a gift of ministry.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Interruptions at Work (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

In Mark 1:14–20 Jesus begins calling his disciples. The disciples in this story were called as they were working. Jesus simply interrupted their work one day and gave them the opportunity to follow him and be a part of his ministry. Interruptions are quite often frustrating, especially when we’re working on something important or are trying to meet a deadline. These interruptions, however, can also be ministry opportunities. The next time your work is interrupted, pause to think about how this might be an opportunity for ministry and how Jesus might be calling to you. Perhaps the person interrupting you needs a friend to talk to. Perhaps the situation calls for someone with discernment to make sense of confusion for others. As you pay attention to these interruptions, you’ll become more aware of opportunities for ministry as well as the ways God is equipping you to respond.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



8 Tongues of Fire

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel” (Anonymous), https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401

Find a quiet place and arrange to have “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel” available so you can see it while reading the scripture. Read Acts 2. Then contemplate the following questions:

- What different languages do you know?
- If you don’t know a second language, what words or phrases do you know in a different language?
- What would it be like to know a different language? What could you do? With whom could you communicate that you cannot now?

- Think about the people at your work, school, gym, club, church or the people in your neighborhood. Who do you know that knows a different language?
- How does God use people who can speak different languages for ministry?

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Pot Luck

Supplies:

- Bible
- main course of a meal
- home with a large enough space to host a social meal (If your home is not large enough, a friend may let you host the meal in their home.)

In Acts 4:32–35 the first generation of Christians pooled together all their resources and made sure that everyone had what they needed. When we come together, using and sharing the gifts each person has plays an important role in ministry. Invite some friends, neighbors, or relatives to a pot luck dinner. Explain that you will provide the main course and each person is invited to bring a food item to share. During the meal read aloud Acts 4:32–35. Then lead a prayer giving thanks to God for the special gift each person shared.

Attachment: Activity 2

One Spirit of Love

♩ = 89

Muted strum
Light Reggae Feel

Paul B. Svenson

Musical notation for the first line, including a 4-measure rest and a repeat sign.

1. Ma - ny are the won - ders of God ma - ny
2. Some will be the tea - chers of life some the
3. Li - ving as the bo - dy of Christ and the

Musical notation for the second line.

doors o - pen wide ma - ny roads that are still un -
prea - chers of love some the fa - thers and some the
heart of the earth and the hands that will break new

Musical notation for the third line.

tra - veled Ma - ny are the gifts that we share
mo - thers Some will be the ones who will care
gro - und Cel - e - brate the gifts from with - in

Musical notation for the fourth line.

ma - ny bur - dens we bear ma - ny
some will li - sten and share serv - ing
now its time to be - gin God's -

Musical notation for the fifth line.

my - ster - ies still un - ra - veled
God as they serve each - o - ther
peo - ple can turn the world a - rou - nd now!

Musical notation for the sixth line.

CHORUS Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

Musical notation for the seventh line.

Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

"One Spirit of Love" by Paul B. Svenson, ©1987/2011 Dad's Songbook Music LLC. All rights reserved. Used by permission, www.dadsongbook.com.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

A disciple is someone who follows a teacher and learns from that person, practices the things he or she does, and over time becomes more and more like the teacher. Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ, and, over time, they become more like him. This transformation happens as we follow closely on the path of discipleship. These activities may help you begin to practice using your gifts of ministry in ways that will draw you into deeper relationship with God and closer discipleship of Jesus Christ.

About this Exploration

Jesus extends the invitation to “come, follow me.” We are asked to trust that our gifts, talents, and interests may be used by God for the ministry that is before us. We are not asked first to learn more or begin afresh in order to be noticed by Jesus, but rather to hear the Spirit’s call and come just as we are. Through this invitation we are encouraged to place our confidence in God, who is able to work through our open hands and hearts that are offered to the church, community, and world. If we have doubts about our abilities or qualifications, we can be encouraged by the countless Biblical stories that remind us that God always chooses and uses the “least of these.” Come, let’s follow!

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Jeremiah 15:15–21
Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Follow the Leader (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

Discipleship is about following Jesus and becoming more like him. As we follow him we use the gifts God has given us for ministry in the manner and likeness of Christ. To practice this, invite your family to participate in a game of Follow the Leader. As you play, act out a situation that involves using a gift of ministry. You might act out the gift of compassion by offering a hug. You might act out the gift of music by singing. After a couple of tries invite others to be the leader and act out their gifts of ministry. Remember, there are no winners or losers in this game. We're all trying to follow Jesus as best we can.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 The Meaning of Names

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- website: "Name Meanings," <http://www.name-meanings.com>

Do you know what your name means? Do the others in your family know what their names mean? Our names are a part of our identity. In the Bible people gave their children names that quite often shaped their personality and their ministry. Gather your family together and ask them if they know what their names mean. Go to the website "Name Meanings" and look up each person's name. As you discover the meanings of your names, discuss ways your names can be a gift of ministry—ways your names might shape who you are and how you minister to others. Our names are given to us before we develop any gifts or skills. As you think about your gifts for ministry, what name would you choose for yourself now? How do you think you have lived into the name you were given?

Sending & Serving Activity

3 The Wonder of Believing in Yourself

Supplies:

- movie: *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium* (Mandate Pictures/Film Colony, 2007); movie trailers, <http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/mr-magorium-s-wonder-emporium/trailers/>
- movie player

God has given us all unique gifts of ministry. Even when we know what they are, sometimes we have to overcome the barrier of self doubt to put them to good use. Invite your family to watch the movie *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium* together.

After the movie, discuss the following questions:

- Why did Mr. Magorium’s shop shut down when he left?
- What did Molly Mahoney have to do to make the shop run again?
- Do you think it was hard for her to believe in herself? Why?
- How did Mr. Magorium know that Molly Mahoney would be successful?
- Do you ever have a hard time believing God gave you special gifts of ministry?
- What do you need to do to believe in yourself?
- Do you think God believes in you?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Who, Me? (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pen or pencil

It’s often hard for us to believe that God will use us for ministry because we don’t think we’re good enough. But God sees good in us that we don’t always see. This activity will help you understand how your shortcomings don’t disqualify you from joining in Christ’s ministry. Begin by writing down all the reasons you think you’re not good enough or all the reasons you think God wouldn’t use you for ministry. When you’re done writing, read Matthew 9: 9–13. Spend a moment thinking about what it would have been like for Matthew, the much-despised tax collector, to be called upon by Jesus. Next, as largely as you can, write “Yes, you!” across the paper. It’s okay to write right over the top of your list. End this activity with a prayer, thanking God for giving you gifts of ministry and for calling on you just as you are.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



5 Renaming our Fears

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Renaming Our Fears Worksheet,” Attachment: Activity 5
- pen or pencil

As we follow Jesus and discover our gifts of ministry, we sometimes encounter fear, anxiety, or uncertainty. That’s okay! It’s perfectly normal. In fact, many of the people God called and empowered for ministry in the Bible expressed fears, anxieties, and doubts. When we voice them in prayer, God renames our fears. God gives us a new perspective. We are reminded to put our hope and trust in God.

Begin this practice by filling out the left-hand column of the “Renaming Our Fears Worksheet.” In this column list your fears. Then read Jeremiah 15:15–21,

paying attention to how God listened to Jeremiah's fears and responded with words of encouragement. Next, try to fill in the right-hand column of the worksheet. Think about how God might respond to each one of your fears with words of encouragement.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Will You?

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- song: "The Summons" by John Bell (tune: Kelvingrove); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0aAkOe87mo&feature=related>

God constantly calls us to follow closer and to minister to others with love, mercy, and compassion. But we aren't always perceptive of the calling. Watch the video "The Summons." Listen to the words of calling and what the song suggests God calls us to do. Pay attention to the pictures on the screen and what emotions or thoughts they evoke in you. After watching the video spend time thinking about how God is calling you. Who are you being called to love and serve? Where are you being called to go? What are you being called to do? Pray about these questions and trust God to lead you.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Heroes (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

Everyone has heroes. If you look around people's offices, on their walls, or on their desks, you might see pictures of them. There might be pictures on their phone or computer or in their wallet or purse. In their home there might be posters or pictures on the wall. Some people even post favorite sayings of their heroes on their Facebook wall or Twitter feed. During the next week, choose two or three people you are close to and try to discover who their heroes are. Ask each why he or she looks up to that person in particular. As you discuss this together, think about the character traits, skills, or talents that these heroes have. Discuss ways these traits, skills, or talents could be gifts of ministry.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Coffee Talk

Supplies: None

Our gifts of ministry are often developed in relationship with other people, especially as we interact with people who see our gifts and believe in us. These people are often those we might refer to as "mentors." Think about who might be a good mentor for you. Do you know someone who understands your gifts of

ministry and believes in your potential for the work of God? Is that person supportive of you? If someone fits this criteria, ask him or her to be your mentor. This can be as informal or formal of a relationship as you like. A good way to begin is through coffee talk. Invite this person to join you for a cup of coffee or tea or a soft drink somewhere. This can be once a week or once every few months. During your time together, discuss the things God is doing in your life. Share your struggles as well as your successes. And, most importantly, pray together one by one, a number of people of varying ages and backgrounds transform a trash-filled inner-city lot into a productive and beautiful garden, and in doing so, the gardeners are themselves transformed. Read it aloud to yourself or to a gathered group. Reading aloud is an excellent sharing and welcoming activity for people of all ages. The story may provoke you to visit a community garden nearby and experience that green growing hospitality.

Sending & Serving Activity



9 Passing It On

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- artwork: “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner,
<http://www.art.com/products/p10286254-sa-i677605/henry-ossawa-tanner-the-banjo-lesson.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6ce32fa19f9d47aaa58758970c9f0162&searchstring=banjo+lesson>

This activity may help you consider how gifts of ministry have been passed down to you by others and ways you might pass the gifts on again. Display the artwork “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner on your computer screen. Spend four or five minutes silently reflecting on the picture. Next, think about special skills, gifts, and talents that have been passed on to you. Perhaps you inherited a particular talent from someone in your family. Maybe a coworker, teacher, or mentor taught you a particular skill. Perhaps a coach, pastor, or friend helped you develop in confidence or identity. After you’ve identified a few gifts that others have passed on to you and the means in which they were shared, spend a few minutes thinking about whom you might share these gifts with and how you might do so.

Renaming Our Fears Worksheet

Fear, Anxiety, or Uncertainty	God's response

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

The Christian faith has carried on through the centuries because of people who faithfully responded to God's call upon their lives. God calls upon us still today. As we respond to God's calling we find clarity and inspiration in the faithful witness of others, whether parents, teachers, pastors, or historical figures in the church. These practices will help you identify ways others used their gifts of ministry in the development of your faith so that you may begin to use your gifts in similar fashion to develop faith in others.

About this Exploration

Faithful Christian practices encourage a communal awareness that God calls, nurtures, and blesses the use of our gifts to strengthen God's work in the world. Our understanding of this partnership with God is always emerging. Traditional gifts—such as preaching, hospitality, music, and caring—may be demonstrated in ways recognizable since ancient days. Christian tradition may also be informed and evolve to include modern forms of expression such as social media, video, legislative advocacy, and more. No matter the era or tradition, gifts of ministry are grounded in a desire to minister with and on behalf of Christ.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 49:1-7
Luke 10:38-42

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Blessing Others (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

One of the most ancient Christian traditions is the practice of blessing others. We bless others by offering a prayer for them that speaks confidently about our hopes for them. We bless others by speaking truthfully to them about their gifts and their potential. As you interact with others in your home, offer your blessings to them. If a child is gifted academically, take his or her hand in yours and say, "You are very smart, and I pray that God will use your intelligence for great things." If your spouse or partner is particularly gifted at hospitality, take his or her hand in yours and say, "You have made a welcome place for me and for others, and I pray that your hospitality will be rewarded with God's own welcome for you." Word the blessing to suit the particular gifts of each person.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Family Chores

Supplies:

- Bible
- a list of all the chores household members do during the week

It is important for us to recognize and affirm the importance of the work of others, because in doing the work they are exercising their gifts. Often small everyday chores go unappreciated and are not recognized as gifts of ministry. But an important Christian tradition is recognition of all the gifts God gives. At the beginning of the week gather the household together and share the chore list with everyone. Read aloud Luke 10:38-42. Tell everyone that all their chores, whether big or small, are very important and are God given gifts of ministry.

Brother Lawrence was a monk in the fifteenth century. He is known for being able to experience profound peace even as he labored in the monastery kitchen for nearly fifty years. For Brother Lawrence, "common business," no matter how mundane or routine, could be a medium of God's love. He is quoted as saying, "We ought not to grow tired of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed." How might this attitude make a difference in the way you go about the chores on the list?

As the week goes by, thank others for exercising their gifts.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 An Extra Place

Supplies:

- an extra place setting at family meals

In some Christian communities there is a tradition of leaving an extra place setting at the table. Some view the extra place setting as a symbol of Christ’s presence at the table. Others see the extra place setting as an open seat for whatever visitor may arrive hungry. During your family meals set an extra place setting. If no visitors show up, you can remember that Christ was your visitor. If someone shows up unexpectedly, invite that person to stay and share the meal. In doing so you are exercising the gift of hospitality, either for Christ or your visitor.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Born This Way (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- mirror

Read Isaiah 49:1–7. The prophet says that God called him from before his birth. He was made with a calling and purpose. He was created for ministry. Christians understand that we all have been created by God unique. We have gifts that have developed over time as well as gifts that we were born with. Spend a few minutes looking in the mirror. Pay attention to your unique features. Say to yourself, “I was born this way. God made me unique. I have been made for ministry.”



5 Cultivation

Supplies:

- artwork: “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt, <http://www.art.com/products/p15177883-sa-i3715775/gustav-klimt-farm-garden-with-sunflowers-c1912.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=klimt+farm+garden+with+sunflowers>

Some of our gifts have been cultivated in us over the course of time. Many of them were handed down to us by others. Some of our gifts were inherited from parents or grandparents. Other gifts were shared with us by teachers, pastors, mentors and friends. Spend time reflecting on “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” (c. 1912) by Gustav Klimt. Contemplate the following questions:

- What are your sunflowers? What are your gifts?
- Where did these gifts come from? Were you born with them? Were they shared with you?
- Who cultivated these gifts in you? How did they cultivate your gifts?
- How can you help cultivate the gifts of others around you?

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Serving at Church

Supplies: None

Since the very beginning of the Christian faith, ministry has been expressed and practiced as people come together for worshipful work. One way you can practice using your gifts of ministry is by volunteering to serve in your congregation. Ask your pastor or a lay leader for some ways you can contribute to the life of the church. Share with them some of the things you can do and see if there are ways your gifts can be put to good use. In most cases you'll find ample opportunities to serve and share your gifts.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Intercessory Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

Prayer is a tremendous part of the Christian faith, and intercessory prayer, in particular, is a tradition in which you can participate and minister to others. Prayer is a great gift that all of us can offer for one another. Spend time in prayer each day. Think about the people you work with or the people you go to school with. Offer their needs and struggles to God. Think about your friends and family. Offer their needs up to God. Think, also, about the struggles of people around the world. Many suffer from famine, poverty, disease and violence. Offer these people and their struggles up to God in prayer. It may not seem like much of a gift, but it is the biggest gift of all. In prayer you are placing these needs in the hands of the Most Able One, our God.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Stained-Glass Stories

Leader preparation: Invite friends or colleagues for this particular discussion

Supplies:

- access to a church or churches with stained glass windows
- website: "Top English Church Stained Glass Windows,"
<http://www.tradeframe.com/resources/StainedGlassWindows.aspx>

Throughout the centuries Christians have communicated their faith through the gift of artistic expression. Many churches tell stories of the faith in their stained-glass windows. Arrange to visit your church if it has stained-glass windows or another church if necessary. Spend time appreciating the artistic expression of the faith. Try to interpret the stories being told or the symbols being offered. Perhaps you will be led to artistic expression of your own faith.

Invite friends or coworkers to join you in a tour of churches in your community to see the stained glass windows. Conduct an Internet image search for historic stained-glass windows. Make one of these windows your screen saver.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Visitation

Supplies:

- a list of people from your congregation who are widows, widowers, hospitalized, or in nursing homes (You can usually get this from your pastor or church office.)

One tradition of Christian ministry is the ministry of visitation. Most churches have a few members who are unable to attend worship or even leave their homes. They are in need of relationships, too. You can practice an important ministry gift just by offering your time to visit them. Make sure to call first and ask for permission to visit. Your pastor or a lay leader may even be willing to offer a little “coaching” for visitation. Most importantly, though, is that you are just willing to sit with someone and spend time with him or her. You can talk, pray together, share coffee or even watch a television program.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

When we discover our gifts of ministry and begin to use them we begin to experience the blessing of God. But God gifted us so that our ministry practices might bless more than ourselves. We use our gifts within the multiple contexts of our lives. Our gifts are meant to bless the church, those in our family or household, those with whom we interact at work or school, and even the whole scope of God's people. Our gifts can even be a blessing to God's creation! These practices may begin to widen your perspective so that you can extend the blessing of God.

About this Exploration

Each of us is like a "letter from Christ," as Paul says, sent to bring hope and healing wherever there is need. In all contexts, there are opportunities for us to share our gifts of ministry in a variety of ways, be it at home, at school, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and at church. Over our lifetimes, the diversity of our gifts can emerge and grow, and may change, as we move into new places and spaces in our lives. Trusting that God can work through us right where we are is an exciting way to realize that the Holy Spirit is all around us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Nehemiah 2:11–20
2 Corinthians 3:1–6

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Vision Walk (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- walking shoes

In Nehemiah 2:11–20, Nehemiah visits Jerusalem and finds it in ruins. He later leads the people in rebuilding the city. But before he begins, he surveys the situation and makes a plan. You and your family likely have gifts that can greatly benefit the people in your city or neighborhood. And you need to know the appropriate ways your gifts can meet the needs around you. Begin making your plan by conducting a vision walk or multiple vision walks. Simply take a walk together around your neighborhood or community and survey the situation. Who are the people who live there? What are their needs? After your walk(s), spend time intentionally discussing ways you can help respond to the situations you encountered. The place where your gifts intersect these needs is the best place to begin.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Pin the Tail on the Mission

Supplies:

- pen or pencil
- several pieces of paper
- piece of brightly colored yarn
- tape
- handkerchief that can be used as a blindfold

Most families have people with a variety of gifts, so one of the hardest parts of using ministry gifts is knowing which one to choose. Sit down with your family and make a list of the different ministries in which you can participate together. You might serve a meal at a shelter, help at a church function, or call on someone who is ill. Write these things on separate pieces of paper and tape them on a wall. Make a “tail” by attaching a piece of tape to the end of the yarn. Blindfold one person and have him or her “pin the tail” on one of the ministries. Whichever one chosen will be the one the family participates in together this week. At the end of the week pin the tail on a different one.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 Letters on Our Hearts

Supplies:

- Bible
- pink construction paper
- scissors
- tape
- markers

In 2 Corinthians 3:1–6 the apostle Paul said Christians wear letters on our hearts. Our lives tell the story of Jesus as we show compassion, mercy, and love. Gather your family together and read the scripture passage. Invite each person to cut out the shape of a heart from the construction paper. Everyone then writes on the hearts a particular gift they have. Tape the heart to your back or chest. During the rest of the day you will notice the hearts that everyone is wearing. At the end of the day gather everyone together again and discuss your experiences.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Garbage Gifts (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

Our gifts of ministry don't pertain just to people. Our gifts empower us to minister to all of creation! Each time you recycle, use less energy, or pick up trash you're ministering to God's creation. As you travel to work or school, church, or home pay attention to trash you encounter along the way. If possible, carry plastic gloves and a trash bag with you. Stop and pick the trash up (if it is safe to touch) and dispose of it properly. As you do so remember that you're not just dumping trash—you're exercising a gift of ministry.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 A Willing Spirit

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- song: "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me," African American spiritual (tune: I'm Gonna Live),
http://www.hymnary.org/text/im_gonna_live_so_god_can_use_me?tab=about

In order for us to use our God-given gifts of ministry, we have to first have the willingness. Take time to listen to the song "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" and read the lyrics. Play it again and sing along. Learn this song, and sing it each day. As you sing joyfully about willingness to be used by God, your attitude will become more open to ministry opportunities.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Exercise Program

Supplies:

- shovel
- small planting-ready tree
- permission to plant the tree

Alternative Supplies:

- plant
- pot large enough for the plant
- potting soil

Caring for creation is a part of our ministry giftedness. God has given each of us the ability to enjoy and care for the earth. Plant a tree as an act of ministry to God's creation. Make sure to secure permission to plant the tree first. Most states have a phone number to call before digging. Someone will come and mark the property so you don't hit any underground utilities. Some communities also require special permission from the city, so check into this first. Also, if you're not planting the tree on your own property, make sure you have the permission of the property owner. As the tree you plant grows, you will experience your gift of ministry thriving for years to come. If you don't have access to a place to plant a tree, use the alternative supplies and try this practice with a potted plant.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Neighbor, Neighbor (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

In Luke 10:29–37 Jesus widened our perspective on neighbors. They aren't just the people who live on our block or our street. They're not just people in our community, state, or nation. Every human being is our neighbor and a partner in ministry. The next time you get ready to leave your home, read Luke 10:29–37. As you encounter different people, remind yourself that each one is your neighbor, including those you like and those you don't. Like the Good Samaritan in the story, consider what resources you have at your disposal to care for your neighbors.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Stone Soup

Supplies:

- a large pot
- a soup ladle
- bowls and spoons
- cooking range
- broth or water for making soup

Stone Soup

A lone traveler comes to a poor village carrying nothing more than an empty cooking pot. He's hungry and asks for a bit of food. The people in the village don't want to share any of their food with him. They are afraid they don't have enough for themselves, let alone a stranger. The traveler then asks where he might get some water. The villagers point him to the local stream. He goes to the stream and fills his pot with water.

He goes back to the middle of the village with his pot full of water. He builds a fire, places the pot over the fire, and drops a large stone in the pot.

One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what the stranger is doing. He answers, "I am making stone soup. It tastes wonderful, but it could use a bit of flavor." The villager says, "I have a small carrot I can give you." "Great," says the stranger, and adds the carrot to the pot.

Another villager comes by and asks what the stranger is doing. Again he answers, "I am making stone soup. It tastes wonderful, but it could use a bit of flavor." The villager says, "I have a small potato I can give you." "Great," says the stranger, and adds the potato to the pot.

More villagers come by and hear the story of the soup. Each one is willing to bring one more ingredient: a turnip, a tomato, a handful of beans, a cup of rice, a piece of garlic, a bit of salt and pepper.

Finally, the soup has cooked. And all the villagers shared a delicious pot of soup.

There are many versions of this folk tale, including ethnic versions from China, France, Hungary, Portugal, and other Northern European countries. Making modern-day stone soup is one way we can share with one another in a way that models how gifts should be shared in Christian community. Invite some friends over for supper, but ask each to provide a different food item, such as potatoes, corn, celery, carrots, or whatever else you want in the soup. Gather these items as least a day before the supper so that you can cook the soup before they arrive. When everyone has arrived, tell the story of Stone Soup. As you enjoy the meal together, talk about the different gifts of ministry each has. How can you put those gifts together to create a way to feed God's people?

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Hospitality

Supplies: None

One important gift of ministry is hospitality. Traditionally, hospitality is understood as inviting someone to the home. That's one way hospitality might be expressed, but hospitality is much more than that. Hospitality is about creating an atmosphere where other people feel welcome to be who they are and to share their thoughts and ideas openly. As you go about your day at work, school, or the marketplace, take the time to be hospitable to others. During conversations, really listen to what others have to say, treat them with respect and honor, and let them know you appreciate them for who they are.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Our God is making all things new. As we listen and respond to the call of God, we enter a process of changing the way things are and creating a new and better future. Using our gifts of ministry is about making a difference in the world and in the lives of others. These practices will engage you in the process of listening for God's call and discerning ways in which you might respond faithfully.

About this Exploration

We are not who we once were. We adapt and change along with the shifting circumstances we experience. Gifts of ministry develop throughout the duration of our lives. Our gifts are revealed, acquired, and developed as we encounter the present and are led toward expanding hope for the future. When we engage our gifts of ministry we join with God in making that hope reality, and we become the people God calls us to be.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
1 Samuel 3:1–10, 11–20
Philippians 4:1–13

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Nicknames (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

The way we refer to others can have a great impact on their self-understanding, especially children. If we compliment people regularly, they are far more likely to have a positive self-image than if we treat them poorly. The way we talk to one another can also help us discover our gifts of ministry and shape our future. Gather your family together and stand in a circle. Go around the circle and invite each person to think of a positive gift-related nickname for the person to the right. For example, someone named Charlotte who has the gift of generosity might be nicknamed “Unselfish Charlotte,” or someone named Paulo who has the gift of teaching might be nicknamed “Professor Paulo.” Together decide on a length of time to use these nicknames. If you enjoy the practice, you might try it again with different names.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



2 Seeing Together

Supplies:

- artwork: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard,
https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- step stool

Our gifts of ministry help us face the future with hope and expectation. We often gain our hopes and expectations through the vision of others. This practice may help you begin to vocalize your hopes and expectations for one another and your gifts of ministry. Display “Sisters in the Wind” in a prominent place of your gathering room. Invite your family to gather together for this practice. Invite everyone to study the picture and think about the two girls. *What does the girl on the rock see out in the distance? What does she say to her sister?* Next invite everyone to take turns standing on the step stool. As each person stands on the step stool, he or she can pretend to look out in the distance. As the person looks out, invite him or her to name hopes for each person around the room. Specifically, dream about the ministry gifts of each person in the room and how God might use them.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 What’s Wrong with This Picture?

Supplies:

- 2 large pieces of poster board
- colored markers

God often uses our perceptions to lead us into ministry. As we become aware of things that are wrong in our world, we then dream about what a better future would look like. This practice may help your family dream of ministering for a better future. Invite your family to create a picture together of your neighborhood or community. Remind everyone you want honesty. Don't make a picture of perfection that isn't true. After the picture is complete, ask everyone to state what's wrong with the picture. What are the things they see that are broken or hurting in the community? Now invite everyone to create a new picture on the other piece of poster board. This time, everyone should create a picture that is what he or she wishes it would look like. Each should make sure to draw him- or herself in the picture, using his or her gifts for good.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 What Keeps You Up at Night? (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

Most of us have things that keep us up at night every once in a while. Sometimes these are things that are exciting, but most of the times they are things we're worried about or things that are "wrong" in our world. Quite often God uses the things that keep us up to lead us into ministry. In 1 Samuel 3:1–20 God continually woke Samuel up at night and spoke to him about his ministry and his future. Spend time thinking about the things that keep you up at night. You might begin with smaller things that are closer to home. After you name one or two things, think about some of your unique talents and abilities. Spend time contemplating and praying about how God might use your gifts to fix what's wrong or to shape a better future.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Personal Suggestion Box

Supplies:

- cardboard box with a lid, such as a shoe box
- pen or pencil
- 3" × 5" or 4" × 6" index cards

Many businesses have suggestion boxes. Customers are encouraged to leave comments or suggestions of ways the business could improve its service. We can make suggestion boxes for ourselves as well. Cut a slit in the lid of the box large enough to fit an index card through. Throughout the week give yourself suggestions. Write down ways that you could use your gifts of ministry. Write down ways God is working in your life. Write down things you would like to see different in the future. Write them down before you forget! At the end of each week, empty the box and review the cards. You'll often discover God calls you to minister to certain people, places, or times on a consistent basis. You may even find God is calling you to minister in ways that will require you to grow.

Sending & Serving Activity



6 Daydreaming during the Sermon

Supplies:

- artwork: “Vision after the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401

For this activity it’s okay to admit that you’ve daydreamed during the sermon at church! Display “Vision after the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin where you will see it upon entering your home after a worship service. During worship, pay attention to the sermon. For this practice, it’s not as important to hang on every word as it is to let your mind wander and explore the stories, images, and events described in the sermon. Upon returning home, examine the artwork and think about the vision that has been inspired by a sermon in the picture. Now, think about the ways your mind wandered during the sermon. What visions did you see? What images stood out? How might these visions and sights serve to call you to work, using your gifts of ministry, for a better future?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Let Your Joy Rub Off (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

In Philippians 4:1–13 we are told that living a joyful life has its benefits. As we rejoice in all circumstances of our lives, we are changed. Furthermore, our joy rubs off on others. When we are in the midst of the demands of work, school, or family life, we sometimes forget to rejoice in all things. But if we concentrate on living joyfully our rejoicing, our joy, can become a gift of ministry that blesses others and ourselves. Commit one day this week to living joyfully no matter what. If things get hard, remind yourself to praise the Lord. If things are frustrating, give thanks to God for the opportunities you have. Try your best to keep a positive attitude. People around you will likely notice and be inspired by the joy you exhibit. Your own perspective may likely be changed as well.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Wishing Well

Supplies:

- pennies or other coins

Many shopping malls and public parks have wishing well or fountains. People will throw a coin or two in the water and make a wish. As we think about the future God calls us to labor for, we are doing something similar to making a wish. The only difference is that our “wish” is made as a prayer with the confidence that God listens and responds. Take a few pennies or other coins to a wishing

well. As you toss them in make a wish, but make more than a wish. Make your coin a type of prayer about a better world, about the realm of God, about the gifts of ministry you have and ways they can be exercised.

Make a wishing well to place in a prominent spot at work or where you volunteer. This could be as simple as a coffee can that you decorate. Add a sign that says “A Wish and a Prayer for a Better World.” Invite people to toss in coins, make a wish, and say a prayer. Be sure to use the money you collect for a cause that helps make a better world, such as addressing a justice issue in your community.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Feeling, Hoping, Thinking, Speaking, Doing

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- song: “The Call” by Regina Spektor,
http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/r/regina_spektor/the_call.html

As we dream about the future, we think about the way things ought to be. These dreams are wrapped up in emotions, hopes, and thoughts. As we move from dreams to reality, our thoughts become words or ideas upon which we act. And as we act we use the gifts that God has given us. Listen to the song “The Call,” and think about this process. Then reflect upon these questions:

- What are your dreams? What does the future hold in your dreams?
- What emotions, hopes, and thoughts do you experience?
- What ideas or words do these dreams evoke?
- How has God gifted you to help make these dreams a reality?