

Ministry: Shaped for serving God

You are shaped to serve God. "Your hands shaped me and made me." (Job 10:8, NIV) "The people I have shaped for myself will broadcast my praises." (Isaiah 43:21, NJB)

God formed every creature on this planet with a special area of expertise. Some animals run, some hop, some swim, some burrow, and some fly. Each has a particular role to play based on the way they were shaped by God. The same is true with humans. Each of us was uniquely designed, or "shaped" to do certain things.

Before architects design any new building they first ask, "What will be its purpose? How will it be used?" The intended function always determines the form of the building. Before God created you, he decided what role he wanted you to play on earth. He planned exactly how he wanted you to serve him, and then he shaped you for those tasks. You are the way you are because you were made for a specific ministry.

The Bible says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10, NIV). Our English word "poem" comes from this Greek word translated "workmanship." You are God's hand-crafted work of art. You are not an assembly-line product, mass-produced without thought. You are a custom designed, one-of-a kind, original masterpiece.

God deliberately shaped and formed you to serve him in a way that makes your ministry unique. He carefully mixed the DNA cocktail that created you. David praised God for this incredible personal attention to detail that God gave in designing each of us: "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous" (Psalm 139:13-14, NLT). "God doesn't make junk," said Ethel Waters.

Not only did God shape you before your birth, he planned every day of your life to support his shaping process. David continues, "Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed" (Psalm 139:16, NLT). This means nothing that happens in your life is insignificant. God uses all of it to mold you for your ministry to others, and shape you for your service to him.

God never wastes anything. He would not give you abilities, interests, talents, gifts, personality, and life experiences unless he intended to use them for his glory. By identifying and understanding these factors you can discover God's will for your life.

The Bible says you are "wonderfully complex." You're a combination of many different factors.

Unwrap your spiritual gifts for serving God

God gives every believer spiritual gifts to be used in ministry. These are special God-empowered abilities for serving him that are given only to believers. The Bible says, "Whoever does not have the Spirit cannot receive the gifts that come from God's Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:14, TEV).

You can't earn your spiritual gifts or deserve them -- that's why they are called gifts! They are an expression of God's grace to you. "Christ has generously divided out his gifts to us." (Ephesians 4:7, CEV) Nor do you get to choose which gifts you'd like to have. God determines that. Paul explained, "It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have" (1 Corinthians 12:11, NLT).

Because God loves variety, and he wants us to be special, no single gift is given to everyone. Also, no individual receives all the gifts. If you had them all, you'd have no need of anyone else, and that would defeat one of God's purposes -- to teach us to depend on each other.

Your spiritual gifts were not given for your own benefit but for the benefit of others, just as other people were given gifts for your benefit. The Bible says, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church" (1 Corinthians 12:7, NLT). God planned it this way so we'd need each other. When we use our gifts together, we all benefit. If others don't use their gifts, you get cheated, but if you don't use your gifts, they get cheated. This is why God wants us to discover and develop our spiritual gifts.

Whenever we forget these basic truths about gifts, it always causes trouble in the church. Two common problems are "gift-envy" and "gift-projection." The first occurs when we compare our gifts to others, feel dissatisfied with what God gave us, and become resentful or jealous of how God uses others. The second problem happens when you expect everyone else to have your gifts, do what you're called to do, and feel as passionate about it as you do. The Bible says, "There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving" (1 Corinthians 12:5, NLT).

Sometimes spiritual gifts are overemphasized to the neglect of the other factors that God uses to shape you for service.

Your gifts reveal one part of God's will for your ministry, but not all of it. There's much more.

Heed your heart in serving God

Listen for inner promptings that can point to the ministry God intends for you to have. The Bible uses the term "heart" to describe the bundle of desires, hopes, interests, ambitions, dreams, and affections that you have. Your heart represents the source of all your motivations -- what you love to do and what you care about most. Even today, we still use the word in this way when we say, "I love you with all my heart."

The Bible says, "A man's heart reflects the man" (Proverbs 27:19, NIV). What is in your heart is what you really are, not what others think you are, or what circumstances force you to be. Your heart is the real you. It determines why you say the things you do, why you feel the way you do, and why you act the way you do.

Physically, each of us has a unique heartbeat. Just as we each have unique thumbprints, eye prints, and voiceprints, our hearts beat in slightly different patterns. It's amazing that out of all the billions of people who've ever lived, no one has ever had a heartbeat exactly like yours.

In the same way, God has given each of us a unique emotional "heartbeat" that races when we think about the subjects, activities, or circumstances that interest us. We instinctively care about some things and not about others. These are clues to where you should be serving.

Another word for heart is passion. There are certain subjects that you feel deeply passionate about and others that you couldn't care less about. Some experiences turn you on and capture your attention, while others turn you off or bore you to tears. These reveal the nature of your heart.

When you were growing up you may have discovered that you were intensely interested in some subjects that no one else in your family cared about. Where did those interests come from? They came from God!

God had a purpose in giving you these inborn interests. Your emotional heartbeat is the second key to understanding your shape for service. Don't ignore your interests. Consider how they might be used for God's glory. There is a reason that you love to do these things.

Repeatedly, the Bible says to "serve the Lord with all your heart." God wants you to serve him passionately, not dutifully. People rarely excel at tasks they don't enjoy doing or feel passionate about. God wants you to use your natural interests to serve him and others.

How do you know when you are serving God from your heart? The first telltale sign is enthusiasm. When you are doing what you love to do, no one has to motivate you, or challenge you, or check up on you. You do it for the sheer enjoyment. You don't need rewards, or applause, or to be paid, because you love serving in this way. The opposite is also true: When you don't have a heart for what you're doing, you are easily discouraged.

The second characteristic of serving God from your heart is effectiveness. Whenever you do what God wired you to love to do, you get good at it. Passion drives perfection. If you don't care about a task, it is unlikely that you'll excel at it. On the other hand, the highest achievers in any field are those who do it because of passion, not duty or profit.

We've all heard people say, "I took a job I hate in order to make a lot of money, so someday I can quit and do what I love to do." That's a big mistake. Don't waste your life in a job that doesn't express your heart. Remember, the greatest things in life are not things. Meaning is far more important than money. The richest man in the world once said, "A simple life in the fear-of-God is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches" (Proverbs 15:16, Msg).

Don't settle for achieving "the good life," because the good life is not good enough. Ultimately it doesn't satisfy. You can have a lot to live on, and still have nothing to live for. Aim instead for "the better life" – serving God in a way that expresses your heart. Figure out what you love to do – that which God gave you a heart for, and then do it for his glory!

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