

You Matter!

You Matter to God: Faith Study

Session 4: Listening to God: Your Unique Gifts Matter

Opening Questions

- Are you someone who guesses what is in a gift package before opening it or do you like the anticipation and suspense of wondering? As a child, did you peek under the wrapping paper or try to find where your gifts were hidden?
- Tell about a memorable gift you received.

Opening Prayer Practice

God, we come together today to be with you and with one another. In the silence, we give you all the things that filled our day, all the distractions that fill our minds, and all that is on our hearts – so that we might be present to listen to one another and to listen for you.

Spend 2-3 minutes in silence.

Open our hearts, God to be filled with your love. Open our hearts with wonder, to see one another as your beloved creation. Open our hearts with love, to listen deeply. Open our hearts with imagination, to see your hopes and dreams for the world. Open our hearts, God, to be your love for the world. Amen.

Group Hopes & Expectations

Reflect back on the "Hopes and Expectations" (covenant) section from session 1. Reflect for a moment on this question in silence or share together:

- What is a gift this group has given you, so far?

What Does the Bible Say?

1 Corinthians 12: 4-13 (NRSV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the

interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Think About...

- How would you reshape the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 to reflect the gifts you see in others as they engage in relationships and in the world?
- What words or phrases stand out to you, as you read the Scripture texts today?

What Do Others Say?

When I was young, I had a very narrow view of what it meant to be a pastor. In my growing up church, the two pastors were both men—who, as adults, seemed ancient to me. They also felt quite distant from me as they wore clerical collars and associated primarily with the other adults. My uncle was also a pastor. By contrast he was super extraverted and outgoing and a ton of fun, but I wasn't like that at all. My brother knew from an early age that he wanted to be a pastor. He was very good. He was so good and proper, he actually got grounded from church in high school because he was spending so much time at church his grades were starting to suffer.

Because of all of this, when people first said to me, "Have you ever thought about being a pastor? I think you'd be a really good pastor," in my head I thought "Are you nuts?!?! I am not a pastor." I just couldn't see myself in that role. Some of that was because I didn't match what they look like. Some of that was because I had some of my own adventures and I wasn't totally sure that I was good enough to be a pastor.

But the call persisted, and the encouragement persisted. I took step after step in faith and listening until I found myself on internship in Los Angeles. It was there, living into the role of pastor, that I started to learn that I could be me and be a pastor. In fact, it was by being me-- living into the qualities and personality and interests and humor and all the things that make me me—it's through that that I could be the best pastor I could be.

I have to say. I'm a work in progress on this front. From time to time, an old tape starts praying in my head and starts whispering little kernels to make me doubt myself. As I see what other pastors are posting online or the way they speak or the way they pray, I'll think "Oh, well, that's what a real pastor looks like." "Oh, a real pastor is interested in that. A real pastor would do this." When I still didn't match that, I doubted myself.

Again and again, as I've grown in ministry and connections with people, I've learned for myself and I've heard from people that it is my unique wiring that has been part of their connection as

they hear me preach, or as we have conversation, as we journey together through the joys and sorrows of life.

Now, even though I'm telling a story about being a pastor, the passage in 1 Corinthians 12 is way more expansive than the religious giftings that are lifted up in these verses. Hear again verses 4-7, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." There are a variety of gifts and a variety of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. What are some of the gifts that come from your unique wiring—that holy combination of personality, interests and joys, gifts and life experience? What are some of the qualities that make you you?

As you consider the joys and sorrows of your life, how have they shaped how you are with and for others. I show up differently as a pastor now than in the early years. Experiencing loss and grief, cancer and a good bit of change through marriage, adoption and parenting has shaped me. These experiences have shaped how I am able to be present with people. Having been through some things, I show up with more compassion and empathy than was possible when I was just imagining what it would be like to go through them.

You matter. YOU matter to God, to your neighbor, to the world. Your unique wiring matters. All parts of your life converge to make you you and God's Spirit activates who you are and what you bring into the world for the good of others. You are chosen and marked by God's love, pride of God's life (Mark 1:11, MSG). So be you and let the world be blessed by you.

In the words of Oscar Wilde, "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken."

-Reflection by Pastor Jeanne Hartfield

A Moment for Individual Reflection

Spend 1-3 minutes in silent reflection on the writing or these questions:

- How have other people, using their unique gifts, made a difference in your life?
- What unique gifts has God given the Incarnation faith community? How does Incarnation matter as a community for others?
- How is the "package of gifts" that you have unique? How do your gifts work together with synergy?

Think About...

There are many more questions here than your group can answer, so select the questions that seem to fit your unique group and spark your imagination or curiosity:

1. Tell about one of your gifts that you especially value, enjoy or find fulfilling.
2. How has your understanding of your gifts changed over time? What is a gift you may not have recognized earlier, but you see now?

3. What role have others played in helping you to see your gifts? What has someone else told you about your gifts that has surprised you?
4. What is the difference between thinking about "something you are naturally good at" and thinking about "a gift that God gave you"? How does that distinction change your perspective?
5. How can using your spiritual gifts help someone else recognize and use their own spiritual gifts?

Community of Gifts

1. We have gifts both individually and together as a community. What gifts do you see in the Incarnation community? What gifts have you seen in other faith communities that provide us with insights on our gifts and how to use those gifts?
2. How do your unique gifts contribute to the gifts of the Incarnation community or another community you belong to? What gifts do you still have to give?
3. What might be some hidden gifts at Incarnation that could be further developed or brought forward?
4. In what ways are you mutually dependent on others and their gifts? In what ways do you see yourself independent of others or a lone ranger? How is the Incarnation community mutually dependent on one another? How is the community more independent?
5. We are made for community, yet we are all different – the same Spirit, different services and deeds, with the same God working through us all. How does that influence how you connect to other people in this faith community? How does that influence your faith practices and/or how you live your faith?

Being a Neighbor in 2020

1. In this time of pandemic, there have been many losses (people, activities, work...). How could your unique gifts make a difference for someone who is in a time of grief or loss?
2. What has changed about how you use your gifts in this time of a pandemic?
3. How could your gifts or our gifts as a community be used in this time of unrest or to seek justice for others?

Claiming the Gifts of the Saints

1. For some groups, this session takes place just after All Saint's Day. What gifts did you see in someone who you've lost? What unique perspective did they bring? How did they model that gift for you? How would you like to use your own version of that gift?
2. Has experiencing grief given you gifts that might make a difference for others?

Connecting Faith with Daily Life

In the week ahead...

- Write 5 of your gifts in a journal and list the ways that you have used that gift across time. Reflect on these questions:
 - How are your gifts connected to one another?
 - Which gifts were given as an individual and which contributed to the gifts of a community?
 - Is there a gift that is still waiting to be given? How could one of your gifts be used in this unprecedented time?
- Write a note or an email to someone telling them about a gift you see in them – and list specific examples of when or where you've seen this gift. If you can, think about how the gift might have made a difference for others.
- Ask a friend or family member to write down 3-5 gifts that they see in you (this is your excuse - you can tell them it's for an assignment!). Select one of your gifts and intentionally use the gift in a new way this week.

Closing Prayer

God of love, we thank you for this day and for the chance to be with you and with one another. Thank you for the fresh start we have every moment in and through you. You see the broken parts of our lives and our world and we pray for your healing presence.

We hold in your presence all that is on our hearts and all who need your healing and love in this day. Receive our prayers in the silence now.

(silence)

Remind us that we are created in your image with gifts to share for the sake of others. Energize our hearts and lives to bring our gifts forward so that together we are part of bringing about your dreams for the world.

Give us courage and wisdom for how to use our gifts and share your love with others. We pray for your spirit of peace to move in our lives and our world. We give you this day.

Together: Fill us with your love. Help us to be people who love. Amen.