

What Gifts Do You Bring?

[Matthew 16:13-20](#), [Romans 12:1-8](#)

Sometimes God speaks in a still small voice. Other times, God is able to get our full attention without a doubt. I would like to share with you what I can only describe as my personal road to Damascus experience, which more appropriately would be called my road to Mt. Tabor experience!

I had spent my entire career in healthcare, holding both laboratory and management positions over my 20+ year tenure. At one point I believed I had hit the pinnacle of my career. I was serving as Marketing Director for two hospitals in Northern Virginia. After being there for a little over a year, I received the devastating layoff notice right after Christmas. After doing some soul searching I began the process of starting over with my career. I kept praying for God to find some use for me as I was

hoping for some good to come out of all the turmoil created by my job loss. My family had to readjust our way of life, but we had struggled through some tough times before and we were determined to get through this as well. After about 2 years, I received the jolt of my life.

I was sitting in church in my comfortable spot in the choir loft when our pastor, Rev. Dennis Yocum, announced some fairly lofty goals for the church. Many of the goals involved increasing membership, weekly attendance, and doubling the size of the youth group. He then mentioned the goal that got my full attention. He noted that the church would raise up six persons to full time ministry. For the first time in my Christian walk I heard the audible voice of God speaking to me loud and clear – ‘You are one of the six.’ Nothing could have shocked me more – remember I said you should be careful what you pray

for! I had always worked with choirs as a singer and handbell ringer, and I enjoyed working as part of a team helping the youth group. At Pleasant Hill UMC, my husband and I started a small youth group and we felt God had led us then as well. I had never considered ministry, not even as a passing thought. My first reaction was, ‘God, you have GOT to be kidding me!’ I spent a full week arguing with God about why He would even remotely consider this as a possibility. My guess was that God has a sense of humor! I wanted to make sure God was straightened out on a few things because clearly He had missed the mark! I had every excuse in the book lined up:

I’m too old for this – but as it turns out about ½ of those called are 2nd career ministers.

I can’t afford a career change – God said, ‘Trust me.’ This was not what I wanted to hear!

I’m not a model Christian – I was specifically referring to the fact that my family and I did not pray before meals. God

said to ‘start today.’ I was reminded that God doesn’t call the perfect – God perfects the called.

I wasn’t raised Methodist – I was raised Pentecostal Holiness. As it turns out, my background religion was a spin-off of Methodism in the United States. Hence the response was ‘close enough.’ Having attended church 3 times/week, I definitely had a background in Bible study and church activities.

I’M AFRAID OF HEIGHTS! – He sent me here! There’s only 1 step up!

Picture the scene if you will. I’m driving to and from work arguing with God! That must have been rather entertaining to watch! By the end of the week I had basically come to terms with God’s calling and decided it was time to tell my husband. His only response was, ‘I’m not calling you Reverend.’

At this point we began this faith journey. I still had no intention of attending seminary as I had already graduated from college with two degrees. Then I heard about the student pastor program that sounded pretty good to me. No sooner did I

receive the acceptance letter from Wesley Theological Seminary than I received a call from our district superintendent about a church that needed a pastor. I came and met with the PPRC here which was a surprise to them as no one was expecting a potential pastor to be at that meeting. But God has a way of fitting things together even when we can't see how.

Even though I had no doubt at this point that God was calling me to ministry, I still doubted the timing. I had only preached two sermons before I came here (I think I'm up to nine now!) I'm still in the process of completing the steps to become a certified candidate and I haven't even **STARTED** seminary (that begins tomorrow by the way). No matter how hard I tried to focus on what I couldn't do, God focused on what I could bring to the pulpit. I have a healthcare background, where I have seen time and again the power of spiritual health and

healing. I have done public speaking as part of my career. I love working with children and youth. I love music. I have some personal experiences that may be of value – I have a strong religious background as my father served as a Pentecostal minister; I am in a long term marriage relationship in a day and age when that is not as common as it may have been in the past; and I am surviving my teenagers!

So here we are – this is my calling from God. What is God calling you to do? Our scripture lesson from Romans encourages each of us to use our different talents to serve God more fully. Some will say, ‘I have no talents,’ yet the Bible states that all have been given gifts and talents. Perhaps we could explore some areas to use those talents in this community.

➤ Do you like music? Do you sing? Do you play an instrument? Do you want to learn? If you haven’t been

told to ONLY sing in the shower, perhaps we could form some small groups for special music during worship services. Consider giving your gift back to God.

➤ Do you speak teen or tween? Can you discern those 1-syllable responses and help nurture a young person through some difficult times? Consider giving your gift back to God.

➤ Can you help create fun? Sometimes we get so hung up on all the tasks that need to get done we forget to have fun. Proverbs tells us that ‘Laughter works like a medicine.’ Maybe you can help plan some fun activities in order to reach out to our community and create times of fun-filled fellowship with our Christian friends. Consider giving your gift back to God.

➤ Can you teach? Not just children but adults as well. Are you interested in heading up a short or long-term adult

Bible study? What about Bible school? Consider giving your gift back to God.

➤ Are you handy? Many of you are. Not just with maintenance work for the church but handy in the kitchen – many of you can COOK! Perhaps you could use these skills of handiwork and cooking to serve on a mission trip either locally, as in the Midwest, or outside the country. Consider giving your gift back to God.

➤ Are you a good organizer? Maybe you aren't especially handy but you can see a need in the community and put that need together with those who could meet that need. For example, we have a group of seniors here that would possibly enjoy different outings or activities. Perhaps you could help organize these events by putting together the transportation options, discount tickets, etc. Consider giving your gift back to God.

- Do you have good computer skills? We are looking to enhance our communications with our local community through newsletters, the church website, brochures, etc. We may also be looking to enhance our worship services through the use of audio or video clips. (Some of us still think a curser is a foul-mouthed kid!) If computer savvy is your talent, consider giving your gift back to God.
- How about fundraising? Maybe you can help us find creative ways to raise funds for the church in order to enhance our ministries here. Consider giving your gift back to God.

One thing is very clear – God is calling each of us to use our talents to better serve God and our neighbor. The fact that we are together is most definitely a sign of God’s calling. We don’t need to feel inferior because we each have gifts to share and

ministries where we can serve God and neighbor - to share the love of God with our community. We are all called to this. My family and I have been called to this church in this area for a reason. You have been called here for a reason. Many of you have been associated with this church for years, yet through all the struggles you continue to worship here because there is a purpose for all of us as a congregation. Through our individual difficulties we have become refined by fire and we are ready to serve.

If you have ever visited Seattle Washington, you have probably seen or heard of the Pike Place Fish Market. This was a standard market that sold fresh fish. The fishmongers would get up before dawn to receive the fresh catch and prep it for sale. At one point, this particular market was in danger of bankruptcy. The manager invited ideas from his workers. One suggested

they set a goal to become world famous. Imagine, a fish market – not very glamorous or classy, becoming world famous. For what? What did they become famous for? It was their customer service and the idea of having fun at work. You've probably seen these guys throwing fish over the counter and having customers behind the counter trying to catch fish! People line up all day long to see these guys having fun at work! Imagine that!

I'm not suggesting we start throwing fish at our next covered dish supper! I am suggesting that we share the joy of God's love! This is great stuff! We are truly blessed! Let us continue to look to God for guidance as we take our gifts and talents and give them back to God through our service to this community. Amen.