

God's Holy & Royal Priests | 5 Fundamental Truths | Discovering Your Individual Gifts

THE SOWER

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Gifts & Callings



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Opening Letter

Our Gifts and Callings

by John W. Schoenheit

This month's issue of *The Sower* focuses on people's God-given gifts and callings. When Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of God, he showered gifts down on his Church (Eph. 4:8). He gave each Christian a "gift ministry," and has given the great diversity found in the Body of Christ. It is wonderful to see numerous ways people can serve in the Church.

The production of *The Sower* magazine provides me with a great example of how many people with different gifts have to work together to bless the Body of Christ. Those of us who write the articles are usually quite visible, mostly because our names are on the articles. But our work would come to a grinding stop if it were not for the people who work behind the scenes (thank God for the credit page!). For example, Jeff Blackburn is our office manager and a genuinely gifted administrator. He seems to effortlessly think in terms of materials, manpower, and schedules. His oversight keeps our materials flowing out of the office. Then there are also Janet Speakes and Dustin Williams, who work with our finances and use their giftings to properly steward all the ministry funds, in addition to editing and their spiritual insight. Ryan Maher wears many hats, but it has become very apparent to those of us here at Spirit & Truth Fellowship that he has a God-given gift in the area of art. *The Sower* you are now reading was in large part put together by him. He designs the covers, picks and edits the pictures, and makes the decisions on the layout. I do not mean to slight the staff whom I have not mentioned, but there is just not enough room to write about how the Lord has gifted each of them and how they use their giftings to help the overall function of the ministry. We constantly rely on the Lord's working in each of us, and each of us utilizes our giftings to make our ministry what it is today.

Christianity is meant to operate by the "TEAM" concept: *Together Everyone Achieves More*. God originated the TEAM concept, but He used an analogy that we can all intimately relate to: the body. We can each relate to the body concept because we each have a body, and we know only too well that 1 Corinthians is speaking the truth when it says that each part needs all the other parts. No part can say to another part, "I don't need you!" (1 Cor. 12:21). On the other hand, no part of the Body should say, "I am not needed!" Yet sometimes Christians act as if God does not need them, because they do not use their giftings for His work. We pray that this issue of *The Sower* will help you to better recognize the giftings you have in the Body of Christ so that you will fully utilize them in serving God and blessing His people.

Thankful for the gifts He gives,

John Schoenheit

5 Fundamental Truths About Our Gifts and Callings

by Dan Gallagher

One of the most influential periods of my life was the eight years I spent in the Roman Catholic Parochial school system. Many people who attended those schools can testify that forty or fifty years ago education at the feet of the priests and nuns was often a no-nonsense affair. For the most part, the students took school seriously, mostly because the nuns knew how to instill discipline like a drill sergeant with a platoon of new recruits. As I reflect back on the many lessons I learned in those formative years, I realize that one of the most beneficial was the sense that everyone has a gift and calling or, as they said, a vocation from God. It was explained that we are all unique and that it is your responsibility to discover your vocation. Today I see more clearly, and in a much larger way, some foundational truths concerning our personal gifts and callings.

Properly understanding these truths concerning our gifts and callings provides us with a proper framework in which to view our personal giftings. It also encourages us to discover our gifts, helps us to honor and respect the gifts of others, and motivates us to use our gifts for the benefit of others. These truths should greatly assist us in keeping our place in the Body of Christ in proper perspective. The elementary truths we will review are:

1. There is only one Body.
2. The one Body is composed of many members.
3. Each member is unique.
4. Each member is to work to benefit one another.
5. Christ is the Head of the one Body.

There is only one Body

Everyone should seek to discover their personal giftings and the role God has called them to play. However, all talk about our personal giftings and roles must be viewed in light of the understanding that there is one Body, the Body of Christ.¹

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into **one body**—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Romans 12:4 and 5

(4) Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

(5) **so in Christ we who are many form one body**, and each member belongs to all the others.

We must never lose sight that there is only one Body. This means that every person who is born again of God's spirit² is part of this one Body, no matter what church, denomination, or group they belong to. This is the proper way to think of others who think differently about the scriptures, because it gives us the greatest opportunity to work for unity.

The one Body is composed of many members

Many Christians recognize that the one Body is composed of many members, yet from a practical standpoint this truth seems to get lost because of how people behave. One way this manifests itself is in the way we negatively judge others who differ from us, merely on the basis that they see and do things differently from us. The truth that there are many members in the Body of Christ obligates us to recognize that we are not

alone. By acknowledging the many other members in the Body of Christ we give ourselves the opportunity to see a variety of perspectives besides our own.

While unity is expressed through the concept of there being one Body, its diversity is celebrated through the understanding that the Body has many members.

Ephesians 4:25

...for **we are all members** of one body.

Romans 12:4 and 5

(4) Just as each of us has one body with **many members**,

(5)...so in Christ we who are many form one body...

1 Corinthians 12:27

Now you are the body of Christ, and **each one of you is a part of it.**³

Each member is unique

With this third truth, that each member is unique, I give permission to myself and others to be different in our gifts and callings. In the New Testament, there are three sections of God's Word (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4) that list various gifts. These lists are by no means exhaustive because we know that there are also those who are gifted as intercessors, dancers, worshippers, artisans, etc. In the Old Testament God even tells us how He spiritually gifted Bezalel as a craftsman with all types of artistry in metals, stone, and wood.⁴ There is no reason to believe He does not do the same today in the Body of Christ.

The diversity of all the members allows for specialization in our functions (doings).

Romans 12:4

Just as each of us has one body with many members, **and these members do not all have the same function** (doing)...

Not only would it be boring, it would also be extremely tedious if we all looked alike and did the same thing. The great variety among the various members allows for each of us to pursue our passions. Having a proper understanding of this truth provides us the greatest opportunity to respect and honor everyone's individual differences. The distinctiveness of each member creates a tapestry of color and hue. We are a kaleidoscope of grace that, through our various combinations, reveals God's great goodness.

Each member is to work to benefit the other members

Despite our individuality, we must work for the mutual benefit of all the members. God has given us all special gifts that we are to use to serve one another.

1 Peter 4:10

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to **serve others**, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

It is because we have a variety of gifts that we can minister (serve) His grace to others in a variety of ways. A teacher provides a benefit to the Body that is very different from an intercessor, server, or administrator. Although we serve differently, our service must be for the benefit of the others, because we belong to each other. One part of the Body cannot rightly deny another part.

Romans 12:5

so in Christ we who are many form one body, **and each member belongs to all the others.**

Within the Body of Christ we are to have a mutual concern for every other member in all we do. This truth is expressed wonderfully through the various “one anothering” sections of God’s Word, for instance:⁵

Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with one another...

Christ is the head of the one Body

The health of the human body is very much dependent upon all the various systems working harmoniously together. In the human body it is the responsibility of the head (brain) to coordinate the various physical, chemical, and neurological systems. In the same way, our connection to the Head, Jesus Christ, is what keeps us working in harmony.

Ephesians 5:23

For the husband is the head of the wife as **Christ is the head of the church, his body**, of which he is the Savior.

Colossians 1:18

And **he is the head of the body**, the church...

Serious problems develop in the Body of Christ whenever we lose connection with the Head. This happens whenever we turn to doing things our own way (idolatry and pride) versus following the lead of the Head.

Colossians 2:18 and 19

(18) Do not let anyone who delights in **false humility** [pride] and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind **puffs him up with idle notions**.

(19) **He has lost connection with the Head**, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

When it comes to our gifts and callings, pride cannot be given any room. This truth is made clear when God provides a fictional dialogue between body parts in 1 Corinthians 12:14-22. This section begins with the foot complaining that because it is not the hand it is not a part of the body. This is the “I’m not good enough syndrome.” This is really rooted in a devalued estimation of self, which is one way pride shows up. The other extreme is depicted when the eye says to the hand, “I don’t need you!” (1 Cor. 12:21). This is the “I’m better than you syndrome,” which is also prideful. The fact is that in the Body of Christ no one is to look up to, or down upon, another. We are all to look to Christ as the Head and work to serve one another with the gifts we have received.

In an orchestra there are hundreds of individual instruments, each of which sound, look, and operate differently. Their ability to make beautiful music depends upon the musicians taking their lead from the conductor. In the same manner, in the Body of Christ our diversity can demonstrate the beauty of God’s grace when we all serve one another with our various gifts of grace, taking our lead from Christ, the Head.

Notes:

1. Ephesians 4:4. See also Ephesians 3:6: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”
2. It is our belief that a person receives the new birth when he confesses Jesus is Lord and believes that God has raised him from the dead in accordance with Romans 10:9 and 10.
3. Additional verses that express this truth are: 1 Corinthians 12:12, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.”; 1 Corinthians 12:14, “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.”

4. Exodus 31:2-5: “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”
5. For further study on “One Anothering” visit TruthOrTradition.com/another

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The Gift of Salvation

Giving gifts is an important part of the holiday season. We spend a lot of time and energy thinking about what to buy and then shopping for the gifts, and that is appropriate. When we are giving to someone we love, and if we have the resources, we spend enough money that the quality of the gift shows that we really care.

It is always a wonderful thing if we can get a gift for someone that they would never get for themselves. Maybe they would never think of it, maybe they would feel guilty spending their money that way, or maybe they just cannot afford to buy it for themselves. But when we freely give such a gift, all the person must do to have it is to receive it from us, which takes little effort on his part.

If you are not a Christian, God is reaching out to you with the gift of a lifetime, His gift of salvation. It is one gift you cannot get for yourself; it has to be given to you. God gave each of us the gift of life when we were born, but, because of Adam's sin, it is a temporary gift. Like candy or live flowers, it is eventually gone. Yet in our temporal life we do get a taste of how good life is, and how wonderful it would be if we could live with our friends and family in a place where there was no sickness, no aging, no hunger, no war, no crime, and no injustice. That is the gift God longs to give to everyone: everlasting life with Him in Paradise.

You will likely get some gifts this holiday season, and will simply reach out and take them. If you are not a Christian, why not also take for yourself the gift of everlasting life that God is making available through His Son Jesus Christ? God bought it for you, and you can tell He loves you immensely because He was willing to give His only begotten Son to get it for you. To receive the gift of salvation and everlasting life, all you have to do is confess that Jesus is your Lord (just say it) and believe that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). A million years from now you will still be saying it was the best gift you ever received!

**For further study, please read our booklet
Becoming a Christian: Why? What? How? and watch a short video at
TruthOrTradition.com/salvation**

The Contender

God's Holy and Royal Priests

by John W. Schoenheit

When God started the Christian Church, He did something different from what He had done since Adam and Eve left Eden: He gave every single believer a job to do in the Church and He spiritually equipped each one with the ability to do that job. This was a monumental break from the way He set up worship in the Old Testament.

Worship Before the Law

The origins of how people began to properly worship God after Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden are not specifically known. Nevertheless, there are pieces of the puzzle that we can fit together by carefully reading and properly translating the Bible. For example, we can piece together that God started blood sacrifice and substitution for sin when He made garments of animal skin for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21).¹ We can also see from the worship offered by Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, and others before the Law, that God had rules concerning the proper way, and times, to worship Him.²

Before the Law, the head of the family acted as the priest for the family and the patriarch of the family clan acted as the priest for the family clan. Thus, Job purified his children, and made sacrifices for them (Job 1:5), and Noah (Gen. 8:20), Abraham (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:18), Isaac (Gen. 26:25), and Jacob (Gen. 31:54; 35:1-4), led their families in sacrifice to God.³ That the patriarch sacrificed animals for himself and his family is often not as clear in English as it is in the Hebrew text. For example, while most English versions say that Abraham “built an altar” to Yahweh (Gen. 13:18), we usually get a mental picture of a simple pile of stones upon which Abraham then worshipped. Why we have this nice looking mental picture is understandable, since many Churches have “altars” and they are usually very nice looking structures. However, the Hebrew word translated “altar” is *mizbeach* (#4196; miz-bā-äck), and it means “place of slaughter.”⁴ In his brilliant translation of Genesis through Deuteronomy, Everett Fox never uses “altar,” but instead uses the phrase “slaughter site.”⁵ The “altars” of biblical times were smelly, blood-covered, fly-infested places that no one wanted close to his tent, and which graphically reminded any worshipper of the messy and deadly-serious consequences of sin.

While worship in sparsely populated areas was led by the patriarch of the family clan, worship in the cities was taking a different turn, one that more closely resembled what God would later establish under the Mosaic Law—a temple building and priests to lead the worship. The “priest and temple” system of worship resulted in the people having less and less to do in a worship service, and even that they were cut off from direct access to God (or the gods). Thus, for example, by the time Jacob and his family got to Egypt, which was long before God gave Moses the revelation for the Tent of Meeting (called the “Tabernacle” in the KJV), there was a very specialized and exclusive class of priests who ministered to the various Egyptian gods. The “regular Egyptian” was relegated to being little more than a spectator who brought donations, or who participated in a limited way in carefully regulated services.

Worship Under the Mosaic Law

After the Exodus (about 1,450 B.C.), God gave Moses the revelation about the Tent of Meeting, which included regulations about priests leading the worship services. God commanded that only Aaron and his descendents were to be priests and serve Him directly. Presiding over the priests, both in the Mosaic Law and in most pagan religions, was a High Priest, who could act as priest to the other priests and to the nation as a whole. The Law also made provisions for the men from the tribe of Levi (the “Levites”) to help the priests by doing lesser acts of service in the Tent of Meeting.⁶

Thus, under the Law, the heads of families were no longer allowed to act as priests to God. In fact, the Old Testament was crystal clear about what would happen if a “regular” person, a non-priest or Levite, even went close to the Tent of Meeting—he would be put to death.

Numbers 1:50, 51 and 53 (Abridged)

(50a)...appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony—over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it...they are to take care of it and encamp around it.

(51b) Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death.

(53b) The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony.”

Even the Levites, however, could not do the specific jobs that God gave to the priests, such as offer the sacrifices. Even for Levites, the penalty for trying to do the work of a priest was death.

Numbers 3:10

Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be put to death.

God made it very clear in the Law of Moses that there were only certain people who were qualified to serve him as priests and workers. The “regular Israelite” could bring an offering and watch certain parts of the worship service (be a spectator), but they could not directly participate in the work of the Tent of Meeting or Temple. Thus in both pagan religions, and in God’s revelation about how to properly worship Him, the separation between the priests and the worshippers was clearly defined.

Over time the two general categories of “priests” and “people” became so deeply entrenched in people’s minds that it seems very few people even questioned it. Of course the different religions varied somewhat as to who the priests were and what they did, and also in how the priests were chosen from among the people. The Mosaic Law, for example, dictated that a priest had to be a descendant of Aaron, the first High Priest (Exod. 29:44; 30:30; Num. 3:10).

The Christian Church—A Royal Priesthood

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, God started a brand new program for His worshippers. On Pentecost He created “the Body of Christ” as a spiritual entity and started the Christian Church, something that had never existed before. God made many significant changes in the way He related to people and in the way they related to Him. For one thing, He did away with the physical Temple, and the collective body of believers became the new Temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (New Living Testament)

Don’t you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?⁷

Not only was the collective Body of believers the Temple, God also made each believer a priest.

1 Peter 2:9

But you [plural: all of you] are a chosen people, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare [the verb is plural] the praises of him who called you [plural: all of you] out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Whereas 1 Peter 2:9 refers to us as a “royal priesthood,” 1 Peter 2:5 calls believers a “holy priesthood.” In the Christian Church, each believer is a priest, and Jesus Christ is our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15). We are all to pray for each other (Col. 4:3, 4; 1 Thess. 5:25; Heb. 13:18). We are to allow others to confess their sins to us (James 5:16). We are all to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, and continually offer the sacrifice of

praise to God along with other “spiritual sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). Furthermore, each believer is to do the work of the ministry, which is clearly stated in a proper translation of Ephesians 4:12 (we will deal with the translation question later in the article).

Ephesians 4:11 and 12

(11) It was he [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

(12) to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

It is clear in verse 12 above that “God’s people” are to do the works of service that God requires. The New Testament Epistles make it clear that Jesus Christ is the High Priest and the only mediator between God and mankind, and that each believer has direct and personal access to God and can serve Him directly. This doctrine is known as “the priesthood of the believer,” and was taught in the 1300’s by the Lollards, who were followers of John Wycliffe (c. 1320s to 1384). Wycliffe disagreed with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and was the first person to translate the Bible into English. The concept of “the priesthood of the believer” became an important part of the Protestant Reformation. It clearly separated the Protestants from the Roman Catholics, whose priests are separate from the people and are supposedly specially empowered by God to perform sacraments such as changing wine to the blood of Christ in the communion service.

The First Century Church and the Priesthood of the Believer

We do not have many records from the first century Church, so it is not clear how smoothly the Church transitioned from the “Priests and People” model of worship that had existed for many centuries, to the new “Every Believer is a Priest” model of worship. We can tell from Acts and the New Testament Epistles that apostles such as Paul and Peter were aggressively promoting that each believer was to serve God directly. The epistle of 1 Corinthians not only points out that each member of the Church has an important function, but that members who seem less important are actually very important (1 Cor. 12:18-26).

Many early Christians quickly adopted the new teaching and started to meet in small groups in houses instead of in the Temple (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12; 18:7; 20:20; 28:30; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). In fact, meeting in homes was one of the earmarks of the early Church. Although it is true that many of them met in homes because they could not build large churches, the “house church” model of the early Church produced strong, involved Christians, and effectively moved people away from the “spectator” model of worship.

In the small groups that met in houses, everyone could get involved and strengthen themselves by publically praying, manifesting holy spirit, and ministering to others. Sometimes everyone was so anxious to get involved that it produced a sort of confused pandemonium in the meeting, so Paul counseled the Corinthians to keep the meeting orderly.

1 Corinthians 14:26

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

While confusion in the meeting is not good, it is understandable. These early Christians knew too well what it meant to not be allowed to participate in the worship and be forced by Law to be a spectator. When God opened the door for them to participate in the meeting, they were a little over-excited about it. But it seems certain that God would rather have that than what He has in many fellowships today—believers who seem only too happy to relegate their priesthood back to the few leaders and remain silent even though there is time for everyone to pray, manifest the gift of holy spirit, or share something. Jesus Christ gave ministries, ways of serving, to each Christian. No one was left out. Each holy, royal, Christian “priest” can, and is supposed to, serve God and fellow believers by way of the individual gift he or she has been given.

1 Peter 4:10

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Each believer is to actively participate in the worship of God, and to help them to grow in the faith are men and women whom Christ gifted with what we of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International refer to as "equipping ministries." Our term "equipping ministries" comes from Ephesians 4:11 and 12, which says that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are to "equip" the believers (ESV; NAB; NET; NRSV; RSV. cp. NASB).

Old Habits Die Hard—Old Testament Ideas in the New Testament Church

There is a saying that "Old habits die hard," and that certainly was the case when it came to how Christianity was practiced by the fourth century. Sadly, the pattern of the strict separation between the priests and the people once again became the norm in the Christian Church. Apparently after the original apostles died, the people who were called by the Lord as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers stopped "equipping" the believers for works of service and took over the works of service themselves, leaving the people to once again be spectators of the service.

Over the decades the separation between the new "priests" and the people became more and more complete. Eventually it was taught that the "equipping" ministries did not last beyond the early church, and in another astounding move back to the pattern of Old Testament worship, women were no longer accepted as leaders in the Church (a sad state that still exists in many modern denominations, supported by tradition and mistranslation of the Scriptures).

Under the influence of tradition and the way people viewed Church organization, verses that should have helped Christians see the truth of the priesthood of every believer were mistranslated, adding support to "spectator Christianity." One of those verses is Ephesians 4:12. For example, the *King James Version*, after saying that Christ gave the five equipping ministries, says what they do in the Church:

Ephesians 4:12 (KJV)

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

The way the *King James Version* translates and punctuates this verse, it is the equipping ministries that do all the work in the Church. They "perfect" (or "equip") the believers, they do the work of the ministry, and they edify (or build up) the Body of Christ.

What is left for the "regular" believer to do? Not much, and that is how the average Christian has been treated through much of the history of the Christian Church. In fact, if we listen to how Christians speak about each other, it is apparent that Christianity has become a "spectator's sport." In many denominations a person is said to be a "good" Christian if he or she "attends church regularly."

Almost gone from Christian consciousness is the truth that a "good" Christian is one who is "equipped" to do the work of the ministry, and does it. As priests to God serving under the High Priest, Jesus Christ, "good" Christians pray boldly both privately and publically, share their faith with others, help unbelievers come to the faith, read their Bibles faithfully and believe it, obey the commands of Scripture, are aware of the spiritual war raging around them and fight against evil, and so on.

Structure Defines Function: How Church Buildings Defined Worship

Occasionally, "victory" results in defeat, and that certainly seems to be the case with church buildings. For the first three hundred years of the Church, Christians were often persecuted, and as a result, they usually met in

small groups in homes or places such as the catacombs in Rome. The blessing of a small meeting is that everyone has an opportunity to participate, and the result of constant participation was that Christians became strong in the faith.

When the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian in 312 A.D., the persecution of Christians stopped, and within twenty years of Constantine's conversion, church buildings were being erected for Christian worship.⁸ The buildings were usually large, and the size and shape of the buildings had a lot of influence on the worship service that was held inside. One immediate consequence of a large meeting was that it limited the participation of the people. If there were 500 worshippers, there was simply not enough time for everyone to pray, share what the Lord was doing in their lives, or manifest the gift of holy spirit. A large church building made it easy for a Christian to have a spectator mindset, and contributed to the spectator mentality in Christianity.

It was only about twenty-five years after Jesus was crucified that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth and said, "your meetings do more harm than good" (1 Cor. 11:17). In the specific case of the Corinthians, their meetings were harmful because of the division that was being fostered by the attitudes the believers had toward one another. However, it certainly seems that if Paul had gone to many church meetings in the centuries after 312 A.D., he would have written the same thing.

Modern "Spectator Christianity" Produces Weak Christians

There is ample evidence that modern "spectator Christianity" produces weak Christians. Even Christians who go to church regularly are rarely equipped to walk out on what the Bible says Christians are to do. For example, it is not uncommon to have someone who has gone to church for years to be afraid to pray out loud in a group because he or she has never done it before. Furthermore, very few of them really know their Bible, and because they never get to open their Bible and share from it, they cannot help others with "it is written," like so many great men and women of the Bible historically did. In fact, it is safe to say that most Christians cannot even recite the names of the books of the Bible if they were asked to do so. Also, very few church-goers are comfortable sharing their faith with unbelievers, even though they confess that being saved means the difference between eternal life and eternal death. "Spectator Christianity" also limits the personal contact that men and women with equipping ministries have with the people who come to church for worship. The equipping ministers have no real time to genuinely deal with the people as individuals, discover their needs, and help equip them to serve.

Thankfully, the house church movement is growing in Christianity, and even some very large churches are encouraging small groups, sometimes referred to as "cell groups," to meet during the week. These smaller groups allow for much more personal growth than is afforded in the large church meetings. As Christians, we need to take what God has done for us seriously and make the priesthood we have been given a part of our daily lives. We also need to demand that those believers who Christ has set in his Body to equip us, do their jobs and genuinely equip us for ministry. We need to allow our apostles to help organize the church and raise up local leaders; we need to listen to our prophets and give them the freedom they need to speak up for God; we need to ask our evangelists to help us reach the unsaved world with the Gospel⁹; we need to go to our pastors to get the encouragement and counsel that we need to stand day after day in the spiritual battle; and we need to demand that our teachers not just preach a social gospel, but tell us what the Bible means, so we ourselves can read, understand, and act on it.

Thank God for His amazing grace in allowing each of us direct access to Him and to serve Him as holy and royal priests! Let us not "despise our birthright" as Esau did and be willing to sell (or simply give away) our positions as priests (Gen. 25:29-34; Heb. 12:16). Rather, let us each live as powerful priests, doing the work of the ministry, "faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10).

Notes:

1. Before the Flood of Noah, people ate only plants (Gen. 1:29, 30), and did not start to eat meat until after the Flood (Gen. 9:3). So when God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins, it was not from skinning animals that were then eaten, but was from animal sacrifice. God had told Adam and Eve that “the day” (KJV) they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. However, instead of them dying, God allowed there to be a substitutionary sacrifice for their sin, and sacrificed animals that day. Thus, right from the start of mankind’s sin God started the pattern that even though the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), God would accept a substitutionary sacrifice in place of the sinner. Substitutionary sacrifice for sin was ultimately carried out by Jesus Christ, the “lamb of God” who died for the sins of the world.
2. It is obvious from reading the record of Cain and Abel that there were proper ways to sacrifice to God. What is not as clear, which Bullinger points out in his marginal note on Genesis 4:3 in *The Companion Bible*, is that the phrase most versions translate as “in the process of time” (KJV) or “in the course of time” (NIV, ESV, NASB), indicates that there was an acceptable time for sacrifice. *The NET Bible* (2004, 2005) more correctly translates the phrase: “at the designated time.” [Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*™, © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2006 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. www.bible.org All rights reserved.]
3. Although it is not explicitly stated that the family patriarch led the family in the worship of God, the heads of families, such as Abraham, are consistently said to build altars and worship, while there is no record of a woman or child doing so. The implication is not that the man worshipped on his own while his wife (or wives) and children did not worship, but rather that the head of the family led the worship of the family.
4. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA reprinted 2006), p. 258.
5. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible: Volume 1: The Five Books of Moses* (Schocken Books, New York, 1995).
6. Levi was the third son of Jacob (Gen. 29:34), and his descendants are referred to as “Levites.” Moses and Aaron were Levites, and God made Aaron and his descendants the priests of Israel. Thus, every priest was also a Levite, but not every Levite was a priest.
7. The NLT’s translation of “all of you together” is very good. The uses of “you” in the verse are plural, and refer to the believers as a collective body, not as individuals. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, *New Living Translation*, copyright 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.
8. For example, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was started in 327 A.D. while Constantine was emperor.
9. It is important for Christians to understand that evangelists do not do all the evangelizing in the Church, leaving us to hope and pray they do a good job. As with every other equipping ministry, they equip the believers for works of service—in their case, reaching the unsaved. Once equipped, the Christians then do the works of service. Do you feel equipped to evangelize? God gave us all the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and it is our job to reach the lost.

**Available online at
TruthOrTradition.com/priests**

Partner Profile

James & Renee Anderson

Our God is so wonderful & has blessed us exceedingly, abundantly above anything we could have ever asked for or even thought of!

We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places: three amazing, God-fearing children, and many wonderful and talented young people to fellowship with for years. We have also been blessed to be associated with a ministry that has committed, hard-working, and pure-hearted ministers & staff. The quality of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International's seminars, books, teachings of the month, and web sites has impacted the spiritual growth and faith of our fellowship for the past six years. They are a huge resource in communicating the truths of God's Word while addressing myriads of issues in people's lives.

Participating in their events (especially Teens & Twenties Camp and Live Out Loud) has connected us with more of the fullness of the Body of Christ, and has had a huge impact on the maturing of our group. We have developed lifelong friendships with fellow believers from across the continent and are blessed to be associated with people of such character, love, and purity of motive to serve in the Body of Christ. That is why we have chosen to participate and financially partner with them.

Sowing financially into this ministry will enable it to function and grow so that believers from around the world can be spiritually fed.

Galatians 6:6 and 7 (KJV)

(6) Let him that is taught in the word communicate (*koinoneo*: partner) unto him that teacheth in all good things.

(7) Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Scripture teaches us that we have a duty to sow financially into those who sow spiritually into us. We, and many in our fellowship, have chosen to financially sow into Spirit & Truth Fellowship International and have reaped many benefits over the years!

We look forward to many more years of mutual fellowship and are excited and can hardly wait to see the continued blessings this ministry will offer to the Body of Christ as we continue to sow.

James & Renee Anderson
Springdale, AR

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Fuel for the Fire

Twenties Conference 2009 Praise Report

by Natalie Plunkett

Hello Brother / Sister in Christ! This is my first contribution to *The Sower*, and I am very excited to be able to share my heart with you! I'd like to share with you about the amazing experience I had while attending the third annual Twenties Conference, but before I do that, I should probably tell you a little bit about myself.

I was raised in the truth of God's Word in a strong Christian home, and I honestly cannot remember a time when our family was not connected with this ministry. In 2001, when I was fourteen, I went to Teen Camp (now called Teens & Twenties Camp) for the first time in North Carolina. It was the most incredible experience of my life up to that point. I had never been around such loving, caring strangers, and after a couple of days they weren't strangers anymore! I made the truest of friends at that Camp. Though we came from all over the country, we were connected by our faith and by the gift of holy spirit in us. I saw many truly wondrous things that week, including a small miracle in the creek (my glasses *should* have been swept away by the current within seconds, but a quick group prayer and a brief search left me with my vision restored and my faith increased). Like I said, it was all incredible. Between 2001 and 2008, I attended six Teens & Twenties Camps, a few regional conferences, a family camp, and last year's Twenties Conference. I'm not telling you this in hopes of impressing you with how long I've been part of this ministry or because I feel my past involvement somehow makes me more holy, but rather to provide you some context for my most recent experience with Spirit & Truth Fellowship.

After last year's Twenties Conference, my husband Luke and I were fired up and ready to change our old routines in order to fully serve God. You would think after all my years of being loved up, encouraged, and exposed to the truth, I would be in a prime position to be a warrior for the Lord. I thought so, too. We made goals, discussed who we would talk to about our beliefs, and reassured each other that yes, this time we would definitely stay on the right track.

As it often happens when believers return to the harsh reality of the world, we quickly lost sight of our goals, in this case quite literally. I don't think our list of goals ever left the folders we received at the Twenties Conference (in fact, I know they didn't because I found them in there yesterday). We were like logs that had rolled away from the fire—our flames, our passion for the Lord, started to fade. We allowed ourselves to be worn down by the stresses and cares of the world, and even when I knew I should read my Bible or pray, I resisted. I didn't ignore God or Jesus completely, but I might as well have for all the good I was doing.

This year, I didn't think Luke and I would both be able to go to the Twenties Conference because we simply didn't have the money. With the economy the way it is, that's a fairly common and believable excuse. I wasn't too broken up about it at first, but as more and more people started talking to me about getting back into fellowship, I began to really *want* to go to the conference. By the grace of God and the intervention of some wonderful believers involved in putting together the event, Luke and I were able to attend the *entire* conference, not just the two or three hours we had previously considered. And it was such a huge blessing to be there! Never have I experienced such a profound sense of purpose or such a deep feeling of peace and relaxation. There was also a maturity about the group of twenties that suggested we were all moving toward that place in our spiritual walk where the Lord cultivates us into the direction of our place in the Body. Of course we weren't all in the exact same place; some have been working in their ministries for some time, others, like me, are still doing some questioning. Perhaps that is why the theme for the Twenties Conference—Fulfilling Your Ministry—seemed so fitting.

This past Labor Day weekend was the first time in my life that I really dared to investigate my gift. Up until now I have been ruled by the fear of failure, as if somehow my Lord Jesus isn't big enough to cover my failings and guide me in all my endeavors. Whenever I would think to myself, "Self, maybe you're meant to be a teacher of the Word," I immediately thought of all the other teachers I know who have more knowledge than me, are bolder than me, have more friends than me...anything to distract myself from the first step toward discovering my ministry. I am happy to report that with the help of Jesus and the prayers of many people at the conference and at home, I am facing my fears and taking that first step—I am writing this article!

Each camp and conference I have attended over the years has had its own distinct flavor and left me with some unique memories. I think I will always remember four things about this past weekend. The first is the incredible warmth and camaraderie of those men and women who led the conference. They blessed us in many ways, one of which was telling us about people like Paul, Esther, Samuel (or was that Eli, Jackson?) and David to remind us of the believers before us who trusted God and worked diligently to fulfill their ministries. They helped the flow of activities transition smoothly, they kept the campfires hot, and they helped make our time at Camp Vision seem twice as long as it really was.

Secondly, I will remember the beautiful fellowship. Reuniting with friends I hadn't seen in years, strengthening bonds with brothers and sisters I'd barely known, and dancing and singing praises in the main hall and around the fire, I really felt like I was experiencing a taste of the future Paradise.

The third thing I will remember is the Sunday morning teaching by John Schoenheit. I thought I had already had my mind blown by the enormity of my Savior's love, but John gave us all a clear (and very animated) picture of how Jesus intervenes for us and works to defend us from the Devil.¹ I cried every time I thought or spoke about it for two days afterward.

Finally, I will remember the message I received from my heavenly Father through one of my dear sisters: "Read the Bible daily." That seems like such a simple and obvious thing to say, a command that hardly needs to be reiterated for someone who has been raised in the Word of God. But it was exactly what I needed to hear.

If you're in your twenties and have not been to a Twenties Conference yet, please don't miss the next one! It's a time of worship and learning, of rejuvenation and peace. Whether you've been a Christian your whole life or have just recently accepted Christ (or not yet), we Twenties are all eager to meet you!

Note:

1. This teaching is available online as our October 2009 Teaching of the Month, "What is Going on in Heaven?" You can listen to our audio teachings for free at STFonline.org/podcast or TruthOrTradition.com/audio

TEENS AND 20s NEEDED!

**If you would like to write a short article for Fuel for the Fire, please contact us at
STF@STFonline.org**

Figures of Speech

Aposiopesis (Sudden Silence)

by John W. Schoenheit

The ability to communicate with words is one thing that sets mankind apart from all other creatures. God is the Author of language, and no one has ever used language as precisely as God does in the Bible, including His use of figures of speech, of which there are more than 200 varieties in Scripture.¹ When most people say, “a figure of speech,” they are speaking in general terms of something that is not true to fact. However, genuine “figures of speech” are legitimate grammatical and lexical forms that add emphasis and feeling to what we say and write. In the Bible, God uses figures of speech to emphasize things that He wants us to see as important. Many people who read the Bible never think to ask themselves, “How do we know what God wants emphasized in His Word?” God uses figures of speech to put emphasis where He wants emphasis, so it is important that we recognize and properly interpret the figures of speech in the Bible. Knowing the figures of speech God uses in the Bible helps us to understand the true meaning of Scripture and enables us to more fully enjoy its richness.

The figure of speech we are going to study in this issue of *The Sower* is Aposiopesis or “Sudden Silence.” Aposiopesis is a “figure of omission,” and occurs when the speaker suddenly breaks off what he or she was saying, omitting the conclusion. There can be many reasons a speaker may break off his sentence. He may not really know how to finish the sentence, or there may be too much emotion to finish, or words are felt inadequate to fully express the thoughts and feelings, or the speaker may feel that the listener can finish the thought on his own.

An example of Aposiopesis would occur in an old western movie if a “good guy” says to the villain, “Why you dirty dog, I oughtta...,” but then never completes his sentence. Perhaps he could not think of what he would do, or he was unwilling to express it, or perhaps he knew what he was thinking was not really appropriate. In any case, he just lets his thought drop and lets his potential action be filled in by the imagination of the listeners. Or imagine a woman trying to express her feelings about receiving a surprise engagement ring. She says, “It’s beautiful! Oh my goodness, it’s...” In the emotion and intensity of the moment, words fail to accurately communicate feelings, so she just stops speaking and the listener is left to relate to her feelings, and not to any words that she might have spoken.

There is a good example of Aposiopesis in the movie *Braveheart*. The hero, William Wallace, has been captured and faces torture and death. The Princess Isabelle has come to visit him for the last time. She says, “If you can only live...” She then breaks into sobs, knowing he will not live. Overcome by the thought of his death, she cannot complete her sentence. This leaves the audience to imagine all that could have been if Wallace were allowed to live.

Another example occurs in the movie *The Matrix*. Two pivotal characters, Trinity and Cypher discuss if the man Neo is the one who can save humankind from the machines. Their leader, Morpheus, believes he is “the one.” Then Cypher poses the question, “Yeah, but if he’s wrong...” He stops midway through his sentence because the consequence of Morpheus being wrong is too awful to contemplate. Cypher’s Aposiopesis also leaves the audience, like the characters in the movie, in a suspenseful foreboding, left to ponder what the consequences may be if Neo is not “the one.”

The figure of speech Aposiopesis places emphasis on the emotion, intensity, and uncertainty in the moment, and gets the reader in touch with the conflicts in life that each of us know only too well. The people who are portrayed in the Bible are not just imaginary characters, but real people who wrestled with the difficulties of life, so it is not unusual that they, like us, have instances of Aposiopesis in their speech.

Aposiopesis has some similarities to other figures of omission, one of which is ellipsis. However, an ellipsis is an omission that can generally be filled in fairly accurately from the context and places the emphasis of the sentence on what is present while deemphasizing the part that is omitted. In contrast, an Aposiopesis usually cannot be accurately filled in from the context and emphasizes the emotion and humanness of the moment.

The Bible has some excellent examples of Aposiopesis.²

Genesis 3:22 (ESV)

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”

God never finished His sentence, and thus the first example of Aposiopesis in the Bible is spoken by God, revealing that He, too, feels emotion, something that becomes abundantly clear as we continue to read through the Bible. God never finished His sentence about what would happen if Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Life in their fallen state because the thought of His people having everlasting life but in a state of sin and sickness was too horrible to express.

Exodus 32:32 (KJV)

Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Moses came down Mount Sinai to find Israel worshipping the golden calf and involved in sexual immorality. He dealt with the sin and rebellion in the camp, but still needed God’s forgiveness for the nation. He asked “if” God would forgive their sin, but how could he complete his sentence? It was not as if he could say something like, “then we will serve you,” because there was no guarantee of that, as history clearly shows. In the emotion and uncertainty of the moment he left his sentence unfinished, shortly moving on to the opposite side, saying “and if not.”

Psalm 6:3 (ESV)

My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long?

The psalmist David, like us, was sometimes greatly troubled in his life, and looked to Yahweh for help and deliverance. If David had asked a purely intellectual and philosophical question, it would have been complete and well formulated, such as, “How long before you send the Messiah and rescue us from these evil people and terrible situations?” However, in the emotion of the moment he, like many of us, could only say, “How long...”

Psalm 27:13 (KJV)

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Without the italics supplied by the *King James Version*, the figure Aposiopesis would be clear. How many times have each of us felt, “Unless I had believed to see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living...!” (Darby). What is the value of the Hope? It gives us strength to endure, courage to face difficult situations, joy in otherwise dark times, and much more. No wonder David cannot finish his sentence. It would take a book to describe all the good the Hope brings to our lives. The translators of the KJV, and many other versions also, took the verse as an ellipsis, not an Aposiopesis, so they filled in the “missing words.” However, that takes away much of the emotion in the text and also greatly limits the otherwise expansive possibilities that could have been in David’s mind. Also, readers need to be aware that there is a textual variant that is given credence in some versions, but the Hebrew text is not unclear as it stands.

Daniel 3:15 (NASB)

“Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar’s idol. In a rage Nebuchadnezzar had them brought in and threatened them. In his anger he let the end of his sentence fall off. Most versions, such as the NASB above, add “very well” or something similar to complete Nebuchadnezzar’s thought. But to Nebuchadnezzar, there was no point in saying what he would do if the three Jews decided to obey him, and he probably had not given it any thought anyway. Instead of trying to think of something in the moment, he hurried on to say that they would be burned to death if they did not obey.

Hosea 9:14 (NIV)

Give them, O LORD— what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.

Hosea prophesied in some very difficult times. He was the one God chose to bring the message that Israel had become so rebellious and disobedient that God would “put an end to the kingdom of Israel” (Hosea 1:4). Hosea himself was angry with the sinful people of Israel and spoke against them. In his anger and frustration he spoke to God and said, “Give them, O Yahweh...” but then he could not think of what evil they deserved, so he broke off his sentence and took time to think about it before he spoke again.

Acts 23:9 (Darby)

And there was a great clamour, and the scribes of the Pharisees’ part rising up contended, saying, We find nothing evil in this man; and if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel...

Paul was on trial, and although the Pharisees and Sadducees in the crowd were angry with him, they had a long standing and bitter feud with each other as well. When Paul announced he was a Pharisee and was on trial concerning the hope and the resurrection, decades-old tensions in the crowd erupted and the Pharisees spoke up on his behalf. However, they never finished their sentence. Perhaps that was because the many Pharisee voices agreed on the first part but not on any conclusion, perhaps because they could not bring themselves to say that Paul was correct in his teaching or should be released, or perhaps even because their Aposiopesis was not actually intended but was “forced” because their speech was cut off by the shouting of the opposition. Interestingly, in the centuries after the New Testament was written, some scribes became uncomfortable with the sudden ending of the sentence and added the words completing the sentence that are now in some Greek manuscripts and have made their way into the *King James Version* as, “let us not fight against God.”

Notes:

1. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1968).
2. In this article we quote from different versions of the Bible because different versions represent the original text differently, some much more clearly than others.

**For many more figures of speech visit
TruthOrTradition.com/figures**

The Vine

Discovering Your Individual Gifts of God's Grace

by Michael L. Patten

Regarding a person's gifts, I have been asked the question, "How do I find out what my ministry is?" In some ways that is like putting the cart before the horse. The gifts will define the ministry. In a similar way a horse will not be very effective in fulfilling its function of moving a cart along if it tries to push the cart from behind. However, if the horse is properly hooked up in front of the cart, it can pull a great load and fulfill its calling, so to speak. This analogy is helpful when it comes to the discussion of gifts, ministries, and the works of God.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

- (4) There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- (5) There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.
- (6) There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

The individual gift in one's life is like the horse that is part of God's creation. The horse supplies the power much like the gifts, also part of God's creative work, can be an avenue whereby the power of God is released in various ways. This correlation continues by understanding that a cart is man-made, as are ministries (ways of serving). While the gifts in a person's life remain constant, his way of serving will change over time due to a variety of changes in his life. Likewise, the same horse can pull different carts according to the job to be done. In the case of gifts and ministry, as well as a horse and cart, the purpose is to get work done. The horse/cart carries a load from one place to another, while gifts/ministries are intended to carry out the works of God among His people.

As a person gets clear about the gifts he has received, the type of ministry through which these gifts will be put to work becomes more focused. Discovering the individual gifts of God's grace in your life is a process, and generally will happen in three ways. The first avenue to consider is your personal assessment of your experiences, passions, and talents. None of these should be discounted as necessarily coincidental. God watches over His children from before birth.

Psalms 139:15 and 16

- (15) My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
- (16) your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

In the wisdom of God, all we are and will do are redeemable for His purposes. Being self-aware is very important in this discovery process. Personality inventories can be helpful in distinguishing for ourselves how we relate to life. Generally, individuals fall into two major categories, which are relational or conceptual. A good place to start is by taking into account how you relate to the world around you because God has gifted you in a way that is consistent with your way of relating to life.

Experience is also a great teacher, and even what we consider negative experiences can be very instructive. A difficult experience I had some years ago helped to clarify for me the fact that I am more conceptual than relational. I volunteered to lead a discussion group made up of members in our church. Each week I struggled

with these meetings, becoming more and more discouraged as time went on. The discussion, as well as the overall experience of the small group, suffered as well. Eventually, I asked my wife, Mary, to lead the discussions. We both realized how gifted she was at leading small group discussions and how much better the group dynamic became.

Twenty-twenty hindsight is a great teacher, and many times our individual gifts of God's grace become apparent in retrospect. As you look back and consider times you have served others, it is helpful to take into account how the experience affected you emotionally. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, we are told to be **zealous** for spiritual matters, of which the individual gifts in one's life are a part. Ask yourself, "Was I energized or drained emotionally by the experience?" Even though physically exhausting, serving in a way that allows your gifts to be used can be very energizing emotionally.

Any honorable service rendered in love to others is commendable and will be rewarded by the Lord (Matt. 10:42). However, ministry (service) produced out of the individual gifts of God's grace in your life has the potential of the power of God energizing it so as to accomplish the purposes of God in significant ways.

Another avenue a person's individual gifts can become apparent is through the input of others. Brothers and sisters in Christ can provide confirmation and/or prophecy to help identify these gifts. The local fellowship is an indispensable resource whereby individuals can discover their gifts of God's grace as well as see others' various gifts in operation. The local fellowship is a safe environment to try different ways of serving. Personal mentorship and team ministry help us sort out over time how we are equipped to serve most effectually.

It is a good exercise to be aware of what stirs us in a way that might not move others. Many times I like to put it this way: "When you look at the Body of Christ or culture in general, what screams at you that needs to be done?" Those who lack maturity tend to tell others that they should do something to meet this "obvious" need. However, many times it is not so obvious to others because they do not have the gifts with which to minister most effectively in that area of need.

Finally, God can reveal to each of us either directly or by way of Scripture, the gifts He has given us. God has given individual gifts of grace to His children so that the Body of Christ can be served and His purposes advanced.

Philippians 2:13

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

**To read more about the Fellowship Network visit
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The ABC's of God

God's Variety Show

by Cara Hanson

Genesis 1:21-23

(21) So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

(22) God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas..."

(23) And there was evening, and there was morning-the fifth day.

On the fifth day, God created the Wobbegong.¹ Fast forward several thousand years, and most humans have never even heard of this strange species of shark. While I was making dinner one night, my five-year-old voracious reader, Grace, entered the kitchen and announced that Wobbegongs do *not* eat humans. I breathed a sigh of relief. Even though I had *no clue* what animal she was talking about, I was thankful not to be featured as the main entrée on its dinner menu. I noted with irony that I had spent the morning teaching her kindergarten math, and now she was teaching *me* high school biology. She held up her marine life book and showed me a picture of this bizarre creature that looked like a rug from the 1970s. "Isn't it funny that God made Wobbegongs, Mommy?" she giggled.

Up until this point, I had only thought about one shark: the Great White - Spielberg's "Jaws," who still manages to torment me when I am swimming in open waters and everything from a twig to a candy wrapper resembles a fin. In fact, there are more than 440 species of sharks - and that only includes the ones we have discovered. There are 11 species of Wobbegongs alone. *WHY?* For one thing, it sure looks impressive on God's resumé.

When we recognize the variety of God's creatures, we acknowledge the breadth of His wisdom and capability. It is safe to say that no human being has the knowledge, wisdom, or ability to make millions of animal species. As far as I know, there is no *Creation for Dummies*, *Idiot's Guide to Creation*, or *any* book to even give us a clue where to start. The magnitude of God's creation humbles us under His mighty hand.

Psalm 66:3-5

(3) Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.

(4) All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name."
Selah

(5) Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!

In verse 5 of Psalm 66, God is clearly sending us an invitation to view His remarkable works. Every day, people flock to museums and spend money to view the world's greatest works of "art," but as Christians we shouldn't ignore the greatest gallery of all. If we open our eyes, we have front row seats to the wonders of His creation. God has organized the most amazing variety show of all time! We have free admission; He's just waiting for people to show up and be blessed. Kids are usually the first in line, so we should follow their lead. Their level of awe and excitement is what God wants from all of us!

As we get older, we tend to numb ourselves to the awesome scope and variety of God's creation. When I think of a "shark," I picture one kind (Jaws). Our kids pour through books in search of unique and remarkable animals. To them, discovering an amazing species is like opening a treasure chest. They are giving God the

praise and *glory* He deserves for his tremendous power and vision! After all, God's creations give Him praise and glory by their very existence. They "sing" to us of His power, ability, and love.

Psalm 148:7

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths...

God's desire is for us to stand in awe of His mighty works and praise Him! He has given us incredible comfort and peace knowing that a God who can make millions of species and provide for their needs can certainly take care of our daily concerns. He has released us from our everyday burdens so that we can love freely, rejoice fully, and laugh heartily.

It took Thomas Edison several hundred tries before he perfected the light bulb. God doesn't make mistakes, so we know that it didn't take him 440 tries to make the Great White, along the way cranking out the Wobbegong, the Hammerhead, and other whoppers. From a child's perspective, God was having fun during creation, the same way children would if given a lump of clay and freedom of creativity. In the Bible, God even analogizes Himself to a potter molding clay (Jer. 18:6).

I believe that God does indeed have a sense of humor, and that He probably enjoyed teaching "art class" when creating sharks. When our kids play with clay, they start with traditional creations, such as a snake or worm. After an hour of fun, all of the colors are mixed together, and the table is covered with five-eyed globe fish and other wacky creatures. I like to imagine that God started with the Great White, and after experimenting with all of the different color and shape possibilities, He was getting downright giddy toward the end. Truly our Father is a God of JOY.

The number of fish species alone is estimated to be over 20,000. I'm basically familiar with the *goldfish*, both the pet and the cracker variety. Unfortunately, most of the fish we see come to us battered on a plate with fries. When I snorkeled for the first time in the tropical waters of the Caribbean, I saw fish in a rainbow of colors that I didn't even know existed. Yet they have been there all along. God made these creatures knowing that it would be thousands of years before anyone would even see them. Imagine Him rejoicing as thousands of years later someone *finally* discovers one of His amazing creations. I picture Him reminiscing with an angel: "Hey, Bob! Remember when I made that one? What a doozy! Someone finally found it!" His joy would be no less than when we give our children a gift and watch their eyes light up with excitement.

Jesus loved to be around little children. After hanging around all day with those who were "dull of understanding" or even those who wanted to throw him off a cliff, who could blame him? As a homeschooling mom of three young children, I can assure you that their joy is infectious. Yes, some days also bring whining, complaining, and crying - but then I tell myself to grow up and be more like my children.

Recently my two little boys begged me incessantly to read a "zoo" book to them. I must confess that sometimes I dread reading this particular book, since it is so long. Then it occurred to me that the boys are excited about animals, and maybe I should learn yet another lesson from them. After all, animals are a part of God's variety show. As my attitude changed, I noticed that the dread was replaced by *joy* as I showed my children the various colors, shapes, and sizes of animals that God could create. We laughed at the peculiar creatures and ran around the room praising God for His greatness. As I read the animal descriptions to our little children, I was reminded of one of my favorite verses:

Romans 11:33a

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!...

The children responded excitedly, "Isn't God *amazing*?" I vowed never again to let my eyes glaze over during a field trip to the zoo.

When we stand in awe of God's creation, we can give Him the praise He so richly deserves. He has humbled us with His mighty show, and we should take full advantage of our lifetime- (not season-) passes. Let us joyfully proclaim:

Psalm 145:3

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

Note:

1. A Christian scientist recognizes that on the 5th day God created the shark genus with enough inherent genetic material that over time it speciated into the thousands of shark varieties that we have today.

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Body Builders

by Dave & Cara Hanson

Ephesians 1:22 and 23

(22) And God placed all things under his (Jesus Christ's) feet and appointed him to be **head** over everything for the **church**,

(23) which is his **body**, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

When God deliberated about the perfect metaphor for Jesus' relationship with his followers, He had unlimited options at His disposal. He wisely rejected "captain/deckhands," "plantation owner/slaves," and "dictator/refugees." Since God is both loving and wise, He chose to call Christians collectively the "Body of Christ," with Jesus Christ as the "Head." God selected this distinctive metaphor, knowing that each of us has a body and can therefore relate to this image (for those of you *without* a body, well...that's just creepy). The body metaphor communicates clearly: 1) how important each of us is to the Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) how important each of us should be to one another.

The metaphor of Christians being members of the Body of Christ demonstrates just how vital each of us is to the Lord himself. Jesus' heart toward his Body is vividly expressed in his first dealing with Saul (also called Paul), on the way to Damascus:

Acts 9:4 and 5

(4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, **why do you persecute me?"**

(5) Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am **Jesus, whom you are persecuting**," he replied.

Jesus didn't say, "You are persecuting *my disciples*," or "*my people*." Jesus said twice, "You are persecuting *me!*" When Christians are afflicted, Jesus Christ takes it **personally**. He also takes it personally when his people treat each other kindly. In Matthew 25:40 he stated, "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did **for me**." Jesus cares about how every member of his Body is treated.

Jesus is the definitive "body" builder, intimately involved with building and developing every member, or part, of his Body. A true bodybuilder is more than just a man with a gargantuan physique and python-swallowing biceps. To achieve perfection throughout his whole body, he works specifically and tirelessly with each body part to reach its maximum potential. He would not be content with an unbalanced physique, where one arm can't fit through the door but the other could be used as dental floss. Interestingly, the head (in our case, Jesus) does not need to be built up, but instead directs the building up of all other members.

Jesus appeared to one member, the Apostle Paul, and became his personal trainer in building the Body of Christ. As Paul began to understand the significance of this body, he, like his Lord, took it very personally; so much so, that he labored fervently as a "body" builder himself. He worked diligently, "warning every man, and teaching every man" (Col. 1:28 - KJV), so that he could "present *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus." He explained, "To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Col. 1:28 and 29). This man fought the urge to hit the snooze button and turn on his bed like the hinges of a door. Bodybuilding is never easy, but sometimes you just have to throw the covers back, put one foot in front of the other, and show up at the gym.

Ephesians 5:29 and 30

(29) After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—

(30) for we are members of his body.

Paul understood that if Jesus loved him so much, then Jesus would also love other Christians as intimately. Therefore, he prayed for the Lord and God, “who *loved* us,” to **encourage** and **strengthen** the saints (2 Thess. 2:16 and 17). Having been trained by Jesus, however, Paul didn’t just pray like this and then roll over in his hammock and go back to sleep. He *loved* Jesus’ saints by getting *involved* in helping them grow, just as Jesus does.

1 Thessalonians 2:8, 11 and 12

(8) We **loved** you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

(11) For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,

(12) **encouraging, comforting and urging** you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Like a father, Paul loved and cared deeply for each individual believer. Paul was not just a spiritual professor, pontificating platitudes from the pulpit; he was personally involved in building every member of Jesus’ body. Notably, Paul didn’t just work this way himself; he also encouraged others to get involved in his mission. He sent Timothy to the Thessalonians with the purpose of *strengthening* and *encouraging* them in their faith (1 Thess. 3:2).

Paul truly understood the metaphor of the Body of Christ with each and every believer as a member in particular.¹ He knew that it was not just his responsibility to build the Body of Christ, but that each believer has an important role in the growth of the body, just as every part of our physical body plays a crucial role.

Years ago we didn’t have plastic grocery bags with convenient handles. Instead, we had brown paper “sacks” that, crammed full of food, were a bit more cumbersome. When you arrived home, you carried them from underneath, and then you would witness the masterful body in all of its glory...

With two fingers twisting the doorknob, you’d wedge your knee in to keep the door from slamming shut (too slow and you had to start all over, often with a poorer attitude). As your knee would open the door, you’d have to pivot your hips to twist your shoulder in to keep it open. Sometimes the chin would take over for the shoulder so you could balance the bags on your hips, twist your biscuits into the space, and finally proceed to the kitchen.

In other words, the members of your body would work instinctively together to accomplish what your head wanted done, all without dropping the eggs on your porch. Not that the groceries aren’t important, but each of us is essential in accomplishing what the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ, wants done.

Ephesians 4:16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, **as each part does its work.**

Throughout the Church Epistles, Paul exhorts each of us to use our gifts toward Jesus Christ’s goals. We begin by recognizing that as Jesus has reached out and received us, so we should reach out and receive one another (Rom. 15:7). Then, we use our gifts and callings to love and serve each other, just as Jesus would do.

Romans 12:4-6a

(4) Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

(5) so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

(6a) We have different gifts, according to the grace given us...

We, the authors, used to understand this section to mean, “IF you have one of these gifts, then use it.” But that’s not what it says; we are *all* members, and we *all* have these gifts of God’s grace! Furthermore, we are to use them primarily to build each other! Each of us, like Paul, needs to recognize the Lord’s love for us and then use our gifts to build each other.

1 Peter 4:8 and 10

(8) Above all, **love** each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

(10) Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

As the Body cannot survive without its Head, Jesus, we also need each other in order to reach our maximum potential. The literal members of Jesus’ body (his hands, legs, etc.) obviously went wherever Jesus’ head went; he didn’t teach at Jerusalem leaving a knee in Galilee, a toe in Jericho, or his sternum in Capernaum. Similarly, Jesus, as the figurative Head of the Body of believers, would never think of leaving any of us out. The head cannot say to any other part of the body, “I don’t need you!” (1 Cor.12:21).

When we truly understand the unconditional love that Jesus has for *each* of us, we can strengthen and encourage each other to serve his Body with our gifts. Thankfully, you don’t have to wear a Speedo™, drink raw eggs, and bench press a truck in order to build someone up. Jesus has already given us our gifts as the equipment that we need to build each other and grow up into him together, spiritually perfect and mature. See you at the gym!

Note:

1. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (KJV): “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

Dear Sower

Video Teachings on MySpace

Just wanted to say thanks for all the wonderful Bible teachings. We have been blessed reading all the articles that relate to life and how to improve our walk with God. Thank you for your ministry. May God continue to shine through you and bless you in all that you do. Thanks again,

Randy & Rachel
MySpace friends

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What a blessing these [MySpace] messages and videos are!!! How blessed I am to benefit from these and I just want to say that I so greatly appreciate them!!!!!! God Bless You!

A MySpace friend in California

Editor's Note:

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Revised English Version®

Wow! You are MIGHTY FOR GOD! Thank you so much for ALL the online resources [we sent an email saying our Bible translation project/commentary is now online.]! I am taking advantage of this GOOD NEWS! Praise God for all of you!

All because of Jesus! Love,
Jetta (& Larry) Inskeep

Editor's Note:

Check our on-going Bible translation project / Commentary work (the *Revised English Version*®) at STFonline.org/rev

Our Books & The Sower

I have read a lot of your books including "*Don't Blame God.*" I was really fascinated and enlightened by that book. It's nice that some of those baffling questions playing inside your head are now given answers.

My friend gave me copies of your *Sower* magazine and I want you to know that I enjoyed reading those. I'm from Philippines and to tell you the truth, I am more convinced in your teaching than those of any other religion like I have now. For the record, I am a Roman Catholic.

Haylee Jayoma
Philippines

Editor's Note:

To watch videos, listen to teachings and read articles on the subject of Don't Blame God, please visit TruthOrTradition.com/dbg2

Speaking in Tongues

Wow - thanks so much for your message and video on tongues - praise God I now speak in tongues. So, not wanting to keep this hidden I passed it on to a few friends - now they all speak in tongues. They passed it on to members of their families and low and behold, they all speak in tongues. That's about a dozen or so people - but we are continuing to spread this awesome teaching around so who knows how far it will branch out.

Thanks so much for posting this! God is good!

Cathy Parisi

Editor's Note:

To read this article or watch our video online, go to TruthOrTradition.com/tongues

October 09' Audio Teaching

Thank you, thank you, thank you! I just finished listening to the October 2009 teaching on "What is going on in Heaven?" and I wanted you to know how your teaching has so touched my heart and blessed me in so many ways.

I am so thankful for this ministry and the wonderful teachers that put themselves out there all the time. You people are amazing. God bless you always,

Lynn Derrie
Wisconsin Rapids, WI

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