



P.O. Box 66540
Albuquerque, NM 87193
505.890.6806
E-mail: irm@liferesource.org
Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript
God's Kind of Ministry
By Bill Jacobs
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The title of this presentation is *God's Kind of Ministry*. It's the fourth in a series of the *Eight Qualities of Church Health*.

When most of us hear that word, *ministry*, we think of ministers – that is, people who serve the church in a full- or part-time capacity. But when we use that term in this presentation, it means something different. It means the application of spiritual gifts to serve the church. All of us, we're told in the Bible, have been given at least one gift so that we'll have something that we can contribute to the church. And unless we want to be like that guy who buried his talent, we need to find out what that talent is – or that gift is – and then put it to work. So this presentation is about how best to do those two things – find it and use it.

Do you remember that in discussing the first aspect of church health – which was *loving relationships* – we saw that there were three elements of Godly love. We saw that most people are strong in one or two of those three things, but seldom do you find somebody that's balanced in all three of them. Well, we're going to think the same way about the application spiritual gifts today. So let's look into the Bible to see these three dimensions of ministry.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12:1. This is one of the cornerstone scriptures about spiritual gifts.

1 Cor. 12:1 – *Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. So this is something we're supposed to know about. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray by mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus, be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. Then he makes three statements in a row. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. We're going to come back to those. It sounds like he's saying the same thing, doesn't it? Same thing three times. Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message*

of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, and to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All of these are the workings of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one just as He determines.

So this is one of the core scriptures that we can look at. But I want to back up and reread some of these verses. I want to look at verse 4.

V-4 - *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.* So it's by the Spirit that these gifts are given. And they are different. It's by the Holy Spirit that something is added to us that we don't naturally have. What could we say about these additions? Well, these gifts make us more powerful in some way, don't they? It's not *our* power, but it's the power of God! So we have the ability to do something that we couldn't do before. That's added power, isn't it?

Let's look at verse 5.

V-5 - *There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.* What's Paul driving at here? When we think about Jesus Christ, our Lord, we think about *serving* Him because He serves us, right? That's the motivation to use our gifts. What comes to mind when we think about that. When we think about Christ, we think about serving Christ and the church – His church. We're doing that because He serves *us*. Right? He sacrificed Himself for us. And we know that it's appropriate that we present ourselves a living sacrifice to Him in response to that. So there's a covenant between us and Christ. So what we're really talking about is our baptismal commitment here, aren't we? We're talking about walking the walk as well as talking the talk. And Paul is telling us that the reason we take up our gifts and the power that we have been given and go out and *use* them is because we're committed to Christ. Right? I mean, if you weren't, nothing would happen. So, of course, right. So our commitment to Christ is the motivator to use the power that we have been given.

Now most of us stop here. I know I did, at one point in my life. Have a gift. Find out what it is and be committed to use it. But there's actually one more thing that we need to think about if we want to approach this subject with the balance of God in our minds. And I believe it's the omission of this one – this third one – which causes all the problems and the fears that we see around this issue of spiritual gifts. I guess I shouldn't say that it causes *all* the problems, but it causes *some* of the problems.

V-6 – *There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.* In English it sounds like Paul's just saying the same thing he just said. But he's not. He's making a new point. He's saying something different. And this is the third thing that Paul says to define the application of spiritual gifts in the church. They come from the Holy Spirit. We're to apply the whole variety of them out of our commitment to Christ. And now this one. What does it mean? It seems rather obscure. So I'll read it in some different translations.

1 Corinthians 12:6 in *The New King James*:

1 Cor. 12:6 – *And there are diversities of activities, but it's all the same God who works all in all.*

And I read it in the *New American Standard*:

1 Cor. 12:6 – *And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.* That got a little closer to what I found out.

So after I read those two, I went to the Greek – I went to *Vine's*. The word for activities there is *to be active or operative*. The quote from *Vine's* was: *The active response of believers to the inworking of God*. So it's about our act of response. So with this one, the focus is what we do in *response* and the kinds of *effects* we produce. Those are the words that were used.

So let's think about this and try to tighten up the meaning in real-world application for us today.

When the Corinthians were all excited and just speaking in tongues, and just jabbering away all at once, were they lacking in commitment? No. Were they lacking in power? No. But they were lacking in something, weren't they? Because they weren't thinking about the kind of *effect* that they were producing. They weren't thinking about the *results* of the way they were using the gifts that they had, were they? So you can't just have a gift. And you can't just be committed to use it. You have to also know *how* to use it for best effect. That's our response to the inworking of God.

So what were they lacking? What one word could we use to describe what they were lacking in? They weren't thinking about results, or effects, or consequences, or cause and effect. And when you think about that stuff, what is that? Well, that's called *wisdom*, isn't it? Wisdom.

So we have three dimensions when we think about using our spiritual gifts in a Godly way. They come from outside of us by the Holy Spirit and add something to us that we didn't have. So there's the element of *power* there added by the Spirit. And we're certainly to use them in a *committed* fashion because of what Christ did for us. And we're also to think about how to use them *wisely*. Just because we have it doesn't mean we're going to use it well or use it at all. But we have to have wisdom if we're going to use it appropriately.

So which one of these three things would you think would be the most important? Well, let's go to Colossians 1:9, where the truth of that question is going to be answered right here. Paul said to the Colossians:

Col. 1:9 – *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to – one – fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.* So wisdom is really important, right? *And we*

pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. So when you live a life *worthy* of the Lord, that's commitment, isn't it? That's walking the walk, as well as talking the talk. Committed people do that. So commitment is important. Wisdom is important. And then he said: *Being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance, patience, and to do it joyfully.* And that's power, isn't it?

So they're *all* important. But our problem is that we're usually good at one of those, or two of them, and then we're usually weak at a third one. So these are the three things that we have to have to be balanced in the love of God as we serve other people and use the gifts that we have been given in the church.

How important is this subject? Well, it's why were we called into the church? For this reason. That's why we're here. Our job in the church is to use the gifts God has given us to help propel the church forward.

What if you have wisdom and you know what your gift is, but you're not committed to using it? Nothing happens, right? What if you have wisdom and commitment, but you don't know what your gift is? You know, you hear people saying, "Let's get fired up!" Fired up to do what? Well, they're not quite sure. If you don't know what your gift is, nothing is going to happen either, is it, because you don't know what to do. What if you have commitment and you know your gift, but you don't have the wisdom to apply it wisely? Kind of like the Corinthians. Well, you get bad results.

So there is no most important thing here – of these three. They are *all* important equally. You can't separate them out and get good results. And yet, every last one of us is strong in either one or two of these areas – or *stronger* – and yet deficient in one or two of them. So we're limited in our ability to get the results that God wants us to get. That's why we're studying this topic – so that we can learn *how* to build ourselves up where we're weak, so that we can get the results – build a healthy self, a healthy congregation and produce fruit for God.

Okay, let's look at each one of these a little bit. Let's look at *commitment* first. When we think about his characteristic, the Bible teaches us something about it. Let's go to Matthew 16, verse 21. This is where Jesus is talking to His disciples and starting to build a picture in their mind that He wasn't always going to be with them. And it said:

Mt. 16:21 – *From that time on – in verse 21 of Matthew 16 – Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, that He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life. And Peter, when he heard this, took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never Lord," he said, "This shall never happen to you." You know, I'm just not going to let this happen. And Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan, you're a stumblingblock to Me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." And then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anybody would come after Me, he must*

deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me, will find it.”

In putting Christ first, we end up first. It’s one of those great spiritual paradoxes. Sacrifice has benefits. But that really isn’t the point of all of this, is it? The point is that, if we want to follow Christ, we have to be willing to take up *our* cross – whatever that is – and follow Him. We have to be *committed* to do that.

Romans 12:1. Let’s look a little bit more at what this means. Paul said:

Rom. 12:1 – *Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. The King James says: This is your reasonable service. This is what makes sense. Based on what Christ has done for us, it’s only right and good that we sacrifice ourselves to Him. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is God’s will – His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

If there’s anybody that’s lacking in commitment, the key there is obedience to God. If you want to be more committed, learn how to obey God more fully. Those two go hand in hand.

A friend of mine went with me, several weeks ago, to Durango for church. And he’s not even sure that God exists. While I was in Durango, I spoke on self-image and I told the story of David and Goliath. On the long ride home, he asked me some questions about the Bible, the Law and the Sabbath. He’s known me for quite a few years, so he’s known that I keep the Sabbath. He made the comment after I’d explained why I do it – he said, “That’s quite a commitment.” And I explained that we evidence our level of commitment by how seriously we take following God’s will and His law.

So, if a person has a problem being committed, the key to growth there is a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. All of this is an outgrowth of our relationship with Him, isn’t it? I mean, that’s what the Bible tells us. It tells us that since Christ sacrificed Himself for us – and if we learn that, and understand that, and become grateful for it – then our *natural* response – it’s just going to grow out of that awareness – is that we’re going to want to be more committed to Him and more like Him. And so we’ll be more obedient.

Let’s look at the second one – *power*. Acts 1, verse 6. Here’s the disciples.

Acts 1:6 – *So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* So there is power to do God’s work and His will.

Let's go to Luke 24, and verse 46, and read another scripture related to this.

Lk. 24:46 – *He told them, “This is what is written. ‘The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what My Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

So they had the commitment, didn't they? And they had the knowledge – the wisdom. But they didn't have the power. So they were told to wait in the city until they had the power that they needed to do God's work. What's the point? Well, the point is, that ministry on our own doesn't work. I mean, we can have all kinds of good ideas, but if the power doesn't come from God to do it, then it's not going to happen. Because the things that God wants us to do are kind of outside of our own ability. That certainly would have been true of them, wouldn't it? The things that they had to do they couldn't do on their own steam. They had to have the power of God behind them.

Now, we saw the disciples flee and deny Christ the night He was taken, didn't we? We saw them run away. So they were cowards at that point, weren't they? And then we saw them infused with commitment when they realized He was alive. They couldn't shut them up! I mean, one day they're running away and hiding. And the next day, they're saying things that get them beaten and thrown in jail. And they just don't stop. They're just completely jazzed by what they saw – when Christ came back from the dead and told them what they were to do! They knew what to do. So they had the wisdom about what was necessary to do. But they just didn't have that power yet – did they? – at first. That's why they had to wait there.

Would it have made sense for them to sit around, while they were waiting in Jerusalem, saying, “You know, if we were just more committed and fired up, things would happen!” No, that wasn't the problem, was it? They just needed power from God. They *had* enthusiasm.

I wanted to host a Feast for a long, long time. And I know in my heart that I was committed to that. And I wanted to do it because it seemed to me that the fruits of the Feast haven't been as good as they *could* be. Now, I don't know if the ideas that I have about it are wisdom or not, because we haven't actually had a Feast with those ideas put to use yet. So that kind of remains to be seen. But I am going to find out soon enough whether they work or not. But that aside, the power to do that was lacking until just recently. There was no way for me to make that happen. Believe me, I tried, and it just wouldn't happen. There was no open door. Well now the door has been opened. And I find myself in a position where it can come to reality at last.

Another example. I know my friend, Guy Swenson, was in the same situation in a different area. He has been interested in church growth for as long as I've known him. He's been committed to that. And he tried every way to cause church growth to happen, but the door was closed. Well, I noticed recently that his little group of two – that would be Guy and Jennifer – has now grown to thirty average attendance on the Sabbath. And

they had a high so far of 44 on Pentecost last year – or this year. You know what happened? Well, they suddenly found themselves in the right place with the right knowledge and right resources. The power was there all of a sudden. And it's happening.

So we have to have power from *God* to do these things as well as commitment.

And then, *wisdom*. What is biblical wisdom? Well, it's the application of knowledge, commitment and power to real-life situations.

The Corinthians had knowledge of their gift. They had power. They had commitment. But they didn't apply them in a way that produced good results at first.

Notice what James tells us in James 1, verse 5.

Jm. 1:5 – *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him.*

There's two points I want to make from this. Number one. Wisdom is so important that if we lack it, we can ask for it, and we'll get it. The second thing is, that God doesn't find fault with us for any of these lacks. He knows how to deal with each of us wherever we are, and He's willing to make up the deficits that we have. We don't have to be afraid of this.

So I was thinking about our little group here. You know, we have a small group and we've gotten quite close, and we talk about a lot things among ourselves on the Sabbath that we wouldn't want to talk about if others came to visit or attend with us, would we? If you think back to some of the conversations we've had, some of them would be fine, and all of them were okay for us, but they just wouldn't be fine or good for those people who don't know us that well, because we're so personal in our approach to each other. So we'd have to become a bit more polite and formal in that situation – though I certainly would never call our group formal in any way. You know, when you study the Bible together, and eat together, and banter back and forth across the table, that's *not* a formal learning experience, is it? But we would have to become a bit more wise in what we say. And that's just part of growing – when we think about new people coming in, we have to tend to *their* needs as well as ours, and have *wisdom* in how we approach them.

Go with me to Proverbs 3, and verse 19. Let's think about something else here.

Prov. 3:19 – *By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundation. By understanding He set the heavens in place.*

Let's suppose that you are an astronomer. Oh, and verse 20:

V-20 – *By His knowledge the deeps were divided. And then the clouds let drop the dew.*

Let's say that you were an astronomer or a weather man. And let's say that you learn something about how the earth was formed as a result of your understanding of...or you

understand how the heavens are set in place better. And you learn something by some of the input that you get from studying from Hubbell. Let's say you get some input from the Hubbell telescope. What you've actually learned is some of the wisdom of God, haven't you? Are you in the church? Are you converted? Probably not. I don't know too many church people that are Hubbell astronomers. There might be some geologists in the church, but mostly not. And all the knowledge of geology that's accurate...that's the wisdom of God, isn't it?

So, do Christians have the corner on every bit of wisdom there is in the world? No! No we don't. Wisdom exists outside of Christianity as well as inside of it.

I recall saying, in a sermon at the Feast some years ago, that I learned more about servant leadership from Buddhists than I ever had in the church. Well, you can imagine how some were offended by that. Nevertheless, it's still true! I did. And that particular Buddhist I know is very wise about servant leadership and, consequently, also very rich. I didn't intend it as an offensive statement. I was intending to impart his wisdom to our group. So why did I bring that up? Well, because I think that if we're going to be wise in the way we deal with people outside the church, we need to figure out that we are not the repository of all wisdom and not be so judgmental about other people and other groups.

Okay, so those are the three touched on briefly. I want to go through the Bible now and look at some people in the Bible. I want you to think with me know about Doubting Thomas. That's what he was called. The Bible doesn't call him that, so we probably shouldn't say that, but I want you to read with me in John 14, verse 1. Here's Jesus talking. He said:

Jn. 14:1 – *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me, that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”* Well, Thomas stopped Him right there. And he said: *“Lord, we don't know where You're going. So how can we know the way?”* I mean, he wasn't just listening to what Jesus said. He was thinking about it. He was a thinking man. He wanted details. Probably a pretty intelligent guy. He wanted evidence. He wanted Jesus to support His statements with something that he could sink his teeth into. He wanted to get good answers. You know, *“Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand in His side, I'm not going to believe it.”* Why did he say that? Because he missed it when the disciples encountered Christ the first time. He wasn't there. He didn't show up at the party. So he comes with this attitude of wanting proof. That's a good thing, isn't it? It is.

V-6 – Then Jesus said something to him. How did Jesus deal with him, by the way? Was He negative? No. He wasn't. He was willing and gracious to let him put his hand in the nail prints and in His side. He said something to him that is very instructive to us. *“Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* So He's kind of showing us Thomas' strength and his weakness all at the same time. There was so much thinking going on in this guy, there wasn't much room

for feeling, was there? It's interesting that Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared. He didn't show up for the feeling event, you know. But you know people who focus so much on facts and relevance and thinking that they kind of leave out the feeling part of life. And that goes back to what we were talking about, doesn't it? All of us are strong in *some* of these things, but not balanced. Thinking is good, but we also need to be feeling people, don't we?

Luke 10. Our second example would be Martha.

Lk. 10:38 - *As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She was hospitable. She had a sister, called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him, and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me." And Jesus said, "Martha, Martha. You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."*

We need people like Martha – that do the work – don't we? They were at *her* house. And they were all comfortable and fed because of what Martha had done. So what could we say? She was strong on commitment, wasn't she? But she didn't get what was most important in that situation. And she obviously wasn't good at timing – you know, she laid a guilt-trip on her sister right there in front of Christ. She lacked wisdom here because Christ turned down her request right in front of everybody. We know that Mary, on the other hand, had poured out an expensive bottle of perfume on Jesus' feet. She was worshipping. That's a spirit-related activity. That's where our power comes from. Do we know people who focus on commitment who make us feel guilty? Sometimes. And they're usually the ones that do all the work and think that's most important. It's kind of a control thing. Martha was trying to control Mary, wasn't she – getting Mary to help? It's interesting that this type of person seldom focuses on spiritual renewal or worship, so they burn out! That's what happens to them quite frequently. They get frustrated with others who are as committed as they are and they tend to burn out.

Thomas is strong in wisdom and Martha is strong in commitment. Now let's talk about Mary. She's strong in the spirit aspect, isn't she? For her, worship and heart things are the only things that really matter. You know, forget about being hospitable. And forget about taking care of the details of the meal and making sure everybody is comfortable. She's focused on Christ and she pours this whole bottle of expensive stuff on Christ's feet. And Jesus did support her – with what she was doing in the moment. And He clearly stated that it was a special time, but the problem comes when the Mary kind of person doesn't know how to contribute on a day-to-day basis. You know, church is *so* spiritual, they never do any of the work.

So there are three examples of three people that each are very strong in one aspect and lacking in two others. Each one of them accepted by Christ. Each one of their strengths very necessary. Was it a good thing that Mary poured that ointment on Christ? Yeah! Was it a good thing that Martha had everybody to her house? Yeah! Was it a good thing

that Thomas asked all those questions and caused Jesus to make profound statements? Yeah! So those things are all important.

Let's look at three more people. Let's look at Moses. Let's talk about him. Moses, we're told, was educated with all the wisdom of Egypt. So he was a very well educated, knowledgeable man. Wisdom and knowledge was *not* his problem. Neither was he lacking in commitment. He did burn out at one point, didn't he? He was just ready to throw in the towel because of the way Israel was acting. And in the beginning, he was the one that said, "I can't go to Pharaoh. I can't even talk straight." So he was weak in power. So here's an example of somebody that was strong in two things and weak in one. Whereas these others were strong in one thing and weak in two. So he's strong in commitment and wisdom, but weak in power. How did God treat him? He gave him power. He didn't look down on him. He gave him power.

Peter. Let's look at Peter. Peter said, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come out to you on the water." He was the only one of the twelve that was willing to do that. Now, it's true that he denied Christ three times, but he was the only one of the disciples who followed along. Where were the rest of them? Well, they weren't there to deny Him. If you read through the book of Acts, and you think about all the things that Peter did, his ministry is filled with healings and wonders. It's amazing what happened. But he also cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, didn't he? Better to do something wrong than nothing at all. That was kind of Peter's approach, you know. So, what could we say about him? Well, he was certainly strong in commitment and strong in power. You know, "I'll walk on water if you just say the word!" But he was weak in wisdom, wasn't he? Jesus had to put the ear back on. How did God treat him? Still loved him and accepted him, didn't He?

Last example. Jonah. It says that the sailors of the ship he was on were convicted of Jonah's words. One of the most amazing things that has ever happened in biblical history is the repentance of Ninevah after they listened to the preaching of Jonah! It's quite astounding when you think of it – especially if you understand Assyrian culture. They worshipped demons and war. That's what it was all about. The guys at Enron were trying to steal money because we're all about money. In Assyria, to be somebody, you had to have a lot of heads on stakes at your house. That was what they liked to do to show who they were. Yet this whole city, after the preaching of Jonah, repented. He was a man of great spiritual power. And what do you call it when he knew ahead of time what was going to happen? He was a man of insight and wisdom, wasn't he? He knew they were going to repent. So he was strong in those two things, but what was his problem? He wasn't willing to *do* what God told him to do. He lacked commitment. He was the detached Christian. He had intellect and power, but not so committed to God or to the people he was serving. There's a serious message here for those of us who are lacking in commitment. That is – the message is – Watch out! Because God has drastic ways of creating commitment in us. A few days in a fish turned him around – at least temporarily.

So we can think about these six people, and we can think about these three very important things when we talk about and think about the gift that God has given us, and how we're going to use it to serve in the church. And, of course, all of these things – and the examples – beg the question, "Where are we weak?" and "Where are we strong?"

Are we strong in one and weak in two? Or are we strong in two and weak in one? Wouldn't it be nice to be able to figure all of that out? We're going to talk some more about that later. Which of these areas help us to minister our gifts? An which of them are impeding us? How can we moved to a more balanced position so that we're stronger in all three of them. – in a balanaced way? Where do we need to become stronger to be more balanced? Which ones of them – or one of them – do we need more work on? And what would we do to get srronger in that one thing? Or those two things?

Well, next time we're going to take a much closer look at *how* to grow in commitment, wisdom and power.