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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Using Your Gifts**  
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The title of this presentation is *Using Your Gifts*. It's the seventh in a series on congregational health. The first three were about God's love in our lives and congregations. And the next four, including this one, are, and were, about spiritual gifts and how to minister to other people.

In the beginning of this section of our series on church health, we saw that there are three prongs to this topic. To have a spiritual gift means to have *power*. A spiritual gift requires *wisdom* to use it properly. That's the second one. And the third one is, a spiritual gift needs *commitment*. We have to have commitment to use it.

So when we talk about *using* our gifts, we're focusing primarily on the commitment aspect and also on wisdom to use them properly. That's what we are going to talk about today – how to use them.

There are probably two reasons why it's hard for us not to be committed to using spiritual gifts. I was talking to somebody once and they were talking about the 80/20 rule – you know, twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work at any given activity. In the church, if everybody was using their gifts, that probably wouldn't be like that. There would probably be more people involved in doing more things. So why don't we do them? We're afraid that we won't use them properly. And I say that in a collective sense about the whole congregation. And I say it individually – for us each one – that we won't have time to do our things, too, if we're always serving and doing things. All we have to do, really, is to ask God how to help us get everything done. We give money away all the time and we know that He gives it back to us. I think the same *has* to be true for time. If we're willing to commit some time to God, I think He takes care of that.

When things are scary, what do you have to do to get past that? Well, you have to have faith. That's how you deal with scary things. We apply faith to it. To me, the congregation that doesn't promote the *tools* that God gives us to do our work is like that logger that's afraid to pull the starter cord on his chainsaw. "I might get cut if I turn it on." A lot of people *are* afraid of it. It's a powerful tool and we're afraid it's going to get out of control. That's the congregational side of it. We're afraid people are going to start

doing things that they really aren't cut out to do. We're afraid everybody is going to go do their own thing and nobody's going to be left to do the really hard stuff. There's all kinds of apprehensions that go along with it.

I'd like you to read with me in Matthew 25, verse 14, though. We've read this in this series already, but it just really needs to be read again.

**Mt. 25:14** – *Jesus said to His disciples, “It will be like a man going on a journey, who calls his servants and entrusts his property to them. To one he gives five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent – each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.” So he doubled his money. “Also the one with the two talents gained two more.” So he doubled his money. “But the man who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time, the master of those servants returned to settle accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ And his master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I’ll put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.’ The man with two talents also came. And he said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I’ve gained two more.’ And his master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful in a few things. I’ll put you in charge of many. Come and share your master’s happiness.’”*

So, do we see that it's not really so much about how much we produce. We're only responsible to do well with what God has given us. Some people have been given more than others, so they can do more. But it's not about the product, it's about our attitude, isn't it? The guy who produced five got the same reward as the one who produced two, because they both doubled. Their attitude was the same. Their productivity was the same. Then verse 24:

**V-24** – *“The man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you were hard man, harvesting where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’” So he gave it back to him, just like he got it. “And his master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant. So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I’ve not scattered seed. Well then....’” He always has a way of doing that to us, doesn't He? He takes our own words and uses them to teach us something. “‘So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I’ve not scattered seed. Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the banker, so that when I returned I would have received it back, at least, with interest! Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more and he will have abundance. And he who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

So, part of the deal is to use the gifts that God gives us to produce fruit for Him. We talk a lot about grace, but there's also this involved in it, isn't there? There's some production that has to be done on our part.

Let's talk about the second reason that the 80/20 rule applies in the church. There's another parable in Matthew 24 that I wanted to read to you. We call this *Beating the Servants* parable. This is Jesus, again, talking about the people that were living at the time of the flood.

**Mt. 24:39** – *“They knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.”* They were just living life, right? *“And that's how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field. One will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill. One will be taken, and the other left.”* Two guys will be filling their cars up at Sam's Club. One will be taken and the other left. *“Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”* We don't know that, do we? It's a surprise, right? *“But understand this: If the owner of the house had known what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.”* That's what thieves do, right? You don't know when they're coming. They sneak in! *“So you also must be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him. Who, then, is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants and his household, to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for the servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”* So we're supposed to be doing our work, right? *“I tell you the truth. He will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked, and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time.’ And he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.”* So he loses his commitment to do his job. And he just kind of blows it off. “Oh, it's a long way off. He's not coming back for a long time. I can do what I want. I won't get caught. Everything will be okay.” *“The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he is not aware of. And he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

Why did Jesus say this guy would be assigned a place with the hypocrites? Yeah! Because he's a hypocrite! He's not doing what he *said* he was going to do. What have we said? Well, all of us said – when we were asked the question, “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master?” – we all said, “I do,” didn't we? So, if we're not willing to keep our word and do what God tells us to do, then we *are* hypocrites and religion is just a bunch of phoney-baloney. That's all it is. One day, when it will be too late, we're going to be called into account for that lack of commitment. It's kind of a scary thought, isn't it? It's supposed to be scary.

Some people will say, “But what about grace?” Well, salvation by grace is to those who are in covenant with God. Right? To those who do not resist God's sanctifying process. We told God we would submit to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master, and He tells us to go out and use our talents – our gift – to produce fruit for the church. It doesn't matter that that's all scary stuff. It doesn't matter that it can be misused and abused. It doesn't

matter if people use it wrongly and it can then be hurtful. If we get it *right*, then it's a powerful tool that causes the work to get done. It's the tool *God* wants us to use to do the work – whatever our gift is, it's given to us to do the work of God. God *wants* us to get it right, and He will *help* us get it right.

You read in the Bible about all the patriarchs and all the things that they had to do to follow God. There really isn't anything that's not scary when it comes to following God. We're always asked to do things that are outside of our comfort zone. To follow God requires faith.

Let's think about applying some wisdom to the fear that we have about this – one of the things that keeps us from doing God's work through the gifts that He gives us. Let's haul some of these fears that we have out in the light of day and process them a little bit.

1 Corinthians 14:12. Let's look at this scripture.

**1 Cor. 14:12** – *So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.* Being really gifted at tiddly-winks is not going to do much good, is it? Gifted in computer games. Those are not the kind of things God is talking about.

According to the New Testament, spiritual gifts are used to build up the church and *not* the self. The problem is, that when a Christian has not yet learned that their identity is in Jesus Christ, then there's a serious possibility that they will use their gift to bolster their own identity. This is especially true if they didn't get what they needed in childhood to develop a healthy sense of themselves.

I was talking to a young friend recently who told me about a successful church activity put on by two of her friends. She said afterwards the two sponsoring people suffered a serious change in demeanor. They started acting really cocky and superior – you know, “Look what *we* did!” That kind of thing. That is exactly what everyone is afraid of in the use of spiritual gifts – that people will get the bighead, that they'll start thinking of themselves more important than they are.

So, how can we deal with situations like that in the church? My young friend decided what should be done was that she told her two cocky friends to get over it, realize that God was the One that made it work, and if it didn't straighten up and fly right, He might have to teach them a really hard lesson, and she'd feel really bad about that. I guess that is one way to handle it. I don't know if it worked or not, but it is feedback, isn't it? We've talked a lot about feedback. If we talk about these problems as a group, if we open a dialogue in our congregation, and we start talking about these things, and we also do more to *train* people about not only the gift itself, but about conversion and that it means to have identity in Christ, if we do some more mentoring with people around the area of these gifts, then I think things can go in a right way. But we've never tried that, have we? We basically have followed the principle of forbidding things that are troublesome, haven't we? That's been our approach – keep a lid on it. So we just forbid things and

won't let people do them, and yet the problem with that is – in the case of spiritual gifts – *God* is the One who gave those to us. So who are we to forbid people from using them? What's the solution? I want to tell you a story. When my father was dying, I went to the west coast to see him and to help my mother reorganize her finances, so that she could survive financially after he passed. In the process of that we ran into a number of snags. I was telling a social worker how difficult it had been, and I asked in frustration, "What do other people do when they're in this situation?" She smiled and said, "They struggle with it." That statement didn't change anything, but somehow it helped to know that it was okay to have this problem, and to be frustrated and concerned, and not know what to do, and to just realize, like everyone else, I was just going to have to push through it. I think the same thing is true about spiritual gifts. God wants us to struggle and learn how to use these gifts, without getting a big head, and without leaving off doing the hard stuff. And he wants us to learn how to do this in a gracious and a serving manner. We may not be up to that, but I think we *can* be with His help. I think we can *learn* how to do that. I think the challenge is out there. And just because we've never done it, doesn't mean we can't. I think we think the reason we can't is because we've never tried that hard.

So, thinking about that, if you would like to take it a step further, you could write down your gift, and you could say a few words about how your gift could be used to help the church, the community or the congregation, while you remain a humble servant and instrument of God. I'm sure we could all think of ways that we could exalt ourselves by helping and doing things, but how can we help while remaining humble and putting the emphasis on helping others and building up the church.

Now, another problem is that we all cringe when someone assumes they have a gift and then their efforts don't produce any fruits. We think, "Well, that person...they *think* they know how to speak, but nobody can listen to them for long," or "That person thinks they can sing," or "That person thinks they can do this or that or whatever." But it makes everybody uncomfortable when they try to do those things. I'm going to propose something really unusual here. What if we're mistaking a lack of giftedness for a lack of training? I actually have had many people, over the years, tell me I have the ability to teach. But, you know, in the beginning I was so much more boring than I am now that no one even wanted to learn from me. So nobody knew that I was a teacher because it was so hard to listen to what I was saying. They all thought that I was a fish out of water. And so did I! But it turned out that it was really a lack of training and experience more than anything else. So I know that I can still learn more about teaching. And I spend some considerable effort on learning more about it in an ongoing fashion.

But this whole idea of teaching people how to do things, rather than just preaching is where my effort is now. We finally have two arenas now where we can do this. One is the Park City Feast of Tabernacles. And one is the workshops we do in congregations and activities where we go. We don't preach anymore when we do those things. We try to get people involved in doing things so they learn how to do something – completely different type of communication.

So what's the point again? Well, before we judge someone as ungifted in an area, if they're interested in it, let's help them get some training and some practice and see if it

can pan out. A lot of times people have an interest because there's an innate talent that's undeveloped there. Who knows what God will do?

We had something really interesting happen at work this week. There's a particular family that the team I'm on is working with, and we're all really frustrated with them. The parents were not well brought up. They didn't have a good model to follow. They weren't treated properly as children, so they really don't know how to treat their children. They don't know how to help their children attach to them, because both of them exhibit signs of poor attachment themselves. The little boy, who is nine, is really decompensating right now. He's just throwing tantrums, consequences don't work, he's having trouble at school. The little girl is two and a half. She's really clingy. You know, you can tell she's not getting enough from her parents. It's so bad that the case worker that goes into the home and into the school broke down and cried at our staff meeting. She talked about how she felt like she didn't know what to do. She felt incompetent. She felt frustrated. So our supervisor has invited one of our staff from across town to come and put on an attachment workshop for us, so that we can learn more specific skills to use with this family. You know, just the promise of more training made us feel so much better! And we made up a plan. And I noticed that in the beginning of the meeting we were all kind of sucked into the family's frustration and into all the drama – you know, all upset at our staff meeting. And when it was over, we were all back together again and moving forward. It came from the training that is going to take place – just the promise of it was so powerful.

I talked to the woman who is going to put on the training – I called her up – and I said, “Is this material coming from a book?” I was going to buy it. And she said, “Well, it's a workbook that I got at a workshop, so I'm going to come and tell you about it, and then I'm going to make some copies of the material or try to buy some more of those workbooks.” This is really pretty specific material and it's aimed right at the problem that we're dealing with. So, isn't that just a great thing?

I have grown up in a church where the church tended to look down on the world. And yet, quite often, I think those of us in the church aren't willing to act as wisely as the world in some ways in the application of God's gifts. We could talk about these things in our congregations – about how to find training for people that want to do certain things. You know, somebody wants to sing and they can't stay on key? Get them some music lessons! Somebody wants to play hymns, but they can't play the piano very well? Train them. Send somebody to take a public speaking course. There are lots of things that we can do to help people, if they think they might be gifted in a certain area.

So, if you want to be active about this in this presentation, why don't you write down one of your gifts, and then add some thoughts about how you could get more training in the use of it.

Now, here's another problem that comes up. I'm off of that one now, and I'm on to this next one. When something comes easy for us, we tend to think it comes easily to other people as well. It's really easy to be critical of other people who don't have our gift. You know, I *love* to invite people over to my home. I don't see why other people don't do it more often. Well, because other people can't do it as well, and as easily, and get nervous

and uptight...whereas some people just love to do that. We can be thankful that we *have* the gift, and we can appreciate others for the gifts that they have, so we don't have to do the things that we're not good at. If we could just *lighten up* – right? – and be happy that we have the gifts that we have.

If you want to be involved here, you could make a list of people that you have judged down because they don't do what you do and think about that. Start praying for those folks – not that they'll be like you, but that they'll do *their* thing – God's thing, actually.

Another one – another problem – that we seem to fall into sometimes. In Christian Schwartz' book on ministry – on the gifts – he talked about meeting this pastor, who said that he thought this whole spiritual gift thing was just a big load of baloney, because they tried it and all of a sudden, everybody was just doing what they *wanted* and they weren't doing the real work that needed to be done anymore. They kept saying, "Setting up chairs isn't really my gift," or "Running the sound system isn't my gift," or "Making the coffee isn't my gift." So nobody turned on the amp, nobody made the coffee and nobody had chairs to sit in. The "grunt work" nobody wanted to do. But that is actually a misuse of spiritual gifts. The thing to remember here is that there are *universal* Christian responsibilities that we all have to take care of. You might not have the gift of giving, but we're all still going to tithe, aren't we? We have to. We might not have the gift of evangelism, but we're all obligated to take care of the poor. We're all obligated to take care of kids, even though some kids might make us really nervous. We're obligated to take care of the elderly. We're obligated to worship and to pray for the sick. That doesn't have anything to do with gifts. Some people might be better at these things than others, but these are things that none of us are let off the hook on. They are roles that *none* of us are excused from. Given any excuse – because we all love the easy road and doing what's easy – it's also easy for us to shy away from the hard stuff if we can find a way to justify it. And some people have used spiritual gifts to justify that.

I can tell you that God never intended spiritual gifts to cause that kind of problem. He just never did. We can look at these problems and we can see how they can happen. Some of us have experienced them. But I really believe that training and struggling with these issues is going to yield fruit, rather than just forbidding and ignoring. So we have to be committed in our engagement, don't we, if we're going to make them work.

I think I told you about the software I bought, didn't I? The Web Authoring software? Real expensive software. And it's so good that it was intimidating at first – because it could do so many things and I didn't know how to use it for any of them – that it was a struggle to learn how to use it. But once I learned how to use it, then oh boy! I think this gifts thing is just like that. It's hard to learn how to do it properly, but, if we will take the effort, if we will, in faith, do what God tells us to do, we're going to reap big, big rewards for it.

Now, the rest of the time I want to talk about this in a different way. I want to talk about the application of spiritual gifts and the effect that it can have on young people in our congregations.

The human brain has a place in it where there's a lot of activity when people feel encouraged. They can see this with the brain-mapping technology they have now. They have discovered that in this – it's a physical location in the brain – there are four compartments there where activation can go on.... What does that mean? Well, it means that to encourage people – that is, to motivate people to take action.... For example, to make a commitment to Christ and remain part of the church you grew up in, specifically, there are four areas we can focus our attention on for best results.

What are those four areas? Well, they use a lot of different words to describe it, but essentially those areas are *belonging* – if people feel like they belong, they feel encouraged – *mastery* – if people have a sense of mastery, they tend to be encouraged – you know, we like to do the stuff we're good at, right? And we like to go to places where we feel a sense of belonging. We're encouraged to attend there. *Independence* is the third one. We tend to like to be able to do independently within a group. And the fourth one is *purpose*. Once people understand their purpose and are able to fulfill it, they really feel a part of what's going on.

Let's think about those four things applied to spiritual gifts. I mean, it's just written all over it, isn't it? God gives us these gifts so that we can participate in the church. And it makes us a *part* of the church. We have that sense of belonging. And there is something that He gives us, or teaches us, so that we can do it *better* than we could before. There's a feeling of mastery that comes with that. He gave these gifts to each of us personally and we're independently, personally responsible to use them, aren't we? If we do – we actually use that gift – that actually defines our purpose in the church, doesn't it?

So let's think about how that might fit in with young people. It just fits hand-in-glove. It just makes so much sense.

We're all accountable to take care of the church's children. Each child presents us a moral dilemma, you know. There they are. What are we going to do? We have suffered a lot of loss in the church – a lot of our young people have left. Many remain, but many more have left. In talking to a lot of folks about it, I get the sense that it's such a thorny problem we'd rather just forget about it. But we can't. The result of that is the millstone, right? We've got to stay focused.

So let's just think about these things. Let's think about the first one – *belonging* – the goal of creating belonging in our children. How do we achieve that? There's another word here that comes in right behind that – *inclusion*. We help them have a sense of belonging by including them in the work. "We're going to go paint a widow's house." Well, they go, too, then. They get included. Right? They get to swing a paint brush like everybody else, if they're old enough. They're included. But what if they slop paint? What if they mess up? To include, we also have to then *trust*, right? There has to be a measure of trust extended to them. In this process – if we take them to do enough things and involve them in enough stuff – they're going to learn how to do things that are helpful, aren't they? That's what's going to happen, isn't it? They're going to learn to do things that are helpful.

What about working in a soup line? When we went to the Feast, we had a work project. And the one I was on was working at a soup kitchen. There was an entire other church group there. And they had teenagers, and older people, and parents. They were all there behind the counter serving the food. Those kids were right in there with everybody else. And they were standing there, looking at this big mass of people, and they're starting to understand that a lot of things they've heard about homeless people aren't true. They could look out and see that most of those people are mentally ill and couldn't fend for themselves, and had, probably, no one to take care of them. So they're learning about that. And they're learning that as they hand those people a bowl of soup, if they didn't do that, they might not get to eat anything that night. So that's great, isn't it?

How about singing in the choir? Or collecting food for the poor at Thanksgiving? There are all kinds of things that we can do to fulfill the mission that we've been given and that we can include our children in. But we have to trust them to do those things, don't we, as we include them in the work.

Okay, that comes right down to the next thing, then, which is *mastery*. When we focus on helping them belong by including and trusting them, then the door just automatically opens to the next pillar of encouragement, which is mastery. People feel a sense of mastery when they become competent at something. In this case, what are we talking about? We're talking about spiritual competencies, aren't we? You know, things like helping the elderly or the poor. How do we cause people to develop a sense of mastery? Well, training – right? – as well as inclusion. The inclusion allows for training. So that word that tags along behind and makes mastery possible is *training*. “Here, let me show you how to apply that paint so that it doesn't run down the brush handle, down your elbow, and off onto to the floor.” “Here's how you pack the food boxes.” “You know, if you really want to learn how to play hymns for church, let's see if we can't starting getting you some music lessons. And if you stay with it and hang with it, then we'll set a goal so that you can play for the talent show, and then maybe for the youth thing, and then maybe even for church some day.” So we start training them to do these things.

We could do this, couldn't we, except that we also have to be involved in the community to teach those kind of competencies, don't we?

So, okay. Mastery comes from belonging and the training that goes with the inclusiveness. What's next? Well, we said *independence* was. If we teach children how to do these things by including them, then they're ready to be encouraged at an even deeper level. How does that work? Well, I'll give you a really good example. After we got home from the Feast, I had this big stack of feedback forms from the Feast. We asked people to rate the entire Feast. We asked a lot of specific questions. On one of the evaluation sheets, I saw that one of the teens wrote, “I liked the work project best. When I get home I'm going to try to find some things to do in my community.” So there you go. That's exactly how it works. She was included. She learned how to do it – she was taught what to do. And she's already taking independent action – an independent spiritual agent going out to help the poor and model Jesus Christ in her community after *one* experience – at least, one that I know of. Of course, for her to act independently, somebody's going to have to give her some *autonomy*, aren't they? She's going to have to be allowed to do

that. She doesn't need somebody to say, "You better hold off. You might mess it up." Right? She needs some training and then allowed to use her initiative to do what she wanted to do. So we need to give her responsibility for her own actions. Independence comes from autonomy. And that brings along behind it responsibility. "Go and try it and see what happens."

I know Tom Kerestes told me...before the Feast we were talking about how there were so many unknowns. He said, "Well, we'll make our mistakes and learn from them for next year." See, we're going to be responsible for the things that we don't get right. Then we're going to make a plan and make it better. That's God working with us as children, just as we work with our kids – or hopefully we do.

Then, the last one is *purpose*. After this young lady goes home and finds some of the projects to do – which I hope she does – how do you think she's going to feel about that? What do you think her experience is going to be? When I've done things like that, I start to understand why I'm in the church. I think I develop a sense of purpose based on those experiences. One of the purposes God calls us to is to serve and to be generous – to be altruistic in our approach. And I think this young woman is going to have a better idea of why she's alive and why she's in the church. That's going to help her feel more committed to it, isn't it? The light's going to go on. And that awareness is what creates commitment. So *commitment* follows along behind purpose. Our part there is to empower that whole process. That's our part in the purpose thing – in the commitment thing – to empower that process so that she has a chance to connect to God and to her congregation, which also, hopefully, is doing this same kind of thing, so that she can feel a part of it.

So where do spiritual gifts fit in here? This is all about finding out what you can do, isn't it? And then doing it. This encouragement thing is all about helping people find what they're good at and getting them in a place where they can do it, so that will cause the commitment to happen.

So many people are so discouraged about this whole issue of why we lose so many children. It seems so complex – like there's no way to figure it out. And it is a complex problem with systemic roots – deep roots in the system – but the solution isn't complex. It's just simple and straight forward, and it involves a few simple changes system wide, and then good things are going to happen. There *is* a way to save more of our kids. One of the best tools has been right under our noses all along – the use of spiritual gifts.