

Hard-Wired for Participation
(series: Making Maturing Disciples of Jesus)

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform 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 God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
(Romans 12:1-8)

We are currently exploring the unspeakable privilege Jesus Christ is giving us. "Come, follow Me," He says. Come, join Me in the grand adventure of being My disciples in the world.

In his letter to the disciples of Jesus living in the capital city of the Roman empire, the apostle Paul – a radical disciple if there ever was one! – opens up for us another dimension, another angle, another level of discipleship. "Present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). In light of the Great Sacrifice, in light of God Himself coming to earth as one of us as Jesus of Nazareth, in light of God in Jesus giving His life for the life of the world on the cross, in light of such unfathomable mercy, "present your bodies as living and holy sacrifices." Offer up your whole self – body, soul, mind, spirit – as a living response to the mercies of God.

And when we do this, we begin to change, we are transformed – "metamorphized" is the word Paul uses – and we begin to discover the unspeakable privilege of discipleship. That privilege, in a word, is participation. When we, in response to God's grace in Jesus, offer up our whole selves as living sacrifices, we begin to participate.

We begin to participate in the life of God! When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He calls us to Himself. And when He calls us to Himself, He calls us into His own life. We begin to participate in His life! And we discover that His life is lived in relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. When Jesus calls us to participate in His life, He is giving us the unspeakable privilege of participating in the life of the Holy Trinity!

“Go, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” As living sacrifices we begin to participate in the inner life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Wow!

And, as living sacrifices, we begin to participate in the mission of God. “Come, follow Me,” is the call to follow Jesus into His on-going work in the world. The call to discipleship is the call to participate in the creative, redemptive, restorative, healing, reconciling work of the Trinity in the world. Wow!

And what the apostle Paul wants us to realize and embrace in Romans 12 is that each of us has been “graced” in unique ways for this participation. “According to the grace given to us” (Romans 12:6). *Charis* is the word – “according to the *charis* given to us.” *Charis* leads to charisma... *charis* bestows charisma. Each of us who follows Jesus has been graced, *charis*-ed, charismatized. Every disciple of Jesus, every living sacrifice, is a charismatic person, given *charis*, graced by Jesus to participate in His mission in the world! Wow!

The way I like to put it is that each of us has been wired – wired in unique ways for this participation. I use the word “wired” because being graced is constitutive of our very being – it is who we are. This grace is not only given to us; it gets a hold on us. This grace not only “comes upon us,” it is built into us. And one of the keys to functioning as a disciple of Jesus Christ is coming to terms with this wiring. We function as maturing disciples as we live out our unique charismatic wiring.

Another way to come at what Paul is getting at is to use the word motivation. What Jesus gives us, what Jesus builds into us, are unique motivations for ministry. We function as maturing disciples as we come to terms with the unique motivations He has built into us. We function as maturing disciples by living out our unique “charismatic motivation.”

In Romans 12, Paul identifies seven “wirings,” seven different motivations for participation in God’s mission: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy.

Why seven? Likely because through the prophet Isaiah – Paul’s favourite prophet – God speaks of the Messiah being graced in a seven-fold way: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him” (Isaiah 11), on Messiah, on Jesus, and the passage goes on to speak of seven expressions of the Spirit’s person and work. Seven is also for Biblical authors the number for completion, perfection. Through the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit resting on Jesus of Nazareth, God bestows on the Body of Jesus, the church, complete, perfect grace. Seven-fold wiring of the people of God for full participation in the on-going mission of God in the world.

The seven wirings are prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy, manifesting the manifold work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Body of Christ.

Paul wants us to realize that every disciple of Jesus is “wired” in one of these ways. Each of the “wirings” is but one of the ways Jesus Himself is “fully wired.” Jesus alone operates in all seven wirings. None of these wirings, these motivations, can operate without the others! “Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think,” says Paul (Romans 12:3). Do not think that you can operate in the grace of God without operating with other “charismatic wirings,” other motivations.

Here is how I want to now proceed. I did some of this with a group of you on a Sunday evening seminar three years ago now. I want to walk through the seven wirings three times. The first time, defining each of the seven. The second time, naming the passion of each of the seven. The third time, suggesting some potential downsides of each. We will then break for a few questions, and I will wrap up with a set of questions we can ask ourselves to help us discern and exercise our unique gifting.

But first a story, originally told by leadership consultant Bruce Bugbee.

It wasn't too long after creation when the animals got together to form a school. They wanted the best school possible, offering their students a well-rounded curriculum of swimming, running, climbing, and flying. In order to graduate, all the animals had to take all the courses.

The duck was excellent at swimming. In fact, he was better than his instructor. But he was only making passing grades at climbing and was getting a very poor grade in running. The duck was so slow in running he had to stay after school every day to practice. There was only a little improvement because his webbed feet got so badly worn. With such worn feet, he was only able to get an average grade in swimming, but average was quite acceptable to everyone, so no one worried much about it ... except the duck.

The rabbit was at the top of her class in running. But after a while, she developed a twitch in her leg from all the time she spent in the water trying to improve her swimming.

The squirrel was a peak performer in climbing, but was constantly frustrated in flying class. His body became so bruised from all his hard landings, that he didn't do too well in climbing and ended up being pretty poor in running.

The eagle was a continual problem student. She was severely disciplined for being a nonconformist. For example, in climbing class, she would always beat everyone else to the top of the tree, but insisted on using her own way to get there.

By now you are getting the point of the story. Each of the animals had a particular expertise. When they did what they were designed to do, they excelled. When they tried to operate outside their area of expertise, they were not nearly as effective.

Think about it for a minute. Can ducks run? Sure they can! Is that what they do best? No! Many churches and organizations are full of running ducks. People who are trying to do the best they can, but they are in positions they are not gifted to do.

What if we could get the ducks in the water, the squirrels in the trees and the birds in the air? Would it change anything? Definitely. Everyone would become peak performers in their areas of expertise.

God has given spiritual gifts and natural talents to each believer. They are the specific ways in which you and I will excel. Everybody is not ideally suited for each position or task. In many cases, training may improve one's skills, but without the corresponding

gifts needed to meet the expectations of the position, training can only make incremental improvements.

(Bruce Bugbee, "Do You Have the Right People in the Right Places for the Right Reasons? Really?" *CMR*, March/April 1995, pp. 19-20)

So, let us walk through the seven "wirings" defining what they are.

Prophecy means to "speak forth" or to "forth tell." They may end up fore-telling, but the essence is forth-telling: "Thus says the Lord." It is the ability to speak a fresh word from God to God's people. This wiring cannot be exercised at will, a person wired in this way cannot announce "tomorrow at 2 pm I will prophesy." It is under the direct control of the Holy Spirit, which is why the prophets of old said "the word of the Lord came upon me." So, it is not necessarily preaching. Most preaching is teaching or exhortation – in which the prophetic word can come. Michael Green says that prophecy is "a particular word for a particular people at a particular time for a particular purpose." It could be a word of warning, comfort, demand, or encounter, but when it happens, people know they have heard God!

Service. The word is *diakonia* from which we get deacon. All of us are servants, but some uniquely so. This wiring is aware of temporal needs and involved in meeting tangible, visible, immediate needs of others.

Teaching is the careful, systematic interpretation and application of Scripture. This wiring imparts information, and helps people understand the word. The burden of the teacher is faithfulness. Clark Pinnock answered the question "Why do we need Theology" by saying, "because Christianity is a missionary religion, and if we are going to get the message out, we had better get it right!" (*Christianity Today*, 3-27-81, p. 68). This wiring protects and passes on the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Exhortation comes from *parakleis*, which is related to the word *paraklete*, one who is called along side (para-medic, para-legal). The person can come alongside for a number of reasons – to comfort, convict, console, counsel – but they come alongside to help in whatever way is needed at the moment to help the person move along to the next step of discipleship. They "comfort the distressed, and distress the comfortable." C.E.B. Cranfield said that they do this "to help Christians to live out their obedience to the Gospel" (*Romans*, 623).

Giving. We are all called to give, but this wiring involves a special kind of giving, for they are motivated to give in generous ways. There is debate as to whether these people give of their own wealth, or of the church's wealth (John Calvin's view). I think it is primarily the first, but these are the people that you want to put in charge of the church's finances! They can be a catalyst for generosity, and Paul encourages them to go for it "with liberality."

Leading is a military term – to "stand up before others." These people step to the head of the line and get things moving, sometimes "whipping things into shape." This is a gifting of elders (1 Timothy 3:12, 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12). Administration is a word that often gets used in association with this wiring – managing people, resources, and processes.

Mercy is a key word for Romans 9-11. Mercy is God doing for us what we could not do – not giving us what we deserve, but giving us what we do not deserve. This wiring has the capacity to feel with and for

others, whether the trouble is due to bad choices or to circumstances beyond the person's control doesn't matter – they will be there for the one who suffers, as Christ is, and to feel with them.

Which of these wirings is the most Christ-like? They all are Christ-like! Each one is but one of the seven ways He responds to the brokenness of life.

Another story, and I owe the genesis of this one to my friend Dr. Glen Thorp. Imagine I am carrying a box of cookies and trip over microphone cords, and fall. The cookies break, and are scattered everywhere. Imagine seven differing people witnessing this, and each one responds out of their own "wiring".

Mercy says "it's okay, Darrell. It can happen to anyone." They know I am embarrassed, and puts their arm around me.

Leadership says, "Abe, get a broom and dust pan! Shirley, would you get some Duct tape and tape those cords down? James, can you run over to the IGA and buy some more cookies? And Lilac, would you ask the Resources & Planning MAT to look into the problem with all these cords?"

Giving says, "Wait... I'll buy the cookies! And here, let me give some money to buy a better audio-visual system so you never have to tape the cords down again."

Exhortation says, "Darrell, next time you should walk around the cords and you need to be more up-front about how you want the platform to look. The cords have bothered you since you came to FBC, haven't they?"

Teaching says, "The reason this happened is two-fold. First, cords should never be left unsecured, and second, the cookies should have been more securely wrapped and not just dumped in the box."

Service says, "Here, let me clean up this mess."

Prophecy says, "This is what happens when you are not careful. Do you see the parable in this? Cords are always lying across our path. The evil one is always trying to trip us up... you need to stay alert to the dangers all around us, visible and invisible."

Did you see yourself in the story? Again, which response is the most Christ-like? All of them! I think that conflict in the body often emerges when a person with one "wiring" expects all others to respond to the brokenness of life his/her way. I also think that burnout in ministry happens not from doing too much, but from operating outside of our wiring.

Now, let us go through the seven wirings again, this time naming the passion in each.

The passion of Prophecy is to see and then help others see.

The passion of Service is to "see to it" that needs are met.

The passion of Teaching is to understand and then help others understand.

The passion of Exhortation is to come alongside and help others take the next step.

The passion of Giving is to make resources available.

The passion of Leading is to see that the job gets done.

And the passion of Mercy is to "be there" for others.

Hopefully there is a little of each of these passions in all of us. After all, they are Jesus' passions ... and we are participating in His life. Yet one of these passions will be dominant in each of us. Which is it in you?

Let me say a bit more about the passions of each of the seven wirings, by giving some words and phrases that unpack the passion.

Prophecy: Truth; the need to see reality as it really is; abhorrence of deceit; a passion to know God as God really is, even if such knowing overwhelms; always thinking in terms of potential and possibilities ("it doesn't have to be this way"); needing to tell others what he or she sees.

Service: Recognizes concrete, tangible needs; detail oriented; organized; no task beneath him or her; joyful spirit (a clue to the rest of us, joy is experienced in living for others!)

Teaching: Precision; organize, systematize; always balancing individual texts against the whole council of God; faithfulness to the truth; consistency, continuity; enjoys the work of research; delights in seeing the "light go on" in others.

Exhortation: Relationships; one-to-one, side-by-side; comfort the disturbed, disturb the comfortable; wisdom; the Christian life as "a walk"; enjoys seeing the other take the next step in the journey.

Giving: Generosity; liberality; catalyst to more giving; never says, "we do not have the funds." Not ashamed to talk about money; enjoys seeing ministries take off.

Leading: Administration; step up to the front; shape up the troops, fulfill the vision; regularly says, "we are in this together, gang; let's make sure we all succeed"; team builder; willing to make hard decisions and suffer the consequences.

Mercy: Compassion; unconditional love; it matters not why you are in the predicament you are in; the other's need "draws something out" even if the other does not move on to the next step, he or she will be there; can see and feel all the sides of an issue.

Can you imagine what would happen in this place if we could get all these passions working together?

OK, now let's go through the seven again, this time suggesting some potential down-sides of each wiring, and thus, where each of us needs to mature in grace.

Prophecy: Easily wounded by criticism; can jump to conclusions too quickly; tends to step in where he or she is not needed; tends to take responsibility for things he or she is not responsible for!

Service: Easily discouraged by lack of gratitude; can become resentful; tends to get over-committed; because the server so wants needs to be met, can tend to push his or her agenda on everyone else.

Teaching: Tends to become so preoccupied with doctrine, crossing the t's and dotting the i's that he or she misses out on relationship with the One to whom doctrine points; can let faithfulness to doctrine become more important than the quality of relationship with those who do not yet understand; can be overly demanding.

Exhortation: Like prophecy-wired folks, can jump in where not yet needed; can become impatient when folks do not move on to the next step; can become committed to too many people and begin to experience “relational overload.”

Giving: In wanting to make sure certain projects happen, can be tempted to become manipulative or controlling; can feel great hurt if a project they really want to fund is not approved by the others.

Leading: Can quickly get exhausted if not wisely delegating; tends to not be sensitive to the issue of timing; has a hard time taking time to pray; can let the desire to see the vision get fulfilled override relationships.

Mercy: Because he or she simply wants to “be there” for others, they can get stuck when the other is making no progress at all; can fall into the trap of co-dependency; tends to never be wrong, largely because he or she is always dispensing mercy – even to him or herself.

So, how do we overcome the potential downsides and avoid the pitfalls of our wirings? By the renewal of our minds, says Paul, which we will look at in greater detail next Sunday.

{Time for Questions and Responses}

Let me conclude by giving you a set of questions we can be asking ourselves as we seek to discern and exercise our unique charismatic wiring:

1. As you look at the world, what, in your mind, is the world’s greatest need?
2. What do you most want to see happen in the lives of other disciples?
3. What bugs you about other disciples?
4. When do you experience the smile, the favour, the pleasure of the Lord? What are you doing?
5. What is your earliest memory of God’s pleasure? What were you doing?
6. If money were no object, and you knew you could not fail, what would you attempt for the kingdom of God?
7. Where do you find your greatest joy?

Frederick Buechner once said that God’s call on your life is found at the intersection of the world’s great need and your deepest joy. Or, as dance instructor Sarah Teter says, “Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you alive. For what the world needs are people who are alive.”

“In light of God’s mercy, present your bodies as living sacrifices ...” and enter into the joy of participating in the life and mission of the Triune God of grace. That is discipleship!