

God: *“What are the ways that being a band director felt like a calling to you?”*

Me: *“I thought you gave me a gift to help everyone figure out what instrument they are best suited to play, help them learn how to play it, and bring all the instruments together to make beautiful music.”*

God: *“I’m calling you to do the same things as a pastor.”*

As you can tell, God won that argument. I began to see how all of us need each other in the church to help us recognize the spiritual gifts that God has given, even when they are as different as a French Horn and an English Horn. When God writes the music for a church to play for the world, sometimes the basses and tubas cause our souls to rumble, and sometimes the flutes and violins cause our spirits to soar.

One of my favorite aspects of symphonic music is the layering of harmonies and rhythms. When there is a long score of instruments, the power and beauty of the music intensifies and somehow reaches every cell in our body. Likewise, when we think we can grow spiritually all by ourselves, we lose out on the sense of purpose to practice individually so we can be stronger together. Besides, there isn’t much of a market for solo oboists or even oboe ensembles. God gives a broad range of spiritual “instruments”, and they truly are made to be used together with Christ as the conductor, guiding the tempo, dynamics, and transitions in the life of his Ensemble, the Church. Like every middle and high school band or orchestra conductor, the Apostle Paul has to plead with students of Christ to not give up practicing and not to give up playing their instrument in Christ’s ensemble. Let’s dig into Ephesians 1:1-16.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

Not everyone has the lips to play a piccolo, but everyone who is baptized has been given spiritual gifts and a calling. Spiritual growth and maturity take commitment, individual practice, and a sense of responsibility that you are not living for your own fulfillment, but for the growth and benefit of others as well.

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

There is often tension between self-care and denying ourselves in order to more fully love others. The more we mature and grow, the more we'll find that sweet spot where we learn how to nourish our own souls at the same time as we pour out our lives to serve and love others. When I'm feeling frazzled, fearful, or frustrated, my life doesn't show the kind of humility, gentleness, patience, and love that every Christian is called to. But the answer isn't first to focus on others. If anything, we'll see more brokenness around us and feel even more overwhelmed and helpless. Rather, we will grow spiritually when we look first to God who alone can provide the bond of peace both within our lives as individuals as well as within our relationships. As we grow in our relationship with God, the Holy Spirit gives us grace to truly love others as Christ has called us to.

One thing that I have learned is that God's love working through us always has healthy boundaries. It's like counting measures silently when the Composer wants to use other instruments instead. If we don't follow the music or the Conductor, we'll make both ourselves and everyone else sound bad. The same is true spiritually. In order to avoid this, we need to use our collective spiritual gifts to become better together. Let's skip to verses 11-13 to get a better idea of how that looks.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

When we hear words like *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers*, there are many people – even Christians – who don't see how they could be considered as fitting in any of those roles. Part of the problem is that we don't understand what those five roles are. Let's take a very broad look at them, and I think you may begin to see how God has gifted you in one of these ways you haven't considered.

1. Apostles – **Entrepreneurs** share vision and strategy to start movements.
2. Prophets – **Challengers** disturb the status quo and share new dreams.
3. Evangelists – **Communicators** explain and promote the message.
4. Pastors – **Caregivers** provide human compassion and connection.
5. Teachers – **Organizers** systematize and explain ideas to help understand.

I believe that each Christian is given a gift and calling to be one of the above to one extent or another. God knows that no calling is better than the other, and no gift can function well without the other gifts working as a team. It is essential to understand that these ministry gifts are not just for people who are in full-time ministry. The same is true about more spiritual gifts described in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. God gives us these gifts for one reason, and it is not only so we can find self-fulfillment. Part of our calling is not just to recognize and use these gifts ourselves, but it is also to identify and equip other people who are called to develop and use these gifts. We have been gifted by God to work together and equip each other to help the church be what God wants it to be – a perfect representation of Jesus to the world.

¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

There's no shortage of trickery, deceit, and scheming in our world. Every day I roll my eyes over another conspiracy theory or drop my jaw over a terrible threat or injustice. It's too bad all that facial movement doesn't help me lose weight. What is worse is that I can easily think of things that I have trusted or believed that I shouldn't have, and I likely still have some child-like gullibility that reminds me that spiritual growth is a life-long process.

¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Which of these five gifts – or “instruments” – has God created you to develop? Each of them needs to be developed on both an individual level as well as together as God's symphony. And as most musicians already know, our job is not only to play the music, but to recognize how the Composer and Conductor is calling and gifting other people, often through the humility, gentleness, patience and love that we have learned from Christ, to help develop their gifts and join in making the music bigger and better. As music leaders like to say, and Christ says to this congregation and his universal church, “All together now!”