 ****

**Your S.H.A.P.E.**

**&**

**God’s Direction**

At, With and Through

**RIVER OF LIFE CHURCH**

(April 2018)

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# Introduction

The purpose of the booklet and the journey of understanding our SHAPE is to receive God’s purposes in our lives. When we have an idea of God’s purposes and created order, we can align our lives, persevere in faith through difficulties and be joyfully used and fulfilled along the way. We want to discover, develop and display our **S.H.A.P.E.** within the Body of Christ and find our “place” to demonstrate the advancing Kingdom of God in and through our whole lives: our work, networks, friends, and family. We want to help us each and all together develop a holistic and interdependent way of understanding and reflecting God’s Spirit in and through the unique person God has made us each to be.

God often uses prophetic images and vision to give us a sense of destiny and hope for the future. They help us lean into and walk in a God-inspired direction. They are impressions that in a sense are coming from the future back to us. They are images that inspire us – though their fulfillment may be years away. Along with these directional clues and inspirations, God gives us experiences that build and equip us along the way.

Look at the lives of Joseph, Moses, David and Paul. Consider their sense of destiny, and then the steadfast and longsuffering shaping hand of God.

**Read Jeremiah 1:1-10.**

God invented your person – and actually has invented your entire life (in a very significant measure) – before you were born. That is how He can give you impressions and a sense of destiny that actually is from the future. “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

This booklet is an effort to help you see His created purposes and shaping hand in your life.

**SPIRITUAL GIFTS:**

* Don’t worry if you don’t know what a question is even talking about. We can discuss whatever categories/gifts/definitions you’d like to discuss when you are finished with the exercise. In many ways this is an exposure/teaching tool related to spiritual gifts.

**HEART PASSIONS:**

* This section could be expanded or redesigned in a number of ways. For our purposes, however, we are particularly emphasizing the 5 Categories of church-life mentioned on page 32. Toward which areas do you most passionately gravitate? God has put those desires and inclinations in your heart. Those are probably the areas in which you will feel most fulfilled as you serve. It is important, however, to also be aware and affirming of the other areas.

**ABILITIES:**

* To some, this section might not seem as spiritual. However, everything is spiritual! God is the One who has given you all your desires and abilities. It is helpful to take a look at them and understand them, and choose which ones you will particularly invest in – and begin to recognize that your abilities, too, are linked to the Kingdom of God.

**PERSONALITY:**

* Understanding, receiving, growing in your personality is very, very important. It is one of the deepest and most important challenges of life. Understanding how God has framed your personality, dealing with its challenges, understanding others’ personalities and navigating the differences is HUGE,

**EXPERIENCES:**

* This section has the least “teaching;” however, it might be the most important. The exercise of doing an “Echo-Life-Gram” can be very valuable. It can really help you to see how God has been shaping your life (just as He shaped Joseph, Moses, David, Paul and Jeremiah) through the events and circumstance – both “good” and “bad” – you have experienced. Reflecting over your “Echogram” and sharing it with others – allowing them to listen, ask questions and speak meaning into your life, can be a very informative and powerful experience.

This tool is designed for you to read, ponder, fill-out and discuss with others. The more fully and honestly you are able to interact with the material, and share your thoughts with others, the clearer your understanding will be of your **S.H.A.P.E.** and “place” in ministry and life. It will be particularly beneficial if you can work through this material with a small group that know you.

\*\* This booklet is a helpful tool in a life-long process of understanding yourself and your relationship with God. In 400AD Augustine wrote: “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know Thee.”

# Spiritual Gifts:

**In this booklet we are going to explore ways to discover and learn about Spiritual Gifts without taking any “tests.”** If, however, you would like to take some inventories/tests, we will reference some along the way.

A spiritual gift is an empowering of the Holy spirit given to a believer for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives these gifts to believers as He chooses for the benefit of others. So, He may demonstrate His power/ability through people in any number of ways, according to the need(s) at hand. In this way, believers may experience the Holy Spirit using them in many different ways at different times. He also, however, demonstrates Himself through people in rather consistent ways, giving particular gifts to believers - gifts that He wants them to tend, develop and use. We want to be aware of this kind of engifting in our lives and be responsible stewards, growing in our understanding and use of these “gift deposits,” or “gracelets” from God. Such understanding and use increases our own sense of joy and fulfillment in Christ. We are designed to be used by God for the building up of others through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore of great value for the individual and the church to discover the way(s) that God has engifted us, and to put those gifts into action for the sake of His Kingdom.

**The New Testament:**In the New Testament the primary passages that teach us about spiritual gifts can be found in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:4-16; 1 Peter 4:8-11. These are probably not an exhaustive list of the gifts of the spirit, but rather descriptions of how the Holy Spirit moves through believers. They are expressions of God love and presence to build people up in faith and life. Some refer to gifts as if they are somehow owned by individual believers. However, we look at them as expressions or manifestations of God Himself – through the Holy Spirit’s activity through believers. We don’t own these expressions, but rather grow to manage/steward them. Sometimes God expresses Himself somewhat consistently through particular gifts in one’s life, but other times He may manifest that activity once or occasionally. As we grow in the use/expression of particular gifts, we may start to be seen and called on for those abilities. This is a progression from the exercise of a gift to a ministry in that area. And, if that expression continues to grow it might lead to others affirming that particular function (or even “office”).

Before we start to explore the passages and gifts consider the following guidelines, to help you develop a rounded understanding of spiritual gifts and their application in your life.

**1.** **Explore the Possibilities**. Read through the four key passages in the Bible (in their context) dealing with spiritual gifts (1Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4). Learn what the gifts are, what characterizes them, and how they function in the Body of Christ.

**2. Experiment with as Many Gifts as Possible**. After you have completed this questionnaire, get involved in some aspect of ministry which will enable you to test the gifts you seem to have. Unless you try to exercise the gifts this analysis has revealed, you will have a hard time knowing whether or not you really “have” (or can move in the Holy Spirit’s powerful expression of) them. Take note of areas of ministry in which you experience rapid growth, progress and effectiveness.

**3. Think about what you truly like to do**. If you enjoy your attempts to exercise a particular gift, that is a pretty good sign of gifting. God has put the church Body together in such a way that we will feel fulfilled when we are functioning in the proper ways. Notice those areas that bring you a particular sense of fulfillment.

**4. Evaluate Your Effectiveness**. Since spiritual gifts are designed to benefit others, you should see positive results when you sue them. Take your time in this evaluation process, and don’t be too hard on your judgments of effectiveness. It may take time for you to move in your gift areas effectively. Pray for the courage to be honest with yourself and God in this evaluation process.

**5. Expect Confirmation from the Body**. No gift can be discovered, developed and used all on your own. As you exercise spiritual gifts to build others, they will recognize and confirm it. If others don’t seem to be agreeing with your perspective that you have a particular gift, you would do well to take a closer look at yourself and re-evaluate. (You will do well to also take note of those gifts that others call out, or prophesy into your life. Receive input from others and learn from those whom God particularly uses to impart gifting, direction and encouragement in your life.)

Two factors are important to keep in mind in seeking to discover and use spiritual gifts. First, while we may be regularly functioning with certain gifts within the Body, God may specially anoint us with a different particular gift to meet a need on a specific occasion. For example, you may generally move in the gift of administration, but at a given point the Lord may empower you to prophesy or grant you a gift of healing. It is important that we be open to the Holy Spirit and ready to be used by Him in whatever way he may choose.

Secondly, there is a danger in becoming overly concerned by what gifts may or may not be, thereby missing opportunities for service. If God has shown you an obvious need to meet or task to accomplish, be obedient to His leading even if you are uncertain as to whether you have gifts in that particular area. For example, though you may not have gifts of evangelism, the Lord will surely call upon you to share your faith with people He places in our life. As you are faithful in meeting the needs around you, you will gain further insight into, and confirmation of, your spiritual gifts. As your gifts become clearer, you can more easily understand your sense of calling. And as your calling(s) become more clear, you can more easily make decisions about your activities and the structuring of your ministries.

You may run across titles or descriptions that you do not understand or that you have never seen or experienced. That is OK. If this is the case, simply move on – there’s plenty of time to continue learning in this area. You will probably have opportunity to see and experience God working through most of these expressions in the future. Things that may not make sense to you now, may make clear sense to you later on. Feel free to ask others about any statements or gifts listed or mentioned in this tool.

**How to Know Your Spiritual Gifts**A good way to discover your unique spiritual gifts is to consider the things you enjoy doing. When serving in different ministry positions, ask yourself what gives you the most joy.

**What Fills You with Delight?**If the pastor asks you to teach a Sunday School class and your heart leaps for joy at the opportunity, you probably have the gift of teaching. If you quietly and excitedly give to missionaries and charities, you probably have the gift of giving. If you enjoy visiting the sick or taking a meal to a family in need, you may have the gift of service or exhortation. If you love organizing the annual missions conference, you likely have the gift of administration.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."  (ESV)

God equips each of us with distinct motivational desires so that our service to him springs from an inexhaustible well of delight. In this way we find ourselves looking forward with excitement to what he has called us to do.

**Why It's Important to Know Your Gifts**By tapping into the supernatural gifting that comes from God, we can touch the lives of others through our gifts. When we are filled with Holy Spirit His power infuses us and flows out to minister to others.

On the other hand, if we try to serve God in our own strength, apart from our God-given gifts, over time we'll lose our joy as our inner motivation wanes. Eventually, we will grow weary and burn out.

If you feel burned out in ministry, perhaps you're serving God in an area outside of your gifting. It might be time to try ministering in new ways until you tap into that inner wellspring of delight.

For the purpose of this study and your S.H.A.P.E., let’s begin looking at those Functions. Some call them the APEST Gifts (referring to the first letter of each gifting – or function Apostolic, Prophetic, Evangelistic, Shepherding, Teaching). Below are some descriptions of the APEST Gifts.

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**Apostles: Catalyze & Commission [Dream Awakeners] – open new areas; entrepreneurial**

Jesus: John 7:28-9; Hebrews 3:1

[Sent one: Are we leading people to their destiny?]

* **Forge** new territory
* **Face** resistance
* **Forgo** safety and comfort
* **Focus** on a purpose
* **Flexibly** adjust to place and person

**Prophets: Expose & Embody [Heart Revealers] – Depth and Ethics**

Acts 3:23-3; Matt. 5:17

[Forthtelling and Foretelling: Are the people hearing God’s voice and responding appropriately?]

* **Convict** people of their sin
* **Confront** the rebellious and unfaithful, especially leaders
* **Conform** to God’s truth in word, spirit, and deed
* **Challenge** people’s worldly thoughts
* **Contrast** those who follow Christ with those who don’t

**Evangelists: Invite & Excite [Story Tellers] – cultivate inviting and welcoming environments**

Mark 16:15; Luke 4:18

[Bring the good news: Are new people entering the Kingdom?]

* **Evoke** in people a curiosity or desire for the Gospel
* **Embrace** Christ’s Good News in their own lives
* **Express** the work Christ has done and still does in them
* **Exhort** others to share the Gospel
* **Extend** themselves or their message to reach others

**Shepherds: Guard & Guide [Soul Healers} – cultivate a life-giving spirituality**

John 10:11; Psalm 23:1-3;

[Shepherd: Are the people of God showing compassion for the broken and alone?]

* **Providing** for us
* **Protecting** us
* **Proving** his faithfulness and goodness
* **Planting** certain people in our lives
* **Pouring** care and concern into us

**Teachers: Interpret & Inform [Light Givers] – help people grow in knowledge and wisdom and maturity**

2 John 1:9; Matt. 7:28-9

[Hold out the truth: Is the Word coming alive and being incarnated?]

* **Illustrate** truths in a visual or visceral way
* **Instruct** a path forward in a given situation
* **Identify** the critical lessons to take away
* **Initiates** the teaching
* **Insist** what he taught matters

**LEADERSHIP:** Learn to lead out of your primary giftedness

**Apostles** love to innovate, blaze new trails.  That leadership style is often entrepreneurial and creative.

**Prophets** points people to God through truth.  That style tells it like it is and leads through a "true north."

**Evangelists** are invitational and charismatic.  These lead through selling people on a vision and being gregarious and welcoming.

**Shepherds** show care and love.  This style leads through investing in people and building trust and relationships.

**Teachers** show knowledge and building up.  This style should not only be great at leading through stories, but also great at developing people.

You can find some helpful information and APEST Inventories at the Following Sites:

www.fivefoldsurvey.com

www.fivefoldministry.com

www.5qcentral.com

www.theforgottenways.org/what-is-apest.asp

In addition to the A.P.E.S.T. gifts that were just outlined, the New Testament describes two other groups of gifts. Many would refer to them as the **Motivational Gifts** and the **Manifestation Gifts.**

**Motivational Gifts:**When it comes to discovering our spiritual gifts (or God’s Enablements – or “Gracelets”) it can be helpful to pay attention to the motivational gifts of the spirit. These gifts are listed in Romans 12. They tend to be practical in nature and describe the inner motivations of the Christian servant:

*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:6-8, ESV)

Here's an interesting way to picture these gifts. Christians with the motivational gift of:

* **Prophecy** are the eyes of the body of Christ.
* **Service** are the hands of the body of Christ.
* **Teaching** are the mind of the body of Christ.
* **Giving** are the arms of the body of Christ.
* **Exhortation** are the mouth of the body of Christ.
* **Administration** are the head of the body of Christ.
* **Mercy** are the heart of the body of Christ.

**“MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS”**The motivational gifts serve to reveal the personality of God. Let's look at them in detail as you try to pick out your gift(s).

* **Prophecy** - Believers with the motivational gift of prophecy are the "seers" or "eyes" of the body. They have insight, foresight, and act like watch dogs in the church. They warn of sin or reveal sin. They are usually very verbal and may come across as judgmental and impersonal; they are serious, dedicated, and loyal to truth even over friendship.
* **Ministering/Serving/Helps**- Those with the motivational gift of serving are the "hands" of the body. They are concerned with meeting needs; they are highly motivated, doers. They may tend to over commit but find joy in serving and meeting short-term goals.
* **Teaching**- Those with the motivational gift of teaching are the "mind" of the body. They realize their gift is foundational; they emphasize accuracy of words and love to study; they delight in research to validate truth.
* **Giving** - Those with the motivational gift of giving are the "arms" of the body. They truly enjoy reaching out in giving. They are excited by the prospect of blessing others; they desire to give quietly, in secret, but will also motivate others to give. They are alert to people's needs; they give cheerfully and always give the best that they can.
* **Exhortation/Encouragement** - Those with the motivational gift of encouragement are the "mouth" of the body. Like cheerleaders, they encourage other believers and are motivated by a desire to see people grow and mature in the Lord. They are practical and positive, and they seek positive responses.
* **Administration/Leadership** - Those with the motivational gift of leadership are the "head" of the body. They have the ability to see the overall picture and set long-term goals; they are good organizers and find efficient ways of getting work done. Although they may not seek leadership, they will assume it when no leader is available. They receive fulfillment when others come together to complete a task.
* **Mercy** - Those with the motivational gift of mercy are the "heart" of the body. They easily sense the joy or distress in other people and are sensitive to feelings and needs. They are attracted to and patient with people in need, motivated by a desire to see people healed of hurts. They are truly meek in nature and avoid firmness.

**For More information, or to take inventories:** www.gifttest.org/gifts-explained  
 www.gifttest.org/survey  
 www.iblp.org/questions/what-your-motivational-spiritual-gift

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### **“MANIFESTATION GIFTS”** (Or some may call them the **“Force Multiplying”** Gifts) **The manifestation gifts serve to reveal the power of God.**

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,**to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.**All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthian 12:4-11)*

**These gifts are supernatural or spiritual in nature. They can be further subdivided into three groups/categories: utterance, power, and revelation.  
  
Please do not discount these gifts – they are “tools” for all believers.** God wants to use you in “supernatural ways” to encourage you, to expression compassion and build others, and to bring glory to Himself. Take time to understand and consider all these gifts. Has God used you in any of these ways? Do you get excited when you consider any of them? Do you want to seek God for any of these expressions of the Holy Spirit? (The apostle Paul wrote, *“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”* - 1 Corinthians 14:1)

**Utterance Gifts** -  **say** something.  
**Power Gifts** - **do** something.  
**Revelation Gifts** - **reveal** something.

### **Utterance Gifts**

* **Prophecy** - This is the "forth telling" of the inspired Word of God primarily to the church, for the purpose of confirming the written Word and building up the entire body. The message is usually one of edification, exhortation or consolation, although it can declare God's will in a particular circumstance, and in rare cases, predict future events.
* **Speaking in Tongues** - This is a supernatural utterance in an unlearned language which is interpreted so that the entire body will be edified. Tongues may also be a sign to unbelievers.
* **Interpretation of Tongues** - This is a supernatural interpretation of a message in tongues, translated into the known language so that the hearers (the entire body) will be edified.

### **Power Gifts**

* **Faith** - This is not the faith that is measured to every believer, nor is it "saving faith." This is special, supernatural faith given by the Spirit to receive miracles or to believe God for miracles.
* **Healing** - This is supernatural healing, beyond natural means, given by the Spirit.
* **Miracles** - This is the supernatural suspension of the natural laws, or an intervention by the Holy Spirit into the laws of nature.

### **Revelation Gifts**

* **Word of Wisdom** - This is supernatural knowledge applied in a godly or correct way. One commentary describes it as "insight into doctrinal truth."
* **Word of Knowledge** - This is supernatural knowledge of facts and information that can only be revealed by God for the purpose of applying doctrinal truth.
* **Discerning of Spirits** - This is the supernatural ability to distinguish between spirits such as good and evil, truthful or deceiving, prophetic versus satanic.

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You have just read about and considered a number of ways the Holy Spirit works through people. As you read you probably sensed that some gifts were more relevant to you than others. It can be helpful to jot down the ones that seemed to resonate the most and start to see and experiment with how they might fit together in your life. Some would call this cluster your “**Gift Mix.” Please record your Gift Mix as best as you are able at this point.** Once you have written them, it can be very good to discuss them with others who know you and have seen your interact with others in ministry settings.

**APEST GIFTs MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS MANIFESTATION GIFTS**

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Remember that this is just a starting place to help you discover the spiritual gifts that God most often works through you. Do not make the mistake of considering the results/findings of this questionnaire as final or irrefutable. It may well be that a gifting that “you have” doesn’t show up strongly here. You can, however, use this inventory as a helpful source of insight, not letting the results control or bind you or your ministry.

# Heart Passions:

The Bible uses the term “heart” to represent the center of your motivation, desires, interests, and inclinations. Your heart determines why you say the things you do (Matt. 12:34), why you feel the way you do (Ps. 34:7), and why you act the way you do (Pr. 4:23).

Physiologically, each of us has a unique heartbeat.  Each person has a slightly different pattern.  Likewise, God has given each of us a unique emotional "heartbeat" that races when we encounter activities, subjects, or circumstances that interest us.

Another word for heart is passion. Your passions usually stir intense emotion that leads you to want to act. There are certain subjects about which you feel passionate and others that leave you cold. God had a purpose in giving you your inborn interests and passions.  Your emotional heartbeat reveals a very important key to understanding His intentions for your life.

Some could say that our Heart Passions become the action arms of the Church. It can be valuable to understand your what makes you most passionate in the church – and in your concerns for society.

**Observations from Revelation 3:14-22**1. God expects passion. (15)

2. God hates apathy. (16)

3. Spiritual apathy results from pursuing a worldly agenda. (17-18)

4. God wants to renew/restore our passion. (19-22)

**Why do we need to connect with our Heart Passions?**

1. We are made to be passionate. (Gen. 1:27; Titus 2:14; Rom. 12:11)

2. Passion leads us to do things. (Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:29; Heb. 13:21)

3. Passion increases willpower.

4. Passion changes lives.

5. Passion makes seemingly impossible things possible.

**Why people lack passion**

1. They allowed something precious to become too familiar.

2. They have exaggerated their need for acceptance and approval. (Jn. 5:44)

3. Apathy has a natural tendency to increase with age.

4. They may lack a sense of purpose beyond themselves. (Matt. 22;37-40)

5. Past failures have made them afraid to hope and be passionate.

6. Busyness, lack of focus, time and energy can swallow clear passion.

**How to become passionate**

1. Recognize the importance of passion.

2. Repent of apathy and indifference – return to your first love, and commit yourself to care. (Rev. 2:4)

3. Pray for passion.

4. Identify the passions that God has put in you.

5. Hang out with passionate people.

6. Read things that will inspire your passion.

Your passions my lie in a number of different areas/directions related to family, neighborhood, creativity, the environment, government, education, etc. These are all worth taking note of and considering more deeply.   
  
**What gets you riled up, and makes you want to do something?**

(Don’t limit yourself to religious topics or areas. You might have a strong desire to be a writer, to do math, to act, to do construction, to teach, to coach, to lead an organization or business, to make a lot of money, to counsel, etc. – Be honest with your desires, most likely they come from God.)

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Don’t ignore your natural interests. People rarely excel at tasks they don't enjoy doing. High achievers enjoy what they do.

**Developing your passions**

1. Recognize your passions, and that God is the One who placed them in you.   
 (Awareness & Thankfulness)

2. Receive your passions as gifts and resources from God, and develop them responsibly, as a wise   
 steward.

3. As you reflect over your passions, are there any concrete steps you could take to increase your passion   
 in a particular area, or exercise it.

4. Consider ways that you can organize your passions around your actual life priorities.

5. Share your passions with others. Ask them for feedback as to whether they can see these things in your   
 life. Discuss your ideas or how you might grow in these areas, and how you might exercise your   
 passions in a consistent kind of way.   
 (Take time to actually receive their insights. God often uses others to speak to us.)

Use this space to jot any ideas that you might have.

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# Abilities

We’ve not all been created equally - at least not in terms of abilities and talents; but we are all important! We’ve all been given different strengths to be developed and used and weaknesses to be protected and sured-up. Not only have we been given different talent mixes in our lives, we’ve also been given different amount of talents. Some people are given world class amounts of abilities, while others are given much smaller abilities. We will not all play professional football, nor could we if we wanted to play (nor should we all if we could). We are all important, however, because God has created each of us to play significant roles within His Kingdom. We all must play our part. As we come to faith in Christ, we are assigned particular roles within His “Body.” We each have functions to perform for the strengthening and betterment of the church and for the advancement of His Kingdom on the earth. “From Him (Christ) the whole body (the church), joined and held together by every supporting ligament (possibly referring to relationships and structures), grows and builds itself up in love, ***as each part does its work***.” **(Ephesians 4:16)**

**God wants you to discover, develop and display your abilities for His glory and for your joy!** As our lives display His workmanship within us, they reveal His glory. As we live, making the most of how He created us, it brings us great joy. Jesus came to release abundance life within us - that our joy may be complete in Him. God’s glory and our joy are magnified as we use our S.H.A.P.E. to do His work. “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” **(Ephesians 2:10)**

**Ability - the capacity to do, a skill, power to perform a task, strength.** As God gives us different abilities, He requires us to be good stewards of those abilities, to use them to the benefit of others. In Matthew 25:15 in the parable of the Talents, Jesus described God saying, He gave different people differing amounts of money *according to their ability*. The Greek word for *ability* used in that verse is *DUNAMIS*. This word can also be translated power, or capacity. In the parable Jesus indicates that God gives different amounts of resources to people for the purpose of investing for His Kingdom, according to their abilities, power or capacity to steward those resources well for God.

Our abilities need to be viewed in two ways, our *natural aptitudes* and our *acquired proficiencies*. Our natural aptitudes refer to our raw potentials. Some of us simply have more raw potential than other - whether it be in mental, social or physical realms. God is not as concerned with our natural aptitudes as he is with what we do to develop them. He wants to see what we do with what He gives us. Our acquired proficiencies refer to our training and skill development. We may not have much natural aptitude in a given area, but through work and/ study we can develop significant levels of proficiency. Thus our abilities in that area are increased. As we discover out natural aptitudes and acquire additional proficiencies in those areas, our abilities seem to multiply.

Abilities are not “spiritual gifts,” but they are spiritual, and they are gifts from God. We don’t always need to make large distinctions between spiritual gifts and abilities because they both come from God, and are intended for His glory. In Exodus 31-36, God gave people specific skills/abilities to build the tabernacle. They were literally “filled with the Holy Spirit” in order to acquire the necessary abilities. Does that mean their craftsmanship was a spiritual gift or an ability? Does it really matter? All our lives are spiritual; there are no compartments that are secular - separated from God. Martin Luther - John Calvin - and the Puritans all emphasized the priesthood of all believers all the time. Grace permeates/“spiritualizes” every aspect of our lives. Our abilities are spiritual, and they must be submitted to Christ’s lordship. “*Whatever you do,* whether in word or deed, do it all to in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” **(Colossians 3:17)** To slave (employees) Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. **(Colossians 3:23)**

**I. You must Discover your abilities**

**A.**  You will discover what you can do through attempting and doing many things - through a trial and error process. Don’t be afraid to fail, particularly in new ventures. Unfortunately many people do not even discover may of their abilities because they are afraid to even try the things that God has given them *DUNAMIS - ability, power, capacity* to do.

**B.**  You need to recognize and affirm abilities in yourself and in others. Once you’ve seen that you have some abilities in a given area, you need to acknowledge it. You cannot develop what you don’t even acknowledge that you have. When you recognize abilities in others, affirm those abilities. This is all part of the process of considering “how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” **(Hebrews 10:24)** Sometimes we need to call out abilities that are latently within others - abilities that they may not yet know they have. We need to encourage and embolden them to develop and use those abilities. And we need to be open to receive such calls and encouragement from others.

It is important that we discover and own/claim abilities that God has given us. We cannot develop what we have not yet acknowledged that we have.

**II. You must Develop your abilities.**

Your natural aptitudes, raw potentials and abilities must be developed, or they will never grow.

**A.** You must receive your abilities as gifts from God. “What do you have that you did not receive. And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?” **(1Corinthians 4:7)** It is important to remember that our development of our abilities is simply our responsibility - our response to the abilities He’s given us.

**B.**  Jesus developed His abilities **(Luke 2:52)**, so should we.

**C.** “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” **(Proverbs 16:3)** We need to really commit the things that we do (the use of our abilities) to the Lord from beginning to end. Before we even understand our plans, we need to commit them to Him. Before we know how we will do what we will do, we need to commit ourselves to Him. As we do what we do, as we exercise our abilities, we need to be committing ourselves to Him. And once we have completed the tasks, we need to commit the results to God.

**D.** Involve yourself in training, so your skills will increase. Read relevant books; hang around people who can do what you want to do; and practice a lot! Training need to be a characteristic of your entire life. Get better at exercising your abilities, don’t settle for getting by.

**III. You must display your abilities for the glory of God and for your joy.**

**A.** Don’t be afraid of the emergence of pride, deal with it if it emerges. Confess it as sin to God and to those before whom it has been displayed. Repent of the pride and move ahead.

**B.** Don’t be a person who is ever preparing, but never doing. Boston is full of such people, and so is the Church in Boston. Our city is called by God to be a city of training, but the enemy wants people to think they are never ready to do anything. Don’t buy that lie!

**C.** Look for opportunities to exercise your abilities. Start small, allow your abilities and the display of your abilities to increase.

* Take real time to consider you strengths and abilities – this is very important in life. These often relate to what you will do for a living, and how people will access and relate to you.
* **StrengthsFinder 2.0, by Tom Rath** is a very helpful book and inventory to help you understand how you may best work with others. It considers 29 Strengths, and highlights your top 5
* **Go Put Your Strengths to Work, by Marcus Buckinghame** – is very helpful, but will take time to really work through. This is a more unique approach that helps you consider you unique and specific strengths.

[Some might relate these Strengths to personality – more than ability. But since they relate to what you “do,” we’ve included them here.]

**Practical Applications**

\* List some of your abilities in the following areas:

(things that you think you do well, and that bring you a sense of joy and/or fulfillment when you are doing them)

Work:

-

-

-

Play/Leisure:

-

-

-

Socially relating to others:

-

-

-

Education/Understandings:

-

-

-

Other abilities beyond the above categories:

-

-

-

\* List any particular ways you are developing the above listed abilities?

\* List any new things related to your abilities that you would like to try

# Personality

**Personality – Distinctive qualities or characteristics of a person.**

1. God created different personalities. While each person is unique, there are also similar types of personalities.
2. Many of our difficulties with one another are rooted in our different personalities. Understanding our differences can help us overcome our difficulties.
3. All personalities have strengths and weaknesses.
4. An awareness and understanding of different personality types can help you to:
   1. Appreciate your strengths.
   2. Recognize your weaknesses.
   3. Respect others’ strengths.
   4. Bear with others’ weaknesses.
   5. Embrace interdependence.
5. Some relevant Scriptural references:

* Romans 12:3-8; 14:1-13; 15:1-7
* 1 Corinthians, chapters 12-14
* Philippians 2:1-4

1. **Three Important Inventory Assessments**

* Enneagram
* MBTI
* DISC

It’s helpful to complete any or all of the following three personality assessments. You can share what you’ve learned with one or two friends or family members who know you well and ask for their feedback on whether the assessment results seem to fit you well. We’ve listed a free version for each assessment as well as a paid version that gives a more accurate result and/or more information to help you apply the results in your decisions and relationships.

**\*\* It is worth investing in understanding yourself!**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Assessment** | **Paid version** | **Free version** |
| **Enneagram**   (Motivations and Essence) | [www.wepss.com](http://www.wepss.com) ($10) www.enneagraminstitute.com/rheti/  ($12) | [www.EnneaApp.com](http://www.EnneaApp.com) |
| **Myers-Briggs** Type indicator (Processing Information) | http://www.myersbriggs.org/ ($175) | www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test |
| StrengthsFinder | Book & Access Code ($18) |  |
| **DISC Assessment** | http://www.thediscpersonalitytest.com/ ($65) | https://discpersonalitytesting.com/free-disc-test/ |

# Experiences

* This is where God SHAPES you.
* We often benefit from reflecting with others
* God uses every stage; high points and low points; we don’t want to miss the lessons and building process
* Listen to others; believe the testimony of witnesses in your life – chances are they are right and you are wrong.

God uses many things to “shape” the kind of person we are. He spends a life time building us, adding things and taking things away. Often we’d like the process to be quicker, wishing we could become all that we can be over night, or at least by the end of this year. But God doesn’t view, or use, time the way we do. He looks into our time frame from a perspective of eternity, and He builds and shapes us according to His good pleasure.

One of the major ingredients God uses in building us is our experiences. The Bible says that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.” **(Romans 8:28)** To understand this verse well, and to understand how God works in and through our experiences, we first need to understand what the verse **doesn’t** mean. Romans 8:28 **doesn’t** mean that all things naturally work out for our good, that we everything is getting better, or that everything will work out in the end just because that’s how life works. We have all seen and experienced enough in our own lives and perceived enough in the lives of others to know that all things don’t always work out well. People get hurt, people lose battles, people even die. Romans 8:28 **doesn’t** even mean that God only allows good things to happen to His people. Christians sometimes experience the worst trials, pains and tortures of all people. This was true of Jesus, it will be true of many of His people as well.

Romans 8:28 **does** mean that God will take the circumstances of this fallen world, those circumstances which are positive as well as negative, and use them to benefit His children. No matter what happens to us in this life, God is ready, willing and able to use it for our good. This does not in any way mean that God necessarily views all the things that happen as good. He does not delight in the bad things that happen, but He can and will redeem them all for our benefit as we bring them to Him and seek to understand His ways. Whether good things or bad things happen to us, God wants to use them to make us ***better***, deeper and fuller as people. But we must be careful that we do not become ***bitter*** through the events of our lives. When bad things happen, the enemy is often postured close by to sow seeds of discontent and bitterness in our hearts. He wants us to misjudge God, to believe that God doesn’t care, or isn’t able to help us. It is important that we meditate regularly upon the truth of God’s goodness and that we look to see His goodness amidst all the circumstances of our lives.

**Psalms 34:8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.**

**Psalms 100:5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

**Psalms 135:3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant.**

**Psalms 145:9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.**

**1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

God uses our experiences to strengthen us and to prepare us for greater challenges in the future. We can see this pattern throughout Scripture. One example can be seen in the life of David who made it clear that he felt prepared to take on Goliath because the Lord had given him victory against a lion and a bear **(1Samuel 17:33-37)**. Joseph was another such example. God gave him dreams relating to how He was going to use him in the future. The dreams ended up causing Joseph a great deal of hardship. The hardship came from outside him, as his parents and brothers became angry at him for having, and sharing, his dreams. His brothers became so angry that they sold him into slavery, where he faced years of different hardships. (These hardships, however, were eventually used by God to bring about the fulfillment of the very dreams that God had given him.) The dreams also caused hardships within Joseph. **Psalm 105:19** says (in the New American Standard Version) that “until the time that His word (the dreams) came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him (Joseph).” God is always ready to use our experiences for our good - to make us **better, not bitter** - but we have to hold on to Him in faith through it all. As we hang on, God’s words and promises to us test our hearts as to whether we will believe He is good and will fulfill His words or not. And when the “fullness of time” comes about, when God sees fit, He unveils how He has been preparing us through our circumstances for the new challenges at hand. Such revelations are wonderful, for they reveal God’s great sovereignty over the affairs of life and His great care for us as individuals and His people.

**A practical tool:**

As the patterns of our heart beat can be recorded on an echocardiogram, so we can record our life experiences on a piece of paper. It can be a valuable exercise every once-in-a-while to **make a graph of our life experiences**, drawing one continuous chronological line from left to right, making the line rise or fall to indicate how positive or negative an experience may have been. The graph can be as detailed as you’d like. Be careful to include especially gifts you have received in your life for which you are most thankful or that have most influenced the trajectory of your life. Also include griefs, losses, and injustices you have suffered, that have impacted you most deeply. It can serve as a good tool to help you more clearly see how your experiences have shaped your life. You may want to label each peak and valley, so that you can ponder the depths of each incident’s effect upon your life. The exercise can take into account your **experiences in the Lord (victories, deliverances, revelations (etc.)), your experiences in relationships, your trials and you accomplishments**. It’s up to you. You may even go a step further, and discuss your graph - your “Echolifeogram” with others. Rehearsing your life in this way can be very healthy and uplifting.

As you look at your life (or someone else’s) remember that God is a redeeming God - a God who wants to work good out of all your experiences. Your pains have been real, as have your delights. God wants to use them all to make you **better, not bitter**.

**Small Group Discussion:**

Using your “Echolifeograms” or not, you may want to share anywhere from 3-7 of the experiences that you feel have most shaped your life. These are some of the experiences that have contributed to making you who you are. Consider carefully what you’d like to share.

 Don’t share too much detail, and take-up too much time.

 Don’t share too many things, allow others to share, too.

 Don’t share anything that is too much for you or for others.   
 (You want to be glad that you’ve shared, not wishing you hadn’t because you were more   
 vulnerable than you or others knew how to handle.)

 Do share with enough depth that your sharing is real and beneficial.

# Step 1: Finding Fruitful Ministry – Who has God made me to be? SHAPE Summary Sheet

*Once you have completed the SHAPE booklet, please complete this Summary, referring to the attached SHAPE booklet, before the May 1 session and bring it with you.*

**1. Spiritual Gifts Summary (SHAPE booklet pp. 13):**

**APEST GIFTs MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS MANIFESTATION GIFTS**

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**2. Heart Passion (SHAPE booklet pp. 15):**

About what are you personally passionate, especially related to the advance of God’s kingdom?   
 Summarize briefly.

**3. Abilities (SHAPE booklet pp. 18):** Summarize your primary natural abilities and learned skills.

**4. Personality (Based on Assessments):**

Enneagram results, Myers-Briggs results, or DISC (maybe include StrengthsFinder results, whatever   
 test you have taken and feel reflects your personality well.

**5. Experiences (SHAPE booklet pp.21-22):** What 3 to 7 significant life experiences has God given you,   
 both peaks and valleys, that have most shaped your life and made you who you are?