

Mercy

How Do I Fit? The Motivational Gifts

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I. Overview

Two weeks ago we talked about fruit. My point was simple while there is such a thing as fruit in the “general” sense (apples, bananas, and oranges are all “fruit”) there is also such a thing as fruit in a “specific” sense. That is, while apples, bananas, and oranges are all fruit it’s also true that an apple is not a banana and a banana is not an orange.

The Biblical truth I was connecting to was this business of spiritual gifts. That is, while all spiritual gifts are the same in a “general” sense there is still specific categories or breakdowns of gifts in a “specific” sense. Just as fruit can be further defined as apples, bananas, or oranges so spiritual gifts come in three different basic categories . . . the *motivational* gifts of Romans 12, the *manifestation* gifts of 1 Corinthians 12, and the *ministry* gifts of Ephesians 4.

My point was this – when we talk about gifts in general it’s also important to go the specific.

This week I want to reverse the thought and take us from the specific to the general. In order to keep the analogy let’s talk about vegetables rather than fruit.

Imagine 7 different kinds of vegetables . . . perhaps lettuce, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, carrots, squash, green beans, and broccoli. How all these vegetables are unique but at the same time they are all vegetables.

Now . . . why do we eat vegetables. They are good for the body, right? Did you know that the same could be said for spiritual gifts. Yes, you and I have a unique gift (one of the seven motivational gifts) and it’s wonderful to understand the uniqueness of that gift. As you and I grasp the “specifics” of who we are and how that gift impacts life and relationships then we are blessed . . . and Gods to bless us.

But just vegetables have a larger purpose than just to be a specific vegetables the seven motivational gifts also have a larger purpose. Simply put, when you read through Romans 12 the inescapable conclusion of the gifts is that they are meant for service and even more specifically they are meant for serving the church. (Of course, we are to take our gifts out into life and relationships as well.) But, that Paul has both service and the church in view is obvious as you read the first several verses of Romans 12 which are meant to be the “framework” in which the entire gift discussion takes place . . .

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, In view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual^a act of worship. ¹

⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body²

Note that verse 1, the very beginning of the conversation pushes in the direction of serving and verse 4 connects serving to the life of the church.

So . . . how does this connect to vegetables and moving from the specific to the general? It's very simple. There may be many kinds of vegetables but they all serve one purpose . . . to feed and strengthen the body. In other words, your gift, specific and unique as it might be, is still meant to serve the church. Said positively, you have a wonderful potential in you to make the church better and wherever the church is weak God's answer is the people the gifting within them being bought to bear. (The answers are not only "in Christ", they are also "in us" because "the anointing is in the Body"). Said negatively . . . you have responsibility to put your gifts to work in the service of the church. Are you doing that?

II. Mercy

I'd like for you to take your Bibles and open them up to 1 John. I have to be honest with you . . . as I read through some of the Bill Gothard material on the gift of mercy (or "compassion") I wasn't sure that Gothard was making his case. (For those of you who don't know, Bill Gothard was a Bible teacher during the 70's and 80's who was enormously influential and helpful in the lives of many of us).

Gothard pointed to the apostle John as someone with this motivational gift of mercy. I read through Gothard's and looked at the Scripture passages he cited and came to the conclusion . . . "maybe". Maybe John has this gift but I would want to see more from the Bible before I was convinced.

Gothard focused almost exclusively on the Gospel of John and the references in there that John made to himself . . . which are few and far between. As I reflected I thought, "I wonder what we would find if we read through John's letters. After all, he isn't telling the story of Jesus there and consequently trying to keep himself in the background. In those letters we might find John the person just a bit more readily."

And so, I began to read through those three letters, with Gothard's observations on this spiritual gift and it's tendencies along with Don and Katie Fortune's research on this gift

^a Or *reasonable*

¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Ro 12:1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Ro 12:4-5). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

and it's tendencies in the back of mind. Literally, I had the research notes in one hand and the Bible in the other . . . and things began to leap off the page at me.

If you had asked me before this study I would likely have guessed that John's motivational gift was teaching. Now that I've had the chance to look a bit more in depth and with this question in mind, I believe there is strong evidence that John's motivational gift was mercy. And I believe that as we look at the evidence we gain real life insight into what the gift of mercy looks like in action.

Let's start with 1 John 1 . . .

1. Connects with the hurting, pressured, oppressed

(1 John 1:3-4; John 1:36; Jn 20:2)

Perhaps you know that when John wrote 1 John times were getting tough for the New Testament church. Roman persecution was greatly intensifying. We're in the era wherein Nero was burning Christians alive because of their faith. It's to that group of people, a group of people greatly stressed, oppressed, and hurting John wrote. He wanted to connect with them and express God's heart for them. Take a look at what he writes as he begins 1 John . . .

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen.

As I was reading through John's Gospel I noticed something – just a detail – that got my attention. John 1:36 . . . "**Behold, the lamb of God.**" The words are John the Baptist's and he's talking about Jesus. Interestingly, John the Apostle (they are two different people, by the way) is the only Gospel writer to record this statement.

Now first of all it's recorded because it's truth. But I was intrigued that John the apostle was the one to write this down. Why? Well, the lamb of God picture tells us that Jesus was the vulnerable sacrifice of God and intended to be so all along. It's the very picture that would move the heart of the person with the gift of mercy.

And then I found John 19:25-26 (the notes in KPC Express say John 20:2 but that verse comes into play later) interesting . . . and this insight I do owe to Bill Gothard . . .

²⁵Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved,³

The scene is the crucifixion of Jesus. And which disciple/apostle was there? Peter the prophet? No. Matthew the giver? No. It was John and I find that significant because one of the key characteristics of those with the gift of mercy is that they are drawn

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 19:25-26). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

towards the hurting. They want to be there . . . physically, if possible. And if they can't be there in person then maybe they can write a letter.

Got it?

2. Highly Relational

(1 John 1:3-4; 1 Jn 1:6-7; 1 Jn 1:12-14; Jn 13:23; 3 Jn 13-14)

Here's the next trait or characteristic that we see in the person with the gift of mercy . . . they are highly relational. This is quite different from the organizer/administrator who is task oriented or the teacher who is truth oriented. Check out some of the wording in 1 John 1 . . .

*³We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.*⁴*

Note how John connects "proclaiming" (preaching) with relationship . . . we "proclaim" so that you may have "fellowship" (relationship) with us. Fascinating. He's not preaching so that they grow in Christ as the encourager would or that truth may be taught as the prophet or the teacher would . . . if John is to be taken at his word then he is "proclaiming" the truth of Christ because it produces relationship.

Note the same kind of thinking in vss 6-7 . . .

⁶So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. ⁷But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.⁵

What's the subject? Confession and repentance. What's the reason for walking in these things? Because it's the right thing to do? Well, it is the right thing to do and an encourager such as myself what want you to do this because we would want you to grow *spiritually*. But notice how John connects this to relationship . . . ***"if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other"***. John, the mercy person and therefore the highly relational person, wants us to walk in confession and repentance because when we do so we grow *relationally*.

Is John the Merciful more right than, for example, Paul the Encourager? No. They are both equally right. Both are a part of who God is and the truth of the matter is that it takes more than one person to get God's take or truth on any given situation.

* Or *so that our joy may be complete*; some manuscripts read *your joy*.

⁴Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Jn 1:1-4). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Jn 1:6-7). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Now, move forward to vss. 12-14 . . .

¹² I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus. ¹³ I am writing to you who are mature in the faith* because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one. ¹⁴ I have written to you who are God's children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God's word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one.⁶*

All I want you to see is the highly relational, tender, intimate language he uses in what is essentially a doctrinal exhortation . . . *God's children, mature in faith, young in faith.* This is tender and highly relational language by which he speaks to the larger church.

3. An Advocate (1 Jn 2:1-6)

Here's the next thing about the mercy person. They are natural advocates. Think of the Good Samaritan. While others passed by the hurting person he stopped and tended to all their needs. He took that person to the inn. Paid their bills. Checked back on them. Count on the mercy person to move towards the hurting person and be an advocate for them . . . even fiercely so.

Now with that in mind listen to how John describes Jesus and remember that there were countless things that he could have written . . . Jesus the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Jesus the soon and coming king, Jesus the judge of all the earth and all mankind . . . but instead of those truths the Holy Spirit inspires this man of mercy to write about Jesus the Advocate . . .

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ²He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.⁷

Now we have a different kind of victim in view rather than the Jew beaten up on the side of the road and left for dead by a group of thieves as in the Story of the Good Samaritan. Here, in 1 Jn 2:1-2, John speaks to the person who has been victimized by their own sin. Done it to themselves. What's his message? You have an Advocate. Jesus comes to your side. He's the defense attorney not the prosecuting attorney.

* Greek *through his name*.

* Or *to you fathers*; also in 2:14.

⁶Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Jn 2:12-14). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁷Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Jn 2:1-2). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

John looks at the sinner and immediately his heart of mercy rises up within him. His motivational gift – a gift from the Holy Spirit – a partial but true expression of who God is – immediately preaches the message of God’s mercy through the advocacy of God’s Son.

Mercy people move towards those who are downtrodden for whatever reason and seek to alleviate their suffering.

4. Reacts strongly to lack of love (1 Jn 2:9-11; 3:15)

Check out this verse . . .

¹⁵Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them.⁸*

When I read it I was hit by the intensity of those words. If you hate your brother or sister you are really a murderer at heart. 1 Jn 2:9-11 carries a similar, though less intense, thought.

Here’s the “hard side” of mercy . . . there is only one unforgiveable sin . . . hatred . . . giving up on people . . . writing off people . . . unmercifully judging people . . . allowing hatred to well up in your heart towards any human being and especially someone else in the body of Christ.

Mercy people react strongly when they see a lack of love. And, even though I am an encourager rather than a mercy person, I do too.

5. Unconditional Love is the key value

(1 Jn 3:1; 1 Jn 4:7-12; 1 Jn 5:1-3; Jn 3:16; Jn 13:33-35; 3 Jn 5-10)

Who was John known as? If you know some Scripture then you may be aware that he is commonly described as the “the apostle of love”. He uses the word “love” (according to New King James) 117 times in his five books (John, 1-3 John, Revelation), 57 times in the Gospel of John and 43 times in 1 John.

The Holy Spirit inspired this man with the motivational gift of mercy to write some of the most famous verses in the Bible and it’s amazing how often the word “love” shows up in those verses:

“For God so loved the world” (John 3:16)

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.⁹ (1 Jn 4:7)

God is love (1 Jn 4:16)

* Greek *hates his brother*.

⁸Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Jn 3:15). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁹*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (1 Jn 4:7). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

6. Highly connects “true” faith with love (Jn 15:12-17)

It's also not surprising that a mercy person such as John would be especially in touch with the connection between true faith (real doctrine, sound doctrine) and love:

³⁵*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”¹⁰
(John 13:35)*

¹²*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.¹¹ (Jn 15:12)*

Unless it produces love, unconditional love, tender-hearted love, then it is not true faith or sound doctrine.

7. Often connects with a prophet (Acts 4:13)

Here's an irony of the mercy person . . . I've heard it said that oftentimes where you find a mercy person you will also find a prophet. It's as if God knows that these two gifts belong to each other and are necessary to balance one another. I don't know if it's true that this is always the case but I do know that John and Peter were often together, that Peter's motivational gift was likely prophecy just as John's was probably mercy, and that they did seem to rub off on and balance each other . . .

¹³*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men,¹²*

Perhaps it's worth drawing particularly attention to family relationships wherein this is both a prophetic figure and a mercy person . . . most especially in the husband-wife relationship. Needless to say this gift combination can be truly great or it can be filled with conflict. The choice is yours and it may come down to well you understand your gifts, how they can work together or against one another, and how to walk in maturity with one another.

8. Strong desire to remove hurts (1 Jn 3:11)

¹¹*This is the message you heard from the beginning:
We should love one another.¹³*

¹⁰*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 13:35). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 15:12). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹²*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Ac 4:13). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹³*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (1 Jn 3:11). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

That is, we should love one another rather than hurt one another. It's interesting to remember the setting into which John wrote . . . a persecuted church, a church under attack, an intense and even extreme era. In that setting John told the church 43 times to love each other. (1 John record 43 separate instances wherein John uses the word "love").

9. Is trusting and trustworthy (Jn 20:2)

At the cross as Jesus was dying an extraordinary thing happened. He saw his suffering and grieving mother and he saw John the apostle with his great heart for mercy. Jesus was more than wise . . . he saw into men's souls with the very gaze of the Almighty. He John's gift. John's heart. John's compassion. John's mercy. He knew that these things made John trustworthy. He knew that John would be drawn towards Jesus' mother in compassion and that he would love her through her hurt. In that setting and with that understanding Jesus said . . .

²⁶When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," ²⁷and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. ¹⁴"Took her into his home . . ."

Need I say more.

10. Exemplified by the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35)

Read the story of the Good Samaritan and you will see the gift of mercy in action.

11. Heart driven

There is so much heart in John . . . and so much heart in the mercy person. The Teacher thinks . . . the mercy person feels. Both are a part of who God is.

Misuses

If the above are expressions of the gift in it's strengths, then what about it's weaknesses. As in the other gifts, the weaknesses are often intuitive and are reverse expressions of the gift in it's strength.

1. Can become offended (Luke 9:54)

When Jesus was passing through certain Samaritan villages he was largely rejected. When John saw that his response was as follows:

¹⁴*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 19:26-27). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

⁵⁴When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"^a ¹⁵

This makes sense. If you are all about the underdog and move in the direction of people who have hurt or are in distress then it's easy to get angry at those who have done the damage. You can become offended . . . which is of course the devil's temptation and trap to get you out of your gift. It's a great irony . . . the mercy person can become controlled by bitterness. Notice Jesus' response . . .

⁵⁵But Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶and^b they went to another village. ¹⁶

So, mercy person, stay in your gift. Stay soft. Stay merciful. Don't write people off – even those who are hard on others. Why? That's the way God does it because, after all, *"it's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance."* (Romans 2:4)

2. Can be indecisive

This observation doesn't come from the life of John or any Biblical passage that I'm aware of but the Fortune's did pick it up in their testing and Bill Gothard makes the same observation.

3. Can be easily hurt by others

This is obvious. If you're all about heart and have a deep sensitivity towards others and their needs then that same awareness of vulnerabilities can make you vulnerable.

This is where it's important to become "strong in spirit" (Luke 1:80). That is, tender as a mercy person but still able to find strength from God and not let your hurts cripple you. It's an amazing thing, really. A God thing. Soft and yet strong.

4. Can be too accepting

This also is obvious. The mercy person wants to alleviate suffering. Again, think about John and the cross in order to be with both Jesus and Mary in their terrible hour. But this wonderful gift can leave with the inability to correct sin or challenge wrong. After all, if you want to alleviate suffering then it's hard for you to hurt people even when a little pain could be important.

^a Some manuscripts *them, even as Elijah did*

¹⁵*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Lk 9:54). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

^b ^{55,56} Some manuscripts *them. And he said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."* And

¹⁶*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Lk 9:55-56). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

5. Can fail to be firm when needed

What can I say? See above.

6. Can base decisions on emotions rather than sound principles

Again, the heart driven person. Again and again John talked about love. He moved towards the hurting. He felt people's pain. But there's more to life than emotion . . . there is truth as well. Here's where I think we see maturity in John. If you'll read through 1 John you'll see lots of heart but you'll also see that he was connected to truth:

To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—² because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: ³ Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.¹⁷

7. Need for relationship can result in monopolizing the time of others

This is self-evident.

8. Affectionate nature can be misinterpreted

It's interesting to note that John had a uniquely touch-oriented relationship with Jesus. Check out this verse:

²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."¹⁸

King James translates it, "*leaning back again Jesus' bosom*". Proximity. Touch. Affection. These are the natural to the mercy person and with proper boundaries are wonderful and good. Touch is intensifier and can be used by God to bring a great sense of comfort, assurance, or friendship to another person.

But here's a potential problem. Touch can be misinterpreted and you can end up sending signals to someone you never intended to. So, be wise with touch. That's all.

Finally, what the specific instruction to the person with the gift of mercy. It makes complete sense . . .

¹⁷*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (2 Jn 1-3). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹⁸*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Jn 13:25-26). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.¹⁹

In other words, do your thing. Connect with people. Move into their lives. Be with them . . . both in the good times and the bad. And, one more instruction added to the end of verse 8 . . .

if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully

Wise counsel. If you're a mercy person then you can get pulled down by the hurts around you. Don't become a downer. You can show compassion to others in need and yet be cheerful as you give comfort. Weep with those who weep. Absolutely. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Absolutely. (Spend time with those who are rejoicing . . . as much for yourself as for them). And do it all cheerfully as well as compassionately. The Lord will show you to bring the two of those together. After all, Jesus was a man of great compassion and great joy.

III. God

God must be serious about mercy. Far and away more people test out with the gift of mercy than with any other gift. 30%. Wow. I guess God knows that people need a lot of mercy. Too true.

We've been talking about the human side of mercy . . . people with the motivational gift and how it shapes their lives and how they shape us. But, as important as this is, this is still the smaller conversation. The big conversation is that God is merciful.

John himself wrote in 2 John, vs. 3:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ

Here's the meaning of that word:

mercy: kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them. 1A of men towards men: to exercise the virtue of mercy, show one's self merciful. 1B of God towards men: in general providence; the mercy and clemency of God in providing and offering to men salvation by Christ. 1c the mercy of Christ, whereby at his return to judgment he will bless true Christians with eternal life.

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¹⁹*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Ro 12:15). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

²⁰Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the test of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G1656). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

Here's the amazing thing . . . God is willing to be merciful. Desires to be merciful. The conduit of that mercy is Jesus Christ and faith in Him. Here's a prayer I hope we all would resonate with . . . "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

I've been talking with Brett Johnson, a KPC member and army chaplain who is Afghanistan. (By the way, pray for Brett). Just last night, over Facebook, he wrote me the following:

"These soldiers are so distant from God because they are so conscious of their sinfulness and i really like being around them, as a representative of Jesus Christ telling them that our Heavenly Father knows all about their sin and loves them and has made a way for them to become forgiven and washed clean."

That's a huge thought. "Conscious of their sinfulness . . . distant from God." Many people are like that. Perhaps that's you. God is ready to be merciful to you . . . to forgive you . . . accept you . . . cleanse you . . . give you a new start . . . give you the gift of heaven when you die.

You see, mercy from people is wonderful. Mercy from God is essential. Would you like to put your faith in Christ today?

God in heaven, I need mercy. Your mercy. I have wounded myself and others through sin. I am like the man on the road beset by thieves . . . robbed, wounded, weak, vulnerable, needy. Have mercy on me, O God, a sinner. Accept me. Help me. Strengthen me. I put my faith in your Son Jesus Christ . . .the merciful One. The merciful Savior. Thank-you for forgiving me. Ministering to me. Helping me. Having mercy on me.

In Jesus Name. Amen.