

GOD IS Powerful IN YOU

Discovering and using
your spiritual gifts

*A book of small group agendas
by Paul Ford
with Boyd Pelley*

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Introduction

For twenty years I have been mobilizing Christians to use their spiritual gifts, watching the Holy Spirit thrust thousands of believers into life-changing ministry. But a funny thing happened on the way to releasing the Body of Christ to be the body . . . each player to use his or her own God-designed spiritual gifts. God gave me a fresh, innovative way to talk about these amazing grace gifts.

I have the privilege of training Christians in four regions of the world. One area of my work is in Central Asia, formerly the southern part of the Soviet Union. I went to the country of Kazakhstan in that region for the first time in 1997. While talking about spiritual gifts, I suddenly discovered that the Kazaks have 20 words for sheep but not one word for the concept of "supernatural." Unbelievable!

I had to figure out a way – and quickly – to explain the nature of spiritual gifts to the Kazaks without using my normal words. Here is the idea that came to me: "Spiritual gifts are where God is powerful in you!" While saying the words, I moved my arms in an upward and forward motion, beginning from my stomach and moving out my chest. That is, spiritual gifts are when God's power rises up within you and moves dynamically outward! The Spirit of God, when He knows we will not figure out the important biblical concepts on our own, usually brings them to mind in dramatic but often simple ways. That is what happened to me halfway around the world from my home that day, even as I was powerfully using my own gifts!

This concept has truly revolutionized the way that I talk about spiritual gifts. It is not where you are good at something but rather where you are powerful in the Spirit. It is not your natural skills or strength but rather the dynamic power of God at work, first inside and then outward from you to others.

Let's take a deeper look at this new notion of God's power working in us through our spiritual gifts.

- Paul Ford

Paul and I first met in the early 1990's while he was still working on his doctorate from Fuller Seminary. We were both discipleship pastors at local churches and hit it off from our first lunch together. His ideas have so influenced me that I've actually claimed them as my own. One day I was sharing with him a new, revolutionary idea I had only to realize I had heard it from him to start with. We had a great laugh together. Such is the nature of friendships and mentoring.

Through the years, the Lord led Paul to extend his sphere of influence across the globe, but we've maintained our friendship and I've continued interacting with his latest learnings all along the way. In my ministry on Church staff for over 18 years and even in the development of Churchteams, I've sought to live out the principles of equipping and releasing people. In fact, these were the ideas that fueled the earliest vision of developing a web-based tool to enhance disciple making and team building, which is now Churchteams.

One evening after a small group conference, Randall Neighbour and I were enjoying a meal and talking about what was up with TOUCH Publications. He mentioned a writing project that he needed someone to come alongside to work with the author. He didn't even know of Paul's influence in my life! I was amazed at how God orchestrated such a conversation. I wrote curriculum for years because of my role on church staff. Since I felt like I could almost finish Paul's sentences, this was a great fit for me.

I loved working with Paul on this project. It has been a great privilege to call him friend and to find occasional places that I can come alongside to use who I am to serve him and by God's grace the Kingdom. It's wonderful to find where you are powerful through Christ. I pray these agendas will help you and your group find God's power through you as well.

- Boyd Pelley

How to Use This Book

Devotionals

Each agenda begins with a personal devotional for you, the small group leader. The best way to use this devotional is to meditate on it each day between your meetings. For example, if your group meets on Thursday evenings, use the next week's devotional to begin your daily time with God on Friday morning, meditating on the scripture each day until the next Thursday. Ask God how the truths discovered in the scripture and devotional should shape how you facilitate the meeting and work with your group members one-on-one.

This Week

The devotional is followed by a brief overview of the agenda, goals for the meeting, and instructions. Reading this insures your small group will understand the point of the agenda and you'll be prepared.

Agendas

The agendas are organized around four W's, which are *Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness*. These four areas are designed to help your group experience Christ's presence, embrace His power, and understand His purposes for your lives to the point of practical application.

- **Welcome:** An opening question to get your group members involved in the weekly meeting.
- **Worship:** Practical ways for your group to enter into Christ's presence.
- **Word:** Applying God's Word to your everyday lives that results in member-to-member ministry in and out of your meetings.
- **Witness:** "Putting feet" on what you've discussed so your group can live out Christ's purposes for your lives.

In some agendas in this series, you'll notice the order is not as it appears above. This has been done to keep it interesting for your group and set an important tone.

Leader's Notes and Tip Boxes

We've included helpful tip boxes and author's notes under many of the discussion questions to help you understand their meaning. Read through the agenda a few times in the days before your meeting to grasp the direction and outcome of each agenda. *Use the notes and tips to prepare, but don't read them aloud during your meeting.* They have been placed within the agenda to help you become a better facilitator.

Questions in the Word section

Each numbered question in this section of the agenda has been written so you can simply read it to your group. To increase involvement, write the questions on individual slips of paper and distribute them to various members of your group to read aloud in smaller groups. If you feel these questions should be rephrased to better fit your group or make the meeting more powerful, go for it!

Unless otherwise instructed, keep the last questions in each agenda for yourself as the main facilitator. These are ministry questions that usually require follow up.

Between-the-Meetings Options

Because healthy small group life is more than a once-a-week meeting, it will be important for you to look over these ideas, possibly share them with your group, and then determine which option or options will help your group grow.

If you find implementation to be especially challenging, remember these practical things are what make small group life so powerful and different from other kinds of groups you may have led before. Work as hard at your between-the-meetings activities as you do preparing for your weekly meeting and you'll see growth in yourself and your group.

Scripture Memory Verses

Each agenda ends with a scripture verse, which we highly recommend your group members memorize. There's nothing like scripture memory to keep your mind on glorifying God! Feel free to copy this verse and pass it out to everyone as your members walk out the door after each meeting. To make it fun, offer a small prize (a candy bar, etc.) for the first person who can recite the verse to you when you next meet. When you celebrate scripture memory, everyone will join in.

At the back of this book you'll find an appendix with each week's scripture verse on a time-saving, easy-to-duplicate page. This is one area of small group life that you can easily delegate. Ask a member to duplicate the scripture verses and distribute them for you for the next six weeks as the meetings conclude.

Your Devotional

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

How do you think the disciples felt at this point in the gospel story? What would prompt such a question? They had lived with and learned from Jesus. They watched him die. They saw him risen like he said. But they were Jews living under Roman oppression. They knew about kingdoms and power. They were expecting a messiah to come with power to restore Israel's dignity.

God's plan was not for Jesus to become a politician to reinstitute the kingdom of Israel. After all, kingdoms come and go. Nor was his plan to provide contentment and personal comfort. Economies rise and fall. God's plan was for people of every type and time to know Jesus. Oppression, comfort and many other things present obstacles. God knows this and has a plan to get it done. His plan still involves power. But it's power of a different kind. It's the power of God's grace through the Holy Spirit taking on skin.

How about you? Concerning politics and power, do you tend to be indifferent, interested or involved? What about grace and power? Be honest. Which of those three responses best describes you? Why? What would life be like if you became the Holy Spirit's conduit for grace?

As you take your group on a new journey to discover your spiritual gifts, you will certainly find a completely new paradigm for ministry just like the disciples. To prepare your own heart and mind for what you'll experience over the course of the next six weeks, invite God to work through you powerfully in whatever way he chooses. Set your preconceived notions and expectations aside with any desire to be comfortable.

This Week

The Objective

This agenda is designed to help members of your group:

1. Understand the Biblical background for spiritual gifts as power that comes from the grace they received at salvation.
2. Increase their curiosity about how God has empowered them.

The Point

Spiritual gifts are not just natural talents or abilities. Spiritual gifts are God's saving grace working itself out in your life in a supernaturally empowered way.

This makes a huge difference in how you develop and use who God has already made you to be. For some, this will mean moving out of your "comfort" zone into the Holy Spirit's "power" zone. For others, this will lead to a new excitement knowing that God has prepared you to minister powerfully by the Holy Spirit.

Preparation

1. Ask your worship leader to find a CD, DVD, or provide the words to "Shout to the Lord" for your time of worship this week.
2. Make copies of Appendix A: Ministry Time Questions (found following week 6). You'll need one set of questions per person. Be sure to leave the back blank for prayer requests.
3. Make copies of Appendix B for each member of your group (each member should have one copy of page 1 and three copies of page 2). If your copier has a magnification feature, increasing the size of these pages will ease completion and give people more room to comment.
3. Go over the between-the-meeting options and collect necessary materials based on the recommendations you are going to make.
4. If your meeting starts late or you anticipate the agenda might be too long, skip the section of questions on Philippians 2:12-13.

The Agenda

Welcome

Icebreaker Questions: (Go around the room twice)

1. What is the most powerful gift you ever received? What makes it powerful?
2. In one or two sentences, what have you heard about spiritual gifts?

Worship

Sing “Shout To The Lord” or some other song that has power or majesty as a theme. Use a CD, DVD, or invite someone to accompany with a guitar. When you are finished singing, encourage members to spontaneously speak out phrases as prayers to God describing His power. Close in prayer.

Before you conclude worship this week, the worship leader should the group this question:

How do you know when you have really worshipped God? Describe what that’s like.

The point here is to think through together the nature of God’s power as we all see it in worship. There’s an internal sense of community with God and each other that stirs the emotions as well as the mind to know that we have been in God’s presence.

Word

Ask someone to read Ephesians 2:8-10:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Week 1: Empowered by Grace

1. Salvation (a right relationship with God) comes by grace as a gift from God we simply receive by faith. What were the sticking points for you to understand and then receive grace?

This is a great opportunity to hear someone's testimony about coming to Christ or to share yours. Be as specific as possible in sharing the challenges you faced in coming to Christ. This will help people identify with you. Don't be long-winded, however, you'll lose everyone.

2. We work to earn wages, not gifts. Yet, the last part of this passage talks about us being created to do good works. How do the two work together?

Works are the result, outpouring or overflow of grace. Grace empowers the works or purpose for which God created us.

Ask a different person to read Philippians 2:12-13:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

3. If works are an expression of grace, what does "work out your salvation" mean?

It means to put skin on God's grace in your life. Learn about and master the use of the grace gifts God has given you.

Tip

Many of the discussion questions this week don't require multiple answers. If the members agree with the first answer, move on to the next question. Focus your time on the ministry questions.

4. What does "fear and trembling" imply?

Power. A sense of authority and accountability, not wanting to do anything to offend God. Another interpretive phrase is "awe and reverence." The bottom line is that there's no reason for a Christian to work out his salvation with others if he has little desire to please his Creator.

5. Have you ever had a sense of fear and trembling in using the gifts God has given you? If so, what was that like?
6. From the verse, who is working in you? Why? What difference does it make to know God is orchestrating all this?

Now, let's look at how Paul saw this working in his own life. Read Ephesians 3:7,8 to your group:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

7. Look over this passage closely, what were the results of God's power in Paul's life?

He was given grace. He became a servant of the gospel. He was sent to preach to the Gentiles.

8. How have you seen God work powerfully in the lives of others in this group or elsewhere?
9. What do you think the "working of God's power" feels like?

Your Ministry Time

Consider discussing these in triads so that everyone gets a chance to talk them through. Pass out copies of the questions below, found in Appendix A.

10. How does this idea of God's power at work in your life differ from what you've heard or thought about spiritual gifts in the past? How does it make you feel to know God wants to work powerfully through you?

Week 1: Empowered by Grace

11. Paul struggled to use his spiritual gifts. It's not easy to be available to be used by God powerfully. What are you struggling with that keeps you from being used by God more powerfully?
12. Spend a few minutes praying for each other. Ask for permission to lay your hands on the person's shoulder while you are praying. Share and pray for any personal needs as well. (i.e. not prayer requests for friends, relatives, co-workers, etc.)

Witness

1. If God is powerful through us, He wants to extend His grace through us to our friends and family members who don't yet know Christ. Share with the group one or two people that for whom you would like to be a conduit of God's grace.
2. Share one thing from the scripture or our discussion that you found valuable.

Be sure to let people have time to think through their responses. A couple of minutes of silence and reflection is okay. It is fine to allow members to pass if nothing comes to mind. This may be a whole new way to think about being used by God.

Distribute the copies from Appendix B to each member of your group. Ask everyone to write their name at the bottom of page 2 on all three sheets and give them to three different members in your group to complete and bring to the meeting next week.

Between-the-Meetings Options

The essence of discipleship is learning by doing. Read these options aloud to your members and let the group choose two.

Option #1

Pick a word or phrase from this week's scripture verse. Ask a friend who

doesn't know Christ how they would interpret it. (Tell the person it's a homework assignment if doing this makes you feel uncomfortable.)

Option #2

Copy "Appendix C: Gift Card" onto card stock. Hand out these cards and ask everyone to display them in a prominent place like a bathroom mirror or car dashboard. Pray over these gifts each day as a way to become familiar with them for the next few weeks. Then select the 3 to 5 gifts that you think you might have.

Option #3

Decide to use Appendix D: *Listening to God Day by Day* or use your regular journal to record thoughts and prayers each day this week using one of the passages of scripture used in this study.

Option #4

Watch a news program this week. Come to the group next week prepared to share a story of a powerful newsmaker of the week and what made that story powerful.

Option #5

For more insight into the implications of God's power at work in your life, read chapter one of "Knocking Over The Leadership Ladder" by Paul Ford. (Information about this title can be found at the back of this book.)

Option #6

Invest time in personal Bible Study this week looking at these passages of scripture: Exodus 9:10-16, Judges 3:9-11, 6:12-16, Numbers 11:25-26, Psalm 68:28, Ephesians 4:1-8, Colossians 1:24-28. Note your thoughts about God's power at work through people in each of these passages and share it with the group next week.

Scripture for the Week

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:8-10)

Leader's Weekly Journal

This week, I learned the following about how grace works in a person's life after they become a Christian...

List the qualities of each person in your group that might indicate what his or her spiritual gifts are...