It was one of those moments when God spoke to me... through me. This happens occasionally. I'll be counseling someone, asking God inwardly for wisdom to know how to respond, when all of a sudden something pops out of my mouth and I think, "Hey, that's really good!"

Well, recently I was counseling someone in my office and towards the end of our time together, the individual looked at me and "Thank you for taking so much time with me these last few months. I know you have a whole congregation to worry about."

At which point, I looked at the person straight in the eyes and said, "Well, actually, there's no way I could touch everyone in this congregation. Instead I am seeking to simply be a good model of what it means... (and this is where the Holy Spirit must have stepped in)... to love my family, disciple a few, and walk in my giftedness. If we all just do that, the needs will be met."

I was stunned. I don't think I had ever articulated it quite so simple and succinctly to anyone before (myself included). And as I pondered on the statement later, I realized that this truth has the potential to transform the culture of our church!

Think about it. What would happen if we ALL just did those three simple things? Imagine what our church would look like if we all chose on a daily, weekly basis simply to:

1.) Love our family
2.) Disciple a few
3.) Walk in our giftedness.

Love Your Family
Church, I truly believe there is no end to what Jesus could do with a group of believers like that!

So, to the end that we actually absorb these concepts and begin to put them into practice in increasing measure, I hope to present them in a variety of ways over the next few months. Let's begin in this month's Connection article to talk about what it means to "Love Our Families".

**Love Your Family**

I probably don't need to tell you this, but our families are the foundation upon which much of our lives rest. I remember back in college a professor of mine would say to the upcoming pastoral students, "Get your priorities straight: God, Family, and then Ministry." I would affirm this wisdom. Our relationship to God and then to our spouse and children are the "foundational relationships" upon which the rest of our lives rest. If the foundations are crumbling, then the everything else will come tumbling down sooner or later. Thus, when considering adding a responsibility to your already full plate, the question becomes, "How are my foundational relationships? Can they handle the stress of this additional burden?" If your relationship with God and your family are strong, then by all means, for the sake of Jesus, work as hard as you can for the Kingdom. God will enable you to pick up that additional ministry responsibility or evangelistic opportunity. But understand with me, Jesus would not ask you to do something that would cause you to further damage your relationship with Him or at home.

So... can I make this suggestion? Be proactive. Since we want to work as hard as possible for the Kingdom, let's work as hard as necessary to have strong foundational relationships. Well, in addition to keeping a strong relationship with God through spiritual disciplines, soft hearts, and accountability, we must work diligently to love our family. Because, as one pastor friend I know puts it, "Your home is your first parish".

In practical terms then, what does that look like? Well, in no particular order, here are some observations:

- **Spend Time Together**--Consider having at least one night a week that is usually your "Family Night". Watch a movie, go out to eat, go bowling, etc. But carve out of your week at least one night in which you intentionally spend time together to have fun. Then, towards the end of your time, spend some time in prayer for one another.

- **Eat Together**--Similar to the above stated point, seek to eat together whenever possible (preferably one meal per day). And be intentional during those times together. My family will occasionally pull out a question from a jar that we all answer as we continue to eat together.

- **Have Devotions Together**--Don't be overwhelmed by this one! This may be as infrequent as once a week and still be very effective. And it doesn't have to be long or complicated either. Simply pull out the Scriptures, read a small section of Scripture, offer your thoughts about the passage, ask a few discussion questions, and close in prayer asking God to make this truth a reality in your lives. And do it when it makes sense! Find a time when you are naturally together already and capitalize on the opportunity to have devotions. More recently, I've been thinking that our family dinner times would be a great time to take the last ten minutes to do this before we are dismissed.
• **Be Intimate**—Husbands and Wives, in the midst of the craziness of life, make sure you are working to remain intimate with one another—spiritually, relationally, sexually. Remember that the sexual intimacy in a marriage often is the lubricant that keeps the whole machinery of marriage and family running smoothly and without unnecessary friction. Remember too, that sexual intimacy best flows out of spiritual and relational intimacy. It's a "both-and".

• **Be Gentle**—Parents, be gentle with your kids. I have been very challenged by 2 Timothy 2:20-21 and viewing it in the context of parenting. And of course, Husband, be gentle with your wife. And Wife, be gentle with your husband. We are flawed sinners in need of much grace.

• **No Sarcasm**—As tempting as it is to emphasize your point with sarcasm, don't do it.

• **Be Quick to Apologize/Quick to Forgive**—The importance of this cannot be overstated. In fact, I am convinced that I can be a pretty flawed husband and father and not run the risk of losing the relationship to my wife and children if I am quick to apologize sincerely. And make your home a safe place for someone to apologize too. Do you know what I mean by that? Sometimes someone will apologize only to be read another "riot" act. Don't do that.

As we choose to live our lives with increasing passion and single-minded focus on the things of the Kingdom, let's be careful to care for and strengthen the foundational relationships we have been given—first to God, and secondly to our families. If these are strong, there is so much we can do for His glory together.
Disciple a Few

Last month I described something that happened to me in the counseling office. It was one of those occasional moments when God spoke to me... through me. It happened in response to the individual I was speaking with who said this: "Thank you for taking so much time with me these last few months. I know you have a whole congregation to worry about."

At which point, I simply responded, "Well, actually, there's no way I could touch everyone in this congregation. Instead I am seeking to simply be a good model of what it means... (and this is where the Holy Spirit must have stepped in)... to love my family, disciple a few, and walk in my giftedness. If we all just do that, the needs will be met."

As I later pondered the statement, I realized that this truth has the potential to transform the culture of our church!

Think about it. What would happen if we ALL just did those three simple things? Imagine what our church would look like if we all chose on a daily, weekly basis simply to:

4.) Love our family
5.) Disciple a few
6.) Walk in our giftedness.

Last month we discussed what it means to "Love our Family". This month, I want to examine the concept of what it means to "Disciple a Few".
Disciple a Few

We've said it many times before: we believe the whole reason we're still here is to become a disciple who makes disciples.

I am incredibly thankful for the many in our congregation who serve so faithfully in such roles as Trustee, worship team, usher, Sunday School teacher, etc. I believe that all of the ministry roles in our church are absolutely integral to the general disciple-making function of our church. When we gather, we're not just "playing church" but seeking to create environments in which disciples may be challenged, formed, and grow.

But I'd like to take that concept to the next step. I would like suggest that God would have each one of us be reaching out personally to at least one, perhaps a few, in order to mentor and disciple them. I believe with all my heart that it is within this one-on-one, or one-on-two (or three) environment that true life-change occurs.

In short, we need to be a "Paul" to someone. The apostle Paul was wonderful example of someone who actively ministered in the gift mix and calling God had given him but he (like Jesus) also invested personally in a few. Not surprisingly, these few went on to be leaders in the early church. Timothy for instance, was a timid young man without a strong spiritual father figure in his life who went on to become the pastor of the church in Ephesus in large part because of Paul's mentorship.

I recognize that not everyone is comfortable with this idea, but I truly believe that every one of us is called to be a "Paul" in someone's life. So, let me ask you... "Who's your Timothy?"

Now, because this is not a comfortable thought for many, I want to suggest two things:

1.) Find a Mentor

If you don't currently have a "Paul" in your life, I would highly encourage you to find one. I have had a variety of men in my life that I have intentionally spent time with in order to be challenged by them to grow spiritually. These men have walked alongside me, challenged me, prayed for me, and guided me.

By finding a mentor, you will begin to understand more intuitively what it looks like to be a mentor. Now, you will likely do it differently based on your personality and spiritual gift-mix, but you will understand the basic concept of what it looks like.

2.) Don't Overcomplicate This

This is not as hard as it may look. I want to suggest some basic principles that will help you as you seek to be a "Paul" in someone's life:

- **BE FAITHFUL TO MEET REGULARLY.** I find that shooting for once a week is best, but every other week may work as well.
- **ASK TWO QUESTIONS.** Ask yourselves two basic questions whenever you get together: 1.) "What's God saying to you right now?" and 2.) "What are you going to do about it?". Again,
when you meet simply ask each other in what way or ways God is speaking—e.g. through the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit's conviction, through the challenge of others, etc.—and then explore together how that translates to obedience. If the person you are mentoring indicates that God is not saying anything, then explore what may be hindering this process. For instance, are they in the Scriptures right now? If not, then perhaps commit to reading a certain portion or passage together. Then ask for the Holy Spirit to speak clearly to both of your hearts this upcoming week.

- **ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO EMPOWER.** After discussing the second question, "What are you going to do about it?", take some time to pray that the Holy Spirit will empower your group to walk in obedience. Truly, it is not so much that we live our life for God, but rather that He lives His life through us! This is through the ministry of His Holy Spirit. So, before you end your time together, be sure to ask Him to fill you with His Spirit, even as you commit to walk in obedience.

- **HOLD EACH OTHER LOVINGLY ACCOUNTABLE.** Finally, whenever you get together, ask how it's going with the area(s) that were identified the week before. This ensures that the things that God is saying do not get "dropped" or forgotten. You as the mentor should write these things down and pray for them throughout the week. Writing them down will also help you remember to bring them up the next time you get together.

Church, I absolutely believe this is what God has called every believer to. And I truly believe that it will powerfully transform our church and your life personally, should you choose to make "discipling a few" a part of your life and ministry.
Walk in Your Giftedness

There's not very much that I'm really good at.

Those who know me best know that I've dabble-dabbled at all sorts of things: roasting coffee, interior decorating, graphic design, architectural drawings, painting, drama, making bagels and soft pretzels, and more recently... home improvements. However, while there have been some measured success stories in all of these and I have enjoyed doing them, I would have to say that on the whole I'm really not *that* good at them.

And of course there are dozens of things that I'm *really* not good at. Take plumbing, for example.

Seven years ago when I assumed the role as Transitional Pastor, I was terrified of one thing: making a mistake. A little ridiculous perhaps because that fear was realized within I'd say... oh, about a week. And I think I have continued that pattern ever since! One thing that *has* changed is that I'm not so terrified anymore (because I've seen God use me in spite of myself). Another is that I'm finally coming to terms with what I'm good at and probably more importantly, what I'm not.

In fact, instead of trying to be a "generalist" in my role as a pastor, I am trying to be more and more of a "specialist". That is, I am trying to limit my activities to just those things that I'm really good at. Now this doesn't get me off the hook of doing certain administrative duties, etc. (i.e. "damage control") but I
am trying to stay more focused, finding others who will excel in those areas which I may only be mediocre at best.

Can you imagine if we ALL found ways to take what we’re really good at and used those skills to serve Christ in this church and community?

Paul, in his letter to the church in Thessalonica, compared the Church to a human body, highlighting the idea that the body though it is one, is made up of many parts.

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.* (1 Corinthians 12:12)

A little bit later in the passage, Paul says that no part of the body can do without the other parts of the body, therefore no part of the body should feel unimportant. This is so true. We ALL have a unique "shape" in the Body of Christ. That is, a unique function and ministry role within a local body of believers.

**Discover Your SHAPE**

In light of this, I want to call every single person in our church to discover, develop and deploy your God-given SHAPE! What is your SHAPE?

**S – Spiritual Gifts**

The Bible is clear that every believer has been given spiritual gifts, that is, a set of God-given abilities that may be used of God to uniquely serve and build up the body of Christ (i.e. the Church). You may find several lists of these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 5.

**H— Heart Passion**

In addition to your spiritual gift-mix, God has also given you particular passions which represent a certain “slice” of God’s heart. Not everyone will share your passions (as they will have been given other passions from God), thus, you ought to promote and pursue those passions God has given to you!

**A—Abilities**

You also have certain God-given abilities or learned skills that may be used to advance Christ’s Kingdom. Truly, there are endless opportunities to serve Christ when one considers the breadth of skills that God has granted His Church as a whole.

**P—Personality**

Your personality is also a huge factor in how you may serve the Lord. There are certainly times when the Lord will push us outside of our comfort zone in serving Him, however, most of the time, what He calls us to falls within the lines of our natural personality. Thus, an introvert gifted in evangelism may look quite different than an extrovert gifted in evangelism. But in God’s economy, we need BOTH!

**E—Experiences**
Finally, you have certain life experiences that have uniquely shaped who you are and who you may best relate to. As such, considering what experiences God has allowed you may also be a key consideration when prayerfully discerning how best you may serve Him, the Church, and in reaching the lost.

**In summary...** when it comes to ministry, I think a lot of people feel like they're only firing on two or three cylinders. BUT when you find a ministry in which you are firing on four, maybe even five cylinders, NOW you have a ministry in which you are not only increasingly effective but are finding the time spent in the ministry as life-giving and not draining. I believe this is God's desire for every single one of His children. That stated, it may take a little bit of effort on your part to discover what your SHAPE is! To that end, I want to invite you to attend a SHAPE class coming up towards the end of the month. Hope to see you there!

![SHAPE Poster](image)

**Sunday, April 24th--3:00pm-5:30pm**

*(in church foyer)*