



Let Me! Releasing Kids to Use Their Spiritual Gifts.

Written by Stephanie Cheek

Our children have spiritual gifts! 1 Corinthians 12:7 tells us that to *each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. Many times we fail to recognize children's gifts because we can't see past the normal behavior of a child. A child can be involved in a sincere prayer of faith one minute and chasing a friend through the church the very next. As a children's minister I love to use the story of the boy giving his lunch to Jesus as an example of the gift of giving. He gave willingly, without question and trusted Jesus with his gift. However, if we think through this story the question quickly arises, "Why did this boy still have his lunch when everyone else's was gone?" Perhaps he was too busy chasing his friends around the field to stop and eat. It could've been the very nature of being a child that opened the door for him to participate in one of Jesus' miracles.

We can play a significant role in equipping and releasing children to use their gifts. We must look for and call out the gifts God has given to our children. If we are going to call out a gift in a child the first step is to recognize it. Discovering the gifts in children takes more than just observing them. You have to look past what is seen to what the heart motive is. Prayer enables us to discern a child's spiritual gifts and the motives of his heart. Communication with the child is also necessary. In conversation we might ask the child questions like, "What were you thinking when you helped her? What made you notice her crying?" These questions will help reveal if the Holy Spirit was involved in the child's actions. A child may not say "The Holy Spirit told me to go and help her", but he may say things like, "I just saw her and knew she was sad," or "I heard something and looked up and knew she needed help." These can later be pointed out as a way the Spirit leads us.

Once you have recognized a spiritual gift working in the life of child share your observations with the child. Let them know that you have been praying and that the behaviors you have seen are evidence of a gift. You could say, "I have noticed how you always speak encouraging words to the other children when they are disappointed. You love to cheer your friends on. I believe that you have the gift of encouragement."

Just showing or telling a child they possess a gift is not enough. We must equip them to use it. They need to understand the gift and its purpose in the body of Christ. Give them Scripture verses to increase their knowledge. Teach them how to hear the Holy Spirit and challenge them to pray and ask God how they can use this gift.

Part of our equipping is giving children the opportunity to use their gifts. If you have a child with the gift of faith allow them time to share what they have been praying for. Ask questions like, "What has God put on your heart to pray for?" If you expect them to hear from God they will expect it to. If you tell a child that those with the gift of faith pray and believe God when others are unable to they will be willing to believe against all odds. The gift of faith will be given room to grow.

The purpose of the spiritual gifts is to equip the church. Once you have allowed a child the opportunity to exercise their gift, it is time to put them into active service. This is where a child's talents or natural abilities can come into play. Be willing to think outside the box for ways they can serve. Let God lead you in placing children in serving roles. A shy child with a gift of mercy may be able to write letters to shut-ins, while a bold child with the gift of mercy may be ready to take clothes and food to the homeless.

Our children are willing. They are always the first to raise a hand and say "Let me." So let's give them that opportunity. Equip them to use their gifts and prepare them to do the work God has for them! Psalm 127 tells us that our children are arrows destined to strike down the enemy. We are the mighty men assigned to pull them out of the sheaf and put them into our bow and shoot them straight at the enemy. In order for these arrows (our children) to hit their mark (strike down the enemy's plans) children need to recognize and understand their spiritual gifts, be trained in their use, and be given opportunities to serve in their areas of giftedness.