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Fostering Faith Through Spiritual Gifts

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Every Christian parent desires for their children to develop a faith in God and in the church where they worship. Let's consider the role of discovering spiritual gifts in this faith development. Two passages show us spiritual gifts are not age-based. Paul instructed the church about the importance of discovering and using spiritual gifts. While this speaks to abilities and opportunities of those who may be older, nowhere does he suggest an age limit. In 1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV), we read: *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

As parents and other important adults in children's lives, we can make the Bible come alive as we also share 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV), which reads, *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.* How empowering for children to begin to understand that there is a role for them, no matter their age, in God's army for good. They deserve our help to see who they are in Christ, and they need to be nurtured in age-appropriate ways to identify and develop the gifts he has given them. What a privilege for parents to be involved actively in this process!

So what are some ways to accomplish this? Our children deserve to be taught specifically about God's purposes for the church and what the Bible says about spiritual gifts. We can help them realize they have a part to do now, not just when they are older. They deserve opportunities to serve in various kinds of ministry so they can begin to identify where they may have gifts. When they can work side-by-side with family members and others, they can grow passion within their hearts.

Allow children to plan and lead their own programs, under appropriate supervision, and leaders and teachers will emerge among them. You will see the gift of mercy blossom as children have chances to minister to those in need.



Volunteering in the church and broader community is a way the gift of service may be discovered. Be careful that, in the process, you don't use coercion or a reward system to get them involved. Serving out of love and obedience is faith-building; doing it because of tantalizing rewards is not.

Share realistic affirmation and feedback. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he took the time to discuss how it went with them. Our children deserve no less. They also deserve appropriate training for what we ask them to do. If they just don't seem suited for what you have planned, let them find something that is a better fit for them. Sadly, many adults don't do their part by serving along with their children. Sending them out and remaining uninvolved confuses and disappoints. Also, you lose potential blessings awaiting you!

We can pray that ministry and using their spiritual gifts goes beyond head knowledge and translates into a real love for the Lord and a true desire to serve him. Pray that God will use opportunities, even in small ways, to grow a passion in their hearts to follow his purposes in their lives. Always, no matter what, pray for their walk with the Lord!

Susan E. Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, certified family life educator, and licensed marriage and family therapist.