

Aware Part I: Seeing the Signs
God at Work through You
July 3, 2011

Introduction

How many of you can remember your favorite summer job growing up? Probably my favorite and most memorable summer job was the time I spent with my Uncle Jerry building homes when I was a freshman in high school. My 16 year old cousin and I worked together for my uncle and it was an experience I'll never forget. (and one I'm sure my uncle's never forgotten either!) Can you imagine entrusting a couple of inexperienced 16 year olds with a skill saw, a chalk line and a pair of nail guns? My oh my!! My Uncle Jerry had to be a little crazy.

More than once, I remember sawing boards off way too short because I measured wrong. (That summer is when I learned the old saying: measure twice, cut once!)

Now back to my story. Quite often I accidentally hammered nails and staples in places where I shouldn't have.

For example, I remember a time when I got a little wild with the staple gun while hanging insulation. I accidentally put a staple right through an electrician's newly hung wiring. The worse part about the whole thing was I was too embarrassed to tell anybody about it. To this day, I wonder if he ever knew it was me.

Whatever he knew didn't seem to matter because he kept my cousin and I busy all summer building homes and we had a blast. When it was all over, I can say I learned a lot about the building trades and got a great suntan. Do you know what the most amazing part of the whole experience was? It was the fact that my uncle successfully built several new homes while using two mistake prone, inexperienced 16 year old boys. What a miracle!

If you think about it, God's work is a lot like the home building business of my Uncle Jerry's.

- **He's in the building industry; only He's building a kingdom and not just a few houses.**
- **He's chosen to use us, his "sons and daughters", to build his kingdom.**
- **He's given each of us a set of tools, gifts, and abilities to accomplish His work.**
- **The miracle: he's able to accomplish his purpose through unskilled, imperfect, sinful laborers, like you and me.**

And that's what I want to talk about today...how God works through unskilled, imperfect people to "get er done", as Larry the Cable guy would say.

Review

As you know, we are in the middle of a series called AWARE. The goal of this series is to help us become more aware of God's presence and activity in our lives. And as David just sang, we all need to work on developing our eyes and ears. Not our physical eyes and ears, but our spiritual eyes and ears so we can see and hear what God's doing in our lives. For the last three weeks, Rick's talked about the three different signs of God's

activity in our lives: God's work ON us, God's work IN us, and God's work FOR us. Each one of these is indicative of God's activity in our lives...if we will only open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. You can pick up a copy of these messages at the Well or visit our website.

Today...I want to focus on the fourth sign of God's activity, which is God working THROUGH us. God wants to work through us to accomplish His mission of building His Kingdom and His church. The main questions we must wrestle with today are these:

- **Will we “see” God’s work through us and cooperate?**
- **How do you know God is working through you?**
- **What are the signs that make you aware that He’s working through you?**
- **What should you do if you don’t see any signs at all?**

Those are all really good questions. But before we attempt to answer them, let's look at the theology behind this idea of God working THROUGH us.

The Principle

One of the best passages that explains this idea of God working through us is Ephesians 2:10. But in order for us to understand Ephesians 2:10, we must first understand the verses that precede it, Ephesians 2:8,9. In those verses, Paul explains the principle of grace; that we are saved by God's grace, by His unmerited favor, and not by anything we have done.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)

In these two verses, Paul stresses the fact that you and I have nothing to do with our salvation. Our salvation is God's doing; it is not our own doing. Therefore, we didn't earn it. It is all of grace. It is given to us as a free gift from the hand of God. All we have to do is to accept and receive it.

(at salvation)

**“not our own doing”
gift from God**

(in our everyday lives)

**“not our own doing”
gift from God**

In other words, we are to daily walk in grace in the same way we were saved by grace...receiving our good works as a gift from God.

In order to understand this more clearly, I want to look more closely at v. 10 and discuss each part individually. First, Paul says that we are HIS workmanship.

- **we are His workmanship (“poiema”; not our own doing)**

Literally, he’s saying we are God’s “poiema” or poem; his creative masterpiece. God’s the one at the work on our lives. We don’t make ourselves into a masterpiece, God does. He determines the course and direction for our lives. We are His workmanship.

- **we are created to do good works which He prepared for us (not our own doing)**

Second, Paul says the purpose of this poem or masterpiece that God is creating is to do good works. But notice that these good works aren't our works, but God's works chosen for us. These are good works prepared **BEFOREHAND** by God...not works we dream up or conger up on our own. These are good works that God has hand-picked for us to do. All we have to do is to walk in them.

Let me summarize the main point in Ephesians 2:10:

Key points (Ephesians 2:10):

- **We are to live daily by grace in the same way we were saved by grace: receiving everything we need as a gift from God.**
- **God's part is to supply the path (show us what to do) and the power (give us all the resources we need) to do good works.**
- **Our part is to follow God's path and rely on the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work.**

That's the way the Christian life is supposed to work. That's the way that God has chosen to work through us. So if you are going to see the signs of God working through you, then you must begin by letting him provide the path and power for your good works. Now that we've examined the principle of God's workmanship in general, let's see how this idea works out in detail. Let's look at the actual process.

THE PROCESS: How God works

If we are going to recognize the signs of God working through us, then we need to know what to look for. Let's look at how God has chosen to work through his people.

There are two ways God has chosen to work through his people. One way is primary and the other is secondary. Both ways are important, but...

- **The PRIMARY way God works through his people is through their spiritual gifts.**

The bible refers to spiritual gifts as “charis” gifts or “grace” gifts because they are divine “enablements” freely given to us by the Holy Spirit to build up the church and to further God’s kingdom on the earth.

These PRIMARY means or spiritual gifts can be divided in two groups: speaking gifts and serving gifts, according the Apostle Peter. He says,

Each one should use whatever spiritual gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:10-11a NIV)

According to Peter, the primary way God is going to use each Christian is through some form of speaking or serving opportunity. Therefore, every spiritual gift falls within one of these two groups.

This chart illustrates the two main categories of spiritual gifts:

- **Speaking gifts: teaching, prophesy, evangelism, leadership, encouragement, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, tongues, interpretation of tongues**
- **Serving gifts: helps, shepherding, mercy, giving, healing, hospitality, administration**

The main point I'm trying to make here is this: each of us has been given a one or more spiritual gifts that make up our PRIMARY job description from God. Therefore, our job is to cooperate with God and let him use us and our spiritual gifts.

Now, if you want to learn more about how to discover and use your spiritual gifts, I encourage you to sign up for CORE: Discovery 401 class. In addition to our spiritual gifts, God has a SECONDARY way he can work through us.

The SECONDARY way that God works through us is through “spontaneous acts of kindness”.

70-80% of the time he works through us by using our spiritual gifts, but the other 20-30% of the time, he'll work through us through spontaneous acts of kindness.

Think of this as the “other duties as assigned” section of your job description. Every Christian has an “other duties as assigned” portion of their job description that God wants them to fulfill.

The Apostle Paul seems to point to these “other duties as assigned” in Romans 13 where he says,

“Owe no one anything except the debt of love”. (Romans 13:8 ESV)

What he's saying is that we owe a debt of love to everyone we meet. We should always be looking for opportunities to show love to our fellow man. Any time we spontaneously meet a need that comes across our path, we are acting as the “hands and feet of Jesus” and allowing God to work THROUGH us. We don't need a job description to meet needs. We just need a loving

heart. We just need to be willing to act when the need arises.

Let me summarize what I just said: God will work through us in two ways:

How God will work THROUGH us

- **PRIMARILY (70-80%) through our speaking or serving gifts**
- **SECONDARILY (20-30%) through spontaneous acts of kindness**

If you are operating in one of these two ways, I guarantee that God will work through you. How do I know this? because the Bible says so. The Scriptures tell us we will see fruit whenever we use our spiritual gifts or spontaneously respond to needs by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I think a couple of logical questions someone might ask at this point are these: “How do you know for sure that God is using you? What are some of the visible signs?”

Interestingly enough, Jesus was asked some similar questions by the disciples of John the Baptist in the book of Luke. John's disciples wanted to know if Jesus was the coming Messiah. They were looking for signs to know for sure that he was the one. Let's read Luke 7.

And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them." Luke 7:20-22 (ESV)

Those were the visible signs of Jesus' Messiahship. Those were the signs that God was working through him. But what about us? What are some signs we should look for? What are some things people should see and hear in our?

Here are some of the signs or evidences that God is working through us. Beside each sign I've listed the spiritual gift that was at work to produce the sign.

- **People are challenged in a way that causes them to turn and accept God's plan for their lives. (evangelism, prophesy)**
- **People feel listened to and consoled in a way that gives them hope to carry on. (encouragement, mercy)**
- **People are assisted in a way that reduces their workload or gives them a much need break. (helps)**

- **People are supported in a way that removes the financial crisis or debt that is burdening their lives. (generosity)**
- **People feel welcomed in a way that makes them feel special or no longer lonely. (hospitality)**
- **Tasks get organized and carried out in a way that gives people a sense of stability**

**and confidence in the organization.
(administration)**

- **The poor are fed, the mourning are comforted, the evil person is forgiven, the sick are prayed for, etc. (spontaneous acts of kindness)**

Whenever you use your spiritual gifts or respond randomly to the needs around you, you should expect to see these results. You should expect to see some signs that God is at work. These are signs of God's workmanship in your life. So watch for them...be aware whenever they appear...take note of them...journal about them...let them be an encouragement to you that you are making a difference for the kingdom of God.

At this point, some of you are saying: "That's all sounds well and good, but what if you don't see any of these signs in your life? What should you do if there's no visible evidence that God's working through you?"

What to Check If You Don't See Any Signs

I remember my high school days when I was first started to learn how to drive a car. My dad taught me that if a car doesn't start, it's most likely a problem with the fuel or the spark. In other words, if your car won't start, you're either out of gas, or your battery isn't working probably. Those simple diagnostic questions helped me while I was learning to drive a car. Here are a few things to check if you aren't seeing any signs of God at work in your life. Check the following:

Faithfulness (Am I seriously committed to anything or am I just floating around from this to that?)

Rick Warren says, "Faithfulness has always been a rare commodity. Most people don't know the meaning of commitment. They make commitments casually, and then break them for the slightest reason without any hesitation, remorse or regret.

Every week, churches, and other organizations must improvise because volunteers didn't prepare, didn't show up, or didn't even call to

say they weren't coming. Can you be counted on by others? This is a test. God is testing your faithfulness. (Purpose Driven Life)

In 1 Corinthians 4:2, the bible says that if you are going to be a steward or a servant of God, it's required that you be faithful. Your lack of faithfulness may be one of the reasons why you aren't seeing any signs of God working.

Availability (Is my schedule free or am I constantly booked up with all kinds of other activities?)

In the Scriptures, we see how Jesus responded to people who were too preoccupied with other things to serve and follow him. Listen to what he said,

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus

said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:57-62 (ESV)

What Jesus was saying is that In order to be used by God, you’ve got to make yourself available. Being a servant of God means giving up the right to control your schedule and allowing God to interrupt it whenever he needs to. If you only serve when it’s convenient for you, then you’re not really a servant of God. That may be another reason why you aren’t seeing any signs of God working.

Teachability (Am I open to God’s leading or do I think I know better where and how I’m supposed to serve?)

There’s an interesting story about the young, prideful, newly converted apostle Paul in the book

of Acts. As some of you know, Paul was a very well-known Jewish leader before he was converted to Christianity. Following his conversion, Paul was pridefully convinced that God would send him back to minister to his own people, the Jews. So instead asking and waiting on God to give him his first assignment, Paul went ahead of God and started an evangelistic ministry to the Jews in the local synagogues.

Unfortunately, his plan backfired. He failed miserably as an apostle to the Jews. He failed so badly that the leaders of the church had to remove him from his ministry and send him away to Arabia for a few years to get his head on straight. At the end of his time in Arabia, Paul came out with a new attitude and began witnessing to an entirely different group... the Gentile community. That was God's plan for him all along. But because Paul wasn't very teachable as a new Christian, he incorrectly assumed that he should be an apostle to Jews. Yet God in his sovereignty wanted him to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

Maybe the reason you don't see any signs of God working through you is because you think you know better than God what your assignment should be. Learn from the mistake of the apostle Paul and go where God leads you. Be humble, be teachable and let God lead you.

Watchfulness (Am I looking to meet needs that exist around me or am I ignoring what God is doing right under my nose?)

This is the opposite problem of the one I just mentioned. In the last example, I said that sometimes we aren't teachable and our pride causes us to get ahead of God. But the opposite problem can be true as well. Sometimes we are oblivious to what God is doing right under our very noses.

Rick Warren says, "God often tests us by asking us to serve in ways we aren't shaped. God expects you to help him out. Not to say, "I don't have the gift of service or mercy". While you may not be gifted for a specific task, you may be called to do it if no one gifted at it is

around....No special talent or gift is required to stay after a meeting to pick up trash or to stack chairs. Anyone can be a servant. All it requires is character.” (Purpose Driven Life)

Maybe the problem is that you are looking for something big rather than meeting the needs that come across your path.

My first experience with just meeting needs came as a young Christian while we were living in Wichita. Norma and I decided to serve as youth leaders because our church didn't have any at the time. We weren't experienced, but we just met a need that existed at the time.

If you don't see signs of God working through you, maybe you just need to look down...right under your very nose. Don't wait for the big ask. Just be faithful in doing the little things that come across your path.

Bottom line: If you don't feel like God is using you, check your faithfulness, availability,

teachability or watchfulness. There's a good chance one of those is the source of your problem.

Conclusion

As we wrap up our time today, I want to leave you with a few final thoughts.

EM Bounds once said, “Whenever God has a job to do and a gap to be filled, he always starts by choosing and calling an individual. While men use methods, God's methods are men and women.”

Friends, God wants to use you and I to build his kingdom. He has promised to supply the path and the power, the methods and the means. In addition, He's promised to give us spiritual gifts to use. That's his part. So if we are faithful, available, teachable and watchful, good things will happen. That's our part. Ray Stedman says it best:

How do we discover these ministries which God has given? We find them by responding to a need

that is right at our doorstep. You do not have to look for a ministry, it is usually right in front of you---on the bus, in your carpool, with your neighbor next door. Respond to a need. Speak to some lonely person. Open up your home to someone who is homeless. Do a kind deed to some widow on your block who needs help. Have a cup of coffee with somebody. That is how you find the ministry which is given by the Lord himself. If you follow it up you will soon discover that you have an exciting door of opportunity opened to you. Perhaps others can join in with you, and life becomes for all a tremendous adventure of faith.
Ray Stedman

So it's time to rise. It's time to take that step of faith. It's time trust in God to accomplish his work through unskilled, imperfect, sinful laborers, like you and me. Believe in God's provision and let him work through you. Let's pray.