

Never Forget How God SHAPED You for Ministry

By [Rick Warren](#) April 17, 2015

If you've ever doubted your calling to ministry, consider this: God has been molding and shaping you for ministry since before you were born!

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe." (Ps. 139:13-16 TLB)

This passage indicates that –

1. God shaped you for a purpose,
2. You are unique, and
3. You are wonderfully complex.

You are a composite of many different factors, summarized in the acrostic, S.H.A.P.E.:

Spiritual gifts

Heart

Abilities

Personality

Experience

Spiritual gifts

The Bible teaches that God gives every believer certain spiritual gifts to be used in ministry (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 8, Eph. 4). However, I believe spiritual gifts are only one part of the picture. In my opinion, spiritual gifts are often overemphasized to the neglect of other equally important factors. Natural abilities that you were born with also came from God. So do your experiences and inborn personality traits. Your Creator planned these factors as well.

I also believe most churches get the process backwards. They say, "Discover your spiritual gifts and then you'll know what ministry you're supposed to have." I believe the exact opposite of this: Start experimenting with different ministries and then you'll discover your gifts! Until you actually get involved in serving, you're not going to know what you're good at.

Heart

The Bible uses the term “heart” to represent the center of your motivation, desires, interests, and inclinations. Your heart determines why you say the things you do (Matt. 12:34), why you feel the way you do (Ps. 34:7), and why you act the way you do (Pr. 4:23).

Physiologically, each of us has a unique heartbeat. Each person has a slightly different pattern. Likewise, God has given each of us a unique emotional “heartbeat” that races when we encounter activities, subjects, or circumstances that interest us.

Another word for heart is passion. There are certain subjects that you feel passionate about and others that you couldn't care less about.

God had a purpose in giving you your inborn interests. Your emotional heartbeat reveals a very important key to understanding his intentions for your life. Don't ignore your natural interests. People rarely excel at tasks they don't enjoy doing. High achievers enjoy what they do.

Abilities

These are the natural talents that you were born with. Some people have a natural ability with words. They came out of the womb talking! Others are naturally good with numbers. They think mathematically and they can't understand why you don't understand calculus.

Exodus 31:3 gives an example of how God gives people “skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts ...” in order to accomplish his purposes. In this case, it was artistic ability to be used in building the Tabernacle. It's interesting to me that musical talent is not listed as a “spiritual gift,” but it certainly is a natural ability that God uses in worship.

One of the most common excuses people give for not getting involved in ministry is, “I just don't have any abilities to offer.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Many national studies have proven that the average person possesses from five hundred to seven hundred skills!

The real problem is two-fold:

First, people need some process of skill identification.

Second, they need a process to help them match their abilities with the right ministry.

There are people in your church with all kinds of abilities that are not being put to use: recruiting, researching, writing, landscaping, interviewing, promoting, decorating, planning, entertaining, repairing, drawing, and even feeding.

These abilities should not be wasted. “There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.” (1 Cor. 12:5)

Personality

It's obvious that God has not used a cookie cutter to create people. He made introverts and extroverts. He made people who love routine and those who love variety. Some people work best when given an individual assignment while others work better with a team.

There is no "right" or "wrong" temperament for ministry. We need all kinds of personalities to balance the church and give it flavor. The world would be a very boring place if we were all plain vanilla. Fortunately, ministry comes in more than 31 flavors.

Your personality will affect how and where you use your spiritual gifts and abilities. For instance, two people may have the same gift of evangelism, but if one is introverted and the other is extroverted, that gift will be expressed in different ways.

When you minister in a manner that is consistent with the personality God gave you, you experience fulfillment, satisfaction, and fruitfulness. It feels good when you do exactly what God made you to do.

Experiences

God never wastes an experience. Romans 8:28 reminds us, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

At Saddleback, we help people consider five areas of experience that will influence the kind of ministry they are best shaped for:

- Educational experiences: What were your favorite subjects in school?
- Vocational experiences: What jobs have you enjoyed and achieved results while doing?
- Spiritual experiences: What have been the meaningful or decisive times with God in your life?
- Ministry experiences: How have you served God in the past?
- Painful experiences: What are the problems, hurts, and trials that you've learned from?

God sovereignly determined your shape for his purpose, so you shouldn't resent it or reject it. "What right have you – a human being – to cross-examine God? The pot has no right to say to the potter: 'Why did you make me this shape?' Surely a potter can do what he likes with the clay!" (Rom. 9:20-21 JB)

Instead of trying to reshape ourselves to be like someone else, we should celebrate the shape God has given to each of us.

Wise stewardship of your life begins by understanding your shape. You will be the most effective and fulfilled in ministry when you use your spiritual gifts and abilities in the area of your heart's desire and in a way that best expresses your personality and experiences.

What God made you to *be* determines what God intends for you to *do*.