# Table of Contents

- **Getting Started**
  - 2

- **January**
  - 3

- **Meditation**
  - *By Your Fruit*
  - CHARLES F. STANLEY
  - 12

- **February**
  - 21

- **March**
  - 33

- **Looking Ahead**
  - 47
I’ve devoted most of my life to serving in a local church, so as you can imagine, the community of faith is a subject very dear to my heart. When God led me to start In Touch Ministries, I knew right away He wanted strengthening the body of Jesus Christ, in churches all over the world, to be a central part of our mission.

Just as a log pulled from the fire will burn only a little while on its own, so too will the life of a believer be extinguished when isolated from praying, worshipping, and serving in community with other believers. That’s why our team here at In Touch has been working for months, bringing together special resources to help you find your unique place in the church. Our hope over the next year is to help you understand that your presence and your gifts are vital to the health of Christ’s body on earth, including its witness to those who don’t yet believe.

As you walk with us through the following pages, I pray you’ll come away with hope and confidence that together, the church is growing up into Christ, its head (Eph. 4:15)—and you’re an essential part of the process.
Sunday morning services, Wednesday night small groups, Friday prayer meetings—for some, the rhythm of church brings comfort and order; for others, frustration and disappointment. But regardless of where we might fall along that spectrum, there’s one thing we can all agree on: If we’re being honest, at times we all hope for more in our church experience.

Whether it’s better teaching, deeper friendships, or more community involvement, there’s an undercurrent of longing coursing through the veins of the global church. We share a desire for the church to be not simply another earthly institution, but rather the hell-defying, kingdom-expanding, God-glorifying bride of Christ.

It’s time for us to reflect our Bridegroom in such a way that the world cannot say it’s never seen God. And this requires that we become whole.

Whole looks like one family of God, not just a collection of individual people who gather on a Sunday morning. Whole means we’re healthy, leaving behind childish ways and embracing spiritual and relational maturity.

This transformation doesn’t happen in our lives without other people, and it doesn’t happen by accident. In this guide, we’ll dive into three different aspects of wholeness, intentionally meditating on Jesus’ vision for His church. But this journey isn’t just about exploring—it’s about embodying. Let the questions and reflections of this guide motivate you to grow with your sisters and brothers in Christ—because it’s in unity that we most reflect God’s love for this fallen world.
THE WHOLE CHURCH: WHO AND WHAT ARE WE?
Exploring family ancestry is big business right now. Thanks to the miracle of modern DNA testing and the internet, we’re all one cheek swab and a mouse click away from tracing our bloodlines across continents and through multiple generations. Such discoveries exhilarate us, but why? Why are we so fascinated with people we’ve never met from places we’ve never visited?

It’s because deep down, we want to understand ourselves. We want insight into our here and now, and instinctively, we know that means going back to there and then. By investigating our past, we might stumble upon the roots of present-day problems as well as their solutions. Or we might draw strength from the hard-won victories of our ancestors. Whatever we may find in our yesteryears has a direct bearing on our todays.

Why, then, do we neglect our ancestry as the family of God? Whether it’s on purpose or not, many Christians tend to ignore the historical foundations of the church. And when we do that, we mistakenly assume modern Christianity has nothing to learn from its origins. Who we are as the body of Christ in 2019 has everything to do with the wisdom and sacrifices of those who came before us. Yet we often live as if the contemporary church were an island in time, cut off from the influence of the past and without regard for its impact on the future.

The truth is, nothing comes from nothing. And as counterintuitive as it may sound, we can find a better way forward by looking back.

Heavenly Father,

I praise You for the rich tapestry You are weaving together through countless lives surrendered to Your will. Thank You for including me in this long story of Your redemption. Help me, Lord, to be humble and curious as I look beyond my personal experience of faith in the here and now. Show me how You’ve been working in ways, places, and people that are foreign to me. Guide me, Holy Spirit, as You open my eyes to the history of the faithful. Amen.

Use this prayer, or let it inspire one in your own words, as you move through the weekly reflections in the following section.
WHERE DOES YOUR FAITH COME FROM? For some people, faith in Jesus is almost like red hair, a distaste for cilantro, or a quick wit—it’s an inheritance handed down through the generations. For others, following the Lord was an unexpected detour from family expectations or cultural traditions. Yes, salvation is solely the work of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, but no believer is born again without spiritual midwives. These are the Sunday school teachers, relatives, evangelists, friends, and strangers who ushered us from death to life. And we wouldn’t be here without their faithful witness.
TRY THIS

Write down your spiritual family tree—who were the people that shaped your walk with God? In what ways does your faith look like theirs? What beliefs and behaviors did you inherit from them? Repeat this process, going back as many “generations” as you can to sketch the fullest picture of your personal spiritual DNA.

KEY VERSE

“For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.” —2 Timothy 1:5

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

The apostle Paul originally wrote the words above to a young pastor, but imagine if he were to have written a similar letter addressed to one of your descendants.

→ How would he describe your faith?

→ What spiritual strengths and weaknesses might future generations inherit from you?
BESIDES BEING PRONE TO SIN, all of humanity suffers from at least one common affliction: fear. And few things arouse our fear quite like the unknown, the unfamiliar, or the unusual. Sadly, not even believers are immune to this primal anxiety, which often shows up as judgment and even persecution of Christians who worship differently than we do. Throughout history, there are countless examples of Christians being either perpetrators or victims of religious violence. But while we might be quick to draw lines and take up arms, Jesus took a different approach, telling His disciples, “He who is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40). What if we were able to adopt a humble posture toward the practices and beliefs of Christians outside our own denominations?
QUESTIONs FOR REFLECTION

God’s standard for who’s in or out is simple, but sometimes we overcomplicate it.

Do you need to repent of any fear-born pride or bias toward other believers?

What can you learn from the variety of approaches to church and spiritual practices represented by Christians around the world and throughout history?

TRY THIS

Conduct an informal interview with someone from a different Christian tradition than yours. Don’t worry about resolving any differences in theology—just relax, be curious, and enjoy learning from your brother or sister in Christ.

KEY VERSES

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” —John 3:16

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” —1 John 4:15
moving forward by looking back may sound like nonsense, but then again, so does much of godly wisdom to earthly ears: “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (1 Cor. 2:14).

So what does this strategy look like in practice? Let’s take a cue from Jesus. As a Jewish person, Jesus grew up celebrating Passover, a meal commemorating the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt. On His final Passover—which we know as the Last Supper—Jesus used the rituals of the feast to reveal His identity as the perfect sacrificial lamb, the atonement for all humanity’s sin. It’s an astonishing revelation, and one we wouldn’t have without Him honoring tradition. Bearing in mind the modern Western distaste for tradition and ceremony, what other fresh insights could we be overlooking by failing to value the past?
TRY THIS

When you attend church this week, keep an eye out for any rituals—taking Communion, observing baptism, saying the Lord’s Prayer, or reciting the Apostles’ Creed—that connect your congregation to the history of God’s people. If you can, dig a little deeper into each practice to find meaning that you may have missed before.

KEY VERSES

“THE LORD JESUS IN THE NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED TOOK BREAD: AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BROKE IT AND SAID, THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH IS FOR YOU: DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.” —1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–24

“He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.” —LUKE 24:30–31

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

→ After the resurrection, two disciples walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus without recognizing Him. What opened their eyes?

→ How could honoring history and tradition bring a similar revelation of Jesus’ presence in your life?
We are the body of Christ. We are to be the hands, feet, eyes, and ears of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—Walking With God, Charles F. Stanley
BY YOUR FRUIT
OF ALL THE SERMON SERIES I have preached, none has captured people’s attention like a series on spiritual gifts. The Bible has a lot to say about the gifts of the Spirit—and part of me would like to take you through each and every verse—but I’ve chosen to focus on the significance of spiritual gifts in relation to the Spirit-filled life.

The Spirit-filled life is one of interdependency. We are to depend on the Holy Spirit, but we are to live interdependently with other believers. The apostle Paul said,

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many … Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it (1 Cor. 12:12-14, 27).

You are a part of a living organism called the body of Christ—or the church. You are not the entire organism; you are only one member. In spiritual as well as biological terms, survival of one part of the body hinges on the health and well-being of the other parts. You are not an independent operator.

The head of the body is Christ (Eph. 5:23). He has a plan and a purpose for His church, just as He has a personal will for your life. In fact, the two overlap. Since you’re a member of His body, what you do (or refuse to do) as an individual affects the whole body. God’s will for your life includes discovering your niche and fulfilling your corresponding responsibility.

Regardless of how you advance in personal holiness, you will always need other believers. But that’s not because you’re weak or because God isn’t sufficient for you. On the contrary, God planned it that way. It’s His design. You cannot walk in the Spirit apart from functioning in the body of Christ.

An individual’s role in the body of Christ is determined by his or her spiritual gifts. One writer defined it as “an ability to function effectively and significantly in a particular service as a member of Christ’s body, the church.” Each member of the body of Christ has been given at least one such ability. The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts according to His will. And His will is in accordance with the Father’s plan for the church.

Three truths from 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 need to be emphasized concerning spiritual gifts:

1. **They are manifestations of the Spirit** (v. 7). When a believer exercises his or her gift, it is a demonstration of the Spirit’s power in that person.

2. **They are for the common good of the body** (v. 7). The primary purpose of spiritual gifts is the building up of the church—not the personal gratification of the individual member.

3. **They are distributed as the Holy Spirit wills** (v. 11). There is much discussion these days about getting certain gifts, but we would do well to leave the administering of gifts to the Holy Spirit. He assigns gifts to believers.

A common question that I get about spiritual gifts is, “How do I find out which ones I have?” I always respond, “What do you most enjoy about serving the Lord?” You will enjoy exercising your gift, so the best way to discover yours is to serve in a variety of ministry situations. When you find the one that suits your gift, you will know it.

While searching for your spiritual gift, concentrate on bearing fruit. The Holy Spirit wants you to know what your gift is. Follow His lead, and you won’t miss it. You are a unique blend of talents and skills. That means you’re an indispensable member of the body of Christ. Only you can fulfill your unique calling. So don’t cheat the rest of us. Get out there and get busy!
The church is you and me. It's the woman who sings in the choir and the kid who leads a Bible study. The church is not a place. It is a people.

WE HUMANS ARE A FORGETFUL BUNCH. To cope, we set phone alarms, scribble to-do lists, or sometimes add reminders and events to our calendars. Whichever strategy we adopt, the goal is the same: to remind ourselves about important things.

So strange, then, that we don’t approach our spiritual life with the same care. But that hasn’t always been the case for God’s people. When faithful followers like Jacob, Joshua, and Samuel encountered the Lord in memorable ways, they constructed humble stone monuments to commemorate their experiences. Imagine if we practiced that today. How would having tangible reminders of our history with God affect our faith?
TRY THIS

Think about your personal history with God. What experiences with Him bring you joy, encourage your heart, or soothe your fears? Try to find (or create) a small token to serve as a reminder of that special experience, and place it somewhere visible. Each time you see this symbol, it will serve as a reminder to pray and thank God for His faithfulness.

KEY VERSE

“Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, what do these stones mean? Tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”
—Joshua 4:5-7 (NIV)

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

→ How does building physical monuments help connect God’s people through multiple generations?
HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THAT ONE DAY our lives, culture, and achievements will be someone else’s history lesson? In the grand scheme of time, we are protagonists for only a moment before the spotlight moves on. Humbling, right?

Now think about God. As the beginning and end of all things, He sees the past, present, and future from a cosmic bird’s-eye view. From God’s perspective, all things are present tense. Strange? Certainly. But when we look at God’s redemption story from His vantage point, it becomes clear how much reverence and humility we need.
TRY THIS

Pray the Lord’s Prayer every day this week. As you recite the familiar words, imagine joining a chorus millions strong—of voices past, present, and future—all glorifying God and inviting His kingdom to come more fully on earth.

KEY VERSE


QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

→ This instruction above comes after the chapter known as the “Hall of Faith,” a long list of deceased people who boldly took God at His word. How does an awareness of those who’ve gone before invigorate us?
Learning to value church history requires curiosity, yes, but more importantly, humility. When we start exploring and honoring our roots, we’re acknowledging that we didn’t get here by ourselves. Nothing comes from nothing, remember?

This month we looked at our personal faith family tree and embraced the opportunity to learn from other Christians. We came to appreciate new revelation hidden within old traditions and discovered a fresh perspective on our place in God’s redemption story. Whether we’re zooming in or zooming out, we have to widen our gaze beyond the here and now.

Keep in mind how the Lord identified Himself to John in the book of Revelation: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (1:8). That means encountering God involves recognizing He’s not just everywhere but everywhen. And embodying Him on earth as His church requires a more holistic view of our past, present, and future with Him.

As we move from who we are to how we are, don’t stop exploring. You’ll need this same humble curiosity to embrace the most foundational—if uncomfortable—verb in Christianity: surrender.
God created us for fellowship without it something inside us dies. Fellowship with other believers is breath and life to Christians.

—Into His Presence, Charles F. Stanley
February

THE WHOLE CHURCH: HOW ARE WE THE BODY?
We live in a world of scoreboards. And it’s not just our athletic feats and failures that are being tallied—it’s everything. Salaries, clothing, degrees, grades, body measurements—nearly every facet of who we are adds or detracts from our rank. Whether consciously or not, we’re competing with most everyone in our life from co-workers and family members to strangers and celebrities we’ll never even meet. Why? Because we want to know how we measure up. And we want to come out on top.

In this culture of competition, the words surrender and submit sound like the fancy versions of something we all dread: losing. After all, only conquered people surrender, and only the weak submit. But while the world may equate submission with defeat, God has an entirely different view.

Look at how Jesus addressed the disciples: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Matt. 20:25-27).

It’s an upside-down, inside-out, back-to-front way of thinking and living. But we have to reorient ourselves in His kingdom if we want to be His body. If we want to “win,” we must first lose. Or put another way, we can’t triumph together as the body of Christ and be His loving hands and feet on earth without submitting to one another. As unnatural as that might feel, it’s simply not optional.

Heavenly Father,
I stand in awe of the example You set for us. Lord, I desire to love and serve others humbly, but I confess that I need Your help. I pray that You open my eyes to the areas in my life where I need to surrender more fully to both You and Your people. Where pride is causing me to stumble, I ask for Your gentle correction. I trust You even when I may feel discomfort. Amen.
Church should be a place where we strip off the competitive spirit, but instead, it’s often just another arena where we struggle for our own glory. That spirit is easy to spot—think of the drama surrounding worship team auditions or how people subtly use their Sunday best to one-up each other. And all this jockeying for position and recognition isn’t benign.

When we treat our sanctuaries like stages, chasing our own spotlight, we end up building our own kingdoms at the expense of God’s. And our brothers and sisters in Christ become stepping-stones, or worse, collateral damage.

This problem isn’t new, nor is its solution. Jesus taught the disciples to abandon not the pursuit of excellence, but the path of self-exaltation. In other words, if we’re competing for anything, it’s for last place—so that we might all triumph together in becoming a true reflection of Christ.
TRY THIS

Redirect any competitiveness you might have into uplifting others and helping them serve well.

KEY VERSES

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH BROTHERLY AFFECTION, OUTDO ONE ANOTHER IN SHOWING HONOR.”
—ROMANS 12:10 (ESV)

“THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST.”
—MATTHEW 20:16

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

➔ Thinking about your own life, what specific areas need to be reoriented so that they are aligned with these two verses above? With whom are you competing? How can you shift toward honoring and serving them instead?

➔ Does a competitive spirit exist in your church? Are you fanning the flames of competition or looking to extinguish them?
Ever wondered what it means to be made in the image of God? After all, none of us can say we have His brow or chin the way children might say of an earthly parent. Yet we do take after our heavenly Father. For example, qualities like our desire for justice, our capacity for love, and our drive to create reflect Him. And that’s not all.

In Genesis, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image” (1:26, emphasis added). God Himself is a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While the Trinity is a mystery no one will ever fully understand, Scripture makes one thing very clear about the triune Godhead: It’s defined by mutual submission. All three—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—are surrendered to one another, working seamlessly together in love. And as the body of Christ, we’re called to operate in that same self-emptying way.
TRY THIS

Keep an eye out for any group or team of people who exemplify “working together seamlessly.” Jot down observations about how they interact and communicate, and contemplate ways that their practices could be implemented in your church.

KEY VERSE

“HAVE THIS ATTITUDE IN YOURSELVES WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT REGARD EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED, BUT EMPTYED HIMSELF, TAKING THE FORM OF A BOND-SERVANT.” —PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

If anyone has ever had the right to “pull rank,” it’s Jesus—He was and is God—but He did the opposite. Do you possess that same attitude described in the verse above? Why or why not?
Imagine if a revered mentor of yours insisted on clipping your toenails. In public. At bare minimum, you’d be queasy at the inappropriateness—not just because it should be done privately, but because it’s embarrassing to see your leader take a subservient position. That challenges your expectations of what it means to lead.

And it’s this conventional understanding that Jesus sought to upend when He washed His disciples’ feet: “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (John 13:14-15). In the body of Christ, we all lead by accepting the invitation to serve one another in humility and love.
TRY THIS

Consciously or not, we tend to turn up our nose at certain areas of service that we consider “beneath” us. Rather than do this, look for opportunities to serve alongside others in those same areas.

KEY VERSES

“THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE.” —MATTHEW 20:28

“A DISCIPLE IS NOT ABOVE HIS TEACHER, NOR A SLAVE ABOVE HIS MASTER. IT IS ENOUGH FOR THE DISCIPLE THAT HE BECOME LIKE HIS TEACHER, AND THE SLAVE LIKE HIS MASTER.” —MATTHEW 10:24-25

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

Getting our hands dirty and doing the lowly tasks is not always easy. But Jesus isn’t asking us to do something He Himself hasn’t already done. In your personal life, how can you follow His example? Bring to the Lord any reluctance you may feel, and ask for His help in both understanding and overcoming it.
Are you satisfied with your body? For many of us, the answer is probably a resounding “no.” Consumed by insecurities and convinced perfection is the cure, we’re far more likely to punish than take care of our body. It’s as if we believe we can shame ourselves into health—not just physically but spiritually, too.

Remember that, as the church, we are the body of Christ. And just as our physical bodies respond best to tenderness, patience, and encouragement, here too does this divine body. We’ve excused a harsh, judgmental approach as “tough love” for long enough. If the kindness of God leads us to repentance, then why take a different tack with ourselves and fellow members of His body?
TRY THIS

Refrain from saying anything negative about your body and church, and don’t feed anyone else’s insecurities. Instead, encourage acceptance of perceived flaws and patience for God’s process.

KEY VERSE

“But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

1 Corinthians 12:24-26

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Would you say that your local church body behaves in the manner described by this verse? If not, how can you contribute toward a shift in behavior?
Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

In the Lord’s Prayer—the one prayer we have record of Jesus teaching His disciples—He emphasized something that often gets overlooked. The entire petition focuses on we, not me—it’s our Father, our daily bread, our debts. (See Matt. 6:9-13.) What does that tell you? That our relationship with God is personal, yes, but it’s not individual in nature. We’re part of a family, and in the church, none of us benefits from operating like an only child.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we must take to heart Paul’s words to the Philippians: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (2:3). Without this foundation of mutual submission, everything we build as the church is but one disagreement away from disintegration.

That’s why our focus this month has been on disarming the spirit of competitiveness in the church and contemplating how we might embody the self-emptying love of the Trinity. We turned our conventional understanding of leadership inside out and agreed to stop using shame and judgment as tools for growth.

Don’t forget: Whole means “healthy.” And being whole requires all of us submitting first to God and then to one another.

If we want to build up Christ’s body in love, then we need to know how. That’s what we’ll be exploring in the next section.
Apart from Jesus we’re nothing.

A person who’s learned the spirit of humility understands who they are.

They understand who is the source of it all.

—“Humility in the Life of a Believer: The Pattern,” Charles F. Stanley
THE WHOLE CHURCH: HOW DO I FIND MY PLACE?
What kind of stories inspire you? Chances are, you respond to those where ordinary people discover latent abilities, powers, or lost identities that launch them into an unexpected destiny. King Arthur, Anastasia, the entire canon of fairytale princesses, and too many comic book heroes to count—the fact that we relish these tales reveals something about human nature: We long to be special. We want to play a unique role in an important story.

On the surface, we might think our desire for “capes and crowns” is the type of egotistical ambition the Bible warns against. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). But that isn’t necessarily what’s really going on here. At the heart of this longing is something God wants us to experience: the feeling of being significant to Him and His world.

Even though together we make up the body of Christ, that doesn’t mean we’re all the same. On the contrary, God has specially equipped each of us to contribute to the health of His body in a way only we can. But how do we discover these gifts, and what does it look like to offer them for the good of the whole? As always, in the church our answers are found in community.

**USE THIS PRAYER, OR LET IT INSPIRE ONE IN YOUR OWN WORDS, AS YOU MOVE THROUGH THE WEEKLY REFLECTIONS IN THE FOLLOWING SECTION.**

*Heavenly Father,*

*I am so humbled to be a part of Your church on earth. Thank You for giving me a place among Your people, thereby fulfilling my desire to be significant in this world. God, would You open my eyes to all the ways in which You have specially equipped me to serve? Teach me, Lord, how to partner with fellow believers in Your divine ministry. And help me see how I can strengthen the gifts of my brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*Amen.*
Think about the last time you had dinner with a friend and the check arrived. Who paid? Was it awkward to decide? Being on the receiving end of generosity can cause discomfort, which we often hide behind the popular verse “It’s better to give than receive” (Acts 20:35). But that can be problematic in the church.

God is a giver. He not only gave us His Son Jesus, but He also lavished us with spiritual gifts. If we’re too proud or self-conscious to acknowledge them, then we harm the body of Christ. What’s more, we also forgo the opportunity to walk in a fullness of joy that comes only in service to our brothers and sisters in the Lord.
TRY THIS

Be open to gifts—physical, material, relational, spiritual—both from God and from others. Simply receive them with gratitude.

KEY VERSE

“EVERY GOOD THING GIVEN AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHIFTING SHADOW.” —JAMES 1:17

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

→ Try to recall the last time you watched a loved one open a present from you—that person’s pleasure was your pleasure, right? Did you ever consider that, like you, God delights in giving gifts?

→ How could receiving them with joy and gratitude help you develop a deeper intimacy with Him?
HOW DO YOU FIGURE OUT what your spiritual gifts are? In recent years, many Christians have relied on the abundance of online quizzes or spiritual gift inventory questionnaires, sometimes provided by their church’s small groups or Sunday school classes. But as helpful as those resources can be, they’re not divinely authoritative.

What if, instead of relying on man-made assessments, we approached identifying our gifts as an opportunity to engage our community of believers? The process of discovery should lead us deeper into relationship with God’s people. Take time to ask trusted people what gifts they see in you, and always seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit.
TRY THIS

Explore these questions with God: What needs tend to draw my attention? How do I like to help? What needs do others consistently bring to me? What kind of service brings me life?

Don’t stop there. With these questions in mind, observe believers in your community and see if you can spot their spiritual gifts.

KEY VERSES

“What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” —1 Corinthians 14:26 (NIV)

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” —1 Corinthians 12:7

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

→ Do you fall prey to the lie that you have no special gift to bring to the body?

→ How do the verses above challenge that belief?
As you read through the following definitions of spiritual gifts, see which resonate with your life experiences. And keep in mind, these are merely snapshots. For further exploration, check out the March/April 2019 issue of In Touch Magazine (available at intouch.org/magazine).

- The gift of prophecy leads a person to confront evil, hypocrisy, error, and false conclusions.
- A person with the gift of service is alert to the practical needs of others and has a desire to meet those needs.
- The gift of teaching manifests itself in a deep desire to instruct others about the Bible and who God is.
- If you have the gift of exhortation, your desire is to encourage other believers to stay in step with God.
- Leadership as a spiritual gift means a person has the ability to influence and empower others for the sake of God’s kingdom.
- In the church, the gift of giving shows up in people who find great joy in generously supporting the kingdom of God with their time and resources.
- The gift of mercy is usually evident as a deep tenderness toward others, displayed through acts of kindness and empathy.
A S P I R I T U A L  G I F T  I S  L I K E  the electricity in your home—still there even when you’re not using it. But unlike the invisible current that powers all your lights and electronics, spiritual gifts have no obvious power switch. So how do we turn them “on” in our lives?

In a word, obedience. The Lord is constantly bringing opportunities that require our particular gifting, but sometimes insecurity or embarrassment stops us from stepping up. The truth is, though, we’re not called to live naturally, but supernaturally. That’s exactly why God poured out His Spirit on us, and why Paul tells us to eagerly desire spiritual gifts. By acting in faith, we activate our gifts.
TRY THIS

Be intentional about looking for opportunities to serve your church with your gifts. Pray that God would reveal which doors He’s opened for you, whether that looks like starting something new and recruiting people or coming alongside someone in an established ministry.

KEY VERSES

“AS EACH ONE HAS RECEIVED A SPECIAL GIFT, EMPLOY IT IN SERVING ONE ANOTHER AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD.” —1 PETER 4:10

“For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” —2 TIMOTHY 1:6

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

→ The words above, which Paul spoke to Timothy, suggest that the gifts of God can in some ways become dormant within us. Is that the case for you?

→ If so, how can you follow the apostle’s instruction to fan those embers into flame?
Servanthood, personal sacrifice, and a genuine love for others mark the Christ-centered life.

—Pathways to His Presence, Charles F. Stanley
Glance through pop music history and you’ll notice a trend: Solo artists often emerge from group acts, leaving their collaborators behind. It’s a trajectory that rarely, if ever, moves in the opposite direction—a star performer giving up some the spotlight so the group can have it. Marching to the beat of your own drum may lead to success in the entertainment industry, but doing so in the church leads only to disintegration.

Remember this hard-to-hear yet ultimately freeing truth: It’s not all about you and your individual fulfillment. When you devote your spiritual gifts to edifying Christ’s body—instead of using the church to launch your personal career—you’re building something eternal. And considering that our lives are but smoke in the wind (James 4:14), that’s the only way we can find true significance.
TRY THIS

On our own, it’s impossible to have a 360-degree view of ourselves, so it’s essential to invite feedback from others. Seek out people who serve alongside you, and ask them for input. Questions like “What’s it like to be around me?” and “How can I serve more selflessly?” can be especially revealing.

KEY VERSE

“FOR THROUGH THE GRACE GIVEN TO ME I SAY TO EVERYONE AMONG YOU NOT TO THINK MORE HIGHLY OF HIMSELF THAN HE OUGHT TO THINK: BUT TO THINK SO AS TO HAVE SOUND JUDGMENT, AS GOD HAS ALLOTTED TO EACH A MEASURE OF FAITH. FOR JUST AS WE HAVE MANY MEMBERS IN ONE BODY AND ALL THE MEMBERS DO NOT HAVE THE SAME FUNCTION, SO WE, WHO ARE MANY, ARE ONE BODY IN CHRIST, AND INDIVIDUALLY MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER.” —ROMANS 12:3-5

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

▷ Do you think of yourself with “sound judgment”?

▷ Are you more likely to think too lowly or too highly of your contributions?

▷ How do you see that affecting your church?
Spiritual gifts get a lot of attention in the New Testament—nearly every book references or illustrates them. It’s true that the Holy Spirit didn’t fully come until the day of Pentecost, but that doesn’t mean God completely withheld the Spirit from His people in the Old Testament. Let’s investigate a lesser-known passage.

In Exodus 31, Moses introduces us to Bezalel, the first person mentioned as being filled with the Spirit of God. Tasked with constructing the ark of the covenant and the tent of meeting, Bezalel teams up with Oholiab to handcraft every component from the scarlet curtains to the wooden altar and plenty of gold hardware. The end result? A resting place for God’s glory, where He met with His people.

Today, God’s probably not going to call us to literally construct a new tabernacle with our bare hands. But still, our spiritual gifts, like Bezalel’s, are for building up Christ’s church. As you move into the next month, ask God to help you stay open to receiving from Him the strength and motivation to keep offering your gifts with a joyful heart. Remember, we can consciously look for opportunities to activate our gifts while taking a moment to center ourselves in humility and service.

As was true for Bezalel and so many other followers throughout history, our gifts find their fullest expression in community for community.
There is no such thing as a non-gifted believer.

—“The Holy Spirit, An Absolute Essential,” Charles F. Stanley
In this labor of love, it’s easy to get anxious, worrying whether or not we’re growing enough or doing it “right.” But instead of embracing the pressure to be perfect, take a moment to exhale. Focus on the opening phrase of the above verse: “Now to Him.” Comforting words, aren’t they? We’re not in this alone.

Yes, we’re the body of Christ, but Jesus is the head. He’s the one guiding us into all righteousness for His sake. He’s the one Paul spoke of in Philippians: “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (1:6 NIV).

We’ve covered quite a bit in the last three months. We recognized the importance of church history, retracing our collective steps as the body of Christ so that we may better understand where we’re headed. Repenting of selfish ambition, we reoriented ourselves to Jesus’ last-shall-be-first approach to greatness, embracing a lifestyle of submission and surrender. And we investigated our individual places in this great story of God’s redemption, exploring with the Holy Spirit what it looks like for us to offer our spiritual gifts for the good of Christ’s body.

This is only the beginning of a lifelong process of becoming the whole church. We don’t have to adopt a frantic pace. We can truly take things one day at a time. In the next volume of this guide, we’ll learn how to refuel for the journey by taking a fresh approach to prayer, Bible study, and discipleship.
When the body of Christ finally begins to realize who we really are, we can make an impact on this world that’s absolutely irresistible.

— “The High Calling of Servanthood,” Charles F. Stanley