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BILL HYBELS

the Volunteer
REVOLUTION

Unleashing the Power of Everybody

ZONDERVAN™

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49530 USA

And finally, my wife, Lynne, immersed herself in the world of Willow volunteers for over a year in an attempt to understand their hearts. Her heart will never be the same. Her writing gifts and editing skills made this book possible, and I am grateful beyond words.

CHAPTER 1

This Is What I Was Made For

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:10

SOME YEARS AGO A NEW STAFF MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH ASKED me how I had the gall to ask people who are already busy at work or in the home to get involved as volunteers at church.

"I mean, don't you feel a little guilty doing this?" he asked. "Isn't it hard to heap such a burden on people?"

He had a point. But I knew of a bigger point:

"During the next few months you're going to meet people who stand at drill presses, ten hours a day, five or six days a week. When they go home at night, few of them sense the pleasure, meaning, and purpose of life they've heard advertised in commercials for beer or computer systems. They're godly, conscientious people, and they feel thankful for their jobs. But they don't find satisfaction for their souls at the drill press.

"And you're going to meet fine, hardworking people in real estate who show thirty homes a week. If they're lucky,

one buyer will make an offer, but they're not lucky every week. Many are extroverts who love showing property and helping families find the right home, but even then they probably don't arrive home at night filled with deep inner joy because of their latest showing.

"You'll meet insurance salespeople who have been selling policies for twenty years. While they feel grateful that the insurance business puts food on their table and sends their kids to college, the thought of selling one more policy likely doesn't float their emotional boat.

"You're going to meet car dealers and stockbrokers and bricklayers and police officers and plumbers who, despite their commitment to their careers and jobs, are honest enough to admit that their secular vocation does not offer enough meaning to satisfy the deeper needs that stir in their souls.

"Some of them love their jobs; they feel stimulated and energized by their work. Some of them even leave their workplace each day knowing that they have honored God by their work and their love for people. But few of them would say: *This is what life is all about.*"

I looked directly into the eyes of my young friend. "You and I get to invite these people to be used by God in ways they never imagined. We have the opportunity to empower them to develop gifts they didn't know they had. We can cheer them on as they courageously assume new levels of Kingdom responsibility that fill their hearts to overflowing. And we get to see the look on their faces when they realize God has used them to touch another human being.

"No," I said, "I never really feel guilty inviting people to become volunteers in our church. Never."

ON A MISSION

When the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes decided to determine his purpose in life, he started by accumulating a vast sum of money, only to discover that it didn't provide the meaning he had hoped for. Then he sought power, attained it, and discovered that it too failed to satisfy. Next came a scandalous pursuit of pleasure. Then fame and celebrity. Finally, at the end of all his efforts, he uttered his famous words: "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity." Or as another translation says, "All of this is like chasing the wind."

We were not created to chase the wind.

We are created to join God on a mission. Some people think of God as hanging around beyond the edges of the universe somewhere, listening to really good worship music. The Bible sees it much differently. It teaches that God is at work 24/7, all over our world, filling his followers with grace and mercy and power to reclaim and redeem and fix this broken planet.

It's as if God has work gloves on. And he calls us to roll up our sleeves and join him with our talents, our money, our time, and our passion. He wants his mission to become ours. "If you're into chasing the wind," he tells us, "you can keep right on doing that. Or you can hook up with me, and together we'll transform this hurting planet."

What would it feel like to lay your head on your pillow at night and say, "You know what I did today? I teamed up with God to change the world"?

The desire to be a world-changer is planted in the heart of every human being, and that desire comes directly from the heart of God. We can suffocate that desire in selfishness, silence it with the chatter of competing demands, or bypass

it on the fast track to personal achievement. But it's still there. Whenever we wonder if the daily eight-to-five grind or our round-the-clock parenting tasks are all there is to life, that divine desire nudges us. Whenever we feel restless and unsatisfied, the desire whispers in our soul. Whenever we wonder what a life of real purpose would feel like, the desire calls us to something more.

A TRANSFORMED WORLD

Jesus made it pretty clear what God's idea of a transformed world would look like, first within the community of believers called the church and then as the values of that community spread out into the world:

- When he said we should *love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves*, he was calling us to trade a ritualized religion for a genuine love relationship with God and to offer to others the same kind of attention, honor, and compassion we give ourselves.
- When Jesus punctuated his teaching with *concern for the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed*, he was describing a new value system.
- When he said, *Take up your cross and follow me*, he was telling us in graphic terms that following him would require sacrifice, hardship, and death to something selfish inside of us.
- When he said, *Go into all the world and preach the gospel, baptizing in my name and telling people all that you have heard from me*, he was making it clear that his will for us includes the call to worldwide mis-

sion. Our call to love our neighbor as ourselves includes our neighbor across the globe as well as the one next door.

The transformation God longs for transforms everything: marriages, families, friendships, economic and political systems. It lifts up the humble, humbles the proud, and draws people together across racial, social, and cultural divides. It calls us to live in such a way that, as pastor Rob Bell from Mars Hill Bible Church says, *love wins*—in the discussion with our spouse, in the conversation with our neighbor, in the encounter with a stranger, in the decision we make, in the response to one in need, in the attitude toward our enemy . . . in the choice we make to serve.

A POWERFUL MOMENT

When I ask long-term volunteers when they became “lif-ers”—people who decide to serve in God's mission for as long as he gives them breath—they almost always point back to a specific serving moment that sealed their commitment. “In that moment,” they say, “I felt the God of heaven and earth use me, and I discovered that there's nothing in the world like that. It beats anything else I've ever experienced!”

Whether they taught a child how to pray, guided someone toward faith, helped a husband and wife reconcile, served a meal to a homeless person, or produced an audio tape that puts the Christian message in somebody's hand, they knew their lives would never be the same.

Acts 13:36 speaks about the Old Testament character David. It says simply, “And David served the purposes of God in his generation.” I love the clarity of that single sentence.

David didn't waste time chasing the wind. He devoted himself single-mindedly to God's mission and died knowing that his one and only life had served its highest purpose.

A PARTICIPANT OR A SPECTATOR?

I've never been a great athlete, but I've played enough to learn that when it comes to sports, it's a lot more exciting to be a participant than a spectator.

For five years in the early '80s, I played with a group of friends in a park district football league. Most of the teams we played against had big guys in construction jobs who hit the bars hard after work. By the time they got to the park, they just wanted to hit people hard.

We church guys weren't big or inebriated, but with speed and deception we did rather well. Several times we won the Tuesday night park district championship.

During those same five years, I served as the chaplain for the Chicago Bears football team. Several times the team gave me premier tickets for games at Soldier Field during the Bears' spectacular charge toward the Super Bowl.

Sometimes on Sunday afternoons or Monday evenings I'd be at Soldier Field, in seats on the fifty-yard-line, watching the world championship Bears cream their opponents. I'd try to focus on the game, but I'd see somebody catch a spiraling pass . . . and I'd wish it was Tuesday night so I could be catching one myself. I'd watch somebody throw a beautiful block . . . and I'd recall the cruncher a big guy put on me the previous week. Despite the bruises I had to show for my participation, I wished I could trade Soldier Field for the hard-packed field at the park district. I wanted to be *in* the action, not just watching it.

My current recreational passion is sailing. Three times, by God's grace, I've had the opportunity to watch the premier sailboat-racing event in the world, the America's Cup. Seated on the deck of a friend's boat in the spectacular waters just north of Auckland, New Zealand, I saw the top racing boats and crews under sail on one racecourse.

But the whole time I thought, *I'd rather participate in one of our local Lake Michigan regattas, on my used, banged-up sailboat with my eight buddies, than be a spectator at the America's Cup Finals.*

Spectating never compares with the thrills and chills of being in the middle of the action. I'd much rather get a little beat up participating in a regatta than sip a lemonade from the comfort of a deck chair on a spectator boat. And I don't think I'm the only one who feels that way.

Every local churchgoer has a choice to make. He can park in his usual spot in the church parking lot, make his way to a comfortable seat in a favorite row, watch a good service, chat with friends, and then go home. That choice makes for a nice, safe Sunday morning experience. Or he can throw himself into an adventure by rolling up his sleeves, joining a team of like-minded servants, and helping to build the local church God has called him to be a part of.

I get letters and emails all the time from volunteers who have discovered that serving is far more satisfying than spectating. Here's an example:

Three years ago you challenged me to get involved as a volunteer. I was hesitant at first, but you wouldn't let up. Now I can't thank you enough. The meaning I derive, the sense of ownership I feel, the friendships I have built, the spiritual growth I've

experienced—it's all directly related to finding my niche in serving. I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life for inviting me into the game.

Scattered throughout this book you'll find dozens of excerpts from actual emails I've received from volunteers at our church and elsewhere who found the purpose of their lives when they finally committed themselves to serving.

Most of them didn't find the perfect volunteer niche overnight. A lot of them served faithfully in less-than-ideal situations before they discovered what they're really good at. Some of them didn't have a clue where to start. But they started anyway. They experimented. Even though they felt scared or thought they had little to offer, they decided to take a first small step.

A few of those you'll read about tried through the years to silence the voice calling them from self-absorption into servanthood. But God didn't quit. And now they have become the most enthusiastic proponents of serving.

One man wrote the following:

My life used to be about one thing: me. I was a self-serving guy who had neither purpose nor passion. I was leading a miserable life, throwing away time and money on beer and cheap thrills. Then one day I walked into a church and heard the message of Christ: Give your life away to others and you will find your life. I didn't have much to give up so I decided to give it a shot.

That's when my life started to change and Christ became more real to me. I started serving teenagers and found a purpose . . . a reason for my existence.

It was twenty-one years ago that I wandered into that church. Today my life is richer than I ever believed it could be. Serving others made the difference. It was one of the best decisions I ever made.

Here's the experience of a woman named Marty:

Two years ago I started volunteering in our ministry for children experiencing divorce. I had been divorced myself and clearly remembered what it was like for me as a single parent, struggling with all that was happening in my life and having very little energy left for my children. When I heard about this ministry I was convinced God was calling me to get involved.

Every week I see children come in struggling with anger and fear and leave with hope and peace. How I wish my own kids had been served in this way.

So many people hesitate to volunteer because they are afraid of failing. I felt that way too. But when we let God lead us to where he wants us to serve, we find an incredible sense of satisfaction and joy. I wouldn't give that up for the world.

Why don't I feel guilty asking people to volunteer in the local church? Because I know that what Marty says is true. People who let God lead them to where he wants them to serve find "an incredible sense of satisfaction and joy."

What about you? Is it time for you to get up from the grandstands, crawl over a couple of benches, suit up, and get out on the playing field? I guarantee, it's far more exhilarating to be a participant than a spectator. Why watch others change the world when you can join them?

Your move.

What? Me, a Priest?

JUST TO YANK MY CHAIN, A BUSINESSMAN FRIEND OF MINE introduces me to his golfing buddies as “my priest.” His words elicit a shocked response for two reasons. First, I don’t dress like their image of a priest. And second, my friend isn’t close enough to any church to have a priest—or anything even vaguely resembling one.

In fact, my friend knows I’m not his priest, or anyone else’s either. At least not according to his limited, stereotypical view of what a priest is. On the other hand, I most certainly am a priest. And chances are, so are you. For some of you reading this book, being a priest may be the furthest thing from your mind, but it’s not far from God’s mind.

THE JOB OF A PRIEST

Before the coming of Christ, the Holy Spirit operated through a select group of people called priests. Aaron, the brother of Moses, served as the first priest and his sons carried on the priesthood.

Old Testament priests mediated affairs between God and the people. To do anything religiously—pray, give a worship

offering, confess their sins—the average person couldn't go directly to God; he or she had to go through a priest.

But Jesus' life and death turned the Old Testament religious system inside out. On what we now call the Day of Pentecost, when the first Christ-followers gathered in "the upper room," they heard the sound of a sudden, rushing wind. Then tongues of fire landed on everyone's head. I have no clue what those "tongues of fire" looked like, but they represented the coming of the Holy Spirit in full measure to the church. And the tongues sat not on the heads of a select few, but on *everybody's* head.

From that moment on, instead of a few, select priests filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to act as go-betweens with God, suddenly every one of Jesus' followers became a priest.

This means that today we have direct access to God. We don't have to call a priest or a pastor every time we want to worship, pray, or confess our sins to God.

It also means that we become priests to one another. And what does a faithful priest do for his people? Prays for them. Encourages them. Watches over them. Confronts them. Grieves with those who grieve. Rejoices with those who rejoice. As a result, the people feel loved, nurtured, secure, and blessed.

Imagine a community in which every member takes his or her priesthood as seriously as did the priests of the Old Testament. A community like that would turn the world upside down!

According to Ephesians 4:11–12, God has uniquely equipped some of these priestly servants to train others how to serve (emphasis added): "It was he who gave some to be

apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Instead of the Old Testament temple system, we have congregations full of priests, with a few teachers, leaders, and pastors among the priesthood who are called to equip those priests for ministry. In most modern church settings, the "equipping servants" would be paid pastors and staff members. Those equipped to carry out the good works of ministry would be the "volunteers."

Throughout church history, whenever this plan has been implemented, the church has born great fruit. In such a situation, everybody wins.

- The equippers win each time they see God greatly use the volunteers they have recruited, loved, trained, and empowered.
- The volunteers win, because they get the thrill of moving from the spectator's seat to the playing field. They become instruments of healing, hope, and transformation in the hands of God.
- The surrounding community wins as it receives the service of a loving, unified, multigifted force for good.
- And of course, the Architect of the whole plan wins because God has the pleasure of seeing his children carry forward his grand purpose of fixing this broken world.

THE TRAIN JUMPS THE TRACKS

I'm not enough of a historian to define exactly how or when the church train jumped tracks, but jump it did. Although

the early church started out with this beautiful concept of the priesthood of all believers—with every member an active minister and good works carried forth in all directions—during the last couple of centuries, most churches have retreated to the Old Testament model. Here's how it often plays out:

A group of a hundred people get together, decide to form a congregation, and “hire a minister.” That's the terminology they use: hire a minister. Then they say to their new minister, “Okay, this is what we want you to do: Preach. Teach. Marry. Bury. Make hospital calls. Visit members. Counsel the confused. Evangelize the community. Raise money. Print the bulletins. Do announcements. Pray for the sick. Then, come year end, we'll get out our report cards and determine whether you have met our expectations. If you have, we'll sign you up for another year. If not, we'll hire someone else.”

If the hired minister energetically throws himself into his multitude of tasks and the church starts to grow, the congregation might hire an associate pastor, an administrative pastor, or a youth pastor to take care of the programs and people beyond the senior minister's reach. But again, the congregation pays “the clergy” to do ministry.

So the church ends up with a few overworked professionals, paid by the tithes and offerings of the congregation to fulfill the whole gamut of priestly functions, while everybody else remains passive observers, their gifts and talents atrophying from disuse.

This is the most widely practiced ministry paradigm in existence today—and it doesn't have a shred of biblical support. Tragically, this approach has left many contemporary churches in shambles: weak, unorganized, and powerless. And unfortunately, it's a tough mindset to change.

Howard Snyder says in *Liberating the Church* that most church members “expect doctors to treat us, not to train us to treat others. We expect lawyers to give us expert advice, not to admit us to the secret fraternity of those who understand how the legal system works. Likewise, we want pastors to serve us, not to build and train us” to serve others.⁵

I think one of the reasons God made me somewhat thick-skinned is because for so many years I have had to absorb disapproval from people who want me to be like their doctor and their lawyer. They want me to perform my “priestly function” for them, never realizing that God is calling *them* to put on their own mantle of priestly responsibility.

“You're the priest,” they protest, “not us.” But the Bible replies, “Not true. If you're a Christ-follower, you're a priest.”

It must break God's heart when people come to church with a consumer mindset, content to eat and run. “Serve me,” they say. “Teach me. Pray for me. Fix my kids. Counsel my spouse. And if you don't do all of this up to my standards, I'll go down the street and see if another church will pay better attention to me.” I've learned that you can't possibly build a God-honoring church with a congregation full of consumers.

Neither can you build a God-honoring church without teachers, leaders, and pastors committed to equipping. When those called to equip think of themselves as the only worthy “doers of ministry,” when they peer down from their perch in the pulpit at their congregation, convinced that the Holy Spirit could not possibly work through the people seated in front of them, they are directly disobeying their calling and mandate from God.

I honestly don't know why some church leaders do this. I doubt it's due to scriptural ignorance. Perhaps they've never learned the skill of delegating responsibility. Or they don't know how to build a team. Maybe they feel insecure, afraid that if they share responsibility, another person's stature might eclipse their own in the congregation. Whatever the reason, they live as lonely, overworked clergymen, wearing themselves out doing the work of ministry, while bored potential volunteer ministers dutifully take their seats in the viewing stand week after week after week—and miss out on all the action.

I've heard many pastors say, "My people just won't get out of the spectator stands and serve."

And I have to ask, "Are you inspiring them to get out of the stands? Are you teaching regularly on the priesthood of believers? Have you reminded your people recently that they have the Holy Spirit in them? Have you made it clear that they don't have to go to seminary to make a huge difference in your church? Are they aware that they don't have to have theological credentials scribbled on a sheepskin in order to lead a small group, to serve communion, to teach, to make hospital calls, or even to start a new ministry in the church? Are you calling them to be part of the redemptive mission of God? Or are you presenting volunteerism as a duty, a drudgery they have to endure, like a parent asking a kid to take out the garbage?"

I remember an era at Willow when we had far too few volunteers. My staff colleagues would come to me and say, "Hey Bill, you've got to do something. We're trying to pull volunteers into our ministries, but it's not working. You've got to teach this stuff." So they got me all worked up, and

I finally stood up at our midweek service and said, "Okay, here's the deal. I'm going to teach about the priesthood of all believers. I'm not going to let up on it until we all get on board with it and we become a serving church. And I can outlast you!"

That was the beginning of a thirteen-week series. From the priesthood of believers, I moved to the concept of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. According to that passage, the Body of Christ needs all its members—eyes, ears, nose, hands, feet—functioning properly in order to be fully alive. "Now you are the body of Christ," Paul tells us, "and each one of you is a part of it" (v. 27). Week after week I hammered home the truth that the body of Christ, the church, cannot do what it's called to do unless it becomes a community of interdependent, serving brothers and sisters. That's what it means to be priests and priestesses.

God used that series to add hundreds of new volunteers to our ministries. One church member told me recently, "It was almost twenty years ago, during week twelve of your marathon serving series, when I realized that God hadn't awakened me spiritually so I could just sit back and take in. He had called me to be a volunteer priest in this church. Thanks for not giving up on this message. Thanks for calling me into the game."

LIFT THE VISION

If we are going to be biblically functioning communities and maximize the potential of our churches, we need to lift the vision of volunteerism. Let me say it again. When those who are called to equip really do equip, and when volunteers show up to be equipped, trained, empowered, and entrusted

with ministry, everybody wins—the equippers, those being equipped, the church, and the community. And God gets the glory because it was his incredible idea.

If you're reading this book and you're sitting in a church and not serving, step up! God has honored you by calling you to be a priest or priestess.

Accept the honor.

If you're reading this book and you're a church leader who is not equipping your people to serve, you are failing them. You can do better! You can decide to do better right now.

Rise to the challenge.

Imagine what could happen in your church and your community if every potential minister—priest, priestess, equipper, equipped—actually lived according to the biblical mandate. What an extraordinary power for good would be unleashed!

Just Jump In

IF I HAD TO SUM UP THE KEY TO FINDING THE PERFECT SERVING niche, I'd do it in one word: *experiment*.

That's not what I would have said twenty years ago, or even ten. Back then I would have said to start by figuring out your spiritual gift, that divinely empowered ability given to every Christ-follower that allows them to most effectively advance the purposes of God. Read 1 Corinthians 12, I would have suggested—and Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and Ephesians 4. Then take a spiritual gift assessment test.

Learn and reflect, I would have said. Before you begin to serve anywhere, figure out how God has specially equipped you. Has he gifted you to lead, to teach, or to administrate? Are you especially good at extending mercy, encouragement, or hospitality? Do you feel uniquely empowered to communicate the Christian message to people far from God? Are you happiest when you can use your skills in craftsmanship or your creative talents in music, writing, visual arts? Do you feel fulfilled spiritually when you're organizing details related to a worthy cause or helping in practical ways behind the scenes? Are you known for being particularly wise, discerning, faith-filled, or generous?

First answer questions like these, I would have said, and then serve according to what you discover. I felt strongly about starting from the point of spiritual giftedness, because early in my ministry I discovered what happens when you don't.

A HARD LESSON

When Dr. B taught us about servanthood back in the youth ministry days, he also taught us about spiritual gifts. So as we served together we asked each other: *Who are you and what special talents and abilities do you bring to our corporate effort?* Along the way we encouraged one another to move toward the areas of ministry where we felt most effective and energized.

But planting a church for adults with no money, no facilities, and no paid staff was harder than we anticipated. We believed to our toes that God had called us to start a church to reach out to unchurched people and help them become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. But we had so few people and so much to do. The overwhelming demands on our time and talents sent us scrambling back to the concept of raw servanthood. We adopted the mantra, *Whatever It Takes*.

If something needed to be done, we didn't ask questions. We just put on the necessary hat and did it. We considered a match between a volunteer role and a person's giftedness an appreciated bonus, but it definitely wasn't our priority.

I preached, led the staff (all volunteers in the beginning), sang in two music groups at weekend services, disciplined new believers, raised money, did strategic planning, visited people in the hospital, led a small group, and per-

formed weddings and funerals. Everybody else in the core group served with the same intensity. When new believers joined the church, we challenged them to serve that way too—and they did. Our church wouldn't have lasted a year without that degree of commitment to doing “whatever it takes.”

But after five years of serving with abandon, great people started flaming out. Men and women with pure hearts and deep devotion said, “I can't do this anymore. I'm exhausted.” Others said, “I'm angry. What you're asking isn't reasonable.” Some left the church so wounded that they had to get away to recover.

The way many of us had been living worked for a few years because of our youth and because we felt tremendously excited about starting a new adventure. But it was neither healthy nor sustainable.

We all had asked a single question—*What needs to be done?*—and we had answered enthusiastically with our actions. But we didn't ask these questions: *What are you good at? What energizes you?* And conversely: *What aren't you good at? What drains you?* We didn't think we had the luxury of asking such questions.

But as the decade of the '70s turned to the '80s, we realized there was more to faithful servanthood than just working harder. We had to work smarter. We had to move back toward the concept of spiritual gifts we had learned in the youth ministry.

We started teaching the concept of giftedness every way we could. We developed an in-depth spiritual gift assessment course called *Network*, which we taught throughout the year on Saturdays. We taught a nine-week series on

spiritual gifts at our midweek services. We even came up with an abbreviated spiritual gift assessment that I used at our weekend services.

During the '80s, many people in our congregation discovered the exhilaration of serving in an area of perfect fit, where their personality, passions, and spiritual gifts all matched their volunteer role. But we ran into two problems.

First, the pendulum swung too far. An attempt to help people maximize their effectiveness without draining their energy slowly slid into an, "I can't serve until I find the perfect spot" mentality. It wasn't that people refused to serve in less-than-ideal circumstances. It was more that they thought they weren't supposed to; they thought they first had to "get it all figured out" so they could "do it all right." People knew their identity as servants and wanted to serve, but knowing how and where to serve had become a very complicated process.

Second, we had mistakenly assumed that the right assessment tool would assure people of discovering their God-given gifts. For some people it did work; they took the test, determined their spiritual gifts, and immediately started using them—a simple story with a happy ending. For many people, however, taking an assessment test was not enough. We discovered that the right assessment tool can be useful if a person has past serving experience to help inform their assessment. But for a complete rookie to Kingdom life, the approach often raises more questions than it answers.

We still believe that our ultimate goal is to serve in one's area of spiritual giftedness. But we have learned that spiritual gifts are less something we "figure out ahead of time" than something God reveals to us as we serve.

So here's what we recommend to potential volunteers these days. Embrace wholeheartedly your fundamental identity as a servant of Jesus Christ. Use whatever understanding you have of your personality, passions, areas of interests, talents, and preferences to guide you in a general serving direction. Look at the needs in your church and community. Then jump in with a willing heart and an open mind. Drape the servant's towel over your arm and get busy.

As you continue on the serving pathway and experience the joys of difference-making, you can then begin to study about spiritual gifts and ask God to reveal yours to you.

The key is to look at discovering, developing, and deploying your spiritual gift as a process. Don't worry about finding the perfect fit immediately. Give yourself permission to learn as you experiment.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

At our church, this concept of experimentation required a paradigm shift, not only for potential volunteers but also for staff and leaders. Most of our previous serving opportunities had required a commitment of at least three months—not at all conducive to experimentation!

Imagine having to sign a three-month lease on a car you are considering buying, versus having the freedom to take it on a forty-five minute test drive. So throughout all the ministries of the church we introduced the concept of the *First Serve*, one-time serving opportunities offered at a variety of times and tapping into a wide range of skills and areas of interest. Here's the *First Serve* mantra: *Come once and check it out. No strings attached.*