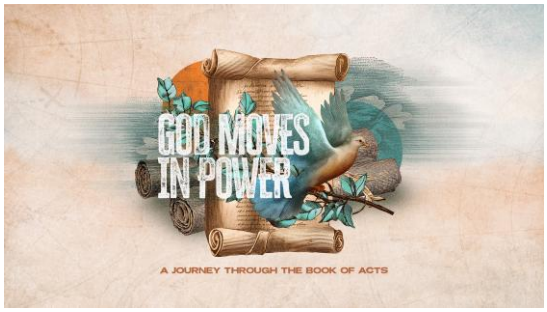


Group Discussion Guide | October 29 & November 1
God Moves in Power through Ordinary People

***Created to Serve* Group Guide Leader Instructions**

This is the second week of our *Created to Serve* experience. We are adjusting our normal Bible Lab and sermon discussion rhythms to engage with *Created to Serve*, an interactive experience designed to help people discover **who God has created them to be** and **how He is inviting them to partner with Him**.

This week you will continue the conversation you began last week and share what each person discovered as they worked through the material on their own.

We recognize that not everyone will have taken time to engage with *Created to Serve* during the week. That's OK. We don't want to shame or embarrass anyone. We have provided questions that anyone can answer based on your group time as well as questions for those who "did the homework."

In this week's group you will discuss the Spiritual Gifts, Passions & Causes, Abilities, and Preferred Contexts sections (you will have "on your own" time in the group to complete the Preferred Contexts material).

We are praying for a rich experience as your group discovers, together, how you are created to serve!

Where we've been and where we're headed: Last week your group explored God's character and heart and reflected on your identity, calling, and purpose. Each person then took the next three sections—Spiritual Gifts, Passions & Causes, and Abilities—home to explore on their own. This week your group will share and affirm what people noticed in those sections, then spend time on your own with Preferred Contexts. Next week people will bring their reflections on "Explore Your Experiences" and "Discover the Bigger Picture," and your group will begin to explore how you are created to serve together.

Here's the way the Created to Serve content has been broken down:

<u>Week 1 (Week of October 25)</u>

During your group time: "Introduction" and "Explore God's Heart and Character" sections of *Created to Serve*

Before your next gathering: "Explore Spiritual Gifts," "Explore Passions and Causes," and "Explore Your Abilities"

<u>Week 2 (Week of November 1)</u>

During your group time: Discuss "Explore Spiritual Gifts," "Explore Passions & Causes," and "Explore Your Abilities"; spend time on your own with "Explore Your Preferred Contexts"

Before your next gathering: "Explore Your Experiences" and "Discover the Bigger Picture"

Note: The week of November 8 will resume sermon content discussion in an abbreviated form to allow for discussion of these two final sections, and future life group guides will provide opportunities for further reflection on the Created to Serve *materials.*

How can you prepare as a leader?

- Spend time with the *Created to Serve* materials and discussion guide before you gather together so you are familiar with their contents.
- Engage with the materials for yourself—we would love for you to experience *Created to Serve* as a participant, not just a leader.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to affirm, equip, and encourage each person in your group.
- Plan your time. We've provided approximate times for each section. But you may wish to allot more than your group's normal discussion time if possible.
- Be ready to go first. When it's time to share, offer your own response before inviting others. Your openness sets the tone for the group.
- Welcome everyone. Some in your group may be new to faith or unsure where they stand with God. Let people know that "I'm not sure yet" is always a good answer and that no one has to share more than they're comfortable with.

What if…? Guidance for situations that may come up

- **Someone feels they have no gifts or checked very little.** Normalize it. The guide reminds us that recognizing the kinds of things God has equipped us to do matters more than finding the right label. Invite the group to share what they have seen in that person and ask what they enjoy or where they have felt joy while serving.
- **Someone names a gift others don't see.** Don't correct or debate. Thank them for sharing and remind the group that gifts are confirmed over time as we serve and receive the affirmation of others. Invite others to share what they have actually observed.
- **Someone asks about gifts that aren't on the list** (such as tongues, healing, or miracles). Acknowledge that the guide is not exhaustive and that Scripture mentions additional gifts. You don't need to answer on the spot or debate the topic. Invite them to continue the conversation with a member of the Formation & Outreach Team.
- **Someone compares themselves with others or feels inadequate.** Name that this is common (the opening exercise does this) and remind the group that every part of the body is needed. Avoid hurrying to fix the feeling; let others offer specific affirmation.

- **One person dominates, or someone stays quiet.** Gently invite others with open-ended questions and offer a few moments to talk in pairs before sharing with the whole group. "I'm not sure yet" is always an acceptable answer.

Below you'll find questions and instructions that lead you through guiding your group to discuss the Spiritual Gifts, Passions & Causes, and Abilities sections of *Created to Serve* and to engage with the Preferred Contexts section.

Opening reading: 1 Peter 4:8-11 (5 minutes)

Before we share what we've discovered, let's ground ourselves in why God gives gifts in the first place. Peter wrote this letter to Christians scattered across the Roman world who were under pressure for their faith. In the middle of that hardship, he describes what life together should look like: deep love, open homes, and each person using what God has given them for the good of others. As we listen, notice three things: where our gifts come from, who they are for, and what they are meant to accomplish.

Invite someone to read 1 Peter 4:8-11 aloud.

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- According to Peter, where do our gifts come from, who are they for, and what are they meant to accomplish?

Notice that Peter begins with love and hospitality before he ever mentions gifts. As we share today, let's practice that kind of love by listening well and encouraging one another.

Overview and opening questions (10 minutes)

You most likely spent time this week reflecting on the gifts, passions, and abilities God has given you. Before we dive into the specifics of what you discovered, let's have some fun finding some things out about each other.

Hold up your hand with all five fingers extended. Put a finger down for each of the following statements that is true of you (whether or not you engaged with *Created to Serve* this week). If you run out of fingers, hold up your other hand!

- When I stop and think about it, I notice ways God has equipped me to serve Him and others.
- I sometimes feel like I don't have as much to offer as other people do.
- I've had an experience where I knew God had me in the right place at the right time.
- I've felt jealous of someone else's gifts and abilities.
- I don't clearly see how what I bring to the table "fits" with ways to serve God.
- On at least one occasion, I've tried serving and it didn't go well.
- On at least one occasion, I've tried serving and it went really well.

- I want to learn more about how I'm created to serve.

Does anyone have any fingers still up? Most of us struggle with jealousy and inadequacy at times. At other times, we can see more clearly how God has gifted and equipped us to partner with Him.

Discussion and reflection on Part 2: Explore Spiritual Gifts (15 minutes)

We're going to spend time on each of the sections we looked at in the past week, beginning with spiritual gifts.

Just as a reminder: a spiritual gift is different from a "natural" talent or ability (although both are given to us by God). A spiritual gift is a Spirit-given ability through which we reflect the love, grace, and truth of Christ.

Take a few moments to look over Part 2: Explore Spiritual Gifts, especially your notes on page 15.

Allow a few minutes for people to review the material. This also allows those who did not spend time with the material before to get an overview of what is there.

- Which spiritual gifts resonated most strongly with you? Why? *Encourage people to go beyond just naming the gift—invite them to say what they mean by that gift. The labels are far less important than the characteristics.*

Before inviting others to respond, introduce this norm in your own words:

The gift of experiencing *Created to Serve* as a life group is that we can affirm each other's observations and notice what someone else might have missed. As we share, here's a simple guideline: affirm what you have seen, and don't assign or prescribe. "I've noticed how you make newcomers feel welcome" is affirming. "You should serve in guest services" is prescribing. Our goal is to help one another notice what God is already doing in us, not to tell each other what to do.

- As you listened to others share the gifts they may recognize in themselves, what came to mind? What have you noticed about that person that can help you affirm that gift in them? What do you see in them that they may not see in themselves?

Encourage a time of affirmation and encouragement, as people in your group provide examples of the way they've seen a gift at work in someone's life.

Discussion and reflection on Part 3: Explore Passions & Causes and Part 4: Explore Your Abilities (15 minutes)

We'll now reflect on what we discovered in Part 3: Explore Passions & Causes and Part 4: Explore Your Abilities. Our passions often reveal where God is inviting us to join Him in His work. They are

the people and causes that consistently capture our attention. Our abilities include our natural strengths as well as skills we have developed during our lives.

Take a few moments to look over Part 3: Explore Passions & Causes, especially your notes on page 20, and Part 4: Explore Your Abilities, especially your notes on page 25.

Allow a few minutes for people to review the material. This also allows those who did not spend time with the material before to get an overview of what is there.

- What did you find yourself checking without hesitation? Why do you find yourself drawn to that?
- What surprised you?
- What else did you notice about what you checked or the process in general?

Remind the group of the affirmation norm: affirm what you have seen, and don't assign or prescribe.

- As you listened to what others shared, what did you notice? What can you encourage or affirm about what they said? What do you see in them that they may not see in themselves?

Discussion and reflection on Part 5: Explore Your Preferred Contexts (20 minutes)

Let's take some time now with Part 5: Explore Your Preferred Contexts.

Invite someone to read the verse and introductory paragraphs on page 27, then give people 10-15 minutes to engage with the material on their own.

It's fairly common to evaluate ourselves in terms of our gifts, interests, and abilities. But thinking in terms of our preferred contexts is not as intuitive for some of us.

- What did you notice? Are there contexts that consistently energize you?
- Are there ones that clearly drain you?
- Did you feel a sense of objectivity about what you noticed about yourself, or did you find yourself sitting in judgment on your preferences?
- Did anything surprise you about what someone else in the group said?

We've spent a lot of time gathering data about ourselves. In the coming week, you'll look at one more data point—your own story. How do your experiences shape and equip you for partnering with God?

You will then have a chance to pull it all together by looking at each section and discovering the bigger picture.

Please spend time in Part 6: Explore Your Experiences and Part 7: Discover the Bigger Picture before our next meeting. Take a look at Part 8: Continuing the Conversation as well. For some of us, exploring our experiences can be painful. Please reach out to someone in the group for support if you need it.

At our next life group time, come prepared to share what next steps you think God might be inviting you into as well as how what we are learning could impact how our life group is created to serve together.

Prayer (5 minutes)

If you have additional time, follow your group's usual procedure for taking and praying for requests from the group. Close your time together with the following prayer, based on prayers at the ends of each section you've discussed tonight:

God, thank You for giving gifts to every member of Your Church. Help us to recognize the spiritual gifts You have entrusted to us. Please shape the desires of our hearts to reflect Your heart. Teach us to use the abilities You have given us with humility, generosity, and joy. Thank You for creating each of us uniquely and help us to embrace the way You have wired us instead of comparing ourselves to others. Use every part of who we are to serve others, strengthen Your church, participate in Your kingdom, and reflect Your heart. Amen.