

## So . . . I Have Gifts; Now What Do I Do?

I want to thank you for choosing my workshop, and if you don't know already, my name is Judy Gustum, and I have come from Indiana. as a lay person, to tell you my story, and help you catch the vision of caring, and put it into practice in your daily life. First, I want to tell you about the events that led to my being here in front of you today. One year ago, my husband and I came to southern California to attend my niece's wedding. While here, I was introduced to the book, **The Miracle of Kindness**, by Dr. Kok. The book, as I understood it, was a project of the Becomers class of this church, and an extension of the Care Conference principles. You've been given a copy of this book with your conference materials, and what a gift it is. The examples from the lives of real people will change your life, as it did mine. These stories are that valuable and worthwhile. However, my reason for buying the book was because my brother's name was on the front cover as the editor. How shallow is that?

And also because I had just met a real author, Dr. Kok. He was the presiding minister at my niece's wedding. I hoped, it wasn't too corny, but I wondered if he would sign my copy. I only expected that he would sign his name, but he wrote an inscription. and it was flattering. and I was puzzled. Why would he write such nice things about me when we had only just met. and he didn't know me. Later I would understand. He had identified some of my gifts. On the flight home, I picked up the book for the first time. It was a pretty good read consisting of stories and suggestions on how to better live Christian lives and help others. I don't remember when I finally finished it, weeks later, but by the time I did, my eyes had been opened and I felt changed. One of the most moving aspects of the book was the experiences of real people.

I was hooked when first I saw the names of people I knew. All the stories in the book are true, but I never expected to read my sister's name there. She was the woman who was caught in a surprise thunderstorm without protection. The miracle for her was that the offer of an umbrella came from a complete stranger, a random act of kindness from someone whose name turned out to be Angela. Sharon felt her name described her. Angela had been an angel to her. I had not been prepared to read my sister's name in print at the end of that personal experience, or for the emotion it created in me. This happened in Taiwan, where my sister has been a tutor for a child of missionaries there for the past three years, and there were many other stories in the Miracle book that tugged at my emotions.

However, my attention was most captured by three concepts from the book. First, the phrase. 'They will know we are Christians by our love.' There's something different about being a Christian, and that is the love, the care and kindness is that we extend, or should extend, to our fellow human beings. Secondly, the idea that I could evangelize in my own corner of the world; that I could witness to my fellow human beings by how I live my life here and now. In contrast, the concept of evangelizing, from the time of my youth, was that I had to be a missionary in a foreign country, or go door to door to get people to attend church. The third life changing realization was that I had been called to do something with the gifts given me. To comment on these concepts further, I went to the Bible, looking in Isaiah 43, where I was reminded that God knows me and has called me by name.

In **The Miracle of Kindness** book, the author affirmed this when he wrote, “Followers of Jesus are obligated to do better, be conspicuous and renowned for sharing hope, care, appreciation and encouragement with others.” Also, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven.” I concluded that I had been nudged, pushed, and inspired by family, coworkers, and mentors all my life, and yet I never realized it until now. The light has been turned on in me. I recognize it. I accept as my duty to pass on this torch, this light, this vision of intentional Christian behavior and share it with others. So here I am, I have been called, but it's scary, because I wondered what have I to offer; what are my gifts?

In August, after reading the book and catching the care and kindness vision, a very dear friend asked me to speak on this topic at a retreat of women from my church. At first, I didn't want to do it, although I was still employed full time, my calendar showed that Saturday would be a day off for me, so I didn't have my job as an excuse. Besides, she was my friend, and she had a lot of faith in me. To persuade me, she laughingly told me it would be just like teaching school, but that these students would be good. I accepted the challenge and began to prepare. At the retreat, I asked the women gathered to write down on a piece of paper what they thought were their gifts. I only asked for a list of three. I really didn't know if this was a difficult question or not. Then I asked them to each write the gifts that they saw in the person sitting next to them. Some of the women looked puzzled, some thoughtful, some wrote fast while others were more deliberate. When they finished, I asked them to share the words they had written first about themselves, and then I wanted to hear the results of a very quick self-appraisal. The second part was for each woman to give to her neighbor the gift of what she saw in that friend. Most of the women present did know each other and had known each other for years and it was rewarding all around.

Number one, the process affirmed . . . affirmed strong qualities! Number two, several were given a quality not previously considered a gift, but, as I feared, there was one lady who had nothing on her paper. I was shocked, but it was a beautiful moment when the other women in the room spontaneously spoke up reminding her of talents she had, which they must have envied, that she had not thought of, or had perhaps thought unworthy. And so Carmen, the woman with no talent, was blessed by the support she received at that moment. And what was the gift she could not think of? She was a great cook, and generously brought food to varied church events.

My point here is to stress that no gift is unworthy. Now, I want each of you to ponder what gifts you have been given. If we are to learn what to do with our gifts, we need first to know what they are. I want you to write three gifts God has given you on your notepad. It may be helpful to consider what your mentors nurtured in you. Think about why people compliment you . . . why they compliment you; what you like to do. What do others think you do well? What do they see in you?

Do you all have something on your paper? I don't have anyone with an empty sheet, do I? Wonderful. Okay. I would like to write down and answer randomly some of the things that are on your pieces of paper.

Good with kids. Great. What else? Listener. Friendly, alright. Sense of humor, Alright, Encouraging, or an encourager. Oh . . . I have another name for that—cheerleader. Giving.

Helpful. Well, I can't write that down . . . Old? Experience? Age? Age! Okay, that's a good one. Let's put in maturity then, will that work? It has more letters. Anything else you want to put up?

Okay. If we were to stop there . . . organization—that's good. Some other ones that I came across: A curious person. Comforting. Confidence speaker. Singer. Friend. Teacher. We got good listener. Nobody said they're good smiler. Pleasant. Outgoing. Kind. Advisor. Caring Patient. Good.

You're now at the point I was when I finished the Miracle book, I knew I had gifts, but what was I supposed to do? It's scary to suddenly realize we are expected to do something. Martin Luther King noted, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?" Do you already know your mission for Christ? What will you do with your gifts? How will you be different tomorrow? Look again at the words on the white board, and note that none of these gifts are defined by education or wealth.

We am amateurs can do a lot of good in our communities. Blue sheets please. She has a handout I want each of you to have next, and what it is, is called the Charles Schultz philosophy, and we're just going to move through this rather quickly, but it is yours to keep, because I think, I think it is good. At this moment, I can't tell you where I got this, but as you know, Charles Schultz was the creator of the **Peanuts** comic strip. You don't have to actually answer these questions . . . just read it and you all understand the point, and I'm going to fly through it pretty fast here.

Name the five wealthiest people in the world. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners. Name the last five winners of the Miss America pageant. Name 10 people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners. The point is none of us remembered the headliners of yesterday. These are no second rate achievers; they are the best in their fields, but applause dies; awards tarnish; achievements are forgotten; accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. How do you do with this one? List a few teachers who aided your journey through school. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Now that's easier, isn't it? The lesson is that the people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most rewards. They're the ones that care.

The lesson found here is meant to bolster our confidence—we amateurs—we lay people. We need to think of these qualities as gifts from God, and take his words literally that we must be a light unto the world. Do not make little of your talents, because you are a child of God.

A number of songs come to mind that make the point of being a light and shining wherever you are. Do you know, "Jesus wants me for us a sunbeam, to shine for him each day. In every way

try to please him, at home, at work, at play.” Sunday school song, right? And you know the rest of it. Wonderful. “Jesus wants me for a sunbeam, a sunbeam, a sunbeam. I’ll be a sunbeam for him.” But my point is to show you things about light. Light is a metaphor for knowledge, inspiration and more. Another song that came to mind, “Brighten the corner where you are.” Our corner . . . where we live, Brighton that corner. How about this (this is really long ago and I don’t know if I could sing it) “This little light of mine. I’m gonna let it shine, I’m going to let it shine.”

Okay? All of that. And then you think of the one from long ago were you were, uh, a light, and don’t hide it under the Bushel. Okay? All of these old, old memories from our childhood in Church and Sunday school come back to us and we take them in a more adult way of looking at them. Uh, open up your heart and let the sun shine in. Jesus bids us shine you and your small corner and I in mine. Other metaphors of light are the candle, and light houses that guided ships in the night or during storms. And I’m reminded, too, of the very lovely song by Ronan Tynan entitled, The Light Inside You. We all have a light in there.

So what are practical ways of making our light shine, or, phrased another way . . . How do I use my talents or my gifts for others? How can we witness daily so that they will know we are Christians by our love? Dr. Kok wrote another book, whose title I love. The name he gave this book, and it’s on your pins: **90% of Helping Is Just Showing Up!** I want to take an activity time now to focus on ways to show up and share ideas about what to do when we get there. Our discoveries will lead us to turning our feelings into deeds.

I’m going to make two lists and on one side, I’m going to call it observe, and the other side I’m going to call, respond, and what I’m going to look for from you—I’m going to solicit your ideas—about situations that you can observe that something needs to be done, and then we will try to figure out, now that we’ve seen it, actually; once we’ve recognized our gifts and we’ve seen a need, what are we going to do? Okay. Where in your everyday life and your little corner of the world, what do you see that needs to be done? What have you observed? Kind of like the two little anecdotes that we read while we were back in the other room. The person needed the cracker to be opened. Okay. Feed me ideas.

*You need to be encouraged by strangers adults.*

Encourage children, and you want the encouragement to come from people other than family and friends. Okay. Can you tell me why?

*Because we have a generation gap and children feel that adults are [inaudible] they light up [inaudible]*

I love the metaphor. They light up. Okay. How about another observation. I’m looking for circumstances . . . situations

**In the grocery store, a child is acting [inaudible]**

What shall I call this? Noisy child? Misbehaving child? Naughty child in public places. Okay.

*You can encourage those parents to [inaudible] Then you, you know when your kids get older and they're not with you and you know [inaudible]*

Okay. We already have our response here . . . to not place blame, encourage. What else? Pardon?

*Let them know it's okay. Or then there or that we, we'd been there.*

In other words, don't condemn, right.

Maybe this is a good plan; to give the situation and then go to the response, rather than do them separately. But my idea was that we're probably going to get a whole lot of observations and not have time to cover them all.

*A child that fell on the playground.*

A child that fell, Hurt, child, playground. What did you have in mind that we should do?

*Well, you know, if you have the ability, you clean them up and then you let . . . you don't know if they need to cry. They cry. Make them laugh, so they forget about it.*

Well, does this mean respond immediately? Comfort them. Distract, good idea.

*If the mom is there, just kind of go alongside of her and help her, support, you know,*

Let's ignore the respond for a moment. I'd like to get a whole bunch of ideas of where, where are things we can do.

*[inaudible]*

Medical fears. Before we go on, let's get more.

*I'm a single mom. Needed a babysitter just to go down.*

Single mom, needs help.

*Yes. When you see someone being confronted by somebody, someone else in a rude manner, like yeah, bullying. Like if someone's in the position of service and they're trying to help the person, but the person was just rude and just, and you've witnessed it. Maybe like trying to be demeaning to them.*

I know exactly what you're saying; I was in retail—I know about that, but I don't know what to write down here. You are the second one in line, and the first one is making a scene. Rude. I like that—rudeness. Okay. Who hasn't offered me something?

*A new neighbor next door or someone in the neighborhood.*

That reminds me, who said? Don't take the pie when they've been there for four years. It's a little late to come for that.

*A new person in church. Yes.*

New Neighbor. Uh, NEW. Okay. You can see my forte is not writing.

*[inaudible]*

Well, I think he was focusing on the verbal.

*I'm bringing meals to people. Somebody that needs something.*

*[inaudible]*

Post surgery. First day home. Right, right.

*Someone dealing with the loss of spouse or parent death*

Loss and death; I suppose we could put divorce with that, too. That's a loss. Like a death in the family.

Okay. I know we could do this for a long time, so let me see if I had any additional notes that I thought would go with that. Jim Kok's favorite phrase is the post office, and since reading the book, I pay attention at the post office. Too often you have to stand in line. You're going to wait, and it's an opportunity to connect, look, smile, all of those things.

You kind of have to feel sorry for people in airports, public places, retail workers.

*You talked about the post office; there's a local post office here. It has a reputation for being . . . all of the people who work there are very rude. No, I refuse to go there anymore. And you know, I think maybe as a Christian is, you know, if your attitude is going to be like, you know, when you go up there [inaudible]*

Okay, let's now focus on what will be we do to respond, knowing full well there are lots of other situations to address, and that our idea is that you're going to notice these things, and then do something about them, because you are recognizing a need, but now what will we do?

The naughty child in public, we've covered. The hurt child. Okay. Someone's about to have serious surgery; it could be life threatening and you know there are fears. What can you do?

*[inaudible]*

Maybe you even provide transportation to or from, if they're having tests Take care of their kids, pray with them, pray for them and with, yes.

What are we going to do about rudeness, Should we ignore it? But back to the people in the checkout line, and the person in front of you is just haranguing the retail worker. And you know the retail worker cannot do anything other than just take it, or shouldn't. And that lady or that person leaves, what could you do? Give them some support, so that they will remember that the whole world is not like that. and it will turn their day, hopefully, so that they won't carry that particular grudge on and on for the rest of the day, or sour on the type of work they're in, when they thought they really did like people. Okay. That's good.

A new neighbor or new people in general, whether it's at church, an aerobics class, or what?

*I was a recipient of a new neighbor kindness about 30 years ago. We moved in—we drove up in the middle of the night, and slept on the floor with five young children, and the truck arrived the next morning, and the neighbor on one side walks over in the morning with a big tray of donuts, orange juice and coffee and said, “Welcome to the neighborhood.” And this was an older couple. They're kids are raised and I still, when I think about my heart just fills, it fills up.*

That was a wonderful response, because you were camping on the floor. No stove, no food. Didn't know the grocery store anyway. Yes. That was a wonderful one.

What are we going to do for our military family?

*I think especially military families that are, are not on a military base because they will support each other.*

Let's hear from you.

*I have a cousin who is on a military base to the why you saw pretty much support each other. But I think it's hard when you've got a little girl in a classroom, her daddy's gone, and she's the only one class. I don't have an answer for what to do about it. I'm just pointing out,*

*Probably not all military spouses stick together. I just moved, we've been in Yuma now for two years, but they made us move from one house to another house, and I'd been there two weeks, and I had a birthday party. I had just come up and had just like four people over. We're on the back patio and playing dominoes, and my neighbor called the cops at 8:15, saying we were too loud. I'd only been there two weeks.*

Okay, now let's go to your situation. What are we going to do when that sort of ugly thing happens?

*You know, he could have given us the courtesy, “Hey, we're trying to put the baby down” or something, you know, even, you know, instead of rude and I think part of it he is one of the military cops on the base. So he was showing his authority. I would call the cops and they're going to show up, because if I wanted to call it up on somebody at that same time, they would have said, “Sorry ma'am, quiet hours are 10 o'clock, you know,”*

Will we be successful always? No. Can we accept that? Well, will we quit trying? When we think about these situations that call for something to be done on our part, and we have made our response, are there any warnings or things to be careful about, things not to do that would be helpful, when we're struggling here to find out what are our gifts. Okay, I can do this and this and this. When will I use them? How can I use them? But what, what should I be told to be careful of?

What you say. How you say it. Your facial expression. There is a woman who was here for a moment a while ago and I think she decided not to stay. She came and asked me, what are you going to talk about? She told me briefly that, in essence, she was kind of burned out. Why does this happen?

Does everybody know what she's referring to, when she says you don't fill up your own bank account? You can't be a good care giver if you're not in a healthy place yourself.

*Some people are just, they're always helping others. They forget that sometimes you need a little bit of alone, and get your nails done or, or just, it's been rough.*

So then you have to set limits. Boundaries. There was, in Dr. Kok's book . . .

*Well, Dr. Tan said, even Jesus said, no.*

That's right. And he went to the wilderness. He said, enough time out. Okay.

*You don't want to become an enabler either.*

That's right. But when I think back to earlier times in my life, I did too much, and Dr. Kok will say in his book somewhere, and you will come across it when you finish reading it, that he said, "When you care, you don't have to adopt." That's a good warning, and I think the other really important thing is what you just reminded us of is what Dr. Tan said. Even Jesus had to set limits, because there comes a time when you have to go out and refresh yourself again. You are totally drained of any more good that you could give, plus we're of varying personality types, and some people get energized by being with people, and others need to say, "Enough, I have to go away and put myself back together."

*Yeah. Spiritually or emotionally. Very needy people can eat you up. And if you don't allow this, they can try to make you feel guilty.*

The last **Care Capsule** . . . do the people in this room get the **Care Capsule**? They need to know about the **Care Capsule**. Because the last one that came out was about the woman who gave too much, and then pretty soon she moved to Florida, and the conclusion might be that she overdid it, and the only way out was to move, so we have to be aware that we have to set limits. We can't do everything, and that takes me back to the **90% of Helping Is Just Showing Up!** God will take care of the other 10%

*I think everybody that comes to his conference are people who really care about other people where that's the situation and this is going to be one of the special speakers. My church, we're using the term ministries using one of his books is part of our training and he says, we have to remember that God is the fixer. We're just the helper. but we think we can solve the problems. All we're supposed to do is just sit and listen and be supportive, but we can't fix*

We are going to have two more handouts here. I had a list of things that I was going to tuck in, in case we needed them, but you've done all so well. One of the ladies here said that she was hospitable; she liked to have people come to her house. I recall as a newly married person that when the people wanted to get together for a party, they were really excited to come to your house, and you thought that this was going to start a circle of, 'Okay, I had you over, and now you're going to have us over.' And guess what? It never went anywhere. How come I didn't get invited back? What was the matter with me? And I went to an older lady, another mentor of mine, and she said, "*Some people don't, but you don't quit doing it yourself. Otherwise there will be no sharing of time.*" And everybody who came always had a wonderful time, but there was something about them that kept them from being able to participate in that activity themselves. Whether or not they thought their home wasn't big enough, uh, who cares, you know, uh, or not nice enough. I don't, I don't know. I thought that we were all good enough friends that we had to do is just get together. Nothing else mattered. But that was a lesson to learn.

My husband did a helpful little act the other day, and that was . . . we were in the grocery store, and the grocery store I think is one of the best places to go for opportunities to help. There was a man in a, a go cart. And he couldn't reach what he needed. And, I'm not sure if he asked for the help, or if it was observed that he needed the help, but anyway, there was a connection, and I'll bet that man doesn't forget that for a long time, because he couldn't get what he needed. And what are you going to do unless someone helps you? Go without? It's an option, but it's not the best solution.

*I used to be in a wheelchair. Okay. It's, it's kind of . . . the person in the motorized wheelchair has some responsibilities, also. If they feel, 'Oh, nobody's helping me, nobody's telling me,' they're not taking care of their own responsibilities, because if you are in a situation like that, I have found, that if I just say, 'Could you get that for me?' And if you look pleasant and not that the world owes me something, people will be very more than happy to help you. And I also found that sometimes these people need to do it themselves and people are a little too eager to help.*

Yes, yes. But it's a fine line and I guess we'll all make mistakes while we are trying to be helpful. Uh, you've just been handed out two more pieces of paper. The pink one, Five Key Essentials To Encourage and Motivate. This is meant to be another thing to bolster your courage about your own abilities. And it's in the book. It's from Dr. Kok's book, **The Miracle Of Kindness**.

Number one, I have the capacities, qualities, and abilities that can brighten another's life or help them face challenges. You've got to believe these things.

Number two, everyone needs my encouragement and support. People need to be noticed personally and respectfully by me and given some word, gesture or look of appreciation. Think about how these apply to the examples that we brought forward.

Key number three, care and kindness. Whether it is my smile, a word of thanks, a visit or treating others fairly, builds hope and happiness in their hearts and opens them to God's love.

Key four, care and kindness toward anyone is care and kindness to the Lord.

Key five, care and kindness is infectious. Others catch it, pass it on. That's what we need to do.

He yellow sheet, again, encapsulates some of what Dr. Kok said, "Why are we here? To make the world better, to hold people, let them cry. When we care, we carry the love of God into needed places."

I love this one: Caring is for amateurs and the word amateur is Latin for 'doing it for the love of it.' Amore. It made me feel a lot better about my amateur status when I read that.

Until your dying day, you can actively express to anyone around you words of care and kindness that will strengthen their hope. It doesn't matter how old or how young you are, whether you're working or not, you can do something for other people.

Another thing from his book is, You have new marching orders to connect with the weary, call on the ill, reach out to the stranger, because you're called to show up. And what I said before, 90% of caring is just showing up and God will take care of the other 10%.

These two handouts are for you to keep, hopefully save and they're meant to bolster your courage and to help you to remember to use your gifts in all that you do. Keep uppermost in your mind that you are the conduit for God's spirit to move and work through you. Our behavior either says good things about Christians or not. We must brighten the corner where we are and bloom where we are planted. In closing, I want to sing for you the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi. This is a prayer that so eloquently asks God's help in being a servant to others.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is sadness, joy;  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Oh, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved, as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

It is in dying that we are born  
To Eternal Life.