

After Pastor Todd left for his six-week Sabbatical, we branched onto the limbs of the spiritual gifts tree that grows within us as we wait for whatever we're waiting for. This particular list of spiritual gifts comes from Holly Whitcomb's book entitled Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting¹. We've already examined two in some detail:

- ✓ **Loss of Control**, when whatever we have planned gets interrupted by an event we totally did not expect, and we must wait until it passes; and.
- ✓ **Patience**, living life in small pieces rather than large chunks, one day at a time, or a half day at a time, if a whole day seems too long to wait.

Holly recognizes five more spiritual gifts growing on the branches of the waiting tree:

- **Living in the present.** Be where we are. The past is finished and done; we cannot go back. The future has not yet arrived; we can only guess what might happen. This moment, right here and now, is the only moment we can claim as ours. While we wait, live in the present.
- **Compassion**, moving past our own impatience long enough to realize that we're not alone. Perhaps we're stuck in an elevator with four other people who have lost control of their lives at that moment, also. Or maybe we're in a hospital room with family or friends waiting to hear how surgery went. Meredith Howard's compassion for the prisoners in other segregation cells near her inspires me. When they cry or moan, or bang their food trays against the door for long periods of time, Meredith says, "She's really having a tough time today. I'll pray extra hard for her." Follow her example; feel compassion for the others who also have to wait.
- **Gratitude.** Maybe we're waiting in a long line at the grocery store with our carts full of food and hygiene items and paper products, practicing living in the present and feeling compassion for those who cannot fill their grocery carts. In a flash, we realize how grateful we are for just to be able to buy what we have in that cart. Waiting, wherever and whenever we wait, teaches us to appreciate what we have, and count our blessings, one by one. Or two by two.
- **Humility.** These spiritual gifts of waiting sort of build upon themselves. When some part of our lives doesn't go as carefully as the plans we laid for it, we lose control and become patient while we live in the present, developing compassion for those in similar or worse circumstances, we feel gratitude for what we have, and realize we are NOT at the top of the heap; we are NOT better than others; we are NOT as powerful as we thought we were. At that moment, it dawns on us that we cannot fix everything; we cannot even change anything except our out attitude toward it, whatever IT is. And for the moment, we feel humble.
- **And it is in those moments we know our trust is in God.** Trusting in God is Holly Whitcomb's final spiritual gift of waiting. Trusting in God. **God.** I wonder what kind of a list we would have if we all wrote down our definitions of God. In my own life I've gone through several definitions. For the past few years, defining God as LIFE feels right. For me, "adoring" God, "worshiping" God, "praising" God all mean loving LIFE so much that I work to improve the lives of the people with whom I come in contact. I wish I could make EVERYONE'S life better, but I can't, there are way too many people in the world. So I stick to what I can do. Trust in God. Trust in the power of life.

These are the seven spiritual gifts of waiting: Loss of control, patience, living in the present, gratitude, compassion, humility, and trust in God.

Just describing them, though, doesn't always help. So draw a picture of a tree on the dry-erase board of your mind, or look at the back of the bulletin if you need a little help. Draw a strong trunk, branches growing out from that trunk, leaves sprouting from each branch. And nestled in between all those leaves we might draw nuts or berries or big juicy pears or peaches or apples. Now draw what we cannot see – draw the root system growing underground. We can't see it, but we know it's there because we learned about trees in

school. Now, let's overlay what we know about spiritual gifts onto the tree. Four of the spiritual gifts could form the big roots:

One root could be *LOSS OF CONTROL*. No tree can control its own life. The seed that took root in the soil determines what it will become, while the amount of sunshine and water and nutrients influence its size and shape. So mark one root with *loss of control*.

Another root is *HUMILITY*. We must admit that only a very few artists marvel at the beauty of a tree *root*; no one I know exclaims about the exquisite taste of that root. Yet no tree can grow without a strong root system. Roots, by their very nature, must be humble.

PATIENCE can go on another root. Trees do not grow so fast that we can sit and watch them soar. It takes time for a tree to grow. And the stronger, sturdier trees – like oak and walnut and maple -- take forever to mature. Roots must be patient while they support their tree!

LIVING IN THE PRESENT is another root. Trees, more than we, live in the present – when it turns cold, the leaves change color and fall off; when it gets warm again, new leaves pop out; when the wind blows, the branches sway and the leaves flutter. When severe droughts come, trees die. Trees *live in the present*.

Emerging from these roots above the ground are a trunk, branches, leaves. On the branches we can write *GRATITUDE*. Branches fling wide their “arms” as if to say “Thank you, God!” And the leaves? The leaves can be named *COMPASSION* because they provide shade and a bit of shelter from the rain [as long as there's no lightening!] And some trees produce pears, or peaches, or apples – the fruit of the spirit!

But there's something missing, one more gift. We have not named the trunk that connects the roots to the branches and leaves. This is *TRUST IN GOD*, believing in the power of *LIFE* that enables us to move from *loss of control, humility, patience and living in the present* (our roots) to *gratitude and compassion* (our branches and leaves).

Like the parable of the fig tree from Luke's gospel, we have to attend to the roots of our “trees” -- find ways to “aerate” the soil and “apply a little fertilizer” to help them grow strong and produce the fruit of the spirit.

Waiting. We cannot escape it. We will be waiting all of our lives for one thing or another.

Short waits and long waits;
important waits and trivial waits;
rewarding waits and agonizing waits.

Waiting is God's gift to us. What we do while we wait is up to us.

ⁱ Holly Whitcomb, Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting, Augsburg Books, Minneapolis, 2005

