



8th grade

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” – 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Eighth grade is a big year for teens as many have experienced Confirmation and are now church members. It's a unique time as they begin to realize what it means to be an active part of the Church - living out their story, owning their faith, and practicing their part in the life of the church community.

Before 8th grade, a teen has grown in knowledge, learned the foundations of Scriptures, explored what they believe, and experienced small group community. But students need much more than to learn the story of God - they need opportunities to practice living it out! During this year, teens will move from learning to practicing, from watching to doing, and from listening to living out their faith.

Over the course of this semester, we hope teens will:

- Grow in understanding of how God has wired them.
- Discover ways that God will help them use their unique gifts.
- Gain confidence in their personal skills and leadership.
- Begin using their gifts within the context of church life and community.

How do teens experience this step? First, each teen will take a gift assessment. Then within a small group, they will 1) hear about gifts that they and others have, 2) reflect on ways they are sharing their gifts with others, and 3) learn the strengths and challenges of their gifts as it relates to working with others. We suggest that you continue to enlist your child's confirmation mentor as an additional sounding board as they explore putting their gifts into practice.

In his book *KidUnique*, Dan Webster offers the following advice: “When you engage a kid, it will not take long for you to notice something. They are both a miracle and a mess ... Some things you see will delight your heart, and others will put your head in a vice. It is relatively easy to see who a kid is not. It takes love, time and discernment to see who a kid is.”

These words seem especially appropriate for the middle school years, when kids are still figuring themselves out and, frankly, the process can be messy. So we need to be careful which part of a kid's identity gets the most attention from us. Let's strive to remind them of the miracle part more consistently than correcting the messy part. As you begin this journey with your child, pray for God to help you see and call out the miracle aspect of your kid, so that you can affirm what is *right* and *good* in his or her heart.

build your team* ❖

As teens move towards high school, they tend to place less and less importance on what their parents say. This doesn't mean that your role is less important or that your words don't have impact. It does mean parents must work during this period to connect their teens to other trusted adults who will deliver and reinforce the same messages they wish to convey.

So pull out a scrap of paper, and quickly write down the names of people who love your teen or interact with them on a consistent basis. Try to name at least six people, although your list may eventually double that number. Include grandparents, neighbors, friends, teachers, coaches, and so on.

This list represents your “team”—whether you chose them or not, they are partners with you in raising your child, at least through this stage of life. Once you have identified them, the next step is to enlist them in your mission to affirm your child's gifts. Email or call them with the following questions:

- What do you see in my child?
- What are they good at?
- When are they at their best?
- Does anything concern you about them?

Gather their responses into a single notebook or envelope, and at the end of the month, take your teen out for dinner. Share with them what you've been doing and the things you personally appreciate about them, and then give them the notebook or envelope. Be available to process your teen's reaction to others' words (but also be aware that your teen may need time to process, they may not have the response you expect in that very moment!).

As the year progresses, keep on the lookout for anyone else who might be added to your kid's team as the year progresses. Whenever someone gives you a compliment about your teen, ask them to be specific—“What did they do? What do you see in them?” Keep collecting and passing on these insights!

*Idea for this activity from *KidUnique*, by Dan Webster