

Why I'm OK With Being a Spiritual Misfit

It annoys me when Christians force people to fit in neat categories. For years we've done this with gender. I wish I had a dollar for every time a preacher has claimed that "all men hide their feelings" or "all women are domestic" or "all men refuse to ask for directions."

Those are stereotypes. While God made only two genders, men and women come in all types. Our uniqueness is shaped by our bodies, skills, interests, personality quirks, communication styles, ethnicity, life experiences and so much more.

Christians also love to fit people into personality types. The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates invented the concept of the "four temperaments"—choleric, sanguine, melancholy and phlegmatic. He believed the levels of our bodily fluids caused these traits (what?!) yet his theory stuck around even though it was totally unscientific. Christians started imposing these rigid personality types on each other after author Tim LaHaye wrote the book *Transformed Temperaments* in 1971.

In the 1990s, family counselor Gary Smalley updated the concept of the four temperaments by describing them as animals: "Beaver," "lion," "otter" and "golden retriever." This began a cottage industry of "personality assessment" that continues to this day. It's based on the idea that every human being on Planet Earth fits into four groups.

More recently, Christian organizations invented questionnaires and tests to determine a person's spiritual gifts. I've taken all of these tests, and sometimes they helped me understand myself better. Yet I always end up feeling like a misfit because I don't stay inside the lines. I certainly don't fit the stereotypes.

For years I've struggled to put a label on what I do in ministry. Am I a prophet? (Prophecy often flows out of me when I minister in a church setting.) Am I a teacher? (I teach regularly in ministry schools.) Am I a pastor? (I don't lead a local church, yet I mentor and disciple many young leaders.)

A few weeks ago I went through an identity crisis. I was tired of people asking me, "What are you?" and my response was to blankly stare back. I wanted a label. I wanted to fit in a clear-cut category. Yet I felt like a weirdo because I don't see my odd combination of gifts and talents in most surveys.

I decided to take my own gifts assessment test by asking some friends to describe my ministry in their own words. I asked them to text me one sentence, but many of them wrote paragraphs. They often used words like "prophet," "teacher," "encourager," "apostle," "mentor" and "father's heart." But I noticed one common thread:

- Fernando said: "Your ministry is versatile. Don't worry about fitting in a box."
- Kent said: "Don't let people put you in a box."
- Ray said: "You don't need to feel any pressure to fit a mold."
- Grant said: "You can't be put in a box. There is too much 'cookie-cutter' identity in the church today."

I wanted to categorize myself. But God's answer was a pleasant surprise: I don't need to fit in! Rather, I just need to stay connected to God and let Him manifest Himself through me however He wants!

Many people follow horoscopes because they think their destiny is determined by which Zodiac sign they were born under. That's dumb, because people don't fit in 12 cosmic categories, much less four personality types. And even though there are a limited number of spiritual gifts listed in the Bible (the "power" gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 and the "motivational" gifts

of Romans 12), these gifts come in an infinite number of combinations.

Besides that, the “package” those gifts come in—you—is totally unique. Did you know that one DNA molecule in your body has enough coded information to fill 100 30-volume sets of encyclopedias? That’s more than million pages of computer code! If all the DNA in your body were joined from end to end, it would stretch 94 billion miles. And that code is different from any other person who has ever lived.

We know our fingerprints are unique from everyone else. Now, researchers have discovered that scanning the iris of the eye is five times more effective than fingerprinting because there are 240 unique features in your iris to prove it’s yours! Scientists are also discovering the same uniqueness in our retinas, our faces, our insulin and the protein molecules in one strand of our hair.

David wrote: “I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:14, NASB). If you are this unique in a biological sense, how much more is it true in the Spirit? We have been fashioned by the Creator to manifest His power in a unique way.

Don’t be so eager to put a label on yourself. Don’t try to be a copy of someone else. It’s okay to break the mold. You can’t be summarized, categorized or boxed in. You are a unique vessel of the Holy Spirit. Let Him flow through you without limitation