



Lessons from the Bird Feeder

by Virginia C. Miller

The three hummingbird feeders in our garden are often crowded. Some of the hummingbirds share; but others, especially the ruby throats, chase each other off and try to keep the feeder to themselves. We also have a feeder with birdseed that attracts sparrows, doves and a variety of other birds. The other birds seem willing to share the seed and to eat side by side. They eat the seed and share the birdbath, but never go near the hummingbird feeders. However, we have one sparrow, with just a tinge of red on his chest, who seems to think he is a hummingbird.

When hummingbirds feed, they flutter their wings so fast that the wings look like miniature helicopter blades in the air. The sparrow is simply not designed to move his wings rapidly enough to remain stationary in the air. Yet one persistent bird goes to the feeder several times a day to get the sweet nectar. He flaps his wings with all his might but still plummets to the ground. A few minutes later, though, he is back again. He could land on the stem of the feeder and reach his beak to the tip of the tube of nectar, but, no, something in his makeup causes him to want to drink hummingbird style.

How often we behave like that persistent sparrow. We each have many talents and gifts, but somehow we want to be gifted like someone else instead of developing our own God-given gifts. Scripture tells us in I Corinthians 12:28-31: *And God has appointed these in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.* (NKJV)

I remember one time speaking at a retreat that featured several other speakers. One whom I admired greatly spoke before I did. She was gifted in administration as well as teaching, and she had a very logical style of teaching. She used the chalkboard with charts and diagrams – a style I never used. But I was so intrigued with her success that I added the chalkboard and graphics to my talk. It was OK, but I felt I bombed. It simply wasn't my style. I'm much better using word pictures and leading a group in one-to-one interaction as I discern the mood of the audience. I should know that, for God impressed me once with a Scripture verse that has become a life theme for me.

In my quiet time I turned to John 21 and prayerfully read the whole chapter. Each time Jesus asked Peter, *Do you love Me?* I felt He was speaking directly to me. Then, toward the end of the chapter, Peter showed some jealousy about Jesus' attention to John. Jesus said, *What is that to you? You follow Me.* (vs 22)

I took that as a personal word from God, telling me to follow in the way He leads

me, using the gifts He's given me, without concern about how another serves Him.

Steve taught an adult class. His wife taught, and he felt duty-bound when others encouraged him to take a class. But he found it very difficult to prepare, and he could hardly sleep on Saturday night for fear of getting up in front of people on Sunday morning. Not only were preparation and presentation agony, but he was also a rather dull teacher, and he knew it. When he gave up the class to follow God's leading, he became a prayer support partner for his pastor. He arranged for other men to pray with the pastor before the service and to pray for him during the week. He happily took a turn at providing coffee and helping widows with repairs. Steve now has a ministry of helps and intercession. And he's full of joy because he knows he's where God wants him.

Carolyn, a young mother of two children under three, was totally frazzled working in the church nursery because "no one else would do it." Her real gift was a great love for teenagers to whom she could minister with great compassion and insight. Someone else was found to lovingly take care of the little ones, freeing her to work with the teens, where she was much needed.

Jill taught third graders in Sunday School. She was near tears each week when she left church. In talking with her, a member of the church staff discovered that Jill had many artistic, creative ideas and that she played the guitar and loved music. When asked if she would like to be a resource person for other teachers, she was delighted. Now, as she rotates from class to class leading music and assisting teachers with art projects, she is fulfilled and relaxed.

In our churches we find people serving with joy. We also find people who grumble and complain as they serve. I believe as each of us discovers our spiritual and natural gifts and use them, we'll have plenty of people to take care of all the necessary work of the church. And they'll serve with joy.

Whenever I begin to feel overly frustrated with the tasks I've accepted, I take a break with God and take a good look at myself. Then I ask myself two questions: *Am I really a sparrow, trying to be a hummingbird? Or Am I a hummingbird, trying to slow my wings to sparrow speed?* In any case God reminds me who I am and where He is calling me to use my gifts.