

An aerial photograph of a dark asphalt road that curves through a dense, lush green forest. The road has white dashed lines and a solid white edge line. A small red car is visible on the road, moving towards the right. The forest is composed of many tall, thin trees with green foliage. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

UNDERSTAND GIFTS

1

G R A C E G I F T S

To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he... gave gifts to his people.”

– E P H E S I A N S 4 : 7 – 8

Since Superman first burst out of a telephone booth in 1938, we’ve had an ever-increasing, insatiable fascination with superheroes and their distinctive superpowers.¹ Yet each of us, in our (*thankfully*) not-so-tight-fitting clothes, have superpowers. The apostle Paul calls them ‘grace gifts.’ Just like the superheroes on our screens, we do not choose our gifts. In our case, our Creator and Redeemer has chosen them for us.

There are two kinds of these grace gifts in the Bible. There are common ones – these are the Creator’s grace gifts given to all people, regardless of their faith or lack of faith. We might call these talents or wirings. Then there’s also the special ones² – these are the Redeemer’s grace gifts specifically given to those in Christ. We often call these callings, spiritual gifts or ministry gifts. Undeserving of any grace at all, we thank God for these gifts of both common and special grace.

As for common grace gifts: Timothy Keller sums these up beautifully. “God gives out gifts of talent and skill according to his grace—that is, in a

completely unmerited way. He casts them across the human race like seed, in order to enrich, brighten, and preserve the world. By rights, sin should be making life on earth here much more unbearable than it is—and in fact, all of creation and culture should have fallen apart by now. The reason it is not worse is because of the gifts of common grace.”³

As for special grace gifts: While on earth, Jesus embodied all the ministry gifts that He would one day distribute to His followers. Now that Jesus has “ascended on high” His instrument of ministry is no longer His physical body, but His spiritual body – the church. His grace gifts – such as teaching, prophecy, mercy, encouragement – radiate through His church into the world. In the same way that pure light shines through a prism to make a rainbow, so the bright, pure light of Jesus’ cosmic competencies fan out across the diversity of His people. Though His vast giftedness cannot be contained by any one of us, it’s still amazing to think a unique portion of it, be it ever so small, has landed upon each of us. Every single one of us has our own colour and contribution to make so that together we represent the redeemed rainbow of God’s grace to the world.

¹ These superheroes have reached their apex in the ever-expanding Marvel and DC franchises of the last decade. Fascinatingly, Marvel alone has 7,000 such superheroes in their library, of which only a fraction have made it onto the big screen.

² Systematic Theologians use these terms: common grace (for all including the unredeemed) and special grace (only for the redeemed). For example, Jesus says that the sun shines on all; the righteous and the unrighteous – that’s common grace (Matt 5:45). Jesus also says that he confers on his disciples a kingdom – that’s special grace (Luke 12:32).

³ Keller, Timothy. Every Good Endeavour: Connecting Your Work to God’s Plan for the World (p191). Hodder & Stoughton.



THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

From Day 10 right through to Day 30, we will explore each of the 7 gifts mentioned in Romans 12 in detail. Before then, we must lay a groundwork. We must first learn to think of Paul's sevenfold gifts on 3 levels: as ministry gifts (*Day 2-5*), as natural wiring (*Day 6-7*) and as Christ-following commands (*Day 9*). Let's get started...

Just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function...

- R O M A N S 12 : 4

The Greek word for function (*praxis*) is used 6 times in the New Testament and refers to actions, deeds, functions and practices. When you trust in Jesus, God gives you more than the gift of salvation. He gives you special gifts to serve others too.

What is a spiritual gift? The word for gift (*charisma*), used 17 times in the New Testament, describes gifts that are given to God's people. A spiritual gift, also called a ministry gift, is a unique, God-given capability to get God's work in the church and in the world done. Spiritual gifts are the kinds of people-impacting ministries that come most naturally (*or supernaturally*) to you. It may be difficult for another, but it's easy for you. Sometimes these spiritual gifts come despite lack of

previous talent in an area; other times, they are Spirit-empowered amplifications of natural gifts that you have had all along.

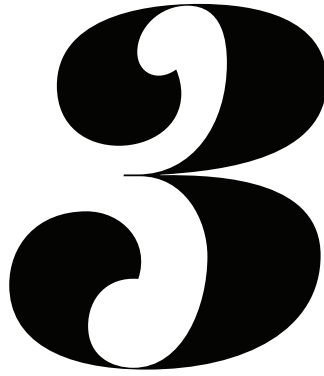
There are 3 categories of gifts. In the New Testament, there are at least 3 kinds of spiritual gifts. There are the motivational gifts of Romans 12:6-8, these are more like talents that the Spirit puts to use. This book focuses exclusively on those. There are the 9 miraculous⁴ gifts of 1 Cor 12:7-10, one of which (*prophecy*) overlaps as a motivational gift. And there are the 5 spiritual leadership gifts of Ephesians 4:11.⁵

How many gifts do we get? Well, you have at least one, probably two or three – it's often useful to speak of your gift mix.⁶ Said another way, we have these gifts in ratios. The biggest slices of our gifting pie constitute our gift mix. The unique ordering of your gifts is part of what makes you so unique.

⁴ While the motivational gifts might seem more "natural" and the miraculous gifts more "supernatural", God can and does use the motivational gifts to supernatural effect.

⁵ A fourth list in 1 Cor 12:28-30 is a mix of all three kinds – motivational, miraculous and leadership gifts.

⁶ Peter Wagner in *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (p40) supports the notion of a profile of gifts: "I would suspect that probably the majority or perhaps all Christians have what we would call a Gift Mix, instead of a single gift."



T H E P U R P O S E O F S P I R I T U A L G I F T S

Each of you must use whatever gift you have received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

- 1 P e t e r 4 : 1 0

Before we look further into the 'what' of the specific gifts, let's step back and look at the 'why'... There are at least 3 reasons it's so important to know and use our gifts as best as we can:

They steer how we serve. Know your gifts, and you will know how to serve. But there's a catch... you won't know your gifts until you begin to serve. That's why we should encourage one another to experiment in serving - have a heart to serve, then take up the opportunities that come your way! Soon enough, your gifts will emerge. How will you spot them? That's easy. When you start serving in line with your gifts, you will begin to experience the amazing thrill and quiet satisfaction that only comes from doing one of the things you were born (*and born again*) to do.

They build up the body of Christ. "Your spiritual gifts were not given for your own benefit but for the benefit of others, just as other people were given gifts for your benefit."⁷ This is why "every gift of God is to be empowered by love."⁸ God doesn't give you the gift as much as he gives us

the gift through you. You're like a postman, delivering the gift of encouragement, or teaching, or mercy to others. Of course, we're grateful to you, but you're not the ultimate source of that gift. God is. And the gift isn't for you. It's for us. When you passively sit on your gifts, you're not only depriving yourself of deep joy, you're depriving us of much-needed strength and support too.

They catalyse kingdom advancement. God doesn't just want the body of Christ built up; he wants the church advancing God's kingdom into this world. And He uses gifts to catalyse that kingdom advance. In this sense, it's not just the church that suffers when we sit on our gifts passively; it's the world around us.

⁷ Rick Warren said this in *The Purpose Driven Life*.

⁸ Kingsley Opuwari Manuel is quoted as saying this.



W H A T G I F T S A R E N O T

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members who belong to one another.

– R o m a n s 12 : 5

There are 3 common misconceptions about our ministry gifts...

We sometimes confuse gifts with individualism. Individuality, a good thing, is something different to individualism, which is not always a good thing. Paul's use of "one" (*Greek: eis*) and "one another" (*Greek: allhlwn*) present the metaphor of parts and whole as one of mutual benefit rather than as separated, self-sufficient individuals. Our gifts are not meant to show off our uniqueness. The Bible does not elevate the same isolated, self-glorifying individualism that pervades Western culture. In place of self-serving individualism, it celebrates others-serving, interdependent communalism. As we send down our roots into community, we must lay aside individualism. Yet in this our individuality is not lost, rather it is rightly placed. For as much as we must enjoy each other's and our own uniqueness, self-expression is not the purpose of these gifts. They are rather an expression of love and service. Our gifts are tools, not trophies.

We sometimes confuse gifts with identity. In our culture, people tend to confuse their identity with their activity. Yet, in Christ, we are given a brand new identity as a loved child of God, totally unrelated to our gift or use of it. We do not serve in order to acquire an identity; rather, we serve

because we already have one. Using our gifts to try to prove ourselves is a recipe for insecurity. God's gifts flow best from us when they flow from the limitless well of his unmerited love.

We sometimes confuse gifts with fruit. The Bible speaks of both the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit refers to the character of Jesus in us. The gifts of the Spirit refer to the ministry of Jesus through us. The fruit of the Spirit is something we are, but a spiritual gift is something we do. Every Christian should aspire to have all the fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22–23*), but none of us has all the gifts of the Spirit. Fruit is more important than gifts because in the final analysis, who we are is more important than what we do. Many a ministry is built around a person's gift but eventually collapses because of the person's lack of Christlikeness. God-given gifts not built upon godly character are like a house built on sand. In the currency of heaven, fruit is more important than gifts.⁹

⁹ This is Paul's point in 1 Cor 13:2–3 where he holds up the gifts of prophecy, faith and giving alongside a love-infused character: "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."



DISCOVER AND DEPLOY YOUR GIFTS

Fan into flame the gift of God that is inside of you.

- 2 Timothy 1:6

God has graciously given us gifts, but it is our responsibility and joy to open them and fan them into flame. Here's how...

Do. In your church and world, find a need and meet it. You are more likely to find your gift when you take an experimental approach to ministry. Action not contemplation is where you discern what you do best. "In the New Testament, we don't find our gift through self-examination and introspection and then find ways to express it. Instead, we love one another, serve one another, help one another, and in so doing, we notice how God has equipped us to do so."¹⁰

Discover. With a variety of serving experiences under your belt (*the more, the merrier*) it's time to ask yourself some questions. Which ways of serving Jesus did I enjoy most? Which came most easily to me? Which one seemed to make the biggest difference to those around me? What do other people think my gifts may be?¹¹ Online gift assessments especially help us to hone in on our gifts – return to the intro section if you haven't done the 2 online tests yet.

Deploy. Naming your gifts is not the time to shelve them. With a clearer suspicion of how God has wired you, look for opportunities to meet real needs using these gifts. Are there new or better ways to integrate some of your gifts in your church-life? And what about your work-life? In all of this, you are not primarily looking for personal fulfilment but the fruit of changed lives around you.¹²

Develop. Your gifts and talents are not inanimate objects – they can grow or diminish (*depending on what we do or don't do*). Jesus teaches us to invest our talents so that they increase.¹³ If we are faithful with what we have, God will entrust us with more.¹⁴ David led sheep, then an army, then a tribe, then a nation.¹⁵ The more you exercise your gifts in reliance on the Spirit, the sharper they will become. You can increase your level of effectiveness by exercising faith as you step out in redemptive action, by patiently accruing trial-and-error wisdom, by learning from other people with the same gift, by getting a whole-Bible theology,¹⁶ by asking God's Spirit for more of His power and love to help you serve, by collaborating with others, and by supplementing gifts with new or sharpened skills.¹⁷

¹⁰ Russell D. Moore in his book, *Adopted for Life*.

¹¹ The process of discovering one's spiritual gifts is a decades-long one, for the simple reason that different seasons of life and different kinds of daily work or responsibility tend to draw out certain aspects of the grace of God in us, while leaving others more dormant for the time being.

¹² Personal fulfillment may be a by-product, but it should not be the goal. The goal Jesus sets before us in life and ministry is glorifying him and loving others. The path of love and worship is also the path of joy.

¹³ Matt 25:14-30

¹⁴ Luke 16:10

¹⁵ Ps 78:72

¹⁶ 2 Tim 3:17 specifically says that the thorough knowledge of Scripture is what will 'thoroughly equip us for every good work.'

¹⁷ Eccl 10:10



G I F T S A N D N A T U R A L W I R I N G

*For through the grace given to me
I say to everyone... God has allotted to each a
measure of faith.¹⁸*

– R O M A N S 12 : 3

So far, we've looked at how our spiritual gifts are in fact ministry gifts. Now, let's see how they relate to our natural wiring. To be clear, as we think about this aspect of the gifts, we must not see it as doctrine, but rather a creative application of Paul's doctrine, based on two observations:

1. Our talents and personality traits tend to correlate. Take the gift of service for example: this is the God-enabled ability to accomplish practical and necessary tasks, usually behind the scenes. But now let's consider the common traits of such a person. Generally, people with this gift are good team players, supportive and conscientious. They focus on short-term goals and are hands-on, and may take on too much or feel unappreciated at times.¹⁹ In this sense, Paul's 7 gifts could also be thought of as 7 types of people.

2. We are each a unique combination of talents and traits. If you number the 7 gifts Paul listed from the one you seem to have most down to the one you possess the least, you might be a 7352146 or a 3721465. In this sense, every person has a unique mix of gifts; a one-of-a-kind combination. With this in mind, it's possible to have a biblically inspired version of the psychometric and strengths-based personality tests that have become so popular.²⁰ Additionally, since the motivational gifts tend to be entwined in talents and traits which we had before we were Christians, this may apply to non-Christians too.²¹

Did Paul get all the basic types of gifts? Of course, each of these 7 wirings can be broken down or combined into more and more specific types, but Paul seems to have covered the irreducible minimums of personality modes.²² For example, a secular research pioneer in vocational theory, John Holland, managed to identify the 6 main personality modes, and they roughly correlate to 6 of the 7 gifts Paul lists.²³

¹⁸ Paul is speaking universally of Christians everywhere. But how does he know these gifts are present specifically in the Roman church to which he has not yet been? It's likely because these are the gifts he has observed in every city and church he has been to.

¹⁹ While there will be exceptions, these traits will be true of most gifted servers.

²⁰ Some of the most popular are the Enneagram, Myers-Briggs, DISC and StrengthsFinders.

²¹ We must tread carefully here. A mediocre talent or ability can be adapted by God into a spiritual gift which God uses greatly, while at other times, an obvious natural talent in someone who comes to

faith never seems to be used as a spiritual gift or ministry. A team of academic researchers from Regent College make a good case for this generalisation though. For further reading, their paper is available online and is entitled 'Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership 2: The Romans 12 Gifts'

²² In the intellectual history of the world, Paul was doing something groundbreaking here – causing people to appreciate their own distinctiveness: what makes them tick, what comes easily to them.

²³ His personality modes are: Realistic (doing / things) = service; Investigative (thinking / ideas) = teaching; Artistic (creating / ideas) = perceiving; Social (helping / people) = mercy; Enterprising (managing / people) = leading; Conventional (conforming / data) = giving. It's not a perfect fit, but there exists an undeniable overlap.



THE CHURCH AND ALL OF LIFE

"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you."

- J O H N 21:3

Peter, even before he met Jesus and long before he spearheaded the Jerusalem revival, was a natural leader and go-getter. When Jesus gave him the spiritual gift of leadership, his talents and personality type were not eliminated but amplified. In the same way, though Paul in Romans 12 likely has Christians in mind in the sevenfold list of gifts, the fact that they are motivational implies that under these spiritual gifts are natural wirings, given by God via nature and nurture to each human being, before we are even saved. Alongside our spiritual gifts, these natural talents and wirings continue to function.²⁴ We offer both up to God's glory and service.

Have you completed both tests on Day zero? If so, you will notice that the first identifies your ministry to the church, the other what you bring to every sphere of life. It does this by taking out the language of faith and church, using Paul's list to benefit not only Christians but non-Christians, and not only our church ministry but what we take into all of life.²⁵

On the days to come as we also study each of the 7 gifts as natural talents and wiring, we will draw, with permission, from the intellectual resources of the assessment organisation, i3 Profiling. As we do, it is worthwhile to note that we will draw on two of the distinctives of their particular ministry:

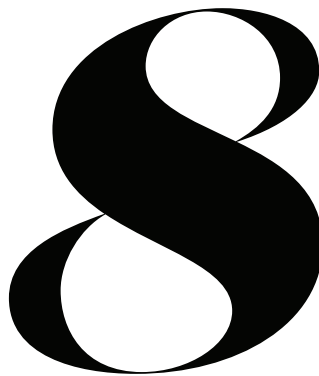
Re-wording for a wider reach. As they tested and coached 1000s of people, they found it useful to adapt the names of the gifts from prophesying to perceiving, serving to practical, teaching to enquiring, encouraging to promoting, giving to enterprising, leading to organising, mercy to responding.

Rethinking weaknesses. Instead of thinking of our weaknesses as the gifts we don't have, i3 Profiling teaches us to rather pay attention to the potential shadow side of the gifts we do have. Again we think of Peter, whose natural gift of leadership had an evident shadow side – he would sometimes speak or act without sufficient thought, self-awareness or other-awareness. Knowing our gifts not only optimises our contribution, but also guides our particular journey towards the godliest version of ourselves. So, on this journey, we pray, "Search me, God, and ... see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."²⁶

²⁴ This is why even non-Christians tend to register some gifting using spiritual gift assessments. According to The Spirit-filled life Bible, "The Romans 12 gifts seem to characterize basic 'motivations,' that is, inherent tendencies that characterize each different person by reason of the Creator's unique workmanship in their initial gifting... these gifts of our place in God's created order are foundational" (p2023). Fortune and Fortune in Discover your God-given gifts state that these gifts "are the gifts that God has built into us... since they provide the motivating force for our lives, they have been called motivational gifts" (p17).

²⁵ This way the assessment tool can assist people with job-fit recruitment, career guidance, conflict resolution, team building, personal development, leadership development, management development, business consulting, and business and life coaching.

²⁶ Ps 139:23-24



P L E A S A N T B O U N D A R Y L I N E S

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

– P s a l m 16 : 6

In ancient Israel the promised land was subdivided into lots. David’s prayer taught the people to celebrate what God had given them, instead of wishing for something else. Still today, each of our gifts and wiring is a grace gift, a one-of-a-kind inheritance to be celebrated. The habit of comparing what we have with others is futile and self-sabotaging.²⁷

The secret to joy is to rest in God’s grace and not value ourselves by our performance. The God who saves us by grace, transforms us by grace, sustains us by grace and also equips us by way of the spiritual grace gifts.²⁸

The famous evangelist Billy Graham fully utilized the gifts God had given him, and encouraged us to do the same: “Some people have a warped idea of living the Christian life. Seeing talented, seemingly ‘successful’ Christians, they attempt to imitate them. For them, the grass on the other side of the

fence is always greener. But when they discover that their own gifts are different or their contributions are more modest (*or even invisible*), they collapse in discouragement and overlook genuine opportunities that are open to them. They have forgotten that they are here to serve Christ, not themselves.”²⁹

As wonderful as our gifts may be, they are not the basis of our worth. Our value lies in the One who made us in love, not in our competencies. Among the Greeks and Romans, the worth of a person rested in his inherited gifts and abilities, not simply in being human. Then came the gospel which has given us a specific basis for honouring every person in the view of the One in whose image they are made.³⁰

Also, as enriching as our gifts may be, they are not the best thing in our lives. There’s one thing much better than the gifts – it’s the Giver, who has welcomed us into His company with open arms. As Brother Yun says, “Do not be satisfied with God’s calling or His gifts in your life. Be satisfied with Jesus Christ Himself.”³¹

²⁷ See 2 Cor 10:12, Gal 6:4-5 for more on the futility of comparison.

²⁸ This is a shortened form of Jerry Bridges beautiful words: “This is the amazing story of God’s grace. God saves us by His grace and transforms us more and more into the likeness of His Son by His grace. In all our trials and afflictions, He sustains and strengthens us by His grace. He calls us by grace to perform our own unique function within the Body of Christ. Then, again by grace, He gives to each of us the spiritual gifts necessary to fulfill our calling. As we serve Him, He makes that service acceptable to Himself by grace, and then rewards us a hundredfold by grace.”

²⁹ From Hope for Each Day: Words of Wisdom and Faith, by Billy Graham.

³⁰ We must not allow a culture of competition and performance to enter into the church. Unlike in the meritocratic culture we live in, in any healthy family, our primary identity and basis for belonging is in who we are, not in the gifts we offer or in the accomplishments we render.

³¹ A quote from The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun.



W H A T E V E R I T T A K E S

Uzziel, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section (of the wall); and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that.

- N E H E M I A H 3 : 8

When all the nearby Israelites repaired the broken walls of Jerusalem, it didn't matter what their gift was. Even perfume- and jewellery-makers had to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in. As Andy Stanley says, "When the house is on fire, don't tell me what your spiritual gift is. Just grab a hose and put out the fire."

I doubt anyone has the gift of washing the dirty feet of another, but this is expected of all followers of Jesus – no task or person beneath us. We might not all have the gift of service as our primary gift, but we are still all called to have a heart to serve; to do whatever it takes to meet the actual needs at hand. Of course, it's wonderful when your gifts fit like a key in the keyhole of the need, but that does not always happen. Often enough, God allows these mismatches so that you can grow in ways you might have preferred not to!

So far we've explored how Paul's list of 7 gifts relates to our ministry and natural wiring. There's one more aspect to keep in mind: Christ commands

them of us. It so happens that these 7 gifts are, according to other Scriptures, also 7 imperatives for us all. As we will see today, there are plenty of instructions by Jesus and his apostles to declare, give, lead, serve, care, teach and encourage. No matter our gifts, each of these is a basic dimension of discipleship.

"There are spiritual gifts like mercy or generosity. But just because you don't have that spiritual gift doesn't mean you aren't held to any standard at all. Even if you aren't gifted in that way, you're still called to live mercifully and generously. You might not set the standard, but you need to meet the standard. There is a baseline that all of us are called to."³² You might not be the best at something outside your gift mix, but if you determine to grow in all areas of following Jesus you will enjoy a greater level of Christlikeness and heavenly reward.

Think of these 7 imperatives as 7 muscle sets. Though you might have one or two muscle sets that bulk up easily – your gifts – putting every muscle to use is vital to avoid wasting away and maintain your all-round health.

³² Mark Batterson: 2013, All In (Kindle Location: 1116)

An aerial photograph of a dense evergreen forest, likely spruce or fir. The trees are tightly packed, creating a textured green canopy. A narrow, winding path or clearing runs through the center of the forest, leading the eye from the bottom towards the top. The lighting is soft, suggesting early morning or late afternoon, with some trees appearing slightly more illuminated than others.

UNCOVER YOUR GIFTS

10

T H E G I F T O F P R O P H E S Y I N G

*If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in
accordance with your³³ faith...*

- R O M A N S 1 2 : 6

Prophecy is the Spirit-inspired speaking for God with God-given words to a person or to a group of people. It includes both the receiving of some revelation from God, as well as the sharing of that revelation with others.

Why does God give this gift? It is intended to strengthen, encourage and comfort fellow Christians and build up the church.³⁴ Though a prophetic word may make sense of past events or make promises about the future, it is primarily forth-telling not foretelling: illuminating Scriptural truths, underlining the Lord's present perspectives or priorities, and giving us a divine view into some aspect of God's character or purposes. Is there someone in your church with this gift whom you can pray for and celebrate?

Though many may prophesy from time to time, some are gifted by God to prophesy more regularly and with greater accuracy and power. These people are called prophets.³⁵

Guidelines for sharing prophetic words.

- 1) God's revelations tend to draw on your range of vocabulary, experiences and mental imagery and be limited to your level of doctrinal understanding.
- 2) Sometimes God will give you the whole message before sharing, other times only as you start to share will He provide you with more details.
- 3) Don't assume that just because God gives you a revelation that you know what it means, or how to share it, or if you must share it at all. Ask God's Spirit to guide you and give you wisdom.
- 4) Don't say, "Thus says the Lord..." but rather, "I think / feel God is saying that..." Since New Testament prophecy is fallible,³⁶ it is always best to be humble in how we share it.
- 5) Don't despise the day of small beginnings.³⁷ At first, God may give you some very simple revelations, but as you are faithful in sharing them, God will trust you with clearer, more accurate prophetic messages.

³³ The Greek text actually reads "the" not "your" before "faith". Paul may be cautioning that prophecy must be according to the faith, the accepted body of doctrine. The Bible is all of God's truth for all of God's people at all times. But prophecy merely builds upon this revelation. It emphasises and highlights some of God's truth to some of God's people at some times. That's why, any prophetic claim must never contradict doctrines taught in the Scriptures; if it does, it must be dismissed. However, prophecy can go beyond Scriptures in non-doctrinal ways without contradicting them. For example, when the prophets helped discern that God wanted Paul and Barnabas to begin their missionary journey right away, this was not doctrinal in nature, rather it was about their specific situation. This Acts 13:1-2 example also highlights that prophecy should most times be experienced as a confirmation not brand new information.

³⁴ 1 Cor 14:3-4. According to these Scriptures, encouragement and comfort are the staple words of prophecy. As a general rule, only seasoned and highly credible prophets should issue corrective, predictive and directive words.

³⁵ Eph 4:11, Acts 21:10

³⁶ False or wrongly applied prophetic words can do great harm to people and churches. That's why 1 Cor 14:29 tells the church to "weigh" prophetic words. Even Agabus the prophet seems to have made a mistake or two, though essentially he gets it right. Wayne Grudem calls Acts 21:10-11 a "prophecy with two small mistakes." The Jews did not bind Paul, nor did they deliver Paul to the Gentiles.

³⁷ Zech 4:10

11

WIRED FOR PERCEIVING

*He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with...justice he will give decisions...*

- I s a i a h 11:3 - 4

This prediction about Jesus, written a millenium before He came, speaks of His ability to look beyond the surface to the essence of things. The word for prophesy (*propheteia*) means revealing or showing forth. A dim reflection of the supernatural version of prophecy, there's a talent or trait that nonetheless runs in the same grain – the ability to perceive.³⁸

Perceivers are discerning, intuitive, imaginative, innovative, futuristic, deep thinkers. They don't just want information; they want and give honesty, the truth, authenticity and integrity. They have a keen sense of right and wrong, a nose for when "things aren't quite right." Most enjoy the challenge of solving problems, and because they are able to see underlying patterns that others can't, they're often the quickest to see a strategic way through complexity. They are often bold, and the depth of their conviction often persuades others. Not afraid of confrontation, they may be poorly received at times, even though their intention is to help or warn people.

Generally, they take life fairly seriously and prefer deeper conversations over chit-chat. Not easily swayed, they make deep commitments based on their convictions and promises. Quick thinkers and talkers, they tend to speak on the basis of a gut feeling, using the words, "I feel that..." rather than, "I think that." Is there a relative, friend or colleague with this gift you can affirm or celebrate over the next day?

If you have this gift, how can you draw on greater self-awareness and the fruit of the Spirit to help you to offset the gift's shadow tendencies? Being right so often, you may be over-convinced about being right when you're not. You may come across as tactless, pushy or blunt. You may be overly independent, which can be spiritually dangerous.³⁹ You may be overly critical, impatient, intolerant and judgmental. Having high personal standards, you may be too hard on yourself and thus too hard on those closest to you too, bringing more correction than encouragement. You may inflict needless pain on others through saying things in an insensitive way. Feeling things so deeply, you may have problems managing anger, and your hurt may give way to bitterness.

³⁸ Taking their cue from Fortune and Fortune's book, Discover your God-given gifts, i3 Profiling uses this term.

³⁹ "It is not good for (a) man to be alone" – we're morally and spiritually safest in community and in team.

12

EVERYONE, PROPHECY!

*Eagerly desire the spiritual gifts,
especially the gift of prophecy.*

- 1 C O R I N T H I A N S 14:1

Of all 9 miraculous gifts Paul lists in 1 Corinthians, this is the one Paul says we should especially ask for. Of course, God does not expect you to prophesy if you don't have this gift but He does expect you to ask Him for it. The spiritual gift of prophecy is different to the other 6 gifts in Romans 12 in that it is more overtly supernatural in nature. This is why we can ask for it.

The fact that Paul tells us to eagerly seek it⁴⁰ reveals something of God's willingness to give this gift to all His children.⁴¹ In the church's first ever sermon, the apostle Peter declared that Joel's prophecy had started to be fulfilled:

In the last days, God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."⁴²

Like Nehemiah, every Spirit-filled believer can expect God to put things in their heart from time to time.⁴³

Though these God-inspired revelations may come to us out of the blue, usually they come as we are drawing close to God in prayer or worship⁴⁴ on our own⁴⁵ or with others⁴⁶ or when we are reading or pondering parts of the Bible.⁴⁷ God may speak vividly,⁴⁸ but usually He speaks through simple impressions which we come to recognise as coming from God. Along with a sense of God's presence and peace, a thought or picture might suddenly come to mind that centres on God and His purposes and seems to not have originated from just your natural insight or thoughts.

A good practice is, after reading the Bible and praying, to open a journal and ask God to directly highlight to you anything He might want to. Then be still and wait. Expect God to speak to you. Write down any thoughts that might come to you.

⁴⁰ 1 Cor 14:1,39

⁴¹ We might not have it for years in our Christian life, then one day it begins to flower in our lives.

⁴² Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18

⁴³ Neh 7:5

⁴⁴ James 4:8

⁴⁵ Acts 10:9-11

⁴⁶ Acts 13:1-2

⁴⁷ 2 Tim 2:7

⁴⁸ The book of Acts tells of God directing his people through audible voices, visions, dreams, trances and even angelic encounters.

13

T H E G I F T O F S E R V I C E

If your gift is... serving, then serve.

- R o m a n s 12:6-7

For some people, accomplishing practical and necessary tasks in the church comes more naturally or, should we say, supernaturally. The Greek word for serving (*diakonia*) means to aid. It can be interpreted as the God-given ability to identify the unmet needs involved in a task and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired goal.

These tasks may free up, support, and meet the needs of others. People with this gift enjoy working behind-the-scenes to support the work of others or the purposes of the church. Routine tasks that many will avoid are enjoyable for people with this gift. They are marked by proactivity, finding things that need to be done and often doing them without being asked. Exuding a joy in the doing, they are star volunteers.

Joseph of Arimathea was the one who asked for Jesus' breathless body. "Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid."⁴⁹ He is an example of those who, with gifts of

service, find ways to minister to the body of Christ. No task is beneath them, and while no one may even notice or applaud them, their service is crucial to the unfolding work of God in our midst.

We should never abuse or take for granted these amazing gifts that make church life and its mission a practical possibility. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable."⁵⁰

Paul refers to a similar gift in another of his lists of gifts: helps.⁵¹ The Greek word means to relieve and/or support, rendering assistance to others in the church. This gift has a broad range of applications, from helping individuals with daily chores (*perhaps overloaded leaders or struggling people*) to assisting in the administration of the affairs of the church.

Is there someone in your church with this gift whom you can pray for and celebrate in the next day?

⁴⁹ Luke 23:53

⁵⁰ 1 Cor 12:21-22

⁵¹ 1 Cor 12:28. Timothy had this gift. Paul said of him: "I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ... Timothy has proved himself... he has served with me in the work of the gospel." (Phil 2:20-22)

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W I R E D T O B E P R A C T I C A L

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service.

- 1 Timothy 1:12

When people think about the apostle Paul they often notice his upfront and intellectual gifts. Yet he also had behind-the-scenes gifts – joyfully working very hard with his own hands as a tent-maker by day.⁵² Behind the ministry gift of service is usually a natural set of traits which is Profiling calls the Practical wiring. Unsurprisingly, the first time we meet Paul, before he's even a Christian, he is behind the scenes, looking after other people's valuables.⁵³

Praise God for these task-oriented people with a passion for the details. They like to tick items off on a list. Willing servers and good team members, they love to help out in all situations, the more practical and methodical the better. They're happiest when they're busy doing something useful. They easily come alongside others' visions and goals. Considerate by nature, they love to practice hospitality and will go the extra mile to ensure people are happy. What they start they finish. Generally punctual, efficient, organised and tidy, attention to detail

comes instinctively. They are cooperative, industrious, humble and reliable. They value responsibility, honesty and dependability in themselves and other people. Generally, they don't seek the limelight and may even run from it.

Though they do what they do for the love of it, they should not be taken for granted, and merit real appreciation for their labours. Is there a relative, friend or colleague with this gift you can affirm or celebrate over the next day?

If you have this gift, how can you draw on greater self-awareness and the fruit of the Spirit to help you to offset the gift's shadow tendencies? Sacrificial by second-nature, don't let others abuse your willingness to serve or forget about your own needs. You may wear yourself out through not observing your own time and energy limits, not resting properly, not saying no, having perfectionistic standards, or by doing everything yourself instead of delegating. Given more to doing than talking, you may bottle your feelings up. Be careful not to unfairly project your sensibilities and high service ethic onto others either, as this will only lead to unnecessary hurt and frustration on both sides.

⁵² Acts 18:3; 20:34

⁵³ Acts 7:58 is admittedly an example of a gift of service being used for terrible ends, which reminds us that even the gift of service is to be measured by its effect and motive.

15

E V E R Y O N E , S E R V E !

I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

- R E V E L A T I O N 2 : 1 9

Jesus gives a community of believers some positive feedback in these words. Our spirituality, as measured by Jesus, is more about actions than intentions, and more about deeds than words. He expects that our readiness to do whatever it takes to love and serve His people and His purposes should expand not shrink over time.

Too many people, having discovered that they have other gifts, then use the fact that they don't have the gift of service as an excuse to not help out in those times when all hands are required on deck. Those with high-profile or vocal callings do well to sanctify their upfront service with regular behind-the-scenes gestures of love.

Indeed, everything we do, including more visible functions, is to be motivated by a heart to serve. This is the way of Jesus: the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.⁵⁴ On the frontlines of God's kingdom coming into the midst of broken lives and

a broken world, there seems to be no end to ways of serving people and the purposes of God. Instead of a sprint, we should see our deeds of love as a marathon. As Paul says: "As for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good."⁵⁵

How is it even possible to never tire? The secret to endless supplies of servant energy is only found as we live in Jesus' love for us.⁵⁶ As a pre-enactment of the cross, He humbly washed His disciples feet and told them (and us) to do the same for others.⁵⁷ Indeed, we do not only need to verbalise the gospel, but enact it through our deeds: "If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Matt 20:28

⁵⁵ 2 Thes 3:3

⁵⁶ John 13:1

⁵⁷ John 13:14

⁵⁸ 1 Peter 4:11. The famous example of Martha serving Jesus in Luke 10:38-42 is an example of someone serving very much in her own strength.

16

THE GIFT OF MERCY

If your gift... is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

- R o m a n s 12 : 6 , 8

The word for show mercy (*eleon*) means to have compassion on. Jesus used the term in his story of the Good Samaritan as “one who does mercy.”⁵⁹ In a fallen world with sin-hardened hearts, genuine mercy is rare. More commonly, the human race is “merciless.”⁶⁰ For those of us bruised or broken by life’s hardships, our own sin or the sin of others, what a sorely needed gift this is. It’s a gift that carries with it its own reward: “Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy,” said Jesus.⁶¹

Alongside her gift of leadership, Mother Teresa embodied this gift. Serving the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, she once told of finding an old woman dying in a garbage dump. She spent the last weeks of this woman’s life cleaning and caring for her. The dying woman was in emotional agony that her own son had so neglected her. Mother Teresa’s focus moved from caring for the woman’s body to caring for her soul, guiding her gently to the place where she could extend forgiveness to her estranged son before she died.

Few may take their gift of mercy to that level, but a similar passion runs through those like-gifted people. They feel genuine compassion for people, seeing the person under the burden, a person who matters to God. They empathize with hurting people and desire to help in the healing process. They are ready to provide sustenance, perspective, stability, tenderness, a listening ear, practical care and/or thoughtful advice. They seek to alleviate, without superficially plastering over, the person’s pain – be it physical, emotional, social, mental, spiritual or relational.

Yet more than merely wanting to remove pain, they long to help the person to experience God’s Father-heart or Shepherd-care in the process of being cared for, and to flourish and reach their potential under the love of God. The mercy-gifted are not only interested in people’s pain, they care for the people themselves. This is the most person-centred of the gifts. As they get involved thoughtfully and empathetically in the life of hurting people, they are often energised, not exhausted. Is there someone in your church with this gift whom you can pray for and celebrate in the next day?

⁵⁹ Luke 10:37

⁶⁰ Rom 1:31

⁶¹ Matt 5:7

17

WIRED TO RESPOND

In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

- P H I L I P P I A N S 2 : 4

Fulfilling this command comes more easily to some. i3 Profiling calls those wired for mercy, *Responders*. Thank God for these givers, not takers, who have such a great capacity to show compassion. They are very relationally connected and responsive to others – driven to defend people and their causes. They instinctively include others, have a nose for inconsistency and believe that all should be treated equally, with no unfair advantage.⁶²

They tend to be unhurried, humble, kind and considerate. Valuing people so much, they easily detect insincerity and lack of genuine care in others. They are great listeners and loyal friends. They easily and empathetically tune into the emotions of others.⁶³

Patient with others, they are the glue in teams, usually concerned more about the relationships between the team members than the goals and output of the team. They prefer consensus to hierarchy. They are careful with their use of words

to avoid needlessly hurting others. Praise God for these people – most affected by personal friction and conflict, they are peacemakers who try to repair relational wounds and misunderstandings.

If you have this gift, how can you draw on greater self-awareness and the fruit of the Spirit to help you to offset the gift's shadow tendencies? So empathetic, you may absorb a crippling amount of other people's pain and problems – hence the need to, as Paul says, "do it cheerfully." So trusting, people may take you for a ride.⁶⁴ Naturally humble and soft-spoken, you may think too little of yourself and the contribution you have to offer. So committed to harmony, you may overly avoid confrontation. You might lose your own voice in people-pleasing tendencies, and go with the flow when it might be better to stand out and be more decisive. Prone to take up other people's defences, you may pick up the offences of others too. Your emotions may supersed your logic, which can lead to ineffective communication and compounding misunderstanding.

Is there a friend, relative or colleague whom you can thank God for and celebrate in the next day? (*You can spot them easily enough – they probably care for you most.*)

⁶² They are similar to Perceivers in this way, though their sense of justice is undergirded by compassion as opposed to a justice undergirded by principle.

⁶³ Since relationship and belonging is so primary, they are more deeply hurt by rejection or unfaithfulness than others.

⁶⁴ In addition, people with this gift can sometimes enable people to continue their poor behaviour by constantly rescuing them from bad situations. Showing mercy doesn't always involve making people feel better at the moment but instead making them realize they need help, which will ultimately make them better in the long run.

18

EVERYONE, SHOW MERCY!

When he saw the crowds, Jesus had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

- M A T T H E W 9 : 3 6

Jesus' love of people, as individuals, was perhaps His most striking characteristic. That's why at the heart of Christlikeness is compassion and mercy, a deep care for people. Those of us not mercy-gifted cannot outsource a genuine love for people to those who do have this gift.

One way to grow in compassion is to ponder deeply Jesus' compassion.⁶⁵ Jesus loved the crowds precisely because he loved the people in the crowd. He did not minister to faceless crowds. For example, in Mark's Gospel we're told of how Jesus hones in on one individual in the crowd: a paralysed man who takes up his mat, after dropping in on Jesus from a torn ceiling,⁶⁶ the woman with the issue of blood who sneaks up to him in the crowd,⁶⁷ a deaf man whom Jesus takes away from the crowd to minister to,⁶⁸ and a blind man whose first sight is of Jesus.⁶⁹

Jesus was downwardly mobile. Jesus paid most attention to society's bottom-feeders: the dirty, the disfigured, those afflicted with sickness, blindness and rotting skin, the deformed, the broken, the lunatic and possessed, the abandoned and the hungry who begged for bread on the streets; the women who were used, abused and thrown out like trash; the seemingly unimportant people – widows and orphans; prostitutes and the homeless, the despised rich and the despairing poor, the very young and the very sick. Jesus received all these people, felt their hurt – and reached out to heal.⁷⁰

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," said Jesus. One commentary translates this verse as, "Blessed are the desperate." With nowhere else to turn, the desperate can turn to Jesus, the only One who offers the deliverance they long for. Jesus really believed that a person who is poor in spirit, or mourning, or persecuted, or hungry and thirsty for righteousness has a peculiar advantage over the rest of us.⁷¹ And so to be with them is to be nearer the heart of God.

⁶⁵ Leading historian Paul Johnson, in *Jesus: a biography from a believer* writes: "Jesus never tired of talking to them and penetrating their secrets. They were drawn to him and only too willing to divulge them. His life was a series of public meetings punctuated by casual encounters which turned into significant events. Jesus not only encouraged these encounters but treasured them. These episodes, though often brief, form the human core of the New Testament and provide a unique satisfaction to the reader. There is nothing like them in the entire literature of the ancient world, sacred or secular."

⁶⁶ Mark 2:1-12

⁶⁷ Mark 5:21-3

⁶⁸ Mark 7:31-35

⁶⁹ Mark 10:46-52

⁷⁰ This paragraph is adapted from Gilbert Bilezekian: 1993, *Christianity* 101, Zondervan

⁷¹ This paragraph is a quote from Philip Yancey: 1995, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Zondervan, p114

19

THE GIFT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

*If your gift... is to encourage,
then give encouragement.*

- R O M A N S 12:6, 8

Wonderfully, God's Spirit enables some people to regularly excel in the ability to lift the spirits and faith of those who are downcast, passive, discouraged or flagging in their faith. Praise God for those who give hope to others by directing them to God's promises. They inspire others to keep going or to take action when needed. They give courage to the intimidated, and hope to the disheartened.⁷²

The Greek word for encouragement (*parakalon*) has two parts: alongside and call. Encouragers skillfully come alongside people and communities, and call them to more. What a catalytic combination. Instead of calling us in a judgmental or detached way, they are adept at coming right up alongside us, and in this way, putting courage into us.

While teachers point us in the right direction, encouragers propel us in that direction.⁷³ Paul's exhortation to those with the gift to 'give encouragement' highlights that the true power of the gift is in its giving, measured not by the words of encouragement but their actual effect – a person or people back on their feet, eagerly ready to take their next step in a God-given direction.

Spirit-led encouragement and prophecy are sometimes indistinguishable. We read of how "Judas and Silas, being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers and sisters."⁷⁴ As a spiritual gift, it is unrelated to how positive the circumstances are of the encourager. We're told how Paul and Silas "went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brothers and sisters, they encouraged them."⁷⁵ For a person in difficulty to lift up others requires supernatural grace, which is what this gift is. Also, the gift ministers to those who have been shaken or traumatised by difficulties or hostility. For example, we read how, "after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and he... encouraged them."⁷⁶ Like David once did, though Paul was greatly distressed, he encouraged himself in the Lord⁷⁷ and was able to encourage others as a result.

Is there someone in your church with this gift whom you can pray for and celebrate in the next day? After all, even encouragers need encouragement.

⁷² A great example of this gift is Joseph, nicknamed Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement (Acts 4:36). Through his gifted encouragement, the apostle Paul was first accepted by the church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27), a fledgling church was able to remain true to the Lord (Acts 11:23), and Mark was given a second chance (Acts 13:13, 15:39).

⁷³ William Mounce in The New American Commentary says that "if teaching provides guidance for what people ought to do then encouragement helps them achieve it" (p235). Said another way, teachers give us a map, encouragers put wind in our sails.

⁷⁴ Acts 15:32

⁷⁵ Acts 16:40

⁷⁶ Acts 20:1

⁷⁷ 1 Sam 30:6

20

WIRED TO PROMOTE

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not
crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed.*
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

God has wired some people to naturally be adept at winning others over, at being able to communicate in a way that lifts others up. i3 Profiling renames the gift of encouragement as the talent for Promoting – because people with it tend to promote energy, confidence, ideas and other people. Praise God for those who tend to also have more buoyancy than others – though the same difficulties may submerge them, they resurface quicker. Believers in the power of networking and momentum, they have the ability to set things in motion, cheer others on and help people to grow.

Encouragers tend to have great communication skills, speaking freely about how they feel or think, as well as using words to inspire action. Entertainers and the extroverted life-of-the-party, they tend to be positive, bringing out the lighter side to many a situation. They vibrate with optimistic can-do energy.⁷⁸

As influencers, their gift is sometimes one-to-one; but more often one-to-many.⁷⁹ Possessing a high self-esteem on average, they can inject a sense of

worth and confidence in many a self-doubter, and are quick to compliment others. They enjoy challenges and value every experience in life, either good or bad, seeing every one as an opportunity to learn and grow further. Is there a colleague, relative or friend like this you can thank God for and encourage in the next day?

If you have this gift, then how can you use greater self-awareness and the fruit of the Spirit to offset the potential shadow side of your strengths? You may be a great starter, but soon enough lose interest as you chase off after the next great idea. You may be too impatient to listen well.⁸⁰ If your encouragement is thoughtlessly applied, it might sound like flattery. With the tendency to crave applause yourself (not just give it), this desire may put you on the hamster-wheel of endlessly trying to impress others. With all that self-confidence, you may exaggerate or make commitments while underestimating how much time, difficulty and energy will be required. To a person in real pain, your positivity and encouragements might sometimes be experienced as you being emotionally tone-deaf.⁸¹

⁷⁸ They are the Thermostats, not thermometers, encouragers set the temperature rather than simply reflect it.

⁷⁹ Like mercy-givers, they enjoy helping individuals, but unlike them, they also tend to enjoy helping groups of people.

⁸⁰ Promoters are often sentence-finishers whose mind fills with things to say while the other person talks.

⁸¹ As Brené Brown says, and as the friends of suffering Job failed to realize, “sometimes hurting people just need someone to sit with them in the darkness.”

21

EVERYONE, ENCOURAGE!

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- H E B R E W S 10:24-25

The world has enough critics already. Our great shortage is encouragers. Following Jesus today requires constant defiance against the forces of darkness. As the day of His return inches nearer, the battle gets fiercer. That's why the church is to be an army of encouragers. The task is too great to leave it to only the few specifically gifted in this regard. We all need to learn how to encourage, and work to stay encouraged ourselves. This will make it easier to live in a fallen world,⁸² to love as Jesus loved,⁸³ to have hope,⁸⁴ to endure trials,⁸⁵ and to sacrifice our own desires for the advancement of God's kingdom.⁸⁶ The writer of Hebrews gives us some further guidelines on how to encourage:

Don't only use machine-gun encouragement.

The Greek literally says, "let us consider one another so we may spur one another..." The word for 'consider' (*katanoeo*) means to pay attention to and look closely at. When we know each other's vulnerabilities and struggles, we can encourage each other with laser-focused effectiveness.

Challenge and inspire one another. We are to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Christian community is the place where we keep the flame of hope alive among us so that it can grow and become stronger in us.⁸⁷ We are to thoughtfully challenge and inspire each other to be changed from one degree of glory to another. The Greek word for spur (*paroxysmoi*) means outburst. We're all called to inspire one another toward bursts of demonstrated love.⁸⁸

Commit to meet with each other. We must "not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." According to the writer of Hebrews, neglecting or abandoning church gatherings is a bad habit, while prioritising them is a good one. As easy and inconsequential as missing worship meetings or small group meetings may seem, it comes at a great price if we get into the habit of doing so.⁸⁹ Over time, our levels of spiritual passion will start to wane. Like a coal that is removed from the other coals, in isolation we lose some of our fervour and fire, and become more susceptible to burning out altogether.⁹⁰

⁸² Heb 3:13

⁸³ John 13:34-35

⁸⁴ Rom 15:4

⁸⁵ Heb 12:5

⁸⁶ 1 Cor 15:57-58

⁸⁷ A quote by Henri Nouwen.

⁸⁸ It is, after all, God's desire that, in each of us, our love will "increase and overflow for one another other and for everyone else" (1 Tim 3:12).

⁸⁹ Our calendar and intentionality help us form the good habit of weekly meeting with God's people – on the calendar, every Sunday

for the rest of our lives has it marked in, and as we approach Sunday we don't leave it as an option whether we will go.

⁹⁰ We don't only gather with other believers for what we need. We gather for what we can give to others. For example, in a weekly public meeting, our very presence, our service, our welcoming of new people and our enthusiasm for God all has a way of encouraging others. Conversely, our absence leaves a void, perhaps even unwittingly draining others of their spiritual fervor. In small groups, our encouragement can be far more focused. Here we can get to know each other, and become more intentional about challenging and inspiring one another. Instead of offering general encouragements, we can hone in on the particular vulnerabilities and challenges individuals are facing. We are to encourage as long as it is called "Today" (Heb 3:13) – this means that every day, we are to ask ourselves, 'Who needs my encouragement today?'



T H E G I F T O F T E A C H I N G

If your gift... is teaching, then teach.

- R O M A N S 12:6-7

The Spirit helps some to more easily understand and explain God's Word to others. They seem to just have a way of clarifying the Bible's teaching and making it come alive to people. They love to cultivate their knowledge of God's Word, and often spend time thinking of ways to pass that knowledge on to others. They tend to be frustrated when they see people's lack of biblical knowledge, and yearn to guide them toward deeper truth. They can present biblical information and Christ-following skills to others in a way that people tend to grasp and start applying in their lives.

The Greek word for teaching (*didaskon*) means to instruct, clarify, illuminate, simplify, and to illustrate for the sake of communication and understanding.⁹¹

It takes time for a gift of teaching to become obvious. It might manifest at first in a mind hungry to learn, a persevering habit of learning, and a passion to help others learn. Even though the gift might be there in seed-form, until we have been taught, we are not ready to teach. The writer of Hebrews laments, "By this time you ought to be teachers, but now you need to be taught the

elementary truths once again."⁹²

That said, having received knowledge, one doesn't necessarily have the gift of teaching – the true test is how much of this knowledge is effectively passed on to those being taught.⁹³

Especially in small groups, the gifted teacher must be careful not to dominate the time, unless that is the purpose of the meeting. To the Corinthian church, Paul speaks of many people sharing different kinds of contributions, only one of which is "a word of instruction" – presumably something much shorter than what we call a sermon today.⁹⁴

Teachers should not only focus on content, but delivery too. Be inspired by Jesus, probably the most gifted teacher in history, who taught the truth about the kingdom in a myriad of fresh and highly engaging ways – using illustrations, object lessons, current events, stories, lectures, dialogues, rhetorical questions and proverbs.⁹⁵

⁹¹ As defined by Bryant in *Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts*.

⁹² John 13:34-35

⁹³ Paul advocated that in the Ephesian church, all pastors were to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2), but those specially gifted to do so should do more of it (1 Tim 5:17). Not everyone with a gift of teaching will necessarily take up the office of teacher as Paul mentions in Eph 4:11.

⁹⁴ 1 Cor 14:26

⁹⁵ Luke 7:31-32, Matt 6:28, Luke 13:4-5, Mark 4:2, Matt 24, John 3, Luke 18:8, Luke 7:45.



W I R E D T O E N Q U I R E

Jesus said, “Every teacher... is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

- M A T T H E W 13:52

i3 Profiling puts the stress on the learning side of this gift, calling this natural orientation Enquiring. As Jesus said, teachers love to learn and store insights and information in their minds, hearts, bookshelves, apps and desktop folders – with the hope of sharing the best of it with others. They like to combine things they learnt long ago with things they have learnt more recently. Praise God for these people who enjoy making difficult concepts easier for us to understand. We’d be in the dark without the likes of them. Is there an enquirer who is a friend, relative or colleague whom you can thank God for and celebrate in the next day?

A range of mental habits tend to coalesce in enquirers: they may analyse things, accumulating data and/or proof to make sense of their circumstances; they may enjoy thinking and thought-provoking conversation often for its own sake; they often equate learning something new as a day well-lived; and they may write or speak or imagine speaking words that instruct, simplify or clarify.

They’re easy enough to notice: clear and sharp thinkers, debaters, researchers, and readers,⁹⁶ they tend to be more objective than subjective, living more in their head than their heart. They pay attention to facts, enjoy words, concepts, studying and investigating.

If you have this gift, how can you draw on greater self-awareness and the fruit of the Spirit to help you to offset the gift’s shadow tendencies? Remember that your feelings matter – if you live in your head all the time, you may lose touch with your heart. Relationships matter too – intellectuals often neglect strengthening emotional connections with others, and they can appear argumentative while simply trying to gain clarification. The present moment matters – if you’re always deep in thought you might miss the wonders that unfold in the ordinary in-between moments of life. Action matters – beware the paralysis of analysis.

Listening matters – you may have read more than others on the subject, but they still see and know things you do not. Finally, humility matters – the best teachers are lifelong learners who know that there is much they have yet to learn. As Scripture says, knowledge puffs up, while love builds up.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ They often like non-fiction and documentaries, and tend to do well academically.

⁹⁷ 1 Cor 8:1

21

EVERYONE, TEACH!

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

- 1 Peter 3:15

Each one should teach one – or two, or three, or ten. There are just too many amazing insights in God’s Word, and too many people who need to hear them, to leave it to the gifted teachers to say. Besides, Jesus said, “From the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.”⁹⁸ As we sit under preaching and daily read and ponder God’s Word, His words will fall more naturally off our lips.

“You shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”⁹⁹ Scripture-saturated people are more ready to mention something they have recently pondered in God’s Word to their families, friends, neighbours, Whatsapp groups, colleagues and connections – whether they are fellow-believers or not-yet-believers.

When you have just read or heard something in the Word that helps or moves you, you can ask the Spirit if there is anyone you can share it with.

As He shows you, why not text or voice message them with it right away. Be especially confident to share Scripture in your conversations with Christian friends. Don’t only talk about the latest news or what people are saying about this or that. Talk about the good news and what God has been saying to you through His Word.

When speaking to not-yet-believers, though it may not always be appropriate and it should never be forced into a conversation, it might be natural to say from time to time, “That reminds me of something Jesus said...” or “My church is busy doing this fascinating study on the different ways God wires and gifts us...” or “This reminds me of one my favourite biblical stories...” Don’t hog the conversation or turn it into a sermon.¹⁰⁰

Use social media wisely. If you share Scripture to your social media feed, be especially mindful how it will come across to people who don’t believe. As a general rule share passages that will immediately make sense, not sound judgmental or preachy, touch on a topic of interest and highlight the goodness of God to your unbelieving friends.

⁹⁸ Matt 12:34

⁹⁹ Deut 6:7. This passage speaks especially of the importance of parents discipling their children by drip-feeding to them aspects of biblical truth, day after day.

¹⁰⁰ You only need a little salt on your food to bring out the taste, so let your words from Scripture add seasoning to your conversations. (Col 4:6)



THE GIFT OF GIVING

If your gift ... is giving, then give generously.

- ROMANS 12:6, 8

Jesus supernaturally enables some of His disciples to easily and consistently excel in contributing money and resources to God's work with cheerfulness.¹⁰¹ They give liberally and joyfully to people in financial need or to kingdom projects requiring support. They understand that God has provided them with an abundance of resources of income, time, energy, practical advice and skills so that they can give more to the Lord's work. They manage their resources so as to exceed what is considered to be a reasonable standard for giving. The Greek word for giving (*metadidous*) means to turn over or to give over, share, or transfer.

Unlike the gifts of teaching, serving and encouraging in which the measure of the gift is the *effect* of the doing, not the doing, Paul lays stress on how the gift works best – with *aploteiti*, a Greek word translated variously as “generously”, “with integrity” or “with simplicity”.¹⁰² The full semantic range of the word¹⁰³ may imply that a giving-gifted person gives more, not only because they are big-hearted and enjoy giving (“*generously*”) but

also because they take a highly ethical, thus diligently managed, approach to money (“*with integrity*”). Additionally, tend to limit their standard of living, all so they can increase their standard of giving – with their lifestyle expenses hemmed in, and needs prioritised over wants, they can hand out more (“*with simplicity*”).

Such a thoughtful approach to accruing money also likely manifests in a thoughtful approach to giving money – wisely assessing the needs they give to, as well as the effective, accountable stewardship of their gift. We wrongly assume a person can give so generously because they don't care about money. The truth is they can give so generously and consistently precisely because they are highly money-conscious – intentionally earning more of it through investments and entrepreneurial efforts balanced by due diligence, by spending less of it, and by giving more of it from the difference. What's more, this financial sensibility often doubles up as a gift of all-round practical wisdom, available to guide people and churches in many different areas of life and ministry.

¹⁰¹ One exciting example of this in the New Testament is Barnabas (see Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-37) – the same man with the gift of encouragement had the gift of giving. He was a magnanimous, open-hearted man, generous with his words, his time and his wealth.

¹⁰² In fact, in 3 of the other 4 places the word 'aploteiti' is used in the New Testament, it is usually translated as “with sincerity/integrity” or “with simplicity” – in 2 Cor 1:12, Eph 6:5 and Col 3:22.

¹⁰³ An admission is made that using the full semantic range of the word may be overloading the word's meaning in this context, but since the confirming data on its specified meaning is so scant, the liberty is taken.

26

W I R E D T O E N T E R P R I S E

Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and ... gave them to Abraham, and ... said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like."

- G E N E S I S 20:14-15

Abraham was privileged to encounter this very wealthy yet magnanimous man who, though he did not know God, nonetheless was wired by God to be enterprising and open-handed. Back behind the spiritual gift of giving is often someone with a similar make-up. As we saw yesterday, the gift of giving may have many natural components to it – they are commonly resourceful, opportunistic, entrepreneurial, business-minded, practically-minded, money-savvy, self-disciplined, frugal, responsible and/or ethical people.

i3 Profiling, based on 1000's of interviews, calls such people Enterprising, and say they commonly find the following qualities too: They tend to be well-rounded, balanced individuals who do not tend to go for extremes or live excessively. They are strategic goal-setters and have high success rates. Praise God for these hard-workers, sharp negotiators, good leaders or managers, business or organisation maximisers, and passionate value-adders.¹⁰⁴

Once they have carefully deliberated the situation or opportunity, they then can be decisive. Providing for their families and growing businesses or organizations upon sound principles is one of the great joys of their life. Is there a friend, relative or colleague that you can thank God for or celebrate in the next day?

If you have this gift, how might you rely on the fruit of the Spirit and greater self-awareness, to avoid the pitfalls common in this line of thinking? Ironically, your particular interest in money may switch from generosity to being a money Stooze. You may nit-pick or unduly withhold. Your love to provide as well as to save can swing in one of two directions – either over-generously spoiling or under-celebrating life with your family. All the biblical warnings about wealth come into play – it might lead us to become proud and independent, and put our hope not in God but in our resources.

¹⁰⁴ Spiritual gift assessors like i3 Profiling are sometimes criticized for going beyond mere super-generosity to also exploring the traits common in a person who is naturally adept at consistently generating and retaining wealth from which they can be super-generous in the first place. The criticism might be valid, but this may be a case of what Jesus calls "wisdom being proved right by her children" – 100s of business leaders who previously had not seen their place in the body of Christ, upon discovering they are Enterprisers, have been more motivated to offer up their practical wisdom and resources for the good of the church's mission and its people's well-being.



E V E R Y O N E , G I V E !

Since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

- 2 C O R I N T H I A N S 8 : 7

Though some individuals have God-given abilities for accruing wealth and giving super-generously, entire communities of believers – such as the Corinthian church Paul writes to above – are to ask God and take actions so they can “excel in the grace of giving.” Jesus expects all His disciples to grow in regular giving to the cause of Christ and the needs of people.¹⁰⁵ Paul provides the Corinthian church, and each of us, with many reasons to give:

Give because your heart has been melted by God’s grace to you. Jesus gave the greatest gift (*salvation*) at the greatest cost (*leaving heaven for earth and dying on a cross*) to the most undeserving. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”¹⁰⁶ Jesus tells us, “Freely you have received, now freely give.”¹⁰⁷

Give as an overflow of worship. Paul tells of a church that “gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”¹⁰⁸ As we give our hearts to God’s majesty in adoring worship, we

find ourselves happy to give our money to God’s mission in the advancing of gospel-work. Paul also says “because of the service (*of giving*), others will praise God.”¹⁰⁹ God’s glory is the motive and the end of our giving to God’s work: in the end even more people worship God.

Give because God gave it to you to give. “Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.”¹¹⁰ We wrongly think that all the money we earn is for us and the progress of our family, yet some of it is not bread for us and our family to eat, but seed to give.

Give as an expression of faith. Any wise farmer knows not to eat their seed. Fear of not having enough is the number one reason we hold our money so tightly. Yet, we’re promised that our generosity to God today opens up his generosity to us tomorrow: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ See Matt 5:42, 25:31-40, Mark 12:41-44, Luke 6:38; 14:12-14; 16:1-14 and Acts 20:35.

¹⁰⁶ 2 Cor 8:9

¹⁰⁷ Matt 10:8

¹⁰⁸ 2 Cor 8:5

¹⁰⁹ 2 Cor 9:13

¹¹⁰ 2 Cor 9:10-11

¹¹¹ 2 Cor 9:6

28

THE GIFT OF LEADERSHIP

If your gift... is to lead, do it diligently.

- R O M A N S 12:6, 8

God calls and enables some people to easily excel in casting vision, and in motivating and directing people to harmoniously accomplish the purposes of God. Nehemiah, a gifted leader motivated and organized God's people to rebuild Jerusalem's wall.

The Greek word for lead (*proistamenos*) means to be put in front of or placed as the head of; to take a position of standing over another or a group. It is interesting that Paul uses a specific tense of the word¹¹² that suggests "a collective leadership model or one in which people have asked someone to take the position of ruler"¹¹³ – something quite different from domineering, self-exalting or self-commis-sioning leadership.

In another list of gifts, Paul mentions the gift of administration.¹¹⁴ Having some overlapping meaning with *proistamenos*, the Greek word for administration (*kubernhseis*) was used in the ancient world to describe someone governing a city or captaining a boat – this is someone with a knack for leveraging and organising people, processes, tasks and resources for maximized effect. These kinds of people have a knack for creating processes, anticipating problems, effectively utilizing resources, co-ordinating people and delegating responsibilities to accomplish tasks.

Still today, gifted leaders influence and organize others to reach a bigger vision. The best amongst them aim to not just get things done, but to grow people in the process. Take Paul as an example, a gifted leader whose driving ambition was to develop Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered and spiritually mature followers of Jesus.¹¹⁵

Paul says the gifted leader should do so with *spoudei*, a word that means "serious-minded and whole-hearted diligence." Since the health of any group – a church, a ministry, an organization, a business, a nation – hinges so much on the quality of its leadership, Paul calls forth the best in God's leaders who in turn will call forth the best in God's people. Setting the pace for others to follow,¹¹⁶ leadership that is lazy, distracted, insecure or half-hearted does not serve the church nor any of its ministries well. With so much hinging on them, is there a gifted leader in your church who you can pray for and encourage in the next day?

¹¹² Passive participle

¹¹³ Paul Jewett in Romans, p752

¹¹⁴ 1 Cor 12:28

¹¹⁵ Gal 5:19, Rom 12:11, Col 1:28-29 and Eph 4:11-16

¹¹⁶ Leadership expert John Maxwell coined this phrase: Speed of the leader, speed of the team.

29

WIRED TO ORGANIZE OTHERS

When the leaders ... take the lead, when the people willingly follow, praise the Lord!

- Judges 5:2

Since leadership makes the world go round, praise God for those people who, through a combination of traits that they received genetically and/or through early life experience, echo the wiring of Benjamin Franklin, Graça Machel and Nelson Mandela. They seem to just have the intuitive ability to attract and direct followers. They usually step up quite comfortably into leadership roles or positions and do not seem to fear confrontation.

Is there a friend, colleague or relative with this gift whom you can thank God for or encourage in the next day? They are at heart “big picture” people with a knack for motivating and helping people get from “here” to “there”. They stubbornly believe in the malleability of the world. Like all gifts, leadership wiring needs to be supported by vital leadership skills.¹¹⁷

When combined with perceiver strengths, one’s leadership can be convictional, visionary and strong.¹¹⁸ When paired with teacher strengths, these kinds of leaders are often thought leaders who persuade through sound arguments. Combined with encourager strengths, they are

communicative, inspirational and skilfull at using their platform to grow people. Twinned with strong practical strengths, they are managerial, process-orientated and exceptional at assuming responsibility. With enterprising strengths in the mix, they tend to maximise the system and excel in wisdom-based decision-making.¹¹⁹ United with responder strengths, they tend to be especially caring and approachable, making it easier for relationally-attuned people to entrust themselves to their leadership.

If you have this gift, it’s important to pay attention to the ways this gift may do damage to your own soul, or worse yet, other people. Depending on your own particular gift mix, beware of being so big-pictured that you are blind to the details, so convinced in your own plans and path forward that you forget to seek counsel and give credit to others, so in control that you become controlling and fail to raise up others, so excited about the future that you miss the present, so communicative that you fail to listen, so responsible for others that you burn yourself out through lack of rest or delegation, so objective that you pay no attention to the emotional state of the people you lead, or so focused on the end goal that you treat people as a mere means to that end.

¹¹⁷ If you have this gift, by all means develop it. As with all the natural wirings, your gift comes to full usefulness as it is undergirded by experience and the acquisition of skills, so learn the skills of communicating clearly, articulating values and vision well, developing strategy and processes, delegating responsibilities, building an empowered team, talent-spotting and cultivating and celebrating the gifts of others.

¹¹⁸ Meaning, it is able to keep the destination in mind and carve out a clear path toward it, regardless of whatever obstacles and complexities exist.”

¹¹⁹ They can thus bring order out of chaos, by setting up structures, systems and methods for others to follow.

30

EVERYONE, LEAD!

Follow me and I will make you a fisher of people.

- M A T T H E W 4 : 1 9

Everyone is a leader of sorts. Leadership is essentially the influence we have on others. All of us, regardless of our gifting, have at least a few people we can influence in the right direction. For example, Peter had a more obvious gift of leadership than Andrew his brother. Yet it was still Andrew's God-given privilege to lead his brother Peter to Jesus.¹²⁰ Since people are, by nature, most ready to listen to people they trust and respect, if there are any people who trust and respect you – be they friends, family members, colleagues, employees or neighbours – then you have influence.¹²¹

A heart to follow qualifies one to lead in God's kingdom. When Jesus called His apostles He did not immediately make them "fishers of people" – or spiritual leaders of others. First, they entrusted themselves to His leadership. Jesus said "Follow me" and in the process of their followership, He readied them for leadership. Our culture celebrates leadership, but where are the conferences, podcasts and books on followership? If

everybody wants to be a leader in every sphere of their life, who will follow? And in that clashing of egos how will we get anything done? In contrast, Jesus teaches us to yeild our egos to His purposes, and to find our security in Him as we follow him.¹²²

God may call people without an evident gift of leadership to lead. God's power is often displayed best in contrast to human weakness. This is why many (although certainly not all)¹²³ of the biblical leaders we see were people our culture would not have chosen to follow. Think of Moses – his first attempt at leading even the people he cares about falls flat.¹²⁴ Only after he has been broken in and stripped of his elite reputation as a prince of Egypt, does God use him to lead others. Think of Gideon – when God calls him to lead he says, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest and I am the least in my family?"¹²⁵ Think of Timothy – naturally timid and fearful, yet Paul urged him to lead by greater reliance upon the Spirit.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ John 1:40-42

¹²¹ As a further argument for the leadership imperative to influence others given to all believers, consider the metaphors Jesus uses for all his followers – yeast in dough, seeds in the field of the world, light in the darkness, salt to arrest decay.

¹²² We should trust God not only for anointed leadership, but anointed followership in the body of Christ. An example of God calling some to lead in the achievement of a goal, while also calling some to follow is found in Ex 31:1-6, "I have chosen Bezalel to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship... Moreover I have appointed Oholiab to help him."

¹²³ For example Joshua, Deborah, Nehemiah, Esther, Peter, Paul and Priscilla seemed to exude natural leadership ability.

¹²⁴ Ex 2:11-14

¹²⁵ Judges 6:15

¹²⁶ 2 Tim 1:6-7

A close-up, front-facing portrait of a lion's head. The lion's eyes are a golden-yellow color, looking directly at the camera. Its fur is a mix of light brown and tan, with some darker spots around the eyes. The lion's nose is dark and prominent. Its whiskers are long and white, extending outwards from the sides of its face. The background is not visible, as the lion's face fills most of the frame.

UNLEASH YOUR GIFTS

31

N O T B Y T A L E N T

*“Not by might, not by power,
but by my Spirit,” says the Lord.*

- Z e c h a r i a h 4 : 6

When Zerubbabel led a team of builders to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, God spoke this word to them. Yes, they had building materials, talented and gifted builders, and plenty of motivation, but God wanted them to know that these were not enough. They needed the Spirit of God, the powerful Breath or Ruach of God.¹²⁷

Throughout this journey, we’ve noted that, for most if not all of the spiritual gifts, a natural wiring often undergirds it. In other words, when we start to follow Jesus, God breathes supernaturally into our natural talents, making them a superpower (spiritual gift). But therein lies a grave danger: we may wrongly trust in our own competencies, rather than in the breath of the Spirit upon our competency.

In contrast, when we surrender our small talents and resources to God, we are like the little boy offering up his lunch to Jesus who then takes this gift and supernaturally multiplies it to feed thousands.¹²⁸ In Jesus’ hands, our talents can be amply used, but their disproportionate impact is not because of our talents, but rather because they’re in the miracle-working hands of Jesus. Think of David as a teen. Later, God would take the

few talents he’d honed – shepherding sheep, slinging stones at predators, putting prayer-poems to song with his harp in hand – and multiply them, making David a shepherd of people, a slayer of giants, a writer of Psalms. Yet his secret was not in relying on his talents but rather offering them up to God. He didn’t say to Goliath, “I come against you with years of slingstone experience.” No, his declaration was, “I come against you in the name of the Living God.”¹²⁹

That’s one reason God so often brings us to the end of ourselves. If so, then like Paul we can pray, “But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”¹³⁰ Mind you, that’s why God may sometimes even give us spiritual gifts in areas where there was no trace of natural talent to start.

¹²⁷ The next verse fascinates: “What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘Grace! Grace!’” (Zech 4:7) The point is that Zerubbabel and his builders, through the power of the Spirit, would enjoy such effectiveness in their work that it would be evident to all that God’s gracious hand had been involved. This points to Paul’s choice of word for spiritual gifts as “charismata” best translated as “grace gifts”.

¹²⁸ John 6:9

¹²⁹ 1 Samuel 17:45

¹³⁰ 2 Cor 1:9



H A R V E S T T O O L S

Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

- M A T T H E W 9 : 3 7 – 3 8

Christians tend to think that evangelism – introducing people to Jesus – is an enormously important thing to do (and it is!) but too often, they believe somebody else more gifted than them should do it. Unfortunately, all this talk about spiritual gifts provides the perfect excuse, especially if one can simply say: “I don’t have the gift of evangelism.”

But guess what? There’s no mention of the gift of evangelism in the Bible. Sure’s there’s the five-fold ministry office of Evangelist, but there’s no gift. In fact, each of the five offices mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 are not meant to monopolise their particular ministry, but multiply it across the entire church, equipping everybody to play their part.

All of us must have a heart to play our part in helping new people to find and follow Jesus. Think of the self-doubting, soft-spoken Timothy. That’s hardly the personality type we imagine suitable for faith-sharing, yet even he is commanded to “Do the work of an evangelist.”¹³¹

To reiterate, our gifts don’t provide an excuse for any of us to not reach out. However, they may inform our own preferred way of doing it. In short, all of our gifts are tools for bringing in Jesus’ harvest:

In prophecy-evangelism we may be led by the Spirit to share something specific with someone, or speak penetratingly to their hearts.¹³² In encourager-evangelism we may share our faith with others in an energetic and infectious way.¹³³ In mercy-evangelism, we might demonstrate the gospel through our compassionate interest in people – as the relationship strengthens, we find authentic ways to tell the ones we care about the most about the One who cares about them even more.¹³⁴ In service-evangelism, we enact the gospel through what many call servant-evangelism. By humbly serving the needs of people and communities, we break through hard hearts and are able to tell people how Jesus inspires our practical love.¹³⁵ In teacher-evangelism, we’re able to thoughtfully engage people’s questions and explain the gospel in a thorough, compelling way.¹³⁶ In organizer-evangelism, we lead ministries, teams and ministries into collective evangelism efforts.¹³⁷ In giver-evangelism, we might open people’s hearts through our generosity and open homes.¹³⁸

¹³¹ 2 Tim 4:5

¹³² 1 Cor 14:24-25, John 1:47-49

¹³³ Acts 8:4, Mark 5:19

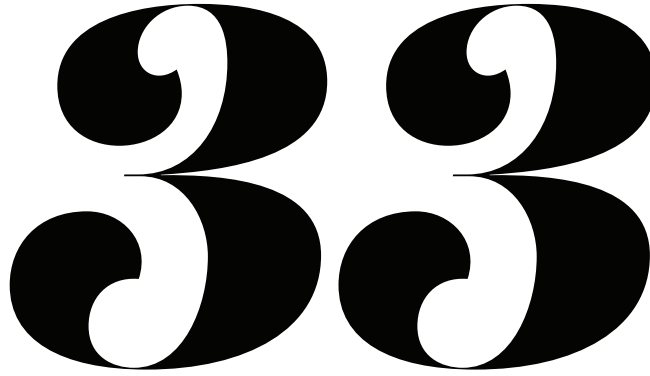
¹³⁴ John 1:43-44, 1 Thes 2:8

¹³⁵ Gal 6:10, Rom 2:4

¹³⁶ Acts 8:30-34

¹³⁷ Acts 2:14, Matt 4:19 – note that Jesus’ choice image for evangelism was not a fishing rod but a fishing net, a collective task.

¹³⁸ 2 Cor 9:12-13, Ex 19:7-12



LEAN INTO COMMUNITY

*Now if the foot should say,
"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the
body," it would not for that reason cease to be part
of the body. And if the ear should say,
"Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the
body," it would not for that reason cease to be part
of the body. If the whole body were an eye,
where would the sense of hearing be?
If the whole body were an ear,
where would the sense of smell be?*
- 1 Corinthians 12:15-17

One reason we need to do our lives and follow Jesus in an interdependent community of diversely gifted people is because we're all so hopelessly non-gifted at some things. Incredibly, this is not a design fault, but the intentional design of God. Our weaknesses are meant to encourage us to lean on each other.¹³⁹

While ministering on earth in bodily form, Jesus personified a unity of all-rounded perfection within Himself. He had the Spirit and all of the gifts without measure. The One who came to unify all things under His leadership holds every gift and grace. Of course, in His humanity He needed companionship and people to partner with, but in His kingdom, competencies and gifting, He was the

closest thing to a legitimate one-man-show. When He ascended to heaven, His ministry to the world transitioned. No longer would He minister through His physical body, now He would do so through His spiritual body – the universal church present in 1000s of local church microcosms. Where do each of us personally fit into this great plan? Like a beautiful thread in a complex tapestry, every single one of us has been given the Spirit and a fraction of Christ's own multi-splendoured gifts.

Why does God do this? Not so that we can jostle and compete with each other or show off our gifts to each other, as though we have somehow been specially singled out as one of His favourites. No! God has given us a measure of gifting as a means to drive us toward each other, so that each community will become – like Jesus on earth once was – a unity of diversity.

Try life for one week without a hand, an ear or a nose, and you'll soon see how much less effective you are. If we are to reach maturity and maximum impact in the world, all of us need all of us.

Why not take a minute to thank God now for the faith community He has placed you in?

¹³⁹ The idea that we need well-rounded teams not well-rounded individuals, has become a popular idea in more recent times. Management guru, Peter Drucker, points out in his book *The Effective Executive*, "The idea that there are 'well-rounded' people, people who have only strengths and no weaknesses, is a prescription for mediocrity if not incompetence. Strong people always have weaknesses too. Where there are peaks there are valleys."

31

D O N ' T W A S T E Y O U R A B I L I T Y

*The master said,
 "Well done, good and faithful servant!
 You have been faithful with a few things;
 I will put you in charge of many things.
 Come and share your master's happiness!"*

- M A T T H E W 2 5 : 2 1

Jesus expects us to so diligently use the resources, opportunities and abilities He gives us, that they multiply over time. He tells a parable so effectively that the English word "talent" derives from His Greek word used in this story (*talanton*). In it, He tells of a wealthy man who leaves, 5 talents (*KJV*) or "bags of gold" (*NIV*) with one servant, 2 with another and 1 with yet another. He does this "according to their abilities."

The third servant wastes his talent, and says to the master, "I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth."

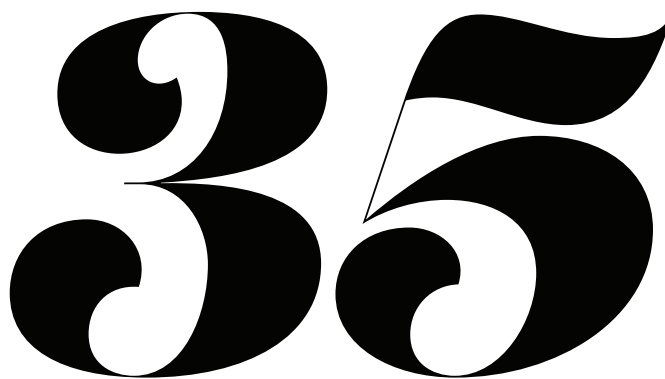
As we explore the master's interaction with this servant¹⁴⁰ we discover 3 obstacles to the investment of our gifts: First, we may be lazy or "unenterprising, timid, slothful, suspicious, heartless, spiritless or idle."¹⁴¹ Second, we may issue excuses about our lack of adequacy, but when we look at the people in the Bible God uses, we realize that God uses all of

us despite ourselves: Abraham was too old, Jacob was too insecure, Leah was too unattractive, Joseph was too exploited, Moses was too inarticulate, Gideon was too poor, Rahab was too immoral, Jeremiah was too depressed, John the Baptist was too eccentric, Zacchaeus was too unpopular. Third, we may be too self-absorbed. Notice the servants repeating the words, "I ... I ... I" Serving God's purpose requires a measure of self-forgetfulness, love for God and love for others.

When we faithfully deploy and develop our gifts and abilities for the good of the church and the world, like the first and second servants did, Jesus promises 3 rewards: First, Christ praises us: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Second, Christ promotes us: "You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things." Third, Christ celebrates with us: "Come and share in your master's happiness." Since the church and the kingdom is eternal, any God-directed effort we make to strengthen the church or bring God's kingdom in the world, will have eternal consequences, which we will happily spend all of eternity celebrating.

¹⁴⁰ Matt 25:24-27

¹⁴¹ This description of the Greek word for laziness comes from FF Bruce in his commentary on Matthew.



COMPLETE YOUR MINISTRY

Tell Archippus, “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.”

– Colossians 4:17

Tagged onto the end of a letter to a church, Paul speaks to just one person, Archippus.¹⁴² So generic is the encouragement that we can imagine our own name in the place of his. What do we learn from this verse?

You have one or more ministry callings in the Lord. There are “good works prepared in advance for us to do.”¹⁴³ Though we’re all called to strengthen His church, to make disciples and to make a difference in the world, God has specific and unique plans to use us to do these things. Some calls are short-term, lasting a few weeks, months or years perhaps.¹⁴⁴ Other calls are life-long – in which we must channel our contribution in one direction for decades it seems.

As you stay close to the Caller, you may discover new ministry callings. This man received his calling “in the Lord.” Still today, God may speak to us about our call in our personal prayer-and-Scripture times, or through a dream, or through a whisper of his Spirit, or through a prophetic word from others. But let’s not overlook

the many less direct ways He may guide us: He may direct us through our passions – those activities or needs in the church or world that make us come alive.¹⁴⁵ Or through our experiences – the wounds we heal from usually enable us to minister to others in the same pain.¹⁴⁶ Or through the requests of others – someone may ask us to do something.¹⁴⁷ Or through the feedback of others – as we venture out in something, someone may say, “Wow, God really used you.” An enormous way He directs us, is through the gifts and abilities He has given us.

Initiate. Focus. Persevere. We may not know exactly why Paul believed that Archippus was in danger of not completing his ministry call and what “complete your ministry” specifically meant to him, yet as we speculate, we can imagine God saying something similar to each of us. Was he delaying obedience? In that case it means, “Just do it.” Was he distracted by less important things? Then it means, “Focus on your work.” Was he discouraged by few results? Then Paul means, “Take a long view on the results.” For you, whichever of these 3 shoes fit, put them on and continue walking out your long obedience in the same direction.

¹⁴² We know nothing about him except for a little verse, Philemon 2, which seems to suggest that he lived in the home of a leader called Philemon and his wife Apphia, perhaps he was their son.

¹⁴³ Eph 2:10

¹⁴⁴ Our callings tend to morph over time, leading from one thing to another, especially as we go through different seasons of life.

¹⁴⁵ Two examples: Eric Liddel, the Olympic runner used to say, “When I run, I feel his pleasure.” Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, as a little boy, used to have a map of China on his wall. He would fall asleep staring at it, dreaming of going there one day.

¹⁴⁶ Rick Warren writes in Purpose Driven Life: “God never wastes a hurt. In fact your greatest ministry will likely come out of your greatest hurt. Who could better minister to the parents of a Down Syndrome child than another couple who have a child afflicted in the same way. Who could better help an alcoholic recover than someone who fought that demon and found freedom? Who could better comfort a wife whose husband has left her for an affair than a woman who went through the same thing?”

¹⁴⁷ Esther 4:14 – Esther only stepped up to the plate when Mordecai suggested she should.

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P U R S U E C H U R C H M A T U R I T Y

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

- E P H E S I A N S 4 : 1 5 - 1 6

If the first Reformation saw the Word of God moving from the few clergy to the entire community, then the second Reformation sees the work of God moving from the ambit of the few to the majority.

A healthy, mature church, says Paul, is one where each and every person is involved in speaking and in serving. In Romans 12, Paul gives greater definition to these vocal and active contributions.¹⁴⁸

If every person uses their at-least-one-of-seven gifts, and if every follower of Jesus grows in all seven ways regardless of gifting, then we will have a mature church with a healthy culture and supernatural impact on the world around it. But see, now we also have a definition of such a body of believers:

It is a compassionate church, inspired by mercy gifts, with a culture of genuine care – this body has a tender heart. It is an organized church, led by leadership gifts. With a culture of moving forward in harmonious effort, this body has a strong and agile spine. It is a Spirit-led church, sensitized to

God's whispers by the prophecy gifts. With a culture of hearing God, this body has keen eyes. It is a Word-fed church, thanks to teaching gifts. With a culture of engaging Scripture, this body has a sharp mind. It is a servant church, catalyzed by service gifts. With a culture of meeting real needs, this body has calloused hands. It is an enthusiastic church, propelled by the encouragement gifts. With a culture of celebration, this body has an affirming mouth. It is a well-resourced church, in the wake of the giving gifts. With a culture of generosity, this body has outstretched arms.

A church with a tender heart, a strong spine, keen eyes, a sharp mind, calloused hands, an affirming mouth and outstretched arms – that's the church Jesus died for, the body Jesus is raising up for a world that so desperately needs it. We dare not impoverish it by our lack of contribution and participation.

¹⁴⁸ It is interesting that the 7 gifts can be, albeit imperfectly, divided into these two categories: serving (service, mercy, giving, leading) and speaking (teaching, encouraging, prophesying).

Lord Jesus Christ,

I'm sorry for doing things my own way.

I'm sorry for living a life away from you.

Please forgive my sin.

I acknowledge that you are the Son of God.

I acknowledge that you died on the cross for me.

Please adopt me into Your family.

I want to live as a child of God from today for the rest of

my life and be with you for all eternity.

Amen