

GIFTED TO SERVE

"As each has received a gift,
use it to serve one another..."

(1 Peter 4:10)

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Part 1: Gifts of God

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Over the next four weeks, we're going to explore many of the gifts with which God equips His people—what they are, how they come, what they're used for, what you can do to develop them, and how to make the most of them.

Some Christians are afraid of the subject of spiritual gifts, because they've witnessed abuses of power, bizarre behaviors, and harmful treatments. Are the gifts really necessary?

Some Christ-followers imagine that they have no significant gifts. Is that really true?

Some Christians wear their gifts proudly, like merit badges. Is that what they are?

Others know they have gifts, but seldom use them because they see no opportunity. Must we just wait for the weather to change?

My aim, over the next month, is to help you understand why God has given gifts and to whom, and to instill confidence in the supernatural ways God works through people, as well as discernment of counterfeits and aberrations.

I encourage you to make notes of points that seem to speak to you, as well as questions that arise from what I have to say. If you will, share them with me, so I may address them, if I am able. Even more helpful, if you will join us Thursday nights on Zoom from 7:00-8:00 for WordREFLECT, we can discuss your thoughts and experiences together.

The Scripture that drives this theme is found in 1 Peter 4:10 – *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another."*

This underscores four vital points, which I'll briefly introduce at this point:

- **EACH ONE** has a gift.
No one has been omitted; God has given gifts to each one of His children.
- Each one has **RECEIVED A GIFT**.
These gifts have been received from God; they are not environmentally formed.

- USE it.
God's gifts are meant to be used; don't waste them, don't bury them.
- Use it to SERVE ONE ANOTHER.
They have not been given for your own benefit. Spending them on yourself will not be fulfilling.

Gifts of God

There are three New Testament passages that explicitly mention gifts from God for those who follow Him—they are found in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12. A brief examination of each passage will give us needed background on the subject.

Gifts of the Father

Romans 12

*12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same **FUNCTION**, 12:5 so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another. 12:6 And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If the gift is **prophecy** (ability to prophesy), that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. 12:7 If it is **service** (serving others), he must serve; if it is **teaching**, he must teach; 12:8 if it is **exhortation** (encouragement), he must exhort; if it is **contributing** (giving), he must do so with sincerity; if it is **leadership**, he must do so with diligence; if it is **showing mercy** (kindness), he must do so with cheerfulness.*

This list, and those to follow, should not be viewed as exhaustive. In other words, that Paul listed seven motivational gifts does not mean there are only seven and can be no others. Rather, these lists are suggestive of the *types* of gifts that fit in each of the three categories.

As you can see by the bold-faced UPPER CASE highlight, this group of gifts has to do with our *functions* as members of the church (the body of Christ, the family of God). Therefore, I believe these gifts come to us from the Father, as personal motivations for our family relationships. These gifts form our personalities and motivate the way we function most effectively among other believers.

Let's look at each one briefly (I think you'll see yourself described here):

Prophecy – (not policing, but) discerning righteousness and injustice, and prodding faithfulness.

Serving – recognizing others' needs, with a desire to lend practical help

Teaching – yearning to bring understanding of God and His ways

Exhortation – readiness to encourage faith and obedience

Contributing – eager generosity to meet needs

Leadership – ability to organize and coordinate the efforts of others

Merciful – tenderhearted patience and compassion

I remind you that *each one* has received such a gift—it's the way God made you. A motivational gift is not something you choose; it's the way you naturally see the people and the relationships around you. It is the Father's gift to you, to make you who you are (who He meant you to be). You are the best and most fulfilled you when you operate in this gift.

Your motivational gift is what attracts you to some people, and irritates you about others. These gifts drive your personal passion—defining what matters most to you about the ways people relate. The motivational gift God has given you will provide enthusiasm for a course of learning and should suggest your career choice.

It's not unusual to recognize more than one of these gifts operating to some degree in your life. In fact, the longer you sincerely walk with Christ and yield yourself to the influence of His Spirit, the more likely you will have seen many, if not all, of these gifts in your experience.

Yet, most people will acknowledge that one of them is expressed more often than all the others—a primary gift—with one or two in the secondary or supporting position.

Do you recognize the primary motivational gift your Heavenly Father has given you?

Considering our theme text again, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another," we may recognize the universal and inherent nature of our Father's motivational gifts.

Gifts of the Son

Ephesians 4

^{4:11} *It was he who gave some as **apostles**, some as **prophets**, some as **evangelists**, and some as **pastors and teachers**, ^{4:12} to equip the saints for **THE WORK OF MINISTRY**, that is, to build up the body of Christ, ^{4:13} until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.*

Again, the bold-faced UPPER CASE highlight reveals that these gifts from Christ the Son, given to His church at the time of His return to Heaven, are designed to direct and enable God's people to do *the work of ministry*—their service in the church and the world.

There are only four (or, perhaps five) gifts in this list, and they are, in fact, gifted individuals whose gifts are designed to provide stability, direction, leadership, and maturity for the church on earth in the absence of Jesus. (Some divide the last two, but I believe the underlying Greek construction suggests a composite, instead; thus, four, instead of five ascension gifts—pastors must teach, and teachers must shepherd.)

Let's look at each one briefly:

Apostles – ground-breaking church planters, reaching new people groups

Prophets – exhorters who speak for God with divine insight

Evangelists – soul-winners, who are passionate about leading people to Christ

Teaching pastors – teachers who nurture spiritual maturity

You may not BE one of these equippers in a vocational role, but the gift will form and guide your heart as you pray and as you speak with others.

Do you long to see others planted in a local church (the apostle's heart)?

Do you carry a burden for believers to express the righteousness of Christ in their lives (the prophet's longing)?

Does your heart break for those who are unaware or resistant to the Gospel of Jesus (the evangelist's burden)?

Are you eager to explain the Scriptures to others, guiding them to apply the message to their daily lives (the teaching pastor's chief concern)?

Again, I remind you that you do not take such a role for yourself just because you want it; it must be appointed by the Lord. These are HIS gifts to His church. Nor are they necessarily formal titles or positions within the structure of the church.

That said, I confess that the church has been neglectful of some of these roles, and it has created a spiritual vacuum. As a result, we are now in a season where some are trying to revive neglected roles by self-appointment and self-proclamation, printing the titles on their book covers or business cards without genuine credentials. It's a mistake. We can't force revival just because we see a need. We'll only make another Ishmael.

Credentials are more than paperwork; the word shares the same root as "credibility." We grant credentials to those who have proved their ministry, those who have credible gifts. It's a function of the organized church, who set standards for education and demonstration and fruit. Lacking that, it's just one person proclaiming, "I am," when no one knows if he really is.

Surely, each of you has had (or will have) each of these types of gifted individuals serving you as you follow Jesus Christ. Every believer, and every church, needs them all. These gifts form the character and ministries of the local churches.

Do you recognize the influence of these gifts of the Son of God in your life?

Reflecting on our theme text, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another,”* the Son’s leadership gifts prompt each of us to get personally involved in ministry at some level, and in a particular vein.

Next week, we’ll consider the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, described in 1 Corinthians 12. Then, we’ll begin to explore the effective application of God’s copious gifts in the church and in the world.

