

GIFTED TO SERVE

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

(1 Peter 4:10)

GIFTED TO SERVE Part 2: One Primary Purpose

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We are exploring the many gifts with which God equips His people—what they are, how they come to us, what they're used for, what you can do to develop them, and how to use them most effectively.

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.

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:

- EACH ONE has a gift. (no one is omitted)
- Each one has RECEIVED A GIFT. (they are not environmentally formed)
- USE it. (don't waste it)
- Use it to SERVE ONE ANOTHER. (spending it on yourself will not be fulfilling)

Gifts of God

Three New Testament passages explicitly mention gifts from God for those who follow Him—Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12. I introduced the first two passages last Sunday.

Briefly, Romans 12:4-8 mentions prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, contributing, leading, and showing mercy.

These are the Father's Motivational Gifts, which form our personalities and motivate the way we function most effectively among other believers. They guide the functions of our interpersonal relations.

An insightful question was offered last week about these gifts:

How do these gifts differ from similarly defined personality traits found in people who don't know Jesus?

The answer is: essentially they don't! These gifts are universal; they are not unique to Christians.

Motivational gifts are not learned from your parents, nor chosen for yourself; they describe the way God made you in your mother's womb. That's why I said they "form your personality."

Why are two children of the same parents, who were raised in the same household, fed the same food, and educated in the same schools so DIFFERENT from each other? The primary answer is: motivational gifts.

One may be intellectual, the other creative. One may be gregarious, the other more of a loner. One may be a talker, the other a thinker. One may be a writer, the other a handyman. One may be generous, the other thrifty. It's how God made you, and how He made everyone else, too. They are all necessary.

Your motivational gift drives your passion, and colors how you tend to see all those around you. You tend to think what the world needs now is... more of your gift!

- The prophet thinks people need to hear the TRUTH.
- The servant thinks people need HELP.
- The teacher thinks they need UNDERSTANDING.
- The exhorter thinks they need ENCOURAGEMENT.
- The giver thinks they need RESOURCES.
- The leader thinks they need ORGANIZATION.
- The merciful think they need KINDNESS.

But, apart from a surrendered relationship with Jesus Christ, your motivational gift is just a relational inclination. It's the power of the Holy Spirit, fueling your gift, that will make you into the best and most fulfilled you that you can be—THAT is your destiny!

The other group of gifts we considered were found in Ephesians 4: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teaching pastors. These are the Son's Leadership Gifts, which are designed to direct and enable God's people to do THE WORK OF MINISTRY—your service in the church and the world. They describe ministry roles.

The leadership gifts provide stability, direction, leadership, and maturity for the church on earth in the absence of Jesus.

Doubtless, your heart and mind have been formed and guided by these gifted individuals, and it shows in the way you pray to God and converse with others.

As gifts of leadership, they generate particular burdens of ministry:

- To see healthy churches formed.

- To see Christians live faithfully.
- To see those far from Christ brought close to Him.
- To see believers rooted and grounded in the Scriptures.

The third prominent list of spiritual gifts, which I now mention for the first time in this series, is found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

12:4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. 12:5 And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. 12:6 And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. 12:7 To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. 12:8 For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom (wise advice), and another the message of knowledge (special knowledge) according to the same Spirit, 12:9 to another (unusual) faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 12:10 to another (power for) performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits (source of spiritual messages), to another different kinds of (unknown) tongues, and to another the interpretation of (messages in) tongues. 12:11 It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.

This is the passage most Pentecostal Christians think of when they speak about the gifts of God, but this is only one of the categories of God's gifts.

Some gifts come from the Father in the formation of our souls, some come from the Son of God for the mobilization of His Church, and some come from the Holy Spirit for the demonstration of the Kingdom of God. These are the latter.

Here are the highlights of the Spirit's Gifts:

The message of wisdom – an insightful application of divine wisdom

The message of knowledge – knowledge of facts that are hidden

Faith – unusual surge of confidence in God

Gifts of healing – power to heal sicknesses

Performance of miracles – power to work miracles

Prophecy – proclaiming what is in God's heart

Discernment of spirits – recognizing the source (good or evil) of spiritual expressions

Different kinds of tongues – an expression of thanks or praise in an unlearned language

The interpretation of tongues – interpreting a message in tongues for others to understand

These are generally described in three sub-groups:

Knowledge gifts – wisdom, knowledge, discerning of spirits

Power gifts – faith, healing, miracles

Vocal gifts – prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues

These are the Spirit's Demonstration Gifts. These are plainly supernatural gifts designed to enhance natural circumstances or conditions through supernatural power.

They are given to individuals in the church for use in the life of the church (that's not to say they cannot be used elsewhere, but the focus is clearly among the church gatherings).

The phrase in the passage that governs the distribution and use of these gifts is: "the benefit of all." These gifts have a wider benefit than the end user; they are "for the church." The Spirit has in view all who witness or receive the fruit of these gifts.

There's a very important BACKSTORY here. The context of this passage begins in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul discussed the manner of receiving the communion meal (the bread and the cup). He emphasized that they were to share that meal together with deep respect for one another—honoring one another, waiting for one another, and caring for one another.

In chapter 12, he emphasized spiritual unity in the midst of natural diversity. The biblical version of "all for one and one for all." Only then did he mention the gifts of the Spirit, in that vein of "one for all."

The aim of these gifts is to bless the people of God with overflowing love and unity, thus empowering them for their life and ministry in the world. This he underscored in chapter 13, as he defined and described the love that comes from God to drive it all.

And finally, in chapter 14, Paul cautioned the church against various misuses of the gifts of prophecy and tongues, emphasizing again the need for loving respect and deference, so that others are well-served and benefitted.

So the Spirit's demonstration gifts reveal the supernatural Kingdom that is coming down from Heaven—by knowledge, power, and words—shown through the love and unity of the Church, Jesus' faithful followers.

If we return for a moment to our theme verse, 1 Peter 4:10, we can see each of these three categories included: *"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another."*

The Father's motivational gifts:
"As each has received a gift..."

The Son's leadership gifts:
"...use it..."

The Spirit's demonstration gifts:
"...to serve one another."

Now that we've had a look at each of the three groups of God's gifts and outlined their uses, let's zoom out to take a wider view of our subject.

All of these gifts—whether motivational, leadership, or demonstration gifts—have one primary purpose.

One Primary Purpose

The one primary purpose for the gifts God has given us is *to build up the church*, both in quality and quantity.

Jesus came to our world to seek and save those who are lost.

And when He returned to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to prepare the Church to be His Royal Bride. That's what's happening right now—between Jesus' departure (almost 2100 years ago) and His return (sometime in the near future)—the Spirit is drawing people to trust in Christ, and then transforming them from the inside out to THINK like Jesus, and LOVE like Jesus, and SPEAK like Jesus, and ACT like Jesus. He is turning us all into a bride suited to accompany the King of kings.

There are three areas of spiritual development in which the Holy Spirit is at work right now to unite us and build us up together as the Church. They are:

- Identity
- Trust
- Passion

Identity

The first of these is IDENTITY. We all have one! Some are ashamed of theirs, while others are proud. Many are simply uncertain...

Some get stuck in an old identity that no longer suits them, but they can't see a way to change. [When I wanted to stop using drugs...] This is the effect of all kinds of addictions. Breaking a habit of sin is never as easy as just wanting to.

Let's see how the Holy Spirit uses the gifts of God to develop and strengthen our sense of identity.

We derive our natural sense of identity from a wide variety of factors:

- Our heritage (family name, history, achievements, or infamy)
- Our upbringing (family relationships, security, provision, responsibilities)
- Our education (teachers, subjects, grades, degrees)

- Our friends (closeness, reliability, righteousness, popularity)
- Our pursuits (successes/failures, wealth/poverty, knowledge, skills, challenge/boredom)
- Our physicality (good health or poor, tall or short, thin or fat, good looking or plain)
- Our experiences (positive/negative, wins/defeats, gains/losses, traumas/recoveries)

Some of these—like heritage and upbringing—eventually settle into a stable pattern, but the others form a shifting landscape that may fluctuate throughout our lives, either because we choose to make changes or because changes happen to us.

Last week, as I read Mark 6, I was stopped in my tracks by verse 3:

Mark 6:3 *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him.*

The people of Jesus' hometown identified Him by His trade, His parent, and His siblings, and these things blinded them to who He had become.

Mark 6:4 *Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household."*

It is naturally (and normally) hard for those who have known you one way, to recognize significant change in you. And their narrowmindedness limits the impact you may have with them.

Mark 6:5 *And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.*

If you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, you have a NEW identity in Christ!

Yet not altogether new, for you are still *you*—your heritage, upbringing, education, friendships, pursuits, physicality, and past experiences still inform your sense of self.

But it is as if you were *adopted* into a new family—you have a new name, a new family, and a new social environment to enjoy and get used to.

Or, if you *moved* to another country to live—you would have a new language to learn, and new customs and rules and opportunities to embrace.

You would ignore the changes to your expected new lifestyle at your own peril. As difficult as the adaptation may be, it would afford you much greater prospects of flourishing.

In Christ Jesus, you're the same you, but identified now by additional parameters—your faith in Christ, your response to the Holy Spirit, and your fellowship with the church. *How can we make those features stronger?*

Your identity is no longer primarily defined by your heritage or your background, nor by your surroundings or your circumstances, (consider the variety of challenges and difficulties that Jesus Himself faced), nor even by your achievements or your failures, for the grace of God is more than enough to cover what you lack and your inconsistencies.

God's grace provides, and your faith embraces your new, *supernatural* identity. You are now:

- A NEW CREATION (new beginning, new destiny)
- FORGIVEN of your sins—all of them
- FREE, no longer bound except by your choice
- CHOSEN to be the treasured possession of God
- RIGHTEOUS, because you trust Christ
- FRIEND OF CHRIST, no longer at odds with Him
- BELOVED CHILD of the Father
- HEIR OF GOD together with Jesus Christ
- CITIZEN OF HEAVEN—passport and ticket provided

All of that is good news, but how can we live like this consistently? Life happens, and our past weaknesses and failings rise again to drag us down to the dust. We forget what we've become.

Luke 11 relates a story about a Jewish man with two sons. One of them, the younger, took his share of the inheritance while his father was still alive, and wasted it, living the high life for himself. Then he ran out of money. The only work he could find was feeding pigs. Then a famine swept the land, and he began to starve. In his misery, he came to himself—he snapped out of it—thinking, “What am I doing here? This is no life for me. I have a family and a home, and even my father's servants are living better than I am! Perhaps there is hope for me.”

He had forgotten who he was, how he was raised, and what his destiny had been—so, while living for the moment, he had wasted his potential and squandered his possibilities.

His father's grace created a bright, new future for him, in spite of his foolishness, and he regained his preferred identity as a favored son.

Whenever you lose sight of your identity in Christ, you, too, may regain it because of God's great grace. But you, too, have a role to play. You must choose to shed the old in order to gain the new.

The new you is the REDEEMED you. And there is nothing of your past that Christ has not redeemed, because He redeemed all of you, as you are. And if redeemed—whether good or bad,

pleasant or painful—that part of you can be turned to usefulness through the strength that Christ gives you.

You don't have to forget your past or disown your past. Instead, give it all to Jesus, and let Him turn it into something meaningful, something useful. He is able to work ALL THINGS together for good for those who love Him and are fulfilling His plan for their lives.

The Father's motivational gifts have everything to do with finding and fulfilling your new identity in Christ.

Each of the seven gifts mentioned by Paul (Romans 12) describes a heart orientation or a passion of the soul.

As you observe and think about the world around you, if disdain for injustices and a cry for justice describe a persistent and familiar angst of yours, then the gift of *prophecy* is strong within you.

Then again, if other people's obvious lack of support and a corresponding desire to help them with whatever they need are what move you most, then the gift of *servicing* is yours.

Or, if you recognize in others a simple, desperate lack of knowledge and you are stirred to meet that need by taking the time to explain things clearly to them, then yours may be the gift of *teaching*.

On the other hand, if, as you observe the world around you, you see a rash of foolishness and a lack of applied wisdom, and feel a corresponding desire to provide thoughtful, direct counsel to guide their steps, then you probably have the gift of *exhortation* (counseling).

However, if what you see the most is people's lack of the material elements they need, and you have a longing and ability to provide those needs, yours is likely the gift of generous *giving* (contributing).

Or, if you see disorganization everywhere, and long to provide direction and coordination to make efforts more effective, then *leadership* is your primary motivational gift.

Yet, if you recognize most the need for tender compassion and you want to be the one to extend mercy and kindness to help lift others, the gift of *mercy* may be yours.

This is how these gifts reveal themselves—in the things that make us lose sleep over other people's needs, and the corresponding desire and ability to try to meet those needs. And these are the gifts that shape our identity, whether or not that gift is applied as our vocation.

More than one of these gifts may operate in your life, depending on circumstances, but as you think back over your life you should be able to recognize one that arises more than the others, or one that others point out to you above the others. (“You’re such a generous person.” “You always have such wise counsel.”)

Others may recognize your motivational gift before you do. Your identity may NOT be how you see yourself, as much as it is how others see you—the kind of person *they* know you to be—until the Holy Spirit reveals your gift and teaches you how to embrace and develop it.

Jesus functioned in ALL of these gifts. That is part of what showed Him to be fully human. And part of the Spirit’s intention for you is to release each of these gifts—in varying degrees—in you, to make you fully human, too.

Still, one of them is likely to characterize you more than the rest. As you recognize which one it is, and give yourself to prayerfully and obediently developing and employing it, you will find greater satisfaction and fulfillment in your life.

It is up to you to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to develop and strengthen the identity the Father has given you. It will not take over without your willingness and intentionality. You must purposefully “take off” the way you formerly identified yourself, and “put on” your new identity every day, until it becomes your second nature.

That leads us to the second area of spiritual development, which we will look into next Sunday: TRUST.