

GIFTED TO SERVE

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

(1 Peter 4:10)

GIFTED TO SERVE Part 3: Developing Spiritually

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We're in the midst of exploring many of the 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.

If you have missed the first two talks in this series, because the amount of information is significant, and not easily summarized, I heartily encourage you to read, listen, or watch them on our website.

The first segment of this series examined three lists of gifts given by God to His people. I categorize them like this:

- Motivational Gifts from God the Father – Romans 12:4-8
- Leadership Gifts from God the Son – Ephesians 4:11-13
- Demonstration Gifts from God the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

These lists are probably not exhaustive, but they provide a clear sense of the *types* of gifts in each category, and their common *purposes*.

With that information as a background, we turned to considering *why* God has given gifts at all.

The one aim they all have in common is to *build up the church* (God's redeemed people). He's preparing a Forever Bride suited to His Eternal Son.

God's gifts provides us with the motivations, the guidance, and the power to develop (mature) spiritually, both individually and collectively, in love and unity.

I identified three areas in a lifetime of spiritual development. They are: identity, trust, and passion.

Without a proper sense of one's Christian identity, the uncertainties of life will throw you off course or sideline you altogether. Identity provides assurance and resilience in the life of a Christian. Identity is built by the Father's motivational gifts.

Without a vital, active trust in the Lord, pride will take over, through self-will and self-protection, turning even good deeds into negative forces. Trust supports humility and perseverance for our Christian journey. Trust is built by the Son's leadership gifts. We'll see how this works in just a few minutes.

Without godly passions, worldly passions will naturally rule, and we will live by our feelings instead of our faith. Godly passion is the fuel of the Christian life that draws us toward God and His will for our lives. Godly passion is built as the Spirit's supernatural gifts promote the love of Christ in our hearts. More about this later.

Christian Identity

Many factors contribute to our natural sense of identity, but only Christ can give us a truly spiritual Christian identity.

The motivational gifts from the Father have everything to do with finding and fulfilling your identity in Christ.

Your identity in Christ cannot (should not) replace your natural identity, which Christ has redeemed. He formed you in love, and He loves *you* just as you have come to Him.

Instead, you will wear your Christian identity as a garment of your new righteousness, never to be removed again. Identification with Christ is how we connect our hearts with His.

Active Trust

As you learn to embrace your new identity in Christ, the Holy Spirit also develops your TRUST in the Savior. This is the second area of spiritual development.

It is safe to say that everyone has some kind of faith. However, faith is only as good (valuable) as its object. If you trust in a chair with a broken leg, you may suffer a fall. If you depend on a car with a clogged fuel line, you won't get far. If you believe in a lie, what good will come of it?

So, what do we do with our natural faith? In what do we naturally trust? We trust what we feel. What we've been told. What we've experienced. What we have studied.

But the heart is deceitful...

God said, through Jeremiah, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick (unhealthy, weak); who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9)

So, if you depend on your feelings, inevitably, you will be led astray. Our feelings are unreliable. They are real, but not necessarily true, or leading us to truth.

And our knowledge is severely limited... even that which is the result of personal experience. Paul wrote, *“Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete.”* (1 Corinthians 13:9)

You know what you know, but we seldom know how much we don't know. And we seldom know perspectives other than our own.

The Scriptures remind us, *“Without faith, it is impossible to please [God].”* (Hebrews 11:6)

And Jesus Himself said, *“All things are possible for the one who [trusts].”* (Mark 9:23)

And yet the Bible says, *“Not everyone is a believer.”* The entire sentence is this: *“Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer.”* (2 Thessalonians 3:2)

In other words, not everyone shares your confidence in Jesus Christ. Some are indifferent to Him, while others are actually opposed to Him and to the Gospel message. They think everyone would be better off as an UNbeliever.

In another place, Paul wrote: *“God has given to everyone the measure of faith”* (Romans 12:3). But the context of that verse makes it clear that he was thinking of a particular kind of faith—faith in Jesus. And, when he said *“everyone,”* the original language makes clear that he meant *“everyone of you,”* referring to the believers in Rome to whom he addressed the letter.

It is through the leadership gifts of the Son of God—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teaching pastors—that God prompts and guides the daily practice and development of our personal trust in Jesus.

When God calls us to Himself, He invites us, first, to trust in Him. So, we begin to believe in Him.

Then God shows us Jesus' faithfulness, His compassion, His authentic love, His selfless sacrifice, His substitutionary death, and then His miraculous resurrection. He reveals His Son as God in human form, and He invites us—not just to believe that He exists, but to trust Him, to trust who He is.

To trust Him for forgiveness from all our sins.

To trust Him for our right standing with the Father.

To trust Him for everlasting salvation.

To trust Him to be with us in every circumstance.

To trust Him to fight for us.

To trust Him to never let us go.

To trust Him to order our steps, to provide our needs, and to secure our victory.

To trust Him to transform us into His likeness, and to be gracious to us at every point of that lifelong process.

Christians are who they are—followers of Jesus Christ—because they trust in Him.

Identification with Christ is how we connect our hearts with His. Trust is how we show others that we identify with Him.

As we follow Jesus, our identity with Him becomes clarified, and our trust in Him deepens.

Godly Passion

To be mature, there is a third area in which we must develop spiritually: our passion.

This is more than the natural passion of youth, for this is a passion that has been tested. In the crucible of life, it has been consumed by the heat until it was gone. Then, by the life of the Holy Spirit, it was resurrected to flourish.

If you haven't had a dream or a vision or a promise from God that has died a natural death, then you do not yet know this passion. For it flows from a well that must be dug in the heat of the day. This passion can only be gained by wrestling with God through the dark night of your soul.

It is precisely the struggle to trust, and to hope, and to love—without assurance, without a sign, and without reward—that births this passion.

It is written concerning Jesus, that *“we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Of all the temptations that Jesus overcame, none are directly mentioned, except one: His struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was arrested. He confided to His closest disciples, *“My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death.”* (Matthew 26:36)

He prayed earnestly, three times, *“My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from Me. Yet I want Your will to be done, not Mine.”* (Matthew 26:39)

It was the closest He ever came to caving in. As He wrestled in prayer, *“He was in such agony of spirit that His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.”* (Luke 22:44)

He rose from the struggle, victorious. He stood up empowered. He said, *“Let’s go”* and *“I am He.”*

This, my friends, depicts the great difference between the “fully human” Jesus and the rest of us—He never caved.

This passion is so much more than the excitement that is stirred by our initial discovery that Christ is real and His love is true. First love is a marker to be remembered—a starting-over place, when we’ve lost our way. But love is meant to grow, and there’s nothing to be compared with seasoned, mature love, that has become a surrendered, devoted love.

Paul wrote: *“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.”* (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Faith, hope, and love—on fire!—describes this passion.

The passion I’m referring to is the persistent enthusiasm of a heart that is surrendered to the love of Christ, full of the Holy Spirit, and joyously embracing opportunities to serve.

Passion is devotion. Love that is focused. Knowledge that is wise. Service that is empowered. Faith that won’t quit. These are the fruit of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The supernatural gifts from the Spirit of God demonstrate the impassioned character of our King Jesus.

They build up the Church until it becomes a united, functioning body of believers, where Christian love prevails and truth is proclaimed and sinners are convicted and the broken are healed.

We need to grow in these ways, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to give ourselves to Him—so completely that He can trust us not to become proud, nor self-centered, nor abusive—until He can use us supernaturally.

Identification with Christ is how we connect our hearts with His. Trust is how we show others that we identify with Him. Passion empowers the revelation of God’s Kingdom.

These three overlap and strengthen each other, maturing each believer, and thus, maturing the whole Church—*“until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:13),

“growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

So far, we have explored three types of gifts from God—motivational gifts, leadership gifts, and demonstration gifts—and underscored the primary purpose of all of them: to build up the Church, developing us spiritually through Christian identity, active trust, and godly passion.

Next Sunday, we’ll learn how we are to use our gifts effectively.