

# GIFTED TO SERVE

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

(1 Peter 4:10)

## GIFTED TO SERVE, Part 4 Twin Functions

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If you have missed the first three talks in this series, I heartily encourage you to read, listen, or watch them on our website.

We’re 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.

In the first segment of this series, we examined three lists of God’s gifts in the New Testament.

I categorize them as:

- 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)

With that as a background, we began to consider *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) as He prepares a Forever Bride suited to His Eternal Son. Last Sunday, we learned of three elements of spiritual development, for which God dispenses His gifts: Christian identity, active trust in Christ, and godly passion for His Kingdom.

Identification with Christ is how we connect our hearts with His. Active trust is how we show others who Jesus is. Godly passion empowers the revelation of God’s Kingdom in our world.

And, God’s gifts to us have one primary purpose: to build up His Church.

And in doing so, they have two main functions: To build up the church—through loving unity (among insiders), and through compassionate evangelism (among outsiders).

### Serving Insiders

The New Testament emphasizes two characteristics of thriving Christians: their love and their unity go hand-in-hand.

Today, we're going to explore the first of these functions, and think about how we practice it.

Jesus said, *"This is My commandment: Love one another as I have loved you."*

Loving the rest of God's children is not an option and not a bonus. It is the very heart of the Gospel, for it is modeled after the ways Jesus has loved you.

I have been reading Philip Yancey's book, "What's So Amazing About Grace," and it has been nourishing my soul and elevating my faith and increasing my love.

Why? Because the source of God's love in my heart (and yours) is not the doctrine of His deity, nor even the record of His sacrifice, but the grace that He extends to me over and over again. Listen to a few of Yancey's words:

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith.

They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional.

What must it feel like for the Maker of the Universe to get another member of His family back? [In Jesus' story of the prodigal son who squandered half the family fortune, He announced], "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Grace is shockingly personal. As Henri Nouwen points out, "God rejoices. Not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because all human pain and suffering have

come to an end, nor because thousands of people have been converted and are now praising Him for His goodness. No, God rejoices because one of His children who was lost has been found.”

This is how God has loved us:

*“God loved the world this way: He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him will not die but will have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

Have you believed in the Son of God? His name is Jesus. I don’t mean, Do you agree that Jesus was a real man who lived and died in history, but have you believed in who He said He was, and what He did to show it?

Have you believed that He is the eternal Son of God, who, as a human being, gave Himself to die as a ransom for our sins?

Do you believe that He is alive today, having been raised from the dead, to grant everlasting salvation to all who put their trust in Him?

This is how God has loved the world!

And this is what that sort of love means:

*“This is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the payment for our sins. Dear friends, if this is the way God loved us, we must also love each other.”* (1 John 4:10-11)

*“Christ has given us this commandment: The person who loves God must also love other believers.”* (1 John 4:21)

This is what Jesus told His followers, *“I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”* (John 13:34)

You and I are to love all those whom God chooses to bring to faith, all those whom He brings into our church family.

*“Just as I have loved you”* expresses both a measure and a manner for loving one another.

Christ’s love for the penitent is the MEASURE of the love we are to share with each other.

That love was expressed in the father’s lavish love for his prodigal son.

That love was expressed in the forgiveness of a servant’s huge debt.

That love was expressed in Jesus’ mercy for the woman caught in the very act of adultery.

That love was expressed in the conversion of Saul, who had despised and persecuted the church.

That love is expressed every time a wayward soul turns to Jesus Christ. Every time a broken heart is healed by His grace. Every time an addict is set free. Every time a hater is transformed. Every time fear turns to peace. Every time worry turns to confidence.

*“Just as I have loved you”* expresses both a measure and a manner for loving one another.

Christ’s love for the hurting demonstrates the MANNER of love we are to show.

Jesus was unashamed to touch a leper and make him whole. He was unafraid to speak to a stranger about the Kingdom of His love. He was eager to welcome diverse peoples into His fold. He was gentle to the bruised. He was strong for the weak. He was patient with those who stumbled. He forgave everyone who expressed repentance.

*“As I have loved you”* expresses both a measure and a manner for loving one another. And when we do it correctly, Christ’s love reaches maturity in us, and we reveal to the world the God who is love.

Jesus said, *“It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as My disciples.”* (John 13:35)

The Apostle John also explained:

*“We understand what love is when we realize that Christ gave His life for us. That means we must give our lives for other believers. Now, suppose a person has enough to live on and notices another believer in need. How can God’s love be in that person if he doesn’t bother to help the other believer?”*

*Dear children, we must show love through actions that are sincere, not through empty words.”* (1 John 3:16-18)

How can you turn otherwise “empty” words into “sincere actions”? By preparing ourselves! You must *think* about it in advance!

*“Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of [Jesus’] return is drawing near.”* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

How should you “think about it”? What if you take a piece of paper and make on it two columns. In the first column, list the things that bother you about some other Christians (be specific, it’s for your eyes only).

Now, looking at your list, begin to pray over it.

First, admit to the Father that your responses have been less than loving, less than you would expect from Jesus.

Second, ask the Lord Jesus to give you words of knowledge (a gift of the Spirit) that could explain why you find these things so irritating. Perhaps it's a prejudice you hold. Perhaps it's a trauma you've suffered. Perhaps it's lies that you've been told. Perhaps it's a fear or intimidation that you carry.

Third, ask for gifts of healings for those wounds or brokenness in you (another gift of the Spirit).

Then, looking to the other column, ask the Lord for words of wisdom (yet another gift of the Spirit) about how to undo your irritation.

And from these, next to each annoying observation, write a corresponding loving act that would counter your natural feelings (ask, How would Jesus show them His love? Or, better yet, How has Jesus loved me when I behaved like that?).

Finally, ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart in each of those areas with His immeasurable love, and to give you a gift of faith to respond in the future as Jesus would (instead of as your old nature would dictate).

When we show love to one another in the ways that Jesus has loved us, two wonderful things happen: we become so grateful for the love He has shown us (our worship of the Lord deepens), and the unity of the Church increases, as our dissensions are overcome.

In the fourth chapter of his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle urged them (and us) with these words:

*"Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."* (Ephesians 4:1-3)

A life that is worthy.

A life that is humble.

A life that is patient.

A life that is tolerant.

Because of your love.

Making every effort to stay together.

Making peace as often as needed.

Maintain the unity the Spirit has given, for He has made us all of “one blood.” He calls us children of God—not because we are so deserving, or so good, or so faithful—because by His grace we have been born of the Spirit (born again). So we are to recognize that gracious unity, that commonality of all believers.

We are to recognize, appreciate, and celebrate the variegated expressions of this faith, patiently enduring our spiritual immaturities and differences and faults, lovingly forgiving and encouraging everyone to a closer walk with Jesus.

This is family life at its best! And when we fall short of this (for we certainly will), we are to acknowledge our shortcomings and repent, and pray for renewal by the Holy Spirit, so that we may pursue again the love of Jesus and unity of the Spirit to let the world know of His saving grace.

Who is with me?!

Why the gifts? *To build up the Church through loving unity (among insiders) and compassionate evangelism (among outsiders).*

Two weeks from today, we’ll pick up this theme again to consider how the gifts of God may be used to empower *compassionate evangelism* (letting others know about salvation in Jesus Christ).