

# GIFTED TO SERVE

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

(1 Peter 4:10)

## GIFTED TO SERVE, Part 5 Serving in Mercy

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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, which I categorize 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)

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.

In the process of building the church, the gifts have two main functions: serving insiders (fellow believers) by emphasizing loving unity, and serving outsiders (the unchurched) by emphasizing compassionate evangelism.

The first of these functions is a response to Jesus’ command to *“love one another as [He has] loved you”* (John 13:35), which expresses both a measure and a manner for loving one another.

Also as a response to Paul’s admonition to *“make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace”* (Ephesians 4:1-3). This is family life at its best!

Today, we turn our attention to the second function of spiritual gifts: serving outsiders (the unchurched) through compassionate evangelism.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are commanded to love one another within the church, and to present the Gospel message to those who are outside the church.

Pastor Tim spoke last Sunday about discerning between OUR responsibilities in life and GOD’S responsibilities in our lives. These two functions fall squarely within the arena of OUR responsibilities.

As to the first, Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (John 13:34-35)

And as to the second, He said, “*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.*” (John 15:26-27)

“*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8)

“*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*” (Mark 16:15)

## **Serving Outsiders**

What does it look like to serve outsiders with the Gospel message? I will show you two expressions of sharing our faith today.

But, before I do, perhaps it will prove valuable to explain concisely what the Gospel message is.

I say “Gospel MESSAGE,” because it is at its heart, a message—a verbal proclamation—whether it is couched in a personal testimony or public preaching.

And the word, Gospel, defines the NATURE of the message or proclamation... in this way: “Gospel” translates the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good message.”

The message from God that is good is the message about Jesus Christ—the Son of the Living God, who became a human and dwelt among us, in order to introduce the Kingdom of God by His words and works, as the prophets of Israel foretold, and to impart the Kingdom Life as a result of His death and resurrection, which graciously released from sin’s judgment and power those who trust God for this amazing gift, and enabled the Holy Spirit to take up residence within those who have been born again, transforming their heart and character to be more like Jesus, filling them with the love of Christ, and empowering the people of God to serve with Him throughout eternity.

And as Peter said, “*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*” (Acts 2:39)

This is REALLY good news!

The Motivational Gifts from our Father in Heaven play a primary role in sharing the Good News with others. But the Leadership Gifts from Jesus the Son and the Demonstration Gifts from the Holy Spirit ALSO are prominent in sharing our faith, as we shall see.

So how do we serve others with this Good News?

First, we must embrace it ourselves. Unless you embrace it with all your heart, your words (even if true) remain powerless. Quoting Scripture from an unrepentant attitude is hypocritical religious bullying (modern-day Phariseism).

To embrace the Gospel in this way means to believe it intellectually, to subscribe to it emotionally, and to practice it actually. It's never 100% in all three categories, or totally consistent in any one category. Christian living is not about performance; it is about persistent pursuit of a real relationship with God as Father, Savior, and Helper.

How do we serve others with this Good News?

First, we must embrace it ourselves.

Second, we share it with others. To keep it to yourself is, at the least, to misunderstand God's intent in saving you, or worse, to selfishly ignore the lostness of others.

Without Christ's saving intervention, humanity is doomed to a graceless eternity apart from God. That is a foregone conclusion, not an afterthought. Jesus Christ did not come to condemn anybody; the reality is that we were all condemned already—condemned by our own conscience, and also by God's law. Jesus Christ came to SAVE all those who repent and believe.

However, no one in this meeting has come to faith in Jesus apart from someone else both living and sharing the Good News with them. Living it and sharing it. And that is just what we, too, must do.

The first aspect of sharing the Good News with others is living it. If your actions do not back up your words, then your words sound hollow. And if your actions do not come from your heart, then they appear as mere empty ritual.

### **Evangelism as Mercy**

So let's first think about evangelism as mercy. Before a word is spoken or a deed performed, evangelism is expressed as mercy within one's heart.

God's grace is first experienced as forgiveness. The sure knowledge that your sins have been forgiven and can no longer interfere with your relationship with God is a source of "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

No matter what you had done or what had been done to you, when you surrendered control of your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, *"He canceled the record of the charges against [you] and took it away by nailing it to the cross."* (Colossians 2:14)

*"He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west."* (Psalm 103:12)

And you have been instructed to *"be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."* (Ephesians 4:32)

In fact, so essential is this secret act of the heart, that Jesus taught us to pray, *"forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us."* (Luke 11:4)

But, do we? Do we forgive everyone? Did He really mean "everyone"?

Almost as if He anticipated that question, Jesus said, *"If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins."* (Matthew 6:14-15)

Why is this so important? Because it is so like God!

*"So that you may be like your Father in heaven, since He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* (Matthew 5:45)

If we overlook or refuse this secret act of the heart, if we harbor unforgiveness in our soul, then we fail to represent Him who loved us, and are in danger of hearing Him say, *"You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"* (Matthew 18:32)

Mercy begins in the heart, with a conscious decision to follow the way of Jesus Christ and forgive those who sin against us—not because they deserve it, and not because we can excuse them, but simply because that's the way Christ forgave us.

But mercy that remains hidden in the heart is like a talent which is buried and bears no fruit and becomes worthless. Mercy must be shown and shared.

Mercy goes beyond releasing judgment or ceasing vengeance—mercy is expressed by deeds of love, acts of compassion.

John asked, *“If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?”* (1 John 3:17)

James added, *“Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?”* (James 2:15-16)

By God’s command, we MUST show such mercy to our brothers and sisters in the faith. But this is the same grace which the Holy Spirit uses to open the hardened hearts of unbelievers.

It has been said, *“People do not care what you know, until they know that you care.”* This means that the least act of kindness can unlock the heart’s door, and bring light to a darkened mind, and make room for Christ in a life that has been full of self and sin.

This is where the Motivational Gifts really shine!

*Do you remember them?* There are seven:

- Prophecy – prodding faithfulness
- Serving – lending practical help
- Teaching – offering understanding of God
- Exhortation – encouraging faith and obedience
- Contributing – generously meeting needs
- Leadership – organizing productivity
- Merciful – demonstrating kindness

They are our wardrobe of grace. They give us the right heart and attitude for sharing the Best News in the world!

As Paul wrote:

*“So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

*“Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness.”* (Colossians 3:12-15; MSG)

Calling on the phone just to say hello, sharing a coffee date or a plate of cookies, fixing a broken fence or changing a tire—just about anything that expresses thoughtfulness and personal attention—these acts of undeserved compassion demonstrate the kind of love God has shown you, and open the gate to heartfelt conversations.

According to Jesus:

*“If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.”* (Matthew 5:39-42)

These are not commands; they are illustrations. They illustrate, in a variety of scenarios, the way (or the manner) in which Christ-followers are to give of themselves—whether materially or emotionally—more than is asked for, more than is deserved, in a word: unselfishly, generously (I know, that’s *two* words).

Again, Jesus explained:

*“In a word, what I’m saying is, Grow up. You’re Kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”* (Matthew 5:48; MSG)

This is LIVING the Good News!

We’ll resume this journey next Sunday to explore the other element of sharing the Good News with others: TELLING others the Good News

So far, we are learning that the purpose of the marvelous gifts God has given to His Church, and to YOU, is to build up the Church through loving unity and compassionate evangelism.