

Message: Gifts that do not tarnish

(Based on “Discover Your God-Given Gifts” by Don & Katie Fortune)¹

What are spiritual gifts?

“Here’s an illustration: if we put an apple, an orange and a banana in a basket, what do we have? It’s not a basket of apples or a basket of oranges or a basket of bananas. It’s a basket of fruit. In the same way, when God brought you to this congregation, you didn’t join a group that was all administrators, all givers, all teachers, all exhorters, all perceivers, all servers or all compassionate persons. Every congregation is filled with people who are unique, each called to different kinds of work with different characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. Each is unique and distinct, but part of the whole.”²

Do you all know God gives you gifts? Did you know that God has given you gifts that don’t tarnish, break, get old or have batteries that run down? Have you ever wondered why you’re drawn to some aspects of church and not to others? Well, you’re in the right place. This Sunday and next, we’re going to take a look at spiritual gifts. We’re going to look at the what, why and how of the gifts God gives to us.

First things first. I have good news for every, single person who believes in Jesus: you have spiritual gifts! You may or may not be aware of your gifts and how they shape you. Some of us may not know we have gifts or what kinds of gifts God gives. And some of us may or may not have developed our gifts through practice. You have an opportunity and an invitation in these next weeks to grow.

“The source of our spiritual gifts is God. Earlier, we read Psalm 139:13-16 together. God knows us, inside and out, because God formed and shaped us, from the inside to the outside. That means God knows how we’re wired, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically. God made each and every one of us for a unique and special purpose. At our baptism, we received spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38-39 Peter said, *“Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (CEB). The Holy Spirit

¹ Don & Katie Fortune, *Discover Your God-Given Gifts*, Chosen Books, 2009

² *Ibid*, p. 9

lives in us and works to help us grow and develop. Our very personality and character is shaped by spiritual gifts. You might call it our spiritual DNA.”³

What are spiritual gifts for? Why does God give us spiritual gifts?

The key passage for our study is 1 Peter 4:10, “*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms*” (NIV). The purpose of spiritual gifts is simple. God invites us to join in work of Christ, the mission of the Church on earth. God uniquely equips us with the spiritual character and strength we need so we can do the tasks God has planned for us as part of the body of Christ on Earth. Our task may require more than one gift, so we often have primary and secondary spiritual gifts.

What are the categories of spiritual gifts? Three types of gifts:

Manifestation gifts show us the ways God works through us supernaturally. 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 tells us about these gifts, “*A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit, faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit, performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another*” (CEB).

Here’s an illustration of supernatural gifts. If you were thirsty, you would go to the sink, turn on the faucet and water would flow through the pipe, quenching your thirst. In the same way, we are the conduit for God’s grace, which is the living water that flows from Christ through us to others, quenching their spiritual thirst.

Ministry gifts are the ways God equips the church so it can accomplish the mission Christ gave us. These are God’s gifts to the church. In particular, the functions of those set apart for service. We find a description in Ephesians 4:7,11-13, “*God has given his grace to each one of us measured out by the gift that is given by Christ ... He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and*

³ *Ibid*, p. 19

teachers. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults - to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ" (CEB). Those who are called to lead us are set apart by God, over and above the ministry of all believers.

If you feel called to be a pastor, teacher, evangelist or prophet, that's a calling by Christ to help lead and equip others in the mission of the church, making disciples who make disciples.

Motivational gifts are the focus of our study. These are the ways God shapes each one of us for life and ministry. Even if God has called you to a role or works supernaturally through you, you have motivational gifts. Our passage for today from Romans 12:6-8 describes them, *"We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful"* (CEB).

There are seven motivational gifts: perceiver, server, teacher, exhorter, giver, administrator and person of compassion. Each gift gives us a unique perspective on God's Word and the very purpose and meaning of our life. Next week we're going to briefly look at the characteristics of each gift and how it shapes us and our part in the church. When you came to church today, you received a copy of a short spiritual gifts inventory. I invite you to take the inventory home and fill it out before next Sunday. That way, when you come, you'll already have an idea of what your primary and secondary spiritual gifts are.

These three categories of spiritual gifts, manifestation, ministry and motivational, are not independent of one another. They do not compete. You can be used by God in a supernatural way, called to serve as a leader of the church and use your spiritual strengths and character in ministry, all with the blessing of God.

What do we do with spiritual gifts? One thing we don't do is put them on a shelf and admire them. 1 Timothy 4:14 says, “...*that special gift of ministry you were given when the leaders of the church laid hands on you and prayed - keep that dusted off and in use*” (The Message). When you were baptized, a church leader laid hands on you and prayed for you. You received gifts. But spiritual gifts aren't fragile. They aren't trophies. They aren't status symbols, to be used for boasting or building ourselves up. Spiritual gifts have utility and purpose. They need to be used or we won't develop and grow to our full potential. If we stop using our spiritual gifts, over time, they'll atrophy. We become numb, less sensitive to the prompting of God's Spirit. We're less receptive to God's Word. That's what it means to have a hardened heart.

God intentionally limits our spiritual gifts. There are two reasons God does that. First, is in relation to God. We have limits so we'll know we depend on Christ for everything. We wouldn't be who and what we are without Jesus. We aren't up to the tasks on our own, but when we rely on God, we can do anything through Christ. Second, is in relation to people. God limits and focuses our gifts on purpose. That way, we must work together and remain dependent on each other to grasp the whole truth.

“Remember the six blind people who went to “see” an elephant?

One felt the side and said the elephant was like a wall. The next felt the tusk and claimed an elephant was like a spear. The third felt the trunk and thought it was like a snake. The fourth felt a leg and said an elephant was like a tree. The fifth touched an ear and said the elephant was like a fan. The sixth felt the tail and insisted the elephant was like a rope. No one was altogether right, yet neither were they wrong. It was only when they got all their observations together that they “saw” the whole elephant.”⁴

It's the same way with our motivational gifts. Each of us is somewhat blind to the other perspectives. We're wrong to say our way is the only true one. We're partly right, but we're not totally right all by ourselves. We need each other's viewpoints to see the complete picture. As we look at our spiritual gifts together, I want to help you discover your gifts

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11

and also to become familiar with other gifts. In particular, how people with different gifts think, how they operate and how they benefit the whole body of Christ. You'll be enriched personally and your relationships will become deeper as you gain new insight.

Let us pray:

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn't be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may serve others with that same love. Help us to share our faith and hope with others through love so they will join us in hope. Lord, thank you shaping and forming us from birth to today. Thank you for giving us gifts that do not tarnish and fade, but we make us better people, better brothers and sisters in Christ, and better able to serve you and your church. We commit ourselves to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Psalm 139:13-16 (The Message)

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.
I thank you, High God - you're breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
I worship in adoration - what a creation!
You know me inside and out,
you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
before I'd even lived one day.

Romans 12:4-6 (The Message)

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.