

A Series on Ephesians
“A Life Worthy of the Calling: Serving with Our Spiritual Gifts”
(Ephesians 4:7-16)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We've been studying through Ephesians.

Let's read Ephesians 4:7-16.

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

⁸This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men."

⁹(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

They say each of us is bombarded by about 3,500 advertisements each day. They're everywhere. There are a lot of products out there, and the advertizing professionals are constantly trying to change the idea of what we need to include their

product. I remember when I first learned how to shave. I used Biggs Disposable Razor which had one blade. It worked ok, until Gillette came out with two blades. I had to get that. And it was pretty good. Then, they came out with 3 blades. Wow. I had to get that. Now, I think I have five blades with independent suspension that contours my face. I need it. And Costco sells it. So, I have it. That's how progress works in capitalistic society. Produce something, convince people they need it, sell a lot of them, and the economy grows.

But, this also has a negative side. We become selfish and need driven. Everything is about how it is going to fulfill our needs and wants. And the list of our needs is growing.

And I think this has rubbed off on the church. We go to church to get our needs met. If it doesn't meet our needs, we leave. If it doesn't have the right program, if it doesn't have the right preacher, if it doesn't have the right kind of music, if it doesn't have the right kind of people, if it doesn't meet my needs, I am not going to stay. But, this completely contradicts what Jesus said: I did not come to be served but to serve. And it contradicts Paul as well here in Ephesians. He says the church is not a spectator sport. Speaking of commercials, I love the Budweiser commercial about a sports announcer—the one that sings to honor various professions. He knows everything about the sport, except how to play it. Paul says we have to get into the game and play. Paul says we are a body of Christ. And each of us is a member of that body. We are players, not spectators. And we are called to function as a part of the body. To make the body function, he now starts to explain what spiritual gifts are.

II. First, it tells us who the gift is given to.

In verse 7, Paul says, “**But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.**” The grace he is talking about is not the grace that saves us. It is a gift that he gives to us. Who is he talking about? He says to each and everyone of us, the believers, Christ gave us a gift. It's not all the same gift and it's not all the same amount of gift. But, one thing for sure is that you and I all have a gift given by God. So, if you think you can't really do anything, you are wrong. The Bible says he has gifted each and everyone of you.

He goes on to quote a Psalm about how Jesus descended to the lower, earthly regions and then ascended on high with captives in his train. The Psalm is a picture of someone who comes back from war in victory with captives in tow. It's a picture of Jesus conquering the principalities of evil and conquering them and declaring victory over them and having a heavenly parade to celebrate the victory. Jesus declared victory over Satan and the things that bound people. And now, he has given us gifts. One way to interpret this passage is to see the Pentecost as the time that the gift of the Spirit came. The *charismata* came after Jesus ascended.

The point is that Christ is in power and he now empowers his church with spiritual gifts, and that means you and I are given a spiritual gift.

III. Now what kind of gifts has he given?

He starts to list some of the gifts in verse 11: “**It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.**” At the time that Paul was writing this, apostles, prophets, and evangelists travelled around and ministered. The pastors and teachers (in Greek, there is no “and” so it is talking about pastor teachers), and they were people who stayed with a church and shepherded and taught the people. That’s who I am. Often times, these were full-time workers. Are they the only ones who are given spiritual gifts?

No. In verse 12, it says, God has given these full-time workers to do what? To do the work of ministry? No. “**To prepare people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.**” My job is to prepare you for works of service. It is to train you and equip you to do the work of ministry. It’s not Jonathan, Shirley, David and my job to do all the work of ministry. Our job is to train you and equip you to do the work of ministry.

Often times, we get into this line of thinking that you are all there to be served, and have your needs met, get spiritual food, so that you can be inspired enough to live another week. Yes, it is important for me to give you spiritual food for that is what the word of God is, but the purpose is to train you to be a minister. I am not the only minister here. You and I are all minister together in Christ!

Here is the wrong way to view the church: you say to me: we want you to preach, teach, marry, bury, make hospital calls, visit members, counsel people, evangelize the community, raise money, make the bulletin, and pray for the sick. We are here to benefit from your ministry. We'll try to tithe and stuff so that we can do this.

So, the church ends up with the pastor teacher doing all the work and burning out from overwork while everyone else remains a passive observers, their gifts and talents just wasting away. That is NOT the picture of the church.

It says my job is to equip YOU so that YOU can do the work of the church. You are an organ, a member, of this body. You have been given a spiritual gift.

There are several places in the NT where the gifts of the Spirit are listed:

In 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4, he talks about the gift of administration (like coordinating thing), helping others (being available to people—for moving, for cooking, for cleaning, whatever), those with gift of healing, those with the gift of speaking in tongues, gift of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, distinguishing between the spirits, interpretation of tongues, serving, encouraging, giving, leadership, showing mercy, hospitality, speaking. None of these lists is intended to be exhaustive.

Some of these gifts are pretty spectacular: the gift of healing and prophecy for example. But all gifts are from God. Spiritual gifts can include natural talents that have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. As the German theologian Moltmann points out, “In principle every human potentiality and capacity can become charismatic [that is gift of the Spirit] through a person’s call, if only they are used in Christ.”

IV. Now, how do you figure out what your spiritual gifts are?

This passage doesn’t say explicitly, but here are some ways to assess your gifts.

(1) the process of accessing your gift is involve both your individual assessment and the church’s assessment. On the one hand, you can’t just figure it out for yourself on your own and come to the conclusion that that’s what God is calling you to do. You can’t just say I believe God is calling me to be a teacher and a preacher. There has to be some confirmation on the part of the community. On the other hand, you can’t just say, the community is not calling me, so even if I want to do it, I am not going to do it until someone asks me to do it. That’s not right either. You have to initiate but listen to what

the community has to say as well. When I was trying to figure whether I should be a pastor, I had to figure out whether I had the gift of a pastor. My mentor told me there are three major gifts for pastoral work: teaching, pastoral, and leadership. He thought I had 2 of the three and said, “two out of three ain’t bad.” I knew I had some seeds of a gift for teaching but I needed to be open to community feedback. Now, you don’t have to be good at everything. We have to come to realize that we are not all hands and mouths. Some are going to be kidney or legs or something else. You can’t be good at everything. That’s why we need each other.

(2) Watch out for gift-projection. Some of you have a gift of evangelism. It comes naturally for you to talk to people about Jesus on the bus. Or some of you have a gift of mercy, and it comes naturally to live among the poor. Or you have the gift of teaching, and you expect everyone to live up to your standard for teaching. Not everyone has your gift and they can still be great Christians. Sometimes, people who are gifted in a particular area write books that make it look like if you don’t have their gift, you are not really a true Christian. That’s gift projection. Watch out.

(3) there is also gift copout. I don’t know how to do anything. Or, I don’t have the spiritual gift of helping; so, I am not going to help. I don’t have the gift of evangelism; so, I am not going to evangelize. No. We are called to do all of these things, but some will have a special gift. It doesn’t mean you can’t do it to a degree. Sometimes, we just all have to do it no matter what.

You have a gift. You have to take initiatives to find out what your gift is.

(4) here are some suggestions on finding your spiritual gifts:

First, try it. Often times, you don’t really know what you will enjoy until you try it. Before I became a pastor, I thought I really didn’t enjoy counseling people. I just felt like I didn’t know what to say that might be helpful. Pastor, what do I do? I can’t stop doing it. Um, stop doing it. But, as I was pushed into the role, this is the part of the ministry that I enjoy the most. So, I want you to try various kinds of ministry.

Then, look for three things: affinity, ability and opportunity.

(a) affinity is your burden, your desire, your passion. Your desire is something you should look at. Do you like to host parties? Do you like to organize things? Do you like to help people? Do you like to teach? Do you like to talk to people? Do you like art?

(b) ability. Do you see fruit? This is the place to find out whether the body is confirming it.

(c) opportunity. Is there a ministry you can join. Maybe God is calling you to start a ministry and you need to find some other body parts to make it happen. A church does not have to have all of the ministries. So, sometimes you have relax and try it again later. Sometimes, it is just not the right time. Sometimes, you might think you are the right person to do something, but others have not confirmed. You need to backup a little and give some room. God works not just through you individually but through the community.

V. What is the goal of our spiritual gift?

To build up the body of Christ. To build up the church. That's how we build the kingdom. Connect people to God, grow together, serve the city and extend God's kingdom.

V. Conclusion

Let me close by putting spiritual gifts in the context of the gospel. You have to remember the flow of Paul letter so far. You have to know where the power comes from.

The first three chapters have been talking about the calling we have received. You have been called to be sons and daughters of God, all as a gift of God, not by earning it. So, just soak in the love of the Father. Just be His sons or daughters. This "be" is a passive be. It is not about trying to do anything. It is just soaking in him. It's all about his grace!

Then, Paul says, **"therefore, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."** *It tells us who we are first, then it calls us to live life worthy of who we are.* What does that mean? There are two dimensions of living a life worthy of the calling: what kind of person we are and what we do. It's gotta be clear: you can't do this unless you are doing the first thing: being in him, soaking in him, being loved by him.