

## GIFTS 1: The Purpose

**Eph 4:7-16 Psa 104:26-32 1Co 12:1-11 Mat 7:7-10**

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We like to receive gifts, especially if they are useful.

+ There was a Dad who suggested that the family get him a gift that the whole family could get something out of. So they did. They bought him a new wallet.

Useful gifts are good, but gifts that can be shared are even better. You hear the expression, "It's better to give than to receive." When Susan and I stayed in Uganda in 2005 we took our hosts shopping...

I can tell you that I got more out buying their children shoes than I did in buying all the shoes I've ever bought for myself.

It is tremendously satisfying to share what you have in a useful way with others.

Now as we talk about gifts over these four weeks, it's easy to think of them as being supernatural abilities that God gives us. Rather like being spiritual X-men or women.

The trouble with that view is that we can divide our life into segments. We may think of natural gifts like being good at woodwork, gardening, building, craft, painting, singing, playing an instrument, writing or cooking etc  
And we use those gifts for ourselves to satisfy our creative urges.

Then the Bible talks about spiritual gifts of miracle working, healing, speaking in tongues, prophesying, evangelism and so on.  
And we see those gifts as things we do for God.

But Psalm 104 suggests that the *whole* creation is from God.

And since the Spirit was a part of creation, then our natural gifts must also be from God.

being good at woodwork, gardening, building, craft, painting, singing, playing an instrument, writing or cooking etc

are spiritual gifts whether you are a Christian or not. Whether you recognise them as being from God, or not.

However if we use them in and for God's Kingdom those same gifts can take on new meaning and significance.

There is something else that you can use as a spiritual gift...

### **The experiences of your life.**

Your life is a combination of highs and lows.

Other people are suffering the lows that you have been through and had to deal with.

Your experiences of bereavement or sickness or depression or whatever it may be, can help those people in ways that others cannot.

Your own worst moments can be gifts to others, if you will put them into God's hands.

*Rom 8<sup>28</sup> We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

You may be thinking, "Well I don't have any particular natural gifts. I certainly don't have these spiritual gifts, and my life has been fairly uneventful."

Let me give you some responses to that:-

1. To be able to use your skills and experiences and to receive other gifts of God's Spirit, you need to be born again of the Spirit.
2. Gifts of the Spirit are acquired by asking.  
Pray that God will fill you with his Spirit  
Ask God for the gifts and abilities which will be most useful in building up God's church.

(Mat 7:7-10 "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!)

3. Maybe you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and are born of his Spirit but you still don't recognise your gifts. Perhaps you need to explore your own life further. Others may be able to see what you don't.
4. Gifts are refined by use and practice. There are opportunities for learning when it comes to craft, cooking, playing an instrument and so on. Skills can be acquired.
5. Even if you feel you are not doing much, your presence is a gift to us all.  
As a father I was present when each of my three children were born. I can tell you that each of them has been a precious gift, even before they were able to do anything.  
Susan and I now have a grandchild, Emily  
They are precious to me simply because they are our family.

I come across many people who do not think that they have much to give. But the very fact that they are there, continuing in the faith, growing in Christ, attending church, is a gift in itself.

You are precious in God's sight and you are precious as a member of the fellowship.

...And remember, we can all pray –  
it is one of the greatest gifts of all.

So let us see that all that we have...

our material possession,  
our natural gifts,  
our spiritual gifts,  
and all that we are...

our very being, personality and the sum of our experiences

are a gift of God, for you and for us

And here is the overwhelming message today about gifts.

**We are all *gifts***

**We are not for selfish use, but for the blessing of others.**

**Ephesians 4 spells out the reason for gifts.**

Paul begins with some leadership gifts for a congregation

Some people are apostles

(close to a missionary's or bishop's role)

Prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers

(not just the ordained clergy)

What does he say these people are for?

<sup>12</sup>*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

He mentions two things:

1. To equip Christians to minister
2. To build up the church (the people of the congregation)

What does that mean in practice?

Equipping Christians to minister I take it means helping Christians to discover, develop and use their gifts.

Building up the body is spelled out in the following verses...

*<sup>13</sup>until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

We are to encourage each other to become more like the head of the body --- to become more Christlike.

It implies not just encouraging with positive comments, but also admonishing

*. <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

Speaking the truth means telling it how it is.

But it is to be done in love, and with the person's best interest at heart (not just so that we can let off steam, or express our exasperation)

Unity and maturity means that we grow to be stable in our faith, knowing where the truth lies, and not being led astray...

*<sup>14</sup>We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

Not only does maturity mean stability, but it also means unity.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 talks of the diversity of gifts but the one giver – God's Spirit

If we are convinced of right doctrine and we are praying for God's Spirit to be at work within us, we will increasingly move in the same direction,

with the same aims  
and a passion for Christ, each other and for the lost.

+ When a baby is born it is uncoordinated. It takes time to grow and develop a sense of how the different parts of the body work together. Love, food, and practice leads to crawling, walking, running and jumping.

When people are filled with God's Spirit, it doesn't suddenly make them super Christians, able to know all things and live perfect lives.

There are things to learn and to practice.

There is wisdom to be exercised in the use of God's gifts.

There will be spiritual opposition!

As we look around our parish to where the needs are...

There are going to be needs in our churches that we may not feel suited to... but we may be the only person available.

There may be gifts we have that need to be taken out of the box and exercised again.

There are other gifts we may have that we don't even know about because we've never tried, or we believe we can't do them.

A baby never learns to walk by lying in its cot...

It has to crawl, and strengthen its muscles,

It needs to take some faltering steps and fall a few times.

It is the way all our best athletes began!...

and it's the way we must go to develop the gifts that God has given us.

+ A while ago I had a minor operation on my finger (for Dupitron's Contracture?). Afterwards it was necessary to exercise for 6 months. Those with knee or hip replacements – or even heart surgery – know how quickly you have to get moving afterwards. You can't simply lie in bed and hope that everything will start to work on its own.

Parents don't become *good* parents (or grandparents) simply by bringing a child into the world. There is learning, interacting, making mistakes, apologising, making adjustments in behaviour, and exercising love.

The exercise of God's gifts then requires the (if I may suggest...even more important) fruit of the Spirit, found in Galatians 5... <sup>22</sup>*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.*

**In summary...**

The gifts of the Spirit are not primarily for our own use, but God's use. They are for His family.

To equip Christians to minister to others.

To form mature Christians who are Christlike and stable in their faith. working and growing together for the one purpose, to God's glory.

That means that what you are, and what you have, is of great importance to your brothers and sisters around you, and ultimately to the community that you serve.

May God fill us with his Holy Spirit,  
give us insight into the gifts he has given us  
and a willingness to use them in his service.