

Gifted to Serve Jesus & His Church

I Corinthians 12:4-27

July 30, 2023

Please turn in your Bibles to I Corinthians 12. 64 years ago this past week, young 13 year old girl made her first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry. She was introduced by none other than Johnny Cash. She sang You Gotta Be My Baby and when she did, Dolly Parton got three encores. Since then she's gotten many more and has enjoyed musical fame and success as few others ever have. She has not only shared her musical gift in the country and gospel genres but has also used the money her gift has enabled her to earn to help children read as well as many other charitable causes. But imagine if Dolly had refused to ever sing outside her own shower. Imagine if she had decided not to sing in her granddaddy's church, the House of Prayer.

Imagine if Billy Graham had decided to play baseball as was his passion and refused to preach the Gospel. Or if Mark Lowry had never told a joke beyond his own dinner table. Our world and our souls are richer for the gifts of these and many others who have used their God-given gifts. And you have them too.

Say Gifts. Bob was in trouble with gifts. He forgot his wedding anniversary and his wife was really angry. She told him "Tomorrow morning, I expect to find a gift in the driveway that goes from 0 to 200 in 6 seconds and it better be there!" The next morning he got up early and left for work. When his wife woke up, she looked out the window and sure enough there was a box gift-wrapped in the middle of the driveway. Confused, the wife put on her robe and ran out to the driveway, brought the box back in the house. She opened it and found a brand new bathroom scale. Bob has been missing since Friday.

If you are able, please stand as we read about spiritual gifts from 1 Cor 12:4
4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. 12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of **many** parts; and though all its parts are many, they form **one** body. So it is with Christ. (Skip to 27) Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Say gifted. If you are born again, God has gifted you to do something for Him and His Body, the Church. There are no ungifted Christians. I say that on the authority

of I Cor 12:7 Now to **each one** the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To each one! Not to some, not even to most. But to each one. I sometimes hear people go on and on about someone else's gift and then bemoan that they have none. If they're saved, that's garbage. We all have at least one gift. We may not have discovered it yet, or maybe we have and we don't want to use it, but every Christian has one.

Over the years, we've done a number of surveys here to help our members discover and know their gifts that they might use them. Perhaps we will again at some point. There are a number of tools online you can use and some books in our library on it. If you don't know what your gift is, let me or one of our Deacons know and we will help you find it. In addition, let's help each other. If you see someone who is gifted in some way, thank God for them and their gift, and then TELL them for crying out loud. Not to boost their ego, but to affirm their calling! To glorify God! They're not doing it for praise, but they may think no one notices or cares. That what they're doing doesn't matter. And it does!

Several gifts are mentioned in this passage. Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation. Later in this chapter, Paul also mentions apostleship, teaching, helps, and administration. Over in Ephesians 4 we find evangelism and pastoring. In 2005, we went through a lengthy sermon series looking at the different gifts mentioned in Scripture and these are samples. They are not all inclusive lists. There are gifts of hospitality, decorating, fixing food, encouraging, and music as well as others. We don't have time today to examine every gift, but suffice it to say, if you're a believer, you have at least one! If you don't know what it is you owe it to yourself, to your Savior, and to your church to find it and to use it. Any by the way, laziness is not a spiritual gift nor is criticism or complaining.

I want to distinguish spiritual gifts from Christian practices. Prayer, Bible Study, sharing Jesus with others are the responsibilities of **every** believer. Some may have a special gift in one or more of these areas, but **every one of us** is to evangelize, pray, and study our Bibles. Every one. Love, joy, peace, patience, etc. are NOT gifts of the Spirit, but fruit of the Spirit that every believer is to produce in our lives. We are all to work, to sing, to have faith, and etc. These are Christian practices or disciplines for all believers, not spiritual gifts.

Let's also talk for a minute about natural abilities versus spiritual gifts. Many of the gifts Paul mentions in I Cor and Eph are unique gifts that the Holy Spirit imparts when an individual gets saved or is baptized. But in addition to those, we're all born with certain God-given capabilities. Abilities to do certain things well. Some are musically inclined, some athletically, some are good with numbers while others are great with little children or with the elderly. Etc. So how can we tell the difference between a spiritual gift or a natural ability? We could examine that another time, but it doesn't really matter. Don't spin your wheels trying to figure that out. If God has given you a gift by

birth or by rebirth, use it for Him! We are to appropriate all that we have to glorify God!

So why does God give these gifts? We've already touched on this, but look again at Vs 7 "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Say common good. For the good of the Church, the whole body. Not for the good of the individual alone. God gives gifts to His people to empower and equip the church to be effective ministering together. It's not about you or me. It's about Jesus and our work together. Some people live their whole lives hoping to be discovered. To become famous or to be praised for their gifts. Which is the exact opposite of why God gave them in the first place. Don't worry about being discovered. God has already discovered you. Too many people spend all their life chasing the bigtime while ignoring the opportunities God has put all around them. If we're using our gifts to draw the applause of human beings, we're playing to the wrong audience anyway.

God also gives us natural abilities to earn a living for ourselves and our families. Some of you are gifted teachers or carpenters or bookkeepers or farmers or nurses or etc. We don't just serve God when we're at church. Or when we're on mission trips. If you're born again, you serve Him every day at your job. In your family, etc. You glorify Him whenever you use the gifts and abilities He's given you to bless others. In honest employment that provides goods or services and that provides income to feed your family and to advance His Kingdom. It's sad because some people live their whole lives and never realized they WERE serving God at their job. It is wrong to think of everything in here as holy and sacred and everything out there as secular. It's all for Him!

But even our secular work is to benefit the church either directly or through our tithing. In Ephesians 4, where Paul talks about gifts, he says they are (12-14) "... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until 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. 14 Then we will no longer be infants..." Every now and then I hear the comment, "Antioch has changed." I pray so! I pray we've grown individually but also as a church! That we are more mature in Him today than we were 5 years ago or 20 years ago or 50. That we look more like Jesus every day. That we are more righteous and holy. Paul emphasizes maturity which implies change by growth. Green tomatoes change as they mature. That's not to say all change is good, a tomato changes as it rots also, so we have to be careful, but I pray we all mature personally and that the Body of Christ itself grows and matures.

Sadly, many people take God's gifts and use them for their own personal glory. Some, to whom God has given a gift of music, have used it to sing the devil's songs. Humor is a gift of God but many are using it for ungodly jokes and such. I can

give you a hammer and you can use it to build a house or to tear one down. How will you use the gift or gifts God given you?

Which leads to our next point. In order for there to be maturity in us and in the church, in order for the common good to be achieved, we have to use our gifts. Say use. In keeping with Paul's analogy of the body, if you're not using your gifts, the body, that is the church, is handicapped. Incapable of doing all God wants us to do. Whenever a body part doesn't do its work, the other parts often try to take up the slack and get worn out.

Anyone ever had tennis elbow? It comes from overusing the forearm. And sometimes when individuals try to cover for other members who aren't using their gifts, they get fatigued. Worn out. Even injured. One of the things I'm so thankful for at Antioch are the many many people who participate in so many ways. We don't have time to go into all of it today, but we have so many **active** members. Willing to step up and do their part. Many churches and organizations suffer from the 90/10 rule. 90 percent of the work is done by 10 percent of the people. I'm thankful we have much greater involvement here, but we still have some who aren't using their gifts. Find your gift and then find a way to use it. Imagine if the most gifted individual of all, Jesus Christ, had refused to use it for us.

Some gifts are called for by various positions in the church. Those who are gifted in construction and such work well on building and grounds. Those whom God has gifted with numbers fit well on the finance commission. And etc. The Nominating committee is working even now to find folks willing to serve in the coming years. Volunteer yourself to them and make suggestions of who you think are gifted in different ways and pray for them. And don't feel guilty for saying no if it's a position you're not gifted for. Few things are as frustrating as trying to do something God hasn't wired you to do. It's very painful whenever I try to trim painting or work in the nursery. Not everyone is gifted for everything. But don't just say no. Say, But I would be willing to serve here instead.

And I don't know what the final ballot will look like. It's usually vote for two and there's only two names. But if there's three and you're the one not elected, don't get miffed. Find a way to serve God anyway. There's plenty of work to go around! None of our commissions refuses volunteers. You don't have to be elected to serve Jesus. He already elected you. We pray for God's guidance so we have to trust it when it comes. I've not been elected before but I didn't quit serving. You don't have to be elected to pull weeds or wash dishes. You just have to be willing. I know gifted people who are unwilling to serve. Imagine a powerlifter sitting on the side watching others carry a heavy load without volunteering to help. The Health and Safety Team needs greeters, our kitchen needs servers and cleaners, BLAST needs helpers, our nursery needs servants, etc. and you don't have to be elected for any of those! Just willing! God will

take willing over gifted any day. Amazing, if you are willing, God often imparts the gift as you serve!

One of the principles of God's kingdom is that of multiplication. Say multiply. The more you use what He's given you, the more He'll give you. Remember the parable Jesus told about the man going away who entrusted his servants with talents before he left? Those talents were money, but we now use that same word to talk about various abilities God has given us. The whole point of the parable was to use what God's given you! Don't dig a hole and bury it. Don't sing only in the shower. Don't only play where no one can hear. It's for the common good!

Even worse, don't refuse to use your gift because the master had some very harsh words for the one who buried his talent. Matt 25:26-30 "You wicked, lazy servant! ..."Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents... And throw that **worthless** servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Say ouch! Instead, how can you maximize your gifts for God? It brings you joy and gives you life to do what God has gifted you to do! And as you use it, He multiplies it. Matt 25:29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance."

This is also a reminder to develop our gifts. To enhance them. Even though God gave Dolly a musical gift, don't think she didn't practice or still does! We admire gifted athletes, but guess what, they practice! And if they practice for a crown or trophy that will fade, how much more should we do it to honor and glorify our Lord? Who gave us these gifts! I've met preachers who didn't think they needed any more training. I don't care how gifted you are, we should all work to maximize the gifts God has given us! For His glory and for the common good.

Sadly, we have a tendency to value some gifts over others, which Paul strongly warns against. Every part of the body is important. Today's daily bread story is called Lower Deck People. Sheridan Voysey writes, "A friend of mine works on a hospital ship called Africa Mercy, which takes free healthcare to developing countries. The staff daily serves hundreds of patients whose ailments would otherwise go untreated.

TV Crews periodically board the ship, point their cameras on its amazing medical staff, who fix cleft palates and reset club feet. Sometimes they go below deck to interview other crew members, but the work Mick does typically goes unnoticed. Mick, an engineer, admits being surprised about where he'd been assigned to work—in the ship's sewage plant. With nearly 11,000 gallons of waste produced each day, managing this toxic material is serious business. Without Mick tending its pipes and pumps, Africa Mercy's life-giving operations would stop. It's easy to applaud those on the "top deck" of Christian ministry while overlooking those in the galleys below..."

Here at Antioch some of you are top deck in the spotlight and others are on the lower deck. Please know you are all important! God is honored by your work and it is indispensable to us all. You know how a sore toe affects your whole body. Or knee or eye or whatever. Look back at 1 Cor 12:15-19 "If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." Just as HE wanted them to be. Not as I want them to be or you, not even how **we** wanted them to be. But as HE wants them to be. Let's trust His arrangement, find and use the gift He's given us for His glory and for the common good of His church.

Aren't you glad Dolly Parton and Billy Graham and especially Jesus Christ used their gifts? If you are willing to use yours for Jesus, I invite you to use the bottom of the bulletin insert to write your gift/gifts and drop it in the offering plate on your way out indicating your willingness to use your gifts for Jesus and for His Church.