

Improving Your Serve

Defrosting Your Spiritual Assets

Frankton – 5/10/15

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12.1-7,12 Spiritual Gift discussion

Proposition: We are given gifts by the Spirit to use for God's church

As we've been learning in our series called, [SLIDE] "Improving Your Serve," most of us default to our selfish settings instead of looking for ways to put others first. [SLIDE] Two weeks ago we focused on checking our motives, expecting difficulties, putting others first, and following the example of Christ. Last week we learned that [SLIDE] we must surrender our bodies, minds, and wills to God and have a proper estimate of ourselves before we can completely engage in service, which is our topic for today.

A man from Illinois decided to travel to Wisconsin to go duck hunting. He shot and dropped a bird, but it fell into a farmer's field on the other side of the fence. As the flatlander climbed over the fence, a dairy farmer drove up on his tractor and asked what was going on. The hunter said, "I shot a duck and I'm retrieving it." The old farmer replied, "This is my property and you're not coming over here!" Well, this made the hunter mad so he said, "If you don't let me come over the fence I'll call my Chicago lawyer and I'll sue you." The farmer smiled and said, "Apparently you don't know how we do things up here. We settle disagreements with the Wisconsin three-kick rule. I'll kick you three times, and then you kick me three times, and so on, back and forth, until someone gives up." The Illini liked this challenge because he thought he could easily take the old farmer. The Wisconsin Badger climbed down from the tractor and planted the steel toe of his heavy work boot into the man's shin. The man fell to his knees. His second kick went directly to his stomach, knocking the wind out of him. The farmer then landed his third kick to the side of the hunter's head. The disoriented man slowly got up and said, "Okay, you old codger, now it's my turn!" To which the farmer responded, "Nah, I give up. You can have the duck."

Many of us battle over things. Sometimes we fight because of a lack of information and other times we kick people simply because we want to. In the church, the whole topic of spiritual gifts has been a battleground for many years going clear back to the church at Corinth. This tension can result because we like to pick fights with those who are wired differently than we are or from an overemphasis on certain gifts. So, before we jump into our text, let's take just a moment to set the context. The Corinthian church had many problems and difficulties. The church was filled with division, arguments, lawsuits, and immorality. On top of that, there was confusion about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship, the Lord's Supper, the Resurrection, tithing, and spiritual gifts. In particular, some people thought they were more important than others because they had some pretty spectacular spiritual gifts. When Paul wrote this letter to the church he specifically addressed this issues.

Chapter 12 gives us several suggestions to help us defrost our spiritual assets. The first one is: [SLIDE] Be Informed About Spiritual Gifts. When we come to 1 Corinthians we see that Paul wanted to make sure that they had a proper understanding about spiritual gifts. Paul starts by saying that he doesn't want the church to be ignorant of the spiritual gifts. This is a topic that is too important for believers to be uninformed about and it's certainly too critical to fight about.

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Why? Author John MacArthur writes, [SLIDE] “No local congregation will be what it should be...until it understands spiritual gifts.”

So let's begin by defining what a spiritual gift is. One of the best definitions I've come across is this: [SLIDE] “A supernatural enabling by the Holy Spirit which equips a Christian for his work of service and ministry.” There's some disagreement on the number of spiritual gifts and what are and are not gifts due in part to there being several different lists of the gifts in scripture. Check out your bulletin insert for the details. But here's one of the most important things to remember: we're all commanded to do much of the things that are also listed as spiritual gifts. For instance, while some people have the gift of giving, all of us are to be givers of our tithes and resources for kingdom purposes. Likewise, we aren't excused from our responsibility to witness just because we might not have the gift of evangelism.

Next is: [SLIDE] Different yet Equal and All are Needed. Paul challenges us to incorporate some diversity in our understanding of spiritual gifts: [SLIDE] *There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all.* [SLIDE] *There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord.* [4-5] The key word in this passage is the word “different.” We all have different kinds of gifts and there are different ways to serve. There's not just one gift that fits all believers because there are different kinds of service needed in the world. But all gifts are important. The Corinthians had elevated the more flashy gifts, like speaking in tongues, and were giving more attention to the supposed spiritual superstars who had those flashy gifts. Paul challenges them, and us, to understand that different gifts are required for the church to be healthy. We minister differently because we've been gifted differently. The same God is at work in us, but he customizes his work through us for his ultimate glory and the strength of the church. Let me illustrate. Suppose someone drops a plate full of dessert on the floor in the Factory. This is how people with different gifts might respond. · Gift of service: “Let me help you clean it up.” Gift of exhortation: “You'll do better next time.” Gift of mercy: “Don't feel bad. It could have happened to anyone.”

We've all been gifted differently and so we act differently and we serve differently. Friends, this church has every gift that is needed in order to function as a biblical community. 1 Corinthians 1:7: [SLIDE] *Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This verse is written to the entire church at Corinth. Even with all its problems, this community of faith did not lack any spiritual gift. Likewise, this church has just the right amount of spiritual gifts!

Next we must: [SLIDE] Identify Your Spiritual Gift. Back to chapter 12: [SLIDE] *A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.* [7] Spiritual gifts are given to make plain the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This verse teaches us two things. First, every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift. Notice the phrase, “each of us.” Every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift. Second, we've been given at least one spiritual gift to help each other. Gifts are given so that they can be given in service to others so that the church will be fortified. These gifts are given to you so that as each part does its work, the church can be built up. Remember that gifts are received, not achieved. You can't earn them; they are given to you freely.

If you need some help in figuring out your spiritual gift, I encourage you to attend a class we're going to run this fall titled: “Serving from the Heart.” We've also put together an insert that has

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all the gifts listed in the scriptures and also references an on-line assessment tool from the UM General Board of Discipleship. Examine the different gift lists in the New Testament and then experiment with some different ministries. The Holy Spirit will lead you because he is the one who gave you your gifts in the first place.

Our next topic: **[SLIDE]** Implement Your Gift in Service. While it's important to identify your gifts, it's not enough. Gifts are given to be used. Verses 12-30 describe how the church is like the human body, with each part playing a critical role in the functioning of the body. You've been given gifts and a key role to play in this church. Until each of us implement our gifts, our church will not become the church God intends it to be. Look at verse 12: **[SLIDE]** *The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.* The foot needs the hand, and the ear needs the eye. Likewise, we all need each other. If you're hoarding your gifts and not using them, the entire body is handicapped.

If Paul were to write a letter to us today, he would say something like this: "Brothers and sisters, say one of you owned a set of tools. Would you spend all your time counting them, naming them, organizing them, polishing them, and putting them on display? Wouldn't you simply use them? So it is with the gifts of the Spirit: they are not tools to be admired and organized. Rather, they are tools to be used to Build God's Community. They are not medals to be won, or trophies to be displayed, or treasures to be guarded. They are gifts to be used. Use them! It is as you serve that God by his spirit will reveal the gifts he has given you."

A well-known conductor was holding a rehearsal one night with a large orchestra and a hundred-voice choir. While the mighty chorus sang out, the horns blared and the cymbals clashed, sitting far back in the orchestra, the piccolo player thought to herself, "With all these loud instruments, it doesn't matter what I do. They don't need me." And so she stopped playing. Suddenly the conductor stopped the music and looked right at the piccolo player and said, "It doesn't sound right without you. We need you." You're needed in this church! God has gifted you and now He wants to use you. Don't allow yourself to think you don't matter. Nobody is a nobody in the body of Christ. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

Lastly: **[SLIDE]** Intensify Your Love. One of the lessons we can learn from the church at Corinth is this: having spiritual gifts does not necessarily make you spiritual. It's possible for a church to have all the gifts that are needed, and for every believer to know what their gift is, and still miss the mark. In the last verse of 1 Corinthians 12, we're reminded that there is something far greater than even our divine abilities: **[SLIDE]** *But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.* [31] While 1 Corinthians 13 is without doubt the best explanation of love ever written, we do a disservice to Paul's intention when we only read it at weddings. This love chapter is sandwiched between a discussion of spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and chapter 14. Paul recognizes the dangers of defrosting our spiritual assets when they are divorced from love.

Notice the gifts that are listed in verses 1-3: *If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.* After elevating the supremacy of love over every

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spiritual gift, Paul then describes how love should be the marinade that provides the distinctive flavor in our serving: *Love is patient, love is kind...* Then, beginning in verse 8, Paul contrasts the cessation of prophecies, tongues and knowledge with the never-failing aspect of love. Love will never fail or cease to exist.

I believe that ignorance related to spiritual gifts is not our basic problem. More basic is the problem of not desiring to strengthen other people's faith by being patient and kind, by refusing to boast, by not being easily angered and by keeping no record of wrongs (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-6). Human nature is more prone to tear down, than it is to build up. We'd rather kick people than labor in love with them and for them. Jonathon Swift once said, **[SLIDE]** "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." Spiritual gifts, no matter how exciting and wonderful, are useless and even destructive if they are not unleashed in love.

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About 20 years ago, when Saddleback Church in Southern California had grown to approximately 500 people, Rick Warren, the Senior Pastor, said, “Folks, I’m out of energy and the church is getting so big that I can’t do much more. As I read the Bible it doesn’t say I’m supposed to do it anyway...I’ll make you a deal. If you’ll do the ministry God’s gifted you to do then I’ll do my part which is to make sure you’re well fed.” Warren said they then “shook hands” and made a pact together. It was after that the church began exploding with growth (From Rick Warren’s sermon, “Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts”).

Can we make the same deal? Jeff and I will serve faithfully in our area of giftedness and responsibility if you will serve in yours. Can we shake on it?

. 1 Corinthians 7:7 makes the same point: “I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”

. Ephesians 4:16: “From 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.”

Paul’s concern for young Timothy was that he not only be able to identify his gift, but that he would implement it: “Do not neglect your gift...I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God” (1 Timothy 4:14;2 Timothy 1:6).

Summary

Let’s summarize the six directives that will help us defrost our spiritual assets:

Be informed about spiritual gifts

Be influenced by the Holy Spirit

Incorporate diversity in your understanding

Identify your spiritual gift

Implement your gift in service

Intensify your love

What’s In Your Gift Box?

I’m thankful for the different gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to me. I’ve put some things in this box that remind me that I am responsible to use what I’ve been given. Each of these is a gift that I’ve received and is displayed in my office to serve as a reminder to me.

Picture of my family (Shepherding). I’m called first to be the pastor of my family and secondly to be the pastor of this church.

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BLT Clock (Evangelism). When I was sent out from Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park to pastor a church in Rockford, I was given this clock and pen set. Engraved on the plaque are three letters: B-L-T. We used these letters to explain our evangelism philosophy: Build relationships, Look for opportunities, and Take non-Christians to outreach events. I try to follow this same formula today as I remember that the clock is “ticking” for people.

Mirror (Encouragement). When this mirror is plugged in, it shows a picture of the cross. I try to help people see Jesus when they look in the mirror, and strive to encourage and build them up with a word of encouragement.

Picture of preacher (Preaching/Teaching). I love how this picture shows a pastor studying the Bible with Jesus standing right behind him. I long to stay in close communion with Christ so that I can hear from Him while I’m preparing to preach and feed this church.

Crown of thorns (service). This was given to me on the morning before I left for a missionary trip to Zimbabwe almost 20 years ago. I was pumped and excited about going and then I opened my door and saw this crown of thorns. On it was a note that read, “Before you can experience the glory, you must first be willing to suffer.” I heard Crawford Loritts say recently that we really shouldn’t look to serve according to our giftedness, but we should serve out of our brokenness. When we’re broken, we minister out of gratitude and dependence. If we serve only out of our giftedness, we may become filled with pride.

Bucky Badger (missionary). This reminds me that I am a missionary sent out from the Promised Land of Wisconsin to the flat lands of Illinois. I just hope you don’t have the three-kick rule here!

What’s in your gift box? Open it and use what you’ve been given. Is it time for you to think outside the box? Allow the Holy Spirit to blow into your life and lead you into some exciting serving opportunities!

(chart to come)

Distinct categories. While there are many ways to categorize the gifts of the Spirit, I like the one suggested by Chuck Swindoll. He sees three gift groupings. Based on 1 Peter 4:11, there are two primary areas of distinction: speaking and serving. The third category would include the “sign gifts,” which are more temporary in nature. 2 Corinthians 12:12 says that these gifts were given to the apostles and were critical to the church in its embryonic stage: “The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.” These gifts were especially important in the first century, before the canon of Scripture was put together. 1 Corinthians 13:8 suggests that many of these kinds of gifts will cease to function: “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

The next directive is: **[SLIDE]** Be Influenced by the Holy Spirit

In verses 2-3, Paul challenges us to be influenced exclusively by the Holy Spirit: “You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

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Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." When we come to the topic of spiritual gifts, our focus must be on the Giver, not on the gifts themselves. Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit is often neglected in many churches today. Paul reminds us that before we were saved we were led astray by our emotions and false doctrines. Now that we are believers, the Holy Spirit empowers and energizes us for ministry.

Just as no one can confess the Lordship of Christ apart from the Spirit's leading, so too, it is impossible to improve your serve without being led by the Spirit. Galatians 5:25: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The Holy Spirit blows like the wind through surrendered lives.

The word "working" refers to the results or accomplishments that come when we use our gifts in meaningful service. Whether or not we are able to see the results, God does. We get the word "energy" from this Greek word. When we serve according to our giftedness, God gives us energy and we in turn energize the church through our service.

Notice the gifts that are listed in verses 1-3: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." After elevating the supremacy of love over every spiritual gift, Paul then describes how love should be the marinade that provides the distinctive flavor in our serving: "Love is patient, love is kind..." Then, beginning in verse 8, Paul contrasts the cessation of prophecies, tongues and knowledge with the never-failing aspect of love. Love will never fail or cease to exist.

According to verse 7, a servant who loves "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres." In other words, as we focus on living out the Great Commandment by intensifying our love for God and for others, then we will want to look for ways to defrost our spiritual assets and serve others.

Five rules of Spiritual gifts:

1. God imparts spiritual gifts according to his divine grace; they cannot be earned through human merit.

God made each of us a minister in his own right.

2. God gives spiritual gifts according to His own discretion; he is not bound by man's wishes.

His will, not ours

Maturing Christians are not concerned with who is the most important member of the body.

Each person has his unique service to perform.

There are no unimportant spiritual gifts: Just as in the church there are no second class Christians and no Super Christians.

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There is no more place among Christians for an attitude of superiority then there is for a sense of inferiority.

3. God wills that every Christian exercise spiritual gifts; these divine enablings are not limited to a few believers.

Not just for clergy, lay leaders, etc. but for EVERY Christian.

4. *God provides gifts for the purpose of ministry and service; they are not given in order to draw attention to man or to satisfy his ego.*

Not for self-gratification or self-glorification.

God gives us spiritual gifts for the purpose of benefiting others.

5. God intends that the ministry of the church be accomplished through spiritual gifts; human talents are not adequate for spiritual ministry.

Romans 12:6-8	1 Corinthians 12:4-11	1 Corinthians 12:28	Ephesians 4:11
Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy
Teaching		Teaching	Teaching
Serving			
Exhortation			
Giving			
Giving Aid			
Compassion			
	Healing	Healing	
	Working Miracles	Working Miracles	
	Tongues	Tongues	
	Interpretation of Tongues	Interpretation of Tongues	
	Wisdom		
	Knowledge		
	Faith		
	Discernment		
		Apostleship	
		Helps	
		Administration	
			Evangelism
			Shepherding