

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

SESSION 1.2 – THE GIFTED SELF

Objectives:

- To make the participants realize that all Christians are gifted in proportion to their ability to carry them out
- To challenge them to use their gifts and talents and not to hide them
- To help them develop their gifts

Introduction

It cannot be denied that we are all different: not only in looks, but also in terms of our abilities. Some people are 'gifted'. We know that because we can see what they have achieved and how they are successful in the world. Many people, however, see themselves as under achievers simply because they haven't the gifts that can make them rich and famous. But as Christians, we must not allow ourselves to be deluded by our lack of gifts. After all, we have all been gifted, by virtue of our union with Christ at baptism. The Gift of the Holy Spirit makes us uniquely talented and skillful. Today, we look at the gifted self, how we define our gifts and how we should and should not make use of what God has given us and how to nurture them.

What has God gifted us?

What's the ultimate reward for the faithful servants? Although Jesus doesn't explicitly say it, it seems obvious they don't get to keep the money. The two successful servants aren't even working for their own increase. It's not their money. They're working for the increase of their master, and they share in the increase to his estate. Their true reward is to share in their master's happiness. So happiness is the reward, and happiness comes from serving others.

As Jesus implies in The Parable of the Talents, creating abundance requires you to move beyond fear. If you're too fearful or suspicious or distrustful, you're going to bury your talents. And this leads to "weeping and gnashing of teeth," i.e. sorrow and depression.

You might think that fear and suspicion will keep you out of trouble, but really they'll just cause you suffering and pain. You don't need fear to avoid being a gullible idiot; for that you just need common sense. To live a life of abundance, you must ultimately move beyond fear and work to create abundance for others. Otherwise you'll ultimately be cast out as worthless.

Serve to create increase for others, and happiness is your reward. Bury your talents, and you get "weeping and gnashing of teeth." The choice is yours.

What He will say THEN depends upon your service in the kingdom NOW...

Using Our Person, Gifts and Skills

Using our person, gifts and skills for God is a deliberate choice. It is the result of the consideration of: All that we are, living for all that He is, in light of all that needs to be done.

We ask ourselves, "What is my part?" "What is my role in this drama of life?" We find the answer when we come to the point where we believe that God has given us a unique combination of personality, interests, spiritual gifts and skills that we can use for Him. There are so many factors that make us who we are. Not only the variables but the strength, size or amount of each of the variables makes a tremendous difference in the outcome of who we are. Change one element and the end result would be skewed. Here are some of the many components that make us who we are:

1. **Personal makeup** - Genes, personality, temperament, chemistry, intelligence, birth order, physical abilities/limitations, aptitudes, and our spiritual gifts that God gives us .
2. **Environment** - Parentage, siblings, relatives, social status, neighborhood, school, clubs, church, civic groups, sports, meaningful or tragic events in your life.
3. **Belief system** - Attitudes, beliefs, motivations, yearnings, ambitions, presuppositions and perceptions.

There are many more components and many variations of each of them. All of these factors are important to who we are. When you take the variables, put them in different amounts and intensities, you can end up with an endless list of combinations. These combinations result in our giftedness. We are gifted in different ways. As part of our call and our ministry in life, God expects us to make the world a better place through our person, gifts and skills. Paul wrote it this way to the Christians at Ephesus:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

We are His workmanship! When an artisan sits at a lump of clay, he or she decides what they want to make and it becomes that very thing right before their eyes. How much more our great and loving God stopped and thought about you and I and then purposely created us for specific good works. Not massed produced, we are His workmanship! We are a unique one-of-a-kind ambassador for God to use in this world. As we respond to life with our unique personage, as we hone in on our ministry preferences and become more proficient with the skills, abilities and resources that God has given us, we will be living out our unique ministries in this life for God.

USING OUR GOD GIVEN GIFTS

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Measuring oneself and our gifts

The true measure of yourself is your measure of Christ. Think of yourself according to the measure of your faith, Paul says. Your self accords with your faith. Self is defined by its faith in Christ. And faith is a looking away from the self to Christ and his mercy. If Christ is more to you, you are more. If Christ is less to you, you are less. Your measure rises and your measure falls with your measure of him. Your valuing him is the value that you have.

How much do we value Christ?

Christian humility is a kind of self-forgetfulness produced by treasuring Christ. Thinking about ourselves will produce pride or despair. And both are forms of unbelief. The gospel alternative to pride is not mere self-condemnation, but Christ-exaltation, to think highly of Christ. The Christian triumph over pride is faith in Christ. Treasuring Christ—especially the mercy of Christ—above all the praise of men and above all the pleasures of earth is the triumph of Christian humility.

Why are we diverse in giftedness?

There is diversity in the body of Christ. In verse 3 God assigns different measures of faith and in verses 4-5 the church is seen as a human body with different members. God plans diversity in the church, even spiritual diversity. When diverse people harmonize by the power and mercy of Christ, Christ is more exalted than if people attain unity in Christ who are all the same. But unity in diversity is impossible without mercy-loving, mercy-dependent, Christ-treasuring humility. The one who serves, the one who teaches, the one who exhorts, the one who contributes, the one who leads, the one who shows mercy are the ones who need it most. These all seem to be acting out of strength. They all are relating to others who are in need of their ministry. And that is a dangerous place to be. It can lead quickly to pride.

Using our gifts for others

Paul's main point is: mercy-dependent, mercy-loving, Christ-treasuring people, saved by the mercy of God, are being renewed in their minds, and the

first thing he mentions is: they don't think more highly of themselves than they ought. And now he says: **All of you who use your gifts for others, do it with deep humility, knowing that you too are dependent on mercy.** That is, do it in proportion to your faith (vv. 3, 6); do it in childlike reliance on Christ.

Paul puts the emphasis on mercy-loving humility in his list of gifts because Christian humility is a self-forgetting happiness in Christ. This humble happiness in Christ unleashes the spirit and attitude of ministry, not just its task and function, that loves people best and exalts Christ best. Humility is not mainly self-condemnation. Little ministry is produced with that kind of self-focus. What unleashes ministry is the positive side of humility: the overflow of humble joy in the mercy of Christ. It is not calculated, careful, measured, self-protecting, self-advancing ministry. He wants us to be free and eager and lavish. This only comes from humble, self-forgetting hearts who are overflowing with joy in Christ.

How we should use our gifts

What matters to God is not merely that we use our gifts, but how we use them—the spirit, the attitude. What matters is not merely that we give and lead and show mercy but free and lavish generosity in our giving. What matters to God is passion and eagerness and zeal in our leadership, gladness and cheerfulness and joy in our mercy. These are the overflow of mercy-dependent, mercy-loving, self-forgetting, Christ-treasuring humility. And isn't this what the world needs? Not just philanthropists. Not just leaders. Not just do-gooders to the poor. The church and the world need people who have trembled in the courtroom of God as guilty sinners; who have heard the joyful sound of mercy from the bench of the Judge: "You may go free; my Son paid your debt"; who are therefore mercy-loving, mercy-dependent, Christ-treasuring people; and who therefore overflow not just with contributions but self-forgetting, lavish contributions; and who don't just lead, but lead with self-forgetting zeal and passion for the cause of Christ; and who don't just do mercy, but love mercy and do it with self-forgetting joy. That is what we need because that is what will show how valuable Christ is. He gets the glory, we get the joy.

What are Our Gifts?

Spiritual gifts overlap with each other and even include each other, and therefore are not mutually exclusive or even rigidly defined. Paul does not intend to give us tightly distinguishable categories. The implication of this is that in seeking to receive and use spiritual gifts (which we should surely do, 1 Corinthians 14:1), we should not think mechanically, as if there is a set number, or that they have fixed boundaries, or that they come in separate packages, so that if you have one you can't have the other, or that they come complete and in no varying proportions or mixtures. Instead, leave to God how he will gift you and use you. Your combination of gifts may—probably will—be utterly different from anyone else's. They come in degrees, and they come in mixtures. Instead of trying to figure out the definitions and boundaries and names and differences of your gifts, let your joy in Christ overflow in love for other people in all the ways you can. And the ways of love that seem more *joyful* and more *fruitful* are your gifts, whatever you call them or whatever mix they are of mercy and service and giving and teaching and exhorting and leading.

Defining Spiritual Gifts

Some spiritual gifts are things that God expects in some measure from all believers. Service, mercy, contributing, exhorting—they are all ordinary Christian virtues. *Some of these virtues come more joyfully and are more fruitfully for some than for others. When that happens we can call it a spiritual gift.* In other words, some take unusual spiritual delight in serving, or giving, or doing mercy, or teaching, or leading, or exhorting. The Holy Spirit has shaped their hearts so that they find themselves unusually drawn to these things. Or it may be that only for a specific season God may come upon a person for an unusual ministry of church leadership or financial contribution which is simply extraordinary. Then after that season the gifting (anointing, unusual inclination and empowerment) may subside. *So a spiritual gift in this sense is one of the Christian virtues that one has unusual joy and satisfaction in doing—either over a lifetime or for an unusual season.*

Our Giftedness should bear Fruit

If your activity is not bearing fruit in helping other people grow in faith, it is probably not a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are not just natural abilities used in church but also Spirit enabled forms of love that over time build up other people. If you think you have the gift of exhortation but no one is helped by your words, you probably don't. If you think you have the gift of teaching, but no one is growing in joyful grasp of the ways of God, you probably don't. If you think you have the gift of service, but in your attempts you make others feel insulted, you probably don't. In other words, one of the measures of our spiritual gifts is that others are spiritually helped. *A spiritual gift is a fruitful form of love.*

In summary

We should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think in accordance with the measure of faith God has assigned to us. The opposite of high self-regard is not mainly low self-regard, though that is a needed starting place in view of our sin and God's holiness. The opposite of pride is not paralyzing self-condemnation, but liberating Christ-exaltation. In other words, the opposite of high self-regard is faith in Christ. Which means that the best way to use your spiritual gifts is to forget about yourself as your joy in Christ spills over in love to other people. Mercy and service and contributing and exhorting, as well as others, are ordinary Christian virtues that we should all have. But they become spiritual gifts when we find the virtues pouring out with unusual joy and with unusual fruitfulness for others.

Seeking the Gifts

The way to seek these gifts is to pray broad, earnest prayers that God would make you joyful and fruitful in every form of Christian love.

Lord help me to overflow joyfully in mercy and service and giving and exhorting, as well as in the more role-specific gifts of leading and teaching. Help me to be joyful and fruitful in all the manifold ways of love.

Some would have a special burden to become especially gifted in one or the other. And so specific prayers would be fitting. *Lord, grant me the gift of mercy. Make me delight ore and more in acts of mercy and make me more and more fruitful in seeing others come to Christ as I show them mercy*