

# Using Our God Given Gifts

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Date: 02 June 1985

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[ 0 : 00 ] Specifically to page 164, I want you to do some thinking about part of what it means to be the body of Christ, part of what it means to be a group of interdependent people who have been called by Christ to follow him. What we're looking at tonight is only a part of that, but nevertheless it's a very important part, and so that's what I want you to look at.

And it's on page 164, and it's the paragraph in chapter 12 that begins with verse 4. And I invite you to read that paragraph aloud with me.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of service, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of working, but is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the offerance of wisdom, and to another the offerance of knowledge according to the same Spirit. To another, faith by the same Spirit. To another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit. To another, the working of miracles. To another, prophecy. To another, the ability to distinguish between Spirit. To another, various kinds of tongues. To another, the interpretation of tongues.

All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually, as he wills. And part of being the body of Christ, you see, is being a group of people who have gifts.

Gifts that are not something that are for our selfish use. But gifts that are to be used interdependently with one another. Our gifts are to mess together so that being the body of Christ, we can do the work of Christ. And that's what this particular paragraph is all about. So that's where I want us to focus our thinking tonight.

[ 2 : 44 ] And the beginning point that I'd like us to take as our focus from this paragraph is the fact that Paul points out. The fact that all Christians have spiritual gifts.

Just look at those first few verses. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord.

And there are varieties of workings. It is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

There is no one, no one at all, who lacks a gift.

Paul's point is those gifts may vary. Those gifts may, in some people, be buried or hidden or unused. But we're all given gifts. Even the most unlikely of it are given gifts.

[ 3 : 55 ] There's a story. I sometimes wonder how true it is, but nevertheless, there's a story from the life of St. Francis of Assisi about one of his followers, one of the men who chose to follow him and become part of his monastic order.

And this fellow's name was Brother Juniper. I guess they named brothers the way Vancouver named some of his priests after trees. And Brother Juniper was, to put it mildly, a walking disaster. Everything he did went wrong. He couldn't get anything right. He'd try this, doing this for the community and it wouldn't work.

And he'd try that and it wouldn't work. And it got to the point where the other monk really preferred that he did nothing. It seemed safer that way.

Well, one day he decided that he would cook a meal for the other monk. He apparently decided that what he would do would be cook rabbits.

[ 5 : 16 ] So he cooked it. However, when it was served in the refectory, it was not one of the more welcome meals. Probably one of the more memorable, but not one of the more welcome.

Because you see, he'd cook the rabbits all right, but he'd cook them with the skin still on them. It hadn't occurred to him that you skinned the rabbit before you cooked it. And so it was a bad scene. And they let him know. They let him know that he'd done wrong again. And in discouragement, he ran out of the building and went to sit in the garden and bemoan his lot in life.

And as he was sitting, very sad, very upset, very discouraged, Francis came up and sat down beside him.

He listened to his frustrations and sorrow for a minute and then said to him, Cheer up. Cheer up. [ 6 : 30 ] Don't you know that you have the greatest gift of all? You have a loving heart. You see, he may have been a disaster.

But all of those disasters had come out of the fact that he really loved the other members of his community and he really wanted in that love to do something for them. You may not have known exactly what he was doing, but he tried. He tried because he did have the gift of love. A great, great gift.

So great that it bubbled out of him in all sorts of unfortunate and inappropriate ways. But nevertheless, the gift of love was real. He just needed help in learning how to channel that gift of love in a way that would be helpful and appropriate for his fellow monks.

In the Christian church, there are all sorts of Brother Juniper. I don't know of any that do the rabbit routine, but there are people who want to do things, want to do things for the community, want to express their being part of the body of Christ, want to take their share in the work of the body of Christ, and who, like Brother Juniper, try to exercise gifts where they're not present.

[ 8 : 15 ] And because they're trying to use gifts that they don't really have, they, like Brother Juniper, fail. They fail because they're trying to exercise gifts they don't have instead of the gifts they do have.

And there are other people who would like to pretend they're like Brother Juniper, in a way. They'd like to pretend that they can't do anything right, that they don't have any gifts.

They do that because they're trying to avoid responsibility. Because, of course, with a gift, with an ability to do something, comes the responsibility to use that gift, to do something, the proper something with that gift.

So there are some people who would dearly love us to believe that they have no gifts. Because they just don't want to use the gifts they have for fear to become responsible, have to become responsible.

And, you see, the tragedy with them is far greater than the tragedy with Brother Juniper. Because the tragedy with them is that they're refusing.

[ 9 : 39 ] It's not that they're looking in the wrong places. It's just that they're refusing to look at all for what God may have given them, what gifts the Spirit may have given them.

They don't want to see it. They don't. They're a tragedy. But, Paul says that we all have gifts.

None of us can claim not to have at least one gift, one skill, one talent, one ability from God.

He says that we all have gifts. Varying gifts, but we all have gifts. And that in using those gifts, that's the way the Spirit of God is to be seen in our lives.

Through the use we make of the gifts the Spirit's given them. Well, not only, as I've already said, do we all have gifts, but Paul's also pointing out, as I've alluded to, the fact that those gifts the Spirit gives do come in a very, very great variety.

[ 10 : 54 ] In verse 4, he says, now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit. And then, starting in verse 8, he takes us in a different direction as to what that means. He says, to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit.

To another, faith by the same Spirit. To another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit. To another, the working of miracles.

To another, prophecy. To another, the ability to distinguish between spirits. To another, various kinds of tongues. To another, the interpretation of tongues.

You have there a list, a partial list. A partial list of the gifts that God gives.

What are these gifts? What are spiritual gifts? Well, if you really want to get a generic definition, we'd say that a spiritual gift is any ability, any skill, any talent, which is given to a person by God the Holy Spirit.

[ 12 : 10 ] Given by God the Holy Spirit, not just to any person, but to one of the people of God. And it's true that the loving God that we know in Christ works out his purposes in human history.

That's what a spiritual gift is. And there's a variety of gifts that are meant to be used in unity. Let me just use with you, conjure up in your minds if you like, the picture of an army at war.

Despite what five and six and seven year olds may think, an army at war is not made up strictly by a group of men running around with rifles shooting at each other.

That is a false impression of an army at war. An army at war is made up of all sorts of people. A few of whom actually do have rifles and shoot at other people.

Some of them are in tanks and some of them operate missiles. Some of them buy food and some of them cook food and some of them serve food. Some of them operate radios.

[ 13 : 32 ] Some of them buy toilet paper. Some of them operate hospitals. The list goes on and on and on and on.

There are all these functions that you have to have. All these tasks that have to be done for an army to function.

And where all the myriad of tasks is not done, then you start running into trouble with the way that army is working. You have to have all these functions done by a whole variety of people.

A variety of people putting their skills to work to achieve one goal. The goal is victory.

That's an army. All those people, all those jobs pulling together to achieve the one common goal.

[ 14 : 37 ] That's a good picture of the Christian church. We Christians individually are given a multitude of functions.

Some are given some functions, gifts, abilities. Some are given others. We're given gifts that are to be brought together in unity.

Brought together to do the work of the church. That means doing the work of the church within the Christian community. We need people who have gifts in leading worship and people who have gifts in music.

People who can do all sorts of other things. From typing to cooking to cleaning, teaching classes.

But all of these gifts, all of these abilities, all of these functions must come together in unity.

Work together for the purposes of Christ. That Christ may be known and that those who know him may know him better and serve him more faithfully.

[ 16 : 07 ] Of course, the gifts are more than just inner-centered, community-centered sort of.

Rather, there are also gifts that instead of being gifts that, if you like, are inward-centered, there are gifts that are outward-centered.

Many gifts that people have for doing the work of the Christian community out in the world. Out where we live, where we work, where we have our recreation, where we go to school, etc.

And God's purpose is that all of these inward-centered gifts and all of the outward-centered gifts be brought together and used together.

That what one person can do in a bank, working in a bank, and another person can do being a student at university, and another person can do selling clothes in a store, and another can do working as a secretary at a church, and on and on.

What each of these people can do individually are brought together into a corporate use, corporate functioning. Working again for that one goal of making Christ known, making him better known to those who already know him, and helping people who know him to follow him faithfully.

[ 17 : 31 ] So we do have a variety of gifts. Look at the variety of gifts that's given there in verses 8, 9, and 10. We have an even greater variety, because that's what a partial list.

It's what a partial list. The gifts we have are far greater than we'd ever have the time to live. God's Spirit calls us to bring those many gifts together, to use them together, a key direct for God's purposes.

Now there's one other thing that needs to be noted here, needs to be remembered and remembered clearly.

And that's the fact that spiritual gifts are given very deliberately to each person. of gifts that we have the same Spirit.

Again, just first looking at 4 and then skipping on. In 4 he says, Now there are varieties of gifts with the same Spirit. And then in verse 11 he says, All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportion to each one individually as He will.

[ 18 : 55 ] Paul's saying, Paul's reminding that the gifts that God's Spirit gives to each of us are not given haphazardly.

Rather they're given with great thought and great care. I'm no gardener. So I had to do a little research in the seed store this week to make sure I was right.

But there are really, if you want to plant a garden, two ways to do it. You take a handful of seeds, you sort of throw it on the ground and hope for the best.

And you may even take the handful of seeds and sort of stretch the earth a bit and throw them and try and cover it up. Not much happens.

I can tell you for sure not much happens because I've tried that. But the directions on the packages, at least the ones I looked at this week said, that there's another way to plant seeds.

[ 20 : 05 ] That is that you plant the seeds individually and you plant each one. You make a hole for it. You put it in. You plant it. And then a given distance apart, you do that same thing with the next seed.

And you plant each seed carefully. And at least according to the packages, if you plant seeds that way, and you provide a minimal amount of watering and weeding, that you'll actually get plants that grow, that turn out to flower or to give you vegetables or whatever it is you thought you were trying to do when you planted the seeds in the first place.

Well, the picture of the Holy Spirit giving gifts to each of us is the picture of planting a seed individually and deliberately and then at another spot planting another seed individually and deliberately.

That's the sort of picture that is suggested by what Paul said. See that God, the Holy Spirit, considers each person individually.

He considers the situation in which that person is or the situation into which that person may at some point move. The Holy Spirit considers the needs of that person, the needs of the situations in which that person is or will be.

[ 21 : 44 ] And then the Spirit deliberately gives to each person the gift or the gift that are necessary for that person in the situations in which they'll be.

Of course, the corollary of all that is that there is no such thing as a superior gift. There's no such thing as a better gift or a lesser gift.

Maybe that some gifts are more visible. Maybe that some are more dramatic. But not that they're better or that they're not as good.

All gifts are important. All gifts are important. All gifts are equal. It's just that they're different because they're given to a particular person, suited to that person and the circumstances of that person's life.

That's the only gift. That's the only gift. They're given where they're needed. Not that they differ in quality. And so the upshot of all this that I hope you remember tonight is that as Christians, we are gifted people.

[ 23 : 14 ] As Christians, we are gifted people who, because of the gifts we have and the gifts we don't have, are interdependent people.

We're people who have, each of whom possesses one or more God-given gifts, talents, abilities, skills, so that we can serve Christ in His church and we can serve Christ in His world.

The way we're going to end this sermon tonight is to, in a sense, express and experience this idea of the multiplicity of gifts that we have.

The way we're going to do that, the way I'm going to ask you to please do that, invite you to do it, is to now, as we move to the intercessions, we're normally accustomed to someone who stands or sits or kneels before us and does the praying for us.

Tonight I'm going to ask you to, in some way, turn the tables on yourself. What I'm going to ask you to do it. What I'm going to ask you is that you, through the intercessions, together, do it, to learn in small groups within the congregation tonight.

[ 24 : 49 ] Learn what it is to work interdependently to contribute your gifts, in this case various gifts around prayer together. So what I'm going to ask you to do is, first of all, to, without running miles, unless you happen to be alone and away from people near you, but just where you are, to form small groups.

Maybe two or three in one row with turning around to face two or three in the row behind them.

Okay? So that's how I'd ask you to form the group.

And then what I'd ask you to do is take about ten minutes to pray. And you'll know approximately when we're going to be calling you back together, because you'll hear one or both of our musicians just quietly playing music to introduce the last of our hymns together tonight.

But when you're in those small groups, what I'm going to ask you to do is, first of all, take a small amount of time, because if you've only got ten minutes, you can't be too long about it, to first of all share the gift that God has given you in terms of a burden of someone to pray for.

It may be yourself. It may be that God's calling you to pray for yourself or to call others to pray for you. It may be for someone else. It may be for a variety of circumstances.

[ 26 : 11 ] But then having taken a few moments to share things to pray about, to pray together, to help each other pray together, to pray for each other. And in that way, at least around prayer, to express that unity or to express that coming together to use the gift that God's given us for one thing.

I'm going to ask you to do it. I'm not saying it will necessarily be easy for doing this for the first time. But I'd ask you to do that now. And as I say, about ten minutes from now, you'll hear music that will be the sign that our prayer time is over.

Last time someone will recognize this again and be prepared for something. None of them have found that. I'm sorry. But if anyone has worked in a ■■■ part, that I do not mistake the following week then. This means has been timeless for an obvious mission. I felt this way. I was not surprised. It was not accurate.

This means that our prayer time is to leave and that it may have been ripant today. The person who sees a resto is later children around that, which is called more than the question that they have! It might take advantage of us in a foundment by spirit. And does it work? We need to make■■■ a good attitude in yourself to help others let meczy