

Discovering Gifts to Serve

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[0 : 00] Good evening all. It would be great if you could get the service outline in front of you, the sermon outline. There's paper copies floating around. If you don't have a paper copy, then you can go on the St Paul's app and you can get it there.

It would be really handy in terms of where we're going tonight. John Mackay was the former president of Princeton University in the US and a missionary in South America.

From his conversion in Scotland at the age of 15, he was captivated by the book of Ephesians, which is what we're going through now. We've got a little bit of chapter 2 as well as chapter 4 tonight, which is great.

I'm always happy to preach chapter 2. It's a fantastic chapter. But he was captivated right from the very moment of conversion, at the age of 15, captivated by this book. And he declared it in Lateran Life, right towards the end of his life, he declared it to be his favorite book in the Bible.

And he wrote this about the book of Ephesians. I did not understand what it all meant.

[1 : 28] What he's saying there is, he understood the book of Ephesians.

That's basically what he's saying. What he's saying is, I'm captivated by God's cosmic agenda in the Lord Jesus, the center of his cosmic agenda, which is declared in the book of Ephesians.

That's what he's saying there. And what he went on to say is that it's not so much a question of what we are to do with the book of Ephesians, but what has Ephesians got to do with you?

What is it going to do to your life? With the scope of God's eternal plan, the Lord Jesus, as it did for John Mackay, will it captivate you?

Will it captivate you of God's cosmic plan through the Lord Jesus and through his church with Jesus as the center?

[2 : 43] Will it captivate you? Will it become your life story? Will you set your life on contributing to that great unity of all things? That's our agenda in our vision series this year.

As we've seen so far in this vision series, as we've gone through Ephesians, the Christian church, even with all of its faults, is a product of God's reconciling work.

And it will, in fact, be an agent in the ultimate cosmic reconciliation of all things. In his book, God's New Society, John Stott writes that the church is central to history, is central to the gospel, and central to Christian living.

The bottom line is, as Stott declares it, and as John Mackay has been captivated, and in fact the Bible says it, the church is not an option for Christians.

Nor is supporting it an option for Christians. It is what Ephesians has confirmed right from the word go, and what I'm calling us to together in this series.

[4 : 05] To give your life, to serve God's global agenda, may your worldview be shaped by what God is doing in this world, first and foremost.

Essentially, to serve God and each other and our neighbourhood through his church with our time, treasures and talents, is what I'm calling you to.

Ephesians 1-3 is the grand vista of God's plan to be bringing everything together under the Lord Jesus. Chapter 4 onwards is how we engage with God's work in this world, what difference it makes.

If this is what God's doing from all time and eternity, then the last three chapters is how we connect into that, and how that impacts the life that we live. And today, my plan is to spend, this is the third week in Ephesians 4, 1-16, and I want to continue to address this issue of spiritual gifts, and especially today, on how we discover spiritual gifts.

So, I've got the outline in front of you, three main points and a lot of little sub points. So, it would be helpful if you had it in front of you. So, first of all, God's gifts, God gifts all people with talents.

[5 : 28] As Christians, we are stewards of the resources God has given us for serving the human community. And the Bible tells us that one of the most important resources that God has given us is our gifts, aptitudes, talents, and abilities.

Now, a little bit of a history lesson. The church in the Middle Ages divided the world into two major categories, the religious and the secular.

And those who went into full-time Christian religious work, into Christian ministry, such as priests and monks and nuns and that sort of stuff, they were regarded in the Middle Ages as being on a different spiritual footing from the rest of the people who did not go into that kind of work.

One of the achievements of the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s was to overturn the secular-sacred divide in humanity.

One of its achievements was to rediscover the biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers.

Martin Luther insisted that all forms of work are God-honoring callings.

[6 : 54] Martin Luther broke down the secular-sacred divide. And so he suggested to be a farmer, a builder, an artist, was just as much of a vocation, that is just as much as a calling from God, which is where the word vocation comes from.

It's a calling, divine calling, just as much a vocation as to be a preacher. He came to see that from this particular view, from the Bible.

He looked at the Bible and said, this is where it says, He says, God made the created world by his spirit in Genesis 1, 1-3, continues to care for and sustain it by his spirit.

In Psalm 104, verse 30, watering it, enriching it, Psalm 65, feeding and meeting the needs of every living thing in Psalm 145 and 147.

And then he goes right at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 21 and 22, we see the very purpose of God's eternal plan of redemption is to massively and to finally restore the material creation back into a place of perfection.

[8 : 06] That is, Luther made the point, as did the other reformers, that God loves this created world so much that he sent his son to redeem it.

That is, this world is a good in and of itself. This world in which we live is not just a temporary theatre for individual salvation.

Very important point. It's not just a temporary theatre of individual salvation. If the Holy Spirit is not only a preacher that convicts people of sin and grace, but also a gardener, an artist, an investor in creation, who renews the material world, it cannot be more spiritual and God-honouring to be a preacher than to be a farmer or an artist or a banker.

That was one of the really crucial points from the Protestant Reformation. That we are all, all those who are in Jesus, are all priests serving God in his world, bringing about his work in the world.

So to give one example of that, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus, such as what I'm doing now as a preacher, what I'm doing now is temporary work.

[9 : 38] It's temporary work. While musicianship is permanent work. In the new heavens and the new earth, when Jesus finally winds the whole show up, I won't be needed.

Jesus isn't going to say, Steve, he's the pulpit for a bit, you know, tell them, Steve, how it is. It's not going to happen. My job's not needed. However, from what I can gather, from Revelations and other parts of the Bible, we are going to be singing the praises of our God for a very long time.

And so, from what I can gather, therefore, that Nick will be gainfully employed, but I won't be. In fact, I can't even go back to my old profession of feral animal control, because I'm figuring that's not going to happen in heaven either.

So, who knows what I'm going to be doing. I've got no idea. Handing out the cheese platters, maybe. Who knows? I'll carry Nick's guitar case.

So, all work, according to God's design, is service. And through work, we enrich one another and become more and more interwoven.

[11 : 01] So, the first point is that God gifts every single person, Christian or not, with talents to serve his purpose.

His work in the world. When Christians do secular work, they function as salt and light in the world, according to Matthew 5.

Farming and business, childcare and law, medicine and music, all these forms of work, cultivate, care for and sustain the created world that God made and loves.

We are all ministers, all full-time priests to the human community, serving others on God's behalf. So, you got the point?

All forms of work in God's world are based on God's gifting of all people. Isaiah 28, verses 24 to 29, we read, when a farmer plows for planting and has leveled the surface.

[12:13] Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and svelte in its field? Has God, his God, instructs him and teaches him the right way?

All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom. Isaiah is teaching here that anyone who becomes a skillful farmer is being taught by God to be a skillful farmer.

Isaiah 45, verse 1, we read of Cyrus, pagan king, whom God anoints with his spirit and chooses for world leadership. This shows that God's spirit can equip people for work even though they are not believers and are not directly witnessing to God in their work.

God gives wisdom, he gives courage, he gives insight to people to do their work. That shouldn't surprise us because James 1, 17 says that every good and perfect gift is from above, from the Father of the heavenly lights.

Every act of goodness, wisdom, justice and beauty, no matter who does it, is being enabled by God. It is a gift and therefore, it's a form of grace even though it's not saving grace.

[13:41] So that's the first point. God gives all people, not just Christians, talents, abilities for serving the human community that we might flourish together.

However, secondly, God gives his people spiritual gifts. Ephesians 4, as we've gone through, we just had it read again tonight, last couple of weeks, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 14, have lists of gifts to minister to others in Jesus' name.

As people creating God's image, Christians have natural talents that God's gifted them with and as people regenerated by the Holy Spirit, they also have spiritual gifts that equip them for ministry in and through the church.

in essence, a spiritual gift is a God-given capacity to express or minister Jesus Christ so that those who receive the service will see Jesus and grow in him to his glory.

when our gifts, spiritual gifts, are used in the power of the Holy Spirit from whom they come, then Christ himself is ministering directly through us to his people.

[15:17] Remember, that's what this passage is about, Ephesians 4. He ascended and gave his gifts, his ministering ability to his people.

We become his mouth, his hands, his feet to fulfill each day his ministry to others. So this means that Christians not only must determine how their talents equip them for a certain range of work, but also how their spiritual gifts equip them for a certain range of ministry in Christ's name.

God may adopt a talent that he's given you as a human being. He may adopt a talent and use it spiritually to build others up in the church but he also may not.

He also may not. Just because you're a banker doesn't mean that your spiritual gift in the church is to be the treasurer. There may be no correlation between the two.

Ultimately, however, both talents and gifts are from the spirit of God. So, last point, let's focus on this one. How do we discover gifts to serve? A Christian has to consider, as I said, both questions.

[16:46] What has God called and equipped me for in my vocation, my career, my work in the world and how is God calling me to serve in and through the church? Now, the difficulty of this is that very little appears in the Bible about the process by which you discover your spiritual gifts.

There are, therefore, problems with almost any prescribed definitive 10-step process towards discovering gifts.

The traditional approach that has happened, you can go to Coorong and buy books on this sort of stuff, leads people to test themselves in ways which are very similar to what you would call apt test that you would get in a secular workforce.

The problem with this approach is that it assumes that you know yourself quite well and the fact is majority of people don't know themselves very well.

In some rare cases a person's church ministry becomes their full-time vocation. That is your spiritual gifting also becomes your job as in my case.

[18:07] And then at this point the answer to both those questions collide so it's kind of easy. In most cases however Christians must answer each question separately. Sometimes what you do in your vocation is very similar to what you will do in the church.

You may be a teacher a strategic planner or an artist outside the church and you will use those same talents because God has taken them and utilized them as spiritual gifts inside the church. In other cases you might find God calling you to do almost completely different sort of work in the church than what you do outside in your vocation.

The banker is not necessarily the treasurer but their gifting might be to be a wonderful kids church teacher. That's possible.

There's no correlation between your vocation and your spiritual gifting. So having said there's all kinds of problems with any system let me just throw one in front of you.

[19 : 16] This is a three part method for discerning a call whether to secular work or church work or anything else really. And I get this from the great Anglican minister of amazing grace fame John Newton.

Newton suggested that to discern a ministry call we consult three factors affinity ability and opportunity. So affinity is looking outward beyond you.

And it's asking the question what people need do I resonate to? Do I kind of like vibrate towards? Contrary to what many books on spiritual gifting will say to you do not start with yourself.

Do not begin with you. Begin beyond you. Don't start with the abstract inventory of your gifts and skills to discern your aptitudes.

Aptitude tests are based on past experience and self knowledge and self knowledge is incredibly limited. We've already seen that in the last couple of weeks. Even though it is one of the ways God shows you your ministry, I don't suggest that you start here though.

[20 : 32] Look to the concrete needs where God has placed you. What do you vibrate towards? What problems and kinds of people or ministry needs move you?

Where are you moved internally? In Acts 17 verse 16 we are told that the apostle Paul experienced inner grief and turmoil.

He was moved in his affections. He experienced inner grief and turmoil as he comes into Athens and sees all the idols of Athens.

And he finds one idol to the unknown God. And from that the very next verse we see this led him having been moved in his affections he launches into a ministry apologetics to help them see what they cannot see.

It's important that we get into ministry with a passion for a certain cause or unmet need. Paul was moved by their need and sought to meet it with the gospel.

[21 : 45] See one of the reasons not to start with a knowledge of your abilities is because gifts often pop up and out and surprise us as we start to participate in serving.

They're kind of like dormant until you start serving in all kinds of different capacities. When I first became a Christian I put my hand up to do whatever was required in the church.

23 just loved the church and just wanted to be involved. I was captivated by the gospel involved in the community that I was a part of. I inevitably started with what I knew where my aptitudes my talents were.

I could cut the grass so I cut the grass. I repaired buildings. I dealt with vermin. I was what I was used to. I just did that sort of stuff. Soon enough the minister of the church started to push me beyond my natural talents and aptitudes to test my spiritual gifting and started to encourage me to do hospital visiting, trained me in evangelism, service leading, leading community groups.

I was on parish council organizing camps. Bit by bit just kept pushing me to do a whole range of things. gifts started to pop up over time. And I would never have known it until he pushed me into it.

[23 : 16] Say, give that a go, have that a crack at that. The first time I ever preached a sermon, no one would have said, oh, he's got a gifting. Not a single person, except the one preacher sitting in the room.

I think he called me a rough rock that need if you had just knocked off it. He said, but I think we can do that. It didn't start with my talents and my aptitudes, or it sort of did, but very short time, and it moved quickly beyond that.

And ultimately, it started with a need. When he started to push me into ministry, he said, we need a youth group here, you should start one.

That's the job description. That was it. What became obvious to the leaders of my first church was I had gifting for church leadership that would develop and be fruitful, providing my character developed.

Because what they noticed is that when I cut the grass, I was able to galvanize people to come with me and to cut the grass. when I went and did hospital visiting, I took other people with me.

[24 : 38] They noticed that people would follow. When I organized camps, I could pull a team together. What they didn't know, what they could never have seen, was God would give me a passion for cross-cultural ministry and multi-ethnic church leadership.

And I didn't even see that 12 years ago. And still I started working in that space. Gifts pop out when you just do it.

You just serve. So that's the first one. Affinity. Look out. Secondly, ability, which is look in. That is, what are my abilities, what are my skills, what are my talents, what are my deficiencies?

It's important to look at your abilities. Many people become burdened to see a ministry begin, but they're not realistic about their own abilities and limitations.

For example, there might be some people who are just so keen to be leaders, even though they don't have the gifting of organizing, and they haven't even noticed that no one's actually following them at this moment.

[25 : 52] They don't have the ability to galvanize people. It's one of the questions I ask of people who are considering vocational ministries, to go into my kind of role. What ministries have you started?

What ministries have you changed? What ministries have you shut down? Really important. It takes courage to start something, it takes leadership to stop it.

you must be very aware of the part you are able to play in the ministry. What should you be doing and what you need someone else to be doing?

Also have the maturity recognize how young and old you are in the faith. You may realize that your godliness does not cover your gift deficiencies very well and you therefore need a strong team around you.

Just a warning here, on this one. As we exercise our spiritual gifts we need to avoid the great problem of gift cop-out. Every single one of the gifts, the spiritual gifts, is also a task or an assignment given to all Christians.

[27 : 11] Not all are evangelists but every one of us are called to witness. Not all of us have the specific gift of giving but all of us are called to a life of radical generosity.

Not all of us have the gifts of service and care of another individual but all of us are called into a ministry of serving others and caring for people.

Gift cop-out is saying since I'm not gifted in that I won't have to do that. And normally we practice gift cop-out when we look at our vocational work and can't see a connection.

I'm a banker and unless you make me the treasurer there's no way I'm doing anything else. That's the only job I can do here. That's gift cop-out. So lastly of opportunity.

This is looking up. And the question here is where does the church and its leaders tell me where I'm needed? This is where the character of humility comes in.

[28 : 14] The third leg in identifying our spiritual gifts is opportunity. Now with this one we need to be aware of the opposite danger of gift cop-out and that is gift projection.

Based on everything we've seen in the past few weeks we must fight against individualism in the way we discern our ministry giftings.

Gift projection works in a whole different number of ways. It can be as simple as saying this is my gift and it's your job to make this gift work in this place. This is my spiritual gifting.

Self-identified gifting. This is my role. This is my gifting. You use it. That's it. I won't do anything else. Or it can be making yourself feel guilty if you aren't as gifted or as good as someone else is in that space.

Or on the other hand it may be making others feel guilty that they aren't as passionate or as good at you at doing what you are doing. That's gift projection.

[29 : 16] In projecting our gifts and our passions it is all too easy to try to make the whole church into our own image.

You know I've got the gift of evangelism for instance and so I want to make this strictly an evangelistic church. Everyone should be evangelized. everyone needs to evangelize like me.

Or I've got the passion for justice ministry so this has to be a justice church and everyone else has to have the same passion and gifting for justice ministry that I do. Or for it to be a cultural center.

I'm so focused on one-to-one discipleship and everyone should be doing one-to-one discipleship. That's gift projection. That's passion projection. And it's making everyone in the same image. huge. The third leg of gift discovery looks to the community, my brothers and sisters, for guidance. The doctrine of sin alone should be enough to prove that you should not be trying to make this decision by yourself.

[30 : 24] Ephesians 4 teaches that when we become Christians we become members of one another. We cannot understand ourselves without paying attention to what our brothers and sisters can see in us.

there may be opportunities for us to serve that we have never considered but for which we are perfect. Now one key factor here and that is that we are under the authority of our leaders. Hebrews 13 7 says remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. And verse 17 goes on to say have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

Do this so that their work will be a joy not a burden for that would be of no benefit to you. The reality is we should bow to what our leaders may tell us are the church's needs.

These are the areas of needs. God put us into a community and we discern his will and his calling together. So I propose as John Newton did 200 years before me that the place to start when you look at these three categories these three legs the place to start is opportunity.

[31 : 50] That's where you begin. Our self-centered individualistic natures want us to go with affinity first or ability ability first then affinity then opportunity.

I would suggest that we start with opportunity. In other words find the ministry needs of the church things that need to be done and just do them.

Just serve. Don't even begin with does this fulfill me? Does it make me happy? the only way you will ever really come to know the kind of ministry that you are best at if you do a whole heap of different things then you will know what God blesses.

Don't look first of all at your proven abilities. Don't look first of all at your day job and your natural talents to determine what you do in the church because as mentioned earlier God may have no plan to use them as your spiritual gifts.

Likewise don't look first of all at your deepest affinities the things that excite you the things that interest you. If you gravitate too quickly to those areas you may miss out on gifts that you aren't even aware of.

[33 : 15] Just serve. That's the simple call. Plug the gaps in the church and help out. Go through the door of opportunity in the church doing what needs to be done and then as time goes by check your affinities check your abilities and begin to specialise.

As your brothers and sisters around you encourage you to do that. There may be and in fact there are many opportunities right now. Right now.

I'll mention them to you but this morning one thing that I threw in this morning was actually we've been looking for a treasurer for some time.

No one's stepping up for that. By the end of the service someone had put their hand up and said I think I can do the treasury roll. Praise God. So God's already at work and maybe he's working at you right now.

Working at you right now. He did it this morning and maybe right now for you. We just need people willing to serve in all sorts areas and membership. We want to be a community.

[34 : 22] A community that is engaging, welcome, inclusive. We want people to belong here. We've just seen the video. We need people who are welcoming, people in the car park.

As soon as someone sets foot on this site to be engaged with, for their name to be known, for them to feel like they belong. We need people who are prepared to serve food for us in our corporate gatherings.

We want to be an open engaging community. Right now, we need people in membership.

Secondly, we need more people willing to serve in our ESL classes. That's a great way to serve people who are not able to easily communicate in the common language of our neighborhood.

That is, ESL is about serving vulnerable people in our neighborhood. That's what it's about. At the moment, we've got two or three people, that's it, who are currently running it. Massive need in that area.

Thirdly, there's grace ministries. This is our ministry to sex workers in our area. They need another prayer team. This is really simple. You just sit in the car with one other person and you pray with them while a couple of our members go in and visit the brothels.

[35 : 33] You don't even have to go in. You just need to sit in the car and pray for goodness sake. There's another great way to be engaged. We need people in that area. The bottom line here is just do it.

That's how you discover it. You just do it. Be captivated. This is the whole point of Ephesians here, where we get to here. Be captivated by the gospel. Be captivated by God's eternal plan in the Lord Jesus.

service. And be captivated by jumping in and signing up to serve. That's what you do. So for your sake, for the sake of the church, for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the blessing of the world, do not rest until every member serving is a reality in this church.