

New Hope Sermon Equipped for Your Calling

I first studied seriously about spiritual gifts when I was co-leading a new ministry to college students a few decades ago. What I discovered literally changed my life and was extremely important for Keith and my marriage. They helped us both eventually build our priorities and relationship around the gifts and feel the blessing of God in our lives and ministry. Keith's understanding of this area is what enabled him to change his view about women in leadership in the church. He had seen God work through my life and realized he didn't want to be guilty before God of forbidding what God was empowering. That was major! Spiritual gifts are truly what equips us for our calling. So I hope today God can give you the blessing of understanding more about these gifts and you can have a new joy in receiving these blessings from Him. The *Daily Light* Scripture reading for yesterday was "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." (Jn.1:16) The spiritual gifts are evidence of that. In fact, they are called Grace Gifts. Let's pray.



I suggest that you take notes today in the sermon so you can retain and reflect on these wonderful truths. Here's principle #1 that can frame our thinking: God gives each believer spiritual gifts so God can accomplish His purposes in the Body of Christ and in the world with His methods and His power. Notice two important parts to that principle, in reverse order. They describe the methods God wants us to use in ministry (the how) and

the way to do ministry (the where) – through his power. But they also describe the dual context in which we are to use our gifts – in the Body of Christ and in the world.

As we begin to unpack those truths, we need to start first with the distinction between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit relates to our character – from Gal. 5:22 – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control*. These are the 'being' qualities that God builds into our lives as we walk with Him. They show in our attitudes and are a by-product of a healthy walk with God. They are necessary for credibility in any ministry. Spiritual gifts are the doing qualities of our lives - what God empowers us to do in our aptitudes; what are our supernatural endowments of the Spirit. They are also necessary for effective ministry. So principle #2 - we must be in order to do.

This is why it is so important to recognize #3 that the context of the gifts received is the Lordship of Christ in our lives. We are *urged to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices* – with open hands to be and do what God wants. We are responding to His blessings. **So** Paul says "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The Message explains this more fully: "God's various gifts are handed out everywhere, but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere but they all originate in God's Spirit. Each person (believer) is given something to do that shows who God is." I cor. 12:4-11.

Let's put this principle #4 more simply: God gives grace gifts for the function each believer is uniquely suited to perform by the power of the Spirit. Your spiritual gifts, thus, determine your spiritual job description – how you are to serve.

And that takes us back to grace and God's intent. In our scripture passage today from I Peter 4:10 Peter says (principle #5) "Spiritual gifts are divine abilities given to minister God's grace in its various forms – actually the idea is a prism of light so the church is *the steward of God's many-colored Grace*. I love that image. All our diversity is in the many-colored forms of grace that display God's character and reality. This makes spiritual gifts the dynamite of the Christian community. I want to see our church rock because of the dynamic of God manifested in our midst. That's our call.

And our responsibility because principle #6 is about stewardship: *As each one has received a spiritual gifts employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* Notice the words “employ” or use the gifts, serve others with the gifts and do it as stewards who are handling the grace of God.

Peter continues: “If anyone speaks (Hanny chose a parrot for this image – clever☺) speak as the oracles of God; if anyone ministers do so with the strength that God supplies. Why? Principle #7 - So that in all things God is glorified.

So there are 7 principles that define spiritual gifts:

1. They describe God’s method and power to be demonstrated through our lives.
2. They are i/2 of our package of being and then doing – character must come first
3. They are received as we submit to Christ’s Lordship in obedience.
4. Your spiritual gifts determine your role in the world and in the Body of Christ
5. They are diverse and are to show God’s grace in its many-colored forms
6. We are to be stewards of these gifts, USING THEM
7. For the glory and demonstration of God in the world.

So now we ask what are some of the gifts we see demonstrated in the New Testament? Romans 12, I Cor. 12 and Eph. 4 list several. Romans – *Encouragement, giving, leadership, mercy, prophecy, service and teaching.* I Corinthians says *Administration, discernment, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, wisdom.* Apostleship, *help, knowledge, miracles and again teaching.* Ephesians lists *apostle, pastor teacher, evangelist and prophecy.* Each of these gifts needs to be properly defined and explained and I want to share a story in a minute where you will see several of these gifts in operation, but let me stop here and just give you a couple of definitions from the Greek. The gift of mercy is described in the Greek as sunbeams dancing in a dark room. Can you picture that – when someone comes to one in need and brings the sunshine of God’s love and goodness into that depressed or difficult setting? Or the gift of giving, also called liberality, which Paul says is giving with hilarity – a generosity that abounds with largeness and delight. Or the gift of faith – ‘*pistis*’ which involves firm persuasion and the gift of vision based on who God is. Or the gift of discernment which is *diadrino* – to discern what is of the Holy Spirit, to distinguish between truth and error before the difference is manifest to all by its results. It is really the ability to discern when someone is a wolf in sheep’s clothing – i.e., coming in to harm a community, not build it up. Often this means to discern when Satan is actually at work in a person, an idea, an attitude could tear apart others. The example from scripture is Peter, and his encounter with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. The early church was built on the generosity of members like Barnabas who sold their property and brought the proceeds to the disciples so that the church could care for orphans and widows. This was becoming a signature mark of the church and thus a powerful witness in the secular Roman society. The problem with Ananias and Sapphira was that they lied about the money they brought, and Peter discerned that spirit of deception would create poison in the church. So Peter called them out and God judged them.

Now let share a contemporary story of when a number of these gifts operated together: It happened on our mission trip to Ecuador with 12 collegians plus our family of 4. Remember, God’s purposes, God’s methods, God’s power, God’s glory. When I was on church staff as a Mission Coordinator in Baltimore, before I became a Pastor, Keith and I took a team of 12 collegians with our two children to Ecuador. Keith’s grace gifts (gifts from the Holy Spirit) in administration and helps were God’s provision as we waited in Kennedy airport with suitcases of supplies for our medical missionary friends plus luggage for 16 of us for 10 days – plus mosquito netting and dried food for 5 days in the jungle! Keith coordinated all the goods, people and passports and we all got on the plane safely. We were all able to be on that trip because church members supported our whole term with giving liberally.

Once we arrived in Quito, Ecuador, it took 4 taxis to get us and our stuff to the mission guesthouse about ½ hour away. But, when we got there, Matt, one of our students, discovered that he had lost his passport – he thought he might have left it in his taxi. American passports sell for a great deal of money on the black market and this posed immediate problems. It seemed impossible to retrace our steps and find the taxi (out of about 20 taxis we had seen at the airport) that had transported him – let alone get the passport back. But Bart, another one of our guys, had a passion about cars. Automatically he had memorized the car license plate and the make of each taxi that drove us to the guesthouse, so he went back with one of our leaders to the airport. He was able to find the specific taxi our student had been in. That cab driver had found the passport and gladly returned it to us. Bart's gift of knowledge enabled us to solve a potentially very costly, difficult problem and continue our trip as planned.

The next day we left for the long ride from the capital to a town on the edge of the jungle where we would spend the night. We drove in 2 vehicles - a bus carrying all our collegians, our children and the wife and children of our missionary friends and a small pick-up truck that Keith and I were in, which John Doerfer drove. The bus and the truck reached the end of the paved road at night where a tunnel led onto a single lane dirt road that twisted across the face of the mountain for an hour to get to the towns on the other side. (Some of you have heard this part of the story – there are so many life lessons from it. But today I want to focus on grace gifts in the midst of the experience.) There were waterfalls and rockslides that tumbled down on that dirt road, hairpin turns, and places where there were no guardrails shielding you from the long drop down to the gorge beneath. The bus went into the tunnel first and continued on its way.

But when John drove the pick-up truck into the tunnel, our headlights went out – at the edge of civilization, it seemed, in the dead of night, with no help in sight. In God's amazing providence a taxi pulled up behind us and became our lights from the rear for that tortuous trip. All the way as we crept across that mountain face, John and Keith and I sang and praised God. We were exercising the grace gift of faith and it built us all up. It particularly gave John courage and hope and that was critical: he knew the perils of that road!! It was only when I saw that road in the daylight on our return trip that I understood how amazing our safe passage had been 2 weeks earlier. It is the most dangerous road I have seen anywhere in the world!

From the town of Shell Mara, we were to be flown by single engine prop plane into the jungle. In the jungle we stayed in the former home of pioneer missionaries to the Indians in the region – Jim and Elizabeth Elliott. They had used their grace gifts of apostleship to bring the gospel to where it had never been before. Now the villagers had gone from being head hunters to being Christians and they had requested help from the missionaries - hence our job to paint all their common buildings - a chapel, a sewing building and a school building robin's egg blue. Several of our teammates had strong grace gifts of helps and their energy and joy in painting those buildings helped the rest of us along in the tropical heat and humidity. On the time off, one of our collegians, Ginny, demonstrated her grace gifts in evangelism and cross-cultural adaptation. She would gather the children in the village and using her limited Spanish share the wordless book with them and talk about Jesus.

During that jungle stay, Matt got a machete cut on his arm. We had no medical doctor or nurse among us – and no chance to be flown out for medical help so we laid hands and prayed that the red line of blood poisoning starting up his arm would be stopped by the power of God. That was using the grace gifts of healing and faith. The red line did stop and stayed at a minimal level until we were flown out 4 days later and he could get proper medical help.

Each night on that trip we had a group meeting to debrief our experiences and God used the grace gifts of teaching and shepherding to help people see what God was doing and how we could all grow in our faith and world perspective. And so it went.

I had actually not signed up to go into the jungle and was considerably exercised that our missionary friends had arranged this for us. Our missionary friends had planned this part of our trip (without our consent) and then informed us of their decision right before we left Baltimore. Amy, a musician friend of mine, knew of my hesitation about the jungle part of the trip, and she wrote a special song for me around the words: *“My grace is sufficient is sufficient for you, for my strength is*

made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor. 12:9. It even had a counterpart melody with words: “those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.” Isa. 40:31. I memorized that song and taught it to the team, and we sang it many times in that jungle setting – it was a huge encouragement from God. Amy used her grace gifts of music and knowledge of scripture to bless us.

During one of those nighttime meetings in this large wooden house in the jungle, the stove exploded, the icebox caught fire and the water pump failed. We were in serious trouble!! So people scrambled and ran outside to get buckets to fill up from a nearby well and run in and douse the fire while I gathered a few of us together and said “This is clearly spiritual warfare and Satan’s attacks on our team. Let go fight back with prayer and praise, which we did. Amazingly, the house did not burn down, no one was hurt and we were able to continue on our mission of helps as we painted all the community buildings in the village square robin-egg blue and kept doing that entire trip what God had called us to do.

Do you see how it works? Throughout the whole trip grace gift after grace gift was put into operation for the common good and we were able to return with stories of God’s work in and through us as a team. I shared with the church, as a pastor, God’s purposes with God’s methods by God’s power for God’s glory.



This leads me back to other spiritual gifts that are operative when people do things that are really God-empowered and that enable things to happen supernaturally. This graphic of the church highlights a few of these additional gifts not mentioned so far – notice hospitality as the spire on top of the church. Just like a church spire can be seen for a distance, so hospitality so often draws people to see God in new ways. This is the welcoming gift that has an open home and an open heart to others. It is Keith’s strongest gift and why now, I believe, he wants to reach out and shake people’s hands after he has met them – just as a sign of welcome. It is why he loves having people live here and have the church in our home.

I think prayer is another of those spiritual gifts. This kind of prayer is not the simple ‘Lord bless so’ and so or ‘Lord help so and so,’ but a fervent intercessory prayer that moves out in faith to establish God’s priorities on earth. The CEO of World Relief characterizes this kind of praying in two ways:

“ Prayer is an act of rebellion

In prayer, we rebel against the world as it is. In prayer we refuse to accept what might seem unchangeable in our own hearts or the world around us. It is an act of rebellion against our private sins, our broken relationships and the state of the fallen world around us.

And, prayer is an act of defiance against principalities and powers

By prayer, we dethrone the Prince of the Power of the air. We declare allegiance to The King and to His Kingdom. In prayer, we declare the manifold wisdom of God to principalities and powers (Colossians 3:10). CEO World Relief. 10/17

Amen.

This is the kind of praying we are called to in this church as we intercede globally for areas around the world – coming against Satan’s plans to kill, steal and destroy and saying in the face of such opposition that Jesus is King and He can do the impossible. With that thought, I’d like to turn to our global focus in the service and share areas in the world that need this kind of powerful prayer.