

Serve with Spiritual Gifts

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[0 : 00] We're going to read together from the New Testament, from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1-16. And Paul writes this, Therefore it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

And in saying he ascended, what does it mean? But that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This is God's holy word. Let's pray. Lord, we ask now as we come and think about this important passage that you would help us, that the Spirit would give us eyes of faith, ears to hear, Lord, and teach us what you have to say to us here.

[2 : 14] Teach it to our hearts, we pray, Lord, and we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. We are working through Ephesians 4-6. And we just started last week, and we looked at the exact same passage we just read.

And every single week, what we're going to do is ask the question, what does the church do? And have an answer for that. And so in Ephesians 1-3, Paul writes about the fact that you are a Christian.

If you're a Christian, you're called. You've been called by God. You've been redeemed. You've been justified. And everything that Christ has accomplished is yours. You're united to Jesus. And that's true, Paul says in Ephesians 1, even before the foundation of the world. And in other words, he's saying when he comes to this, he's reiterating that and saying, look, you have the life of God in you.

You've got the life of the Spirit with you. And so the second half of the book of Ephesians says, live like it. Put it on. Put that clothing on. You have everything that Christ has through the Spirit.

[3 : 13] You have the life of God. So put it on. And so last week he said, what do we do then? How do we do that? And the first two things we saw him say in these verses last week was that we as Christians are called to seek spiritual maturity.

That's the first thing. So all of us, when you become a Christian, you start out as a spiritual baby. You're a baby when you first start. And then he says, but you've got to grow. And so the first thing the church does is we all seek to grow, to grow up together, to pursue discipleship.

And then he says, you do that together. You grow together. And so he said that real spiritual discipleship, formation, maturity, manifest in unity. So the more we're serious about growing in the faith, the more we're growing together.

And so there really is a unity that is inescapable. You can never get away from it. We are one church. We're one church with all Christians throughout the whole globe, throughout all of history. And sometimes we don't look like that.

We don't behave like that. We don't talk like that. But it's true. It's inescapable. So then he says, so be who you are. Become what you are. Live like it. Be one together in love.

[4 : 22] Grow together. And so he really said to us, sit with Christ. Spend time with Christ in order that you might become like Christ. That's the real simple idea that's at the heart of this argument that Paul's making.

Now today is the next step of this argument. And it's right here in the same passage. We didn't get to look at it last week. The next step. And the next step is simply this. A vibrant church that is serious about maturity, discipleship, spiritual formation, and doing that together as one community is going to manifest, is going to become a church where every single Christian is doing ministry. So every person ministry is the value that we put on our vision and value cards. And a church that is growing in maturity is a church where everybody is seeing themselves as ministers of the gospel. So not just from top down, not just the institutional leadership, but every single person, a minister, doing the work of ministry. So you see that if you look with me at verse 12, how clearly he says that. That Jesus gave apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists to the church for what? Verse 12. To equip the saints for the work of ministry. So if you're a Christian, you're here for the work of ministry.

[5 : 42] It's everybody's job, every person in ministry. That's the big argument. Now, Paul uses a metaphor and illustration of this all throughout his letters. It's the body. Classic Pauline metaphor.

The body. We're one body. And Jesus Christ is the head. And there are arms and legs and toes and thumbs. And you need arms.

If your body is going to thrive, you need your arms. You need your legs. You need your big toe. You need your big toe. You need your thumb. And every single person is a part of the body.

And Paul is saying here, we need everybody. We need everybody to be in ministry. Now, that's the whole argument. That's what he's saying in verses 1 to 16. That was efficient.

We could pray. That's really all he says with lots of other clauses describing it. But I'm not going to let you go that quickly. I'm going to take my whole time.

[6 : 41] Let's unpack it. Let's unpack it a little bit. Let's see how we can grow into it. Let's see how we can grow together in seeing that every person is meant for ministry.

So two things. One, the call to ministry that we all have. And then secondly, the gifts that the Spirit gives us for ministry. So first, the call to ministry. Look with me at verse 7.

In verse 7, he says, But grace was given to every one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Not an easy sentence to interpret when you just read it.

But grace was given to every one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Hard to understand that verse unless you know that the word grace in the Bible is used in lots of different ways.

Two different ways in particular. So when we talk about grace, the grace of God, the first thing that we're always talking about is the reality of God saving love to sinners who don't deserve it.

[7 : 39] The grace of the gospel. God's disposition of love to lavish on us forgiveness and mercy through Christ. Grace. Saved by grace, right? But that is not the way he's using the word here.

So in verse 7, when he says, Grace has been given to every one of you in this room that believe on Jesus. He's not talking about saving grace. He's talking about a different type of grace. And the different type of grace is, you might translate it, The graces were given to every single one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

If you've read Corinthians or the gospels, in one section in Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 12, he says, To every single Christian has been given a measure of the spirit of Christ.

Okay. Same thing. Different wording. Or you go back to the gospels, Matthew 25. Jesus says, the Christians, disciples have been given five talents, ten talents, one talent, two talents.

Don't bury your talents. Don't bury your talents. Use them. Talents is just money in the Greco-Roman world. He's talking about gifts or graces. And so the second meaning of the word grace is not saving grace, but he's talking here about the fact that Jesus Christ by the Spirit distributes graces or gifts to everybody who has experienced saving grace.

[8 : 57] All right. So in Greek, the word grace is the word chorus. And you might think of sometimes we talk about churches as charismatic, charismatic churches.

And so when we talk about saving grace, it's chorus, God's grace. But also when you're talking about gifts, it's the same word. And so we here at St. Columbus, we are a charismatic church.

Right? We don't speak in tongues. We don't think the gifts of healing are normative beyond the era of the apostles. But we're charismatic. Why? Because we believe in the graces, the gifts, that the Holy Spirit is actively giving every single Christian gifts for ministry.

And that's what he means by grace here. Grace, the graces, the gifts have been given to every one of you according to a certain measure. Meaning in all sorts of different ways.

In all sorts of different ways. That means that if you're a Christian, there is an equality saved by grace. Equally center, equally justified in Christ.

[10:00] And then there's an inequality. But it's good. And that's the inequality that every single one of us have been given different graces or gifts according to the Spirit's work.

In whatever way the Spirit wanted to work. One writer says, that means that here we have the possibility, because we're all saved by grace, saving grace, of true unity. Inequality. And at the same time, there is no lifeless or colorless uniformity. So real unity, but never uniformity in the church. True unity, but we're not all the same.

We're different. Unity and diversity is another way of talking about it. So we are not to imagine that every Christian, this writer puts it like this, is an exact replica of everybody else. Not at all.

As if we'd all been mass produced in some celestial factory. As if when you become a Christian, you go through the factory conveyor belt and you come out and everybody's the same. No, we're all saved by grace, but we all got different graces, gifts that God has given us by the Spirit.

[11:00] So here's the takeaway. Anyway, if you've got the saving grace of Jesus in your life, you also have service gifts or graces that the Spirit has given to you.

And the simple thing to say is just that that means that you're called to ministry. What's your ministry? Where are you in ministry right now? How are you pursuing the gifts that God has given you?

Do you know them? Are you chasing them? Are you growing in them? Are you pursuing them? You have them. They really are yours. And you can see in verse 11 and 12 here, he says that he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers.

This is some of those gifts, some of those graces, but it's talking there about the offices of the church that help lead people to the gifts and graces they have. And what does it say? He gave the pastors and the teachers to equip the saints.

And who's a saint? If you're a Christian today, you're a saint. And so you're being equipped all the time through the local church to do the work of ministry. So that's the big idea. It's for every single one of us.

[12:02] It means that ministry does not primarily happen at the top level of an institution. So the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, if you know what that is, is not the first order of ministry, nor is the Kirk session meeting, nor is my time in the office in the week, or even this.

This is fundamental ministry. But he's saying here that ministry more often happens in the grassroots. It happens from the bottom up. It happens across the whole organic body.

So where does ministry take place most of the time? Most of the time, we're only here for an hour, right? Most of the time, ministry is in the hundreds and hundreds of interactions every single one of us has all week with people.

So you come here to be equipped for the ministry that God has given you and the thousands of ways you touch people's lives every single week. At work, walking through the city, in the home, at school, wherever it may be, all the ways, all the domains in which you're called to ministry.

It's in every person's ministry. That's where the fundamental heartbeat of ministry really takes place. Week by week, interaction by interaction. All of us are gifted ministering saints. What's your ministry?

[13:10] That's the question Paul's putting to us. Now, let me say it slightly stronger than that. As one writer puts it, it means that every single believer, every single Christian, has a place in the body of Christ that no other Christian can fill.

Every single one of you, believer, has a place in the body of Christ, known by God from before the foundation of the world, that nobody else can replace. You are that valued.

We can't do it without you. We're for one another so much that every single person has such an important role in the life and work of the church. There is a supernatural, eternal reason for why you are such a valuable part of the body of Christ.

And it's the work of the Spirit from before all of eternity even. Now, in verse 8 and 9, Paul takes a verse from the Old Testament to try to make this point and image it for us.

We looked at it just a little bit last week, but he quotes in verse 8 from Psalm 68. So if you have a Bible, you can see that it's bracketed out because it's a psalm quotation.

[14 : 21] And it says, Now, why is he picking this to describe the call that we're all sent out to ministry, we're all gifted from ministry?

He's quoting Psalm 68, and he's saying Psalm 68 is ultimately about Jesus. And in Psalm 68, it's about this king, God the king, who goes out and rescues his people from captivity.

So it's thinking about the Exodus story, and it's thinking about all sorts of other stories in the Old Testament where the people are in captivity, imprisoned. And the king goes out and he rescues them from captivity.

He redeems them. You can see that right here in the quote. And then it says, And then he gave gifts to men, or to people, right? And so it's saying, There's a problem here.

If you were to leave today, I know everybody will do this. If you were to go and leave today and read a little bit about this passage in the commentaries, they will tell you that, or maybe flip back to Psalm 68, you will see that in Psalm 68, it doesn't say that.

[15 : 50] In Psalm 68, it actually says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he received gifts from all men. But when Paul quotes it, he says, He gave gifts to all men.

So sometimes people have come to this moment and said, Look, the Bible is so confused, misquoting, errors all over the place. Is that what's happening?

Has Paul got it wrong? Does Paul not know what Psalm 68 actually said? No, he does. And what's happening here is he's interpreting it for us. And if you read the whole of Psalm 68, it starts to become clear.

He's taking a little piece and rewording it to make the whole Psalm clear for us of how it's accomplished through Jesus. How if you've got redeeming grace, you've also got gifts of grace, spiritual gifts as well in your life.

That's what he's doing. How does it work? If you are invited over in St. C's or another friend outside St. Columbus to their home for lunch, maybe a Sunday lunch or Saturday, Friday night, something like that, oftentimes many of you, I know you do this because you do this at my house, you bring a gift, you bring chocolate, you bring something to drink, whatever it may be, right?

[16 : 58] And when you do that, if I'm the host, I receive the gift to my home. But you know what inevitably happens? What do we do when we receive chocolate?

When you bring it after dinner, we whip that chocolate right out, right? And we give it right back to you. Thank you for the gift. Now you eat it, right? And that's what Paul means here.

If you read the whole Psalm, see in the Psalm, when he sets the captives free, what do you do? You give gifts to God. You come to worship and you lay your tribute today in service.

And you say, Lord, I worship you. I value you for redeeming me. That's a gift. You're giving your time, your effort, your love to God because he's given you his. But then what does God turn around and do?

He then lavishes you with the chocolate. He gives you gifts. And when you read the whole of Psalm 68, that's what it means. In the Lord of the Rings, it's been a while since the Lord of the Rings reference is time.

[17 : 58] In the Lord of the Rings, the fellowship, they come to the lady of the wood, Galadriel. And when they come to Galadriel, they're worn out.

They're broken. They've had a rough time. They've lost their dear friend Gandalf. And they come to the lady of the wood and she throws a feast for them. And she gives them rest. And then she gathers them.

And to each member, what does she do? She gives a gift to every single one of them. She gives Frodo the light of a star and says very famously, May this be a light to you when all of the lights go out in your life, right?

And what you realize in the rest of the story is the gifts that she gives after the feast prove absolutely essential to the accomplishment of the mission. Jesus Christ redeems you from captivity, saving grace.

He brings you to the feast. We're about to celebrate it in a minute. And then he lavishes every one of us with a gift and says, This is absolutely essential for the mission. Use it.

[18 : 55] Don't waste your gift. Don't bury your talents. Use the gift. Every person is needed. We're all needed. Now, before we move to the final thing, what is this gift for?

If you come down to verse 12, he says, The gifts you have are for ministry. And the gifts that a pastor, a teacher, an evangelist has is to gift everybody, help everybody, equip everybody for the

work of ministry.

What is that? We talk about that all the time in the church, right? We talk about ministry. But sometimes the missing piece is, what is ministry? What is ministry? And the word ministry is a Greek word that we know are in English.

It's diakonia. It's where we get the word deacon. So when it says, you're being equipped even now for the work of ministry, it says something like the work of deaconing.

And so the blanket word for ministry is basically the word to deacon. And to deacon doesn't mean the office of deacon, but just service is all that word really means.

[19 : 57] One way of defining ministry. It's very simple. It's when you say, because I've been redeemed, because I've been saved by grace, for the glory of Christ and the power of the gospel, I want to, I do, I go forth and make the needs of other people more important than my own.

That's all it means. So what is ministry? It's just saying, because Jesus did it for me, I'm going to make the needs of other people in my life more important than my own needs. I'm going to serve in whatever way God's called me to.

And I'll just spend one minute on this, but there are only five ministries. Only five. No more. The church only does five things. And you could talk about so many subcategories of ministry, but all ministry comes down to one of five things.

One, the ministry of the word. So opening up the Bible, opening the gospel to somebody else. That could be done at a dinner table. We do it right here in church. It could be done anywhere.

Sometimes maybe a surprising moment on the bus, you enact the ministry of the word with somebody.

The ministry of the word. The ministry of worship, number two. You come together and ascribe value to God who is most valuable. The ministry of worship. So many ways we have to have every single week to even have worship.

[21 : 08] So many ways to serve in the light of worship. Number three, the ministry of community. So that's holistic care for the community of the saints. Meeting the needs of the saints.

Caring for each other. Serving in any way possible. Number four, the ministry of discipleship or spiritual formation. So seeking spiritual maturity for yourself and helping other people walk in spiritual maturity.

And then finally, the ministry of mercy. Caring for people's material and spiritual needs outside of the community of the saints. In the city. That's it. There's only five ministries.

The ministry of the word, worship, community, discipleship, and mercy. Everything else is a subcategory of those. And so we're all gifted and we're all being equipped for the work of those five arenas.

Now, secondly, finally, briefly, the spiritual gifts. Paul says then that you have a grace, a gift. If you're a Christian today, given by the Spirit to do this work of these five ministries.

[22 : 14] And he's making this argument from verse 4 to 10 about the oneness of the church. And then in verse 11 and 12 tells us, you're here to use your gift for the work of ministry. And an overarching theme about this might be to simply say that the Spirit does not take away your individual identity in this.

The Spirit actually affirms it and gives you a gift to grow in an identity. But what the Spirit does take away as the Spirit gives gifts is individualism.

So the Spirit never takes away your individual identity. If he did that, we would just be a colorless uniformity. But what the Spirit does slowly take away from every one of us is individualism.

And so in the world, in the secular culture we live in, individualism is the heartbeat of life. We're trained from the earliest moments to ask, who am I? What am I going to be when I grow up?

If I'm going to be anything, I have to curate my own identity. I have to achieve it. I will be measured entirely by my successes and failures in life. That's what the culture teaches.

[23 : 22] But when the gospel comes into your life, you stop asking the question, who am I? And instead you ask the question, whose am I? I'm God's. He tells me now who I am.

Loved, valued, renewed, day by day, growing in this identity he's given me. So he never takes away your individuality. He confirms it. But instead he does take away individualism. And he does that.

One of the ways he does that is by giving gifts, specific gifts. So let's ask this question. What are the gifts? What gifts can you be looking for in your life that are these spiritual graces or gifts that God might have given to you?

Now, there are four places you can find them in the Bible. Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4, and Romans 12. And we have a few of them listed right here.

Apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors, shepherds. So these are all gifts oriented toward the offices of the church throughout church history. But then in the other places that the gifts are mentioned, it's all the other gifts.

[24 : 24] How many are there? Nobody knows. There are 21 different words used in the four sections of the Bible. But at least 21, maybe 20 to 24, 25.

But a lot of them are probably synonyms. And instead of thinking that we ever have a final list of gifts, a lot of commentators will talk about the fact that it's probably the case that some of the gifts aren't even mentioned in the New Testament.

So Paul is giving you summaries, and there's other gifts as well that the Spirit gives that aren't even listed in the Bible. But let me give you the list of the ones we do know that are listed in the Bible. And here they are. And then there are others that I think are clearly gifts that the Spirit gives that are not in those lists.

For example, prayer. Prayer. So we're all called to pray, but we all know that in this room there are some of us that are so gifted with prayer that they are driving the train.

[25 : 39] You know, the rest of us are following in their footsteps as prayer warriors, as we often say. Right? Or counseling. Counseling is never mentioned as one of the spiritual gifts. But we all know that there are some people who are really gifted with walking alongside somebody and just listening and counseling.

That's a spiritual gift as well. So there's these 21, and there's probably lots more, and we could sit around together and make lists of what they are. But here's a definition for you. Taken all together, what are these spiritual gifts?

They are inclinations and capabilities that the Spirit gives us that helps us do ministry inside and outside of the church. They are from God.

They're gifts. They're not talents. Spiritual gifts are gifts, not talents. So to say, I'm really good at this at work, therefore that's my spiritual gift, is not always the case.

Because it's not just your talent. It's actually something that the Spirit gives you when you become a Christian. And the application today is just simple. If nothing else, believe.

[26 : 40] No. If you're a Christian today, you're charismatic. You're gifted. You have the gifts of the Spirit. And though we no longer believe that in the era of the church age that we live in, that the extraordinary gifts are often on display.

Nevertheless, we believe in the charisma, the gifts of the Spirit, that every single one of us has one. And so let me finish with this. How do you discern? So I mentioned this sheet. On the back, I've put the steps here on the back of the sheet.

So it might be a little easier to take one of these with you and think about it, look at it, pray through it, work on it. But I'll just briefly run through it. Number one, actively discern your gift.

Don't be passive. Know that the gifts of the Spirit are real. You've got one, Christian. Pursue. Don't be passive. Instead, search for it. The gifts are for corporate ministry in all five domains.

So how do you find out what your gift is? Try everything. Get stuck in. Look out and think of all the different ministries available to you. Ask, where can I plug in?

[27 : 44] Where do I see a need? And dive. Don't first ask, what is my spiritual gift? Instead, pursue ministry in whatever capacity. And then let your spiritual gift arise in the midst of that.

Testing and retesting through the work of ministry in all five spheres, all five domains. You can ask these questions. What do I desire? Where do people say that I am effective and helpful?

And thirdly, what opportunities are actually available to me in the church or outside of the church? Desire, effectiveness, and opportunity. Three areas that you can use to discern the gifts.

Secondly, when you've discerned your gift, grow in it. So the gifts often come in clusters. So don't be afraid to step in and pursue, pursue, pursue.

So just because you have a gift doesn't mean you stay static. Instead, you're meant to grow in that gift and develop in it and pursue it. One way you can do that, very practical. Sometimes around the church, people will come and say, Why aren't we here at St. C's doing this?

[28 : 50] And it's often a really good idea. And I'll say, I would love to, but I have no capacity for it. And so one way you can discern your spiritual gift and then grow into it is if you're asking, Why aren't we doing this?

Why aren't we doing mercy to this community? Why aren't we evangelizing and thinking about this context? Then probably when you ask that question, you may be discerning your spiritual gift and calling.

And so one thing I might say if you say that is, could you lead us in that? Could you take us to the next step? Could you be a ministry entrepreneur here and take us in exactly that direction? What can you do? You can evangelize. You can encourage. You can do all sorts of things. But thirdly and finally, everyone is called. You have a spiritual gift. Everyone simultaneously is called to every ministry.

So you might have the gift of evangelism, but you're still also called to the ministry of mercy. You might have the ministry of mercy in your life, but you're also called to evangelize.

[29 : 50] So in every single one of the gifts, what are the gifts for? The gifts are there to equip all of us for every ministry. All of us are called to be generous, to evangelize, to worship, to share the gospel, to show mercy, to love and take care of the needs of the saints.

All of us, right? And what the gifts are there for is to identify leaders that can lead us in the direction of pursuing each of those ministries. We all are called to the ministry of prayer, but there are some of you that I know I can lean on because you're so committed and gifted at prayer.

So it's everybody's ministry, all of it, and yet all of us have leadership capabilities in some arena of ministry in our lives. Paul, the final word, Paul comes in this passage, and he does something here just like 1 Corinthians 12 and 13.

1 Corinthians 12 is one of the most famous lists of all the gifts of the Spirit. And then 1 Corinthians 13 says, And a lot of times we read 1 Corinthians 13 at weddings, but actually 1 Corinthians 13 is about spiritual gifts.

And 1 Corinthians 13 says, If you don't have love in your life for people given to you through the gospel by the Spirit, then don't use your gift. In other words, in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 and here in Ephesians 4, Paul is saying that spiritual fruit is the gatekeeper to using the gifts.

[31 : 19] So he started this passage by saying, Put on humility and patience and gentleness and love, and then he came to the gifts. And you see, the spiritual fruit in your life, maturity, putting on the character of Christ is the gatekeeper to actually using your gifts.

You may have heard, many of you will have listened to probably the podcast, The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill, the famous church in the United States, who was a massive mega church that had huge influence throughout the world.

And over one weekend, the church went from massive, well-attended, flourishing in a way, to closed on Monday. It's not really seeing anything quite like it that we know about in church history that fast.

And in that podcast and many other investigations, what's come out is the leadership in the church were using gifts, but without the gatekeeper of character.

When you use your gifts without the character of Christ in your life, the gifts become dangerous. They become dangerous. How do you break through?

[32 : 30] You've got to say, I can use my gifts to love other people only if I first see that he loved me. Right? You have to say that Jesus Christ, the most gifted for ministry.

Right? Right? What's the greatest thing? In John 13, he says that he got on his knees and he washed feet. Why? Because he loved them to the end. He had such compassion on us, such love for us, that he used his gifts for us.

And so the question is, have I been so changed and transformed by the gospel? Am I pursuing change and transformation through the gospel to where I love people because Jesus loves me? And therefore, I can use my gifts to serve them. Let us pray. Father, we ask that you would give us the love of Christ. We ask today that as we look at the cross in the Lord's Supper, you would give us the love of Jesus so that we could use our gifts.

So I pray, Father, that everybody in this room, every Christian, would be helped to discern their spiritual gift, a gift of the Spirit. And I ask those that may be exploring Christianity tonight that they would come to see the beauty of the first type of grace, the most important type, saving grace.

[33 : 40] So we pray that, O Redeemer, come and meet with us as we sing and as we break bread together. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.