

“What Are Your Gifts?”

Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-12; Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

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September 15, 2019

So what are your gifts? What unique talents and abilities did God give *you*?

We’ve talked about this before, but it’s been a while. Nine years, in fact, since we’re really placed a strong emphasis on this. A lot of you weren’t here back then. It’s time to talk about it again.

The New Testament is very clear: God gives different people different gifts. Some people are excellent teachers. Some people are especially good at offering compassion. Some people have strong administrative talents. Some people are blessed with the gift of generosity. Some are particularly gifted at prayer. Some excel in their artistic abilities, or their creative talents. And so on. Of course, this should be no surprise to us. Not everyone can sing like Aretha Franklin, or pitch like Clayton Kershaw, or paint like Michelangelo, or build like Frank Lloyd Wright, or swim like Michael Phelps, or invent like Thomas Edison, right? Try as we might – we could spend *years* in training, trying to improve our skills in any of those areas – but *none* of us are ever likely to be *that* good. Right? It’s just a simple, basic reality: *God created us all different*. There are some people that are just *naturally* better at some things than other people are. Sure, they still have to work at it – Clayton Kershaw still has to practice; Michael Phelps still has to train – but there’s a *gift* they have been given that enables them to be *particularly* effective in that particular area of life. The most successful people are the ones who figure out what they are *naturally* good at, and then work to maximize their effectiveness.

So the question is, what are you *naturally* good at? What special, unique talent or ability has God given *you*, that you can develop to become *particularly* and *distinctly* effective in that specific area?

Now, let’s be real. There are some people who think they aren’t good at *anything*. Maybe they’ve tried a bunch of different things, and haven’t felt particularly effective in any one of them. Maybe they’ve been told time and time again what they’re not good at. Maybe they think they are a colossal failure in life. I would suggest that those people just *haven’t discovered their particular area of giftedness yet*. It is, indeed, a process of discovery; it is, to a certain extent, a process of trial-and-error. Maybe there’s something you *want* to be good at ... and, the truth of the matter is, you’re just *not*. Maybe there’s someone you *wish* you were like, someone maybe you’re even jealous of to some degree. Well, I’ve got news for you: *maybe that’s not the gift God gave you*. Don’t waste your time trying to be someone you’re not. You’d be much better off focus your energy on figuring out *who God*

wants you to become. If, say, Aretha Franklin had spent many years of her life trying to become a good painter, my hunch is that she would never have become very successful, the world would have been robbed of some amazing music, we probably would never have heard of her, and she probably would have spent much of her life feeling frustrated and ineffective. I'll say it again: *The most successful people are those who figure out what they are naturally good at, and then work to maximize their effectiveness.*

So do you know what you are particularly *gifted* at? What raw talents God has endowed you with, that might be just waiting to be untapped and unleashed?

There are some gifts that are particularly useful in the life of a church. Paul lists some of them, in those three "gift lists" that Maggie read a few minutes ago. Some people are particularly good evangelists. Some people are particularly good teachers. Some people have gifts of healing. Some people are especially wise. Some people can truly work miracles. There are three lists in the New Testament, but they are not exhaustive lists; Paul is being illustrative, not comprehensive. We know from other passages in scripture that there were people who were recognized by the community of faith for their craftsmanship, for their artistic talent, for their administrative skill, and so on. Paul's point is that *everybody* has *something* to offer. Indeed, that is one of the basic maxims of the Christian tradition, that *everyone* is called to *some* form of ministry in the life of the church. Once you become a member, you don't get to just *sit in a pew*. You get to *serve!* Don't think of that as an *obligation* – think of it as an *opportunity*. *God has given you some gifts that can truly bless other people, can truly be beneficial to the whole community of faith.* Where would we be, for example, if we didn't have people who had been gifted with the gift of *music*, people who sing faithfully in our choir week after week? The trick is *figuring out what gift you have to offer to other people, and to the church of Jesus Christ.*

Now you all know that there are a multitude of jobs that need to be done in the life of a church. We need Sunday School teachers. We need committee members. We need communion servers and preparers. We need people to count the offering. We need people to serve in the kitchen. We have a whole bunch of "slots" that need to be filled. *And the church will be most effective – and people will be the most happy – when the "slot" they are serving in matches the gifts that God has given them.*

This is why it is so important that you *know* what your gifts are. Let's say you get a call someday from someone in a leadership position here in the church. *We are wondering if you would be willing to teach Sunday School. We are wondering if you would be willing to serve as a Deacon. We are wondering if you would be willing to serve on the Finance Committee.* Whatever the question might be. How are you going to know if you should say "yes" to that question? Sometimes, people put pressure on you. *We really need someone to do this job, and we think you're the right person for the job.* Sometimes people say "yes" because they've been pressured, or because they feel guilty if they say "no." *That is not the right reason to say "yes"!* And it can lead to all sorts of problems. If the area you're serving in doesn't match your area of giftedness, several things are likely to happen: (a) you're not going to be very good at it, (b) you're not going to be very happy doing it, and (c) other people might come to think that you're not doing a very good job. If you've agreed to do a certain task, and you just *dread* doing it, *it probably doesn't match your areas of giftedness.* You'll be happier, and the church will be better off, if you can find a graceful way to exit from that responsibility, and find something different

to do that better matches your gifts. And there are *plenty* of other possibilities for you to consider. Just because a job doesn't exist *now* doesn't mean we couldn't *create* it in the future. We didn't used to have a Liturgical Arts team, for example – people whose “job” it is to adorn our sanctuary and building with decorations and signs that point us toward God. We created the Liturgical Arts team *after* we discovered that there were people in the congregation who had artistic talents and who were willing to offer them to the church! We can do the same thing again, *anytime* we discover that someone truly has a *gift* to offer, a gift that will *bless* people. We also need to be aware of the fact that there may be times and seasons when we simply don't have anybody with a particular gift, and *maybe it's okay if that job just doesn't get done* until we find someone with the particular *gift* that that job requires. One of the worst things that can happen to a church is for the members or leaders to get locked into thinking that *these* are the “slots” that must be filled, and there is *no room* for any variation or change! The most effective churches are willing to *adapt* their ministry to the *gifts* that God has blessed them with.

So what are *your* gifts? Do you know what they are? Are you *using* them effectively in this community of faith, in ways that enrich both *your* life, and your neighbors in the pews around you? Here's another factor to consider: maybe you already know what *some* of your gifts are. But there might be other gifts that God has given you that *you have yet to discover*. The fancy terms for this are the “manifest” gifts and the “latent” gifts; the *manifest* gifts are the gifts you already know about, and the *latent* gifts are those that are hidden under the surface, just *waiting* to be discovered. When we went through this process nine years ago, there was one particular member who made a *huge* discovery about themselves in the course of the discussions, and it has led to all kinds of benefits, both to them and to the church. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you know *all* the gifts that God has given you. There are probably more just waiting to be discovered and unleashed!

I'm willing to bet that there are some folks here who would like to discover what their gifts are. I'm also willing to bet that there are some folks who went through this process nine years ago, who would benefit from doing again. New gifts sometimes materialize in people over time. You are all in luck! Next month, we are going to help you identify your gifts – both the ones that you may already know about, as well as the ones that you might have *no clue* about at the moment. All you have to do is stick around for a little while after worship, on October 13, 20, and 27. Come to the Adult Sunday School class. I will introduce you to *thirty* different gifts that are all lifted up in the Bible: the gift of service, the gift of organization, the gift of teaching, the gift of wisdom, the gift of hospitality, the gift of craftsmanship, and so on – I'm not going to name all 30 of them right now! I will give you a tool that will help you identify what *your* gifts are, both your manifest gifts and your latent gifts. As a part of that process, you will want to solicit some input from a couple people who know you *really well*. They might see some gifts in you that you are not yet aware of. Then I'll give you some scripture passages and some commentary to help you understand your gifts better, and we'll spend some time thinking about things you could *do* with your gifts – things that that will both benefit you, and bless other people.

The bottom line is that *you have something unique and special to offer*, some gifts that *God* has given you. You might or might not know what those gifts are. We are going to help you identify them!

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