

“Serving”

How Do I Fit? – Part 2

Ekklesia – The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

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Have you ever gotten a Christmas present and yet didn't have the slightest idea as to how it really worked. I've got an ITouch here in my hands . . . you listen to music on it.

Yet, the thing doesn't have any buttons. You don't put anything into it. If your frame of reference is something like this then, well, you're kind of sunk.

Here's the deal . . . you to know how the thing works before you can work it. Otherwise, you have a gift but it's no real use to you or others.

Spiritual gifts are like that. The Bible says that we all have a gift. The problem for a lot of us is that either we don't really know what that gift is or, even if we do, we don't really know how to work it.

During the next few weeks we're talking about the gifts. You have one. I have one. They are really cool – even cooler than this Apple ITouch. But you have to know how they work.

Through the fall we went chapter by chapter through the Book of Acts. We're not done but to understand the Book of Acts you have to understand the Holy Spirit. And, to fully understand the Holy Spirit you must understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So . . . as we take a break for a few weeks and talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit we're going to be learning about two things. We'll be learning about ourselves – what gifts we have and how they work. And, we'll also be learning about God the Holy Spirit, the Giver of those gifts.

Let's pray.

PRAYER

I. Overview

As we did last week, I'd like for you to open Bibles and let's read Romans 12:4-8 . . .

4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.¹

If you know some New Testament, you may know that this is just one of three passages written by Paul the Apostle about spiritual gifts. The other two are found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. It's tempting to look at these three passages and treat them all alike but . . . they are not the same.

Take a look at the word "function" in Romans 12:4 and the phrase in which it is found . . . ***"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function"***.

Here's what the word "function" means . . . it means . . . "function". Like . . . what you do. The word is "praxis" and it means "deed". It also means "to undertake, to accomplish, to perform". So, now let's back up to overall phrase, ***"members of the body"***. The idea is ***"parts"*** of the body. For example, the heart is a "part" or member of the body. It has a certain "function" . . . to pump blood. The lungs are a certain "member" or "part" of the body. They have a certain "function" . . . to bring oxygen into the body and get carbon dioxide out of the body. The eye has a certain function. The ears a certain function.

This is where this word "motive" comes from. Think about it this way . . . just as hearts are all about blood, you might say they are "motivated" to

¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Ro 12:4-8). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

pump it, or lungs are all about oxygen, you might say they are “motivated” to breathe it, these list of 7 gifts similarly define our function . . . our most basic role . . . the thing, you might say, that we are all about.

So, the person with the motive gift is prophecy is all about prophecy or “perceiving.” That’s their role, their function, their motive in all that they do. In fact, it’s much deeper than what they do . . . it’s who they are. Cut into a heart and everything in that heart is about pumping blood. Similarly, as we’ll see in just a few minutes, the person with the gift of “serving” is, at the very core of their being a “servant” or a “doer”. They are hands on people – often even in a literal sense of the word.

The cool thing about understanding these gifts is that to do so is to understand much more than what you do. It is to understand who you are. And, once you understand who you are, then you begin to find your place.

Let’s get back to the puzzle thing for just a moment. What do you instinctively do when you’re putting together a jigsaw puzzle? You look at how the piece is shaped and then you begin to look for the spot in the puzzle with that shape.

Do you see what I’m driving at? So many people don’t feel like they fit, haven’t found where they belong in the church, because they don’t know how they are shaped. They don’t know their gift. Their function.

Once you figure that out – whether you are a perceiver (prophet), doer, (servant), researcher (teacher) . . . or any of the other gifts. Once you have looked at yourself, defined God’s unique shape given to you . . . then you are able to look at the puzzle, the body of Christ, the church, and then say “Aha! I see a hole that is shaped just like me. I think I fit there!”

When that happens, you know how you fit. And, that question, “How Do I Fit?” is a huge question many people ask through life and never really get the answer. But when you know your motive gift, you know where you fit. How you fit.

It’s really cool. Finally, you belong.

II. Serving

Alright, let's read the classic "serving" story in the Bible. Martha and the meal she fixed for Jesus. Please turn in your Bibles with to Luke 10:38-42 . . .

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."²

Let me also read John 12:2 to you . . .

2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.³

This week we're going to talk about the second "motive" gift of Romans 12. We read the list earlier . . . those gifts are prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, organizing, and mercy. You have one of these gifts.

Martha's gift was "serving". In fact, if you take that word in John 12:2 . . . **"Martha served"** you have something far deeper than what Martha did. You have her "function". Her motive. What she was all about. How she looked at life and how she lived. As hearts are all about pumping blood, Martha's role was to serve. In fact the word "serve" here in John 12:2 – "diaknoia" – is identical to the word used in Romans 12:6.

So what do we learn about serving and what it looks like in action?

1. Those with the motive gift of "serving" easily recognize practical need and they are quick to meet them. Check out verse 38 of Luke 10 . . .

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Lk 10:38-42). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

³*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Jn 12:2). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Jesus had a practical need, right? He needed a place to stay and he needed something to eat. Research confirms this time and again . . . those like Bill Gothard and Don and Katie Fortune that have studied the motive gifts in depth find time and again that those with this motive gift of serving have a radar for practical needs and are quick to respond. You see, Martha's story in Luke 10 isn't just about Martha. She's the template for those with this gift.

(By the way, if you're following along in the outline you may have noticed the Scripture reference 2 Timothy 4:9-13. Timothy, Paul's protégé in the faith, may well also have been someone motivated by serving. Those additional references you see in either the letters to Timothy or Philippians point to Timothy and his proclivity towards the serving mindset.)

2. Especially enjoy manual projects.

That is, working with their hands. I got this from the Don and Katie Fortune material and it was new one on me. I hadn't really connected the tendency of those with the motive gift of serving with the love of and, oftentimes, ability to work their hands. But as I reflected on it I saw a couple of things quickly. First of all, Martha confirms this. She's cooking . . . with her hands. Secondly, I think about deacons (it's that same word "diakonia"), and I see the same things. Deacons want to help, and they look doing so with their hands. That lines up with people I know who have this gift. Henry Justis is classic . . . so much of his ministry (preparing food for the hungry, handing out clothing to the poor, giving haircuts to the homeless) is hands on stuff. If you really like to work with your hands it's a clue that this might be your motive gift.

3. Enjoys hospitality.

That's obvious from this story and those with the motive gift of serving are often wired this way. Bill Gothard in his stuff on motivational gifts points out the strong connection between serving and hospitality. The Fortunes in their word make the following statement . . . "When the pastor announces that a place is needed for the visiting missionary, it will likely be the

servers who offer their homes first. They love to entertain people. They look for opportunities to invite others over for dinner or dessert, and they do a terrific job of making their guests feel welcome." (p. 78, "Discover Your God Given Gift" by Don and Katie Fortune.)

4. Frees others to move in their gifts.

Take a look at the whole story of Martha. Why does she serve Jesus and his friends? Why open her home? Why cook the meal? Look at what happens . . . ³⁹ ***She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.*** Do you see it? Jesus starts to minister . . . in this setting he's teaching. Do you get the connection? Because Martha meets his practical needs Jesus is freed up to be, well, Jesus. To do his thing. His ministry.

I had a secretary many years ago while I was at St. Giles church in Charlotte. I was young in ministry and did not get the thing about motive gifts yet. Margie – my secretary – was a servant par excellence. The problem was that I kept trying to turn her into a ministry leader rather than a ministry servant.

I wanted her to teach classes (she knew a bunch of Bible) or stand up front and lead youth events (teens loved her and she loved teens). After awhile I realized that I had a huge problem with pride. I just assumed that if Margie was going to be really effective in ministry that she should do the things I did. But God had not wired her that way. She wanted to free me up to teach the Bible and stand up front and lead youth events. She knew I was good at that stuff so she would make phone calls, send emails, buy food, arrange for transportation, and yes, run out and pick up lunch for because I never stopped to eat.

It was pretty common for me to be in the middle of some big youth rally and for her to walk up and stick a plate of food in my hand and say, "Nate, you need to eat."

She loved to do this. She loved to see me move in my gifts. If you're a person like this . . . you want to minister like Martha, to do the practical things so that other people are freed up to move in their ministries, then there's a good chance that you are a server.

And how important are servers? Well, they are multipliers. They allow others to flourish in their gifts. How big a deal is that?

5. More interested in meeting the needs of others than self.

In Luke 10 Martha is much more concerned about Jesus' needs than her own.

6. Enjoys working on immediate goals rather than long-range.

This is what the research tells us but the research is valuable only in that confirms what we see in the Bible. Some of this is obvious . . . opening her home and providing a meal as Martha did was really important but it was more short-range in nature. Just a few moments ago I mentioned that Timothy, Paul's protégé, shows many of the classic server characteristics. For example, in 2 Timothy 4:9-13 Paul is in prison and dependant on others for his most basic needs. In that context he asks Timothy to come quickly, before winter, and to bring both his parchments (so that he can keep writing) and his coat. Classic servant stuff and the kind of thing you would ask of a servant. Paul knew Timothy well and knew what he loved to do and did well . . . the basic things that made ministry happen. In 1 Timothy 4:16 Paul writes to Timothy and tells him to persevere. In other words, keep going. Do you see how it's in the nature of someone who enjoys the practical and the immediate may need extra encouragement to stick with something for the long haul?

7. Shows love for others in deeds and actions more than words.

The practical is obvious in the story of Martha and also in Timothy's ministry to Paul. Check out this story which brings it into real life as told by the Fortune's:

One woman complained to me that her husband never said the words "I love you." I knew her husband and had observed many ways in which he showed his love. "But he's a server," I reminded her. "Think how often he takes you out to dinner so you won't have to cook. He buys you unbirthdays presents (Nate adds: servers often love to give gifts). He makes you all kinds of things in his workshop. He fixes things that break. He helps you clean house. I wish my husband did ½ as much!" The woman had to admit that she was blessed to have a server husband.

8. Servers need to feel appreciated.

Check out Martha's complaint to Jesus . . . **“Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”** So what's this very human request all about? Is it a cry for help? Sure . . . servers oftentimes take on more than they can do. But it's more than that, isn't it? She's looking for some appreciation and . . . appreciation is important. Servers tend to want to work behind the scenes and so oftentimes people miss their contributions. It's important to go out of the way to express thanks to them. (By the way, that's exactly what Paul does in Philippians 2:20 as he talks about Timothy and how great a help he was.)

9. Servers tend to do more than asked.

Again, that's what the research tells us but far more importantly than that it's what you see in Scripture. Check out verse 41 . . . ⁴¹ **“Martha, Martha,”** the Lord answered, **“you are worried and upset about many things.”** Why was Martha worried and upset about many things? Check out John 12:2 . . . **“Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served,⁴ . . .”** This isn't just a dinner, it's a dinner given in Jesus' honor. You know what was going on, right? Martha was putting on her best, doing her best. You have to know that because it was for Jesus and because it was her nature to serve she did way more than anyone asked. That's the beauty of servers . . . and it can be an Achilles heel at the same time.

Finally, let me hit a few more characteristics of the server in short order:

10. Servers feel the greatest joy in doing something that is helpful.
11. Servers do not want to lead others or projects. (Interestingly, there is a certain line of thinking that Moses may well have been a server.)
12. High Energy Level
13. Servers love to support those who are in leadership.

⁴*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Jn 12:2). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

14. Servers tend to be perfectionists . . . and love to put on those extra touches that make something truly special. (They are a bit frustrated when they can't do so.)
15. They will stay until something is completed.
16. They have a hard time saying "no".

Alright, if those are the uses, then what are the misuses. You'll remember that we talked about this last week . . . every one of the gifts has not only a set of strengths but a set of weaknesses. Put it this way . . . we will always "function" according to our basic motive gift. When we are actively walking with the Lord Jesus, in fellowship with Him, leaning upon Him for grace, maturing as people and as followers of Christ, walking in the Spirit rather than in the flesh then the gift is powerful. But, you and I don't always live that way, do we? Sometimes we are weak. Sometimes we are selfish. Sometimes we are disconnected for Christ's grace in our lives? Sometimes we are immature. Sometimes we walk in the flesh.

Even then, the gift is expressed. It's just that then it's expressed in weakness rather than in strength. So . . . what are some of the misuses of the motive gift of serving?

1. Critical of others who do not help out with obvious needs.
2. Neglect one's own family and their needs.
3. May become pushy or interfering . . . pushing their gift of service on others.
4. Easily becomes hurt when feeling unappreciated.

(Sometimes you will be appreciated, sometimes not. Remember, do it for the Lord and know that He always sees you and appreciates your service.)

5. Lets things – especially little things – become too important.

(Isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying to Martha when he talks about how her sister Mary had chosen the better thing, to sit at Jesus' feet? Here's the thing about serving . . . sometimes it's too practical. You just do and do and do and never have time for yourself simply to "be" with Jesus. This is why, in my opinion, Paul writes to Timothy the following:

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Notice that Paul reminds Timothy to ***“fan into flame the gift of God”***. In other words, Paul knows that Timothy, like all servers, can become so consumed with doing the practical that they lose track of the spiritual. Isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying to Martha? And, evenmoreso, servers can become hurt or embittered when they feel that they are left to do it on their own and underappreciated. Of course, that can isolate the server from their sense of Christ's love evenmoreso because it is a form of becoming offended at others and when we are offended at others we are cut off from God's gracious presence in our own lives.

Two more things . . . quickly:

6. Servers tend to work beyond their physical limits.

We see that in Martha and that's another reason for her exasperation. She's just tired. You see the same thing, I think, in Paul's reminder to Timothy to take care of his health because of his tendency towards illness.

7. Interfere with God's discipline.

If you love to serve others and meet their needs you might be unaware that God may be letting some needs go unmet in a person's life as a form of his discipline.

III. God

I mentioned earlier my problem with the Apple ITouch. No buttons. How does the thing work? That's just one issue with this thing. Here's the other. How do you power it up? It didn't come with an ac adapter cord. You see, even once you figure out how it works you only get to enjoy for a few hours before it runs out of juice.

That's the way it is with spiritual gifts as well. I just talked to you about how the motive gift of serving works. Hopefully you've got some sense now of

how it functions, the role it plays, how it interacts with other gifts, it's strengths and weaknesses.

But here's the thing, even once you figure how the gift runs, you're gonna run out of juice sooner or later. You have to know how to repower it.

For the ITouch you don't get the recharge from the wall socket. You plug it into your computer.

For the gifts, you don't get the recharge from people, from serving, from your friends, or from yourself. You recharge the gift by reconnecting to God. Check out this verse, the counsel that God gives through Paul to all with the gift of serving . . .

¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.⁵

Perfect, isn't it? If servers tend to become worn out by their gift and so lose their spiritual fervor, you've have to stay reconnected to the Giver of the Gifts . . . God Himself. This can be particularly true of those with the motive gift of serving and so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – the One who gives the gifts in the first place – Paul write that those with the gift need to be intentional but maintaining their zeal and spiritual fervor.

How do you do that? You stay connected to the power source . . . the Lord Himself. Stay tight with Jesus and your gift won't wear your out, you won't run dry, you'll stay empowered and so be effective. Servant, if you lsoe your fervor for Christ then you are automatically in the flesh with your gift. Right? Maybe today you need to reconnect . . . to ask the Lord to fill you once again with His power, His love, His joy, His strength.

And, by the way, that's true not only for any servant but for any person. If you're here this morning and you don't know Christ I'm pretty sure you're running out of power also. The batteries are about out of juice. You're losing strength, aren't you? Here's the deal . . . like the ITouch has got to connect with the laptop in order to get it's power, you have to connect with God to get the power for living.

You see, while the Christ follower with the gift of serving perhaps needs to reconnect for the umpteenth time, perhaps you need to connect for the first time. Before you can really download the gifts, you have to connect

⁵*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Ro 12:11). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

to the Giver. Plug into God. Let Him pour Himself into you. You do that when you put your faith in Christ. Jesus is our connection to God . . . come on, you know you can't do it on your own, don't you? Hasn't life taught you anything?

In Ephesians 2:13 the Bible tells us that. . . ¹³ **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.** ⁶ In other words, Jesus is the one who brings us near to God. Who connects us to Him.

Perhaps you'd like to plug into God today. Make your connection. Get the power you need to live. Will you pray with me?

God in heaven, the truth is that I am out of strength, out of answers. Really, I am running out hope. I need you. I need you to be real in my life. I am tired of trying to find the answers on my own and so I am taking the time tested route . . . I put my faith in Jesus Christ, Your Son. I ask you to forgive me of my many sins and foolishness. Accept me, Lord. Connect me to you, Father. I receive your gift of salvation. I thank you that I am now your child, that finally I am connected . . . to You, through Christ, forever. Amen.

⁶*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Eph 2:13). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.