

ENGAGING THE SPIRIT'S GIFTING

“He gave gifts to men” Ephesians 4:8

“I had him in an earlier grade,” wrote Sister Helen Mrosia. “[Back then], I had to tape Mark’s mouth for talking too much in class. Now, he was one of my students in Middle School Math.”

One Friday, deciding to give her students a break from their work, Sister Mrosia asked her students to take out a fresh sheet of paper and simply write the nicest thing they could about every other student in the class. After 15-20 minutes she collected the papers and compiled the results for each student. On Monday, everyone received a sheet about what everyone else thought about them.

Several years later, Mark was killed in Viet Nam. After the funeral service, many classmates gathered with Mark’s parents and Sister Mrosia for lunch. Mark’s father took a wallet out of his pocket. “They found this on Mark when he was killed,” he said. Carefully, he removed a folded, refolded, and taped up paper—on which the teacher had listed all the good things Mark’s classmates had said about him.

Suddenly, around the lunch table, other students responded. Charlie smiled sheepishly and said, “I keep my list in my desk drawer. Chuck’s wife said, “Chuck put his list in our wedding album. “I have mine, too, in my diary,” Marilyn said. Vicky reached into her pocketbook and brought out her frazzled (treasured) list.¹

It’s true. One of the greatest gifts anyone can give someone else is the genuine gift of sincere, well-timed encouragement. It brings fresh, flowing water to a thirsty heart, a beaten down spirit.

But don’t you wonder sometimes...in the battle, in the press of life, as the years unfold and sometimes not the way you had planned...don’t you wonder what God would write if he were asked to spell out what He thinks about you? I mean really? He knows me better than I know myself.

What would He say? What would He write? And would I treasure it, or would I toss it aside?

I am here today to bring you that word. Quite frankly, I’ve asked God about what He thinks about you, and He didn’t hesitate in writing His assessment down.

May I summarize what He told me? It’s simple. It’s beautiful. And it’s incredible.

IN THE FLOW OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD you are HIS GIFT.

As a redeemed child of God, as someone “in Christ,” this is what God thinks, because this is what God knows. In Christ you are a new creation. In Christ, you are justified, you are washed, you are sanctified, you are raised from death to life, you are a citizen of heaven, and a chosen brother or sister to the greatest Person who ever walked the earth and who will reign over the earth. You are all

those things. But even more wonderfully, in the flow of the Spirit of God, you are God's uniquely created and endowed GIFT. God has written that

You are the GIFT that the body of Christ needs.
(what's more)
You are gifted in the way that the Spirit of God desires.
(therefore, you are free to)
BE the GIFT in the Spirit's flow.

You may be objecting. You may be saying, "I don't think about myself like that? I've not other, and not-so-complimentary descriptions looping in my psyche.

- I'm that kid that a whole lot of others ignored during my years in school
- I'm the geek that tried to be an athlete but never could make varsity
- I'm the daughter my dad never spent any time with
- I'm the son who watched my dad leave my mom
- I'm the guy that sits on the edges of the worship center, not sure if I'm needed or wanted.

"I'm no gift. I'm a nobody. Yeah...I get along, but I'm nothing special."

Don't you believe it. If that's what you think, it's not what God thinks. When you stepped into Christ by faith, you received something from your heavenly Father, through the Holy Spirit, that has changed you forever. It's called GRACE.

You've been saved by GRACE (Ephesians 2:8)

You stand in GRACE (Romans 5:1)

You are destined to grow in GRACE (2 Peter 3:18)

God's GRACE and PEACE are multiplied to you (1 Peter 1:2)

When Jesus comes again, He will bring into your life for all eternity a GRACE that will perfect you (1 Peter 1:13)

You are called to be STRONG in God's GRACE (2 Tim 2:1)

What's more, you have been given a GRACE ENDOWMENT that makes you an indispensable, key member of the dynamic Body of Christ...which means (no matter what else you might think) you are God's gift

IN THE FLOW OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD you are HIS GIFT.
The GIFT that the body of Christ needs.
Gifted in the way that the Spirit of God desires.
SO...BE the GIFT in the Spirit's flow.

May I show you this from what God has said? **4 Passages – 4 Ways you are God’s Gift**

First 1 Peter 4:10-11 (p.1016 ESV)
Gifted to SPEAK or SERVE in the empowerment of God

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This is interesting. Without listing out all of the varieties of gifts and abilities God gives His children, Peter suggests that they fall into two categories. Some of them are **speaking gifts** – God has given you the grace ability to understand and make clear important ideas to others. If so, measure your words and “speak as though God Himself is speaking through you.” Others of you have **servicing gifts**. What you can uniquely do is *uniquely helpful* and empowering of others. So look for opportunities and “serve with all the strength and energy God provides.”

When God’s **grace-gift stewards** are speaking to one another as God would speak, and serving one another in the strength of God, a whole lot of incredible things start happening, and glory and honor and praise come to God through Jesus Christ.

You are God’s gift, so

Second Romans 12:3-8 (p.948 ESV)
Don’t be AFRAID to STAY/SHINE in your lane!

*³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if **service**, in our serving; the one who **teaches**, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; the one who **contributes**, in generosity; the one who **leads**, with zeal; the one who does **acts of mercy**, with cheerfulness.*

Two helpful instructions come out of this passage. First, **THINK RIGHTLY ABOUT YOURSELF**. Which means think “humbly” (*not to think of himself more highly*) – your grace gifting doesn’t make you better or worse than anyone else. It also means to think “accurately” (*according to the measure of faith God has assigned*). It also means to think “team” (*many members, different functions, one body in Christ, one of another*).

Think RIGHTLY ABOUT YOURSELF. Think HUMBLY. Think ACCURATELY. Think TEAM.

But second, GET IN YOUR LANE AND SHINE IN YOUR LANE. You say, Look, I'm not a teacher, I don't do *prophecy*, I don't have special messages from God for others." OK, that's not your lane. Find your lane and get motoring. You can think humbly, and accurately, and be team oriented. You have "grace given to you," and the Spirit's word is clear: Use it! Make yourself available to God. Explore the needs of the body and get in your lane. Shine in your lane.

A man broke his left arm. One night, when he couldn't sleep, he imagined a dialogue between his right and left hands. Right Hand said, "Left hand, you are not missed. Everybody's glad it was you that was broken, and not me. You're not very important."

Left Hand asked, "How are you so superior?"

Right Hand replied, "Well, my owner cannot write a letter without me."

Left Hand, "But who holds the paper on which he writes?"

Right Hand, "Who swings the hammer?"

Left Hand, "Who holds the nail?"

Right Hand, "Who guides the plane when the carpenter smooths the board?"

Left Hand, "Who steadies the board?"

Right Hand, "When our owner walks down the street and lifts his hat to greet someone, which of us does it?"

Left Hand, "Who holds the briefcase while he does it?" Then he continued.

"When our owner shaved yesterday, you held the razor but his face was cut because I wasn't there to help. Yesterday, our owner's watch stopped because though you may do the winding I wasn't there to hold it. You can't take money out of his wallet to pay for something because I'm not there to hold it."

Right Hand quietly replied. "Our master can do very few things without US."

You are God's gift, so

Third 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (p.959 ESV)
Expect the Spirit to REDISTRIBUTE as He desires

*⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given **the manifestation of the Spirit** for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are **empowered by one and the same Spirit**, who **apportions** to each one individually **as he wills**.*

Here's where we may get a bit entrenched in some of our thinking about the spiritual gifts that come from the Holy Spirit. We think of His gifting of us as "residential;" that is, we think, "OK, the

Holy Spirit has deposited a grace-gift in me. It's mine. It kinda sits here until I decide to use it. And, I suppose, it is the only gift I will ever get." And, there is one sense in which this is true. Every one here has (what we might call) a primary grace-gifting from the Holy Spirit. That seems clear from 1 Peter 4 and Romans 12.

But when I read this passage, there's something additional going on. When the Spirit of God is moving and active among the members of the body of Christ, He can sovereignly – whenever He wants – give any manifestation of His power, any gift to any one of us. In fact, in vs. 31 he urges the Corinthians to “earnestly desire the higher giftings.” If you and I are in the flow of the Spirit – eager to be more used by Him – He can give us any new gifting He desires. It's up to Him.

One more passage - You are God's gift, so

Fourthly - Ephesians 4:11-16 (p.977)
Do your PART to GROW/MATURE the Body

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds^[a] and teachers,^[b] 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,^[c] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 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 in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 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 why we urge you to become active members at Christ Community Church. A healthy church has a strong, engaged membership. This is why we ask you to GATHER (in regular corporate worship), to CONNECT (in Connect groups for spiritual accountability), and to SERVE (at home, at church, and in the world).

You see what the Spirit says in Ephesians 4. This body grows and matures in life-defining relationships in Christ WHEN (vs.16) “every supplying joint holds together” the body, and “each part is working properly.” That's the positive statement. But the reverse is also true. If I don't do what the Spirit has equipped me to do; if you don't provide what the Spirit has equipped you to supply...then this dynamic body of believers loses steam. We won't grow; worse, we won't be built up and love and we won't (vs. 16) grow up in every way into Him who is the head.”

I saw them tearing a building down,
A gang of men in a dusty town.
With a “yo heave ho” and a lusty yell,
They swung a beam and the side wall fell.

I asked the foreman if these men were as skilled
As the men he’d hire, if he were to build.
He laughed and said, “Oh, no indeed.
Common labor is all I need.”

Those men can wreck in a day or two,
What builders have taken years to do.
I asked myself as I went my way,
Which kind of role am I to play?

Am I the builder who builds with care,
Measuring life by the rule and square?
Or am I the wrecker who walks the town,
Content with the role of tearing down.ⁱⁱ

FINISHING UP

What will you take away, this morning, from these minutes in the Word of God. If nothing else, please carry this with you. You are, in Christ, God’s deeply loved child. You are His gift to everyone else in this room, His unique gift of grace to a world that often gangs up on people to destroy them. And when all of our gifts are in play, God has a special way of reminding us just how special and loved we are.

Bill White, Outreach and College Pastor at Emmanuel Church in Paramount, CA remembers a remarkable experience he had in his home.

Two days ago, he writes, I was kneeling in prayer in the front room of our house at 6:30 in the morning. I’d just confessed sins and was asking God for a blessing that day, needing to feel loved by Him.

Our little boy, just 22 months old, had just gotten up, and I noticed out of the corner of my eye that he had sneaked quietly into the front room. He’s always quiet in the morning when I’m praying because his mom tells him to be. But this time, he ambled straight over to me, put his small hand on my clasped hands, and said, “Hi, special one. Hi, special one. Hi, special one.”

Never once had he called me that before. Six times he called me ‘special one.’ He said it enough for me to actually get it—that God was speaking to me and giving me a blessing.ⁱⁱⁱ

Copyright 2018 © David A. Staff
All rights reserved

ⁱ John Trent, *Choosing to Live the Blessing* (WaterBrook, 1997), cited in *1001 Illustrations That Connect*, p.24.

ⁱⁱ Cited in Michael P. Green, ed., *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 117-118.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in PreachingToday.com *More Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion* (Wheaton: Tyndale House publishers, 2003), 91.