

LESSON 6

They Used Their Talents

What is your gift for?

Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

— 1 Peter 4:10-11

Introduction

Last week the door opened. Welcome was the first work of the hands, because no congregation can deploy what it has not first received. Romans 15:7 set the pattern. The church receives the brother Christ has already received, and the welcome itself is one of the gospel's most visible sermons. But welcome is not the end of the work. It is only the entrance to it.

Once a brother is inside, the body has another question to ask. What has this person been given, and how is it meant to serve everyone else? Welcome makes a place at the table. Stewardship asks what each person at the table is bringing, and how the body lives when each of them brings it.

Peter answers in two verses. The answer reaches every Christian by name, leaves no one outside the work, and ends where every use of a Christian gift ends: to the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

The Setting Behind Peter's Command

These verses do not arrive in a vacuum. Peter has already told his readers in 1 Peter 4:7 that "the end of all things is near." The Christians he writes to are scattered across the provinces of Asia Minor under steady social pressure, with the first hints of the persecution that would come more fully under Domitian. The temptation in such conditions is to draw inward. Hold what you have. Wait the season out. Hide the assets.

Peter takes the opposite approach. The end is near, so be alert and sober-minded for prayer (1 Peter 4:7). Maintain constant love (4:8). Be hospitable without complaining (4:9). And then, as one piece of the same urgency, use the gift you have received to serve one another (4:10).

Notice how Peter frames it. Stewardship is not what the church does in seasons of comfort and abundance. It is the response of a body that knows time is short and the King is on his way. The gift in your hand is not for ornamental display when conditions are ideal. It is for use now, for the people the Lord has placed around you now, while the day is still called today.

As Each One Has Received

THE NOUIN PETER CHOOSES

Grace in a Particular Shape

"Just as each one has received a gift..." (1 Peter 4:10)

χάρισμα
charisma — a gift of grace

- *charis* — "grace," the favor freely given
- *-ma* — the result of the giving

WHERE THE WORD SHOWS UP

Different gifts, by the grace given
Romans 12:6

Given to each, for the common good
1 Corinthians 12:7

Each one has received a gift
1 Peter 4:10

The grace that saves you is the grace that equips you.

CONNECTIONS
COURTESY OF PETER

1 Peter 4:10 opens with a verb that sets the whole frame: received. "Just as each one has received a gift." Before any Christian speaks of using anything, Peter establishes that every Christian has been handed something, by someone, that he could not have produced on his own.

The Greek word for gift here is *charisma*, and the family resemblance to *charis*, "grace," is

not accidental. A *charisma* is grace in particular. It is the same grace that saves, taking a specific shape in a specific person for the benefit of the body. Paul makes the connection plain in Romans 12:6: "According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts." Grace is not only what God forgives by. It is also how God equips. Every gift the body uses traces back to the same source, and the variety of gifts only multiplies the credit.

That answers a question many Christians carry. "I do not think I have anything to offer." Peter does not entertain the possibility. As each one has received. There are no exceptions in the verse. The Christian who feels he has nothing has not yet inventoried what grace has put in his hands. Paul tells the Corinthians the same thing from another angle. "A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). To each person, without exception.

Use It to Serve Others

The next phrase tells the recipient what the gift is for. "Use it to serve others." The Christian Standard Bible reads "others" where the ESV reads "one another," and Peter's "others" is no abstraction. He is writing to a network of believing households who are still struggling to look out for one another under pressure. The "others" are the body, near at hand, already at the table.

The gift moves outward. It presses away from the recipient and toward the body. It is not given for the recipient's pleasure or platform, nor so that the gifted Christian can feel useful in private. It is given so that another Christian, somewhere down the row, will be helped.

Paul makes the same point with the body image in 1 Corinthians 12. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Corinthians 12:21). The members exist for one another. A foot that walks only for its own sake is not functioning as a foot. A teacher who teaches only for his own enjoyment is not functioning as a teacher. The gift, by design, points away from the giver and toward the brother who needs what the giver has.

This rules out a common temptation. The gift withheld until the right audience arrives is not being stewarded but hoarded. The gift used to keep score with another gifted member is not being stewarded but weaponized. Peter's command leaves no margin for either move. Use it to serve others. The aim is the body, and the body is already in the room.

As Good Stewards

1 PETER 4:10

Steward, Not Owner

The household manager deploys what belongs to somebody else — and answers for it.

AN OWNER	A STEWARD
- Keeps what he holds, on his own terms - Answers to no one for what he buries - Counts it a success to have lost nothing	- Deploys what he has been handed - Answers to the master who gave it - Is measured by what he put to use

CONNECTIONS
COURTESY OF PETER

The next phrase puts the Christian in a specific role. "As good stewards of the varied grace of God." The Greek word is *oikonomos*, the household manager, the slave or freedman put in charge of another man's estate. The steward did not own what he managed; he answered for it. His job was to deploy the master's resources in a way the master would approve when the books were eventually opened.

That is the picture Peter sets over every Christian gift. The Christian is not the owner of what he carries. He is the manager. The gift came from somewhere else, and the gift will eventually be inspected. In between, the steward's only honorable course is to use the resource the way the master intends.

Jesus tells the parable of the talents on exactly this premise. A master gives his servants funds to manage in his absence (Matthew 25:14-30). Two servants put the funds to work. One buries his single talent, returns it intact, and tries to defend the choice as caution. The master is not impressed. The unused talent is taken from the cautious servant and given to the one who already has ten. The lesson is not gentle. Stewardship is not measured by what a servant did not lose. It is measured by what a servant used.

MATTHEW 25 · LUKE 19

The Gift He Refused to Spend

Neither servant lost a thing. Losing nothing was never the standard.

THE BURIED TALENT	THE FOLDED CLOTH	THE VERDICT
He dug a hole and hid it. Matthew 25:25	He kept it safe, untouched. Luke 19:20	"You evil servant!" Luke 19:22

Stewardship is measured by what you put to use, not by what you kept safe.

CONNECTIONS
COURTESY OF PETER

Luke tells the parable of the minas in similar terms (Luke 19:11-27). One servant pulls his master's mina out of a cloth, where he has been keeping it folded up. "Master, here is your mina; I have kept it safe in a cloth" (Luke 19:20). He has not lost it or damaged it. He has not even looked at it. The master calls him a wicked servant. The folded cloth is the picture every Christian who hides a gift should be willing to hold up against his own

life.

The Varied Grace of God

Peter qualifies the grace the steward manages with one telling word: varied. The Greek is *poikilēs*, the same word he uses a few chapters earlier for the "various trials" his readers were enduring (1 Peter 1:6). Outside the New Testament the word described a multicolored garment, a tapestry of mixed hues, a flower bed in full bloom. Variety is built into it.

That is how Peter pictures the grace at work in the church. Not a single shade, not a single shape. A thousand colors of the same grace, distributed through a thousand members, each carrying one piece of the larger pattern. Paul says it in his own words. "Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God produces each gift in each person" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

This protects the smaller and quieter gifts from being dismissed. The brother whose ministry is to sit beside the bereaved without speaking is one color of the varied grace of God. The sister whose ministry is hospitality across a hot stove is another. The teacher in front of a class, the elder studying late on a weeknight, the high school student making time for the widow at the end of her row, each carries one panel of the tapestry. Strip any one of them out, and the picture loses something the other panels cannot replace.

The Two Categories

Peter then divides the gifts into two large streams. "If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides." Almost every gift named in the New Testament fits one or the other.

The speaker handles a sacred trust. The Greek behind "God's words" is *logia*, the same word used in Romans 3:2 for "the very words of God" entrusted to Israel. Anyone who teaches, preaches, exhorts, prays publicly, leads a song, or counsels a brother is handling words that, if they are to mean anything, must be God's own. That raises the bar. It also lifts the burden. The speaker is not asked to invent material. He is asked to deliver what he has been given, with care.

The servant works in the strength God provides. The Christian who serves is never serving from a depleting personal account. The supply line runs from the same source that issued the calling. A meal taken to a home in trouble. A ride given to a brother who lost his car. A house cleaned for a widow before the family arrives. A nursery covered on a hard Sunday. None of those acts is performed in autonomous strength. They are extensions of grace through hands that have been given strength to lend.

Both categories end in the same place. God speaks; God supplies. The speaker is a mouthpiece, the servant a hand. The body needs both and fills with both.

So That God May Be Glorified

Peter closes with the same turn toward praise that has surfaced in every recent lesson. "So that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen." The use of every gift terminates in the praise of God, through Christ. Stewardship is not finally about productivity. It is about glory.

That changes the question every member asks. The question is not whether a gift produces visible results that match the resumes of the more public members. It is whether God is being glorified, through Christ, in the way the gift is being used. A teaching that points away from itself glorifies God. A meal taken to a

home in trouble glorifies God. A hand on the shoulder of a grieving brother, given without explanation, glorifies God. Every panel of the varied grace of God ends in the same praise.

Looking to Jesus

The pattern Peter calls every Christian to was first walked by the Lord himself.



Begin with how he received what the Father gave him. "The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works" (John 14:10). Jesus did not speak as one who originated the speech. He spoke as one who handled the Father's words. The model for every Christian who handles "God's words" is the Son of God himself, who spoke nothing but what the Father had given him to speak.

He served by the strength his Father supplied. "I can do nothing on my own. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30). Jesus did not draw from a private account. He worked, all the way through, in the strength the Father supplied. Every Christian who serves by that same supply is walking in the Master's footsteps.

Watch him in the smallest of moments. He stooped at a basin in the upper room. He took a towel. He washed feet (John 13:4-5). The hands that had calmed seas and broken bread for thousands now rinsed the dust off twelve sets of feet. The Lord put his gifts to use in service, all the way down to the floor. The Christian who is tempted to think his own gift is too small for use has not yet looked at where his Lord chose to spend his.

And he gave the gift his Father had placed in his hands. "I lay down my life for the sheep... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own" (John 10:15, 18). The Son did not bury what he had been given. He spent it, every drop, to the glory of the Father and for the salvation of the body. The cross is the supreme picture of a gift faithfully stewarded, and the empty grave is the proof it was received.

He is serving still. Hebrews tells us that Jesus "always lives to intercede" for those who draw near to God through him (Hebrews 7:25). The risen Christ has not stepped back from his ministry. He is still using what the Father has placed in his hands, still serving the body, still pleading the case of his people before the throne. The hands of the body that imitates him do not work alone. They work alongside the hands that bear the marks of the nails.

A Final Encouraging Word

Your congregation is full of stewards already at work. The members who teach and the members who serve, the brothers who pray over the bread on Sunday and those who clean up the building on Saturday, the saints who prepare lessons and the saints who prepare meals, the older Christians who counsel the

young and the younger Christians who lift a bag of groceries onto a back porch. Every one of those acts is a panel of the varied grace of God. None of them is small. All of them are of one piece with what every other faithful Christian has done since Peter wrote these verses to a scattered, pressured church.

The calling here is not to invent something new. It is to refuse the cloth. The wicked servant in Luke 19 did not steal his master's mina. He did not lose it. He folded it up and kept it safe. He had a hundred reasons that no doubt sounded prudent in the dark. The master named the hiding for what it was: a failure to use what had been given.

The gift in any Christian's hand right now is the gift the Lord intended for that Christian to put to work. Not the gift he wishes he had. Not the gift the more visible member next to him is using. The gift already received. Use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. The body is waiting on what only that member can bring, and the Lord who provides the strength is on the way.

To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

For Discussion

1. Peter places his command to use the gifts inside the urgency of "the end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7). What changes when stewardship is read inside an end-times frame rather than as a piece of routine church management? Where in your own life has that urgency dimmed?
2. The Greek word for gift is *charisma*, the noun cousin of *charis*, "grace." Why does it matter that every Christian gift is a particular shape of the same grace that saves? What does that frame protect against, in both directions, when Christians talk about their gifts?
3. Peter calls every Christian an *oikonomos*, a household manager who deploys what belongs to someone else. How does the steward image change the way a Christian thinks about the size, source, and final account of a gift?
4. The parable of the minas in Luke 19 names the wicked servant for what he did with his cloth, not for what he stole. Where in the church do good Christians most often fold up their gifts and keep them safe? What makes the temptation feel reasonable from the inside?

5. Peter divides every Christian gift into two large streams: speaking and serving (1 Peter 4:11). Which stream more naturally describes the gift God has placed in your hands? Which stream do you most need to grow in honoring in others?

6. Look honestly at the gift you have received. What is one specific way you could put it to use this week, for one specific person Christ has placed in your path? What is the first step that would move that use from intention to action?