

Have you ever done something that you were supremely suited to do? Athletics, music, business deal, building stuff, fishin'. Something that seemed like you were just born to do. How did you feel? What impact did you see? What about the opposite of that? Have you ever tried something you found out you had no business doing? That probably didn't feel, or look, as good.

If you've heard my story, you know I showed up at Fellowship in 1999 as a lukewarm Catholic accountant. And while the lukewarm descriptor is usually attached to my Catholic faith, I also showed up as a lukewarm accountant. I knew it, and I'll never forget the day others did as well. We had this organization-wide team build event where the company brought in this guy who was supposed to help us with personality or proclivity or something like that. He was going to separate us by colors and, for each color, he told us the characteristics and abilities that went with it. One color was all about numbers and facts and certainty. Another color thrived in variety and a fast-paced environment. And another color sought deep relationships and social opportunity. After explaining, he told us each to figure out what color we were and then sent us to different parts of the room. That's when everything became crystal clear.

As I went to my corner, I looked up and, much to my horror, the entire accounting department was on the other side of the room. And I looked around me and realized I was with marketing and sales and executive people. And when I looked back, my boss was just staring at me, incredulously. And I'll never forget what happened next. The expression on her face changed, and her head began to sort of nod in resigned acceptance. In that moment, she realized I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I had no business being with the accounting team. And she was right. Within six months, I left the profession of accounting forever.

When we are in our gifting, we thrive, life is fulfilling, and we make a difference. When we're not, whether that's because we're in the wrong spot, not doing anything to engage it, or think we have nothing to offer, life can very easily become dull at best and frustrating and depressing at worst. And that reality exists not only in our work, but as members of the body of Christ.

This morning we continue in our series called *Human Resources*, where we're looking at how to view and what to do with all the resources God has given to us, and this morning we are going to consider the resource of spiritual gifts. **Spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities given to make a supernatural impact.** But like all God-given resources, they must be properly stewarded. For far too many followers of Jesus, the entire resource of spiritual gifts is met with confusion, doubt, pride, or misplaced priority. Because of that, we fall far short of the impact God has designed them to make, and live a life lacking in the fulfillment God wants us to have. If that describes you, I pray you leave here with the confidence, clarity, and courage to engage your gifting so that you can begin to more fully live the impactful life God has for you.

[1 Peter 4:7-11] ⁷The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹whoever 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.

While there are several New Testament passages on spiritual gifts, there is, perhaps, none more straightforward than this one, especially as it relates to how we should view, and what we should do with the resource of our gifting. It can be summarized in a single sentence, and I want to give it to you in three parts.

You have been gifted by the grace of God.

As I said last week, everything we have is created, owned, and given by God. That includes our spiritual gifts. To fully grasp the magnitude of what we've been given, it's important for us to know the origin of a couple words. The Greek word *caris* means "grace", and the word for spiritual gifts is *carisma*, which means "a gift of grace, a free gift."

By the grace of God, each and every one of us who are followers of Jesus has been given a gift. You have not only been *saved by grace*, you've also been *enabled by grace*, in the form of a spiritual gift. That means we are stewarding more than just a talent. We are literally stewarding the grace of God. Let that sink in. Think about the most precious, expensive, or meaningful gift you have ever received. And now think about the gift of God's grace. You have been given a gift of eternal and immeasurable value. If you have taken your spiritual gifts lightly, I would challenge you to reconsider.

But for us to feel the responsibility of stewarding our gifts, we must first believe we've been given gifts to steward. I talk to far too many believers who think they have nothing to offer. This passage makes clear that, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have been given at least one gift. There is no probationary period. There are no minimum requirements. It's not work left up to just the professionals. Yes, gifts can be developed, and responsibilities can expand as we are faithful. But if you have trusted in Christ, you have been given his Spirit, and that Spirit gives you one or more gifts at the moment of your salvation. **And because you are gifted right now, you have something to offer right now.** So then what are we supposed to do with our gifts?

You have been gifted by the grace of God to serve the people of God.

Imagine Christmas morning and, after opening your gifts, mom and dad told you it was now time to give them all away. That's the way it is in the Kingdom of God. The spiritual gifts given to us by God are not intended to be kept or used for us. We are given those gifts to give away.

We are to use our gifts to serve one another, as good stewards of God's grace. **The key to proper stewardship is service.** God gives us these spiritual resources as the means by which we love our brothers and sisters in Christ. That means of equal importance to knowing what our gifts are is knowing who God intends us to impact with them. It is certainly the people of this church, but there are other people in your life God has gifted you to love; a single parent in your neighborhood, a co-worker, a seeker of truth, or even a connection on eHarmony or Match.

While there are a great variety of gifts, because of God's varied grace, Peter puts them all in two categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. **We can love one another either by what we say or by what we do.**

If you do not know your gifts, my guess is you just started thinking about which category yours fall into. We can have both, by the way. As I give you some examples, consider what stirs your heart. Our first inclination when we hear “speaking gifts” could be preaching and teaching. But speaking gifts go far beyond that. Those with speaking gifts can be encouragers. They are always asking how you are doing, eager to boost your spirits and inspire you to press on. They can be prayer warriors, someone to help you get clarity on a tough decision, singers, and the one who knows a perfect Bible verse for any situation. Many of these people have no interest in getting up in front of a group to speak, but their words can be life-changing for those who hear them.

Our speaking gifts are given to communicate the beautiful, encouraging, comforting, and life-giving truths found in Scripture. God does not give a speaking gift for someone to go off and make up their own stuff. Everything I say from this platform must agree with and proclaim what is found in God’s Word, or it is not the product of my gifting. God’s Word is the source material to steward all speaking gifts.

Those with serving gifts are often the people who say, “My door is always open”, “My schedule is wide open”, or “My wallet is always open.” They are eager to give of themselves, and their favorite answer to any question that starts with “Would you be able to...” is “Yes!” These people are propelled by the strength of God. Every declaration of gifting should be coupled with a confession of dependency. I don’t know what strikes you there. But what is clear is that our gifts are given to us so that we can turn around and give it to someone else. Service is stewardship.

You have been gifted by the grace of God to serve the people of God for the glory of God.

Stewardship is really a decision about using my resources for God’s purposes or my own. There is no shortage of people in the history of the church who used their gifting for their own glory and benefit. The cult of celebrity pastor is a challenge the Church must face because it reinforces the idea that there are a chosen few who have all the gifts and the rest of us should just sit back and watch.

Even if we are not interested in becoming a celebrity, we can still poorly steward our gifting for ourselves. I am sometimes tempted to find my identity in my gifting rather than in the one who gave me those gifts. A good sermon can sometimes go a long way in helping me feel good about myself. We can use our gifting for our own acclaim, for influence and power, and or just to make ourselves look and feel good. All of these motivations are improper and examples of poor stewardship.

But Jesus said the world would know we are his followers when we love one another. And the resource he has given **all of us** to express that love are our spiritual gifts. **When we use our gifts, we show off God.** When we speak, we declare the good news of the gospel, whether that’s to someone who’s down and needs a reminder, or to someone who’s never heard before and needs salvation. When we serve, we express the heart and character of the one who said, “I have not come to be served, but to serve, and give my life as a ransom for many.” The exercise of our gifts is to be a glorious proclamation of the gift giver.

So what do we do with this? There is a verse in Paul's second letter to Timothy, and it's a call to stewardship.

[2 Timothy 1:6a] ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.

There is a burning ember of God's grace in all of us who have trusted in Christ for salvation and it's our job to steward that into a flame that ignites our life for the Lord and engages our gifts so that we can make an impact in the world. I want to close with three ways to steward our gifts.

Get curious. God's gifts would be no good if we couldn't discover what they are. He makes it possible for us to know but, for some, it takes some work. It's like any gift you receive. For some of you, it will be as easy as getting a gift in a gift bag. You just pull out a couple pieces of tissue paper, lift that thing out, and you'll know exactly what it is. For others of you, though, it will take more work than that. My mother is notorious for over-taping presents. You need a good 15-20 minutes just to get that thing open. It takes some time and effort before the gift is revealed. Some of your spiritual gifts may be that way. But there is great insight that can be found in the experiences of your life and the people in your life.

For experiences, begin by thinking about the times and situations when you have positively impacted other people. Have people come to you for counsel? Prayer? Insight? Clarity on God's Word? Because something had to get done and they knew you were the person for the job? I got a text Friday night from an old college friend whom I haven't talked to in quite a while and he asked me for some of my time because he's wrestling with something and wants my input. If I didn't know my gifting, I could probably take that as an indication that I have had an impact on him through my words in the past. Additionally, where have you experienced fulfillment? It could be that you were doing the very thing God has put on your heart and gifted you to live out.

God has also given you people to speak into your life. You see that throughout the New Testament church. Who knows you well and could tell you what they see in you? Friends? Family? Our Life Groups will be doing this very thing this week as a way to encourage and enlighten one another. Sometimes people see things in us we haven't seen ourselves. Begin a journey of discovery and ask God to show you how he's gifted you. He doesn't want to keep it a secret. And, if you have discovered your gifts, be an encourager and guide for those who are searching.

Give it a shot. Here's the deal. You'll never really know unless you try. That may seem like a scary thing. It is. I remember walking into the restroom at Dallas Seminary and there, in front of a mirror, was a very nervous student practicing a sermon in the mirror for his preaching class. Whatever gift you may be testing out, let me give you this encouragement. **By God's grace, we can fail forward.** There is great benefit in knowing how you are gifted, but there's also great benefit in knowing how you are not gifted. You know how I knew I wasn't a very good accountant? By trying to be an accountant. And when I realized I was not gifted for it, I spent as little time of the rest of my life doing it and quickly made a change. That's progress. That's failing forward. **God's got you!** If you think you may be gifted in some way and, upon attempting it, realize you are not, progress has been made, and you are ever closer to knowing. And if it turns out you are gifted that way, I'm confident you'll see the difference you're making,

and you'll feel the deep satisfaction of living in your gifting. There is a Service Teams interest meeting today at 9:30 and 11:00. That could be a great place to start your journey.

Go be who God made you to be. You know, the gifts God gives do not come with a gift receipt. There are no returns or exchanges. Do not covet other's gifting. It will only cause you frustration and is an affront to God. "Your gift isn't good enough." **We must believe that what God has called you to do he has gifted you to do.** And the gifts he gives you are one of the primary resources we have to steward that calling. We must also believe that, when we live that out, he will be most glorified, and we will be supremely satisfied. Maybe now is the time for you to participate in Repurposed. We have our weekend intensive on May 31/June 1 where you can begin to discover and live out that calling.

I was back in Florida this past week working on some of my dad's estate stuff, and I was reminded of something he always used to say to my brothers and me. "Put forth the effort." It was a sentiment that went beyond just exertion. My dad was adamant that we didn't waste the talents and gifts we were given. He used to tell me often he could see me running a company one day. He was disappointed when I got out of accounting, and you can imagine my angst when I dialed him up 5.5 years ago to say I was leaving the business world all together to go into vocational ministry. I told him what I was doing and said, "So dad, I guess you'll have to be ok with me leading a church instead of leading a company." And over the next few minutes we talked about how this was what I was made to do and this is what I was gifted to do. And, at the end, my dad said, "I can buy that." That was strong affirmation from the stoic German.

You and I have a Heavenly Father who wants us to put forth the effort. He doesn't want us to waste what we've been given. He wants us to flourish as we make use of every gift he has given us through his Spirit, for his glory, for the blessing of others, and for our satisfaction. That is the outcome of good stewardship.