

Sermon – Spiritual Gifts Part 2 – 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; 1 Peter 4:7-12. Rev. Bruce Stanley

*** Intro** – NRMA dog video – “unworry”. Wouldn’t it be good to “get on with the good things in life.”

NRMA started this ad campaign because they thought people had a negative view of insurance. So they decided that instead of talking about how much insurance cost, they would tell people how much they were **getting**. And what were they getting? “No worries”. An uncomplicated life. Never having to worry when things go wrong. Just get on with your life. Car crash? House robbed? Don’t worry – you’re insured!

And what a great thought! Unworry. Get on with the **good** things in life.

Well, I have insurance. I have life insurance, car insurance, house insurance. WHY is my life still COMPLICATED!?! WHY do I still WORRY?

* Today we’re talking about spiritual gifts. But here’s what I want us to take away today. If you want to not worry, if you want an uncomplicated life, the answer is **“Don’t be self centred”**. Didn’t expect that, did you?!

Self centred-ness is what makes our life stressful and complicated. And I want to suggest from these passages today that there is another way to live. As Christians, I think we need to be challenged in this area of our life, and I think if we respond, we will be a lot better off for it.

Let me start where I did last week:

There is one Spirit. One body of Christ. One gift that matters above all else. And that is the gift of the Holy Spirit himself. The one gift we NEED is the gift of new life by the Holy Spirit. Being a Christian is about being people who are not centred on ourselves, but are, BY the Spirit, centred on God and other people.

So, first of all, let’s address self centredness. Let’s look at it, and see how we can move AWAY from living a self centred life.

The most common question people ask me about the topic of Spiritual gifts is this: “What is MY spiritual gift?” What gifts do I have? Should I have the gift of tongues? Do I have the gift of administration? Am I a gifted speaker? Is compassion a gift? Maybe I have the gift of hospitality.” And I would often meet with people to talk about their gifts in ministry. And we had fruitful discussions. But as I have read the Scriptures over and over again, I want to go against convention and say: these are not the questions to ask. It is in fact a question God never calls on us to ask. We’re not encouraged to ask that question: “What are my gifts?”

Another common concern: “I know God has gifted me in some way. But I don’t know what it is. Will you help me find my spiritual gift.” I cannot help wondering about this approach. Do you think God would give us something good, like a Spiritual gift, and then not tell us what it is? 10 years later we start doing some administration and suddenly realise “Wow! God gave me the gift of administration and I never knew!” Can you imagine this: “God has given us all gifts. But it’s a secret that you’ll have to work out.”

I think all of this stems back to one thing. And you may think it’s harsh of me to say it, but I will: “Self centredness.” It’s all about ME. What gifts do **I** have. What am **I** good at. What has God given **ME**.

I’ve asked these questions. But what do they really achieve? Uncertainty. Worry. It leaves us asking “What is my place in the church? Why hasn’t God shown me my gifts? How can I be part of the church body?

I want to suggest there is another way. A way that will help us to truly “unworry”. And the way is to not think of ourselves. The way the Bible teaches us to focus our lives is perhaps best thought of as asking two questions. And the first question is this:

1. ***“What will bring praise to God?”***

1 Peter 4:11 – *“If anyone serves he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”*

That’s what Jesus did. He served so God would be praised – even to the point of death on a cross. Jesus’ life was about serving. And he did it because **we needed him to**. We need to think about the ministry that **needs** to be done in this world. To ask ourselves how we can serve. To ask that question: *“What will bring glory to God?”*

When we decide how to choose a career, when we decide how to serve on Sundays, when we think about our spending day to day or our giving week to week, when we talk to our neighbour. Do we ask: *“What will bring glory to God?”* and then do what’s needed? Or do we ask “What am *I* good at?”

When God’s Holy Spirit is living in you, he will give you the answer to this question. If we are first of all God focussed, we actually **protect** our decision making from being self-focused.

So the first question is *“What will bring praise to God?”*

The second question is:

2. ***“How can I serve others?”***

1 Corinthians 12:7: *“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit has been given for the common good.”*

Notice Paul doesn’t even use the word “gift” in this particular verse. This verse is telling us that **the way the Spirit works in each one of us** is for the common good. Whatever the Spirit does through us, it’s for the good of others.

He doesn’t say “everyone’s got a gift.” Although we’ve already established that every Christian has the most important gift – the gift of the Spirit himself. And that’s the **only essential gift!**

But what he’s saying is important – he’s saying that the way the Spirit works, or manifests, in each person is for the good of others. To one the message of wisdom, to another miraculous powers, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues. Paul’s not giving us a complete list of gifts here. He’s saying that **whatever way** God’s spirit works out of you, it is for the good of others.

1 Peter 4:10, says: *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...”*

Gifts are about serving. It’s never about “me”. It’s always about serving. And as we move to the rest of 1 Corinthians 12, we see how that “looks” for us as a church. 1 Corinthians 12:12 says: *“The body is a unit.”*

We are dependent on God, but we’re also **inter-dependent** on one another. As a body, we are completely dependent upon God for all things, but God has also “given us” each other to depend upon. Every person is a **part** of the body. Every person **belongs** to the body. Every part is **necessary**. Every part is **important**. Every part is **equal**. Every part **suffers** together. Every part **rejoices** together.

When I stub my toe, I grab it with my hand. When I run with my feet, my heart pumps harder. My body responds to each part’s needs. And as a church, we are inter-dependent. We need to respond to each other.

And so I want to offer what I believe is a radical change in the way many of us may think about spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts have always caused confusion, so I’ve really worked hard today to express an understanding of them that makes sense of everything the Bible says about them. To answer those questions: Does everyone have a gift? Can you ask for gifts? Why do some people have more gifts? Why do some people not KNOW their gifts? What gifts should we want to have most? So here it is:

“We are not gifted to serve. We are gifted as we serve.”

In other words, God doesn't say: “OK here's a gift for you, and one for you, and one for you and two for you. Now go and do something with them.” Instead, God gives us gifts AS we step up to serve.

The primary gift, you remember, is the Holy Spirit himself. And when the Spirit of God lives inside us, he gives us that desire to serve God and to serve others. And as we respond to Him in our life, as we listen to the Holy Spirit calling us to serve, then we act. We move. We start to actually serve. And God is *then* able to gift us with what we need to serve.

Through the gift of the Spirit himself, we need to **act** on that desire to serve. To look around and see where there is a need, then stand up and serve. In our church, in our community. Wherever you see a need. We need youth group leaders, we need home group leaders, we need an administrator, we need people to care for the poor and homeless in our community, we need people to visit the sick, we need Christian people in politics – wherever you see the need in our world, serve. And when you do, God will gift you as he sees necessary.

Now that doesn't mean you just walk into it. We need a Kid's Club leader. You don't necessarily just turn up and do it. You stand up and say: “I'll serve there.” And then you train.

In the church I grew up in, we started a new evening service. They needed drummer. One guy, not me, said he would do it. He couldn't play at all. No music background. We bought a drum kit. He learned. Practiced hard. And God gifted him with patience, skill, and devotion. Not only did God gift HIM through that experience, more importantly God gifted the church with that person. HE was the gift.

Sometimes, of course, these gifts are not things we can work on and train in. The gift of healing. The gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy. Even often the gift of preaching. Sometimes gifts are supernaturally given. Some people have even claimed to be able to speak another language overnight thanks to the gift of the Spirit. Naturally or supernaturally, God will equip us with the gifts we need to serve him. But that's what happens when we step up to serve. Naturally or supernaturally, God gives us what he knows we need. **And through those gifts, God makes us a gift to others.**

And that's why Paul talks in 1 Corinthians 13 about the “most excellent way” – the way of love. Love is what motivates us to serve. In fact, without love, no gift means anything. Love is what pours out of our hearts when we respond to the Spirit in our lives. Love never fails.

And the more we seek to love, the more we're prepared to serve, and the more God will continue to give us gifts to serve. Remember Luke 19:26 and the parable of the ten talents. Jesus said: *“To everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.”* Jesus is saying that while you are serving he will continue to gift you more and more to continue your work.

When I think of the most “gifted” people in churches, they are always the servants. Don't you think? They are the people always willing to serve any way they can. To him who has, more will be given. God doesn't give us gifts to serve. He calls us to serve and then gifts us as we need.

Here's what God's calling on you for: Serve. Look for the needs, and serve out of love. If you already have skills in that area, great. If you don't, be prepared to learn them. Let God worry about those things. But the Spirit you received when you came to Jesus, is the Spirit who calls us to serve out of love. So we can be gifts to others.

Unworry. Don't worry about what gifts you do or don't have. Just serve out of love and be amazed at what God does through you. Let's pray.