

INTRODUCTION

- “Organic Church”; the church is a living thing: ***Living God, living people (spiritually), and living connection.***
- The church is ***the body of Christ.*** Its life revolves around spiritual gifts.
- You ***discover your gifts by “presenting your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”*** As Romans 12 tells us. Which simply means; you put your faith in gear and start moving.

That’s where we are so far. But does ***Scripture show us what that looks like?***

We only need to go as far as the ***first church of Jerusalem.*** The church is brand new. In fact much of the New Testament hasn’t even been written yet. We are in the days of Acts 6.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE “SPIRITUAL GIFTS”?

1. HOW GIFTS LOOKED IN THE FIRST CHURCH

Acts 6

1. Now in those days, when ***the number of the disciples was multiplying,*** there ***arose a murmuring*** against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.
2. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ***“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”***
3. “Therefore, brethren, ***seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,*** whom we may ***appoint over this business;***
4. “but ***we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”***

There are the disciples multiplying and yet, murmurs are rising-

Isn’t it interesting! Right from the beginning; when churches grow, so do the complaints. Churches are always in danger of being torn apart. And in some cases like the first one; those complaints are legitimate. There was preferential treatment going on. And it was happening right under the noses of the greatest leaders the church has ever had!

The solution-

The church was never designed to have a “pastoral staff” do it all; visit every person; hold every hand; oversee every task like caretakers in a kindergarten. Not even when the staff was the apostles themselves.

The church works when the members grow up into the proper division of gifts. And that’s exactly what the apostles put into action. This is how they did it:

- ***They first acknowledged their own gift area and calling~***

As apostles, they were called to coordinate the ***big picture.*** The church was then around 5000 in the Jerusalem area. The apostles’ calling was first, to stay connected with God and then lead the entire group.

They could not take care of all the personal needs, focus on God's leading for the entire church at the same time. Something would get done poorly.

So, they did something we all have to do. They took a hard look at how God gifted them, and they stuck to that calling. Then they released others to take care of other important ministries.

- ***They searched for the right people with other needed gifts~***

So, what qualifications did they look for?

Full of faith, and the Holy Spirit. Let's break that down:

Faith (pistis) *Credence, moral conviction, constancy in such profession*

Spirit (pneuma) *breath, [life] rational soul, vital principle, in divine sense: spirit of God*

Full (pleres) *To be covered over or complete*

Put it together and we get this: They were looking for people who had the breath of God in them, they lived by His vital principles and they did it constantly. They were covered over with the influence of God; they were marinated in His ways. The result of that is wisdom, and the result of wisdom is earned credibility.

- ***Those spiritual gifts were recognized by all the body~***

Spiritual gifts aren't a secret thing; they are not just something you sense privately. The gift is for all, so it is not surprising that it is recognized by others as well.

Here is yet another reason we need each other. We need each other; *even to help identify who we are in Christ.*

So here's the flip side of the coin: *If a person is inactive, how can anyone identify what is in you?*

So the Apostles whose main gift and calling was apostleship; put all their time, energy, and focus, into taking care of the big picture.

But the big picture isn't the only picture. God is unfolding a grand eternal plan; but He is also the ***God who knows the smallest details***. He even knows the number of hairs on your head. So is it surprising that God calls people to the personal ministries as well?

He equips people with gifts such as mercy and kindness as well. Here's a perfect example of how those gifts work.

In the time of the first church; there were the "true blue" Jews; the ones who remained in Jerusalem. Then there were those who wandered off into the Greek culture, they were called Hellenists. They were considered second rate Jews; not quite as important. And since they were seen as less important, they didn't receive quite as much attention. (*Does that kind of thing go on in churches today?*)

The gift of mercy has a Godly element to it. It cares so much for people as people that it ***rises above the cultural biases***. It has sympathy for human suffering because it is humans

suffering. That is what it means to be a **deacon**; it is to be a **minister of mercy**. And that's how it looked in the first church.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT SPIRITUAL GIFTS EXIST IN THIS CHURCH?

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

2. HOW GIFTS LOOKED IN THE INDIVIDUAL

5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude. **And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit**, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

6. whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

The gifts were evident to the whole church body. And then these men were officially recognized into their ministry.

Question: What made spiritual gifts that obvious?

- **Gifts show because they are a passionate conviction.**

A person has a growing conviction that there's a need that must be met. Perhaps your gift is extraordinary kindness. God brings a need to your mind that only kindness will meet. *If you don't put your kindness into gear, who will?*

Perhaps your gift is evangelism; you can open up to people one on one. *If you don't open your mouth; if you don't approach that person, who will?*

- **Gifts show through personal credibility.**

One component of credibility that can never be replaced is **time**. If someone comes to me with a passion to do something, I like to see if they come back again. If a week or a month later they are still moved with the same conviction, it is most likely from God. And once they start doing that act of ministry, it isn't on and off. It is constant.

And please understand, when I say "passionate" I don't mean your necessarily moved with emotion all the time. Sometimes you may not feel like it at all; but the conviction is always there. **Constant, passionate conviction, that's what a gift looks like.**

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT PERSONAL TRAITS OR OTHER EVIDENCE CONVINCES YOU SOMEONE HAS A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

3. HOW WE PREPARE FOR OUR GIFTS

4. A spiritual gift has an element of passion to it. Where does that passion come from? ***It all starts with a passion for Christ.*** Not belief; not a sense of duty; and definitely not "fire insurance." (You know what I mean; get saved, just in case.)

5.

6. If a person sees their relationship with Christ in terms of a onetime decision; (*I was "saved" ten years ago and haven't thought much about it since, and don't need to.*); I think that person is in serious trouble. Jesus never talked in those terms. Here is Jesus' view, directly from His own mouth:

7. John 15

8. **5.** "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

How long does a healthy branch stay in solid contact with the vine? -For the entire life of the plant; 24/7. There is life flowing from the vine into the branch on a constant basis. And because of that, the branch bears fruit.

A branch blossoms because it is continually connected and sustained by the vine. ***If your only concern is that you are "saved"*** you will never know the triumph of spiritual gifts. You will never know real Christian experience.

4. THE RESULTS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN ACTION

7. And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Spiritual gifts show themselves inside the body of Christ, that is, His church; then the body starts showing to the rest of the world. And then a very logical thing happens: ***Those who have a thirst for Christ will respond positively, and those who reject Christ, will respond negatively.*** And that is the story of this gifted young man by the name of Stephen.

If we launched through Acts 7, we'd see Stephen, with the spiritual gift of preaching, launching into a message that pulled no punches. He did it to a crowd who was quickly becoming deadly.

That tells us something else about gifts. Reaching out with kindness; approaching with evangelism; or telling the truth to a crowd who doesn't want to hear it- ***there is always a risk.*** There is a risk of looking silly, of rejection, or even something worse. -So along with passion, there is also an element of ***courage.***

Let me read you a prayer concern from last week's prayer pages:

Eritrean Christian woman dies in prison -- Senait Oqbazgi Habta (28) died on April 23 in the Sawa Military Training Centre in Eritrea after suffering severe abuse and being denied medical treatment for malaria and severe anemia. Senait was arrested in 2008, along with 15 other university students, for attending a Bible study group. She and the other students were imprisoned in large metal shipping containers where they suffered suffocating heat during the day and freezing temperatures at night. They were also deprived of fresh air, sanitation and medical attention. Sawa officials reportedly offered Senait her freedom and medical attention if she would recant her Christian beliefs, but she refused. Camp officials eventually relented and allowed her to be moved to the prison's medical centre. She died shortly after her transfer, however, due to her prolonged illnesses.

How does a person move with this level of conviction and resolve? What makes a young woman like Senait, or a young man like Stephen, not just hold on, but ***press forward in that kind of adversity?***

I tell you this with all certainty, it is not a mere belief in Christ. It is when the branch realizes it is truly a part of the vine; a 24/7 connection. Nothing happens without the vine.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HOW DOES A PERSON OPEN THEMSELVES UP TO DISCOVERING THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

WHAT RESULTS SHOULD WE SEE FROM GENUINE GIFTS BEING ENGAGED?

CONCLUSION

I don't ask if you believe in Christ, I ask, do you have a passionate connection. Nothing really happens until then. If you don't there is only one way to get it. Connect with Him and ask. Ask Him to fan the smallest spark in you.