

Fulfilling Your Ministries

Paul prayed for the Ephesian church that God would give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of (their) understanding being enlightened; that (they) may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:17, 18). God had a hope for the Ephesians. God has a hope for you. He has a calling for you. It is your inheritance. It is something "in" you, because you too are a "saint".

Discovering your personal calling and God's "hope", his purpose in creating you, is one of the great privileges of serving Christ. We are going to focus this month (dedicating this entire newsletter) on helping you understand just one aspect of that hope and calling – you're personal ministry. Yes, you have a ministry! Let's explore that truth together.

"I can't play an instrument or sing" you say?

No problem! The church still needs your "ministry".

"But, I can't teach or preach!"

You aren't supposed to! Nevertheless, there is still a very important work God has for you to do. Do you know what it is? Romans chapter 12 is written to help you discover it. Rom. 12:3 is probably one of the most misunderstood and wrongly applied scriptures in the Bible. "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Virtually every time I have heard this scripture quoted, it was used as "proof text" to say that everyone has faith if they will only use it, and can thus believe God for healing, or prosperity, etc. But if you study it in context (My daughter Carissa learned in Bible college this year that the first three rules of scriptural interpretation are "context, context, context"), you will see verse 3 isn't speaking primarily about believing God for things, but rather is establishing the fact everyone has been given a gift from God, with the necessary "faith" to operate it. "All members . . . have . . . gifts differing according to the grace that is given us" (vv. 4-6). Gifts are given by "grace".

They are not earned. Faith, in this context, is the grace (the heavenly confidence and enablement) for us to do what God has called us individually to do! Romans 12:6-8 lists seven of these "callings" or "gifts". Some have referred to them as "motivational gifts" because these are seen as inherent specific motivations to serve in certain ways. Some of you reading this list will immediately recognize your "gift". Others must learn to discover their gift. Let's first lay a foundation for understanding the proper arrangement and application of these gifts.

Though God intended to give every one in the body a "gift" ("unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" Eph. 4:7), He knew that, being as human as we are, to turn loose everybody on their own to "manifest" their gifts would bring confusion, competitiveness and divisions. To help reduce the "out of control" application of these gifts, he established five special gifts to facilitate them.

FIVE-FOLD OFFICE GIFTS

"He gave some, apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting (some translations say "equipping") of the saints, for the work of the ministry." (Eph. 4:11, 12).

The clear, primary purpose of these five office gifts is to train, perfect (mature), equip, and release other people with "gifts" to do their individual "work of the ministry". One of the greatest Satanic misappropriation of Biblical truth was to convince the church that these 5 gifts were the ones who were to officially "do the work of the ministry", and thus they came to be called "ministers". All the others in the body became "laymen" who support and maintain the "ministers". How Satan must laugh when Christians "humbly" let the "Reverends" marry, bury and carry the rest of the people in the church, full-well knowing that that they are really supposed to be training and assisting every one else in the church to "minister" in their own callings. Be convinced of this once and for all time: You are a minister (servant) and you have a ministry (service to perform). We'll try to help you discover that ministry in this newsletter.

I find it interesting, but tragic, that many pastors who clearly see their responsibility in the above scripture to help train their people, will nevertheless rarely allow evangelists or prophets in their pulpits to do the same, though it is so evident that they too play just as important a part as pastors in fully equipping God's people. Obviously, it would be a lesser part, time-wise, than the pastor. To never, or rarely allow their people to receive the input of itinerant leadership gifts is a blatant rejection of the clearly revealed intent of the Holy Spirit in giving the church these gifts. Pray with me that more pastors would open their pulpits to all five office gifts. The church can't be "perfected" without such input!

Heb. 13:17 makes it clear that every Christian should be "submitted" to a 5-fold office gift leader on the local church level: "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves". This "ruler ship" obviously is not referring to the trinity! It is referring to people. We are all sheep, and need a pastor (shepherd) to lead us and feed us and to keep us from being "tossed to and fro" or being led astray through false "doctrine" (Eph. 4:13-16).

Pastors also help prod us forward towards the "effectual (effective) working in the measure of every part", that is, helping us do our part in ministry! Here is where we must hasten to add: the pastor is also human, and limited by his own shortcomings, leadership weaknesses, lack of wisdom, or even sins. Some self-righteously leave the church because they become so aware of their pastor's foibles.

If you are one of those who is no longer "obeying" a pastor and giving him the "rule" over you, ostensibly because you have seen so many weaknesses in his life, may I ask you something? Are you wiser than God? Don't you think God was aware of that person's shortcomings when he called him to become a pastor? Didn't the Lord know David would commit adultery with Bathsheba, yet he still anointed him to be king? Didn't God know Moses would never overcome his temper, nevertheless He still called him to lead Israel?

Five- fold gifts are just as human as you are and (surprise!) God can still use them in spite of their shortcomings, even as he intends to use you, in spite of your shortcomings. This is why Paul wrote in Rom. 12:16, "Be of the same mind one toward another (don't allow differences to make for arguments and division). Mind not high things (Don't see yourself as the wisest or most spiritual, worthy of the "highest" position), but condescend to men of low estate (learn to live and walk among men and women who are "low" on the human scale of success). "Be not wise in your own conceits" (Don't make the Satanic mistake of seeing yourself as "holier" or better than others!).

I am a five-fold office-gift evangelist but I have a pastor! Bill Burnett is my pastor. I meet with him for lunch from time to time and we correspond some on the internet. I counsel with him when I need pastoral insight. We don't agree on everything, but "iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17). The more you may disagree with your pastor and the way things are done in your church, the more it

makes you grow up and not be such a selfish, spoiled brat! Anyone who is critical and judgmental of the 5-fold gifts is critical of God's idea (Eph. 4:8).

Remember, David wouldn't touch Saul, God's "anointed", though Saul was backslidden in heart (1 Sam. 24:6). Do you really want to stand before God at the final judgment and tell him what a "terrible" job he did with his church, and what poor leaders he chose, and why you felt so holy not being a submitted part of it? I don't think so. Go back to church and stop trying to find one where you feel comfortable and well-entertained and find a church that will help you become disciplined for effective service. Take your pastor to lunch and submit yourself to his authority. Tell him you want to serve where needed and seek his help in understanding your gift to the body of Christ. It's a great starting place for self-discovery.

How does one know he has been chosen by the Lord to be one of these five-fold office gifts? It is simple: He is "called" to that office. "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him." (Gal. 1:15, 16). It is difficult for one who has been called to explain that call.

God called me to preach the gospel when I was 17. I can't explain how I knew. I just woke up one morning at summer camp, about 4 a.m., and "felt" the call. Previously I had hoped to be an astronomer, or a doctor, or Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. God had another plan for my life, and clearly communicated that plan to my heart. He simply "called" me. It's how pastors, missionaries, evangelists and other "preachers of the gospel" have known down through the ages. If you are called, you will know, one way or another, sooner or later. You can disobey the call, of course, but it is nevertheless irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).

Because all gifts work through human limitations, God has given us supernatural gifts to transcend these limits:

THE NINE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

This is another class of "gifts" offered to God's people in Cor. 12:7-11. We have discussed these gifts in past newsletters. I mention them now because one of the motivational gifts, "prophecy", is a gift of the Spirit, according to 12:10. Every Christian can manifest a gift of the Holy Spirit and all are encouraged to seek to do so (1 Cor. 12:7, 31, 14:1, 31, 39). But there are some who will feel a unique and strong calling to pursue the operation of the gifts of the Spirit regularly and fluently in their personal life. I believe such a person fits under the first of the motivational gifts (prophecy), which we discuss shortly.

THE SEVEN MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us" (Rom. 12:6) prefaces the listing of the motivational gifts by making them clear that they are gifts of "grace". We don't earn these gifts. It's what we become; it's the way the Lord made us; it's in our genetic code. That's why they are referred to as "motivational" gifts. These gifts emanate from the very soul of the Christian and are manifested in certain actions.

Which of the following gifts do you feel really describe the way you feel about others, about yourself, about how you want to serve God? Bill Hammond says, "Your ministry is probably what you do best and enjoy most". So what do *you* do best and enjoy most? Which of the following fits *you* most?

Prophecy

The nine gifts of the Spirit are very, very important, for we see them manifest often in Jesus' life, in Paul's life, and in the prophet's ministry throughout both the Old and New Testament.

Of all the gifts, prophecy stands to the forefront: "Desire spiritual gifts, but rather (not "instead of". Most translations say "especially") that ye may prophesy." (1 Cor. 14:1). Prophecy is the basic instrument through which every gift of the Spirit manifests itself. Whether faith, discerning of Spirits, healing, miracles, etc., the mouth will always be the instrument of release and operation. This is a form of "prophecy": Speaking the mind and purpose of God into a situation. Thus, when Rom. 12:6 mentions the motivational gift of "prophecy", I believe the Holy Spirit is here including truth that relates to the operation of all the other gifts of the Spirit. If one is given a "grace" gift of prophecy, inherent within them is the desire to "speak for God", to know his voice and his will and purpose for others.

My sister, Elaine, has this gift of prophecy. She has coveted "prophecy" as much as anyone I know. She has fasted and prayed and desperately sought to understand God's will, plan, and purpose for her life and the life of others. Her pursuit has paid off. I know no one personally who has the ability to discover God's will in a situation as well as my sister. Sometimes I will call her and ask her to seek the Lord and see if he gives her a "word" concerning a decision I need to make.

I wish I had time to relate the amazing confirmations she had received for me, my wife, and her family through the years. I am urging her to write a book on her experiences. She has great faith in God's ability to speak. This is fulfillment of the rest of verse 6, "let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith".

Elaine sought God for decades to discern His voice. Her faith to hear has grown. Your faith can grow too (11 Thess. 1:3, "your faith growth exceedingly"). You don't start out prophesying who is the next president, or who so-and-so should marry.

If you have a burning desire to "prophecy", you will seek God to understand how this gift operates. You will spend much time in his presence, and you will grow in this gift until you become the person in the church whom the pastor will refer others to for interpretation of dreams, for counsel for spiritual warfare, or one who is known as a "Mother in Zion" to help God's people discern the will and mind of God. Consider, for example Phillip's four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8,9) or Deborah who led Israel into Battle through her prophetic insight (Judges 4:4).

Those who are by nature intuitive are usually those whom God uses in prophecy. My wife picks up on things in the Spirit realm probably 100 times more readily than I do, therefore I believe "prophecy" is also her motivational gift.

Some teachers (especially those outside of Charismatic/Pentecostal circles) try to make the motivational prophecy gift more or less the tendency to tell people what they ought to do. In a sense, this is true. But, on the other hand, wherever in scripture "prophet" or "prophecy" is mentioned, a supernatural gift of revelation is virtually always shown or implied. Doubtless, there are many with the motivational gift of prophecy who are living below their level of gifting.

Just as there are evangelists who are leading souls to Christ, but not casting out devils and healing the sick like the prototype evangelist, Phillip exemplified (Acts 8:4-8), so also there are many in the body of Christ who are living below their potential to fully exploit all the anointing and capability the Lord intended. Admittedly, one can only prophecy "according to the proportion of

faith" and one of the reasons why people with this gift are not encouraged to exercise it more is because of past abuses that is people prophesying beyond their faith level (proven level of prophetic capability, which operates by their faith).

I fear that many pastors have over-reacted by throwing out the baby with the bath water! But person reading this article who feels you are called to prophesy, if you will humbly submit your gift to your pastor and to those also to whom you are giving prophetic insight, there will be a lessened possibility of abuse and error. We all grow in our faith level together and achieve a higher level of prophetic accuracy because we are "submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21).

Also, if you have a strong desire to be used in healing gifts, or any of the other nine gifts of the Spirit, you need to be assured this desire is evidence of heaven's purpose for you (Phi. 2:13). If you are indeed "zealous of spiritual gifts," you must be diligent to "seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church" (1 Cor. 14:12). No "inner gifts" operate automatically or with instant full maturity. We must "seek" help in order to gain "excel(lence)" in their operation.

Every gift requires the assistance and empowerment of the God who created them, the leadership of teachers in the body to help us most effectively use these gifts, and our faith, obedience, and unselfishness in spending time in preparation ("study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed" II Tim. 2:15). We must be unselfish in leaving our personal interests and comfort in order to "minister" to others. Perhaps prophecy is mentioned first in the list because it is the most important. Perhaps it is mentioned first, along with faith, because it is the hardest to operate effectively and requires great nurturing and spiritual maturity. May God raise up sons and daughters who "prophecy" (Acts 2:17)!

Pastors, train and encourage your people in manifesting this gift and watch for those with the motivational gift of prophecy who could become a great ongoing blessing to your local body by regularly and accurately manifesting that gift. Reader, if you suspect this is your gift, read books on it, fast, pray, and seek to understand the mind of Christ. Earn the trust of your pastor and church by showing the fruit of the Spirit by your "love ... peace ... patience . . . gentleness . . . meekness . . . faithfulness" (Gal. 5:22), which is the only instrumentation through which the Holy Spirit ever intended the gifts of the Spirit to operate!

Ministry

In 12:7, The Greek word translated "ministry" is "diakonia". It can also be translated "service". We must resist using a common terminology which hints at error. Let's stop going to a "church service" and instead be the church "in service." Service could be a janitor vacuuming the carpet, a musician playing an instrument, a deacon serving communion, or any needed action to help the church better fulfill its mission. Whatever you can do, you should be willing to do. Verse 7 adds, "let us wait on our ministering". In other words, "expend your energies toward doing what you can do". V. 11 puts it another way, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord".

I meet many Christians who have given up ministry opportunities because they didn't feel they were shown enough appreciation for their sacrifices, or given enough credit. The word calls this "eye service" and "man pleasing" (Eph. 6:6-8) . Instead, we are told, "whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23, 24).

Serving people, whether they appreciate it or not, is how we serve God! "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). If you're

not serving people, you are not serving God. (And serving your family members doesn't count! Even the unsaved do that! Luke 6:32, 33).

This is why true Christians attend church. We attend church to serve God, our brethren in Christ and to learn how to best serve a needy world. Those who selfishly stay home and watch TV instead of going to church are not serving the Lord and show either an ignorance of or an utter disregard of Biblical truth concerning this (shut-ins would be one valid exception, of course).

I believe people with this "ministry" or "service" gift have a natural tendency to like to do "things" that help people and make others happy. Tommy Barnett, pastor of the 1st Assembly of God in Phoenix, Arizona, has learned to harvest these ministry gifts, utilizing over 1000 "ministers" who minister to practically every area of need you could imagine. This natural gift to want to serve must be developed and sanctified, like every other gifting. All gifts operate through "earthen vessels." (II Cor. 4:7)

The problem with the church is there are so many cracked pots!!! Rough edges of pride, temper, complaining, etc. have to be dealt with for ministries to become most effective. Many just quit their church when unpleasanties arise, and blame the pastor or others in the church, and seek to find a "better working atmosphere". But, if a "minister" is wise, he will understand problems and pressures within his church family are part of God's plan to help him grow stronger, and will just keep faithfully serving the Lord where he is (Gal. 6:1, 2, 11 Cor. 12:7-10, Rom. 15:1-3).

Like to serve? Ask God to reveal to you how to best fulfill His gift in you. Submit your willingness to serve to the pastor. But don't leave it up to his "originality" to find a place for you to serve. His gift may not be service. He may not be naturally good at delegating. Sometimes ministers must "create" a position for themselves. Any wise pastor will greatly appreciate your offer and will try to facilitate it. But, don't rush ahead of God's timing (Ps. 138:8)!

Aimee Semple McPherson started out washing pots and pans for tent campaigns, graduated to the piano, and eventually wound up being the preacher (even starting her own denomination, Bible college, and building the biggest Pentecostal church of her time). Philip and Steven started out waiting on tables (Acts 6:3-6) and ended up with great ministries recorded in Acts 7 & 8. Be faithful in the little things, and God may make you ruler of much greater things, if not on earth, at least in heaven (Matt. 25:21, Luke 16:17).

Teaching

If you enjoy studying, are a good communicator, and know how to organize your thoughts, you may have this gift. Teachers are born, not made. (Anybody can remember in high school how some teachers were fascinating and others were just plain borrrrrriiiiiinnnnngggg! Same education: different gifting). Obviously, any gift can be improved. The best way to improve a teaching gift is to collect illustrations, stories, pithy sayings, and jokes. I never preach very long before I tell a story or try to be funny.

Once when I preached at a chapel service at a Bible college, the president of the school told me he felt the Lord gave me my sense of humor because my message was so "hard" that humor made it easier to receive. Stories, humor, etc. make any teacher's teaching easier to receive. And, to be effective teachers today, we have to get up very early in the morning to compete! Many churches have given up Sunday school entirely. Why? For one reason because many people with a teaching gift were not volunteering their time. But, also, because children today are so used to high caliber, fast-moving entertainment teachers who simply read from the quarterly or teach dry

doctrines have a very difficult time keeping their attention. If people aren't listening, they are not learning.

Teachers must do whatever necessary to make people listen. With computers, interesting things are easy to organize and permanently record, according to topics, ready to be retrieved for future use. The wise teacher indeed is the one who is always taking copious notes and copying and organizing these notes later for future reference.

One more important comment: The world has a saying, "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." This must never be said of a Christian teacher. Conformed to the image of Christ, the master teacher, we must ever seek to be those who practice what they preach, not like the Pharisees who "say and do not" (Matt. 23:3). One warning: Don't aspire to teaching if it isn't your calling! James 3:1 warns there is stricter judgment for teachers. False information can snowball into deception (Matt. 23:15)

Exhortation

In verse 8 the Greek Word "parakaleo" means "to call to a person, to invite, to urge". Another word for "exhortation" is "encouragement". Those with this gift don't just tell people what to do, like a prophet. They have the ability to encourage one to do things. A soul winner could be an exhorter. A counselor could be an exhorter. A prayer warrior could be an exhorter. These gifts also can be improved through study (II Tim. 2:15).

Though an evangelist by birth, called to "exhort" people to receive Christ, I didn't win one soul to Christ until I took a class in Bible college that showed me step by step how to do so. The more an encourager knows, and has experienced, the more he can encourage others (II Cor. 1:4, Prov. 11:9).

Giving

Verse 8: Recently, a lady came into the prayer line who longed to prosper and be successful so she could give more to the cause of Christ. She wept as I prayed for her. How amazing this gift is to me. I give generously to the cause of Christ, but often for selfish reasons: I want to prosper on earth and have more reward in heaven! But, those with the gift of giving simply love to give, Do you have this gift? If you do, verse 8 tells you to do it "with simplicity" or "generously". Why would the Holy Spirit have to tell givers to give "generously"? Probably because they have to make up for so many tightwads in the church! I thank God for those with this gift who support me!

Rulership

Verse 8: This would be those called to leadership or positions in the body of Christ. Do you have authority over others? Those who have authority over others are warned to do so with "diligence": Diligence against pride (1 Tim. 3:6, 11 Tim. 3:24, 25); Diligence against sin (Gal. 6:2); Diligence against Satan (Mark 14:27); Diligence to keep your family strong (1 Tim. 3:4); Diligence to keep a good testimony in the world (1 Tim. 3:7). Diligence to discipline (1 Tim. 4:14-16, 1 Cor. 9:24-27); and Diligence to keep pure motives (Prov. 4:23). Remember too, faithfulness is still the primary requirement of a leader (Heb. 3:2, 5, 1 Tim. 1:12, 1 Cor. 4:2, 11 Tim. 2:2). If you have the rulership gift, it will surface in life as that gift pushes you to prominence and others see your capacity to lead. "A man's gift maketh room for him. It bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16).

I was president of my junior high school before I ever imagined being a leader in the body of Christ. (Though the vice-principal reported that I was "the worst president in the history of the school"!) Like every other gift, leaders have to be sanctified, "polished" and "improved"

upon. Would to God that Hitler's gift of leadership had been sanctified and submitted to God's purposes!

Mercy

In my dad's last days in a board and care home, one of the ladies who worked there who changed his diaper and hand-fed him said, "I just love these people. They are like my family." Most of us would die of exasperation working in a rest home. But, God created a special group of people for some of the most difficult jobs: those with the gift of mercy. They make great nurses, missionaries, inner-city missions workers, counselors or prayer intercessors. God sometimes has to balance this mercy gift in their life by having them marry someone who doesn't have the gift, to keep them from literally killing themselves with sacrificial service.

Mercy people often cannot say "no" to a hurting person crying out for help. On the other hand, those without the mercy gift must sometimes go through a great "school of the Spirit" to whittle down their insensitivity to other's hurts. Oh, what a hard school I have had to go through because of my insensitive and unsympathetic nature! And, I'm still in it. (Just got my kindergarten diploma, though!) Mercy is a blessed gift indeed- "blessed are the merciful" (Matt. 5:7). God give us more mercy people!

Finally, we must understand that Satan fights the expression of every gift in the body of Christ, no matter how relatively insignificant we may think it is. 1 Cor. 12:12-26 shows the importance of every member of the body working properly: "If one member suffer, all the members suffer" (v. 26). An aching little toe makes the whole body suffer. Every church has a "little toe" that hasn't been paid attention to lately. But, wait until it is banged against the bed-frame! The whole body will be awakened in pain! To prevent this unexpected "midnight" occurrence, (which you can be sure the devil is planning), we are exhorted in Rom. 12:21, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good".

We are at war. And God has given us weapons to win: people-people with gifts! Your "good gift" (James 1:17) residing inside of you is part of God's plan to help everyone else in the body of Christ overcome evil.

Discover your gift, accept it, develop it as fully as possible, and use it. Use it or lose it! ("Him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" Matt. 25:29). Don't "hide" your "talent" (Matt. 25:14-29) anymore.