

A man lived alone in a house a long way from town. He heard on the news from the weather girl that a flood was coming where he lived, but he said, "I'll be OK. I love my God and he will look after me" As promised, the floods came. As the water rose to his upstairs window, a man in a rowboat came and offered to take him to safety but the man said, "I'll be OK. I love my God and he will look after me" The man in the boat left. The waters rose higher and the man had to sit on the roof. A helicopter came by and offered to take him away but he said, "I'll be OK. I love my God and he will look after me" The helicopter went away, the waters rose higher and the man drowned.

When he got to heaven, he asked God "Why did you not save me?" God replied, "I gave the lady the gift of working out what weather would do, but you ignored her. I gave a man the strength to row against the currents and sent him to you, but you sent him away. I gave another man the love of flying and the skill to fly a helicopter, but you sent him away as well. Just what did you want?"

God helps our lives through people who have gifts from God. God blesses us to be blessings to others. God wants us to use our gifts to be blessing to others. Today I would like to share two gifts with you.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of the first gift in 1 Corinthians 12:1-3.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. <sup>3</sup> Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit."

Do you find any gift from this passage? Paul says the first gift in different way in Romans 10:9, "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The first gift we are given is SALVATION. One of the Bible's greatest truths is that God offers us our salvation as a free gift. It isn't something we can buy, nor is it something we can earn by our own good works. Salvation is the gift from God.

But the Bible also teaches us two important truths about God's gift of salvation. First, it tells us that it is a costly gift. Suppose you wanted to express your love for someone by giving them a very fine gift. What would you have to do? Well, you'd first have to go to the store and buy it. The finer the gift, the more it would cost you. To your friend, it's a free gift, but it wasn't free on your part. The same is true with God's gift of salvation. To us it's free, but it cost God the life of His Son. The reason is because on the cross Jesus Christ became the final sacrifice for our sins. He paid for our salvation with His blood.

Someone may ask, if God gives us salvation as a free gift, why doesn't God go ahead and give it to everyone?

Like any other gift, God's gift of salvation doesn't become ours until we accept it. My health plan provides \$100 gift card when I have a free biometric wellness screening. However, some pastors did not receive the gift card because they ignore this offer. Just as they can ignore the gift the health plan offers them, so we can ignore God's gift of salvation. Don't let this happen to you. God gives us salvation as a free gift through Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul continued making his point to the Corinthians about the second gift, a spiritual gift.

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

All Christians have God's various gifts. They serve others through their spiritual gifts. All ministries express that the power of God works in action everywhere. We all have different kinds of spiritual gifts. However, when I ask you, what kind of spiritual gifts do you have, you, in an attempt to humble yourselves, may deny that God gives you a spiritual gift.

The bible teaches us in Corinthians 7:7, But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another different kind.

You may naturally be good with numbers and financial planning. This ability can be used for spiritual purposes as the Lord uses you. Or perhaps you are skilled with your hands and the Spirit's gift to you is service and He uses your natural gifts as a spiritual gift to bless others. Any ability that we have can be used for ministry. What makes an ability "spiritual" is whether we use it for God's work and spiritual purposes.

How can we find our spiritual gifts? 1 Peter 4:10 reminds us of this truth, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."

The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual gift to each believer for serving others. The reason we have spiritual gifts is so that we can strengthen other people's faith. It is one of the ways to find your spiritual gift. If someone's faith is in jeopardy, how can you help him? What can you do for him? You can do or say what seems most helpful, and if the person is helped, then you may have discovered one of your gifts.

For example, the Lord has given you the gift of encouragement. You are able to show genuine concern for others and lift their spirits with words of encouragement. As you look at your financial blessings, perhaps the Holy Spirit has given you the gift of contributing to the needs of others. Always remember that you have at least one spiritual gift to use for others. I hope the Holy Spirit helps you find it and motivate you to use it.

In the book, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, James Emery White tells this story:

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we allow Him to occupy and control every area of our lives...How much of you does the Holy Spirit have?

When teaching this to my seminary students, I bring two glasses of water and two packets of Alka-Seltzer to class. I drop a packet of Alka-Seltzer, with the wrapper on, into one glass. Then I plop an unsealed packet into the second glass, and watch it fill with fizz.

I say to my students, "Both glasses have the Alka-Seltzer, just as all Christians have the Holy Spirit. But notice how you can have the Holy Spirit and not His filling." Our goal is to live in such a way as to unwrap the packaging around the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us.

When you use your gifts, you will grow more gifts. When you faithfully use your spiritual gifts, you will get more gifts you don't have, or you will grow in the effectiveness of your present gifts. However, when you don't use the gifts, You will lose the gifts. If you have a farm and don't plow, plant and tend it constantly, you'll lose that ground to weeds and trees.

I am asking every one of you right now to look honestly at yourself, use your spiritual gift in service to others.

"You are gifted!" The Holy Spirit has given you the gift to serve other and strengthen other's faith. As gifted people may we now use our gifts.