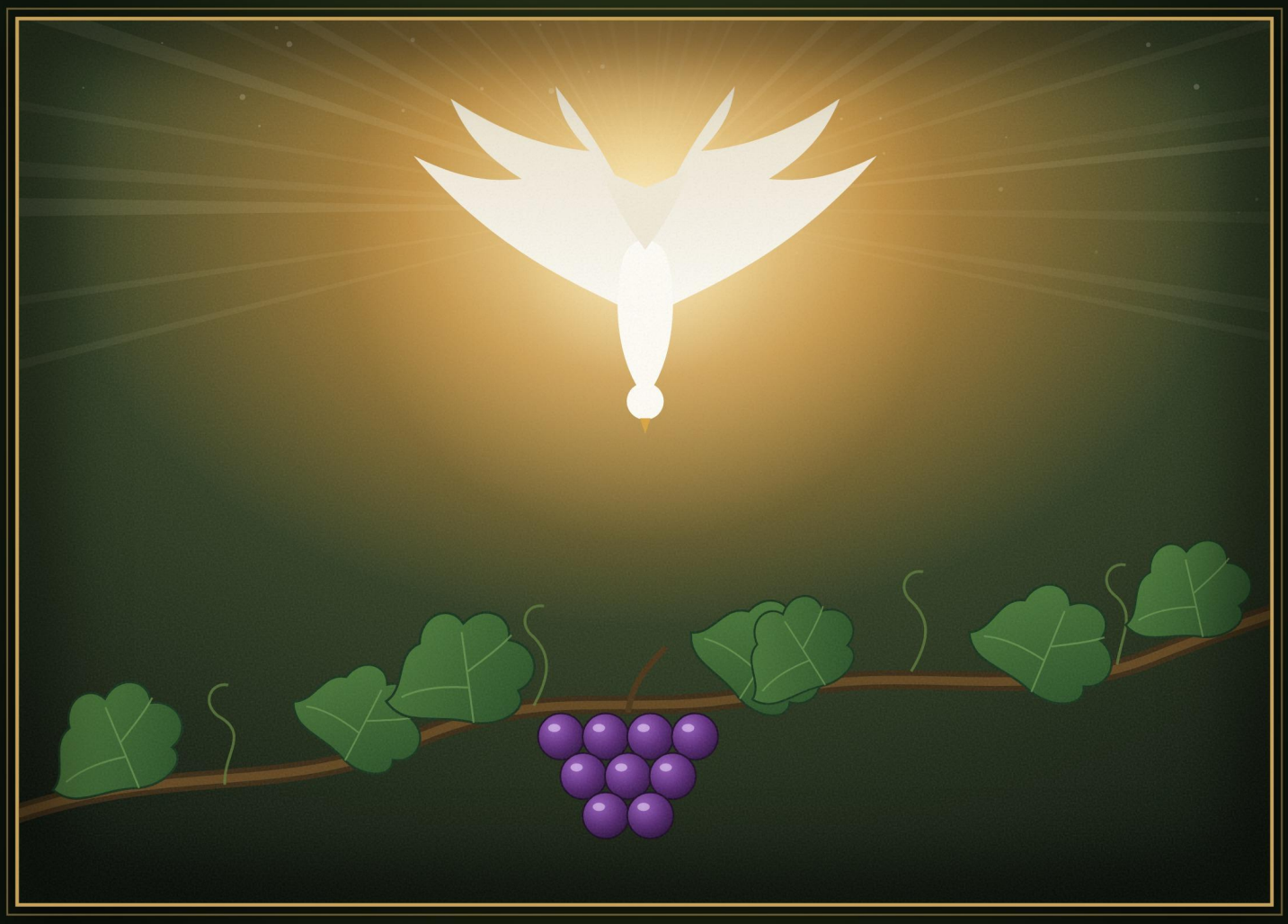
# GIVEN AND GROWN

*The Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit,*
*Word by Word, Then and Now*



*The gifts are given. The fruit is grown.*

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

# Given and Grown

*The Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit, Word by Word, Then and Now*

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

**Given and Grown: The Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit, Word by Word, Then and Now**

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# A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

# Contents

Before You Begin....1

**Part One: The Giver and His Gifts**

Chapter 1: The Giver Comes First....5
Chapter 2: Grace With a Job to Do....9
Chapter 3: Gifts, Talents, Fruit, and Offices....15
Chapter 4: One Body and a Better Way....19
Chapter 5: Do All the Gifts Continue Today?....24

**Part Two: The Speaking Gifts**

Chapter 6: Prophecy....31
Chapter 7: Teaching....36
Chapter 8: Exhortation....40
Chapter 9: The Word of Wisdom....44
Chapter 10: The Word of Knowledge....48
Chapter 11: Distinguishing of Spirits....52
Chapter 12: Evangelists....56

**Part Three: The Leading and Serving Gifts**

Chapter 13: Apostles....61
Chapter 14: Shepherds....65
Chapter 15: Serving....70
Chapter 16: Helps....74
Chapter 17: Leading....77
Chapter 18: Administrations....81
Chapter 19: Giving....84
Chapter 20: Showing Mercy....88
Chapter 21: Faith....92
Chapter 22: Hospitality and Singleness....96

**Part Four: The Sign Gifts**

Chapter 23: Gifts of Healings....102
Chapter 24: Workings of Miracles....107
Chapter 25: Kinds of Tongues....111
Chapter 26: Interpretation of Tongues....116
Chapter 27: Order in the Church Meeting....120

**Part Five: The Fruit of the Spirit**

Chapter 28: One Fruit, Nine Flavors....126
Chapter 29: Love....131
Chapter 30: Joy....136
Chapter 31: Peace....140

Chapter 32: Patience....144
Chapter 33: Kindness....148
Chapter 34: Goodness....152
Chapter 35: Faithfulness....156
Chapter 36: Gentleness....160
Chapter 37: Self-Control....164
Chapter 38: How Fruit Grows....169

**Part Six: Finding and Using Your Gift**

Chapter 39: Finding Your Gift....175
Chapter 40: Things Often Called Gifts....179
Chapter 41: Gifts and Fruit Together....183
A Closing Word....187
Appendix A: Greek Word Table....188
Appendix B: The Gift Lists Side by Side....192
Appendix C: Gift Discovery Worksheet....193
Appendix D: Words to Know....195
Appendix E: Sources and Credits....196
About This Book....197
Scripture Index....198

# Before You Begin

> *each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves, as good stewards of* ***the*** *manifold grace of God.*
>
> 1 Peter 4:10 (SLB)

I've sat in churches where nobody talked about spiritual gifts at all. I've sat in others where people talked about almost nothing else. In the first kind of church, a lot of good people sat in the pews for thirty years and never knew God had built them for something. In the second kind, the gifts sometimes became a show, and people who didn't have the loud ones went home feeling like second-class Christians. Neither one is what the New Testament describes.

I have led Bible studies, preached and served as a lay pastor. What started as simple obedience in small rooms grew into a study on every book of the Bible and the Steadfast Literal Bible. God uses what we offer in ways no plan can predict. Every believer has been given something real by the Spirit, and it grows only when we put it to work.

This book is my attempt to slow down and look at what God actually says. Not what one camp or another says, but what the words on the page say, in the language they were first written in, and how those words played out in the lives of the first believers. Then we'll ask the question that matters most for you and me: what does this look like on a Tuesday in an ordinary church today?

## Gifts and Fruit Belong Together

The Holy Spirit does two kinds of work in a believer that this book is about. He gives gifts, and He grows fruit. The gifts are what He equips you to do for others. The fruit is who He makes you into. You can't trade one for the other. Corinth had more gifts than almost any church in the New Testament, and Paul still had to write to them about jealousy, lawsuits, sexual sin, and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper. A gifted Christian without fruit is a loud noise (1 Corinthians 13:1). A fruitful Christian who never uses his gift is a lamp under a basket.

That's why I put both in one book. The title says it simply. The gifts are given. The fruit is grown.

## How Each Chapter Works

Every gift and every fruit gets the same treatment, in the same order, so you can find things quickly when you come back to this book later.

- **The Word.** A gray box gives the Greek word, how to say it, its Strong's number, how many times it appears in the New Testament, and what it means in plain English.
- **How the New Testament Uses It.** We look at the word in its own verses, because the Bible is the best dictionary of its own words.
- **In the Apostles' Day.** We look at real examples from Acts and the letters, the first generation of the church.

- **What It Looks Like Today.** We bring it home to an ordinary church, an ordinary family, and an ordinary workweek.
- **Watch Out For.** Every good gift can be bent. Every fruit has a counterfeit. We name them.
- **If This Is Your Gift** (or **Growing in** the fruit). Practical steps.
- **Study Questions.** For your own time with God or for a small group.

## About the Greek

You don't need to know Greek to read this book. I don't expect you to learn the alphabet or memorize anything. I give you the Greek word because a lot of the meaning is sitting right there in the word, and English translations sometimes have to use three or four different English words for the same Greek word. When you see the original, you start to notice connections you'd miss otherwise. For example, the word for spiritual gift, *charisma*, is built on the word for grace, *charis*. A spiritual gift is grace with a job to do. You'll see that one again.

Here is where the facts in the gray boxes come from, so you can check me.

- **Strong's numbers** come from James Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890), which gave every Greek word in the New Testament a number. Most Bible software and websites still use those numbers, so you can look up any word in this book with a free tool.
- **Word counts** were counted word by word from the same Greek text my Steadfast Literal Bible New Testament follows, the Received Text (Textus Receptus) as printed by Frederick Scrivener in 1894. I used the free word-by-word data published by STEPBible (Tyndale House, Cambridge). Other Greek editions differ in a few places, so another book may give a count that is one or two higher or lower. That doesn't change anything taught here.
- **Meanings** were checked against Strong's own definitions and Joseph Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1889), and then against how the word is actually used in its verses.

The "Say it" line is a simple English way to sound the word out, with the stressed part in capital letters. Scholars argue about how Greek was pronounced two thousand years ago, so take it as a help, not a ruling.

## The Question That Divides Good Christians

I'll say this right up front so nobody is surprised later. Faithful, Bible-believing Christians disagree about whether some of the gifts, especially tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, continue today the same way they did in the book of Acts. Some believe those gifts ended with the apostles. Some believe they continue in full. Many sit somewhere in the middle: open to God doing anything He pleases, but careful about what gets claimed in His name.

In this book I lay out each view fairly, with its best verses, the same way I have in my other studies. I don't call anyone names, and I don't pretend the other side has no Bible. Chapter 5 walks through the whole question, and each of the sign-gift chapters shows what each view would expect to see in a church today. More important, I show you the tests that every side agrees on. Those tests come straight from Scripture, and if we all used them, a lot of the trouble would go away.

## About the Examples

In the “What It Looks Like Today” sections you’ll meet ordinary people using their gifts: a retired nurse, a young dad who runs sound on Sundays, a woman who always seems to know who needs a phone call. These people are examples I made up to put a face on how a gift can work. They are not real people, and I don’t tell any made-up stories about healings or miracles. When I talk about something that really happened, I’ll tell you where it comes from.

## How to Read This Book

You can read it straight through. That’s the best way the first time, because Part One lays the foundation for everything else. After that, it works as a reference. If someone in your small group asks, “What is the gift of helps, anyway?” you can turn to that chapter and find the word, the verses, and the examples in one place.

If you lead a group, take one chapter a week, or two short ones. Every chapter ends with study questions. The Greek word table, the gift lists side by side, and the discovery worksheet are in the back.

And one more thing. Read with your Bible open. Don’t take my word for any of this. The Bereans checked even the apostle Paul against the Scriptures, and Luke called them noble for it (Acts 17:11). Do the same with me.

# Part One: The Giver and His Gifts

# Chapter 1: The Giver Comes First

> *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may remain with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not see Him nor know Him; but you know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you.*
>
> John 14:16-17 (SLB)

Before we talk about any gift, we need to talk about the Giver. That sounds obvious, but a lot of confusion about spiritual gifts starts right here. When people treat the Holy Spirit as a force, a feeling, or a kind of spiritual electricity, they start treating His gifts like tools they own and switch on when they want. When we know who He really is, we treat His gifts the way you treat a gift from someone you love and respect. You take care of it, you use it the way it was meant to be used, and you never forget who gave it to you.

Pastor Jimmy Carter led me to Christ when I was a boy in Victorville. Through the years I leaned on mentors and pastors for guidance and for strength I did not have. I learned I could not muster up spiritual strength on my own. The Holy Spirit is not a force or a feeling. He is God Himself, present with us.

So who is the Holy Spirit?

## The Word

**πνεῦμα** (*pneuma*)
**Say it:** PNEW-mah
**Strong's number:** G4151
**Used in the New Testament:** 385 times, in 350 verses
**Plain meaning:** wind, breath, spirit; used for the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, and evil spirits

The Greek word for spirit is *pneuma*. You can hear it in English words like pneumatic (run by air) and pneumonia (a disease of the lungs). Its first meaning is moving air: wind or breath. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament, *ruach*, works the same way. Jesus used that double meaning when He talked with Nicodemus at night.

> *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.* (John 3:8)

Wind is real, powerful, and invisible. You can't put it in a jar, but you can see what it does to a tree. That's a good picture of how the Spirit works. But it's only a picture. The New Testament makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit is not just a wind. He is a Person.

## He Is a Person, Not a Force

How do we know the Spirit is a Person? Because the Bible says He does what only persons do.

- He teaches and reminds (John 14:26).
- He speaks. "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart now for Me both Barnabas and Saul'" (Acts 13:2). Notice the word "Me." A force doesn't say "Me."
- He knows. "No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11).
- He prays for us (Romans 8:26).
- He can be grieved. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). You can't hurt the feelings of electricity.
- He can be lied to. Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, and Peter said that meant he had lied to God (Acts 5:3-4).
- He makes decisions. He stopped Paul from preaching in Asia and would not let him go into Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7).
- And most important for this book, He hands out gifts "to each individually as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11). He has a will. He chooses.

There's a small detail in the Greek here that's worth knowing. The word *pneuma* is grammatically neuter, like the English word "it." If John had simply followed the grammar, he would have called the Spirit "it." But in John 14:26 and 16:13-14, John uses the masculine word for "He" (*ekeinos*, "that One") to point back to the Spirit. John broke the grammar on purpose to make sure we wouldn't think of the Spirit as a thing.

## He Is God

The Spirit is not only a Person. He is God. Peter says so plainly in Acts 5. Ananias lied "to the Holy Spirit" (5:3), and in the next breath Peter tells him, "You have not lied to men but to God" (5:4). Jesus put the Spirit's name right next to the Father's and His own when He gave the Great Commission.

> *Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19)

That's one name, not three names. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God in three Persons. Christians have called this the Trinity for a long time. The word isn't in the Bible, but the truth is all over it. When I say the gifts come from the Spirit, I'm saying they come from God Himself. When Paul writes about the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he names all three Persons in a row.

> *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, and the same Lord; and there are varieties of workings, but it is the same God who works all things in all.* (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Same Spirit. Same Lord. Same God. Every gift comes from the whole Godhead working together.

## He Is the Helper Jesus Promised

**παράκλητος** (*parakletos*)
**Say it:** pah-RAH-klay-tos
**Strong's number:** G3875
**Used in the New Testament:** 5 times
**Plain meaning:** one called alongside to help: a helper, comforter, advocate, counselor

On the night before the cross, Jesus told His disciples He was leaving. They were crushed. Then He told them something that must have sounded impossible.

> *But I say the truth to you: it is profitable for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.* (John 16:7)

Better for Jesus to leave? How could that be? Because while Jesus walked the earth in a body, He could only be in one place at a time. The Spirit would live inside every believer, in every place, at the same time.

The word Jesus used is *parakletos*. It's built from *para* (beside) and *kaleo* (to call). A *parakletos* is someone called to your side. In the courts of that day it could mean a friend who stood up and spoke for you. The SLB translates it "Helper." Older Bibles use "Comforter," which is good too, as long as you remember that in old English "comfort" meant to make strong, not just to make cozy. The word appears only 5 times in the New Testament: four times in John 14-16 for the Spirit, and once in 1 John 2:1 for Jesus Himself, our Advocate with the Father.

Notice that Jesus said "another Helper" (John 14:16). The Greek word there, *allos*, means another of the same kind. Jesus was saying, I have been your Helper. Now I'm sending another One just like Me. The Spirit is not a lesser stand-in. He is God, with us and in us.

## Then and Now: What Changed at Pentecost

The Spirit didn't start working at Pentecost. He was there at creation, "hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). In the Old Testament He came upon certain people for certain jobs: judges like Samson (Judges 14:6), kings like David (1 Samuel 16:13), prophets, and even craftsmen (Exodus 31:2-5). But He came on a few, and He could leave. The very next verse after the one that tells us the Spirit came on David says He had departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). That's why David prayed after his sin with Bathsheba, "do not take the Spirit of Your holiness from me" (Psalm 51:11).

Moses longed for something more. When two men began prophesying in the camp and Joshua wanted them stopped, Moses said this:

> *And Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for me? And who will grant **that** all the people of the LORD **were** prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!"* (Numbers 11:29)

Centuries later, God promised through Joel that this is exactly what He would do.

> *And it will be afterward **that** I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. And*

> *also on the **male** servants and on the female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit.*
> (Joel 2:28-29)

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and said, "this is that" (Acts 2:16). The promise had come. The Spirit was poured out on all kinds of people: men and women, young and old, slaves and free. From that day on, every believer has the Spirit living inside him. Paul could not have said it more strongly.

> *But you are not in **the** flesh but in **the** Spirit, if indeed **the** Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have **the** Spirit of Christ, this one is not His.* (Romans 8:9)

That matters for this book. Under the old covenant, the gifts of the Spirit were mostly for a few leaders. Under the new covenant, every believer has the Spirit, so every believer has a gift (1 Peter 4:10). There are no spectators in the church of Jesus Christ.

## What the Spirit Always Does

If you want to know whether something is really the work of the Holy Spirit, here is the simplest test in the Bible. Jesus said the Spirit "will glorify Me" (John 16:14). The Spirit is like a floodlight on a building at night. You're not supposed to stare at the floodlight. You're supposed to look at the building it lights up. The Spirit always points away from Himself and toward Jesus.

So when a gift, a meeting, or a person keeps pointing to the gift, the meeting, or the person, something has gone wrong. When it points people to Jesus, to His cross, His Word, and His glory, you're seeing the Spirit's fingerprints. Paul says the same thing as he opens his teaching on gifts.

> *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by **the** Spirit of God says, "Jesus **is** accursed," and no one is able to say, "Jesus **is** Lord," except by **the** Holy Spirit.*
> (1 Corinthians 12:3)

That's where we'll start next chapter: with the words the Bible uses for these gifts, and what they tell us about the Giver.

## Watch Out For

- **Treating the Spirit as a power to use.** Simon the sorcerer saw the apostles lay hands on people and wanted to buy that power (Acts 8:18-20). Peter told him his heart was not right with God. The Spirit is never for sale, and He is never our tool.
- **Ignoring the Spirit.** Some churches are so afraid of excess that they barely mention Him. But Jesus called His coming "profitable" for us. You can't live the Christian life without Him.
- **Talking about the Spirit more than about Jesus.** The Spirit Himself doesn't do that. We shouldn't either.

## Study Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, how did you picture the Holy Spirit? A force, a feeling, a Person? Why?
2. Read John 14:16-17 and 14:26. List everything Jesus says the Spirit will do.
3. Why do you think John broke Greek grammar and called the Spirit "He" instead of "it"?

4. Jesus said it was better for the disciples that He leave (John 16:7). What did He mean?

5. How is the Spirit's work in believers today different from His work in the Old Testament?

6. What is one way you can tell whether something is truly the Spirit's work (John 16:14; 1 Corinthians 12:3)?

# Chapter 2: Grace With a Job to Do

> *And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith*
>
> Romans 12:6 (SLB)

When you buy a tool, you get a manual. Most people throw it away. Then six months later they're on the internet trying to figure out what the little lever on the side does. God didn't give us a manual with every gift He gives, but He did give us something better: the words He chose to describe them. Those words tell us what a spiritual gift is, where it comes from, and what it's for.

The New Testament uses at least six different words for spiritual gifts. Each one shows a different side of the same thing, like walking around a house and looking at it from the front, the side, and the back. Let's take them one at a time.

## Charisma: A Gift of Grace

**χάρισμα** (*charisma*)
**Say it:** KHAR-is-mah
**Strong's number:** G5486
**Used in the New Testament:** 17 times
**Plain meaning:** a gift freely given out of grace; a grace-gift

This is the main word, and the one that gave us the English words charismatic and charisma. It is built on *charis*, the word for grace. Add the ending *-ma*, which usually means the result of an action, and you get "the result of grace" or "grace given in a concrete form." I like to put it this way: a spiritual gift is grace with a job to do.

**χάρις** (*charis*)
**Say it:** KHAR-is
**Strong's number:** G5485
**Used in the New Testament:** 155 times, in 146 verses
**Plain meaning:** grace, undeserved favor, kindness freely given

Grace is God's kindness to people who don't deserve it. You can't earn it, and you can't buy it. That's why Paul uses this same word, *charisma*, for salvation itself.

> *For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
> (Romans 6:23)

Think about that. The same word that describes eternal life describes your spiritual gift. Both come from the same place. Both are free. Both are undeserved. Nobody gets a gift because he's more spiritual than the next guy. Paul asked the proud Corinthians a question that ought to settle that forever.

> *For who makes you different? And what do you have which you did not receive? And if you did indeed receive **it**, why do you boast as if not having received **it**?* (1 Corinthians 4:7)

### *Where Charisma Shows Up*

The word appears 17 times in the New Testament, and all but one of them are in Paul's letters. The one exception is in Peter (1 Peter 4:10). Here's how they fall out:

- **Salvation and God's free gift in Christ:** Romans 5:15, 5:16, and 6:23.
- **God's gifts to Israel:** Romans 11:29, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."
- **Gifts for serving the church:** Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10.
- **A gift Paul wanted to share with the Roman church:** Romans 1:11.
- **Singleness and marriage:** 1 Corinthians 7:7, where Paul says "each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that way."
- **God's rescue in answer to prayer:** 2 Corinthians 1:11.

So *charisma* is wider than the "gift lists." It covers anything God freely gives by grace. But most of the time in Paul's letters, it means an ability God gives a believer to build up others.

## Pneumatika: Things of the Spirit

**πνευματικός** (*pneumatikos*)
**Say it:** pnew-mah-tee-KOS
**Strong's number:** G4152
**Used in the New Testament:** 26 times, in 21 verses
**Plain meaning:** spiritual; belonging to or coming from the Spirit

When Paul opens his long teaching on gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he doesn't start with *charisma*. He starts with *pneumatikos*, the adjective form of the word for spirit.

> *Now concerning spiritual **gifts**, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.* (1 Corinthians 12:1)

Notice the word "gifts" is in bold italics. That means it isn't in the Greek. Word for word, Paul wrote "concerning the spirituals." It could mean spiritual gifts or spiritual people. Either way, the word points to where these things come from: the Spirit. The Corinthians seem to have liked this word. They wanted to be known as "spiritual" people. Paul takes their favorite word and spends three chapters showing them what real spirituality looks like: one Spirit, one body, many gifts, and love above them all.

He uses the same word again in 14:1, "earnestly desire spiritual gifts," and in Romans 1:11, "that I may impart some spiritual gift to you." Put the two words together and you get the full picture. A *charisma* tells you a gift comes from grace. A *pneumatikon* tells you it comes from the Spirit.

## Dorea and Doma: Gifts Given Freely

**δωρεά** (*dorea*)
**Say it:** doh-REH-ah
**Strong's number:** G1431
**Used in the New Testament:** 11 times
**Plain meaning:** a free gift, given with no strings attached

**δόμα** (*doma*)
**Say it:** DOH-mah
**Strong's number:** G1390
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** a gift, a present

These are ordinary Greek words for a gift or a present. *Dorea* has the idea of something given freely, with nothing owed. Luke uses it for the Holy Spirit Himself: "you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Simon the sorcerer wanted to buy that gift with money, and Peter was horrified (Acts 8:20). Paul uses it when he can't find words big enough for what God did for us in Jesus: "Now thanks be to God for His indescribable free gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Both words show up in the Ephesians passage on gifts.

> *But to each one of us the grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore it says, "Having ascended on high, He took captivity captive, and He gave gifts to men."* (Ephesians 4:7-8)

"The gift of Christ" in verse 7 is *dorea*. "He gave gifts to men" in verse 8 is *doma*. Paul is quoting Psalm 68:18 and picturing a king coming home from battle, leading his captives behind him and handing out gifts to his people. Jesus won the victory at the cross, rose, ascended, and now hands out gifts to His church. Your gift is part of the spoils of His victory. That's how valuable it is.

## Diakonia: Gifts for Service

**διακονία** (*diakonia*)
**Say it:** dee-ah-ko-NEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G1248
**Used in the New Testament:** 34 times, in 32 verses
**Plain meaning:** service, ministry; the work of a servant

In 1 Corinthians 12:5 Paul says "there are varieties of services, and the same Lord." The word is *diakonia*, where we get our word deacon. It first meant waiting on tables. That's a humbling thought. Every gift is a form of table-waiting. It puts you in an apron, not on a throne. Jesus said it about Himself.

> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.* (Mark 10:45)

"To serve" there is *diakoneo*, the verb form of the same word. If the Son of God came to serve, then any gift that makes me feel too important to serve has been bent out of shape. We'll come back to this word when we look at the gift of serving in Chapter 15.

## Energema: Gifts as God at Work

**ἐνέργημα** (*energema*)
**Say it:** en-ERG-ay-mah
**Strong's number:** G1755
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** a working, an effect produced by power at work

In 1 Corinthians 12:6 Paul uses another word, "varieties of workings." The Greek is *energema*, and you can hear the English word energy in it. It appears only twice in the New Testament, both in this chapter (12:6 and 12:10, "workings of miracles"). It tells us that a gift is not just a skill we practice. It's God's own power at work through us. Paul goes on: "it is the same God who works all things in all." The verb "works" there is *energeo*. The gift is the place where God's energy meets our everyday life.

## Phanerosis: Gifts Make the Spirit Visible

**φανέρωσις** (*phanerosis*)
**Say it:** fan-EHR-oh-sis
**Strong's number:** G5321
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** a making visible, a showing, a manifestation

> *But to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* (1 Corinthians 12:7)

You can't see the Spirit any more than you can see the wind. But you can see what He does. The word "manifestation" is *phanerosis*, from a root that means to bring something into the light. When a believer teaches clearly, gives generously, or sits with someone in the hospital at two in the morning, the invisible Spirit becomes visible. People can see Him in what He does through you.

Look at the two other phrases in that verse. "To each" means every believer has at least one. "For the common good" means no gift is for your own benefit. It's like the parts of a car. The alternator doesn't charge itself. It exists to keep everything else running.

## Stewards, Not Owners

Peter adds one more word that changes how we think about all of this.

*each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves, as good stewards of **the** manifold grace of God.* (1 Peter 4:10)

**οἰκονόμος** (*oikonomos*)
**Say it:** oy-KON-oh-mos
**Strong's number:** G3623
**Used in the New Testament:** 10 times
**Plain meaning:** a household manager, a steward who handles what belongs to someone else

A steward in Peter's day ran a household for its owner. He handled the money, the supplies, and the servants, but none of it was his. Joseph was a steward over Potiphar's house. That's what you are with your gift. You don't own it. You manage it for its Owner, and one day He'll ask how you handled it. Jesus told a whole parable about that (Matthew 25:14-30), and the man who buried what he was given didn't come out well.

Peter also says God's grace is "manifold." The Greek word, *poikilos*, means many-colored, like a quilt or a stained glass window. God's grace comes in a lot of colors, and your gift is one of them. The church needs every color to show the whole picture.

## Putting the Words Together

Here's what the six words teach us when you stand back and look at all of them at once.

| Greek word | What it tells us about a spiritual gift |
|---|---|
| charisma | It comes from grace. You didn't earn it. |
| pneumatika | It comes from the Spirit. It's not natural talent with a church label on it. |
| dorea, doma | It's a free gift from the risen Christ, part of His victory. |
| diakonia | It's for serving. It puts you in an apron. |
| energema | It's God's own power at work through you. |
| phanerosis | It makes the invisible Spirit visible to others. |

So here's a working definition we'll use for the rest of this book: **a spiritual gift is an ability God gives a believer by His grace, through the Holy Spirit, to serve and build up others for the glory of Jesus Christ.**

## Watch Out For

- **Pride.** If it's grace, you can't boast. The minute a gift becomes a badge, it has stopped being used the way God intended.
- **False humility.** Some people say, "Oh, I don't have any gifts." That sounds humble, but it contradicts God. He says "to each" and "each one." You have something.
- **Burying it.** A steward who sits on what his master gave him is not being careful. He's being unfaithful.

## Study Questions

1. What does it mean to call a spiritual gift “grace with a job to do”?
2. Why do you think Paul uses the same word, *charisma*, for eternal life and for spiritual gifts?
3. Read Ephesians 4:7-8. What picture does Paul use, and what does it say about the value of your gift?
4. Which of the six words in this chapter speaks most to you right now, and why?
5. Read 1 Peter 4:10. How would you treat your gift differently if you really saw yourself as a steward and not an owner?
6. Have you ever said, “I don’t have any gifts”? What does 1 Corinthians 12:7 say to that?

# Chapter 3: Gifts, Talents, Fruit, and Offices

> *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, and the same Lord; and there are varieties of workings, but it is the same God who works all things in all.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (SLB)

A man in a Sunday school class once asked me, "So is my woodworking a spiritual gift?" It's a good question, and it opens up four things people mix up all the time: spiritual gifts, natural talents, the fruit of the Spirit, and church offices. They overlap, but they are not the same thing. If we don't sort them out, we'll either call everything a spiritual gift or miss the gifts that are right in front of us.

## Gifts and Natural Talents

Everybody has natural talents. God gave them to every human being, saved or not, because He made us in His image. A non-Christian can be a gifted musician, a brilliant teacher, or a natural-born leader. James says "every good giving and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). So your talents come from God too. But they are not what the New Testament means by a spiritual gift.

Here's the difference. A natural talent is given at your first birth. A spiritual gift is given by the Spirit, who comes to live in you at your new birth. A talent can be used for anything. A spiritual gift is given "for the common good" of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7) and for the glory of Jesus.

But here's where it gets interesting. God often uses what He already built into you. The Spirit can take a natural teacher and give him the spiritual gift of teaching, so his teaching now opens up God's Word and changes lives instead of just passing on information. He can take a natural organizer and turn her into a gift of administration for the church. A talent is the raw material. When the Spirit fills it and points it at building up God's people, it starts to function like a spiritual gift.

Look at Bezalel in the Old Testament. He was a craftsman. God said this about him:

> *See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him **with** the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all **kinds of** work, to devise designs, to work in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in cutting of stone for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all **kinds of** work.* (Exodus 31:2-5)

Bezalel was a skilled metalworker and woodcarver, and God filled him with His Spirit for a holy purpose: building the tabernacle. So, back to the man in my class: is woodworking a spiritual gift? It's not on any of the New Testament gift lists. But when the Spirit fills a man who has that skill and he uses it to serve God's people, building ramps for widows or repairing the church's pews, he's walking in the gift of helps or serving with a set of skills God gave him. We'll talk about this more in Chapter 40.

## Gifts and Fruit

This is the big one, and the reason this book covers both. Gifts and fruit both come from the Spirit, but they are different in almost every way.

| | **Spiritual gifts** | **Fruit of the Spirit** |
|---|---|---|
| What it is | What the Spirit equips you to do | Who the Spirit makes you into |
| Who gets what | Different gifts to different people (1 Corinthians 12:29-30) | All nine fruit for every believer (Galatians 5:22-23) |
| How it comes | Given by the Spirit "as He wills" | Grown over time as you walk by the Spirit |
| Number | Many kinds | One fruit with nine sides |
| How long it lasts | Some gifts will be "done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8) | Love "never fails" |
| What it proves | That God is working through you | That you are becoming like Jesus |

That last row matters more than it looks. Gifts don't prove a person is spiritually mature. Corinth was loaded with gifts and full of immaturity. Jesus warned that some people will stand before Him on the last day pointing to their gifts, and He will tell them He never knew them.

> *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.'* (Matthew 7:22-23)

Jesus doesn't judge them by their gifts. He judges them by whether He knew them, and by the way they lived. "You who work lawlessness." In another place Jesus said "you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16, 20). Fruit is the real test of a life. Gifts are tools. Fruit is character. Paul wrapped his whole teaching on gifts around a chapter on love for exactly this reason.

## Gifts and Offices

The New Testament also describes church offices: positions of responsibility a person is chosen or appointed to. The two main ones are overseers (also called elders or shepherds) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Philippians 1:1).

An office is not the same as a gift. A gift is an ability. An office is a role. Look at what Paul requires for an overseer in 1 Timothy 3: most of it is character. Above reproach, faithful in marriage, self-controlled, hospitable, not a drunkard, not violent, managing his own home well. Only one item on the list is about ability: "able to teach." The church is supposed to look first at fruit, and then at gifts, when it chooses leaders. The same was true when the apostles chose the seven men in Acts 6. They had to be "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3).

A man may have the gift of shepherding and never hold the office of elder. He might shepherd a small group, his family, or a few younger men. And sadly, a man can hold the title of pastor without much gift for it. The best situation is when gift, fruit, and office all line up in one person.

Ephesians 4:11 is a little different. There Paul lists people, not abilities: “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers.” These are gifted people whom Christ has given to His church. We’ll look at each of them in their own chapters.

## The Five Gift Lists

The New Testament gives five main lists of spiritual gifts. Here they are side by side, using the SLB’s wording. You’ll find a larger chart in Appendix B.

| **Romans 12:6-8** | **1 Corinthians 12:8-10** | **1 Corinthians 12:28-30** | **Ephesians 4:11** | **1 Peter 4:10-11** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| prophecy | word of wisdom | apostles | apostles | speaking |
| ministry (serving) | word of knowledge | prophets | prophets | serving |
| teaching | faith | teachers | evangelists | |
| exhorting | gifts of healings | miracles | shepherds and teachers | |
| giving | workings of miracles | gifts of healings | | |
| leading | prophecy | helps | | |
| showing mercy | distinguishing of spirits | administrations | | |
| | kinds of tongues | kinds of tongues | | |
| | interpretation of tongues | interpretation (12:30) | | |

A few things jump out when you put them side by side.

First, no two lists are the same. Only prophecy and teaching show up in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians, and even those are worded differently each time. That tells us none of the lists was meant to be complete. Paul wasn’t writing a catalog. He was teaching each church what it needed to hear, and he picked examples to make his point.

Second, the lists mix different kinds of things. Some are abilities (teaching, giving). Some are people (apostles, evangelists). Some are events where God acts (healings, miracles). That’s another sign they are samples, not a full inventory.

Third, Peter boils it all down to two big families: speaking and serving. Every gift either says something for God or does something for God. That’s a helpful way to think about it, and it’s close to how this book is organized.

## How Many Gifts Are There?

If you count every different item in the five lists and merge the ones that overlap, you get somewhere around twenty. I count twenty-two in this book once I add hospitality and celibacy, which the New Testament speaks of in gift language. Other teachers count eighteen, nineteen, or twenty-seven, depending on how they group them. Nobody should fight about that. The point of the lists is not to give us a number. It's to show us how many different ways God works through His people, and to make sure nobody in the church thinks he's useless.

Here is how this book groups them:

- **Part Two, The Speaking Gifts:** prophecy, teaching, exhortation, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, distinguishing of spirits, and evangelists.
- **Part Three, The Leading and Serving Gifts:** apostles, shepherds, serving, helps, leading, administrations, giving, showing mercy, faith, and the gifts of hospitality and celibacy.
- **Part Four, The Sign Gifts:** healings, miracles, tongues, and interpretation, with a chapter on order in the church meeting.

This grouping is mine. Paul didn't divide them this way, and some gifts fit in more than one group. Prophecy, for example, is a speaking gift that many people also count among the sign gifts. Teaching is a speaking gift that is also tied to the office of shepherd. Don't let the groups box the gifts in. They're just shelves to make the book easier to use.

## Study Questions

1. What's the difference between a natural talent and a spiritual gift? How can God use one in the other?
2. Read Matthew 7:22-23. Why aren't gifts enough to prove someone belongs to Jesus?
3. Look at the gifts-and-fruit table. Which row surprised you most?
4. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7. How much of that list is about ability, and how much is about character? What does that tell you?
5. Why do you think the five gift lists are all different?
6. Peter sorts gifts into speaking and serving (1 Peter 4:11). Which family do you think you lean toward?

# Chapter 4: One Body and a Better Way

> *Now you are **the** body of Christ, and members individually.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:27 (SLB)

Paul never talks about spiritual gifts without talking about the body. Look at Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. All three gift passages use the picture of a human body. That's not an accident. You can't understand gifts as private possessions. They only make sense inside a body, the way a kidney only makes sense inside a person.

And in his longest teaching on gifts, Paul stops right in the middle to write the most famous chapter on love ever written. That's not an accident either. In this chapter we'll look at both: the body that the gifts serve, and the love that has to run through all of them.

## The Word

**σῶμα** (*soma*)
**Say it:** SOH-mah
**Strong's number:** G4983
**Used in the New Testament:** 146 times, in 122 verses
**Plain meaning:** a body; the physical body, and the church as the body of Christ

The word *soma* is the ordinary Greek word for a physical body. Paul took that everyday word and made it one of the great pictures of the church. Jesus is the head. Every believer is a member, which in Paul's day meant a body part, like an arm or an eye, not someone on a list. When Paul says you are "members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:27), he is saying you are a working part of Christ's body on earth.

**μέλος** (*melos*)
**Say it:** MEL-oss
**Strong's number:** G3196
**Used in the New Testament:** 34 times, in 24 verses
**Plain meaning:** a limb or part of the body

## One Spirit, One Body

> *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also **is** the Christ. For indeed by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and we were all made to drink into one Spirit.* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Corinth was a mixed-up church. It had Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, rich and poor, people who had grown up in synagogues and people who had grown up in pagan temples. In that city, those people would never have eaten at the same table. But Paul says one Spirit put them all into one body. The same Spirit who joined them together is the One who gives the gifts. So the gifts were never meant to divide the church. They were meant to hold it together.

Bible teachers disagree about the timing of the baptism in the Spirit mentioned in verse 13. Many believe it happens to every believer at salvation, since Paul says "we were all baptized" by one Spirit. Others, especially in Pentecostal churches, teach a second experience after salvation. We'll look at that question more in Chapter 25. What everyone agrees on is the point Paul is making here: every believer belongs to the body, and nobody is left outside.

## Two Lies the Body Must Reject

Paul tells a little story about body parts talking to each other. It sounds silly on purpose. It's how he exposes two lies that do a lot of damage in churches.

### *The First Lie: "I Don't Belong"*

> *If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," it is not for this **reason** not of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," it is not for this **reason** not of the body.* (1 Corinthians 12:15-16)

The foot compares itself to the hand and decides it doesn't belong. That's the believer who says, "I can't preach like the pastor or sing like the worship leader, so I guess I'm not much use." Paul says that feeling doesn't change the facts. The foot is still part of the body. You are still part of the body, whether you feel like it or not. Some of the most important people in any church are people you never see on a stage.

### *The Second Lie: "I Don't Need You"*

> *And the eye is not able to say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." But much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary* (1 Corinthians 12:21-22)

This is the opposite problem. Now the eye looks down at the hand and says, "I don't need you." That's the gifted person who looks down on others. In Corinth, the people with the showy gifts were looking down on everybody else. Paul says the parts that seem weaker are necessary. Think of your own body. Your heart and your liver are hidden. Nobody compliments you on them. But you can live without your eyes. You can't live without your liver.

Then Paul says God arranged it this way on purpose.

> *but our presentable **members** have no need. But God has blended the body together, having given more abundant honor to the **member** that lacks, so that there may be no division in the body, but **that** the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with **it**; if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with **it**.* (1 Corinthians 12:24-26)

God gives more honor to the part that lacks. Why? "So that there may be no division." When one of us hurts, we all hurt. When one of us is honored, we all rejoice. That's what a healthy church looks like. A gift that divides the body is being misused, no matter how impressive it looks.

## The Body Builds Itself Up

Ephesians 4 adds something important. The leaders Christ gives to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers) are not there to do all the work. They're there to get everybody else ready to do it.

> *And He Himself gave some **as** apostles, and some **as** prophets, and some **as** evangelists, and some **as** shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for **the** work of ministry, for **the** building up of the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:11-12)

"Equipping" is the word *katartismos*. It's related to a word used for fishermen mending their nets (Mark 1:19) and for setting a broken bone. The pastor's job is to get the saints ready and in good working order. "The work of ministry" belongs to the saints, which means every believer. A church where the pastor does everything and the people watch is like a body where only the mouth moves.

Then Paul shows what happens when every part does its job.

> *but speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being joined together and held together through every joint of the supply, according to **the** working in **the** measure of each individual part, makes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* (Ephesians 4:15-16)

"The measure of each individual part." Every part has a measure. Every part contributes. And when they all work, the body grows and builds itself up in love. There's that word again: love.

## The Way Beyond Comparison

At the end of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says, "earnestly desire the better gifts. And yet I show you a way beyond comparison" (12:31). Then he writes chapter 13. This chapter is read at weddings, and that's fine, but Paul didn't write it for weddings. He wrote it for a church fighting over spiritual gifts.

> *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions to feed **others**, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but do not have love, I am profited nothing.* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Look at what Paul lists: tongues, prophecy, knowledge, mountain-moving faith, giving everything away, even dying a martyr's death. Those are the biggest gifts and the biggest sacrifices he can imagine. Without love, he says, they amount to noise. They amount to nothing. They profit nothing.

That's a hard word. It means a person can preach a great sermon and it counts for nothing in God's eyes if it was preached out of pride. A person can give a big check and it profits him nothing if it was given to be

seen. The gift still might help someone else, because God can use anything. But it does nothing for the one who gave it without love.

Then Paul describes what love looks like when gifted people live together.

> *Love is patient, is kind; love is not envious; love does not boast, is not puffed up, does not behave improperly, does not seek its own things, is not provoked, does not count the evil, does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Every line here hits a problem in Corinth. They were envious of each other's gifts. They boasted. They were puffed up. They behaved improperly in worship. They sought their own things. That's why this is the right place for this chapter. It's the cure for gift problems.

Here is how I'd put it. Gifts are the tools. Love is the reason you pick them up. If you pick up a tool for any other reason, sooner or later you'll hurt somebody with it.

## Gifts Are for Now, Love Is Forever

> *Love never fails; but whether **there are** prophecies, they will be done away; whether tongues, they will cease; whether knowledge, it will be done away.* (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Paul's point here is about time. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are partial and temporary. They are tools for the in-between time, before we see Jesus face to face. Love will last forever. In heaven nobody will need the gift of teaching, because we'll know Him fully. Nobody will need the gift of mercy, because there won't be any more tears. But love will still be there.

When exactly do the partial gifts end? That's the question we take up in the next chapter, because good Bible teachers read verses 8-12 differently. But don't miss what all of them agree on: love is greater, and love lasts. Paul ends the chapter this way:

> *But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these **is** love.*
> (1 Corinthians 13:13)

And he opens the next chapter with this: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts" (14:1). Not one or the other. Love first, and gifts in love.

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture a mid-sized church on an ordinary Sunday. There's a seventy-year-old man who comes in an hour early every week to unlock doors and turn up the heat. Nobody thinks of him as gifted. There's a young mom who notices when someone new walks in alone and goes straight over to sit with them. There's a teenager running the slides who has learned to fix every problem the old projector throws at him. There's a gifted Bible teacher who could fill a bigger room but chose this little one.

In a church that understands the body, every one of those people knows they matter. The teacher thanks the man who turned up the heat, because nobody learns much when they're freezing. The mom isn't

jealous of the teacher, because she knows her gift reaches people his doesn't. And when one of them gets sick, the rest show up with meals. That's 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 in real life.

## Watch Out For

- **Spectator Christianity.** If you only come to receive and never to give, you're a foot that has decided it doesn't belong.
- **Celebrity Christianity.** When a church builds everything around one gifted person, the body gets weak and the person gets proud.
- **Gifts without love.** Talent can draw a crowd. Only love builds a church.

## Study Questions

1. Why do you think Paul uses the picture of a body every time he teaches about gifts?
2. Which lie do you struggle with more: "I don't belong" or "I don't need you"? Why?
3. Read Ephesians 4:11-12. Who does the work of ministry, according to Paul? How should that change the way you see your pastor's job, and yours?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and think about your own church. Which of these qualities would most change how people use their gifts?
5. What does it mean that gifts are "for now" and love is "forever"?
6. Who is someone in your church whose quiet gift you've never thanked them for? What will you do about that this week?

# Chapter 5: Do All the Gifts Continue Today?

*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast the good.*
1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 (SLB)

If you've been a Christian for very long, you've run into this question. Maybe you grew up in a church where speaking in tongues was normal and expected. Maybe you grew up in one where it was never mentioned except as a warning. Maybe you've changed churches and found yourself confused, because both churches loved Jesus and believed the Bible, and they couldn't have been further apart on this.

I want to walk through this question slowly and fairly. I'm going to lay out the three main views, with the best Bible reasons each one gives, and I'm not going to pick a winner. I've taken the same approach in my studies on Acts, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. Faithful believers hold each of these views. None of them is a matter of salvation. And at the end of this chapter I'll show you the tests that all three views agree on, which matter a lot more than the labels.

## Which Gifts Are We Talking About?

Nobody argues about whether the gift of teaching or the gift of giving continues today. The question is about the gifts that are often called sign gifts or miraculous gifts: tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, gifts of healings, and workings of miracles. Some would also add the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, and the question of whether there are apostles today.

They're called sign gifts because the New Testament often calls miracles "signs." A sign points to something beyond itself, the way a road sign points to a town. The signs Jesus and the apostles did pointed to who Jesus is and showed that their message came from God.

**σημεῖον** (*semeion*)
**Say it:** say-MY-on
**Strong's number:** G4592
**Used in the New Testament:** 77 times, in 69 verses
**Plain meaning:** a sign; a mark or miracle that points to something beyond itself

## View One: The Sign Gifts Ended With the Apostles

This view is often called **cessationism**, from the word cease. It teaches that the sign gifts were given to confirm the message of the apostles while the New Testament was being written and the church was being founded. Once that work was done, those gifts stopped. God still works, still answers prayer, and still heals when He chooses, but He no longer gives individuals the gift of doing miracles or of speaking new revelation.

Here are the main reasons given for it.

- **The signs confirmed the apostles' message.** Hebrews looks back on the first generation and says the gospel was "confirmed to us by those who heard, God bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His will" (Hebrews 2:3-4). Notice the past tense. The signs bore witness to the message of those who heard Jesus.
- **The miracles were "signs of the apostle."** Paul defended his apostleship by pointing to them: "the signs of the apostle were performed among you" (2 Corinthians 12:12). If miracles were common to every believer, that would prove nothing.
- **The foundation is laid once.** The church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). You only lay a foundation once. When the foundation was complete, the foundational gifts were no longer needed.
- **The faith was delivered once for all.** Jude says the faith was "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). With the New Testament complete, there is no more new revelation to give.
- **Even in the New Testament, the miracles faded.** Late in his life Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20), told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23), and nearly lost Epaphroditus to illness (Philippians 2:27). The man whose handkerchiefs once healed people (Acts 19:11-12) didn't heal his own coworkers.
- **History.** Writers in the fourth and fifth centuries, such as John Chrysostom, said the gifts the Corinthians had were no longer happening in their day.

## View Two: All the Gifts Continue

This view is called **continuationism**. It teaches that all the gifts the New Testament describes are still given today, and will be until Jesus returns. Pentecostal and charismatic churches hold this view, and so do many others who aren't part of those movements.

Here are the main reasons given for it.

- **The Bible never says they would stop.** No verse says tongues or healings would end when the last apostle died. The burden of proof, this view says, is on the people who claim they stopped.
- **Paul says they last until "the perfect comes."** In 1 Corinthians 13:10, the partial gifts end "when the perfect comes." Verse 12 says that then we will see "face to face" and know fully. That sounds like the return of Christ, not the completion of the Bible.
- **The gifts were for the whole church age.** Paul told the Corinthians they were "not lacking in any gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). The gifts are tied to the waiting time before Christ returns, which we are still in.
- **Pentecost was the start of "the last days."** Peter said Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled in "the last days" (Acts 2:17), and that the promise is "to you and to your children and to all those far off" (Acts 2:39). We're still in the last days.
- **Paul's commands still stand.** "Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:39). "Do not despise prophecies" (1 Thessalonians 5:20). These are commands to the church, not just to Corinth.
- **History.** Writers in the second century, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, said prophetic gifts and healings were still seen among Christians in their day. Missionaries today report miracles, especially where the gospel is reaching people for the first time.

## View Three: Open but Cautious

Many believers stand between those two. This view doesn't have a good one-word name. Some call it "open but cautious." It says that God has not changed and can do anything He pleases, including healing, miracles, and giving unusual gifts. But it also believes the apostles held a unique place that no one holds today, that Scripture is complete, and that much of what gets called prophecy or tongues today should be tested very carefully.

People who hold this view usually pray boldly for healing and expect God to answer, but they're slow to say any one person has "the gift of healing." They don't forbid tongues, but they insist on Paul's rules for order in 1 Corinthians 14. They believe God can speak to and guide His people, but they never treat that guidance as equal to the Bible.

Here are the main reasons given for it.

- It takes seriously both the continuing commands (1 Corinthians 14:39) and the unique, foundational role of the apostles (Ephesians 2:20).
- It notices that even in Acts, the miracles were clustered around the apostles and the first spread of the gospel, but it doesn't find a verse that shuts them off.
- It wants to obey "do not quench the Spirit" and "test all things" in the same breath, the way Paul wrote them (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

## What About "the Perfect"?

A lot of this debate turns on one verse.

> *For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, then that which **is** in part will be done away.* (1 Corinthians 13:9-10)

The word for perfect is *teleios*. It means complete, mature, having reached its goal.

**τέλειος** (*teleios*)
**Say it:** TEL-ay-oss
**Strong's number:** G5046
**Used in the New Testament:** 19 times, in 17 verses
**Plain meaning:** complete, mature, finished, having reached its goal

Bible teachers give three main answers to what "the perfect" is, as I laid out in my 1 Corinthians study:

1. **The return of Christ and the eternal state.** Verse 12 says "then face to face" and "then I will fully know, even as I also have been fully known." Many believe only seeing Jesus can match that description. On this reading, the gifts continue until He comes.
2. **The completed New Testament.** Others point out that *teleios* is neuter, "the perfect thing," and that it is set against things that are "in part," which are pieces of revelation (prophecy and knowledge). When the whole revelation came, the partial pieces were done. They read "face to face" as a picture of clearer understanding.

3. **The maturity of the church.** Still others notice the next verse is about a child growing into a man (13:11). They link "the perfect" to the church growing up past its infancy, which some connect to the end of the apostolic age.

Each view has thoughtful supporters. I'll say this much. All three agree that the gifts are temporary and love is eternal, which is Paul's main point. And all three agree that our best day of knowing God is still ahead, when we see Jesus face to face.

## What the Early Church Said

People on every side of this question point to church history, so it's worth looking at what the early Christians actually wrote. I've kept this to writings that are old enough to be in the public domain and that you can look up yourself.

- **The Didache** (also called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*), a church manual probably written around A.D. 100, gives rules for traveling prophets. Its key test is simple: "not every one that speaketh in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord. So from their ways shall the false prophet and the prophet be known." It also says a traveling apostle who stays three days, or asks for money, is a false prophet, and that no one should listen to a prophet who asks for money for himself (Didache 11). So prophets were still around, and the church was already testing them by their character.
- **Justin Martyr**, writing around A.D. 155-160, told a Jewish man named Trypho that prophetic gifts were still found among Christians in his day, and he took that as a sign that God's favor had passed to the church (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 82).
- **Irenaeus**, a bishop in what is now France around A.D. 180, wrote that some believers in his day cast out demons, saw visions, prophesied, and healed the sick (*Against Heresies* 2.32.4), and that he heard many in the church who had prophetic gifts and spoke in all kinds of languages through the Spirit (5.6.1).
- **John Chrysostom**, preaching on 1 Corinthians around A.D. 390, said the passage on gifts was hard to understand because the things Paul described used to happen and no longer did (*Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, Homily 29).
- **Augustine**, writing *The City of God* in the early 400s, said miracles had been needed before the world believed, so that it might believe. But in the same chapter he wrote, "even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ," and then listed healings he had seen or carefully checked in his own city (*The City of God* 22.8, Dods translation).

So history doesn't settle it. The early writers testify to gifts continuing into the second century. Later writers say the most dramatic gifts had faded, and even then some of them still record miracles. Every view can find something in history to point to. That's one more reason to settle the question from Scripture, and to hold our conclusions humbly.

## What Every View Agrees On

Here's the part I most want you to take away. Whatever you believe about the sign gifts, the Bible gives tests that every faithful Christian accepts. If every church used these, most of the abuses people worry about would disappear, and most of the fear would too.

1. **It honors Jesus as Lord.** "No one is able to say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Spirit always glorifies Jesus (John 16:14). Anything that makes a celebrity of a person or a show of a gift fails this test.

2. **It agrees with Scripture and never adds to it.** The faith was delivered once for all (Jude 3). No prophecy, vision, or word today carries the authority of the Bible. If it contradicts the Bible, it's wrong. If it claims equal authority with the Bible, it's wrong even if it agrees with it.
3. **It builds up the church.** "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26). A gift is for the common good (12:7).
4. **It's done in love.** Without love, even real gifts are noise (13:1).
5. **It's done in order.** "Let all things be done properly and in order" (14:40). God is not a God of confusion (14:33).
6. **It's tested.** "Test all things; hold fast the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). "Test the spirits" (1 John 4:1). Testing is not a lack of faith. It's obedience.
7. **The person's life backs it up.** "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). The Didache said the same thing a few decades later.
8. **It's never for sale.** Peter rebuked Simon for trying to buy the gift of God (Acts 8:20). Anyone who charges for a healing or sells a "word from the Lord" has failed the test before he opens his mouth.

## How This Book Handles It

In the chapters on the sign gifts, I'll do three things. I'll show you what the Greek word means and how it was used. I'll show you what the gift looked like in the apostles' day, from the text. Then, in the "What It Looks Like Today" section, I'll describe what a church that holds each view would expect to see, and how all of them can apply the tests above.

One more thing. In 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 Paul asks, "Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" In Greek, each question is worded to expect the answer no. I said that plainly in my 1 Corinthians study, and I'll say it again here when we get to tongues. That's not a vote for or against tongues today. It's simply what the verse says: whatever gifts God gives, He doesn't give the same one to everybody.

## Watch Out For

- **Contempt.** Calling the other side "dead" or "crazy" breaks 1 Corinthians 13 while arguing about 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.
- **Fear.** Some believers are so afraid of excess that they stop praying for the sick at all. James 5:14-15 is still in your Bible, whatever your view.
- **Gullibility.** Some believers accept every claim of a miracle or a prophecy without testing it. That's not faith. Paul commands testing.
- **Making it the main thing.** You can hold any of these three views and love Jesus, love His Word, and love His people. Keep the main thing the main thing.

## Study Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, which view were you closest to? Where did that view come from?
2. What is the strongest argument you read for a view that is not your own?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. What do all three readings of "the perfect" agree on?

4. Look at the list of tests every view agrees on. Which one do you think is most often skipped in churches today?

5. How can believers who disagree on this question still worship and serve together?

6. Whatever your view, does your life include praying for the sick (James 5:14-15)? Why or why not?

# Part Two: The Speaking Gifts

# Chapter 6: Prophecy

> *But the one who prophesies speaks to men edification and exhortation and consolation.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:3 (SLB)

Say the word "prophet" and most people picture an old man with a long beard predicting the future. That's part of it, but only part. In the Bible, a prophet is first of all someone who speaks for God. Sometimes that means telling what will happen. Much more often it means telling God's people what God wants them to hear right now. Prophecy and teaching are the only two gifts named in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, and Paul told the Corinthians to want it more than any other speaking gift. So it's worth taking slowly.

## The Word

**προφητεία** (*propheteia*)
**Say it:** prof-ay-TAY-ah
**Strong's number:** G4394
**Used in the New Testament:** 19 times
**Plain meaning:** prophecy; speaking a message from God

**προφητεύω** (*propheteuo*)
**Say it:** prof-ay-TEW-oh
**Strong's number:** G4395
**Used in the New Testament:** 28 times, in 27 verses
**Plain meaning:** to prophesy; to speak a message from God

**προφήτης** (*prophetes*)
**Say it:** prof-AY-tays
**Strong's number:** G4396
**Used in the New Testament:** 149 times, in 143 verses
**Plain meaning:** a prophet; one who speaks for God

The word comes from *pro* and *phemi*. *Phemi* means "to speak." *Pro* can mean "before" in time, which gives us foretelling, or "in front of" or "on behalf of," which gives us forthtelling: speaking out for someone else. Both meanings fit the Bible's prophets. They spoke for God, and sometimes what they spoke was about the future.

The noun *prophetes*, prophet, is one of the most common words in this book. It appears 149 times in the New Testament. Most of those point back to the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and

Daniel. But a good number refer to prophets in the church: Agabus, Judas and Silas, Philip's daughters, and the prophets in Antioch and Corinth.

## How the New Testament Uses It

The New Testament uses prophecy in a few different ways, and keeping them straight clears up a lot of confusion.

### *The Prophets of Scripture*

First, there are the prophets whose words became Scripture. Peter says their prophecy did not come from their own will.

> *knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from private interpretation; for prophecy was never borne by* ***the*** *will of man, but being borne by* ***the*** *Holy Spirit, holy men of God spoke.* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

"Borne by the Holy Spirit" is the picture of a ship carried along by the wind. Those prophets didn't make it up. God carried their words. Paul says the church is built on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20), and that the mystery of the gospel was "revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5). That kind of prophecy carried God's full authority, and the church was built on it. All three views in Chapter 5 agree that no one today speaks with that authority. The Bible is complete.

### *Prophecy in the Local Church*

Second, there is prophecy as a gift used in the local church meeting. This is what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 14. Here's how he defines it:

> *But the one who prophesies speaks to men edification and exhortation and consolation.* (1 Corinthians 14:3)

Three words describe what this kind of prophecy does.

- **Edification** (*oikodome*): building up, like building a house.
- **Exhortation** (*paraklesis*): urging forward, encouraging. This is the same word as the gift of exhortation in Romans 12:8, which we'll look at in Chapter 8.
- **Consolation** (*paramuthia*): comfort, the kind of word that puts an arm around someone who's hurting. This word appears only here in the New Testament.

Notice that "predict the future" is not on Paul's list. Prophecy in the church strengthened, urged, and comforted. It could also convict. When an unbeliever walks into a church where people are prophesying, Paul says "the secrets of his heart become manifest; and thus, having fallen on his face, he will worship God, declaring that God is truly among you" (1 Corinthians 14:25). God's word hit him where he lived.

### *Prophecy Must Be Weighed*

Third, and this is important, Paul says local church prophecy has to be tested.

> *And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern.* (1 Corinthians 14:29)

"Discern" is *diakrino*, to sort or judge carefully. The other believers were supposed to weigh what was said, keep what was from God, and set aside what wasn't. Paul says the same thing to the Thessalonians: "Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). In the Old Testament, a false prophet was put to death (Deuteronomy 18:20). In the church, prophecies were to be weighed. That tells us that Paul did not think local church prophecy carried the same authority as Scripture. Nobody was told to "weigh" Isaiah.

### *"According to the Proportion of the Faith"*

In Romans 12:6 Paul says prophecy should be "according to the proportion of the faith." The word is *analogia*, which gives us the English word analogy. It means in proportion, or in agreement with.

**ἀναλογία** (*analogia*)
**Say it:** ah-nah-lo-GEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G356
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** proportion; being in agreement or in line with something

It can mean that a person should prophesy only as far as God has given him faith to, and not go beyond it. Or, since the Greek has "the faith," it can mean that prophecy must agree with the faith, the body of truth God has revealed. Either way, it's a guardrail. Prophecy that goes beyond what God gave, or that pulls against what God has already said, is out of line.

## In the Apostles' Day

The book of Acts shows us prophecy in action, and it's not what a lot of people expect.

**Agabus and the famine.** Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them, Agabus, "signified through the Spirit that a great famine was going to be over all the inhabited earth; which also came about under Claudius Caesar" (Acts 11:28). The church didn't panic. They took up an offering and sent relief to the believers in Judea (11:29-30). Good prophecy led to practical love.

**Agabus and Paul's belt.** Years later, Agabus showed up again. He took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet, and said that the Jews in Jerusalem would bind the owner of that belt and hand him over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11). Paul's friends begged him not to go. Paul went anyway. He was ready to die for Jesus (21:13). And notice: the prophecy told Paul what would happen, but it didn't tell him what to do. Earlier the believers in Tyre had told Paul "through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem" (21:4), and Paul seems to have understood that the Spirit was warning him of the danger, not forbidding him to go, because elsewhere the Spirit testified that chains were waiting for him in every city (20:23). Bible teachers discuss how to fit those verses together. But it's a good lesson. Even in the apostles' day, a word given "through the Spirit" still had to be understood and weighed.

**Prophets who strengthened churches.** After the council in Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, "being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brothers with many words and strengthened them" (Acts 15:32). That's 1 Corinthians 14:3 in real life. Prophecy here looks a lot like strong, Spirit-filled encouragement.

**Prophets in the leadership team.** The church in Antioch had "prophets and teachers" (Acts 13:1), including Barnabas and Saul. While they were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work He had called them to. That was the start of the first missionary journey.

**Women who prophesied.** Anna was called a prophetess (Luke 2:36). Philip the evangelist "had four daughters, virgins, prophesying" (Acts 21:9). Paul expected women to pray and prophesy in the gatherings (1 Corinthians 11:5). That fulfilled Joel's promise: "your sons and your daughters will prophesy" (Joel 2:28).

## What It Looks Like Today

This is where the three views from Chapter 5 come in, so let me describe how each would see it. Then I'll show what they share.

**Those who believe the gift has ended** hold that the revelatory gift of prophecy, God giving new words to speak, ended with the apostles. They often point out that what remains is the prophetic task of declaring God's Word boldly: preaching that applies the Bible to people's lives so sharply that hearts are exposed and people fall on their faces before God. Many older writers, including the Puritans, called preaching "prophesying" in this sense. To them, the cure for a weak church isn't new revelation. It's the old revelation preached with fire.

**Those who believe the gift continues** hold that God still gives believers impressions, pictures, or words to share for the building up of others, just as in Corinth. They usually agree such words are not on the level of Scripture, can be mixed with human error, and must be weighed. A healthy church that holds this view will have a pattern like Paul's: two or three speak, others weigh it, everything is tested by the Bible, and nobody's personal "word" is allowed to overrule the elders or the Scriptures.

**Those who are open but cautious** expect God to guide His people and sometimes to put a timely word on someone's heart for another believer. They are slow to call it "prophecy" and quick to test it.

Here's an example that all three views could recognize as God at work. Picture Diane, a retired nurse who has taught a women's Bible study for fifteen years. One night, a younger woman in the group shares a prayer request about her job, and Diane feels pressed in her spirit to ask her a different question: "How are things at home?" The young woman bursts into tears. Her marriage is in trouble, and she hadn't told anyone. Diane opens her Bible to a passage on God's faithfulness and reads it to her. The young woman is comforted, and the group prays.

One person would call that a word of prophecy. Another would call it wisdom and spiritual sensitivity that the Spirit gave a mature believer. Another would call it the Spirit helping Diane apply Scripture. What they would all agree on is that it built up, urged forward, and comforted, and that it pointed the young woman to God's Word, not away from it.

## Watch Out For

- **"God told me" as a trump card.** When someone says "God told me" to win an argument, end discussion, or control others, something's wrong. Paul said the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Corinthians 14:32). A real word can be weighed.
- **Predictions that fail.** Deuteronomy 18:22 is still a good test. If someone keeps claiming God showed them the future, and it keeps not happening, stop listening.
- **Words that add to Scripture.** No word today gives new doctrine. If it does, reject it.
- **Prophecy for money.** The Didache said a prophet who asks money for himself is false. That rule still works.
- **Despising it.** The other danger is to be so afraid of false prophecy that we "despise prophecies" (1 Thessalonians 5:20) and shut down every Spirit-given word of encouragement. Test it. Don't sneer at it.
- **False prophets.** Jesus said they come "in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). Look at the fruit, not just the words.

## If This Is Your Gift

If you find that God often uses you to speak a timely word that strengthens, urges, or comforts people, and that word lines up with Scripture, here's how to steward it.

- Soak in the Bible. The more God's written Word fills you, the more anything you say will line up with it.
- Speak humbly. "I think the Lord may be putting this on my heart" is more honest than "Thus says the Lord," and it invites others to weigh it.
- Submit to your elders. A gift that won't be accountable is a danger to the church.
- Aim at Paul's three goals: building up, urging forward, comforting. If what you're about to say does none of those, keep it to yourself.
- Love first. "If I have prophecy... but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

## Study Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, what did the word "prophecy" mean to you?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 14:3. How is prophecy in the church different from what most people picture?
3. Why do you think Paul told the church to weigh prophecy (14:29)? What does that tell you about its authority compared with Scripture?
4. What can we learn from how Paul handled Agabus's prophecy in Acts 21?
5. Whatever your view on the gift today, how can your church practice 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21?
6. Has God ever used someone to speak a timely word into your life? Did it line up with Scripture?

# Chapter 7: Teaching

> *and the things which you heard from me through many witnesses, commit these to faithful men, who will be sufficient to teach others also.*
>
> 2 Timothy 2:2 (SLB)

Most of us can name a teacher who changed our lives. Maybe it was a shop teacher who saw something in you nobody else did, or a Sunday school teacher who made the Bible come alive for the first time. Good teachers don't just pass along facts. They open a door, and you walk through it into a bigger world. The spiritual gift of teaching does that with the truth of God.

## The Word

**διδάσκω** (*didasko*)
**Say it:** dih-DAS-ko
**Strong's number:** G1321
**Used in the New Testament:** 97 times, in 91 verses
**Plain meaning:** to teach; to give instruction

**διδάσκαλος** (*didaskalos*)
**Say it:** dih-DAS-kah-loss
**Strong's number:** G1320
**Used in the New Testament:** 58 times, in 57 verses
**Plain meaning:** a teacher

**διδασκαλία** (*didaskalia*)
**Say it:** dih-das-kah-LEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G1319
**Used in the New Testament:** 21 times
**Plain meaning:** teaching; both the act of teaching and what is taught (doctrine)

These three words come from one family. The verb *didasko* (to teach) appears 97 times in the New Testament. The person who teaches is a *didaskalos*, used 58 times. What he teaches is *didaskalia*, used 21 times. Older Bibles often translate *didaskalia* as "doctrine," which is just an old word for teaching.

Teaching shows up in three of the gift passages: "the one who teaches, in the teaching" (Romans 12:7), "third teachers" (1 Corinthians 12:28), and "shepherds and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Only prophecy is named as often.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Jesus the Teacher.** One of the most common titles people used for Jesus in the Gospels was *didaskalos*, Teacher. When Nicodemus came at night, he said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher" (John 3:2). And when Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, "the crowds were astonished at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29). The scribes quoted other rabbis. Jesus spoke as the One who wrote the book.

**Teaching is commanded.** The Great Commission isn't only "go and baptize." It ends with "teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Notice: not just teaching them all things, but teaching them to *observe* them. Biblical teaching aims at obedience, not just information.

**Teaching is tied to sound doctrine.** The word *didaskalia* shows up 15 times in Paul's three short letters to Timothy and Titus. Over and over Paul talks about "sound teaching," and the word for sound is *hugiaino*, where we get hygiene. Healthy teaching. Teaching that makes people spiritually well. Paul warned that "there will be a time when they will not endure sound teaching, but according to their own desires they will heap up teachers for themselves, being tickled in the hearing" (2 Timothy 4:3). That time is not hard to recognize.

**Teaching carries a warning.** James wrote one of the most sobering verses in the Bible for anybody who stands up in front of a class.

> *Let not many **of you** become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive greater judgment.* (James 3:1)

A teacher shapes what other people believe about God. That's a heavy responsibility, and God will hold teachers to it.

**Teaching is passed down.** Paul gave Timothy a plan for teaching that would outlast them both.

> *and the things which you heard from me through many witnesses, commit these to faithful men, who will be sufficient to teach others also.* (2 Timothy 2:2)

Count the generations in that verse: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others. Four generations of teachers in one sentence. That's how the gospel has come down to us for two thousand years.

## How Teaching Differs From the Other Speaking Gifts

Teaching sits close to prophecy and exhortation, so it helps to see how they differ. In simple terms:

- **Teaching** explains what God has said. It answers the question, "What does this mean?"
- **Exhortation** urges people to act on it. It answers, "What do I do now?"
- **Prophecy** (as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 14) brings a timely word for a particular moment. It answers, "What is God saying to us here, today?"

In real life they blend. A good sermon has all three. But a person with the gift of teaching will usually light up at the "what does it mean" part. He's the one who can't help asking what the Greek word is, or who reads three commentaries before teaching a fifteen-minute devotion.

## In the Apostles' Day

The first church was a teaching church. On the day it was born, three thousand people were saved, and the first thing Luke tells us they did was this: "they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles" (Acts 2:42). Teaching came first, before fellowship, before the breaking of bread, before prayers. Within weeks, the apostles were "in the temple and from house to house" teaching every day (Acts 5:42).

Paul was a teacher. He spent a year and a half in Corinth "teaching among them the word of God" (Acts 18:11) and two years in a lecture hall in Ephesus (Acts 19:9-10). When he said goodbye to the Ephesian elders, he reminded them that he had taught them "publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). Teaching wasn't only a Sunday event. It happened at kitchen tables.

One of my favorite stories about teaching in the New Testament involves Apollos.

> *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, being mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And having heard him, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.* (Acts 18:24-26)

Apollos was gifted. He was eloquent, fervent, and mighty in the Scriptures. But he had a gap. He knew only John's baptism. Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who made tents for a living, heard him and saw the gap. They didn't correct him publicly. They didn't post about him. They "took him aside" (the word suggests they took him home) and explained the way of God more accurately. Apollos humbly received it and went on to be a great help to the church (Acts 18:27-28).

Look at what that story teaches. A gifted teacher still needs teaching. Teaching often happens in private, around a table. And a tentmaking couple, including a wife, were used by God to sharpen one of the great preachers of the early church.

Paul also told older women to be "teachers of good," training the younger women (Titus 2:3-4). And he told the whole church at Colossae to be "teaching and admonishing yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16). Every believer teaches someone. Some have a special gift for it.

## What It Looks Like Today

This is one of the gifts nobody argues about. It's clearly still given, and the church still desperately needs it.

The gift of teaching shows up in the pulpit, but it shows up in a lot of other places too. Picture Mike, a machinist who's never been to seminary. He teaches a Wednesday night class for eight men. He doesn't use big words. But when he explains a passage, things click. Men who've sat in church for twenty years say, "I never saw that before." He's careful. He checks what he teaches. When a younger man asks him a question he can't answer, Mike says, "I don't know, let me dig into that," and comes back the next week with an answer. That's the gift of teaching.

It shows up in a children's Sunday school teacher who can explain the cross to a seven-year-old in a way that sticks for life. It shows up in a mom teaching her kids at the breakfast table (Deuteronomy 6:7). It shows up in a woman leading a Bible study for women who are hungry to understand Romans. It shows up in a missionary translating the Bible into a language that's never had one.

And the warnings still apply. Today a teacher can reach millions with a phone and a microphone. Anybody can start a podcast. James 3:1 has never been more needed.

## Watch Out For

- **Teaching for itch-scratching.** When a teacher tells people only what they want to hear, he's become one of the teachers 2 Timothy 4:3 warns about.
- **Information without transformation.** The goal is "to observe all things" (Matthew 28:20). Teaching that fills heads but never changes lives has missed the target.
- **Pride of knowledge.** "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). The more you know, the easier it is to look down on people who know less.
- **Teaching beyond your depth.** It's fine to say, "I don't know." It's not fine to make something up.
- **Neglecting your own life.** "Give heed to yourself and to the teaching" (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul put yourself first. A teacher's life is part of the lesson.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Study before you teach. Ezra "had set his heart to seek the law of the LORD and to do it, and to teach" (Ezra 7:10). Seek, do, then teach, in that order.
- Make it clear. When Ezra's helpers read the law to the people, they were "making it clear and giving the sense, and they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). Clear is better than clever.
- Find your Timothy. Who are you passing it on to (2 Timothy 2:2)?
- Stay teachable. Be like Apollos, ready to learn from a tentmaker.
- Point to Jesus. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus "was explaining to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Every lesson should lead there.

## Study Questions

1. Who is a teacher who changed your life? What did they do that made the difference?
2. Read Matthew 28:20. Why does Jesus say "teaching them to observe" instead of just "teaching them"?
3. What's the difference between teaching, exhortation, and prophecy?
4. What do you learn from how Priscilla and Aquila handled Apollos (Acts 18:24-26)?
5. Why do you think James says teachers will receive greater judgment?
6. Who is someone you could teach, even informally, this year?

# Chapter 8: Exhortation

> *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "Today," so that no one of you may be hardened by **the** deceitfulness of sin.*
>
> Hebrews 3:13 (SLB)

Some people walk into a room and everybody stands up a little straighter. Not because they're bossy, but because they believe in you, and somehow when they talk to you, you start believing God can do something with you after all. They're the ones who call when you're about to quit. They're also the ones who will look you in the eye and tell you to stop doing something foolish. That's the gift of exhortation, and it's one of the most needed gifts in any church.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter took time with a neighbor kid who mowed his lawn and brought me to church. Years later, when I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me, another pastor listened to me and did not turn me away. Both men pointed me back to Christ instead of giving up on me. That is encouragement in the local church: standing next to someone until they can stand again.

## The Word

**παρακαλέω** (*parakaleo*)
**Say it:** par-ah-kah-LEH-oh
**Strong's number:** G3870
**Used in the New Testament:** 108 times, in 104 verses
**Plain meaning:** to call alongside; to urge, encourage, comfort, plead

**παράκλησις** (*paraklesis*)
**Say it:** par-AH-klay-sis
**Strong's number:** G3874
**Used in the New Testament:** 29 times, in 28 verses
**Plain meaning:** encouragement, exhortation, comfort; a calling alongside

You've seen this word family before. It's the same root as *parakletos*, the Helper Jesus promised (Chapter 1). *Para* means beside, and *kaleo* means to call. To exhort is to call someone to your side, or to come alongside them, and speak into their life.

The verb *parakaleo* is used 108 times in the New Testament, and English translations need a whole handful of words to cover it: exhort, encourage, urge, comfort, beg, plead, appeal. That's because the word covers the whole range of coming alongside someone. Sometimes you come alongside to comfort a person who's crushed. Sometimes you come alongside to push a person who's stalled. Sometimes you come alongside to plead with a person who's heading the wrong way. It's the same word every time.

In Romans 12:8 Paul writes, “the one who exhorts, in the exhortation.” In other words, if this is your gift, give yourself to it.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Comfort in suffering.** Paul packs this word family into the opening of 2 Corinthians like nowhere else in the Bible.

> *Blessed **be** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those in every affliction through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Every “comfort” in those two verses is from *parakaleo* or *paraklesis*. Notice the flow: God comforts us so that we can comfort others with the same comfort. A person who has walked through a hard season often comes out the other side with a gift of exhortation for people walking through the same thing. Your scars become someone else’s road map.

**Daily urging against sin.** Hebrews tells us to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that no one of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Sin is deceitful. It hardens slowly, like concrete. One of God’s tools against it is a brother or sister who loves you enough to say something today, not someday.

**Encouraging in the gathering.** The writer of Hebrews also tied exhortation to church attendance: “not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as is the custom of some, but encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25). Part of why we go to church is to be encouraged and to encourage. You can’t do that from your couch.

**Different people need different things.** Paul gave a short lesson in exhortation in one verse: “admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient toward all” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). A person with this gift learns to tell which one a person needs. Kicking a fainthearted man makes things worse. Patting a lazy man on the back makes things worse too.

**Exhortation and Scripture.** Paul said the Scriptures themselves give us “encouragement” (*paraklesis*) so that we may have hope (Romans 15:4). Real exhortation isn’t just a pep talk. It points people back to God’s promises.

## In the Apostles’ Day

The New Testament gives us a portrait of this gift in one man. His real name was Joses, but nobody called him that.

> *And Joses, who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being translated, Son of Encouragement), a Levite, a Cypriot by birth, having a field, sold **it** and brought the money and laid **it** at the feet of the apostles.* (Acts 4:36-37)

The apostles nicknamed him Barnabas, "Son of Encouragement." The word is *paraklesis*. In Hebrew idiom, being the "son of" something meant that thing was your whole character. Barnabas was so full of encouragement that it became his name. Follow him through Acts and you'll see the gift in action.

**He encouraged with his money.** The first time we meet him, he's selling a field and giving the money to meet needs (Acts 4:37). Encouragers often put their wallet where their mouth is.

**He stood up for an outsider.** After Saul of Tarsus was converted, he went to Jerusalem, and "all were afraid of him, not believing that he is a disciple." Who wouldn't be? This was the man who had dragged believers off to prison. "But Barnabas, having taken hold of him, brought him to the apostles" (Acts 9:26-27). Without Barnabas, the church might have kept Paul at arm's length for years. Encouragers see what God is doing in someone before anyone else does, and they put their own reputation on the line for it.

**He saw grace and said so.** When the gospel broke through among Gentiles in Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to check it out. When he arrived and "having seen the grace of God, rejoiced, and was exhorting all with purpose of heart to remain with the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large crowd was added to the Lord" (Acts 11:23-24). He didn't come looking for problems. He came looking for grace, found it, celebrated it, and urged the new believers to stick with Jesus.

**He gave a failure a second chance.** John Mark had quit the first missionary journey and gone home (Acts 13:13). When it was time for a second trip, Barnabas wanted to take him again. Paul said no. The argument got so sharp that they split up (Acts 15:36-39). Barnabas took Mark. Who was right? Maybe both of them, in a way. But years later, Paul wrote from prison, "Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). That restored young man went on to write the Gospel of Mark, according to the early church. A Son of Encouragement saw something in him worth fighting for.

Paul had the gift too. Over and over Acts says he went through the churches "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). And Judas and Silas "exhorted the brothers with many words and strengthened them" (Acts 15:32). Encouragement was the fuel that kept the early church going under persecution.

## What It Looks Like Today

This is another gift nobody argues about, and it is sorely needed. A lot of people sit in church every Sunday carrying something heavy, and nobody knows.

Picture Ray. He's a sixty-year-old retired trucker who doesn't teach and doesn't lead anything. But Ray knows everybody's name, and he notices things. He notices when a young husband looks worn out, and he takes him to breakfast. He notices when a teenager hasn't been around for three weeks, and he sends him a text: "Missed you, buddy. Praying for you." He's also the guy who, over coffee, will quietly tell a younger man, "I'm worried about where you're heading with that. Can I tell you what I see?" And because Ray has encouraged him a hundred times, the young man listens.

That's the gift. It works one-on-one more than from a stage. It shows up in cards, texts, phone calls, hospital visits, and long talks in parking lots. It shows up in a preacher whose sermons always leave you

with something to do and the hope that you can do it. It shows up in a counselor, a coach, a recovery sponsor, or a grandmother who never lets you leave without praying for you.

## Watch Out For

- **Flattery.** Real encouragement is honest. Telling people only what makes them feel good isn't exhortation. It's flattery, and the Bible doesn't think much of flattery.
- **Harshness.** The opposite error is all push and no comfort. The word includes both. If people dread hearing from you, check your balance.
- **Advice without Scripture.** Your opinion isn't enough. Point people to God's promises and God's commands.
- **Talking without doing.** Barnabas sold a field and walked Paul into a room full of scared apostles. Encouragement costs something.
- **Gossip dressed up as concern.** "I just want to share this so we can pray for him" is sometimes the oldest trick in the book. Go to the person, not around him.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Pay attention. Exhortation starts with noticing. Ask God to show you who needs a word this week.
- Act quickly. "Every day, as long as it is called 'Today'" (Hebrews 3:13). Don't wait for the perfect moment.
- Learn to read people. Is this person fainthearted or disorderly? Weak or lazy? Ask questions before you speak.
- Use your own story. "The comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" is the comfort you have to give (2 Corinthians 1:4).
- Find a Saul or a Mark. Look for the person others have written off, and go stand next to him.

## Study Questions

1. Who has been a Barnabas in your life? What did they do?
2. The word *parakaleo* can mean comfort, urge, or plead. Which one do you most need to hear right now? Which one do you find hardest to give?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. How has a hard season in your life prepared you to encourage someone else?
4. What do you learn from the way Barnabas treated Saul and Mark?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Why is it important to know which kind of encouragement a person needs?
6. Who could you encourage this week, and how?

# Chapter 9: The Word of Wisdom

> *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and of good fruits, impartial, and without hypocrisy.*
>
> James 3:17 (SLB)

We live in an age that's drowning in information and starving for wisdom. You can look up nearly any fact in two seconds on your phone. But knowing what to do with those facts, how to apply them to a real person, a real problem, and a real decision, is something no search engine can give you. That's wisdom. And the first gift Paul names in 1 Corinthians 12 is "a word of wisdom."

## The Word

**σοφία** (*sophia*)
**Say it:** soh-FEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G4678
**Used in the New Testament:** 51 times, in 49 verses
**Plain meaning:** wisdom; skill in living, insight into how to act rightly

**λόγος** (*logos*)
**Say it:** LOG-oss
**Strong's number:** G3056
**Used in the New Testament:** 330 times, in 316 verses
**Plain meaning:** a word, a message, a saying

Paul's phrase is *logos sophias*, a word of wisdom. *Sophia* appears 51 times in the New Testament. In the Greek world it could mean cleverness or philosophy (that's where we get "philosophy," the love of *sophia*). But in the Bible, wisdom grows out of the Old Testament idea of skill in living. The Hebrew word *chokmah* was used for the skill of a craftsman (Exodus 31:3) and for the skill of living rightly before God. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD" (Proverbs 9:10).

Notice that Paul doesn't call the gift "wisdom." He calls it "a word of wisdom." Every believer is supposed to grow in wisdom, and James tells all of us to ask God for it (James 1:5). The gift seems to be a word, a spoken message, that brings God's wisdom to bear on a particular situation, for the good of others.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**God's wisdom and the world's wisdom.** Paul spends the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians contrasting two kinds of wisdom. The Corinthians loved clever speakers and impressive arguments. Paul says the cross looks like foolishness to the world, but Christ crucified is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Then he says this:

> *But we speak wisdom among the mature, but wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nothing. But we speak **the** wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden **wisdom**, which God predestined before the ages for our glory* (1 Corinthians 2:6-7)

So the "word of wisdom" in chapter 12 is not clever human reasoning. It's God's wisdom, centered on Christ and His cross, applied by the Spirit.

**What God's wisdom looks like.** James gives us a description that works like a test.

> *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and of good fruits, impartial, and without hypocrisy.* (James 3:17)

Pure. Peaceable. Gentle. Reasonable. Full of mercy. That's how you can tell God's wisdom from the clever kind. Human cleverness often wins arguments and leaves bodies on the floor. God's wisdom makes peace.

**Wisdom promised for hard moments.** Jesus promised His followers, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all those opposing you will not be able to contradict nor resist" (Luke 21:15). He said it in the context of being dragged before courts and kings. Sometimes the word of wisdom comes exactly when it's needed, and not a minute before.

## In the Apostles' Day

**Stephen.** When the apostles needed men to oversee the daily food for widows, one requirement was that they be "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Stephen was one of them. When opponents argued with him, "they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was speaking" (Acts 6:10). That's Luke 21:15 fulfilled.

**James at the council.** One of the clearest pictures of a word of wisdom in the New Testament is the meeting in Acts 15. The church faced its first big split: did Gentile believers have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? There was "much debate" (15:7). Peter told what God had done with Cornelius. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done among the Gentiles. Then James stood up, tied it all to Scripture (Amos 9:11-12), and gave a judgment that kept the gospel pure and kept the church together: don't burden the Gentiles with the law, but ask them to avoid a few things that would deeply offend their Jewish brothers (Acts 15:19-20). The letter that went out said, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (15:28). That's a word of wisdom: God's truth applied to a real problem in a way that brought peace.

**Paul in a storm.** On the voyage to Rome, Paul warned the crew not to sail from Crete. They ignored him. In the middle of the storm, after an angel told him every life would be spared, Paul stood up and gave them practical, steadying counsel: take courage, eat something, stay with the ship (Acts 27:21-36). He was the only calm man on board, and 276 people walked out of the sea alive.

**Jesus.** The perfect example is our Lord. When His enemies tried to trap Him with the question about paying taxes to Caesar, He asked for a coin and said, "Therefore give back the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God" (Matthew 22:21). One sentence, and the trap fell apart. "In whom all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge are hidden" (Colossians 2:3).

## What It Looks Like Today

Bible teachers describe this gift in two main ways, and they line up somewhat with the views in Chapter 5.

Some see the word of wisdom as a mostly supernatural gift: the Spirit giving a believer a sudden insight into what to do in a situation, beyond what that person could have figured out. Others see it as a Spirit-given ability to apply the Bible's wisdom to real situations with unusual skill, growing over time through study and experience. Many believe it can be both. Everybody agrees the result looks the same: a word that cuts through confusion and points people toward God's way.

Picture a church board meeting that's gone sideways. Two good men have dug in on opposite sides of a building decision, and things are getting heated. Then Frank, a quiet older elder who hasn't said much, speaks up. "Brothers, can I ask what we'd do if we weren't worried about who wins? What does the Lord want for these families?" He opens to Philippians 2 and reads about counting others more important than yourselves. Then he lays out a simple plan that neither side had thought of. The room gets quiet. Both men end up agreeing. Later, one of them says, "I don't know where that came from." Frank would tell you it came from the Lord.

That's what the gift often looks like. It shows up in a counselor who knows which question to ask. It shows up in a mother who knows exactly what to say to a teenager who's about to make a terrible choice. It shows up in a pastor who can untangle a church conflict without anyone losing face. It isn't flashy. It's usually calm, simple, and right.

## Watch Out For

- **Clever instead of wise.** If your "wisdom" mostly makes you look smart, it's the Corinthian kind.
- **Wisdom that isn't peaceable.** James 3:17 says God's wisdom is peaceable and gentle. If a word leaves people bitter and divided, check where it came from (James 3:14-16).
- **Advice that contradicts Scripture.** God's wisdom never tells you to do what His Word forbids.
- **Speaking too fast.** Wisdom often listens much longer than it talks.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Pray for it. James 1:5 is a promise. Ask, and keep asking.
- Soak in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, James, and the words of Jesus. Wisdom is built on that kind of foundation.
- Listen well before you speak. Ask questions. Wisdom fits the answer to the real problem.
- Stay humble. "Do not be wise in your own eyes" (Proverbs 3:7).
- Make peace your goal. The best words of wisdom leave people closer to God and closer to each other.

## Study Questions

1. What's the difference between information, knowledge, and wisdom?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 and 2:6-7. How is God's wisdom different from the world's?
3. Read James 3:13-18. How can you tell God's wisdom from the other kind?
4. What do you learn about the word of wisdom from James's role at the council in Acts 15?

5. Has someone ever spoken a word of wisdom into your life at just the right time? What happened?

6. Read James 1:5. In what situation do you need to ask God for wisdom right now?

# Chapter 10: The Word of Knowledge

> *in whom all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge are hidden.*
>
> Colossians 2:3 (SLB)

The word of knowledge sits right next to the word of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 12:8, and the two are often mentioned together. Of all the gifts in Paul's lists, this one has some of the widest differences in how Bible teachers understand it. Paul doesn't define it, and the New Testament never uses the exact phrase again. So we'll need to be careful here and let the words and examples guide us.

## The Word

**γνῶσις** (*gnosis*)
**Say it:** GNO-sis
**Strong's number:** G1108
**Used in the New Testament:** 29 times, in 28 verses
**Plain meaning:** knowledge; knowing, understanding

Paul's phrase is *logos gnoseos*, a word of knowledge. *Gnosis* appears 29 times in the New Testament, and Paul uses it more than anyone else. It's where we get words like diagnosis (knowing what's wrong) and agnostic (not knowing). In the second century, a group of false teachers called themselves Gnostics. They claimed to have a secret, higher knowledge that ordinary Christians didn't have. The New Testament had already pushed back against that kind of thinking. Paul warned Timothy about the "contradictions of the falsely called knowledge" (1 Timothy 6:20). The Greek word there is *gnosis*.

If wisdom is knowing what to do, knowledge is knowing what is true. One way to put it: knowledge sees, and wisdom applies.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**The knowledge of God.** The highest knowledge in the Bible is knowing God Himself in Jesus Christ. Paul said, "I also consider all things to be loss because of the surpassing worth of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). Peter ended his last letter with "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). This knowledge isn't just facts about God. It's a relationship.

**Knowledge that every believer should have.** Paul told the Romans they were "filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14). The Corinthians had been "enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge" (1 Corinthians 1:5). Every believer grows in knowing God's truth.

**Knowledge as a gift for the church.** In 1 Corinthians 12:8 knowledge is a gift given to some. And in 14:6 Paul lists it with other ways of speaking to the church: "unless I speak to you either in revelation, or in knowledge, or in prophecy, or in teaching." That suggests a "word of knowledge" was a way of speaking that built up the gathered church.

**Knowledge that puffs up.** Knowledge has a danger built in. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). The Corinthians who "knew" idols were nothing were eating meat in idol temples and causing weaker believers to stumble. Paul says that kind of knowledge, without love, actually destroys people (8:11).

**Knowledge is partial.** "Whether knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:8-9). Even the best knowledge we have in this life is partial compared with what we will know when we see Jesus.

## Two Ways of Understanding the Gift

Because Paul doesn't define this gift, Bible teachers understand it in two main ways.

**A gift of understanding and explaining truth.** Many believe the word of knowledge is the Spirit-given ability to grasp the truths of God's Word deeply and explain them clearly. On this view, it's close to the gift of teaching. The person with this gift is the one who sees how the whole Bible fits together and can open it up for others. This reading fits the way Paul uses *gnosis* for knowledge of God's truth throughout his letters.

**A gift of supernatural insight.** Others, especially in Pentecostal and charismatic churches, believe the word of knowledge is the Spirit revealing a fact that the person couldn't have known by natural means, for the purpose of helping someone. They point to examples in the Gospels and Acts (below).

Those who believe the revelatory gifts ended with the apostles usually take the first view. Those who believe all the gifts continue usually hold that the second view is included, and many of them hold both. The open-but-cautious view generally holds the first and allows that God may at times give the second.

## In the Apostles' Day

Here are examples people point to, whatever view they hold.

**Jesus and the Samaritan woman.** Jesus asked a Samaritan woman to go call her husband. She said she didn't have one. Jesus said, "You have spoken well, 'I do not have a husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband" (John 4:17-18). Nobody had told Him. He knew. And notice what that knowledge did. It didn't shame her. It opened the door to the conversation that led her, and much of her town, to believe in Him (4:39-42). Of course, Jesus is the Son of God and knew what was in every person (John 2:25), so His knowledge was in a class by itself.

**Peter and Ananias.** Ananias and Sapphira sold a field, kept back part of the money, and brought the rest to the apostles as if it were the whole amount (Acts 5:1-2). Peter knew. "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart for you to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (5:3). Luke doesn't tell us how Peter knew. Many believe the Spirit revealed it to him.

**Peter and Simon.** When Simon the sorcerer tried to buy the Spirit's power, Peter saw straight into him: "For I see you being in the gall of bitterness and the bond of unrighteousness" (Acts 8:23).

**Paul's letters.** On the other side, the "knowledge" Paul pours into his letters, opening up the mystery of Christ, the place of Israel, and the meaning of the cross, is a great example of the first view. When he finishes three chapters on God's plan for Jews and Gentiles, he bursts out, "O depth of riches and of wisdom and of knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture Carol, who has taught a women's Bible class for thirty years. She has read through the Bible more times than she can count. When someone asks a hard question about how a passage in Leviticus connects to Hebrews, Carol lights up and shows them, and the whole Bible suddenly looks like one story. That fits the first view of the gift. Nobody in her church would doubt she's gifted.

Now picture a different moment. A pastor is praying with a man after a service, and the pastor has a strong sense that the man is carrying guilt about something from long ago. He asks gently, "Is there something from your past you've never told anyone?" The man breaks down and confesses something he's carried for twenty years, and he finds forgiveness in Christ that night. A continuationist would likely call that a word of knowledge. Someone who is open but cautious might call it the Spirit's guidance. A cessationist might call it pastoral wisdom and the Spirit using the pastor's experience. All of them would rejoice in the result.

What they'd all agree on: real knowledge from God serves people and points them to Christ. It is never used to impress a crowd, and it never contradicts God's Word.

## Watch Out For

- **Knowledge that puffs up.** If what you know makes you look down on people, you've missed the point (1 Corinthians 8:1).
- **Secret knowledge.** Any teacher who claims a hidden knowledge that the Bible doesn't give, or that only an inner circle can have, is following the Gnostics, not the apostles.
- **Guessing in God's name.** Some public "words of knowledge" are really cold reading, the same trick fortune-tellers use: vague statements that fit half the room. Real knowledge from God doesn't need tricks.
- **Exposing people.** Even when God reveals something, how you handle it matters. Jesus revealed the Samaritan woman's past privately and gently, and it led to her salvation.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Grow in the knowledge of God through His Word. That's the foundation no matter which view you hold.
- Use what you know to build others up, not to win arguments.
- Be honest about what you don't know. "We know in part."
- Handle anything sensitive with care, privacy, and love.
- Keep Jesus at the center. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Colossians 2:3).

## Study Questions

1. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
2. Read Philippians 3:8-10. What kind of knowledge did Paul value most?

3. What are the two main ways Bible teachers understand the word of knowledge? Which makes more sense to you, and why?

4. Read John 4:16-26 and 4:39-42. What did Jesus' knowledge of the woman's life lead to?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3. How can knowledge become dangerous?

6. How are you growing in the knowledge of God right now?

# Chapter 11: Distinguishing of Spirits

> *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits **to see** whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*
>
> 1 John 4:1 (SLB)

Counterfeiters don't waste their time faking three-dollar bills. They fake twenties and hundreds, because those are worth something. In the same way, Satan doesn't bother counterfeiting things that don't matter. He counterfeits the things of God: false prophets, false teachers, false miracles, false peace. That's why God gave His church a gift that works like a bank teller who has handled so much real money that a fake feels wrong in her hands the moment she touches it. Paul calls it "distinguishing of spirits."

For years I was a fully functioning alcoholic. I was successful at work and looked dependable on the outside, and it was easy to convince myself everything was fine. A 12-step program and Scripture showed me how easily we mistake outward success for spiritual health. Testing everything against the Word keeps us from being fooled by appearances, including our own.

## The Word

**διάκρισις** (*diakrisis*)
**Say it:** dee-AK-rih-sis
**Strong's number:** G1253
**Used in the New Testament:** 3 times
**Plain meaning:** a distinguishing, a separating out, discernment; judging between things

**διακρίνω** (*diakrino*)
**Say it:** dee-ah-KREE-no
**Strong's number:** G1252
**Used in the New Testament:** 19 times, in 18 verses
**Plain meaning:** to separate, to judge carefully, to discern; sometimes to doubt or waver

*Diakrisis* comes from *dia* (through) and *krino* (to judge). It means to judge through something, to sort it out, to separate one thing from another. It appears only 3 times in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 12:10 it's the gift: "to another distinguishing of spirits." In Hebrews 5:14 it's a skill mature believers develop: "for those who through practice have the senses trained for discernment of both good and evil." In Romans 14:1 it's used in a negative sense, for "disputes" over opinions.

The verb form, *diakrino*, is the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14:29 when he says that after prophets speak, "let the others discern." So this gift works hand in hand with prophecy. One speaks. Another weighs.

Notice the word "spirits" is plural. Paul isn't just talking about discerning the Holy Spirit. He's talking about telling the difference between what comes from the Spirit of God, what comes from a human spirit, and what comes from evil spirits.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Every believer must test.** John told the whole church to do this.

> *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits **to see** whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in **the** flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ having come in **the** flesh is not of God. And this is the **spirit** of the antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.* (1 John 4:1-3)

John gives a doctrinal test: does this spirit confess Jesus Christ having come in the flesh? In John's day false teachers were saying Jesus only seemed to have a body. That was the error of the moment. The test always comes back to the truth about Jesus. Paul gave the same kind of test in 1 Corinthians 12:3: no one speaking by the Spirit says "Jesus is accursed," and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

**Discernment grows by practice.** Hebrews 5:14 uses an athletic word: the mature have their senses "trained," the word for exercising, like an athlete's muscles. Every believer can grow in discernment. Some have a special gift of it.

**Counterfeits look good.** Paul warned the Corinthians about false apostles who were "disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And it is no marvel, for Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). Deception rarely shows up with horns and a pitchfork. It shows up looking spiritual, sounding biblical, and making people feel good.

**Even the truth from the wrong source.** Discernment isn't only about spotting lies. Sometimes the problem is where a true statement is coming from, and why.

## In the Apostles' Day

**Paul and the fortune-telling slave girl.** This is one of the clearest examples in the Bible.

> *Now it came about, as we were going to **the place of** prayer, **that** a certain slave girl having a spirit of Python met us, who was bringing much profit to her masters by fortune-telling. She, having followed after Paul and us, was crying out, saying, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation." And this she was doing for many days. But Paul, having been greatly annoyed and having turned, said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out from her." And it came out that very hour.* (Acts 16:16-18)

Look at what the girl was saying: "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation." Every word of that was true! Most of us would have been glad for the free advertising. But

Paul discerned that the source was an evil spirit, and that if the city linked his message to a fortune-teller, the gospel would be muddied. So he cast it out. The truth was right. The spirit was wrong.

**Peter and Ananias, Peter and Simon.** We saw these in the last chapter. Peter saw through Ananias's lie (Acts 5:3) and through Simon's heart (Acts 8:23). In both cases, someone was wearing a religious mask, and Peter saw behind it.

**Paul and Elymas.** On Cyprus, a sorcerer named Elymas tried to keep a Roman official from believing. "Saul, who is also Paul, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, and having looked intently at him," called him "full of all deceit and all villainy, son of the devil" (Acts 13:9-10). Paul saw the spiritual battle behind a man's opposition.

**Jesus and Peter.** One of the most sobering examples comes from Jesus. Right after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Peter tried to talk Him out of going to the cross. Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not minding the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23). Peter meant well. He loved Jesus. But the idea behind his words came from the enemy. Discernment can see that even in a friend's well-meant advice.

## What It Looks Like Today

Here the three views from Chapter 5 differ some, but less than you might think. Every view believes the church must test spirits, because John and Paul command it. Every view believes some believers have a sharper sense for it than others.

Those who believe the gift continues in its first-century form usually see distinguishing of spirits as a supernatural sense, often in situations involving demonic activity or false prophecy. Those who believe the revelatory gifts ended usually see it as a Spirit-given ability to judge teaching and claims by Scripture, sharpened by maturity. The open-but-cautious view often holds both, with Scripture as the final test.

Picture Linda in the church office. A charming new man starts attending and within a month is asking to lead a Bible study. Everyone likes him. Linda can't put her finger on it, but something feels off. Instead of gossiping about it, she goes to the pastor and says, "I could be wrong, but would you look a little closer before you give him a class?" The pastor talks with him and finds out he's been teaching that Jesus was a created being, and that he left his last two churches in a split. Linda wasn't psychic. She was discerning. And she handled it the right way.

Today the gift is needed everywhere. It's needed when a book everyone's reading sounds so close to the gospel that people miss what's been changed. It's needed when someone stands up in a meeting and says, "The Lord told me." It's needed when a teaching sounds loving but quietly drops repentance. It's needed in counseling, where a wise believer can sometimes tell the difference between a spiritual problem, a medical problem, and a sin problem, and send a person to the right kind of help.

## Watch Out For

- **Suspicion dressed up as discernment.** Some people think they have this gift when they're really just critical. Discernment is aimed at protecting the flock, not at proving you're smarter than everyone else.

- **A demon behind every bush.** Not every problem is demonic. Some are medical. Some are sin. Some are just being tired. Real discernment tells the difference.
- **Feelings over Scripture.** A sense that something is wrong is a reason to look closer, not a verdict. Test your own sense by God's Word.
- **Silence.** The opposite error is to see something wrong and say nothing because you don't want to cause trouble. Linda went to the pastor.
- **Gullibility.** Believing every claim because it sounds spiritual is not a sign of great faith. John commands us to test.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Know the real thing. Bank tellers learn counterfeits by handling real money. Know your Bible so well that error feels wrong.
- Use John's test. What does this teach about Jesus?
- Go to the right people. Bring your concerns to leaders privately and humbly, not to the gossip line.
- Be willing to be wrong. "I could be wrong" is not weakness. It's honesty.
- Pray for the people involved, not only about them.

## Study Questions

1. Why do you think Satan counterfeits the things of God instead of things that don't matter?
2. Read 1 John 4:1-3. What test does John give for discerning spirits?
3. In Acts 16:16-18 the girl said true things. Why did Paul stop her?
4. Read Matthew 16:21-23. What does Jesus' answer to Peter teach about discernment?
5. What's the difference between discernment and a critical spirit?
6. Read Hebrews 5:14. What can you do to train your senses to discern good and evil?

# Chapter 12: Evangelists

> *How then will they call on **Him** in whom they did not believe? And how will they believe **in Him** of whom they did not hear? And how will they hear without one proclaiming? And how will they proclaim unless they are sent? Just as it has been written, "How beautiful **are** the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who preach the gospel of good things!"*
>
> Romans 10:14-15 (SLB)

Every believer is called to share the gospel. Jesus said, "Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19), and He said it to all His disciples. But some believers seem to have been built for it in a special way. They talk about Jesus as naturally as they talk about the weather, and people come to Christ through them again and again. They're the ones who come home from a trip to the hardware store and say, "You'll never guess who I got to pray with." The New Testament calls them evangelists.

## The Word

**εὐαγγελιστής** (*euangelistes*)
**Say it:** yoo-ang-gel-ee-STAYS
**Strong's number:** G2099
**Used in the New Testament:** 3 times
**Plain meaning:** an evangelist; one who announces the good news

**εὐαγγελίζω** (*euangelizo*)
**Say it:** yoo-ang-gel-ID-zo
**Strong's number:** G2097
**Used in the New Testament:** 55 times, in 52 verses
**Plain meaning:** to announce good news, to preach the gospel

**εὐαγγέλιον** (*euangelion*)
**Say it:** yoo-ang-GEL-ee-on
**Strong's number:** G2098
**Used in the New Testament:** 76 times, in 73 verses
**Plain meaning:** good news, the gospel

These words come from *eu* (good) and *angelos* (messenger, the word also used for angels). The *euangelion* is the good news. In the Roman world, the word was used when a herald brought news of a military victory or the birth of an heir to the emperor. The church took that word and used it for the best news ever announced: Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The verb *euangelizo*, to announce the good news, appears 55 times. The noun *euangelion*, gospel, appears 76 times. But the word for the person, evangelist, appears only 3 times in the whole New Testament:

- Philip is called "the evangelist" (Acts 21:8).
- Christ gave some "as evangelists" (Ephesians 4:11).
- Timothy is told, "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5).

That's not much, but those three verses together give us a clear picture: a real person known for this work, a gift Christ gives His church, and a job that even a pastor like Timothy was told to do.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Everyone shares the news.** After Stephen was killed, persecution broke out and the believers scattered. "Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word as the gospel" (Acts 8:4). The verb there is *euangelizo*. It wasn't the apostles. They stayed in Jerusalem (8:1). It was ordinary believers. Every Christian is to be "ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

**Some are gifted for it.** At the same time, Ephesians 4:11 says Christ gives some as evangelists. Like the other gifts in that list, evangelists are given "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry" (4:12). That means a gifted evangelist is not only supposed to win people himself. He's supposed to help the whole church get better at sharing Jesus.

**The message matters most.** The evangelist doesn't make up his own message. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace" (Romans 10:15, quoting Isaiah 52:7). The beauty is in the message. Paul said that if anyone, even an angel, preached a different gospel, "let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

## In the Apostles' Day

The only person the Bible calls an evangelist is Philip, and his story shows us the gift in action.

Philip was first chosen as one of the seven men to make sure the widows got their daily food (Acts 6:5). So the first thing we know about him is that he was trusted with a serving job. That's worth noticing. God often grows gifts in people who are faithful in small things.

**Philip in Samaria.** When the believers scattered, Philip went to a city in Samaria. Samaritans and Jews had hated each other for centuries. Philip went anyway.

> *And Philip, having gone down to a city of Samaria, was proclaiming the Christ to them. And the crowds with one accord were giving heed to the things being spoken by Philip, in their hearing and seeing the signs which he was doing.* (Acts 8:5-6)

Crowds listened. People were set free, healed, and filled with joy (8:7-8). And "when they believed Philip preaching the gospel, the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women" (8:12). Signs accompanied his preaching, but notice what the people believed: the gospel he preached.

**Philip and one man in the desert.** Then, in the middle of a citywide revival, an angel told Philip to go to a desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza (8:26). He went. There he met an official from Ethiopia, a treasurer to the queen, reading Isaiah 53 in his chariot. Philip ran up, asked if he understood what he was reading, climbed in, and "having begun from this Scripture, preached Jesus as the gospel to him" (8:35). Before the day was over, the man was baptized and "was going on his way rejoicing" (8:39).

I love that a man who could draw crowds would leave them for one person. An evangelist's heart is not about the size of the audience. It's about souls. Jesus said there is "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7).

**Philip at home.** Twenty years later, Paul and Luke stayed at Philip's house in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9). He had four daughters who prophesied. Whatever else he did, Philip raised a family that served God. An evangelist's first mission field is his own home.

Paul had this gift too, along with being an apostle. He said, "I have become all things to all men, so that by all means I may save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). And he told Timothy, who seems to have been more of a pastor-teacher, to "do the work of an evangelist" anyway (2 Timothy 4:5). Even if it's not your main gift, it's still your job.

## What It Looks Like Today

This is another gift nobody argues about. The gospel hasn't changed, and the need hasn't changed.

The gift shows up in big ways. Over the last two hundred years, God has used gifted evangelists to preach to huge crowds, and countless people trace their salvation to a night when they walked forward at a meeting like that. But most evangelists will never preach to a crowd.

Picture Tony. He runs a small auto repair shop. He's not a preacher. But he has a way of turning any conversation toward Jesus without it ever feeling forced. A customer complains about his marriage, and Tony says, "Can I tell you what saved mine?" He keeps a stack of Bibles in the office and has given away dozens. Every year or two, somebody walks into his church and says, "Tony told me I should come." That's an evangelist.

It also shows up in a college student who starts a Bible study in her dorm, a retired couple who volunteer with a prison ministry, a missionary planting churches among a people group who've never heard, and a woman who has led three of her coworkers to Christ over lunch breaks. And according to Ephesians 4:12, gifted evangelists should be training the rest of the church: teaching people how to share their story, how to explain the gospel simply, and how not to be afraid.

## Watch Out For

- **A watered-down message.** Leaving out sin, repentance, or the cross to make the gospel easier to accept is not evangelism. It's a different gospel (Galatians 1:6-8).
- **Pressure tactics.** Manipulating people into a decision may get a number, but it doesn't make a disciple. The Spirit convicts. We don't need to manipulate.

- **Counting scalps.** When the number of people "saved" becomes a source of pride, the evangelist has started building his own name.
- **Born and abandoned.** Philip baptized the Samaritans, and then Peter and John came to help (Acts 8:14). New believers need follow-up and a church home.
- **Letting the gifted do it all.** "Our church has an outreach pastor" is not an excuse for the rest of us to keep quiet.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Know the gospel cold. Be able to explain 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 in your own words in two minutes.
- Go where people are. Philip went to Samaria and to a desert road. Where's your Samaria?
- Listen for open doors. Philip started with a question: "Do you indeed understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30)
- Start from where they are. Philip, "having begun from this Scripture," preached Jesus (Acts 8:35), the one the man was already reading.
- Bring them home. Connect new believers to a church and to someone who will disciple them.
- Train others. Help the rest of the church do what comes naturally to you.

## Study Questions

1. Who shared the gospel with you? What did they do that helped?
2. Read Acts 8:4. Who was preaching the gospel? What does that say about whose job it is?
3. Why do you think Philip left a crowd in Samaria for one man on a desert road?
4. Read Acts 8:30-35. What can we learn from how Philip started his conversation?
5. Read Ephesians 4:11-12. How should a gifted evangelist help the rest of the church?
6. Who is one person you could pray for and look for a chance to share Jesus with this month?

# Part Three: The Leading and Serving Gifts

# Chapter 13: Apostles

> *So then you are no longer strangers and resident aliens, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being **the** cornerstone*
>
> Ephesians 2:19-20 (SLB)

Paul puts apostles first in two of his lists: "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1 Corinthians 12:28), and "He Himself gave some as apostles" (Ephesians 4:11). That raises a question a lot of believers ask today, because some people call themselves apostles. Are there apostles today? The answer depends on which use of the word you mean, and the New Testament uses it in more than one way.

## The Word

**ἀπόστολος** (*apostolos*)
**Say it:** ah-POSS-toh-loss
**Strong's number:** G652
**Used in the New Testament:** 81 times, in 80 verses
**Plain meaning:** one who is sent; a messenger with a commission; an apostle

**ἀποστέλλω** (*apostello*)
**Say it:** ah-poss-TEL-lo
**Strong's number:** G649
**Used in the New Testament:** 133 times, in 130 verses
**Plain meaning:** to send out on a mission

*Apostolos* comes from *apo* (from, away) and *stello* (to send). An apostle is someone sent out with a message and with the authority of the one who sent him. In ordinary Greek it could mean an envoy, a delegate, or even a fleet sent out on a mission. Jesus took that ordinary word and gave it to the twelve men He chose.

The noun appears 81 times in the New Testament, most of them in Luke, Acts, and Paul's letters. The verb *apostello*, to send, appears 133 times, and you can see the connection in what Jesus said after He rose: "even as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

Jesus Himself is called an apostle once: "consider carefully the apostle and high priest of our confession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1). He is the One the Father sent. Every other apostle is sent by Him.

## How the New Testament Uses It

When you look at every use of the word, it falls into two groups.

### *The Apostles of Christ*

The first group is the Twelve, plus Paul. These men were chosen by Jesus personally. Mark tells us why: "He appointed twelve, so that they might be with Him, and so that He might send them out to preach, and to have authority to heal the diseases and to cast out the demons" (Mark 3:14-15).

When Judas died, Peter laid out what it took to replace him.

> *Therefore it is necessary, of the men who accompanied us during all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us,* ***for*** *one of these to become a witness with us of His resurrection.* (Acts 1:21-22)

To be one of these apostles, a man had to have been with Jesus through His ministry and had to be an eyewitness of the risen Lord. Matthias was chosen (1:26).

Paul was added in an unusual way. He hadn't walked with Jesus during His ministry. But the risen Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, and Paul pointed to that: "Am I not an apostle?... Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). He called himself "the untimely birth" and "the least of the apostles" (15:8-9). He insisted his apostleship came "not from men, nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1).

These apostles had unique authority. Their teaching was the foundation of the church.

> *So then you are no longer strangers and resident aliens, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone* (Ephesians 2:19-20)

In the New Jerusalem, the wall of the city has twelve foundations, "and in them names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:14). Their names are on the foundation stones forever. Their word became the New Testament, either written by them or by close companions like Mark and Luke.

### *Apostles of the Churches*

The second group is broader. The same Greek word is used for people who were sent out by churches on missions, without the unique authority of the Twelve.

- Barnabas is called an apostle along with Paul (Acts 14:4, 14). He was sent out by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3).
- Paul calls certain brothers carrying the offering for Jerusalem "apostles of the churches" (2 Corinthians 8:23). The SLB keeps the word "apostles" there.
- Epaphroditus is called the Philippians' "messenger" (Philippians 2:25). The Greek word is *apostolos*.
- Andronicus and Junia, whom Paul greets in Romans 16:7, are "of note among the apostles." The SLB reads Junia, a woman's name. Bible teachers debate both whether the second name is a woman (Junia) or a man (Junias), and whether the phrase means they were apostles or that the apostles thought highly of them.
- Paul speaks of himself, Silas, and Timothy together as "apostles of Christ" in 1 Thessalonians 2:6.

So in this wider sense, an apostle was a sent one: a missionary, a church planter, a messenger sent by a church to do a specific job.

## In the Apostles' Day

The work of the apostles is the whole book of Acts. They preached Jesus' resurrection. They did signs and wonders (Acts 2:43; 5:12). They planted churches, appointed elders, settled questions of doctrine (Acts 15), and wrote letters that became Scripture. Paul summed up the burden that came with it: "the pressure on me daily, the care for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28).

And Paul showed what apostolic ministry should look like. He had real authority, but he wrote to the Thessalonians, "though being able to be weighty as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:6-7). The greatest apostle acted like a nursing mother. That says a lot about leadership in God's kingdom.

Paul's goal was "to preach the gospel not where Christ was named, so that I may not build on another's foundation" (Romans 15:20). That's pioneer work. An apostle went where the gospel hadn't gone.

False apostles showed up fast. Paul fought "false apostles, deceitful workers" (2 Corinthians 11:13). By the end of the century, Jesus commended the church in Ephesus because "you have tested those who claim to be apostles and are not, and you have found them false" (Revelation 2:2). Even then, claiming the title proved nothing.

## What It Looks Like Today

On some things, every view agrees. There are no apostles today in the first sense: men chosen personally by Jesus, eyewitnesses of His resurrection, with authority to write Scripture and lay the church's foundation. You only lay a foundation once (Ephesians 2:20). The Twelve have no successors with their authority. Paul called himself "last of all" to see the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:8).

On the wider sense, believers differ, as my Ephesians study notes.

**Many believe** the gift of apostle ended with the first generation, and that what continues today is better called missionary or church-planting work. They avoid the title "apostle" for anyone today because it causes confusion and can lead to abuse.

**Others believe** the gift continues in the wider "sent one" sense. They see it in pioneering missionaries and church planters who start new works where Christ isn't known and help establish them. Some of them use the word apostle for this. Most still avoid it as a title.

**Some movements** today name certain leaders as apostles with authority over networks of churches, sometimes claiming new revelation. Most Christians, including many continuationists, are concerned about this, because it tends to put a man's word alongside the apostles' word in Scripture.

Picture a couple named Sam and Grace. They've spent twenty years in a remote region where there were no churches. They learned the language, translated the Gospel of Mark, led the first few families to Christ, trained local men to lead, and then moved on to the next valley. They would never call themselves apostles. Some Bible teachers would say they have an apostolic gift in the "sent one" sense. Others would call them faithful missionaries. Both would agree they're doing what Paul did in Romans 15:20.

## Watch Out For

- **Self-appointed apostles.** Anyone who announces he's an apostle and demands obedience on that basis should be tested, as the Ephesians did (Revelation 2:2).
- **New revelation.** The apostles' teaching is complete and written down. No one today can add to it.
- **Authority without accountability.** Even Paul submitted his gospel to the other apostles (Galatians 2:2).
- **Forgetting the mission.** The opposite danger is a church that never sends anyone. "Sent ones" are still needed, whatever we call them.

## If This Is Your Gift

If God has given you a burden for going where Christ isn't known and starting something new, here's how to steward it.

- Be sent, not self-sent. Barnabas and Saul were sent out by their church after prayer and fasting (Acts 13:1-3).
- Go to the hard places. Pioneer work is lonely. It needs a strong walk with God.
- Build on the apostles' foundation. Teach what they taught.
- Raise up local leaders and move on. Paul appointed elders in every city (Acts 14:23).
- Be gentle. Lead like a nursing mother, not a boss.

## Study Questions

1. What does the word *apostolos* mean, and how does John 20:21 connect to it?
2. Read Acts 1:21-22 and 1 Corinthians 9:1. What qualified the Twelve and Paul to be apostles?
3. Why can't anyone today be an apostle in that first sense (Ephesians 2:20)?
4. Who are some people the New Testament calls apostles in the wider sense?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7. What does Paul's example teach about spiritual authority?
6. Does your church send people out? How could you support missionaries and church planters?

# Chapter 14: Shepherds

> *shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly, nor for shameful gain but eagerly; nor as exercising lordship over the portions* ***allotted to you****, but becoming examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd has been manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
>
> 1 Peter 5:2-4 (SLB)

Most English Bibles translate Ephesians 4:11 as "pastors and teachers." The SLB says "shepherds and teachers," and that's exactly what the word means. The word "pastor" comes from the Latin word for shepherd. I like the SLB's choice because it keeps the picture in front of us. A shepherd feeds, leads, protects, and searches for sheep. He smells like the flock. That's the gift we're looking at in this chapter.

## The Word

**ποιμήν** (*poimen*)
**Say it:** poy-MAYN
**Strong's number:** G4166
**Used in the New Testament:** 18 times, in 17 verses
**Plain meaning:** a shepherd; one who tends a flock

**ποιμαίνω** (*poimaino*)
**Say it:** poy-MY-no
**Strong's number:** G4165
**Used in the New Testament:** 11 times
**Plain meaning:** to shepherd; to tend, feed, lead, and protect a flock

The noun *poimen*, shepherd, appears 18 times in the New Testament. Only once is it used for a church leader: Ephesians 4:11. Every other time, it's either a literal shepherd (like the ones at Bethlehem in Luke 2) or Jesus Himself. The verb *poimaino*, to shepherd, appears 11 times, and that's the word Jesus, Paul, and Peter use when they tell church leaders what to do.

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul writes "some as shepherds and teachers." In Greek there is one article ("the") covering both words. Many Bible teachers believe that means one group of people who both shepherd and teach, a pastor-teacher. Others think it means two groups that overlap: every shepherd teaches, but not every teacher shepherds. Either way, shepherding and teaching belong together. You can't feed sheep without food.

## The Good Shepherd First

Before the New Testament ever calls a church leader a shepherd, it calls Jesus the Shepherd.

> *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.* (John 10:11)

He is "the good shepherd" (John 10:11), "the great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20), "the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25), and "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4). That last title matters. If Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, every pastor is an under-shepherd. The flock isn't his. Paul told the Ephesian elders to "shepherd the church of God, which He purchased through His own blood" (Acts 20:28). A pastor is looking after someone else's sheep, sheep that cost the Owner His blood. That ought to make any pastor careful.

This picture goes back to the Old Testament. "The LORD is my shepherd; I will not lack" (Psalm 23:1). And God was furious with the leaders of Israel who used His flock for themselves.

> *Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and you shall say to them, to the shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe **to** the shepherds of Israel who have been shepherding themselves! Should not the shepherds shepherd the flock? You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves **with** the wool; you slaughter the fat **ones**; the flock you do not shepherd. The weak you have not strengthened, and the sick you have not healed, and the broken you have not bound up, and the strayed you have not brought back, and the lost you have not sought; and with force you have ruled them, and with harshness.* (Ezekiel 34:2-4)

Read that list backward and you get a job description for a good shepherd: strengthen the weak, care for the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the strays, seek the lost, and lead gently, not by force.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Shepherd, elder, and overseer are the same office.** In Acts 20, Paul calls the "elders" of Ephesus together (20:17), tells them the Holy Spirit made them "overseers" (20:28), and tells them to "shepherd" the church (20:28). Peter does the same thing in 1 Peter 5:1-2: he exhorts the "elders" to "shepherd the flock," "exercising oversight." Three words, one group of men:

**πρεσβύτερος** (*presbyteros*)
**Say it:** pres-BOO-ter-oss
**Strong's number:** G4245
**Used in the New Testament:** 67 times
**Plain meaning:** an elder; an older man, and a church leader

**ἐπίσκοπος** (*episkopos*)
**Say it:** eh-PIS-ko-poss
**Strong's number:** G1985
**Used in the New Testament:** 5 times
**Plain meaning:** an overseer; one who watches over (older Bibles: bishop)

*Presbyteros* (elder) speaks of maturity. *Episkopos* (overseer) speaks of responsibility. *Poimen* (shepherd) speaks of the heart and the work. The gift of shepherding is what makes a man fit to do the work of the office well.

**Jesus' charge to Peter.** After Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus restored him with three questions and three commands: "Feed My lambs." "Shepherd My sheep." "Feed My sheep" (John 21:15-17). Before Peter could shepherd anyone, he had to answer one question: "Do you love Me?" Shepherding starts with love for the Shepherd.

**How to shepherd.** Peter passed it on to the elders he wrote to.

> *shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly, nor for shameful gain but eagerly; nor as exercising lordship over the portions* ***allotted to you****, but becoming examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd has been manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.* (1 Peter 5:2-4)

Willingly, not because you have to. Eagerly, not for money. As an example, not as a boss. Those three contrasts cover most of the ways pastors go wrong.

**Shepherds protect.** Paul warned the Ephesian elders that "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" and that some would even rise up from among the elders themselves (Acts 20:29-30). A shepherd who won't confront wolves isn't kind. He's negligent.

## In the Apostles' Day

Paul and Barnabas planted churches and "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23). Paul left Titus in Crete to "appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). Wherever churches were planted, shepherds were put in place, usually a team of them, not one man alone.

Paul's own ministry in Ephesus is a picture of shepherding. He reminded the elders that "for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears" (Acts 20:31). Each one. With tears. That's not a CEO. That's a shepherd who knew his sheep by name.

## A Word About Women and the Office

This is a question many readers will ask, so I'll handle it the way I have in my New Testament studies: say plainly what the text says, then give the main readings fairly.

Here is what's not in question. The Spirit gives gifts to women as well as men. Women prophesied (Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5). Priscilla taught Apollos alongside her husband (Acts 18:26). Older women are told to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-4). Phoebe was "a servant of the church" in Cenchrea and a patroness of many, including Paul (Romans 16:1-2). Euodia and Syntyche "contended together with me in the gospel" (Philippians 4:3). Many women have the gifts of teaching, exhortation, mercy, leading, and more, and the church is poorer when those gifts are buried.

Here is what the text says about the office. Paul writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12), and in the next chapter he describes the overseer as "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2).

Bible-believing Christians read these verses in two main ways. Many believe they teach that the office of elder or pastor, with its authority to teach and lead the whole church, is given to qualified men, while women serve in many other ways, including teaching women and children. This is often called the complementarian view. Others believe Paul was dealing with a specific problem in Ephesus, such as false teaching spreading among untaught women, and that his words don't close the office to women in every time and place. This is often called the egalitarian view. Faithful believers hold each view, and both sides agree that women's gifts are real and needed.

## What It Looks Like Today

The gift of shepherding is clearly still given, and every view agrees on that.

It shows up in the pastor who preaches on Sunday, but the gift is broader than the pulpit. Picture Glen. He's not on staff. He leads a small group of six couples that meets in his living room. He knows when one of the husbands lost his job, and he calls him every week until he's back on his feet. When a couple stops coming, Glen goes and finds them. When someone in the group starts drifting into strange teaching from the internet, Glen sits down with him, Bible open, and lovingly walks him back. He has the heart of a shepherd, whether or not he ever holds the office of elder.

It also shows up in a youth leader who knows every kid's name, a women's ministry leader who notices who's hurting, a chaplain in a hospital or a prison, and a grandfather who disciples three young men over breakfast every Saturday.

## Watch Out For

- **Shepherds who feed themselves.** Ezekiel 34 is still in the Bible. Ministry that's about money, power, or ego is an old sin.
- **Lording it over the flock.** Peter said lead by example, not by force (1 Peter 5:3). Control and intimidation are not shepherding.
- **Hirelings.** Jesus said the hired hand runs when the wolf comes (John 10:12-13). A shepherd stays and protects.
- **One-man shows.** The New Testament pattern is a team of elders. No pastor should carry the flock alone, or answer to no one.
- **Sheep who won't be shepherded.** Hebrews 13:17 tells believers to let their leaders lead, "so that they may do this with joy and not groaning." Make your pastors' work a joy.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Love the Chief Shepherd first. Jesus asked Peter "Do you love Me?" before He said "Feed My sheep."
- Feed them the Word. Shepherds and teachers go together.
- Know them by name. Shepherding happens one sheep at a time.
- Go after strays. Don't wait for them to come back on their own.

- Guard your own heart. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock” (Acts 20:28). Yourself first.
- Remember the crown. Faithful shepherds will receive “the unfading crown of glory” when the Chief Shepherd appears (1 Peter 5:4).

## Study Questions

1. What do you picture when you hear the word “pastor”? How does “shepherd” change that picture?
2. Read Ezekiel 34:2-4. Turn it around and make a list of what a good shepherd does.
3. Read Acts 20:17 and 20:28. What three words does Paul use for the same leaders? What does each one tell you?
4. Read 1 Peter 5:2-4. Which of Peter’s three contrasts is most needed in churches today?
5. Who has shepherded you, whether or not they held a church office?
6. Read Hebrews 13:17. How can you make your pastors’ work a joy instead of a burden?

# Chapter 15: Serving

> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.*
>
> Mark 10:45 (SLB)

Every church has them. They're the people who show up early to set up chairs and stay late to stack them. They notice the overflowing trash can and take it out without being asked. They fix the leaky faucet in the nursery. They drive the van, make the coffee, cook for the funeral lunch, and clean up afterward. You rarely hear their names from the platform. But if they all stayed home for a month, the church would grind to a halt. They have the gift of serving, and Jesus said that's the road to greatness in His kingdom.

I have served as a lay pastor, volunteered at church camp for several years and helped lead youth mission trips to Baja for five straight years. Big work like that runs on people doing jobs nobody sees. The quiet work of serving holds the whole body together.

## The Word

**διακονία** (*diakonia*)
**Say it:** dee-ah-ko-NEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G1248
**Used in the New Testament:** 34 times, in 32 verses
**Plain meaning:** service, ministry; practical help given to meet needs

**διακονέω** (*diakoneo*)
**Say it:** dee-ah-KO-neh-oh
**Strong's number:** G1247
**Used in the New Testament:** 37 times, in 32 verses
**Plain meaning:** to serve; to wait on, to minister to someone's needs

**διάκονος** (*diakonos*)
**Say it:** dee-AH-ko-noss
**Strong's number:** G1249
**Used in the New Testament:** 30 times, in 28 verses
**Plain meaning:** a servant; a waiter; a minister; a deacon

In Romans 12:7 Paul lists this gift second, right after prophecy: "or ministry, in the ministry." The word is *diakonia*, and we met it back in Chapter 2. It's the family where we get the word deacon. The noun appears 34 times, the verb *diakoneo* 37 times, and *diakonos*, the person who serves, 30 times.

The first meaning of the word is very down to earth: waiting on tables. At the wedding in Cana, the "servants" who filled the water jars were *diakonoi* (John 2:5, 9). When Martha was "distracted about much serving" in her kitchen, the word is *diakonia* (Luke 10:40). This is apron work.

But the New Testament also uses the same word for the highest kinds of ministry. Paul called himself a *diakonos* of the gospel (Ephesians 3:7). The apostles devoted themselves to "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), and the word is *diakonia*. So the word covers everything from preaching to doing dishes. That tells you something about how God sees work. In His kingdom, there's no such thing as a menial task done for Him.

Paul uses the word in two ways when it comes to gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:5 it describes all the gifts in general, "varieties of services." In Romans 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:11 it names a specific gift: the ability to meet practical needs. That's the gift this chapter is about.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Jesus the Servant.** The disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest. Jesus turned their idea of greatness upside down.

> *But you, not so; but the greater among you, let him become as the younger, and the one leading as the one serving. For who **is** greater, the one reclining **at table** or the one serving? **Is it** not the one reclining? But I am in your midst as the One serving.* (Luke 22:26-27)

"I am in your midst as the One serving." That same night, Jesus got up from supper, wrapped a towel around Himself, and washed their dirty feet, the job of the lowest slave in the house. Then He said, "I gave you an example, so that even as I did to you, you also may do" (John 13:15).

**Greatness in God's kingdom.** "Whoever desires to become great among you will be your servant; and whoever of you desires to become first will be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44). The word "servant" there is *diakonos*. If you want to be great, pick up a towel.

**Serving in God's strength.** Peter gives the gift a simple rule: "if anyone serves, let him serve as from the strength which God supplies" (1 Peter 4:11). Serving is hard and often tiring. People with this gift learn to do it in God's strength, not their own, so they don't burn out or grow bitter.

**Serving Jesus Himself.** Jesus said that when we serve "the least" of His brothers, we serve Him (Matthew 25:40). Every plate of food and every stacked chair is done for Him.

## In the Apostles' Day

The most famous example of this gift is in Acts 6.

> *Now in these days, when the disciples were multiplying, there arose a grumbling of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily ministry. And the Twelve, having called near the multitude of the disciples, said, "It is not pleasing **for** us, having left the word of God, to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men being well attested, full of **the** Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will*

> *appoint over this need; but we will steadfastly continue in prayer and in the ministry of the word."* (Acts 6:1-4)

The church was growing fast, and a problem came up. Widows who spoke Greek were being overlooked in the daily food distribution. That's a practical problem with a spiritual danger: it was causing grumbling and division along cultural lines. The apostles didn't ignore it, and they didn't take it over. They had the church choose seven men "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" to handle it.

Look at the qualifications for a food-distribution job: full of the Spirit and wisdom. Serving isn't second-class ministry. It needs spiritual people. And look at what happened next: "the word of God was increasing, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was being multiplied exceedingly" (Acts 6:7). When servants serve, preachers can preach, and the whole church grows.

Two of those seven, Stephen and Philip, went on to become a powerful preacher and an evangelist. God often grows gifts in people who start by serving tables.

The New Testament is full of other servants:

- Women who traveled with Jesus "were ministering to Him from their possessions" (Luke 8:3). The verb is *diakoneo*. They funded and fed the ministry of Jesus.
- Peter's mother-in-law, as soon as Jesus healed her fever, "was ministering to them" (Mark 1:31). The verb is *diakoneo* again.
- The household of Stephanas "appointed themselves for service to the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:15). Nobody assigned them. They saw the need and volunteered.
- Phoebe was "a servant of the church that is in Cenchrea" (Romans 16:1). The word is *diakonos*. Bible teachers debate whether that means she held the office of deacon or simply served the church.
- Onesiphorus "often refreshed" Paul in prison and served him in Ephesus (2 Timothy 1:16-18).

## Deacons

Over time the word *diakonos* became the name of an office: deacon. Paul greets "the overseers and deacons" in Philippi (Philippians 1:1), and he lists qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Like the elder qualifications, they're almost all about character: dignified, honest, not a heavy drinker, not greedy, holding the faith with a clear conscience, tested first, faithful at home. Then Paul gives them a promise: "those who have served well acquire for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:13).

The gift of serving and the office of deacon fit together naturally. But you don't need the office to have the gift. Most people with the gift of serving never hold a title.

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues. Every church needs it.

Picture Jerry. He's a retired electrician. Jerry doesn't teach, doesn't sing, and gets nervous praying out loud. But Jerry has keys to every door in the church. When the sound system dies twenty minutes before service, Jerry is the one on his back under the board with a flashlight. When a widow's porch light goes

out, Jerry fixes it, and he usually notices her gutters need cleaning while he's there. He'd be embarrassed to hear this called a spiritual gift. But it is, and the church would be lost without him.

The gift also shows up in the woman who organizes the meals when someone has a baby or a surgery, the man who runs the food pantry, the teenagers who mow lawns for elderly members, the people who clean the building on Saturday, and the couple who keep the coffee going every Sunday for twenty years. People with this gift often have a sharp eye for practical needs and get real joy from meeting them.

## Watch Out For

- **Martha's trap.** Martha was serving Jesus, but she was "distracted" and "anxious and troubled" (Luke 10:40-41). Service can crowd out time at Jesus' feet. Don't let the work for Him replace time with Him.
- **Resentment.** "Lord, does it not concern You that my sister has left me alone to serve?" Servants sometimes start keeping score. When you do, you've stopped serving Jesus and started serving your reputation.
- **Burnout.** Serve "from the strength which God supplies" (1 Peter 4:11), not from guilt. And learn to say no sometimes. You're not the only member of the body.
- **Looking down on servers.** Churches sometimes treat behind-the-scenes people as less spiritual. The apostles required that the table-servers be full of the Spirit.
- **Serving to be seen.** Jesus warned against doing good "before men in order to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1).

## If This Is Your Gift

- See it as worship. "Whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23).
- Keep your seat at Jesus' feet. Like Mary, choose the good portion first.
- Do the job nobody wants. That's where this gift shines brightest.
- Train someone. Show a younger believer how to see needs and meet them.
- Remember God remembers. "God is not unjust, to forget your work and the labor of love which you have shown toward His name, having ministered to the saints and still ministering" (Hebrews 6:10).

## Study Questions

1. Who are the servants in your church who make everything run? Have you thanked them?
2. Read Luke 22:24-27. How did Jesus redefine greatness?
3. Read Acts 6:1-7. Why did the apostles require table-servers to be full of the Spirit and wisdom? What happened when they served well?
4. Read Luke 10:38-42. How can people with the gift of serving avoid Martha's trap?
5. What needs in your church or neighborhood are going unmet right now?
6. Read Hebrews 6:10. How does this verse encourage someone whose service goes unnoticed?

# Chapter 16: Helps

*Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*

Galatians 6:2 (SLB)

Tucked into Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 12:28, between "gifts of healings" and "administrations," is a little word most people skip right over: "helps." It's easy to miss. It sits in the list the same way the people who have it sit in the church: quietly, without fanfare, holding things up. But God put it in the same list as apostles and miracles, and that should tell us something.

## The Word

**ἀντίληψις** (*antilepsis*)
**Say it:** an-TEE-laymp-sis
**Strong's number:** G484
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** help, assistance; taking hold of someone to support them

**ἀντιλαμβάνομαι** (*antilambanomai*)
**Say it:** an-tee-lam-BAN-oh-my
**Strong's number:** G482
**Used in the New Testament:** 3 times
**Plain meaning:** to take hold of in turn; to help, to support

*Antilepsis* appears only 1 time in the whole New Testament, right here in 1 Corinthians 12:28. So we learn what it means by looking at its family. It comes from *anti* (in exchange, in place of, facing) and *lambano* (to take hold of). The picture is someone taking hold of a load from the other side so the person carrying it doesn't fall. It's the friend who grabs the other end of the couch.

The verb form, *antilambanomai*, appears 3 times:

- Mary sang that God "has helped Israel His servant" (Luke 1:54). God Himself takes hold of His people to hold them up.
- Paul told the Ephesian elders, "by laboring thus it is necessary to help those who are weak" (Acts 20:35). That's *antilambanomai*.
- In 1 Timothy 6:2 it's used for those who "partake of the benefit," who take hold of the help that comes from another's good work.

So it's not a fancy word. It's the kind of word you use when you need somebody to pitch in.

## Helps and Serving: What's the Difference?

Helps sounds a lot like serving (Chapter 15), and the two overlap. Many teachers treat them as nearly the same gift. Here's one way some distinguish them, though I hold it loosely because the New Testament doesn't spell it out:

- The gift of **serving** tends to focus on tasks and practical needs: food, buildings, logistics.
- The gift of **helps** tends to focus on people, especially coming alongside someone else's ministry to lift some of their load so they can do what God called them to do.

A person with the gift of helps is often the right-hand person. They make the leader's work possible. They're happy to be second, as long as the work gets done.

## In the Apostles' Day

The New Testament is full of helpers, and most of them only get a sentence or two.

**Paul's helpers.** Paul almost never traveled alone. Look at the end of his letters and you'll find a list of people who held up his arms. Tychicus, "the beloved brother and faithful servant" who carried his letters and news (Colossians 4:7). Luke, the doctor, who stayed when everyone else left: "Luke alone is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). Mark, who became "useful to me for ministry" (same verse). Mary in Rome, "who toiled much for us" (Romans 16:6). Priscilla and Aquila, "who laid down their own neck for my life" (Romans 16:4). Without them, Paul's ministry would have been a fraction of what it was.

**Dorcas.** In the town of Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, also called Dorcas, who "was full of good works and charitable deeds" (Acts 9:36). When she died, the widows of the church stood around Peter weeping, "showing tunics and garments, as many as Dorcas was making while she was with them" (9:39). She made clothes for widows. That's it. That's what she's known for. And God raised her from the dead through Peter, and "many believed on the Lord" (9:42). A seamstress with the gift of helps became the occasion for a whole town hearing about Jesus.

**Moses' helpers.** The Old Testament has a famous picture of this gift. When Israel fought the Amalekites, Moses held up the staff of God on a hilltop. As long as his hands were up, Israel won. When his arms got tired, they lost. So Aaron and Hur sat him on a rock and held up his hands, one on each side, until sunset (Exodus 17:11-12). Nobody remembers Aaron and Hur's battle plan. They didn't have one. They just held up the arms of the man God was using. That's the gift of helps.

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues.

Picture Donna. She's been the church secretary for twenty-two years, but her real gift isn't typing. It's taking things off the pastor's plate so he can study and visit. She remembers every member's surgery date. She catches the mistake in the bulletin before it prints. When a new staff member is overwhelmed, she quietly shows them how things work. She'd never want to preach. She loves making it possible for others to do what God called them to do.

Or picture Marcus, a young man who shows up an hour early to help the youth leader set up, and then stays to sit with the kid who's sitting alone. He doesn't lead anything. He just makes the leader's job easier, and the kids love him.

The gift shows up in volunteers who help a missionary family on furlough settle into a borrowed house, in a man who drives an older pastor to hospital visits, in people who help a single mom move, and in the person who answers the phone at a crisis pregnancy center. It's the gift of saying, "What can I take off your hands?"

## Watch Out For

- **Feeling invisible.** People with this gift can start to feel that nobody notices. God notices. Aaron and Hur are in the Bible.
- **Enabling.** Helping someone carry a load is good. Carrying someone's load because they refuse to carry their own isn't. Paul says "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2), and also "each will bear his own load" (6:5).
- **Overcommitting.** Helpers often can't say no. You can't hold up every pair of arms in the church.
- **Leaders who use helpers.** If you're the one being helped, don't take these people for granted. Thank them. Protect them from burnout.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Find a leader to stand beside. Ask your pastor, a missionary, or a ministry leader, "What can I take off your plate?"
- Do it as unto the Lord. Your help to them is help to Him.
- Watch for the weak. Paul said to help them (Acts 20:35). Look for the person who's struggling to keep up.
- Rest well. Even Aaron and Hur sat down eventually.

## Study Questions

1. Read Exodus 17:8-13. What does the story of Aaron and Hur teach about the gift of helps?
2. What's the difference, if any, between the gift of serving and the gift of helps?
3. Read Romans 16:1-16. How many helpers can you count in Paul's list of greetings?
4. Read Acts 9:36-42. What was Dorcas known for, and what did God do through her?
5. Read Galatians 6:2 and 6:5. How do you balance bearing others' burdens with letting them carry their own load?
6. Whose arms could you hold up this month?

# Chapter 17: Leading

> *or the one who exhorts, in the exhortation; the one who gives, in generosity; the one who leads, in diligence; the one who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.*
>
> Romans 12:8 (SLB)

Some people can't walk into a disorganized room without wanting to fix it. Others can stand up in front of a discouraged group and, within ten minutes, have everybody believing the job can be done and knowing their part in it. The world calls that leadership and writes thousands of books about it. The Bible calls it a gift from God, and it gives the gift a very different shape than most leadership books do.

## The Word

**προΐστημι** (*proistemi*)
**Say it:** pro-IS-tay-mee
**Strong's number:** G4291
**Used in the New Testament:** 8 times
**Plain meaning:** to stand before; to lead, to preside over, to manage, to care for

**σπουδή** (*spoude*)
**Say it:** spoo-DAY
**Strong's number:** G4710
**Used in the New Testament:** 12 times
**Plain meaning:** diligence, eagerness, earnestness; doing something with real effort

In Romans 12:8 Paul writes, "the one who leads, in diligence." The word for lead is *proistemi*, from *pro* (before, in front) and *histemi* (to stand). A leader is, word for word, one who stands in front. He goes first.

It appears 8 times in the New Testament, and the way it's used is eye-opening. It's used for elders who lead the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17), for a man who manages his household (1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12), and for believers who "devote themselves to good works" (Titus 3:8, 14). That last one is the same Greek word. Leading and devoting yourself to something are close cousins. A leader is someone who stands in front of a good work and gives himself to it.

There's also a sense of caring in this word. In 1 Timothy 3:5 Paul asks, "if one does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" Managing and taking care of are used side by side. In the Bible, leading is a form of caring.

Then Paul adds how to do it: "in diligence." The word *spoude* means eagerness, earnest effort, zeal. It appears 12 times. Paul uses it again three verses later, "in diligence not lazy" (Romans 12:11). Jude uses it

when he says he was "making all diligence to write to you" (Jude 3). A leader can't lead half-heartedly. If the one in front isn't giving it his all, nobody behind him will.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Leaders are to be honored.** "But we ask you, brothers, to know those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them most exceedingly in love because of their work" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Notice three things leaders do: they labor, they lead, and they admonish. Leadership is hard work. And notice why they're honored: "because of their work," not because of their title.

**Leadership starts at home.** Paul's question in 1 Timothy 3:5 is a searching one. If a man can't lead his own family with love and order, he's not ready to lead God's family. Home is the proving ground.

**Leadership is servant-hearted.** Jesus drew a sharp line between the world's leadership and His.

> *But Jesus, having called them to **Him**, says to them, "You know that those being accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and their great **ones** exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you will be your servant; and whoever of you desires to become first will be slave of all."* (Mark 10:42-44)

"It will not be so among you." The world's leaders "exercise lordship." Christ's leaders serve. The one who stands in front is supposed to stand there the way Jesus did, with a towel and a cross.

**Leaders are examples.** "Remember those who lead you, who spoke the word of God to you; considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). The best leaders are people you want to copy.

## In the Apostles' Day

**Leading through a crisis.** When the church faced the circumcision question in Acts 15, leaders stepped up. "The apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter" (15:6). There was "much debate." Peter spoke. Paul and Barnabas reported. James proposed a solution. Then "it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to send men chosen from among them" (15:22). That's what good leadership looks like: it faces the hard problem, listens, follows Scripture, makes a decision, and brings the whole church along.

**Leading men.** The men they chose to carry the decision were "Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers" (Acts 15:22). Silas went on to travel with Paul, sing in a Philippian jail, and help plant churches across Greece.

**Leading in the household.** The early church met in homes, and the leaders of those households often became the leaders of the church that met there: Priscilla and Aquila (1 Corinthians 16:19), Nymphas (Colossians 4:15), Philemon (Philemon 2). Leadership at home and leadership in the church went hand in hand.

**Nehemiah.** The Old Testament gives one of the Bible's best portraits of a leader. Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem's walls were broken down. He wept, prayed, and fasted (Nehemiah 1:4). Then he got permission from the king, went to Jerusalem, and inspected the walls at night before telling anyone his plan (2:12-15). When he finally spoke, he was honest about the problem and pointed to God: "Come, and let us build the wall of Jerusalem" (2:17). And the people said, "Let us arise and build" (2:18). He assigned families to sections near their own homes (chapter 3). When enemies threatened, he set guards and said, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the great and awesome Lord" (4:14). When they tried to distract him, he said, "I am doing a great work, and I am not able to come down" (6:3). The wall was done in fifty-two days (6:15). That's prayer, planning, vision, delegation, courage, focus, and diligence, all in one man.

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues. Every church, ministry, and family needs it.

Picture Angela. She's a mother of three who works part-time. When the church wanted to start a ministry to families of kids with special needs, nobody knew where to begin. Angela prayed about it, talked to families, figured out what they actually needed (a few hours of respite on a Friday night), recruited volunteers, set up training, and launched it in four months. She didn't do it all herself. She cast the vision, got people in the right spots, kept everybody encouraged, and kept the whole thing moving. When it was running well, she handed it to someone else and went back to the nursery. That's the gift of leading.

The gift shows up in elders and pastors, but also in small group leaders, ministry directors, business owners who lead their employees with integrity, coaches, and parents. Wherever someone stands in front and goes first with diligence and care, the gift may be at work.

## Watch Out For

- **Lording it over people.** "It will not be so among you" (Mark 10:43). Control, manipulation, and fear are the world's tools.
- **Laziness.** Paul said lead "in diligence." A leader who coasts drains the energy out of everyone behind him.
- **Neglecting home.** A man who leads the church and loses his family has his priorities backward (1 Timothy 3:5).
- **Leading without praying.** Nehemiah prayed before he planned. Leaders who skip prayer end up building their own kingdoms.
- **Refusing to follow.** Good leaders are good followers. Every leader answers to Christ and should answer to others in the church.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Pray first. Nehemiah's first move was to weep and pray.
- Give it your full effort. "In diligence."
- Lead at home first.
- Serve the people you lead. Ask what they need to do their part well.
- Raise up other leaders. Don't build something that collapses when you leave.
- Stay accountable. Have people who can tell you no.

## Study Questions

1. Who is the best leader you've ever followed? What made them good?
2. Read Mark 10:42-45. How is Christ's kind of leadership different from the world's?
3. The word *proistemi* can mean lead, manage, care for, or devote yourself to. How do all those meanings fit together?
4. Read 1 Timothy 3:4-5. Why does Paul connect leading at home with leading in the church?
5. Read Nehemiah 2:11-18. What leadership principles do you see?
6. Where is God calling you to stand in front and go first?

# Chapter 18: Administrations

> *Let all things be done properly and in order.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:40 (SLB)

If you've ever been part of a church event that fell apart because nobody knew who was supposed to bring the tables, you know the value of this gift. If you've ever been part of one that ran so smoothly you never even thought about it, you've probably been blessed by someone who has it. Paul calls it "administrations." It sounds like the least spiritual gift on the list. But the word Paul chose for it might be the most vivid picture of all.

## The Word

**κυβέρνησις** (*kybernesis*)
**Say it:** koo-BER-nay-sis
**Strong's number:** G2941
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** steering, piloting; guiding a group toward its goal

**κυβερνήτης** (*kybernetes*)
**Say it:** koo-ber-NAY-tays
**Strong's number:** G2942
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** a ship's pilot, a helmsman, the man who steers

*Kybernesis* appears only 1 time in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 12:28: "helps, administrations." But its family tells us exactly what it means. A *kybernetes* was the pilot of a ship, the man at the helm. The word appears 2 times. In Acts 27:11 the centurion "was persuaded by the pilot and the ship owner rather than by the things spoken by Paul." In Revelation 18:17 "every shipmaster" weeps over fallen Babylon.

So the gift of administration is the gift of steering. The pilot isn't the owner of the ship, and he isn't the wind that drives it. He's the one who keeps it pointed toward port, reads the conditions, adjusts course, and makes sure it doesn't hit the rocks. Interestingly, the English words "govern" and "government" come from this same Greek word, through Latin.

In a church, the Spirit is the wind. Christ is the Owner and the Head. The person with the gift of administration is like the helmsman: helping the body get where Christ wants it to go, in good order.

## Leading and Administrating: What's the Difference?

These two gifts overlap, and many people have both. But they're not quite the same.

- **Leading** (*proistemi*, Chapter 17) stands in front, casts vision, and motivates people. It answers, "Where are we going, and why?"
- **Administration** (*kybernesis*) steers, plans, and organizes. It answers, "How do we get there, step by step?"

A visionary leader without an administrator often leaves a trail of exciting ideas that never get finished. An administrator without a leader may run a perfectly organized ship that isn't going anywhere. Put them together, and things happen.

## How the Bible Shows It

The word itself only appears once as a gift, but the Bible is full of people with this gift.

**Jethro's advice to Moses.** Moses was judging every dispute among a couple of million people by himself, from morning to evening. His father-in-law saw it and said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both you and this people that is with you; for the thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to do it by yourself alone" (Exodus 18:17-18). Then Jethro laid out a plan: find capable, God-fearing, honest men and set them over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (18:21). The small cases went to them; the hard cases came to Moses. That's administration. It saved Moses' health and served the people better.

**Joseph in Egypt.** When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream of seven good years and seven years of famine, he didn't stop at the interpretation. He gave Pharaoh an administrative plan: appoint a wise man, appoint overseers, store a fifth of the harvest in the cities, and keep it for the lean years (Genesis 41:33-36). Pharaoh put Joseph in charge, and his planning saved Egypt, his own family, and the line through which the Messiah would come.

**The seven in Acts 6.** When the widows were being overlooked, the apostles didn't just tell people to try harder. They created a structure: seven qualified men "whom we will appoint over this need" (Acts 6:3). Good administration solved a problem that could have split the church.

**Paul and the offering.** Paul spent years organizing a collection from the Gentile churches for the poor believers in Jerusalem. He gave instructions to set money aside on the first day of every week (1 Corinthians 16:2). He arranged for men chosen by the churches to carry it (2 Corinthians 8:19). And he was careful about how it looked: "avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this bounty which is being ministered by us, providing good things not only before the Lord but also before men" (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). That's administration with integrity. Handling God's money carefully and openly is a spiritual matter.

**Titus in Crete.** "For this reason I left you in Crete, so that you might set in order the things lacking and appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). Somebody had to get the churches organized. Paul trusted Titus to do it.

Paul also said this about the church gathering: "Let all things be done properly and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). God isn't against order. He invented it. Creation itself is the most organized thing ever made.

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues. And in a world of budgets, background checks for children's workers, building codes, and complicated schedules, churches need it more than ever.

Picture Paul (not the apostle). He's an accountant by day, and on Sundays he's the guy with the clipboard. He built the church's volunteer schedule so that nobody serves more than two Sundays a month. He set up the child safety check-in system. He writes the budget every year and explains it clearly to the congregation. He makes sure two unrelated people count the offering. Most people never notice what Paul does. They just notice that things work. When the pastor has a vision for a new ministry, Paul is the one who asks, "Okay, what will it take, and who does what?"

Jesus said that a man who wants to build a tower first sits down and counts the cost (Luke 14:28). That's the person with this gift. They see the steps between here and there.

## Watch Out For

- **Programs over people.** Administration exists to serve the body. When the system becomes more important than the people in it, the ship is being steered for the sake of the steering.
- **Control.** The pilot isn't the owner. Administrators who need everything their way forget whose ship it is.
- **Quenching the Spirit.** Order is good, but some administrators are so tied to the plan that they can't adjust when God does something unexpected. A good pilot reads the wind.
- **Looking down on administrators.** Some think this gift is "just business." Paul put it in the same list as apostles and prophets.
- **Sloppiness with money.** Paul took great care to be above reproach. So should we.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Remember who owns the ship. Pray over the plans and hold them loosely.
- Serve the vision. Ask leaders what they're trying to accomplish, then help them get there.
- Build systems that protect people, especially children and money.
- Explain the why. People follow a plan better when they understand it.
- Train others. A good administrator builds structures that work without him.

## Study Questions

1. What picture does the word *kybernesis* give you of the gift of administration?
2. What's the difference between leading and administrating? Why do they need each other?
3. Read Exodus 18:13-27. What problem did Jethro solve, and how?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 8:18-21. Why was Paul so careful about how the offering was handled?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 14:40. Is order spiritual? Why?
6. Where could your church, family, or small group use better steering right now?

# Chapter 19: Giving

> *Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 9:7 (SLB)

Every believer is called to give. That's not in question. But Paul lists giving in Romans 12:8 as a special gift, alongside teaching and leading. Some believers have been wired by the Spirit to give in a way that goes beyond the normal. They find real joy in it. They notice needs, and their first thought is, "How can I help pay for that?" They don't all have a lot of money, either. Some of the most gifted givers I've known lived on very little. What sets them apart isn't the size of the check. It's the heart behind it.

## The Word

**μεταδίδωμι** (*metadidomi*)
**Say it:** met-ah-DID-oh-mee
**Strong's number:** G3330
**Used in the New Testament:** 5 times
**Plain meaning:** to share, to give a portion of what you have to another

**ἁπλότης** (*haplotes*)
**Say it:** hap-LOT-ays
**Strong's number:** G572
**Used in the New Testament:** 8 times
**Plain meaning:** simplicity, single-mindedness; sincere generosity with no hidden motive

Paul writes, "the one who gives, in generosity" (Romans 12:8). The word for give isn't the ordinary word for giving (*didomi*). It's *metadidomi*, which adds *meta* (with). It means to share, to give a part of what you have so that someone else has it with you. It's used only 5 times. Besides Romans 12:8, here are the other four:

- John the Baptist: "The one having two tunics, let him share with the one not having any" (Luke 3:11).
- Paul to the Romans: "that I may impart some spiritual gift to you" (Romans 1:11).
- Paul about the former thief: "let him labor, working with the hands what is good, so that he may have something to share with the one who has need" (Ephesians 4:28).
- Paul to the Thessalonians: "we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

That last one is beautiful. The gift of giving isn't only about money. Paul shared his very life.

Then Paul adds how to give: "in generosity." The word is *haplotes*. Its root meaning is simplicity or singleness, like a piece of cloth folded only once instead of many times. It came to mean sincerity, a single

motive with nothing hidden, and from there, open-handed generosity. It appears 8 times. In Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22 it's "sincerity of heart." In 2 Corinthians 8:2 and 9:11-13 it's "generosity." The two ideas belong together. A generous giver gives with a single motive: love for God and for people. No strings, no angles, no hidden agenda.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**God loves a cheerful giver.** Paul's longest teaching on giving is 2 Corinthians 8-9.

> *Now this **I say**: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings. Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

"Cheerful" is *hilaros*, which gives us the English word hilarious. It appears only 1 time in the New Testament. God doesn't want grudging, guilt-driven, arm-twisted giving. He loves a giver who's glad to do it.

**The Macedonians.** Paul held up the churches in Macedonia as an example.

> *Now we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given among the churches of Macedonia, that in much testing of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their generosity. For according to **their** ability, I testify, and beyond **their** ability, **they gave** of their own accord, with much appeal begging us to receive the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints. And not as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us through **the** will of God* (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

Look at what produced their generosity: grace from God, "much testing of affliction," "deep poverty," and "abundance of their joy." These were poor, persecuted people. They begged Paul to let them give. And the reason is in verse 5: "they first gave themselves to the Lord." Once you've given yourself to God, giving your money is just following through.

**Generosity is God's grace in us.** Paul calls their giving "the grace of God which has been given among the churches" (8:1). Giving is a grace. It's a *charis*, which ties right back to *charisma*.

**God supplies the giver.** "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work" (9:8). God gives to the giver so that he can keep giving.

**Giving in secret.** Jesus said, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your charity may be in secret" (Matthew 6:3-4). The single-minded giver isn't looking for a plaque.

## In the Apostles' Day

**The first church.** After Pentecost, the believers shared so freely that "neither was anyone needy among them" (Acts 4:34). People sold land and houses and brought the money to the apostles, and "distribution was being made to each, as anyone had need" (4:35). This wasn't forced. Peter told Ananias that his land had been his to keep (5:4). It was love overflowing.

**Barnabas.** The first giver named is Barnabas, who sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37). We saw him in Chapter 8 as the Son of Encouragement. Encouragers and givers are often the same people.

**Ananias and Sapphira.** The very next story is the counterfeit. They sold property, kept part of the money, and pretended they'd given it all (Acts 5:1-11). Their sin wasn't keeping some. It was lying to look generous. That's the opposite of *haplotes*, single-minded sincerity. They had two motives, and one of them was to be seen.

**Antioch's famine relief.** When Agabus prophesied a famine, "the disciples, according as anyone was prospering, each of them determined to send for ministry to the brothers dwelling in Judea" (Acts 11:29). Everybody gave according to what they had.

**The Philippians.** This church supported Paul again and again. "Even in Thessalonica you sent to me both once and twice for my need" (Philippians 4:16). Paul said their gift was "an aroma of fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (4:18). A gift to God's work is worship that rises to heaven like incense.

**The widow.** And we can't forget the poor widow Jesus watched put two small coins into the temple treasury. He said, "this poor widow has cast in more than all; for all these out of what was abounding to them cast into the gifts of God, but she out of her poverty cast in all the livelihood that she had" (Luke 21:3-4). God doesn't measure the gift by the amount. He measures it by what it cost.

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues.

Every believer should give regularly, proportionately, and cheerfully to God's work through the local church (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7). Many believers follow the tithe, a tenth, as a good biblical pattern and starting point. The New Testament doesn't lay down a fixed percentage as a law for Christians, but it does call us to give generously and gladly, and it never suggests we should give less under grace than Israel gave under the law.

The gift of giving goes beyond that. Picture Walt and Ruth. They ran a small business for forty years and never lived in a big house. Without telling anyone, they've paid for dozens of kids to go to church camp, covered a struggling family's rent more than once, and quietly funded a missionary's whole retirement. They pray over every request and don't give to everything. But when God puts something on their hearts, they give fast and they give big, and they get a kick out of it. That's *hilaros* giving.

Or picture Teresa, a single mom on a tight budget. She can't write big checks. But she's always got an extra bag of groceries for the family down the street, and she gives her time and her guest room just as freely as her money. She has the gift too. It's measured by the heart, not the bank account.

## Watch Out For

- **Giving to be seen.** Ananias and Sapphira died over this one. Jesus said those who give to be seen "have no reward" with the Father (Matthew 6:1).

- **Giving to control.** Big givers sometimes expect big influence. Generosity with strings attached isn't *haplotes*.
- **Giving under pressure.** "Not out of grief or out of necessity" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Beware of anyone who uses guilt or promises of riches to pry money out of you. God is not a slot machine.
- **Giving foolishly.** A gifted giver still needs wisdom. Not every request is from God, and not every ministry is honest.
- **Thinking giving is only for the rich.** The Macedonians gave out of deep poverty. The widow gave two coins.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Give yourself first. "They first gave themselves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5).
- Give through your church, and give beyond it as God leads.
- Pray over requests. Give where God leads, not just where the loudest voice is.
- Give quietly. Let your left hand stay in the dark.
- Live simply. People with this gift often choose a smaller lifestyle so they can give more.
- Enjoy it. God loves a hilarious giver.

## Study Questions

1. What's the difference between *didomi* (give) and *metadidomi* (share)?
2. The word *haplotes* means both "sincerity" and "generosity." Why do those two ideas belong together?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. What made the Macedonians so generous?
4. What was Ananias and Sapphira's real sin (Acts 5:1-4)?
5. Read Luke 21:1-4. How does God measure a gift?
6. Is your giving cheerful? What would make it more so?

# Chapter 20: Showing Mercy

> *Which therefore of these three seems to you to have become a neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, and you do likewise.*
>
> Luke 10:36-37 (SLB)

When someone's world falls apart, some people bring advice. Some bring a casserole. And some just show up, sit down next to you, and stay. They don't need to fix it. They just don't want you to be alone in it. When they leave, you somehow feel lighter. That's the gift of showing mercy, and it's the last one Paul names in Romans 12: "the one who shows mercy, in cheerfulness" (12:8).

## The Word

**ἐλεέω** (*eleeo*)
**Say it:** el-eh-EH-oh
**Strong's number:** G1653
**Used in the New Testament:** 31 times, in 28 verses
**Plain meaning:** to show mercy; to have compassion and act on it

**ἔλεος** (*eleos*)
**Say it:** EL-eh-oss
**Strong's number:** G1656
**Used in the New Testament:** 28 times, in 27 verses
**Plain meaning:** mercy; kindness and pity toward someone in trouble

**ἱλαρότης** (*hilarotes*)
**Say it:** hih-lah-ROT-ays
**Strong's number:** G2432
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** cheerfulness, gladness, willingness

*Eleeo*, to show mercy, appears 31 times in the New Testament. The noun *eleos*, mercy, appears 28 times. Mercy in the Bible isn't just a feeling of pity. It's pity that does something. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Mercy is God, or one of His people, stepping in to relieve misery.

Listen to who uses this word in the Gospels. Over and over, desperate people cry out to Jesus with it. "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!" shouted blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:47). Lepers, blind men, a Canaanite mother, and a father with a suffering son all cried, "Have mercy." That's the cry of people who can't help themselves. The gift of showing mercy is God's answer to that cry, given through His people.

Then Paul adds: "in cheerfulness." The word is *hilarotes*, from the same family as the "cheerful giver" of 2 Corinthians 9:7. It appears only 1 time in the New Testament, right here. Mercy shown grudgingly, or with a long face, or with a sigh that says, "Here we go again," hurts the person you're trying to help. People who are suffering can tell whether you're glad to be there.

## Mercy and Compassion

The New Testament has another word that goes hand in hand with mercy.

**σπλαγχνίζομαι** (*splanchnizomai*)
**Say it:** splangk-NID-zo-my
**Strong's number:** G4697
**Used in the New Testament:** 12 times
**Plain meaning:** to be moved with compassion; to feel it deep in your gut

*Splanchnizomai* comes from the word for a person's inner organs, the gut. The ancients thought of the gut as the seat of deep feeling, the way we talk about the heart. To be "moved with compassion" was to feel it so deeply that your insides churned. The word appears 12 times, and almost every time it describes Jesus.

> *And having seen the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd.* (Matthew 9:36)

When Jesus saw crowds, a widow burying her only son, lepers, the blind, and hungry people, He was moved with compassion, and then He acted (Luke 7:13; Mark 1:41; Matthew 20:34; Mark 8:2). In Mark 9:22 a desperate father begs Jesus for it. The other three times, it's in a parable describing what God is like: the master who forgives the debt (Matthew 18:27), the Samaritan who stops on the road (Luke 10:33), and the father who sees his prodigal son far off and runs to him (Luke 15:20). Compassion is the feeling. Mercy is what it does.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**The Good Samaritan.** Jesus' most famous picture of mercy is a story. A man was robbed and left half dead. A priest passed by. A Levite passed by. Then a Samaritan, a man the Jews despised, "felt compassion" (that's *splanchnizomai*), bandaged his wounds, put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and paid for his care (Luke 10:33-35). Then Jesus asked who had been a neighbor.

> *"Which therefore of these three seems to you to have become a neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, and you do likewise."* (Luke 10:36-37)

"The one who showed mercy." Mercy crosses the road. It costs time, money, and comfort. And it doesn't ask first whether the person deserves it.

**Blessed are the merciful.** "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7). James adds a warning: "the judgment will be merciless to the one who has not shown mercy; and mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

**God desires mercy.** When the Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with sinners, He quoted Hosea: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13). Religious activity without mercy doesn't impress God.

**Pure religion.** "Religion pure and undefiled before the God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). Notice the word "visit." Showing mercy usually means going.

## In the Apostles' Day

The early church became famous for mercy. They took care of their widows every day (Acts 6:1). Dorcas sewed clothes for them (Acts 9:36-39). The churches sent famine relief across the empire (Acts 11:29; Romans 15:26). Hebrews tells believers to "remember the prisoners as bound with them, and those being mistreated, as being yourselves also in the body" (Hebrews 13:3), and many believers visited Christians in prison, at real risk to themselves.

Paul was shown mercy and knew it. "I was shown mercy," he wrote, even though he had been "a blasphemer and a persecutor" (1 Timothy 1:13). The Philippians showed him mercy by sending Epaphroditus with a gift. And when Epaphroditus got deathly sick, Paul wrote, "God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow" (Philippians 2:27).

Jesus said that on the last day, the King will say to the righteous: "I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:35-36). That's the gift of mercy in six lines. And He said whatever we did for the least of His brothers, we did for Him.

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues. There's no shortage of suffering.

Picture Bev. She's in her sixties and has buried a husband and a son. You might think that would make her want to stay away from grief. Instead, she's the first one at the house when someone in the church loses a loved one. She doesn't say much. She makes coffee, answers the door, and sits with the family. A month later, when everyone else has gone back to normal, Bev is still calling. She's learned that the hardest days come after the casseroles stop. And she does it gladly. "Somebody did it for me," she says.

The gift shows up in hospice volunteers, nursing home visitors, people who work with those fighting addiction and those without a home, foster parents, those who visit prisons, people who sit with the dying, and the co-worker who notices someone eating lunch alone every day and pulls up a chair. People with this gift often feel others' pain more deeply than most. That's a burden, but it's also what makes them so good at it.

## Watch Out For

- **Mercy without cheerfulness.** Paul said "in cheerfulness" for a reason. Grudging mercy leaves people feeling like a burden.
- **Mercy without truth.** Mercy doesn't mean telling people their sin is okay. Jesus showed mercy to sinners and told them to go and sin no more.
- **Burnout.** People with this gift can carry too much. They need rest, and they need others to show mercy to them.
- **Judging the "undeserving."** If mercy only goes to people who deserve it, it isn't mercy.
- **Looking down on others.** Merciful people can be hard on believers with other gifts, like administrators, who seem less tender. The body needs both.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Remember the mercy you've received. Paul never forgot it. Neither should we.
- Show up. Presence matters more than words. Job's friends did best in the first week, when they sat with him and said nothing (Job 2:13).
- Stay longer than everyone else. Grief doesn't end after the funeral.
- Weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, even knowing He was about to raise him (John 11:35).
- Do it gladly. Ask God for *hilarotes*, real joy in it.
- Take care of yourself and let others care for you.

## Study Questions

1. What's the difference between grace and mercy?
2. Read Mark 10:46-52. What does Bartimaeus's cry teach you about mercy?
3. The word *splanchnizomai* is used almost only of Jesus. What does that tell you about His heart?
4. Read Luke 10:30-37. What did mercy cost the Samaritan?
5. Why does Paul say mercy should be shown "in cheerfulness"?
6. Who is suffering near you right now? What would it look like to cross the road for them?

# Chapter 21: Faith

> *And without faith **it is** impossible to please **Him**; for the one who draws near to God must believe that He is, and **that** He becomes a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him.*
>
> Hebrews 11:6 (SLB)

Every Christian has faith. You can't be saved without it: "by grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). So why does Paul list faith as a special gift in 1 Corinthians 12:9, given "to a different one"? Because there's a kind of faith that God gives to some believers for the sake of the whole church. It's the faith that believes God for big things, holds steady when everyone else is shaking, and moves forward when the way isn't clear yet. Every church I've ever known has had a few people like that. When things get hard, everybody looks at them.

On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me drinking. She did not cover for me, and she did not give up on me. She took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day and waited for me until it was over. Sometimes the clearest picture of faith is the person next to you who refuses to let go.

## The Word

**πίστις** (*pistis*)
**Say it:** PIS-tis
**Strong's number:** G4102
**Used in the New Testament:** 243 times, in 227 verses
**Plain meaning:** faith, trust, belief; also faithfulness, reliability

**πιστεύω** (*pisteuo*)
**Say it:** pis-TEW-oh
**Strong's number:** G4100
**Used in the New Testament:** 248 times, in 220 verses
**Plain meaning:** to believe, to trust, to rely on

*Pistis* is one of the great words of the New Testament. It appears 243 times, and its verb *pisteuo*, to believe, appears 248 times. At its root, it means trust, leaning your whole weight on someone or something. You'll see this word again in Chapter 35, because it's also the seventh fruit of the Spirit, where it means faithfulness.

The New Testament uses *pistis* in at least four ways, and keeping them apart is the key to understanding this gift.

1. **Saving faith.** Trusting Christ for salvation. Every believer has it (Ephesians 2:8).

2. **The faith.** The body of truth we believe, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).
3. **Growing faith.** The daily trust in God that every believer is called to grow in. Paul says God "has allotted to each a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).
4. **The gift of faith.** A special, Spirit-given confidence in God for a particular work or situation, given to some for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:9).

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Mountain-moving faith.** Paul seems to have the gift in mind in 1 Corinthians 13:2: "if I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." He's echoing Jesus.

> *And Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."* (Matthew 17:20)

Jesus wasn't talking about bulldozing hills for fun. He was talking about the impossible obstacles that stand between God's people and God's will. Faith takes God at His word and expects Him to act.

**Faith that doesn't waver.** Paul held up Abraham as the great example. God promised him a son when he was a hundred years old and Sarah was ninety. "Yet with respect to the promise of God he did not waver in unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, having given glory to God, and having been fully convinced that what He has promised He is able also to do" (Romans 4:20-21). The gift of faith often shows up as that kind of settled confidence.

**The great hall of faith.** Hebrews 11 is a whole chapter of people who trusted God when it made no sense. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). Noah built a boat on dry land. Abraham left home not knowing where he was going. Moses walked away from the palace. The list ends with people "who through faith conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions" (11:33).

**Faith rests on God, not on itself.** The power is never in the faith. It's in the One you trust. Jesus said "Have faith of God" (Mark 11:22). The SLB keeps that literal wording. It can mean faith in God, or faith that comes from God. Either way, God is the source and the object. A tiny mustard seed of faith in a great God accomplishes more than a mountain of confidence in yourself.

## In the Apostles' Day

**Stephen.** Luke describes Stephen as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5), and then "full of faith and power" (6:8). Stephen faced a hostile council with his face shining like an angel's, preached the gospel to the men who were about to kill him, and died praying for them (6:15; 7:59-60). That's not ordinary courage.

**Barnabas.** "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large crowd was added to the Lord" (Acts 11:24). His faith saw what God was doing among the Gentiles in Antioch when others might have hesitated.

**Paul in the storm.** After fourteen days of storm, with no sun or stars and every hope gone, Paul stood up in the middle of 276 terrified people and said, "take courage, men; for I believe God that it will be so, in the way in which it has been told to me" (Acts 27:25). "I believe God." Everyone else was looking at the waves. Paul was looking at the promise.

**Peter and the lame man.** After Peter healed a man lame from birth at the temple gate, he told the crowd, "on the faith of His name, this man whom you see and know, His name has strengthened" (Acts 3:16). The gift of faith often stood behind the healings and miracles in Acts. In Lystra, Paul looked at a crippled man, "having seen that he has faith to be saved," and told him to stand up, and he did (Acts 14:9-10).

## What It Looks Like Today

Unlike healing and miracles, the gift of faith isn't usually counted among the disputed sign gifts. But the three views from Chapter 5 do shade how people describe it. Those who believe all the gifts continue often connect the gift of faith with expecting miracles and healing. Those who believe the sign gifts ended usually describe the gift of faith as an unusual confidence in God's promises and providence that moves people to attempt great things for God. The open-but-cautious view usually holds both.

Church history is full of examples people on every side admire. George Müller ran orphanages in Bristol, England, in the 1800s and cared for thousands of children over his lifetime. He made it his practice never to ask anyone for money, but to pray and tell God alone about the need, and he kept careful records of how the needs were met. Hudson Taylor went into the interior of China with a similar faith. You don't have to agree with every method of men like that to see that God gave them a gift of faith that blessed thousands.

And it shows up in ordinary churches. Picture Harold. He's eighty-one. When the church board looked at the numbers for a new ministry to kids in the trailer park down the road, everyone said it couldn't be done. Harold said, "Brothers, has God told us to reach these kids? Then He'll provide. Let's pray, and let's start with what we have." He wasn't reckless. He was sure. They started with a van and three volunteers. Ten years later, that ministry has seen dozens of families come to Christ. Everyone in the church will tell you it started with Harold's faith.

The gift often shows up in prayer warriors who keep believing for a prodigal child for twenty years, in missionaries who go to hard places with no guarantees, and in church planters who start with a living room and a handful of people.

## Watch Out For

- **Presumption.** Real faith rests on what God has said. Presumption tells God what He must do. "Name it and claim it" teaching that treats faith as a force to get whatever we want is not biblical faith.
- **Blaming the sick.** Some teach that if you're not healed, it's because you didn't have enough faith. Paul left Trophimus sick (2 Timothy 4:20). Was Paul's faith weak? No. God is sovereign.
- **Faith without love.** "If I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

- **Faith as an excuse for poor planning.** Faith and wisdom work together. Jesus also told us to count the cost (Luke 14:28).
- **Despising people with less faith.** "Now receive the one who is weak in the faith" (Romans 14:1). The gift is given to strengthen the weak, not to look down on them.

## If This Is Your Gift

- Feed it with God's Word. "So faith is from report, and report through the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Report means the message heard.
- Pray boldly and specifically. Then watch and record what God does.
- Encourage others to trust God. Your faith is meant to lift the faith of the whole body.
- Stay humble. You didn't create your faith. God gave it.
- Accept God's answers, including no and wait. Faith trusts God's character, not just His gifts.

## Study Questions

1. What are the four ways the New Testament uses the word "faith"? How is the gift of faith different from saving faith?
2. Read Matthew 17:20. What "mountains" in your life or church need faith right now?
3. Read Romans 4:18-21. What made Abraham's faith so strong?
4. Read Acts 27:20-25. What did Paul believe, and where did his confidence come from?
5. What's the difference between faith and presumption?
6. Who is someone in your church with the gift of faith? How has their faith encouraged you?

# Chapter 22: Hospitality and Singleness

> ***be*** *hospitable to one another without grumbling; each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves, as good stewards of* ***the*** *manifold grace of God.*
>
> 1 Peter 4:9-10 (SLB)

These two gifts don't appear in the main gift lists, but the New Testament speaks of both in gift language. Peter tells us to be hospitable right before he says, "each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves" (1 Peter 4:9-10). And Paul uses the word *charisma* itself for singleness in 1 Corinthians 7:7. They seem like an odd pair for one chapter. But they have something in common. Both are about what you do with your home and your life. One opens the door. The other frees the calendar. Both are given for the sake of others.

## First, the Gift of Hospitality

**φιλοξενία** (*philoxenia*)
**Say it:** fil-ox-en-EE-ah
**Strong's number:** G5381
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** hospitality; word for word, love of strangers

**φιλόξενος** (*philoxenos*)
**Say it:** fil-OX-en-oss
**Strong's number:** G5382
**Used in the New Testament:** 3 times
**Plain meaning:** hospitable; a lover of strangers

The word is a compound of *philos* (love, friendship) and *xenos* (stranger, foreigner, guest). Hospitality in the Bible is, word for word, the love of strangers. That's different from what we usually mean. Most of us think of hospitality as having friends over. The Bible's word is about opening your home to people you don't know, or don't know well.

The noun *philoxenia* appears only 2 times: "pursuing hospitality" (Romans 12:13) and "Do not forget hospitality, for through this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). The adjective *philoxenos* appears 3 times: twice as a requirement for elders (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8), and once as a command to everyone: "be hospitable to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9).

Notice two things. Paul says "pursuing" hospitality. The word means to chase after it. You don't wait for hospitality to happen. You go after it. And Peter says "without grumbling," which means he knew how easy it is to grumble about it. Guests are work.

## How the Bible Uses It

**Every believer is called to it.** Romans 12:13 and 1 Peter 4:9 are addressed to the whole church. And elders must be hospitable. It's one of the few things on the elder list besides character and teaching.

**Some have a special gift for it.** Peter's flow of thought, from hospitality straight into "each one, as he has received a gift," suggests that some believers have been especially gifted to make others welcome. You know them. Their house always seems to have an extra place at the table.

**Angels unaware.** Hebrews 13:2 points back to Abraham, who ran out of his tent in the heat of the day to welcome three strangers, bowed down, washed their feet, and fed them a meal. He didn't know at first that one of them was the Lord and the other two were angels (Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1).

**Supporting gospel workers.** John praised Gaius for receiving traveling missionaries: "We therefore ought to receive such men, so that we may become fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 8). When you open your home to God's servants, you become a partner in their work.

## In the Apostles' Day

The early church couldn't have survived without hospitality. There were no church buildings for about two hundred years. Churches met in homes. Traveling preachers stayed with believers. The first believers were "breaking bread from house to house" and "partaking of food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46).

- **Lydia**, the businesswoman in Philippi, was baptized and immediately said, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, having entered into my house, remain." Luke adds, "And she prevailed upon us" (Acts 16:15). Her home became the first church in Europe.
- **Priscilla and Aquila** had a church in their house in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19) and later in Rome (Romans 16:5).
- **Martha** "received Him into her house" (Luke 10:38). Her hospitality gave Mary the chance to sit at Jesus' feet.
- **Publius**, the leading man on Malta, "having received us, entertained us hospitably three days" (Acts 28:7). God used that welcome to bring healing to his father and to many on the island.
- **Gaius** hosted Paul and "the whole church" in Corinth (Romans 16:23).

## What It Looks Like Today

Everyone agrees this gift continues.

Picture the Hendersons. They're not wealthy, and their house isn't fancy. The couch has a stain they've given up on. But every Sunday after church, they invite somebody home for lunch, usually someone new or someone who looks like they're alone. College students who are far from home know there's always a plate of food there. Over the years, they've hosted missionaries on furlough, a family whose house burned down, and a young man just out of prison who needed a place to land. Most of the people who have come to Christ through their small group first walked through their front door for a pot roast.

That's the gift. It isn't about a perfect house or fancy food. It's about making people feel wanted. In a lonely age, an open door may be one of the most powerful tools for the gospel we have.

## Second, the Gift of Singleness

> *For I wish all men to be even as I myself **am**. But each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that way.* (1 Corinthians 7:7)

Paul was unmarried when he wrote this, and he says he wishes everyone could be like him. Then he immediately adds that "each has his own gift from God." The word is *charisma*, the same word he uses for spiritual gifts in chapter 12.

**ἄγαμος** (*agamos*)
**Say it:** AG-ah-moss
**Strong's number:** G22
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** unmarried; not married

Paul uses the word *agamos* (unmarried, word for word "not married") 4 times, all in 1 Corinthians 7. Jesus spoke of the same thing in Matthew 19:12, when He talked about those who "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens," meaning they chose not to marry so they could serve God. Then He said, "Not all receive this word, but those to whom it has been given" (19:11). Again, it's a gift.

Some call this the gift of celibacy. I prefer to call it the gift of singleness, because the point isn't just what a person doesn't do. It's what they're free to do.

## What Paul Means

Bible teachers understand 1 Corinthians 7:7 in two main ways. Some believe Paul means that both singleness and marriage are gifts from God: "one in this way, and another in that way." Others believe Paul is talking about the specific gift of contentment and self-control in singleness that he had, and that others may have. Both readings agree that singleness, for those God calls to it, is a good gift, not a second-class life.

Paul explains why singleness can be such a gift.

> *But I want you to be without anxiety. The unmarried man is anxious for the things of the Lord, how he will please the Lord; but the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how he will please his wife. The wife and the virgin have been divided. The unmarried woman is anxious for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but the one who has married is anxious for the things of the world, how she will please her husband. And this I say for your own benefit, not that I may cast a noose on you, but for what is seemly and devoted to the Lord without distraction.* (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

A married person rightly has divided concerns. A husband should care about pleasing his wife. A wife should care about pleasing her husband. That's good and right. But an unmarried person can give undivided attention to the Lord's work. Paul is careful to say he isn't trying to "cast a noose" on anyone (7:35). He also says, "if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn" (7:9). Marriage is honorable (Hebrews 13:4), and forbidding marriage is a mark of false teaching (1 Timothy 4:3). Singleness is a gift for some, not a rule for all.

## In the Apostles' Day

Paul himself traveled thousands of miles, was shipwrecked, beaten, and imprisoned, and planted churches across the Roman world. It's hard to imagine him doing all that with a wife and children waiting at home. His singleness was part of how God used him.

And we can't forget the greatest single person who ever lived: Jesus Christ. He never married, and His whole life was given to His Father's will and to His bride, the church.

There were others. Philip's four daughters were unmarried and prophesied (Acts 21:9). Anna, widowed after seven years of marriage, spent decades in the temple "serving with fastings and petitions night and day" (Luke 2:37).

## What It Looks Like Today

Many churches today, without meaning to, treat single adults as if they're waiting for their real life to start. That's not how Paul saw it.

Picture Karen. She's forty-eight and never married. For years she wondered if something was wrong with her. Then she started to see how God was using her freedom. She's spent summers on short-term mission trips. She teaches a Bible study for young women. She can drop everything when a friend is in the hospital. She's "Aunt Karen" to a dozen kids in her church. She still has hard days, and some nights she's lonely. But she's not waiting. She's serving.

Not every single person has this gift in the sense of being content to stay single for life. Many single believers hope to marry, and that's a good desire. But every season of singleness, whether short or long, can be used for undivided devotion to the Lord.

## Watch Out For

- **Hospitality to impress.** A perfect house and a fancy meal can become about you. Hospitality is about the guest.
- **Grumbling.** Peter said "without grumbling." If you open your home but complain about it, you've lost the gift's point.
- **Only welcoming friends.** The word means love of strangers. Jesus said to invite those who can't pay you back (Luke 14:12-14).
- **Treating singles as incomplete.** Jesus was single. Paul was single. Don't make single people feel like a project.

- **Singleness as selfishness.** The gift is for undivided devotion to the Lord, not for living however you please.

## If This Is Your Gift

- **Hospitality:** Keep it simple. Soup and bread with a warm welcome beats a feast you never get around to hosting. Look for the stranger, the lonely, and the new.
- **Singleness:** Use your freedom on purpose. Ask God where your undivided attention is needed. Build deep friendships in the body of Christ, and let the church be your family.
- **Both:** They fit together beautifully. Some of the most hospitable people I know are single.

## Study Questions

1. The word for hospitality means "love of strangers." How is that different from just having friends over?
2. Read Hebrews 13:2 and Genesis 18:1-8. What does Abraham's example teach about hospitality?
3. Read Acts 16:14-15. How did Lydia's hospitality help the gospel spread?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 7:7 and 7:32-35. Why does Paul call singleness a gift?
5. How can your church better value and include single adults?
6. Who could you invite into your home this month who wouldn't expect it?

# Part Four: The Sign Gifts

# Chapter 23: Gifts of Healings

> *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.*
>
> James 5:14-15 (SLB)

I've sat in hospital waiting rooms praying for people I love. I've seen people get better in ways the doctors couldn't explain, and I've stood at gravesides of people the whole church prayed for. If you've been a Christian for long, you have too. So this chapter isn't just theory for me. Healing touches all of us sooner or later, and what we believe about it matters when we're sitting in that waiting room.

This is the first of the four sign gifts we'll look at in Part Four. Remember from Chapter 5 that faithful believers differ on whether these gifts continue the same way today. I'll show you what the words mean and what happened in the apostles' day, then lay out how each view sees it today and what all of us can agree on.

## The Word

**ἴαμα** (*iama*)
**Say it:** EE-ah-mah
**Strong's number:** G2386
**Used in the New Testament:** 3 times
**Plain meaning:** a healing; a cure; the result of being healed

**ἰάομαι** (*iaomai*)
**Say it:** ee-AH-oh-my
**Strong's number:** G2390
**Used in the New Testament:** 28 times
**Plain meaning:** to heal, to cure, to make whole

**θεραπεύω** (*therapeuo*)
**Say it:** ther-ah-PEW-oh
**Strong's number:** G2323
**Used in the New Testament:** 44 times, in 43 verses
**Plain meaning:** to heal, to treat; first meaning, to serve or take care of

Paul's phrase is "gifts of healings" (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30). Both words are plural in Greek: *charismata iamaton*. The noun *iama*, healing, appears only 3 times in the New Testament, and all three are in this

one chapter. The double plural may suggest different gifts for different kinds of healing, or that each healing is its own gift from God at the moment it happens, rather than a power a person carries around and uses at will. Many Bible teachers on every side of the debate have noticed that.

Two verbs carry the idea of healing through the rest of the New Testament. *Iaomai*, to heal, appears 28 times. *Therapeuo* appears 44 times. Its first meaning is to serve or take care of, and you can hear our word therapy in it. In the Gospels and Acts, it's the most common word for Jesus and His followers healing people.

Peter uses *iaomai* for the deepest healing of all: "who Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live to righteousness; by whose wound you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24, drawing on Isaiah 53:5). Every other healing points to that one. Our biggest sickness is sin, and Jesus healed it at the cross.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Jesus the Healer.** Healing was everywhere in Jesus' ministry. Peter summed it up for Cornelius: "God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all those being oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). Matthew saw Isaiah fulfilled in it.

> *And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and He healed all who were sick, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore the diseases."* (Matthew 8:16-17)

**Healing as a sign of the kingdom.** When Jesus sent out the Twelve, He gave them "power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal those who were sick" (Luke 9:1-2). Healing went with the message. It showed what the kingdom is like: a place where sickness and death are defeated. John says the signs were written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

**Healing through the prayer of faith.** James gives instructions for the whole church, not just for gifted individuals.

> *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.* (James 5:14-15)

Notice who prays: "the elders of the church." Not a traveling healer, but the ordinary leaders of a local church. And notice whose power heals: "the Lord will raise him up." The oil was a common medicine in that day and also a sign of being set apart for God. Either way, the power is the Lord's.

**Not everyone was healed.** The New Testament is honest about this. Paul had "a thorn in the flesh" and begged the Lord three times to take it away. The answer was no: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Paul first preached in Galatia "because of weakness of the flesh" (Galatians 4:13). He left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20) and told

Timothy to take a little wine for his frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23). Even apostles weren't always healed and didn't always heal.

## In the Apostles' Day

The book of Acts is full of healings.

**The lame man at the temple.** "Silver and gold I do not have; but what I have, this I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). A man lame from birth went "walking and leaping and praising God" (3:8). It was undeniable. Even the council that hated the apostles "had nothing to say against it" (4:14).

**Peter's shadow.** People laid the sick in the streets hoping Peter's shadow would fall on them, and crowds from surrounding towns brought the sick and tormented, "who were all being healed" (Acts 5:15-16).

**Aeneas.** Peter found a man paralyzed for eight years and said, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you" (Acts 9:34). Notice who heals. Peter knew it wasn't him. And "all those dwelling in Lydda and Sharon saw him, who turned to the Lord" (9:35). The healing led to salvation.

**Paul in Ephesus.** "God was doing miracles of no ordinary kind through the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from his skin to the sick, and the diseases departed from them" (Acts 19:11-12). Luke calls these "no ordinary" miracles. Even in Acts, this was unusual.

**Publius' father.** On Malta, Paul prayed, laid hands on a man with fever and dysentery, and healed him, and then others on the island came and were healed (Acts 28:8-9).

Look at the pattern. Healings happened mostly through the apostles and those close to them (Stephen and Philip, for example). They were done in Jesus' name. They were immediate, complete, and public, and even enemies couldn't deny them. And they opened doors for the gospel.

## What It Looks Like Today

Here's how each of the three views from Chapter 5 sees this gift.

**Those who believe the sign gifts ended** hold that the gift of healing, a person being given the ability to heal, ended with the apostles, whose miracles confirmed their message. They point to the pattern above: immediate, complete, undeniable healings clustered around the apostles. But they firmly believe God still heals today in answer to prayer, through medicine, and sometimes in ways no doctor can explain. They practice James 5. The difference is that they see healing today as God's direct answer to the prayers of His people, not as a gift residing in a particular person.

**Those who believe all the gifts continue** hold that God still gives some believers gifts of healings, and that the church should expect healing as part of the kingdom breaking in, while recognizing that not everyone is healed in this life. They point to the commands of James 5, to 1 Corinthians 12, and to reports of healing, especially where the gospel is new.

**Those who are open but cautious** pray boldly for healing and expect God to answer, and are glad when He does, but are careful not to label anyone a "healer," and they test claims carefully.

Picture First Church on a Wednesday night. Margaret, seventy-four, has just been diagnosed with cancer. She asks the elders to pray for her, as James says. They gather around her, anoint her forehead with a little oil, and pray. Nobody puts on a show. Nobody promises her she'll be healed. They pray in faith, asking God to raise her up, and they keep praying with her through every treatment. Months later her scans come back clear. Her doctor says the treatment worked better than expected. Margaret says God answered prayer. And she's right either way, because God works through doctors too.

Now picture another Margaret, in another church. Same diagnosis, same prayers, same faith. She goes home to be with the Lord eight months later, surrounded by her church family. Was God's answer to the first Margaret a healing and His answer to the second a failure? No. Both were healed. One was healed for a little while longer here. The other was healed forever. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain" (Revelation 21:4). Every healing in this life is temporary. Lazarus died again. The resurrection is the final healing.

Every view can agree on that. And every view can practice this: call the elders, pray in faith, confess sins to one another (James 5:16), use the doctors God has given, and trust Him with the outcome.

## About Mark 16:17-18

Some point to Mark 16:18, "they will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well," as a promise for every believer. The SLB includes Mark 16:9-20 because the Received Text it follows has these verses. The two oldest complete copies we have do not include them, so many Bible teachers are careful about building doctrine on them alone. The same passage mentions picking up serpents and drinking poison, and no wise church makes those a test of faith.

## Watch Out For

- **Blaming the sick.** Telling a sick person "you just don't have enough faith" is cruel and unbiblical. Paul wasn't healed of his thorn, and it wasn't for lack of faith.
- **Healing for money.** "Freely you received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Anyone who charges for healing or ties healing to a donation fails the test.
- **Abandoning medicine.** Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14). Paul recommended a little wine for Timothy's stomach. God works through medicine. Never stop treatment because someone told you to "just believe."
- **Showmanship.** Healings in Acts pointed to Jesus, not to a stage personality. Jesus warned that false prophets will "give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).
- **Not praying at all.** The other danger is churches that never pray for the sick because they're afraid of excess. James 5 is a command, not a suggestion.

## If God Uses You This Way

- Pray for the sick, and keep praying. Whatever your view, that's for all of us.

- Point to Jesus. “Jesus the Christ heals you” (Acts 9:34).
- Be honest. Don’t claim healings that didn’t happen or can’t be checked.
- Stay humble. Healing is God’s gift at the moment, not your possession.
- Walk with those who aren’t healed. Sitting with someone through a long illness may be the greatest healing ministry of all.

## Study Questions

1. Read 1 Peter 2:24. What’s the deepest healing Jesus gives?
2. Why do you think Paul calls them “gifts of healings,” with both words plural?
3. Read James 5:14-16. Who prays, what do they do, and who heals? Does your church practice this?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What did Paul learn when God said no to his prayer for healing?
5. How would you comfort a believer who prayed for healing and wasn’t healed?
6. Whatever your view of the gift today, how can you take part in praying for the sick this week?

# Chapter 24: Workings of Miracles

> *Israelite men, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves also know*
>
> Acts 2:22 (SLB)

People use the word "miracle" loosely. We call a parking spot near the door a miracle, or a baby's birth, or a team coming back from twenty points down. Some of those are real blessings from God, but they're not what the Bible means by a miracle. In this chapter we'll look at the gift Paul calls "workings of miracles" (1 Corinthians 12:10), what the Greek words mean, what miracles were for in the apostles' day, and how believers today understand this gift.

There is no human reason my marriage survived my worst seasons, or that I stopped drinking on May 29, 2020, and stayed stopped. After a hiking accident in 2014 and four major surgeries, I spent six years using alcohol to mask the pain until it became an addiction. Willpower failed every time. When God broke through my pride, He changed desires I could not change myself. That is God's power at work in an ordinary life.

## The Word

**δύναμις** (*dynamis*)
**Say it:** DOO-nah-mis
**Strong's number:** G1411
**Used in the New Testament:** 120 times, in 116 verses
**Plain meaning:** power, might, ability; a mighty work, a miracle

**ἐνέργημα** (*energema*)
**Say it:** en-ERG-ay-mah
**Strong's number:** G1755
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** a working, an operation, an effect produced by power

Paul's phrase is *energemata dynameon*, "workings of powers." Both words are plural, just like "gifts of healings." We met *energema* in Chapter 2. It appears only 2 times, both in this chapter of 1 Corinthians. *Dynamis* is one of the great power words of the New Testament. It appears 120 times. You can hear it in our words dynamite and dynamic. It can mean power in general ("you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," Acts 1:8), or a mighty work that shows God's power, a miracle.

The New Testament uses three words together for the miracles of Jesus and the apostles. Peter used all three at Pentecost: "Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22).

**τέρας** (*teras*)
**Say it:** TEH-rahss
**Strong's number:** G5059
**Used in the New Testament:** 16 times
**Plain meaning:** a wonder; something that makes people stop and stare in amazement

- **Miracles** (*dynameis*) show God's *power*. They answer the question, "Who can do this?"
- **Wonders** (*terata*, used 16 times) produce *amazement*. They make people stop in their tracks. Interestingly, the New Testament never uses this word alone. It's always paired with "signs."
- **Signs** (*semeia*, used 77 times) carry a *meaning*. They point to something beyond themselves.

One event could be all three at once. When Jesus raised Lazarus, it was a display of power, it amazed everyone, and it pointed to the truth that He is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

## What Miracles Were For

The New Testament is clear that miracles had a purpose. They were never just for show.

**They revealed who Jesus is.** After the first sign at Cana, "He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). John chose the signs he recorded "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

**They confirmed the messengers.** God attested to Jesus "by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22). The gospel was "confirmed to us by those who heard, God bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and various miracles" (Hebrews 2:3-4). Paul called them "the signs of the apostle" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

**They showed the kingdom.** Healings, deliverances, raising the dead, and calming storms showed what the kingdom of God is like: a world set right, where the curse is undone.

**They met real needs.** Jesus fed hungry crowds because He had compassion on them (Mark 8:2). Miracles were acts of love, not stunts.

But miracles didn't force anyone to believe. "Though He had done so many signs before them, they were not believing in Him" (John 12:37). Jesus said that people who won't listen to Scripture won't be persuaded "if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Miracles open eyes that God is opening. They don't open hearts that are determined to stay shut.

## In the Apostles' Day

Acts records a wide range of miracles beyond healing.

- **Signs through the apostles.** "Many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). "Through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people" (5:12).
- **Stephen**, "full of faith and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8).
- **Philip** did signs in Samaria that even amazed Simon the sorcerer, who had amazed everyone else (8:6-13).
- **Raising the dead.** Peter raised Dorcas (9:40-41). Paul raised Eutychus, a young man who fell asleep during a long sermon and fell from a third-story window (20:9-12). Every preacher should remember that one.
- **Judgment.** Paul's word struck the sorcerer Elymas blind for a season (13:11). Miracles weren't always gentle.
- **Protection.** A viper bit Paul on Malta, and he shook it into the fire and suffered no harm (28:3-6).
- **Deliverance.** An angel freed Peter from prison (12:7-10). An earthquake opened the doors where Paul and Silas sang at midnight (16:25-26). These were God's direct acts, not gifts working through a person.

Notice who did most of the miracles in Acts: the apostles, and a few men closely connected to them like Stephen and Philip. Paul does write to the Galatians about God "working miracles among you" (Galatians 3:5), so they weren't limited to apostles alone. But they were most often tied to those who carried the gospel into new places.

## What It Looks Like Today

Here's how the three views from Chapter 5 see this gift.

**Those who believe the sign gifts ended** hold that the gift of working miracles, a person regularly doing miracles as a sign, belonged to the apostolic age. The miracles confirmed the apostles' message, and that message is now written down in the New Testament. They do believe God still does miraculous things today in His providence and in answer to prayer, whenever and however He pleases. The difference is that they don't believe He gives the gift of working miracles to individuals.

**Those who believe all the gifts continue** hold that God still gives this gift. Many point to reports from missionaries and from the growing church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where the gospel is reaching people for the first time, and where accounts of miracles often come along with conversions, much as in Acts.

**Those who are open but cautious** believe God can and sometimes does work miracles today, but they look carefully at claims, and they're slow to say any individual has the gift.

All three views can rejoice when God does something only He could do. And all three need to be careful, because the Bible warns that the enemy can produce signs too.

## Counterfeit Miracles

The Bible gives more warnings about false miracles than you might expect.

- Pharaoh's magicians copied some of Moses' signs "by their secret arts" (Exodus 7:11).
- Jesus said, "false christs and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

- The man of sin will come "according to the working of Satan in every power and signs and wonders of falsehood" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Notice all three miracle words, used of a counterfeit.
- The beast from the earth in Revelation "performs great signs, so that it even makes fire come down out of heaven" (Revelation 13:13).
- Jesus warned that some who did "many mighty works" in His name will hear, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22-23). "Mighty works" is *dynameis*, the same word.

That means a miracle alone never proves a message is from God. The message has to be tested by Scripture (Deuteronomy 13:1-3 even warns that a sign might come true and still be from a false prophet). Miracles serve the truth. They never replace it.

## Watch Out For

- **Chasing miracles instead of Jesus.** Crowds followed Jesus for the bread and left when He talked about Himself as the Bread of Life (John 6:26, 66).
- **Calling everything a miracle.** When everything is a miracle, nothing is. Honesty matters.
- **Believing every claim.** The Bible warns of counterfeits. Test everything.
- **Denying God's power.** The other error is to live as if God never acts beyond the ordinary. He is the same God who raised Jesus from the dead.
- **Making a show of it.** Every miracle in the Bible pointed to God. When a person becomes the center, be careful.

## If God Uses You This Way

- Give God the glory, every time. Peter said, "why do you marvel at this? Or why do you look intently at us, as if by our own power or godliness we had made him walk?" (Acts 3:12).
- Keep the gospel central. Miracles in Acts opened doors for preaching.
- Submit to your church's leaders and to Scripture.
- Never take money for it.

## Study Questions

1. What's the difference between a miracle, a wonder, and a sign?
2. Read John 20:30-31. Why did John record the signs Jesus did?
3. Read John 12:37 and Luke 16:31. Why don't miracles automatically produce faith?
4. Who did most of the miracles in Acts? What do you think that tells us?
5. Read Matthew 24:24 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Why can't a miracle alone prove that a message is from God?
6. Whatever your view of the gift, how have you seen God's power at work in your own life?

# Chapter 25: Kinds of Tongues

> *I thank my God, speaking in tongues more than you all; but in **the** church I want to speak five words through my mind, so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:18-19 (SLB)

No spiritual gift has caused more arguments than this one. Whole denominations have formed around it. Churches have split over it. Some believers have been told they're not really filled with the Spirit because they've never spoken in tongues. Others have been told that anyone who speaks in tongues is deceived. Somewhere in the middle are a lot of sincere Christians who just want to know what the Bible actually says.

So let's slow down and look carefully. Paul spent more words on this gift than on any other, and most of them were corrections. That alone tells us something.

## The Word

**γλῶσσα** (*glossa*)
**Say it:** GLOHS-sah
**Strong's number:** G1100
**Used in the New Testament:** 50 times, in 47 verses
**Plain meaning:** the tongue (the body part); a language

**γένος** (*genos*)
**Say it:** GEN-oss
**Strong's number:** G1085
**Used in the New Testament:** 21 times
**Plain meaning:** a kind, a family, a race; a type of something

Paul's phrase is "kinds of tongues" (*gene glosson*, 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28). *Glossa* is the ordinary Greek word for the tongue in your mouth, and from there, for a language. We do the same thing in English when we say "mother tongue." It appears 50 times in the New Testament. Sometimes it means the body part ("the tongue is a fire," James 3:6). Sometimes it means a language or a people group ("every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues," Revelation 7:9). And 21 times, in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it's tied to the gift.

The word *genos*, "kinds," appears 21 times. It means a family or a type, and it suggests there was more than one kind of tongue. Bible teachers disagree about what the kinds were, as we'll see.

Luke also uses another word at Pentecost:

**διάλεκτος** (*dialektos*)
**Say it:** dee-AL-ek-toss
**Strong's number:** G1258
**Used in the New Testament:** 6 times
**Plain meaning:** a language, a dialect; the particular language of a people

"Each one was hearing them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6). That's *dialektos*, where we get dialect. Luke uses it 6 times, always for a real human language like Aramaic or Hebrew.

## Tongues in the Book of Acts

Tongues appear three times in Acts, and each time is at an important turning point in the spread of the gospel.

**Pentecost (Acts 2).** The believers "began to speak in other tongues, just as the Spirit was giving them to speak forth" (2:4). Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem for the feast, and they were amazed.

> *And they were all amazed and were marveling, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how do we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"* (Acts 2:7-8)

These were real human languages, and the hearers recognized them. Luke lists fifteen regions (2:9-11). What the hearers understood was "the great things of God" (2:11). It was praise. As I said in my Acts study, the miracle was in the speaking. Some teachers believe it was also in the hearing. Either way, the languages were real, and people understood them.

Think about what this reverses. At Babel, God confused the languages of the earth and scattered the people (Genesis 11:7-9). At Pentecost, God spoke through many languages to gather people from every nation into one family. That's a picture of where history is headed: "a great multitude which no one was able to number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

**Cornelius' house (Acts 10).** When Peter preached to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word." The Jewish believers with Peter "were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out even upon the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and magnifying God" (10:44-46). Tongues here were the proof that Gentiles had received the same Spirit. Peter later told Jerusalem it was "even as also upon us at the beginning" (11:15).

**The disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19).** Paul met about twelve men who knew only John's baptism. After they believed in Jesus and were baptized, "when Paul had laid the hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they were speaking in tongues and prophesying" (19:6).

Look at the pattern: Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2), Gentiles (Acts 10), and followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19). Many see each as a milestone in Acts 1:8 being fulfilled, with tongues as God's public sign that each new group was truly included in the church. Notice also what's missing. Acts records many other

conversions, like the three thousand at Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian official, Paul himself, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer, without mentioning tongues.

## Tongues in Corinth

In 1 Corinthians, tongues show up as a gift used in the church meeting, and Paul has a lot to say about it.

**Speaking to God.** "For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one hears him, but in the spirit he speaks mysteries" (14:2). In Corinth, unlike Pentecost, nobody understood the tongue without an interpreter.

**Building up oneself.** "The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church" (14:4). Some read this as a good thing, a private benefit. Others read it as a gentle rebuke, since every gift is supposed to be for the common good (12:7). Probably Paul means it isn't bad, but it isn't the point of gathering.

**Praying with the spirit and with the mind.** "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What then is it? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind" (14:14-15).

**Paul himself.** "I thank my God, speaking in tongues more than you all; but in the church I want to speak five words through my mind, so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue" (14:18-19). Paul wasn't against tongues because he didn't have the gift. He had it more than anyone. But in church, five clear words beat ten thousand nobody understands.

**A sign to unbelievers.** Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, where God warned Israel that because they wouldn't listen to plain words, He would speak to them through foreign invaders' languages, a sign of judgment. "So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelievers" (14:22). Then he warns that if an unbeliever walks into a meeting where everyone is speaking in tongues, "will they not say that you are mad?" (14:23). That's a hard passage, and Bible teachers piece it together differently. Most understand that tongues without interpretation leave unbelievers outside and unmoved, while clear prophecy can convict them.

**Not everyone.** "Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (12:30). In Greek, each question uses a word (*me*) that expects the answer no. Not all speak in tongues.

## What Were the "Kinds of Tongues"?

Bible teachers give three main answers.

1. **Real human languages only.** Many believe tongues in Corinth were the same as at Pentecost: real languages the speaker never learned. They point out that the same word is used in both places, and that Paul compares tongues to foreign languages (14:10-11). "Kinds" would mean different languages.
2. **Human languages and heavenly speech.** Others believe tongues could include both human languages and a kind of spiritual speech or prayer language not tied to any earthly language. They point to "the tongues of men and of angels" (13:1), to speaking "mysteries" to God that "no one hears" (14:2), and to praying "with the spirit" (14:14).

3. **A heavenly prayer language only in Corinth.** A smaller group believes Corinthian tongues were different from Pentecost altogether.

My 1 Corinthians study presents the first two views without a verdict, and I'll leave it there too. Faithful believers hold each one.

## Is Tongues the Sign of Being Filled With the Spirit?

Many Pentecostal churches teach that speaking in tongues is the "initial evidence" that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit, a second experience after salvation. They point to the three times in Acts where tongues came with the Spirit's coming (2:4; 10:46; 19:6), and to the Samaritans, who believed and were baptized but received the Spirit later (8:14-17).

Here's the one place this book leans, because my 1 Corinthians study already does, and it's simply what the verse says: Paul's question "Do all speak in tongues?" (12:30) expects the answer no. Paul also says in the same chapter that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (12:13), all of them, though not all spoke in tongues. And Acts records many conversions without tongues. So I don't believe Scripture teaches that every Spirit-filled believer must speak in tongues. Many continuationists agree with that. No believer should be made to feel second-class because he hasn't had this experience. The New Testament command is "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), and the evidence Paul gives in the verses that follow is worship, thanksgiving, and humble submission to one another (5:19-21). When the believers in Acts 4 were filled with the Spirit, the result was that they "were speaking the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

## What It Looks Like Today

**Those who believe the sign gifts ended** hold that tongues were a sign for the apostolic age, especially a sign to unbelieving Israel (1 Corinthians 14:21-22) and a sign that each new group was included in the church. Once those purposes were fulfilled, the gift ended. Many point to 1 Corinthians 13:8, "whether tongues, they will cease." They believe most tongues today are learned behavior or sincere but mistaken experiences, not the biblical gift.

**Those who believe all the gifts continue** hold that tongues remain a gift of the Spirit, used in private prayer and, with interpretation, in the church. Healthy churches with this view follow Paul's rules closely: two or three at most, one at a time, always interpreted, and silence if there's no interpreter (14:27-28). They don't push everyone to speak in tongues.

**Those who are open but cautious** obey Paul's command "do not forbid speaking in tongues" (14:39), but they insist on his rules for order, they don't treat it as a mark of spirituality, and they test what they see.

Picture two believers in the same small group. Carlos grew up Pentecostal and prays in tongues privately most mornings. He's never used it in a meeting, because no one has interpreted, and he knows Paul's rule. David grew up in a church that taught tongues had ceased, and he's never spoken in tongues. They disagree about it. But they've decided that the love of 1 Corinthians 13 matters more than winning the

argument about 1 Corinthians 14. They pray together every week, in English. That's a picture of what Paul was after.

## Watch Out For

- **Pride.** Tongues was the Corinthians' favorite gift, and it made them proud. Paul put it at the end of his lists (12:10, 28, 30).
- **Pressure.** Coaching people to repeat syllables or telling them they must speak in tongues isn't biblical. The Spirit distributes "as He wills" (12:11).
- **Disorder.** Many people speaking at once without interpretation breaks Paul's direct instructions (14:27-28, 40).
- **Contempt.** Mocking believers who speak in tongues also breaks Paul's direct instruction: "do not forbid speaking in tongues" (14:39).
- **Tongues without love.** "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (13:1).

## If God Has Given You This Gift

- Follow Paul's rules. In church: two or three at most, one at a time, with interpretation, or keep silent.
- Pray that you may interpret (14:13).
- Pray with your mind too. Paul did both.
- Never look down on believers who don't have it, or who don't believe it continues.
- Pursue love above all.

## Study Questions

1. What does the word *glossa* mean? What does that tell you about the gift?
2. Read Acts 2:1-11. What did the hearers understand, and why does it matter that they heard it in their own languages?
3. Compare Pentecost with Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). What is God doing at Pentecost?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 14:18-19. What does Paul's own example teach about tongues in church?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 12:13 and 12:30. Does every Spirit-filled believer speak in tongues? Why or why not?
6. How can believers who disagree about tongues still love and serve together?

# Chapter 26: Interpretation of Tongues

*Therefore let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.*

1 Corinthians 14:13 (SLB)

The last gift in Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is "interpretation of tongues." It's the gift that makes the gift of tongues useful to the church. Without it, Paul says, a tongue in the meeting is like a trumpet that gives an unclear sound: nobody knows whether to get ready for battle (14:8). With it, what was locked up becomes something the whole church can hear, understand, and say "Amen" to.

## The Word

**ἑρμηνεία** (*hermeneia*)
**Say it:** her-may-NAY-ah
**Strong's number:** G2058
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** interpretation, translation; putting into words that can be understood

**διερμηνεύω** (*diermeneuo*)
**Say it:** dee-er-may-NEW-oh
**Strong's number:** G1329
**Used in the New Testament:** 6 times
**Plain meaning:** to interpret, to translate, to explain fully

**διερμηνευτής** (*diermeneutes*)
**Say it:** dee-er-may-new-TAYS
**Strong's number:** G1328
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** an interpreter

This word family is connected to the name Hermes, the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology. A *hermeneus* was a translator or interpreter. The study of how to interpret the Bible is still called hermeneutics.

*Hermeneia*, interpretation, appears only 2 times, both in 1 Corinthians (12:10; 14:26). The stronger verb *diermeneuo*, to interpret fully, appears 6 times. Four of those six are in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. One is in Acts 9:36, where Luke explains that the name Tabitha, "translated," means Dorcas. The last is Luke 24:27, which we'll come to in a moment. The word for an interpreter, *diermeneutes*, appears just 1 time: "if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in the church" (14:28).

The simpler verb *hermeneuo* is used four times for translating a word from one language to another (John 1:38, 42; 9:7; Hebrews 7:2). That fits the first view of tongues in the last chapter, that the gift involved real languages. But "interpret" can also mean to explain the meaning of something, so it also fits the other views.

Jesus Himself did this for His disciples on the road to Emmaus: "He was explaining to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The word for "explaining" there is *diermeneuo*.

## How the New Testament Uses It

Everything Paul says about interpretation comes from 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

**It's a separate gift.** "To a different one kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues" (12:10). Sometimes the same person may have both. Sometimes it's someone else.

**It makes tongues equal to prophecy.** "Greater is the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification" (14:5). An interpreted tongue builds up the church the way prophecy does. That's Paul's whole concern.

**Ask for it.** "Therefore let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret" (14:13). This is a striking verse. It tells us gifts aren't fixed forever. A believer can ask God for a gift that would serve the church better.

**No interpreter, no tongue.** "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God" (14:27-28). That's about as plain a rule as the New Testament gives.

**So everyone can say Amen.** "Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will the one who fills the place of the uninstructed say the 'Amen' at your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you say?" (14:16). Worship in the church is meant to be shared. If I can't understand what you're saying, I can't agree with it.

## In the Apostles' Day

The New Testament doesn't record a specific example of someone interpreting a tongue. At Pentecost, no interpreter was needed, because the hearers understood their own languages (Acts 2:8). We learn about interpretation only from Paul's instructions to the Corinthians, which tell us it was happening in their meetings.

The Old Testament has a picture that some have connected to it. When a mysterious hand wrote on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, none of the king's wise men could read it or tell what it meant. Daniel was brought in, and by God's help he read the words and gave their meaning: God had numbered the king's kingdom and finished it (Daniel 5:25-28). That's not the New Testament gift, but it shows the same principle: God gives understanding of what would otherwise be a mystery.

## What It Looks Like Today

This gift stands or falls with the gift of tongues, so the three views line up the same way they did in the last chapter.

**Those who believe the sign gifts ended** hold that interpretation ended with tongues.

**Those who believe all the gifts continue** hold that interpretation remains a gift of the Spirit. In a healthy church with this view, if someone speaks aloud in a tongue during a gathering, the leaders wait for an interpretation. If none comes, they gently remind the church of Paul's rule, and the speaker keeps it between himself and God from then on. Interpretations are weighed like prophecy and tested by Scripture.

**Those who are open but cautious** don't forbid it, but they hold firmly to Paul's rule that there be no uninterpreted tongues in the gathering.

And here's something every view agrees on: Paul's principle behind the gift still applies to everything we do in church. "Let all things be done for edification" (14:26). If people can't understand it, it doesn't build them up. That principle is why churches translate the Bible into every language, why we preach in the language people speak, and why a good church thinks about the visitor sitting in the back row who doesn't know any church words. Every sermon full of words nobody understands breaks the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14, even if nobody speaks in tongues.

## Watch Out For

- **Interpretations that don't fit.** An interpretation is a message to the church and should be weighed like prophecy. If it contradicts Scripture, reject it.
- **Ignoring Paul's rule.** In some churches tongues are spoken aloud week after week with no interpretation. Paul plainly says that shouldn't happen.
- **Pressure to produce.** Nobody should feel pushed to "come up with" an interpretation to fill an awkward silence. Silence is better than invention.
- **Church-speak.** Whatever your view, speak so people understand.

## If God Has Given You This Gift

- Weigh what you sense before you speak, and submit it to your leaders.
- Keep it short and clear, and test it by Scripture.
- Give God the glory.
- Remember the goal: so that the church may receive edification.

## Study Questions

1. What does the word *hermeneia* mean, and where else do we hear it in English?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 14:5. How does interpretation change the value of tongues in the church?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 14:13. What does it tell you about asking God for gifts?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 14:27-28. What rule does Paul give? Why do you think he's so firm about it?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 14:16. Why is it important that everyone in church understand what's said?

6. Whatever your view of tongues, how could your church do a better job of being understood by visitors?

# Chapter 27: Order in the Church Meeting

> *Let all things be done properly and in order.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:40 (SLB)

Before we leave the sign gifts, we need one more chapter. Paul didn't end his teaching on tongues and prophecy with a list of gifts. He ended it with a picture of a church meeting. He wanted the Corinthians to know not just what the gifts were, but how to use them when the church came together. That's where most of the trouble in Corinth was happening, and it's where most of the trouble still happens today.

This chapter belongs to every view. Whether you believe the sign gifts ended or continue, 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 still tells us what God wants a gathering of His people to be like.

## The Word

**τάξις** (*taxis*)
**Say it:** TAX-is
**Strong's number:** G5010
**Used in the New Testament:** 10 times, in 9 verses
**Plain meaning:** order; an arrangement, a fixed place in line

**εὐσχημόνως** (*euschemonos*)
**Say it:** yoo-skay-MON-oce
**Strong's number:** G2156
**Used in the New Testament:** 3 times
**Plain meaning:** properly, decently; in a fitting and becoming way

**ἀκαταστασία** (*akatastasia*)
**Say it:** ah-kat-ah-stah-SEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G181
**Used in the New Testament:** 5 times
**Plain meaning:** disorder, confusion, instability; things stirred up and out of place

Paul's closing line is "Let all things be done properly and in order" (14:40). Two words carry it.

*Taxis*, order, appears 10 times in 9 verses. It was a military word for troops in their ranks, and an everyday word for things in their proper sequence. Luke uses it for Zechariah serving "in the order of his division" at the temple (Luke 1:8). Hebrews uses it in six verses for Jesus as "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6). And Paul uses it once more, as a compliment: "rejoicing and

seeing your order and the firmness of your faith in Christ" (Colossians 2:5). Order isn't the opposite of spiritual life. In Colossae, it was a sign of it.

*Euschemonos*, properly, appears 3 times. It's built from *eu* (good) and *schema* (shape or form), so it means "in good form." Paul uses it for how believers should live in public: "Let us walk properly, as in the day" (Romans 13:13), and "walk properly toward those outside" (1 Thessalonians 4:12). Notice that both times he's thinking about how believers look to outsiders. That's exactly his concern in 1 Corinthians 14, too.

The opposite word is *akatastasia*, disorder. It appears 5 times. Jesus used it for the "disorders" that would come before the end (Luke 21:9). Paul used it for the "riots" he went through (2 Corinthians 6:5) and for the "disorders" he was afraid he'd find in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:20). James tells us where it comes from: "For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16). And Paul tells us who it doesn't come from: "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

## How the New Testament Uses It

Paul gives a short, practical guide for the meeting in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. Here's what it says, piece by piece.

**Everyone brings something.** "Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (14:26). Paul pictures a meeting where many people take part. Church wasn't a show put on by a few for an audience of many. And the test for every part of it is one word: edification, building up.

**Tongues: two or three, one at a time, interpreted.** "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in the church" (14:27-28). We looked at this in the last two chapters.

**Prophecy: two or three, and weighed.** "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern" (14:29). The word for "discern" is *diakrino*, from the same family as distinguishing of spirits (Chapter 11). Even real prophecy wasn't accepted without being tested.

**Take turns.** "But if something is revealed to another who is sitting by, let the first be silent. For you are all able to prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted" (14:30-31). No one should hog the floor. Even a person who believes God has given him something to say can stop and let someone else speak.

**Self-control is part of the gift.** "And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (14:32). This is one of the most important verses in the chapter. A believer speaking by the Spirit is never out of control. Pagan religion in Corinth was full of frenzy, where worshipers said they were overtaken by a god and couldn't help themselves. Paul says the Holy Spirit doesn't work that way. If someone says, "I couldn't stop, the Spirit made me do it," Paul's answer is that the Spirit leaves the speaker in charge of himself. That fits the fruit of the Spirit, which includes self-control (Galatians 5:23).

**Because of who God is.** "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (14:33). This is the reason behind all the rules. A meeting reflects the God it worships. A God of peace is honored by a meeting marked by peace.

**This is the Lord's command.** "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are commandments of the Lord" (14:37). The Corinthians thought of themselves as very spiritual. Paul says the test of being spiritual is whether you'll submit to the word of the Lord through His apostle.

**Don't overcorrect.** "So, brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. Let all things be done properly and in order" (14:39-40). Paul had just spent a whole chapter correcting the misuse of tongues. But he doesn't end by banning them. He ends with balance: desire the gift that builds others up, don't forbid the one that was being misused, and do everything in order.

## The Outsider in the Room

Paul keeps thinking about the person who walks in from outside.

> *Therefore if the whole church comes together in the same place and all speak in tongues, and uninstructed **men** or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and some unbeliever or uninstructed **man** comes in, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all; and thus the secrets of his heart become manifest; and thus, having fallen on **his** face, he will worship God, declaring that God is truly among you.* (1 Corinthians 14:23-25)

Picture the scene. An unbeliever walks in, hears a room full of people speaking in languages nobody understands, and walks out thinking they're crazy. Now picture the same person walking in and hearing clear words from God that cut to the heart. He sees his own sin. He falls on his face. He says, "God is really here."

That's what Paul wants. The meeting isn't just for insiders. A church that thinks about the visitor in the back row is following 1 Corinthians 14, whatever its view of the gifts.

## About 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Right in the middle of this section are two verses that Bible-believing Christians read in different ways.

> *Let your women be silent in the churches; for it has not been permitted to them to speak, but **they are** to be subject, as the law also says. And if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in **the** church.*
> (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)

Here's the difficulty. Just three chapters earlier, Paul assumed that women would pray and prophesy aloud in the church, as long as they did it with the right sign of honor (11:5). Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). So "be silent" can't mean women may never make a sound in a meeting, or Paul would be contradicting himself.

Bible teachers give several readings. Two are the most common.

1. **Silent in judging prophecies.** Many believe Paul is still talking about the weighing of prophecies (14:29). Women could prophesy, but they weren't to take part in the public judging of prophecies, which was an act of authority in the church. Many who hold this reading connect it with 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man." This fits the complementarian view described in Chapter 14.
2. **Silent from disruptive questions.** Others believe Paul is addressing a specific problem in Corinth: women, many of whom had never been taught, were interrupting the meeting with questions. That's why he says, "if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home" (14:35). The concern is order, not a ban on women's gifts. Many who hold the egalitarian view read it this way.

Faithful believers hold each reading, and this book won't settle it for you. Both readings agree on three things. Women prophesied and prayed in the early church. Paul's concern in this whole section was order and edification. And every believer, man or woman, is called to use the gifts God gave.

## In the Apostles' Day

Corinth gives us a picture of what not to do. Paul had already corrected their meetings in chapter 11. When they came together for the Lord's Supper, "each one takes his own supper beforehand, and one is hungry, and another is drunk" (11:21). The rich ate first and the poor went home hungry. Paul's fix was simple: "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another" (11:33). Wait for one another. That's the spirit of the whole section, in the Supper and in the gifts.

Jerusalem gives us a healthier picture. "And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. Simple, steady, and full of life.

Early Christian writers describe meetings that followed this pattern. Justin Martyr, writing in Rome around A.D. 150, described a Sunday gathering where the writings of the apostles and prophets were read "as long as time permits," the leader then gave a talk urging the people to follow what they'd heard, everyone stood to pray, and the Lord's Supper was shared, with an offering taken for widows, orphans, the sick, and strangers (*First Apology*, chapter 67). Reading, preaching, prayer, the Supper, and care for the poor. Not much different from what many churches still do every Sunday.

## What It Looks Like Today

**Those who believe the sign gifts ended** still find plenty here. The principles of 14:26-40 apply to every part of a service: everything should build people up, speakers should take turns and be weighed by Scripture, the visitor matters, and God is honored by peace and order. Many in this view point out that every sermon is to be "weighed" by the hearers, like the Bereans who were "examining the Scriptures every day to see if these things might be so" (Acts 17:11).

**Those who believe all the gifts continue** take these verses as the operating manual for using the gifts in a meeting. In healthy churches with this view, there's often a time in the service, or in a smaller gathering, where people can share a prophecy or a tongue with interpretation. Leaders keep it to two or three, ask that what's shared be tested, and stop anything that crosses the line.

**Those who are open but cautious** often keep the main Sunday service simple and leave room for the gifts in prayer meetings and small groups, where it's easier to weigh what's said and to follow Paul's rules.

Picture a small group of twelve that meets in a living room on Thursday nights. After the study, the leader opens a time of prayer. One woman says she's been thinking about Isaiah 43:2 all week and believes it's for someone in the room: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." A man who just lost his job quietly says that's for him. Nobody makes a big deal about whether it was prophecy or just a good word from a friend. They pray for him, and they check it against Scripture, and it fits. Then someone else prays, and then another. It's orderly, warm, and real. That's 1 Corinthians 14 in a living room.

Now picture the opposite. A loud voice breaks into the pastor's sermon with a "word" that contradicts what the Bible plainly says. Nobody stops it, because they're afraid of quenching the Spirit. Visitors leave and don't come back. That's not freedom. That's what Paul was correcting.

## Watch Out For

- **Confusing noise with power.** Volume and chaos aren't proof the Spirit is moving. Peace is (14:33).
- **Confusing order with dead formality.** The other danger is a service so controlled that nobody but the leaders can ever take part. Paul pictured "each of you" bringing something (14:26).
- **"I couldn't help it."** The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (14:32). The Spirit gives self-control, not frenzy.
- **Forgetting the visitor.** Ask what an unbeliever would hear and think.
- **Leaders who won't lead.** Order in the meeting needs someone willing to gently say "not now" or "that doesn't fit Scripture."

## If You Help Lead a Gathering

- Ask one question about every part of the meeting: does this build people up?
- Make room for others to take part, and make sure what's said is weighed by Scripture.
- Be ready to step in kindly when something is out of order. That's love, not control.
- Think about the visitor sitting in the back row.
- Remember who you're reflecting: a God of peace.

## Study Questions

1. What do the words *taxis* and *euschemonos* mean? Where else does Paul use them?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26. What does it tell you about how many people took part in a church meeting?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 14:32-33. Why does it matter that the Spirit leaves the speaker in control?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. How should the visitor shape the way we worship?
5. Read James 3:16. Where does disorder in a church usually come from?
6. Is your church more at risk of disorder or of dead formality? What would help?

# Part Five: The Fruit of the Spirit

# Chapter 28: One Fruit, Nine Flavors

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such **things** there is no law.*
>
> Galatians 5:22-23 (SLB)

We've spent most of this book on the gifts. Now we turn to the fruit, and in a way this is the more important half. Paul said that without love, the greatest gifts are just noise (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Jesus said the way to recognize His people is by their fruit, not their gifts (Matthew 7:16-20). And some of the most gifted people in Scripture were the least fruitful. The Corinthians had every gift (1 Corinthians 1:7), and they were also proud, divided, and suing one another.

Gifts are what the Spirit gives you to do. Fruit is what the Spirit grows in you to be. A church can survive a shortage of gifts. It can't survive a shortage of fruit.

After about 40 years of work, I lean toward fixing problems fast and moving on. Patience and gentleness do not come naturally to a man wired for schedules. The Spirit grows all nine parts of His fruit in us, especially the ones that clash with our natural wiring.

## The Word

**καρπός** (*karpos*)
**Say it:** kar-POSS
**Strong's number:** G2590
**Used in the New Testament:** 66 times, in 56 verses
**Plain meaning:** fruit; a crop, a harvest; the result of something

*Karpos* is the ordinary Greek word for fruit, the kind you pick off a tree or harvest from a field. It appears 66 times in 56 verses. Jesus used it for literal fruit ("Let no fruit come from you any longer, forever," Matthew 21:19) and for the visible result of a person's life ("You will know them by their fruits," Matthew 7:16). Paul used it for the gift the churches sent to Jerusalem, "having sealed this fruit to them" (Romans 15:28), for the results of his ministry, "fruit of work for me" (Philippians 1:22), and for the life that grows out of salvation: "you have your fruit leading to sanctification, and the end, eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

Here's the first thing to notice in Galatians 5:22. Paul says "the *fruit* of the Spirit is," not "the fruits of the Spirit are." The word is singular. Nine qualities, one fruit.

Bible teachers explain that in a few ways, and they all point to the same truth. Some picture one fruit with nine flavors. Others picture a cluster of grapes, one bunch with nine grapes on it. Either way, the point is that the nine come together. You don't get to pick your favorite three. The gifts are divided up: "distributing to each individually as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11). The fruit isn't divided. The Spirit grows all nine in every believer.

That's a key difference. Not every Christian has the gift of teaching. Every Christian is meant to have love. Not every Christian has the gift of mercy. Every Christian is meant to have kindness. You might be strong in some of the fruit and weak in others for a season, but none of them is optional.

## The Fruit Against the Works

Paul sets the fruit right next to its opposite.

> *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strifes, jealousies, outbursts of rage, rivalries, dissensions, factions, envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revelries, and the things like these, which I tell you beforehand, just as I also said before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* (Galatians 5:19-21)

**σάρξ** (*sarx*)
**Say it:** SARKS
**Strong's number:** G4561
**Used in the New Testament:** 151 times, in 130 verses
**Plain meaning:** flesh; the body; human nature apart from God

**ἔργον** (*ergon*)
**Say it:** ER-gon
**Strong's number:** G2041
**Used in the New Testament:** 176 times, in 161 verses
**Plain meaning:** a work, a deed, something done

*Sarx*, flesh, appears 151 times. Sometimes it just means the body ("the Word became flesh," John 1:14). But in Galatians 5, it means our fallen human nature, the part of us that wants to run our own lives without God. Paul calls what it produces "works" (*erga*), plural, and "the fruit of the Spirit," singular.

Notice the difference. Works are what we produce by our own effort. Fruit is what grows when a living thing is connected to its source. The flesh manufactures. The Spirit grows. The works of the flesh are many and scattered and they fight one another. The fruit of the Spirit is one, and it holds together.

Look at the list of works, too. We usually think of the first few: adultery, sexual immorality, sorcery, drunkenness. But most of the list is about relationships: hostilities, strife, jealousies, outbursts of rage, rivalries, dissensions, factions, envyings. Eight of the seventeen in the SLB are sins of the mouth and the heart against other people. That's the kind of thing that splits churches. And it's exactly what the fruit of the Spirit heals.

Paul gives a hard warning about them: "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (5:21). He doesn't mean a believer who stumbles loses his salvation. The word "practice" points to a settled way of life. A life marked by the works of the flesh, with no fight against them and no fruit of the Spirit, is a life that hasn't been changed by the Spirit at all.

## Three Ways to Group the Nine

Many Bible teachers notice that the nine fall into three groups of three. This isn't Paul's own outline, but it's a helpful way to remember them.

- **Toward God:** love, joy, peace. These describe the inner life of a person who knows God.
- **Toward others:** patience, kindness, goodness. These show up in how we treat people.
- **Toward ourselves:** faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These describe the character that holds steady.

Love comes first, and many believe the other eight are simply love in action. Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 sounds almost like the fruit list: "Love is patient, is kind... is not provoked... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (13:4-7).

## "Against Such Things There Is No Law"

Paul ends the list with a line that's easy to skip: "against such things there is no law" (5:23). The Galatians were being told by false teachers that they needed to keep the law of Moses to be right with God. Paul's answer is that the life the Spirit grows goes beyond anything the law could require. Nobody ever needed a law against too much love or too much kindness.

That's also why the fruit can't be produced by rules. You can make rules against stealing. You can't make a rule that produces joy. Only the Spirit grows that.

## How the New Testament Uses It

The New Testament talks about fruit far more often than Galatians 5.

**Fruit shows what's inside.** "So every good tree produces good fruits, but the rotten tree produces evil fruits" (Matthew 7:17). Jesus taught that you can tell a false prophet not by his gifts but by his fruit. Fruit doesn't make a tree good. It shows that a tree is good.

**Fruit is the goal of the vine.** "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you, so that you may go and bear fruit, and your fruit may remain" (John 15:16). We'll come back to John 15 in Chapter 38.

**Fruit grows through discipline.** "Now all discipline for the present does not seem to be of joy, but of grief; but afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). God often grows fruit through hard seasons.

**Fruit is more than nine things.** Paul speaks of "fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:11) and says the Colossians would be "bearing fruit in every good work" (Colossians 1:10). In Ephesians 5:9, the SLB, following the Received Text, reads "the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." The nine in Galatians 5 are the best-known list, but they're not the only description of what the Spirit grows.

## Walking by the Spirit

**περιπατέω** (*peripateo*)
**Say it:** per-ee-pah-TEH-oh
**Strong's number:** G4043
**Used in the New Testament:** 96 times, in 90 verses
**Plain meaning:** to walk around; to live, to conduct your life

**στοιχέω** (*stoicheo*)
**Say it:** stoy-KHEH-oh
**Strong's number:** G4748
**Used in the New Testament:** 5 times
**Plain meaning:** to walk in line; to keep in step, like soldiers in a rank

Paul frames the fruit with two "walk" commands, using two different words.

"Walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). That's *peripateo*, the everyday word for walking around. It appears 96 times. Paul uses it often for how a person lives day to day. It's a picture of a whole life, step after step.

"If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk in line" (5:25). That's *stoicheo*, a rarer word. It appears just 5 times. It was used for soldiers marching in rank or for things lined up in a row. The SLB brings that out with "walk in line." It's a picture of keeping in step with Someone who's leading.

Put them together and you get Paul's whole method. You don't grow fruit by staring at the fruit list and trying harder. You grow it by walking with the Spirit, every day, and keeping in step with where He leads. We'll look at that more in Chapter 38.

## In the Apostles' Day

The fruit list wasn't written for a calm, easy church. The Galatian churches were in a fight. False teachers had come in. People were arguing about circumcision and the law. Paul warned them, "But if you bite and devour one another, watch out lest you be consumed by one another" (5:15). The fruit of the Spirit was the cure for a church eating itself alive.

The early church outside the New Testament noticed the same thing. Around A.D. 197, Tertullian wrote that pagans looked at the Christians and said, "See how they love one another" (*Apology*, chapter 39). That was fruit, and the watching world could see it.

## What It Looks Like Today

Here's something every view on the gifts agrees on. There's no debate in this book about whether the fruit of the Spirit continues today. Every Christian in every church is called to grow it.

And this is where Christians who disagree about the gifts can stand on the same ground. A cessationist and a continuationist may never agree on 1 Corinthians 14. But they can both grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And when they do, they'll find it a lot easier to love each other across the disagreement.

In the next nine chapters, we'll look at each part of the fruit the same way we looked at the gifts: the word, how the New Testament uses it, what it looked like in the apostles' day, and what it looks like today.

## Watch Out For

- **Gifts without fruit.** Gifted people with no love do great harm. Corinth proves it.
- **Picking favorites.** The fruit is one. You can't be loving but never patient, or joyful but never self-controlled.
- **Fruit by willpower.** You can fake fruit for a while. Plastic fruit looks good in a bowl, but nobody gets fed by it.
- **Ignoring the "respectable" works.** Strife, jealousy, and factions are on the same list as sorcery and drunkenness.
- **Measuring others' fruit instead of your own.** Paul's next words are, "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (5:26).

## Growing in the Fruit

- Read Galatians 5:22-23 slowly and ask which of the nine is weakest in your life right now.
- Read the works of the flesh too, and ask honestly which ones still show up in you.
- Ask God for His Spirit to grow what you can't produce.
- Walk with Him today, one step at a time.

## Study Questions

1. Why do you think Paul says "fruit" (singular) instead of "fruits"?
2. What's the difference between the gifts being "distributed" and the fruit being grown in every believer?
3. Read Galatians 5:19-21. How many of the works of the flesh are about relationships? What does that tell you?
4. What's the difference between a "work" and "fruit"?
5. Read Galatians 5:16 and 5:25. What do "walk" and "walk in line" add to each other?
6. Which part of the fruit do you see most clearly in someone you admire? Which do you most need?

# Chapter 29: Love

> *But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these **is** love.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 13:13 (SLB)

Love comes first in Paul's list, and it's no accident. Paul had just told the Galatians that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). He told the Corinthians that love is the "way beyond comparison" that makes every gift worth having (1 Corinthians 12:31). He told the Colossians to put on love "above all these things" (Colossians 3:14). If you get love right, the rest of the fruit tends to follow. If you get love wrong, nothing else in the list holds up.

When I read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and put my own name in place of love, it hits hard. In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. I fell far short on my own. That passage reminds me that love is measured by patient action, not good intentions.

## The Word

**ἀγάπη** (*agape*)
**Say it:** ah-GAH-pay
**Strong's number:** G26
**Used in the New Testament:** 116 times, in 106 verses
**Plain meaning:** love; goodwill that seeks another's good

**ἀγαπάω** (*agapao*)
**Say it:** ah-gah-PAH-oh
**Strong's number:** G25
**Used in the New Testament:** 142 times, in 109 verses
**Plain meaning:** to love; to value, to be devoted to, to seek another's good

*Agape*, love, appears 116 times in the New Testament. The verb *agapao*, to love, appears 142 times. Together they're the main New Testament words for love, used for God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for one another.

You may have heard that *agape* always means a perfect, divine kind of love. That's partly true and partly overstated. The verb is used for good love: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son" (John 3:16). But it's also used for bad love. Demas deserted Paul, "having loved the present age" (2 Timothy 4:10). And "men loved the darkness rather than the Light" (John 3:19). So the word itself doesn't make love holy. What makes it holy is what it's aimed at, and where it comes from.

What these words do carry is the idea of a love that chooses. It isn't just a warm feeling. It's a settled devotion that acts. That's why Jesus can command it: "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). You can't command a feeling. You can command a choice.

**φιλέω** (*phileo*)
**Say it:** fil-EH-oh
**Strong's number:** G5368
**Used in the New Testament:** 25 times, in 21 verses
**Plain meaning:** to love as a friend; to be fond of; to kiss

Greek had other words for love. *Phileo*, the love of friendship and affection, appears 25 times. It's used of the Father's love for us: "the Father Himself loves you dearly" (John 16:27). It's used of Jesus' love for Lazarus: "he whom You love dearly is sick" (John 11:3). It's also the root of *philadelphia*, brotherly love, and *philoxenia*, the love of strangers we met in Chapter 22. The two words overlap a lot, and Bible teachers warn against pressing the difference too hard. But *agape* is the word Paul chose for the fruit.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Love starts with God.** "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). We don't produce this kind of love. We receive it, and then it flows out. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). John goes even further: "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love isn't just something God does. It's who He is.

**Love is poured in by the Spirit.** "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). That's why love is a fruit of the Spirit. It's God's own love, placed in us by His Spirit.

**Love was shown at the cross.** "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). If you want to know what love looks like, look at the cross. "By this we have known the love of God, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16).

**Love is the mark of a disciple.** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love among one another" (John 13:34-35). Not by our gifts. Not by our doctrine, as important as that is. By our love.

**Love acts.** "My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

**Love sums up the law.** "Love does not work evil to the neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God with everything and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).

## What Love Looks Like

Paul's great description in 1 Corinthians 13 was written for a church that was misusing its gifts. Read it again with that in mind.

> *Love is patient, is kind; love is not envious; love does not boast, is not puffed up, does not behave improperly, does not seek its own things, is not provoked, does not count the evil, does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Notice that almost every line is a verb. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not boast. Paul doesn't describe love as a feeling. He describes it as a way of acting.

And notice how many lines are about what love doesn't do. It doesn't envy, doesn't boast, isn't puffed up, doesn't behave improperly, doesn't seek its own things, isn't provoked, doesn't count the evil. The Corinthians were doing every one of those things. That's what gifts without love look like.

Here's a simple test many have used. Read verses 4-7 and put "I" where it says "love." "I am patient. I am kind. I do not envy..." It gets uncomfortable fast. Then put "Jesus" in the same spot. Every line fits perfectly. That's the love the Spirit is growing in us: the love of Jesus.

## Why Love Is Greatest

> *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions to feed* ***others****, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but do not have love, I am profited nothing.* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Paul says that without love, tongues are noise, prophecy and knowledge and faith are nothing, and even giving everything away and dying a martyr's death gains nothing. That's a stunning list. Some of the greatest gifts and sacrifices a person could make are worth nothing without love.

Then he says, "Love never fails; but whether there are prophecies, they will be done away; whether tongues, they will cease; whether knowledge, it will be done away" (13:8). The gifts are for this age. Love lasts forever. "But now faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (13:13). In heaven, faith will become sight, and hope will be fulfilled. Love will still be there, because God is love.

Paul puts it in one line in 1 Corinthians 8:1: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." The gifts are meant to build up the church. Love is what makes them do it.

## In the Apostles' Day

The first church in Jerusalem showed love in a very practical way.

> *And of the multitude of those who had believed, the heart and the soul was one; and not one was saying that anything of his possessions was his own, but all things were common to them.* (Acts 4:32)

"For neither was anyone needy among them" (4:34). People sold land and houses so that no believer went without. Barnabas sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet (4:36-37). This wasn't forced, and it wasn't a law. It was love.

The early Christians also met for what Jude calls "your love feasts" (Jude 12), the *agapai*, shared meals where rich and poor ate together. That's what had gone wrong in Corinth, where the rich ate first and the poor went hungry (1 Corinthians 11:21). Love meant waiting for one another.

Outsiders noticed. Tertullian, writing in North Africa around A.D. 197, said the pagans pointed at the Christians and said, "See how they love one another" (*Apology*, chapter 39). When plagues swept the Roman world, many Christians stayed to care for the sick, including pagans, when others fled. Eusebius preserves a letter from Dionysius, a bishop of Alexandria in the 250s, describing believers who nursed the sick and died alongside them (*Church History* 7.22). The love of Christ in His people became one of the strongest arguments for the gospel.

## What It Looks Like Today

Love today looks a lot like it did then. It just wears different clothes.

It looks like a church that quietly pays a widow's power bill and never mentions it. It looks like a husband who chooses to be patient when he's tired and his wife is short with him, or a wife who keeps no record of wrongs. It looks like a believer who prays for the coworker who keeps taking credit for his work. It looks like a church that welcomes the family nobody else wants to sit with.

Picture Tom, a deacon in his sixties. A younger man in his church posted something unkind about him online after a church business meeting. Tom was hurt, and he had every right to be. He could have answered online. Instead, he called the young man and asked him to lunch. He didn't defend himself. He asked questions and listened. By the end of the meal, the young man was apologizing, and Tom had a new friend. That's "not provoked" and "does not count the evil" (13:5) in a Mexican restaurant on a Tuesday.

Love also tells the truth. Paul says we grow up into Christ by "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Love isn't the same as never disagreeing. Sometimes love says the hard thing. But it says it to help, not to hurt, and it never stops being kind.

## Watch Out For

- **Love as only a feeling.** Feelings come and go. Love chooses and acts.
- **Love without truth.** Letting someone walk into harm without a word isn't love. "Speaking the truth in love" holds both together.
- **Truth without love.** Being right in a way that crushes people is just a clanging cymbal.
- **Loving only those who love you.** "For even the sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32).
- **Love that's only words.** "Let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

## Growing in Love

- Start with God's love for you. Read Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:10 and let them sink in. You can't give what you haven't received.

- Pray 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 back to God, line by line, and ask Him to grow each one in you.
- Pick one person who's hard to love and do one concrete act of love for them this week.
- Pray for your enemies by name (Matthew 5:44).
- Let everything you do in church be "done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14).

## Study Questions

1. The word *agapao* is used for loving the darkness (John 3:19) as well as God's love (John 3:16). What does that tell us about love?
2. Read 1 John 4:10 and 4:19. Where does our love come from?
3. Read John 13:34-35. How would people outside the church know we belong to Jesus?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and put your own name in place of "love." Which line is hardest for you?
5. Why is love greater than the gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)?
6. Who is one person you could show love to this week "in deed and in truth"?

# Chapter 30: Joy

> *These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may remain in you, and your joy may be full.*
>
> John 15:11 (SLB)

Paul wrote his most joyful letter from a prison. Philippians uses the words "joy" and "rejoice" more than a dozen times, and Paul wrote it in chains, not knowing whether he'd live or die (Philippians 1:20-23). That tells us right away that the joy of the Spirit isn't the same thing as a good mood. A good mood depends on how your day is going. The joy of the Spirit depends on Someone who doesn't change.

## The Word

**χαρά** (*chara*)
**Say it:** khah-RAH
**Strong's number:** G5479
**Used in the New Testament:** 58 times, in 56 verses
**Plain meaning:** joy, gladness, delight

**χαίρω** (*chairo*)
**Say it:** KHAI-roh
**Strong's number:** G5463
**Used in the New Testament:** 74 times, in 68 verses
**Plain meaning:** to rejoice, to be glad; also used as a greeting, "Greetings!"

*Chara*, joy, appears 58 times in the New Testament. The verb *chairo*, to rejoice, appears 74 times. It was also the everyday Greek greeting, a bit like saying "Be glad!" when you met someone. The angel greeted Mary with it (Luke 1:28), and the soldiers mocked Jesus with it: "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matthew 27:29).

Here's something worth noticing. *Chara* comes from the same family as *charis*, grace, and *charisma*, the word for spiritual gift that we studied in Chapter 2. Joy, grace, and gift are related words in Greek. That fits. Joy is what happens in a heart that has received grace. The person who knows he's been given everything as a free gift is the person who can rejoice.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Joy is Jesus' own joy, shared.** "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may remain in you, and your joy may be full" (John 15:11). Jesus said this the night before the cross. He prayed it again a few minutes later: "so that they may have My joy made full in them" (John 17:13). The joy of the Spirit isn't ours first. It's His, given to us.

**Joy can't be taken.** "And you therefore now indeed have grief; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy from you" (John 16:22). Circumstances can take your comfort, your health, and your money. They can't take a joy rooted in a risen Savior.

**Joy is part of the kingdom.** "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Notice the same three words show up in the fruit list: love, joy, peace.

**Joy lives alongside sorrow.** Paul described himself "as being sorrowful, but always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Joy isn't the absence of grief. The Thessalonians "received the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Both at once.

**Joy looks ahead.** Jesus "for the joy lying before Him endured the cross, having despised the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus wasn't happy about the cross. He sweat drops like blood in the garden. But He could see past it to the joy of a finished work and a redeemed people. That's why James can say, "Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). Not because the trials feel good, but because of what God is doing through them.

**Joy is commanded.** "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Notice the key words: "in the Lord." Paul doesn't say rejoice in your circumstances. He says rejoice in the Lord, who is the same in every circumstance.

**Heaven rejoices.** "There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7). The gospel itself was announced as "great joy as good news, which will be to all the people" (Luke 2:10).

## Joy and Happiness

People sometimes say, "Happiness depends on what happens. Joy depends on Jesus." That's a helpful saying, as long as we don't take it too far. The Bible doesn't put down happiness. God gives us "fat things" and "sweet things" to enjoy (Nehemiah 8:10), and He gives us "all things richly for enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). Being glad about a good meal or a grandchild's laugh isn't unspiritual.

But the joy of the Spirit runs deeper than happiness, because it doesn't rise and fall with the news. Habakkuk said it about as well as anyone ever has.

> *Though the fig tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines, the yield of the olive fails, and the fields do not make food, the flock is cut off from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stalls, and I, I will exult in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*
> (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

No figs, no grapes, no olives, no crops, no sheep, no cattle. For a farmer, that's the end of everything. And Habakkuk says, "I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." That's joy.

## In the Apostles' Day

The book of Acts is full of joy, often in places you'd least expect it.

- After the apostles were beaten for preaching, "they were departing from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to be dishonored for His name" (Acts 5:41).
- When Philip preached in Samaria and people were healed and saved, "there was great joy in that city" (8:8).
- The Ethiopian official, after his baptism, "was going on his way rejoicing" (8:39).
- In Pisidian Antioch, right after Paul and Barnabas were driven out of town, "the disciples were being filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (13:52).
- In Philippi, with their backs bleeding and their feet in stocks, "about midnight Paul and Silas, praying, were singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (16:25).

That last one is worth thinking about. The prisoners were listening. Joy in suffering gets people's attention. Anybody can sing when life is good. When a Christian sings at midnight in a prison cell, people want to know why.

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture Linda. She's been caring for her husband through his Parkinson's for six years. Some days are very hard. She's tired, and sometimes she cries in the car before she goes into the grocery store. But her friends at church say she's one of the most joyful people they know. She still laughs. She still sings in the choir. When someone asks how she does it, she says, "I don't know how people do this without the Lord." Her joy isn't the absence of sorrow. It's the presence of God in the middle of it.

Joy today also looks like a church that's glad when people get saved, a believer who can be happy for a friend's success without envy ("Rejoice with those who rejoice," Romans 12:15), and a Christian whose face isn't always sour. The world has a picture of Christians as grim and gloomy. Joy is one of the clearest ways to show them otherwise.

## Watch Out For

- **Fake cheer.** Joy doesn't mean pretending to be fine. Jesus wept (John 11:35). Paul was "sorrowful, but always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Don't tell a grieving person to "just have joy."
- **Joy that depends on circumstances.** If your joy goes up and down with the stock market or the weather, it's rooted in the wrong place.
- **Joy-killers.** Grumbling, comparing, and bitterness choke joy faster than anything.
- **Thinking sadness is a sin.** Grief is not a failure of faith. The Psalms are full of honest lament, and many of those psalms end in praise.

## Growing in Joy

- Rejoice "in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4). Make a list of what's true of God and of you in Christ that no circumstance can change.
- Sing. Paul and Silas did it at midnight. Singing is one of God's tools for growing joy.
- Give thanks for specific things. Gratitude and joy grow together.
- Look ahead. Remember the "joy lying before" you (Hebrews 12:2), the day you'll hear "Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).
- Spend time with joyful believers. Joy spreads.

## Study Questions

1. The words for joy, grace, and gift are related in Greek. How do you think receiving grace leads to joy?
2. Read John 15:11 and 16:22. Whose joy is it, and why can't anyone take it?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 6:10. How can a person be sorrowful and rejoicing at the same time?
4. Read Habakkuk 3:17-18. What was Habakkuk's joy rooted in?
5. Read Acts 16:22-25. Why do you think the prisoners were listening?
6. What steals your joy most often? What could you do this week to "rejoice in the Lord"?

# Chapter 31: Peace

> *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let your heart not be troubled, nor let it be afraid.*
>
> John 14:27 (SLB)

Jesus said these words on the worst night of His disciples' lives. In a few hours He'd be arrested. By the next afternoon He'd be dead. And He said, "Peace I leave with you." He wasn't promising them a calm week. He was giving them something the world couldn't give and couldn't take away.

## The Word

**εἰρήνη** (*eirene*)
**Say it:** ay-RAY-nay
**Strong's number:** G1515
**Used in the New Testament:** 92 times, in 86 verses
**Plain meaning:** peace; harmony, wholeness, well-being; the end of hostility

*Eirene*, peace, appears 92 times in the New Testament. In ordinary Greek, it mostly meant the absence of war. But the New Testament writers were soaked in the Old Testament, and they filled the word with the meaning of the Hebrew *shalom* (Strong's H7965), one of the richest words in the Bible. *Shalom* means more than the absence of fighting. It means wholeness, completeness, everything being as it should be. It was (and still is) the everyday Hebrew greeting. When you wished someone *shalom*, you were wishing them well in every part of life.

That's why Paul opens almost every letter with "grace to you and peace." Grace was a Greek greeting idea. Peace was the Hebrew greeting. In Christ, both come together.

Two related words are worth knowing. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). That's *eirenopoios*, word for word a peace-maker, used just once. And Paul says Jesus was "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20), using the verb form, also just once.

## Three Kinds of Peace

The New Testament speaks of peace in three ways, and they build on each other.

**Peace with God.** "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). This is the foundation. Before Christ, we were God's enemies (Romans 5:10). The war is over now. Jesus made peace "through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20). This peace isn't a feeling. It's a fact, a legal standing before God. It's true on your worst day.

**The peace of God.** "Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all

understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). This is the inner peace the Spirit grows in us. Because we have peace *with* God, we can have the peace *of* God.

**φρουρέω** (*phroureo*)
**Say it:** froo-REH-oh
**Strong's number:** G5432
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** to guard, as a garrison of soldiers guards a city

The word for "guard" in Philippians 4:7 is *phroureo*, a military word for soldiers posted to guard a city. It appears 4 times. Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians 11:32 for the governor of Damascus "guarding the city" to catch him. The Philippians would have understood. Philippi was a Roman colony with retired soldiers living there. Paul's picture is that God's peace stands guard like a soldier at the gate of your heart and mind.

**Peace with one another.** "For He Himself is our peace, who made both one and broke down the middle wall of the barrier" (Ephesians 2:14). Paul was talking about Jews and Gentiles, who had been separated by a real wall in the temple. In Christ, the wall came down. Peace with God leads to peace in the church. That's why Paul says, "being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Jesus is our peace.** Isaiah called Him the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Paul said, "He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). Peter told Cornelius that God sent the message "preaching peace as the gospel through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36). The gospel is a message of peace.

**Peace in the middle of trouble.** "These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Notice: "in Me... peace" and "in the world... tribulation." Both at the same time.

**Peace as an umpire.** "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you also were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15). The word "rule" is *brabeuo*, used only here. It was the word for an umpire or judge at the athletic games, the one who made the call. Many have found this a helpful way to make decisions. When you're facing a choice, let God's peace be the umpire. That doesn't replace Scripture or wise counsel, but it's part of how the Spirit leads.

**Peace is pursued.** "Pursue peace with all" (Hebrews 12:14). "So then let us pursue the things of peace and the things of building up one another" (Romans 14:19). Peace in relationships doesn't just happen. You go after it.

**Peace has limits we can't control.** "If possible, so far as it is from you, being at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). Paul is realistic. Some people won't be at peace with you no matter what you do. Your job is your side of it.

**The mind set on the Spirit.** "For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). What you set your mind on shapes whether you have peace.

## In the Apostles' Day

One of the clearest pictures of peace in Acts is a sleeping man.

> *And when Herod was about to bring him out, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards before the door were keeping the prison.* (Acts 12:6)

Herod had just killed James, the brother of John, with a sword (12:2). Peter knew he was next. His trial was the next morning. And Peter was asleep. Not pacing, not panicking. Sleeping so soundly that the angel had to strike him on the side to wake him up (12:7). That's the peace of God guarding a heart.

Jesus had shown the same thing. In the middle of a storm that had seasoned fishermen terrified, He was asleep in the back of the boat (Mark 4:38). When He woke, He spoke to the sea, "and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm" (4:39).

The early church also had to work at peace with one another. Paul and Barnabas had such "a sharp disagreement" over John Mark that they split up (Acts 15:39). But years later, Paul wrote, "take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). The fight wasn't the end of the story. Peace came back.

And Luke gives this summary of the church after Paul's conversion: "So then the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). Peace, building up, the fear of the Lord, the comfort of the Spirit, and growth. They go together.

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture Rick, a small business owner. The economy turns, his biggest client goes under, and he's not sure he can make payroll. He doesn't sleep well for a week. Then one morning he sits at the kitchen table, opens his Bible to Philippians 4, and does exactly what it says. He writes down every request, one by one, and gives thanks for what God has already done. Nothing about the business changes that day. But something in Rick does. He goes to work with a calm he can't explain. He makes some hard calls, talks honestly with his employees, and trusts God with the rest. That's "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding." It doesn't make sense on paper. It just guards him.

Peace today also looks like the church member who refuses to join the gossip after a hard business meeting, the believer who makes the first phone call to fix a broken friendship, and the parent who stays calm when a teenager is shouting. It looks like peacemakers, who are "called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9) because they act like their Father.

## Watch Out For

- **Peace at any price.** Biblical peace isn't avoiding every hard conversation. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He also cleared the temple. Sometimes making real peace means facing a problem.

- **Peacekeeping instead of peacemaking.** Pretending everything is fine keeps things quiet. It doesn't make peace.
- **Using "I don't have peace about it" to avoid obedience.** The peace of God is a real guide, but it never contradicts what Scripture plainly says.
- **Worry as a lifestyle.** "Be anxious about nothing" (Philippians 4:6) is a command, and it comes with a way out: prayer with thanksgiving.

## Growing in Peace

- Remember that you have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Start there, especially on bad days.
- Practice Philippians 4:6-7. Write your worries down as prayers, and thank God for something with each one.
- Set your mind on what the Spirit wants (Romans 8:6). What you feed your mind shapes your peace.
- Make the first move toward someone you're at odds with. "So far as it is from you."
- Let peace be the umpire when you make decisions, inside the boundaries of Scripture.

## Study Questions

1. How does the Hebrew idea of *shalom* make the word "peace" bigger than just "no fighting"?
2. What's the difference between peace with God (Romans 5:1) and the peace of God (Philippians 4:7)?
3. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What does God's peace guard, and what do we do to receive it?
4. Read Acts 12:1-7. What does Peter's sleep tell you about his heart?
5. Read Romans 12:18. What part of peace with others is up to you, and what isn't?
6. Is there someone you need to make peace with? What would the first step be?

# Chapter 32: Patience

> *The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance.*
>
> 2 Peter 3:9 (SLB)

Somebody once joked that you should never pray for patience, because God will answer by sending you a traffic jam. There's some truth in that. Patience doesn't grow in easy places. It grows in slow lines, difficult people, unanswered prayers, and long seasons of waiting. But here's what makes the fruit of patience different from just gritting your teeth: it starts with the patience God has shown to us.

## The Word

**μακροθυμία** (*makrothymia*)
**Say it:** mak-roth-oo-MEE-ah
**Strong's number:** G3115
**Used in the New Testament:** 14 times
**Plain meaning:** patience, longsuffering; word for word, long-tempered

**μακροθυμέω** (*makrothymeo*)
**Say it:** mak-roth-oo-MEH-oh
**Strong's number:** G3114
**Used in the New Testament:** 10 times, in 9 verses
**Plain meaning:** to be patient, to bear long, to hold back anger for a long time

*Makrothymia* is a compound of *makros* (long) and *thymos* (anger, passion, temper). It means "long-tempered," the opposite of short-tempered. Older English Bibles translated it "longsuffering," which captures the idea well: suffering long before you snap. It appears 14 times. The verb *makrothymeo* appears 10 times.

Here's something you can see right in Galatians 5. One of the works of the flesh is "outbursts of rage" (5:20). The Greek word there is *thymoi*, the plural of *thymos*. The flesh produces quick explosions of *thymos*. The Spirit produces *makrothymia*, *thymos* held back for a long time. Same root, opposite fruit.

The idea comes from the Old Testament. When God passed by Moses on the mountain, He described Himself as "slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6). The Hebrew, word for word, is "long of nostrils," a picture of someone who takes a long time to get hot. The SLB brings that out in Proverbs: "Better is one long of anger than a mighty one, and he who rules over his spirit than he who captures a city" (Proverbs 16:32). The Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the apostles, the Septuagint, often used *makrothymos* for that phrase.

**ὑπομονή** (*hypomone*)
**Say it:** hoo-pom-on-AY
**Strong's number:** G5281
**Used in the New Testament:** 32 times, in 31 verses
**Plain meaning:** endurance, steadfastness; word for word, remaining under a load

The New Testament has a second word often translated "patience." *Hypomone* appears 32 times. It means endurance, staying under a heavy load without giving up. Bible teachers often explain the difference this way: *hypomone* is patience with hard circumstances, and *makrothymia* is patience with difficult people. The two often appear together: "for all endurance and patience with joy" (Colossians 1:11). The fruit in Galatians 5 is *makrothymia*, patience with people.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**God is patient first.** "The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Every day that Jesus hasn't returned yet is a day of God's patience, giving people more time to turn to Him. Peter says to "consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation" (3:15). Peter also points back to Noah's day, "when once the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared" (1 Peter 3:20). Many believe that wait lasted as long as 120 years (Genesis 6:3).

**God's patience leads to repentance.** "Or do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). God's patience isn't weakness. It's an invitation.

**Paul was Exhibit A.** "But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His patience as a pattern for those who were going to believe on Him" (1 Timothy 1:16). Paul had persecuted the church. If Christ could be patient with him, He could be patient with anyone.

**Patience waits for the harvest.** "Be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Look, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and late rain" (James 5:7). A farmer can't make his crop grow faster by yelling at it. He plants, he waters, and he waits.

**Patience inherits the promises.** "So that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). Abraham waited twenty-five years for Isaac. "And thus, having waited patiently, he obtained the promise" (6:15).

**Patience is needed in ministry.** "Preach the word; be ready in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). People don't change overnight. Neither did we.

**Patience toward all.** "Admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient toward all" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Notice that each kind of person needs something different, but everyone needs patience.

## A Parable About Patience

Jesus told a story that turns on this word.

A servant owed his king ten thousand talents, a debt he could never pay in many lifetimes. He fell down and begged, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all" (Matthew 18:26). The king did more than be patient. He forgave the whole debt.

Then that servant found a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii, a few months' wages. The fellow servant fell down and begged with almost the same words: "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all" (18:29). And the first servant threw him in prison.

That's the point. The person who has received God's patience and then refuses to give it to others has forgotten what he's been given. When we're impatient with people, it usually means we've lost sight of how patient God has been with us.

## In the Apostles' Day

Paul listed patience as one of the marks of his ministry: "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love" (2 Corinthians 6:6). And he reminded Timothy, "you have closely followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance" (2 Timothy 3:10).

You can see that patience in how Paul dealt with the Corinthians. They questioned his authority, mocked his speaking, and followed false teachers. He wrote them at least four letters, two of which we have. He visited, he wept, he corrected, and he kept coming back. "I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, even if, loving you more abundantly, I am loved less" (2 Corinthians 12:15).

And you can see it in how Barnabas dealt with John Mark. When Mark left the team early, Paul didn't want him back. Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36), was patient with him (Acts 15:37-39). Years later Paul himself called Mark "useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Somebody's patience gave Mark a second chance, and he went on to write the Gospel of Mark, according to early church tradition.

## What It Looks Like Today

Patience today looks like a mom answering the same question from a four-year-old for the ninth time. It looks like a Sunday school teacher who keeps showing up for a class of rowdy middle schoolers, believing God is working even when it doesn't look like it. It looks like an employee who doesn't snap at a customer who's yelling at him. It looks like a husband praying for an unbelieving wife for twenty years.

Picture Ray, who leads a men's Bible study. One of the men, Jake, keeps falling back into drinking. He's done it four times in two years. The other men are getting tired of it. Ray is tired too. But Ray keeps calling Jake. He keeps meeting him for coffee. He's honest with him, and he doesn't pretend the drinking is fine. But he doesn't give up on him either. He remembers how many times God had to be patient with Ray. That's *makrothymia*: long-tempered love that keeps showing up.

Patience also shows up in how we wait on God. Many believers are waiting right now for something: a prodigal to come home, a diagnosis to clear, a door to open. Patience doesn't mean sitting still. It means trusting God's timing while you keep doing what's right.

## Watch Out For

- **Patience as passivity.** Being patient with someone doesn't mean ignoring sin or never speaking up. Paul was patient with Corinth and still wrote 1 Corinthians.
- **Patience with some, none with others.** Many of us are patient at church and short-tempered at home. The fruit is meant to grow everywhere.
- **Mistaking God's patience for approval.** "Do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience?" (Romans 2:4). God's patience gives us time to repent, not permission to keep going.
- **Patience that enables harm.** Patience never means staying in a place where you or your children are in danger. Get to safety, and get help.
- **The quick reply.** "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). Most impatience comes out of the mouth first.

## Growing in Patience

- Remember how patient God has been with you. Read 1 Timothy 1:15-16 and put your name in it.
- Notice your triggers. When do you most often lose your temper? Pray ahead of those moments.
- Slow down your words (James 1:19). Count to ten if you need to. It's not just an old saying; it's good fruit training.
- Pray for the people who test your patience, by name.
- When you're waiting on God, keep a record of His past faithfulness.

## Study Questions

1. *Makrothymia* means "long-tempered." How does that help you understand patience?
2. Read 2 Peter 3:9. How is God's patience a gift to the world?
3. Read Matthew 18:23-35. Why is the first servant's impatience so shocking?
4. What's the difference between patience with circumstances (*hypomone*) and patience with people (*makrothymia*)?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Which kind of person are you most likely to lose patience with?
6. Who in your life needs your patience right now? What would it look like this week?

# Chapter 33: Kindness

> *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*
>
> Ephesians 4:32 (SLB)

Kindness is one of those words that sounds soft until you try to live it. It's easy to be kind to kind people. It's a lot harder to be kind to the driver who cut you off, the relative who always criticizes, or the coworker who goes out of his way to make your job harder. The kindness of the Spirit reaches those people too, because it's modeled on God's kindness, and God is "kind to the ungrateful and evil" (Luke 6:35).

## The Word

**χρηστότης** (*chrestotes*)
**Say it:** khray-STOT-ace
**Strong's number:** G5544
**Used in the New Testament:** 10 times, in 8 verses
**Plain meaning:** kindness; goodness of heart that shows itself in useful, gracious action

**χρηστός** (*chrestos*)
**Say it:** khray-STOSS
**Strong's number:** G5543
**Used in the New Testament:** 7 times
**Plain meaning:** kind, good, easy; useful and pleasant to deal with

*Chrestotes*, kindness, appears 10 times in 8 verses, all of them in Paul's letters. The adjective *chrestos*, kind, appears 7 times. Both come from a root that means "useful" or "fit for use." In everyday Greek, *chrestos* could describe food that was good to eat or a tool that worked well. When it describes a person, it means someone whose goodness is pleasant and useful to others. A kind person is good to be around and good to need.

That root meaning shows up in one of Jesus' most famous lines: "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). "Easy" is *chrestos*. A yoke was a wooden frame that went on an ox's neck. A good carpenter fit the yoke so it didn't rub the animal raw. Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, says His yoke fits. It's kind.

Paul also used a verb form, just once: "Love is patient, is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4). The word is *chresteuomai*, to act kindly, to show yourself useful. Notice that patience and kindness sit side by side in both 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians 5. Patience holds back from hurting. Kindness reaches out to help.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**God's kindness is where it starts.** Most of the times Paul uses *chrestotes*, he's talking about God. "But when the kindness and the love for mankind of God our Savior appeared, not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:4-5). God "might show in the coming ages the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). Our salvation is God's kindness on display, and Paul says we'll be marveling at it forever.

**God's kindness leads to repentance.** "Or do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). God doesn't drag people to Himself. He draws them with kindness.

**Kindness and severity.** "Look then at the kindness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22). God's kindness is real, but it isn't soft on sin. Both are true of Him at the same time.

**Without God, kindness fails.** Paul's description of fallen humanity includes this line: "there is none who practices kindness; there is not so much as one" (Romans 3:12). The SLB uses "kindness" there because the Greek word is *chrestotes*. We may be nice sometimes, but the deep, steady kindness of the Spirit isn't natural to us. It has to be grown.

**Kindness reaches the ungrateful.** "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He Himself is kind to the ungrateful and evil" (Luke 6:35). That's the standard. Not kindness to those who deserve it, but kindness like God's.

**Kindness forgives.** "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Kindness isn't just doing nice things. It includes letting go of the debt someone owes you.

**We've tasted it.** Peter tells believers to grow, "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is kind" (1 Peter 2:3). If you've tasted God's kindness, you know what to offer others.

## The Old Testament Picture

The Old Testament's great word for this is *chesed* (Strong's H2617). The SLB often translates it "steadfast love." It's loyal, covenant kindness that keeps showing up. The story of David and Mephibosheth is one of the best pictures of it.

After David became king, he asked, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may do steadfast love with him for the sake of Jonathan?" (2 Samuel 9:1). In those days, a new king usually wiped out the old king's family. But David found Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was lame in both feet and living in hiding. David told him, "Do not be afraid, for I will certainly do steadfast love with you for the sake of Jonathan your father, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father; and you, you will eat bread at my table continually" (9:7).

That's kindness. Mephibosheth had nothing to offer. David gave him land, a place at the table, and a family. And that's what God has done for us, for the sake of His Son.

## In the Apostles' Day

Some of the kindest people in Acts weren't even believers.

> *And the natives were showing us no ordinary kindness; for having kindled a fire, they received all of us because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold.* (Acts 28:2)

After Paul's ship broke apart off Malta, 276 soaked and freezing people washed up on the beach (Acts 27:37). The islanders built a fire and took them in. Luke says it was "no ordinary kindness." Earlier on the same trip, the Roman centurion Julius "having treated Paul kindly, allowed him, having gone to his friends, to receive care" (27:3).

If unbelievers can show that kind of kindness, how much more should those who have the Spirit? Jesus made the same point with the story of the good Samaritan. The religious leaders walked past the wounded man. The Samaritan, the outsider, "having seen him, he felt compassion, and having approached, he bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and having put him on his own animal, he brought him to an inn and took care of him" (Luke 10:33-34). Then Jesus said, "Go, and you do likewise" (10:37).

Paul listed kindness among the marks of his ministry: "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love" (2 Corinthians 6:6). And he told the Colossians to put it on like clothing: "put on hearts of compassions, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience" (Colossians 3:12).

## What It Looks Like Today

Kindness usually shows up in small, practical ways. It's useful, just like the word.

It looks like a neighbor who mows the yard of the widow next door without being asked. It looks like a believer who writes a note to the new family at church. It looks like the grocery store worker who takes time with the confused elderly man at the register. It looks like a dad who keeps his voice gentle when his son wrecks the car, because the boy is already scared enough.

Picture Angela, who works the front desk at a busy medical office. Patients come in sick, worried, and sometimes rude. One afternoon, a man shouts at her because his appointment is running late. She could shout back, or just go cold. Instead, she apologizes for the wait, brings him a cup of water, and tells him she'll check with the nurse. Later she finds out he'd just been told his wife's cancer had come back. He comes back the next week and apologizes. She never knew his story when she was kind to him. She didn't need to.

Kindness also shows up in how we talk online, what we say about people who aren't in the room, and how we treat those who disagree with us, including other Christians who see the gifts differently than we do.

## Watch Out For

- **Kindness only to the kind.** God is kind "to the ungrateful and evil" (Luke 6:35). That's the standard.

- **Kindness as a technique.** Being nice to get something isn't the fruit of the Spirit. It's just manipulation with a smile.
- **Confusing kindness with weakness.** Paul spoke of "the kindness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22). Kindness can say no, and it can tell the truth.
- **Kindness in public, cruelty at home.** The people who live with you should get your kindness first, not last.
- **Withholding forgiveness.** "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other" (Ephesians 4:32). They go together.

## Growing in Kindness

- Remember God's kindness to you. Read Titus 3:3-7 and count what He's done.
- Look for one useful thing you can do for someone each day. Kindness is practical.
- Watch your words. Ask before you speak: is it true, is it needed, is it kind?
- Be kind to someone who can't or won't pay you back.
- Forgive someone this week, even if they haven't asked.

## Study Questions

1. The word *chrestos* comes from a root meaning "useful." How does that change the way you think about kindness?
2. Read Matthew 11:28-30. What does it mean that Jesus' yoke is "easy" (*chrestos*)?
3. Read Titus 3:4-7. How is our salvation a picture of God's kindness?
4. Read 2 Samuel 9. What did David's kindness to Mephibosheth cost him, and what did it give Mephibosheth?
5. Read Luke 6:35. Who is God kind to? What would it look like for you to be kind like that?
6. Who could you show "no ordinary kindness" to this week?

# Chapter 34: Goodness

> *So then, as we have opportunity, let us work the good toward all, and especially toward those of the household of the faith.*
>
> Galatians 6:10 (SLB)

"He's a good man." People say that at funerals more than almost anywhere else. It's one of the highest compliments we give. But what does it mean? Jesus once stopped a man who called Him "good" and said, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except One, God" (Mark 10:18). Jesus wasn't denying that He was good. He was making the man think about what the word means. Real goodness belongs to God. When the Spirit grows goodness in us, He's growing something of God's own character.

On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me drinking and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. She would not pretend things were fine anymore. It did not feel pleasant in the moment. Looking back, it was one of the truest acts of goodness anyone has ever shown me. She cared more about my life and our marriage than my comfort.

## The Word

**ἀγαθωσύνη** (*agathosyne*)
**Say it:** ah-gah-tho-SOO-nay
**Strong's number:** G19
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** goodness; moral excellence that shows itself in doing good

**ἀγαθός** (*agathos*)
**Say it:** ah-gah-THOSS
**Strong's number:** G18
**Used in the New Testament:** 103 times, in 91 verses
**Plain meaning:** good; good in character and good in what it does

*Agathosyne*, goodness, is a rare word. It appears only 4 times in the New Testament, all in Paul's letters. Paul told the Romans he was persuaded "that you yourselves also are full of goodness" (Romans 15:14). He told the Thessalonians he prayed God would "fulfill every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11). And in Ephesians 5:9, the SLB reads, "the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

The word is built on *agathos*, good, one of the most common words in the New Testament. It appears 103 times. It describes God ("No one is good except One, God"), people ("he was a good man," Acts 11:24), gifts ("good gifts to your children," Matthew 7:11), and works ("created in Christ Jesus for good works," Ephesians 2:10).

**καλός** (*kalos*)
**Say it:** kah-LOSS
**Strong's number:** G2570
**Used in the New Testament:** 102 times, in 91 verses
**Plain meaning:** good, fine, beautiful; good in a way others can see and admire

There's another common word for good, *kalos*, which appears 102 times. It often carries the idea of something beautiful or admirable to look at. Jesus said, "let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works" (Matthew 5:16), using *kalos*. The two words overlap a lot. But *agathos* leans toward what something is at its core, and *kalos* leans toward how it looks to others.

## Goodness and Kindness

You might wonder how goodness is different from kindness, the fruit right before it. They're close cousins, and Paul puts them side by side on purpose. Some older Bible teachers drew the line this way: kindness is gentle goodness, and goodness can also be firm. A kind person is pleasant to be around. A good person does what's right for you, even when it isn't pleasant.

Jesus showed both. He took little children in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16). That's kindness. He also "having made a whip of cords, He drove all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned the tables" (John 2:15). That's goodness too. It was good for God's house to be cleansed. It wasn't gentle.

This matters because sometimes we think being good means being nice. It doesn't. Goodness sometimes confronts. A good doctor tells you the hard news. A good father disciplines his children. A good friend warns you when you're about to make a big mistake. Goodness is love that wants what's truly best for a person, not just what feels best right now.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**God is good.** The Bible says it over and over. "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love is forever" (Psalm 107:1). "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8). God made the world, "and look, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Everything good starts with Him.

**Our flesh isn't good.** Paul was honest: "For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for to want is present with me, but to work out the good I do not find" (Romans 7:18). We can want to be good and still fail. That's why goodness has to be a fruit of the Spirit, not a product of willpower.

**Good comes from the heart.** "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good" (Luke 6:45). Goodness isn't a coat of paint. It starts inside.

**Goodness does good.** Peter summed up Jesus' life this way: "God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Goodness isn't just avoiding evil. It's actively doing good.

**Do good to all.** "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work the good toward all, and especially toward those of the household of the faith" (Galatians 6:10). Notice "as we have opportunity." Goodness watches for chances.

**Goodness wins.** "Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good" (Romans 12:21). The way to fight evil isn't more evil. It's good.

**We were made for it.** "For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). God has good works lined up for you that He prepared ahead of time.

## In the Apostles' Day

Luke uses *agathos* only three times in Acts. He uses it once for a good conscience (23:1), once for the good works of a woman named Dorcas (9:36), and once to describe a man. That man is Barnabas.

> *who, having come and having seen the grace of God, rejoiced, and was exhorting all with purpose of heart to remain with the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of* ***the*** *Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large crowd was added to the Lord.* (Acts 11:23-24)

Notice what goes with "a good man": "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Barnabas's goodness came from the Spirit. And look at what he did. He sold his land and gave the money to the church (4:36-37). He took the risk of vouching for Saul when every other believer was afraid of him (9:26-27). He went looking for Saul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch to teach (11:25-26). He gave John Mark a second chance (15:39). Barnabas's goodness wasn't flashy. It was the kind that kept making room for other people.

Then there is Dorcas in Joppa: "she was full of good works and charitable deeds which she was doing" (Acts 9:36). When she died, Peter came, and "all the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and garments, as many as Dorcas was making while she was with them" (9:39). Her goodness was something you could hold in your hands.

## What It Looks Like Today

Goodness today looks like the man in your church who fixes the widows' cars for free. It looks like a businesswoman who refuses to cut corners, even when nobody would know. It looks like a teenager who sits with the kid eating lunch alone. It looks like a believer who speaks up when someone is being treated unfairly at work.

Picture Frank, a retired contractor. When a single mom in his church needed a wheelchair ramp for her son, Frank showed up on a Saturday with lumber and two grandsons and built it. He didn't charge her. When a younger man in the church started a remodeling business and was underbidding jobs to the point he was going broke, Frank sat him down and told him straight that he was going to sink his family if he didn't change. That conversation wasn't fun. But it was good. Frank's goodness came in both kinds: the ramp and the hard talk.

## Watch Out For

- **Nice instead of good.** Avoiding every hard word isn't goodness. Sometimes goodness says what no one else will.
- **Good without God.** Doing good to earn God's favor misses the point. "Not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). We do good because we've been saved, not to get saved.
- **Goodness for show.** Jesus warned against doing good "before men in order to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1).
- **Harshness that calls itself goodness.** Firmness without love isn't goodness either. Jesus cleansed the temple once, and He welcomed children every day.
- **Missing the opportunities.** "As we have opportunity" (Galatians 6:10). Most good is left undone because nobody was looking for it.

## Growing in Goodness

- Thank God for His goodness to you. Make a list. It will be long.
- Ask the Spirit each morning to show you one good work He's prepared for you that day (Ephesians 2:10).
- Look for a chance to "overcome the evil with the good" (Romans 12:21) with someone who's wronged you.
- Ask a trusted friend whether you tend to be too soft or too hard. Goodness needs both kindness and courage.
- Spend time with good people. Barnabas made Saul better.

## Study Questions

1. Read Mark 10:17-18. Why do you think Jesus asked the man, "Why do you call Me good?"
2. How is goodness different from kindness? Can you think of a time someone was good to you in a way that wasn't pleasant at the time?
3. Read Romans 7:18-25. Why can't we produce goodness on our own?
4. Read Acts 11:22-26. What made Barnabas "a good man"?
5. Read Romans 12:21. How can you overcome evil with good this week?
6. What "good works" do you think God might have prepared for you to walk in (Ephesians 2:10)?

# Chapter 35: Faithfulness

> *The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end.* ***They are*** *new in the mornings; great* ***is*** *Your faithfulness.*
>
> Lamentations 3:22-23 (SLB)

In Chapter 21, we looked at the gift of faith, the special trust in God that some believers are given for a particular task. Now we come to a different use of the same Greek word. The gift of faith is given to some. The fruit of faithfulness is grown in all. One is a mountain-moving moment. The other is a lifetime of showing up.

## The Word

**πίστις** (*pistis*)
**Say it: PIS-tis**
**Strong's number:** G4102
**Used in the New Testament:** 243 times, in 227 verses
**Plain meaning:** faith, trust; also faithfulness, loyalty, being trustworthy

**πιστός** (*pistos*)
**Say it: pis-TOSS**
**Strong's number:** G4103
**Used in the New Testament:** 67 times, in 62 verses
**Plain meaning:** faithful, trustworthy, reliable; also believing

*Pistis* appears 243 times in the New Testament. Most of the time it means faith, trust in God. But it can also mean faithfulness, being someone others can trust. Paul uses it that way when he asks, "Will their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God?" (Romans 3:3). Jesus uses it that way when He scolds the Pharisees for leaving aside "the weightier matters of the law: the justice and the mercy and the faith" (Matthew 23:23). And Paul tells servants to be "showing all good faith" (Titus 2:10), meaning they should be fully trustworthy.

That's why some older English Bibles have "faith" in Galatians 5:22, and most newer ones, including the SLB, have "faithfulness." Because the fruit list is about character, most Bible teachers believe Paul means faithfulness here. The two meanings aren't far apart. A person who trusts God becomes a person others can trust.

The adjective *pistos*, faithful, appears 67 times. It's used of God ("God is faithful," 1 Corinthians 1:9), of Jesus ("Faithful and True," Revelation 19:11), and of believers ("a faithful minister of Christ," Colossians 1:7).

In the Old Testament, the main word is *emunah* (Strong's H530), from the same Hebrew root as "amen." When you say "amen," you're saying "that's firm, that's reliable, you can lean on it." A faithful person is an "amen" kind of person.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**God is faithful first.** The Bible says it again and again.

- "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- "God is faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out" (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- "Faithful is the One who calls you, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).
- "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

And the one that's carried more struggling believers than almost any other: "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He is not able to deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). God's faithfulness doesn't depend on ours.

Jeremiah wrote the words at the top of this chapter while sitting in the ruins of Jerusalem. The city had been burned, the temple destroyed, the people killed or carried off. And in the middle of his book of tears, he wrote, "great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23).

**Jesus was faithful.** Hebrews calls Him faithful "to the One who appointed Him, as also Moses was in all His house" (Hebrews 3:2). He finished every task the Father gave Him. "It has been finished" (John 19:30).

**Faithfulness is what God looks for in a servant.** "Now moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). Not brilliant. Not famous. Not successful by the world's measure. Faithful.

**Faithfulness starts small.** "The one who is faithful in very little is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). How you handle the small things shows what you'll do with big ones.

**Faithfulness is rewarded.** "Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21). Notice what the master praises: "good and faithful." Not "gifted and impressive."

**Faithful to the end.** "Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

## In the Apostles' Day

Paul's letters are full of names we barely know, and he often describes them with one word: faithful.

- **Epaphras**, "our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf" (Colossians 1:7). He seems to have first brought the gospel to Colossae, and he never stopped praying for it (4:12).
- **Tychicus**, "the beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow slave in the Lord" (Colossians 4:7). He carried Paul's letters across the empire.
- **Onesimus**, the runaway slave who came to Christ, "the faithful and beloved brother" (Colossians 4:9).

- **Timothy**, "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:17).
- **Antipas**, whom Jesus Himself called "My faithful witness, who was killed among you" (Revelation 2:13).

Paul even marveled that Christ "considered me faithful, appointing me to the ministry" (1 Timothy 1:12), when he had been a persecutor. And he told Timothy how the church would keep going: "commit these to faithful men, who will be sufficient to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Faithful people passing the truth to faithful people. That's how the gospel reached us.

After the New Testament, one of the best-known examples is Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was burned at the stake around A.D. 155. The account of his death, written by the church in Smyrna, says the Roman official urged him to curse Christ and go free. Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" (*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, chapter 9). Smyrna was the same church Jesus had told, "Be faithful to death" (Revelation 2:10).

## What It Looks Like Today

Faithfulness isn't flashy. It's the kind of fruit you notice only over time.

It looks like a husband and wife who keep their vows for fifty years, through job losses and sick kids and seasons when love felt thin. It looks like a man who does what he said he'd do, even when it costs him. It looks like the woman who has taught the same Sunday school class of four-year-olds for thirty years, and the man who's set up chairs every Sunday since the church started. It looks like a believer who prays for the same unbelieving brother every day for decades.

Picture Earl. He's eighty-one. He never preached a sermon, never led a ministry, never had his name on anything. But for forty years he's been the first one at church on Sunday morning to unlock the doors and turn on the heat. He's visited every member who's been in the hospital. He's given faithfully, quietly, every week. When young men in the church ask him for advice, he usually says the same thing: "Just keep showing up. God does the rest." That's faithfulness. When Earl gets to heaven, I suspect he'll hear "Well done, good and faithful slave" and be surprised.

Faithfulness also looks like keeping your word in business, paying your bills, being on time, and being the same person when nobody's watching. Daniel's enemies tried to find something wrong with him and couldn't, "because he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him" (Daniel 6:4).

## Watch Out For

- **Measuring yourself by success.** God asks for faithfulness, not results. You plant and water; God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6).
- **Big promises, small follow-through.** "A multitude of men, each proclaims his steadfast love; and a man of faithfulness, who will find?" (Proverbs 20:6).
- **Faithful in public, faithless in private.** Faithfulness covers your marriage, your money, and your word as much as your church attendance.
- **Despair when you've failed.** "If we are faithless, He remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13). Get back up. His faithfulness is bigger than your failure.

- **Restlessness.** Faithfulness often means staying when you'd rather move on to something new and exciting.

## Growing in Faithfulness

- Start with God's faithfulness. Read Lamentations 3:19-26 and list ways He's been faithful to you.
- Keep one small promise you've been putting off. Faithfulness grows in small things (Luke 16:10).
- Pick one responsibility and do it well, consistently, for a year.
- Thank a faithful person in your life. Tell them what their steadiness has meant.
- Pray to be found faithful, not famous.

## Study Questions

1. The word *pistis* can mean both faith and faithfulness. How are trusting God and being trustworthy connected?
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:13. Why is this verse such good news?
3. Read Lamentations 3:19-26. Where was Jeremiah when he wrote "great is Your faithfulness"?
4. Read Luke 16:10 and Matthew 25:21. Why does God care so much about small things?
5. Who is the most faithful person you know? What has their faithfulness looked like?
6. Where in your life do you most need to grow in faithfulness right now?

# Chapter 36: Gentleness

> *Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*
>
> Matthew 11:29 (SLB)

When Jesus described His own heart, He used two words: "gentle and humble." Not "powerful and impressive," though He was both. Not "strict and demanding," though He never lowered God's standard. Gentle and humble. Of all the ways He could have invited tired people to come to Him, that's the one He chose. If you want to know what the fruit of gentleness looks like, start there.

## The Word

**πρᾳότης** (*praiotes*)
**Say it:** prah-OT-ace
**Strong's number:** G4236
**Used in the New Testament:** 10 times
**Plain meaning:** gentleness, meekness; strength under control; a mild and humble spirit

**πρᾷος** (*praios*)
**Say it:** prah-OSS
**Strong's number:** G4235
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** gentle, meek, mild

The word in Galatians 5:23 is a little unusual, because it comes in two spellings. Greek manuscripts write it either *praotes* or *prautes*. They're the same word. Strong's gives them two numbers (G4236 and G4240), and the STEPBible data used for the counts in this book files Galatians 5:23 under the second one. Put together, the word appears 10 times under the first number and 2 under the second, twelve times in all. The adjective, "gentle," appears another 4 times in the form *praos*. (Modern Greek editions spell it *praus*.)

Older English Bibles usually translated it "meekness." The SLB uses "gentleness" in Galatians 5:23 and "meekness" in several other places. Both are right, but "meekness" has picked up a bad reputation in modern English. People hear "meek" and think "weak." That's not what the Greek word meant.

Greek writers used the word for a wild animal that had been tamed, and for a calm, steady person who didn't fly into a rage. The idea is strength under control. A tamed horse still has all its power. It just responds to the rider instead of running wild. Gentleness isn't the absence of strength. It's strength that has been put under God's control.

Moses is the Old Testament picture. “And the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the ground” (Numbers 12:3). This was the man who stood up to Pharaoh, led a whole nation through the desert, and smashed the stone tablets when Israel worshiped the golden calf. He wasn’t weak. But when his own brother and sister criticized him, he didn’t defend himself. He left it to God.

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Jesus is gentle.** “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). When He rode into Jerusalem, it was the fulfillment of Zechariah’s words: “Look, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey” (Matthew 21:5). A conquering king rode a war horse. Jesus rode a donkey. Paul appealed to the Corinthians “through the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:1).

Isaiah described Him this way centuries before: “A crushed reed He will not break, and a dim wick He will not extinguish” (Isaiah 42:3). Matthew quotes it about Jesus: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench” (Matthew 12:20). A bruised reed is barely standing. A smoldering wick is about to go out. Jesus doesn’t snap the one or snuff out the other. He handles fragile people with care.

**The gentle are blessed.** “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Jesus was quoting Psalm 37:11. The world thinks the aggressive take the land. Jesus says the meek will inherit it.

**Gentleness restores.** “Brothers, if a man is even caught in some trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, watching yourself, lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). This verse comes right after the fruit list, and it’s the first place Paul puts the fruit to work. When a brother falls, the spiritual ones are the gentle ones. The word “restore” was used for setting a broken bone or for mending nets (Matthew 4:21). You don’t set a broken bone roughly.

**Gentleness corrects.** “And a slave of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle toward all, able to teach, patient when wronged, in meekness disciplining those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Paul tells Timothy to correct opponents. But he tells him to do it in meekness, because the goal isn’t to win the argument. It’s for God to grant repentance.

**Gentleness answers.** “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). We defend the faith, but we do it gently.

**Gentleness receives.** “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). Gentleness isn’t only how we treat people. It’s how we receive God’s word: humbly, teachably, without arguing back.

**Gentleness is beautiful.** Peter told believing wives that real beauty is “the hidden man of the heart, in the imperishable quality of the gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth before God” (1 Peter 3:4). That applies to husbands too. God values a gentle spirit more than anything you can buy.

## In the Apostles' Day

Paul wasn't naturally gentle. Before he met Jesus, he was "still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). But the Spirit changed him. Years later, he wrote to the Thessalonians, "we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

He could still be firm. He asked the Corinthians, "Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Corinthians 4:21). Notice that he wanted to come gently. The rod was the last resort, not the first. That's what gentleness looks like in a leader: it would rather persuade than force.

And look at Jesus on trial. When an officer slapped Him across the face, Jesus answered, "If I spoke wrongly, testify concerning the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" (John 18:23). He didn't hit back, and He didn't stay silent about the injustice either. Peter, who watched it all, later wrote, "who, being reviled, did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten, but He kept handing Himself over to the One who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Gentleness isn't pretending a wrong didn't happen. It's trusting God to judge it.

## What It Looks Like Today

Gentleness today looks like a dad who gets down on his knees to talk to his crying child instead of yelling from across the room. It looks like a pastor who corrects a church member in private, with tears, instead of from the pulpit. It looks like a believer who answers an angry email with a calm one. "A soft answer turns away rage, and a word of pain raises anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

Picture Mike, a big guy who played college football and still looks like it. He works as a supervisor at a warehouse. When one of his workers makes a costly mistake, everyone expects Mike to explode. He used to. But since he came to Christ, the guys have noticed a difference. He still holds people accountable. He still gets the job done. But he talks to people with respect. He listens before he speaks. One of the younger workers told him, "You're the only boss I've had who never made me feel stupid." That's strength under control.

Gentleness also shows up in how Christians argue. Whether the topic is the gifts, politics, or theology, a gentle believer can disagree without mocking, can make a strong case without crushing the other person, and can say "I might be wrong" without feeling threatened.

## Watch Out For

- **Confusing gentleness with weakness.** Moses and Jesus were the gentlest men in Scripture, and neither was weak.
- **Gentleness that never confronts.** Galatians 6:1 and 2 Timothy 2:25 both describe gentle correction. Gentleness changes how you correct, not whether you do.
- **Harshness in the name of truth.** Being right doesn't give you permission to be rough. "With gentleness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).
- **Gentle in public, harsh at home.** The people closest to us often see the least of our gentleness.
- **Defending yourself at every turn.** Moses let God defend him. Sometimes the gentle thing is to let it go.

## Growing in Gentleness

- Read Matthew 11:28-30 and spend time with the gentle heart of Jesus. You become like what you look at.
- Before you correct someone, ask yourself: am I trying to restore them or to win?
- Practice the soft answer (Proverbs 15:1) in the next tense conversation you have.
- Lower your voice. It sounds simple, but it works.
- Receive God's word with meekness (James 1:21). A gentle spirit toward God grows gentleness toward people.

## Study Questions

1. Why does the picture of a tamed horse help explain gentleness?
2. Read Matthew 11:28-30. Why do you think Jesus described His heart as "gentle and humble"?
3. Read Galatians 6:1. Why does restoring a fallen believer require gentleness?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:23 and John 18:22-23. How did Jesus respond to being wronged?
5. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-25. How can you correct someone and still be gentle?
6. Where are you most likely to be harsh? What would gentleness look like there?

# Chapter 37: Self-Control

> *A city broken into, without a wall, **is** a man who has no restraint for his spirit.*
>
> Proverbs 25:28 (SLB)

In the ancient world, a city's wall was its life. Without it, any raiding party could walk in and take whatever it wanted. Solomon says a person without self-control is like that city. Anger walks right in. Lust walks right in. Gluttony, laziness, and harsh words walk right in. There's nothing to stop them.

Self-control is last in Paul's list, and some think that's on purpose. It's the wall that protects the rest of the fruit. Love, joy, peace, and all the others can be knocked down fast by a moment of lost control.

## The Word

**ἐγκράτεια** (*enkrateia*)
**Say it:** en-KRAT-eye-ah
**Strong's number:** G1466
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times, in 3 verses
**Plain meaning:** self-control; mastery over one's desires and passions

**ἐγκρατεύομαι** (*enkrateuomai*)
**Say it:** en-krah-TYOO-oh-my
**Strong's number:** G1467
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** to exercise self-control, to hold oneself in

**ἐγκρατής** (*enkrates*)
**Say it:** en-krah-TACE
**Strong's number:** G1468
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** self-controlled; master of oneself

These words are built from *en* (in) and *kratos* (strength, power, rule). The idea is having power over yourself, being strong on the inside. *Enkrateia*, self-control, appears 4 times in 3 verses. The verb appears 2 times, and the adjective 1 time.

Greek philosophers talked about *enkrateia* a lot. For them, it was the virtue of a man who mastered himself by force of will and reason. Paul uses the same word, but he puts it somewhere the philosophers never did: on a list of things the Holy Spirit grows. Christian self-control isn't a self-made man gritting his teeth. It's the Spirit giving a believer power over what used to rule him.

Its opposite is *akrasia*, the lack of self-control. Jesus used it for the Pharisees, whose cups were clean outside but "full of plunder and self-indulgence" inside (Matthew 23:25). Paul warned married couples not to stay apart too long, "so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5). And he listed "without self-control" among the marks of the last days (2 Timothy 3:3).

**σώφρων** (*sophron*)
**Say it:** SOH-frone
**Strong's number:** G4998
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** sensible, sober-minded, of sound mind; self-controlled in thinking

There's a related word family that's close in meaning: *sophron*, sensible or sober-minded, which appears 4 times, all in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. *Enkrateia* focuses on mastering your desires. *Sophron* focuses on a clear, balanced mind. Paul wanted both in church leaders: "sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled" (Titus 1:8).

## How the New Testament Uses It

**Self-control in the gospel message.** When Paul stood before the Roman governor Felix and his wife Drusilla, "he was reasoning about righteousness and self-control and the judgment that is about to be." Luke adds, "Felix, having become frightened, answered, 'For the present, go; and having found an opportunity, I will call for you'" (Acts 24:25). The Jewish historian Josephus says Felix had lured Drusilla away from her first husband (*Antiquities* 20.7.2), and Luke tells us Felix was hoping Paul would bribe him (24:26). Of all the things Paul could have preached to that man, he chose self-control. It hit home, and Felix sent him away.

**Self-control in the athlete.** Paul's best picture of self-control comes from the games.

> *Do you not know that those who run in a stadium all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain* ***it****. And everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things. They then* ***do it*** *that they may receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run thus, not as uncertainly; thus I box, not as beating* ***the*** *air; but I strike my body and bring* ***it*** *into slavery, lest somehow, having preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*
> (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games every two years, one of the great athletic festivals of Greece. Everyone knew what it took to win: months of strict training, careful diet, and saying no to a hundred things other people enjoyed. And all for a crown made of plants that would wilt in a week. Paul says if they can do that for "a perishable crown," we can do it for "an imperishable" one.

Notice that Paul applies this to himself. He was an apostle. He'd planted churches and seen miracles. And he still said, "I strike my body and bring it into slavery, lest somehow, having preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (9:27). No one ever gets past needing self-control.

**Self-control in a list that builds.** "Supply in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness, and in godliness brotherly affection, and in brotherly affection love" (2 Peter 1:5-7). Notice where self-control sits: right after knowledge. Knowing what's right isn't enough. You also need the power to do it.

**Self-control in marriage and singleness.** "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9). We saw this in Chapter 22. Self-control applies to our sexual desires, whether single or married.

**Self-control taught by grace.** "For the grace of God has appeared, which brings salvation to all men, training us that, having denied ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12). Grace doesn't just forgive us. It trains us. The same grace that saves you teaches you to say no.

**Self-control in the tongue.** "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in word, this one is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also" (James 3:2). The tongue is the hardest part of us to control. If the Spirit can master that, He can master anything.

**Self-control with freedom.** "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Some things aren't sins in themselves, like food, phones, sports, or hobbies. But anything can become your master if you let it.

## Where Self-Control Comes From

If self-control were just willpower, it wouldn't be on a list of the Spirit's fruit. Paul makes clear it isn't. "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Notice the order. He doesn't say, "Stop carrying out the desires of the flesh, and then you'll walk by the Spirit." He says walk by the Spirit, and the result will be that you don't carry out the flesh's desires.

That doesn't mean we do nothing. Paul also says, "make no provision for the flesh, for its desires" (Romans 13:14). That's practical: don't keep the bottle in the house, don't leave the browser open, don't walk past the bakery when you're hungry. And Paul says, "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7). The Spirit gives the power, and we put it to use.

## In the Apostles' Day

The world the early church lived in wasn't very different from ours. Corinth was famous for its immorality. Ephesus was full of magic and idols. Rome had its feasts, its arena, and its brothels. The believers who came to Christ in those cities had lived lives with no walls.

Paul reminded the Corinthians what some of them had been: sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, greedy, drunkards. "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). The Spirit had built new walls in people who'd never had any.

Scripture also gives us an earlier picture of self-control in a young man named Joseph. When his master's wife pressured him day after day, he said, "How shall I do this great evil, and sin against God?" And when she grabbed him, "he left his garment in her hand, and he fled and went outside" (Genesis 39:9, 12). Sometimes self-control isn't standing and fighting. Sometimes it's running.

And Daniel, a teenager in a foreign palace, "set on his heart that he would not defile himself with the delicacies of the king and with the wine of his drinking" (Daniel 1:8). He decided ahead of time. Most battles for self-control are won or lost before the moment comes.

## What It Looks Like Today

Self-control today looks like a man who turns off the screen when he's tempted, every time, and has a friend who asks him about it. It looks like a woman who stops before she sends the angry text. It looks like a teenager who walks away from the party when it starts going bad. It looks like someone who says no to the second helping, the extra purchase, the binge, the last word.

Picture Greg. For fifteen years he drank too much. He never thought of himself as an alcoholic, but his wife and kids knew. When he came to Christ, nothing changed overnight. But he started being honest. He joined a men's group at church, and later a recovery group. He poured out every bottle in the house. He stopped going to the bar after work and started going to the gym with a friend from church. There were setbacks. But three years later, he's sober, and his kids trust him again. Greg will tell you it wasn't his willpower. He'd tried willpower for years. It was the Spirit, working through honesty, friends, and a lot of small choices.

Self-control also looks like a believer who manages money carefully, gets enough sleep, takes care of his body because it's "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19), and keeps his temper when he's been wronged.

## Watch Out For

- **Willpower without the Spirit.** White-knuckling it works for a while, and then the wall falls. Walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).
- **Self-control in one area, none in another.** Some people are disciplined with money and out of control with their tongue, or careful with food and careless with lust.
- **Going it alone.** Most people who win this fight have someone walking with them.
- **Giving up after a failure.** Falling isn't the end. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Get up and keep walking.
- **Self-control that becomes pride.** Disciplined people can look down on those who struggle. Remember who gave you the power.

## Growing in Self-Control

- Identify one area where your wall is down. Be honest with God about it.
- Make no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14). Remove what feeds the temptation.
- Decide ahead of time, like Daniel. Know what you'll do before the moment comes.
- Tell a trusted believer and ask them to check on you.

- Start each day by asking the Spirit for power to walk with Him. Then take the next step.

## Study Questions

1. The word *enkrateia* means “strength inside.” How is Christian self-control different from just willpower?
2. Read Acts 24:24-25. Why do you think self-control was the topic that frightened Felix?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. What does the athlete teach us about self-control?
4. Read Titus 2:11-12. How does grace “train” us?
5. Read Genesis 39:7-12. What can we learn from how Joseph handled temptation?
6. Where is your wall the weakest right now? What’s one step you can take this week?

# Chapter 38: How Fruit Grows

> *I am the vine; you **are** the branches. The **one** remaining in Me and I in him, this **one** bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything.*
>
> John 15:5 (SLB)

We've looked at nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit. If you're like me, you read through those chapters and thought, "I'm not there yet." Me neither. So the natural question is, how does it grow? What do I actually do?

Jesus answered that question the night before He died, walking with His disciples, probably past the vineyards outside Jerusalem. His answer is simpler than most of us expect, and harder.

Recovery and rebuilding trust at home stripped away my pride and comfort. It felt like loss, not growth. Looking back through John 15:2, I can see God cutting away dead wood so I could bear real fruit. Pruning hurts while the shears are working. It is the only way a branch gets healthy.

## The Word

**μένω** (*meno*)
**Say it:** MEN-oh
**Strong's number:** G3306
**Used in the New Testament:** 120 times, in 105 verses
**Plain meaning:** to remain, to stay, to abide, to dwell, to keep living in a place

**κλῆμα** (*klema*)
**Say it:** KLAY-mah
**Strong's number:** G2814
**Used in the New Testament:** 4 times
**Plain meaning:** a branch, especially the tender shoot of a vine

*Meno*, to remain, appears 120 times in the New Testament. John loves this word. He uses it 41 times in his Gospel and 23 more times in his first letter. In John 15:4-11 alone, Jesus uses it eleven times. Older Bibles translated it "abide." The SLB has "remain." It means to stay put, to keep living somewhere, to not leave.

*Klema*, branch, appears just 4 times, all in John 15. It's the word for the soft, living shoot of a grapevine, the part that actually carries the grapes.

**καθαίρω** (*kathairo*)
**Say it:** kah-THAI-roh
**Strong's number:** G2508
**Used in the New Testament:** 2 times
**Plain meaning:** to cleanse, to make clean; of a vine, to prune

Then there's a wordplay that's easy to miss in English. "Every branch bearing fruit, He prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:2-3). "Prunes" is *kathairo*, which appears only 2 times. Its basic meaning is "to clean." "Clean" in the next verse is *katharos*, from the same family. Jesus is saying the Father's pruning is a kind of cleansing, and His word is one of the tools He uses.

## The Vine and the Branches

> *Remain in Me, and I in you. Even as the branch is not able to bear fruit from itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither **can** you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you **are** the branches. The **one** remaining in Me and I in him, this **one** bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything.* (John 15:4-5)

Here's the whole secret of fruit, in one picture. A branch doesn't produce grapes by trying hard. It produces grapes by staying connected to the vine. The life of the vine flows into the branch, and fruit appears. A branch cut off from the vine can strain all it wants. It won't produce a single grape.

"Apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (15:5). That's not an exaggeration. You can do a lot of things without Jesus. You can't produce the fruit of the Spirit without Him.

So what does it mean to "remain" in Jesus? Jesus Himself fills in the picture in the verses that follow.

- **His words remain in you.** "If you remain in Me, and My declarations remain in you, you will ask whatever you wish, and it will happen for you" (15:7). Remaining in Christ means letting His word live in you: reading it, thinking about it, and letting it shape you.
- **You pray.** The same verse ties remaining to asking. A branch that remains in the vine talks to the vine.
- **You remain in His love.** "Even as the Father loved Me, I also loved you; remain in My love" (15:9). Not trying to earn it. Resting in it.
- **You obey.** "If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love" (15:10). Obedience isn't how we get connected. It's how we stay close.
- **It leads to joy.** "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may remain in you, and your joy may be full" (15:11).

## The Gardener's Work

Jesus also says the Father is "the vinedresser" (15:1). The vine grower does two things.

**He takes away the dead branches.** "Every branch in Me not bearing fruit, He takes it away" (15:2). Bible teachers understand this in different ways. Some believe it describes people who look like they belong to Christ but never truly did, like Judas, who had just left the room (13:30). Others point out that

the word translated "takes away" can also mean "lifts up," and believe the vine grower is lifting a branch off the ground so it can get sunlight. Either way, the point for us is clear: God is serious about fruit.

**He prunes the good branches.** "Every branch bearing fruit, He prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit" (15:2). Anybody who's grown grapes or roses knows what pruning looks like. You cut back healthy growth, sometimes a lot of it. It looks brutal. But a vine that isn't pruned grows wild leaves and very little fruit.

That's often how God grows fruit in us. He cuts back things that aren't sinful but are taking energy away from what matters. He uses hard seasons, losses, disappointments, and discipline. "Now all discipline for the present does not seem to be of joy, but of grief; but afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). If you're in a season of pruning right now, it may be because you're bearing fruit, not because you aren't.

## Walking by the Spirit

Galatians 5 uses a different picture for the same truth. "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). "If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk in line" (5:25).

We looked at these two verbs in Chapter 28. Put them next to John 15 and you see the same idea from two angles. In John, we remain in Christ like a branch in a vine. In Galatians, we walk with the Spirit like a soldier keeping in step. Both pictures say the same thing: fruit comes from staying close, day after day.

Paul gives three other commands about how we relate to the Spirit, and they help fill in what walking by the Spirit means.

- "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The verb is present tense, "keep being filled." It's not a one-time event but a continual yielding to Him.
- "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). Sin hurts the One who lives in us. Paul says it right after warning about harsh words, bitterness, and anger.
- "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). You can throw water on the fire. Ignoring His promptings, despising His work, and stubbornly holding onto sin all do that.

## God's Part and Our Part

Some believers think growth is all God's job, so they wait for fruit to fall from the sky. Others think it's all their job, so they grit their teeth and try harder. Paul holds both together in one sentence.

> *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the **One** who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of **His** good pleasure.*
> (Philippians 2:12-13)

"Work out your own salvation" is our part. Paul doesn't mean earn it. He means live it out, put it into practice. "For God is the One who is working in you" is God's part. We work because God is working. He gives both the desire ("to will") and the power ("to work").

A farmer can't make a seed grow. But a farmer who never plows, plants, waters, or weeds won't get a crop. God gives the growth. We tend the field.

Jesus told a parable about this. "For the earth bears fruit by itself: first a blade, then a head, then full grain in the head" (Mark 4:28). Growth is slow. It happens in stages. It often happens while we're asleep. But it happens.

And Paul gives us this promise: "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). God doesn't plant and walk away.

## What Chokes Fruit

In the parable of the soils, Jesus described seed that sprang up but never bore fruit: "and the cares of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires concerning the other things, entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).

Notice that none of those are wild sins. Worry, money, and wanting other things. That's an ordinary, busy life. Most believers don't lose their fruit to a scandal. They lose it to a crowded calendar, a phone, and a constant low hum of anxiety. The thorns grow up slowly, and one day there's no room left for the word.

The good soil, Jesus said, is "those who, having heard the word in a noble and good heart, hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:15). Hear it, hold it, and hang in there.

## Practical Ways to Remain

None of these produce fruit by themselves. They're ways of staying connected to the Vine. Christians sometimes call them "spiritual disciplines" or "means of grace."

- **Scripture.** "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16). The person who delights in God's word "shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, which gives its fruit in its season" (Psalm 1:3). Read it daily, even a little.
- **Prayer.** Talk to Him through the day, not just at meals. Branches stay connected.
- **Church.** Fruit grows in community. Most of the fruit list (patience, kindness, gentleness) can only grow around other people. And other believers help us see what we can't see in ourselves.
- **Worship.** "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We become like what we look at.
- **Confession.** Keep short accounts with God. Sin that's hidden grieves the Spirit.
- **Obedience in small things.** Do the next thing He shows you. Then the next.
- **Patience with yourself.** Fruit takes seasons, not days. Don't dig up the seed every morning to see if it's growing.

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture Susan. She came to Christ at forty, and she was, in her own words, "a mess." Quick temper, sharp tongue, and a lot of bitterness from a hard divorce. She didn't change overnight. But she started reading her Bible every morning before work, just a chapter. She joined a women's group. She started praying on

the drive to work instead of stewing. When she lost her temper, she confessed it and apologized, which was humbling and happened a lot at first.

Ten years later, the women in her church call her one of the most gentle, patient people they know. She laughs when she hears that. “I’m the same woman,” she says. “God just kept pruning.” She can’t point to a day when it happened. It grew, first a blade, then a head, then full grain.

That’s how fruit grows. Not by trying to be a better branch, but by staying in the Vine.

## Watch Out For

- **Trying to manufacture fruit.** Plastic fruit looks good and feeds nobody. Remain in Him.
- **Thinking disciplines are the fruit.** Bible reading and prayer aren’t the goal. They’re how we stay connected to the One who is.
- **Impatience with the process.** Grapes don’t ripen in a week. Neither do we.
- **Resenting the pruning.** The cut that hurts may be the very thing that makes you fruitful.
- **The thorns.** Watch for worry, money, and busyness slowly choking the word (Mark 4:19).

## Growing in the Fruit

- Pick one habit that keeps you close to Christ, and do it every day for a month.
- Ask the Spirit to show you what’s choking the word in your life, and remove one thorn.
- If you’re in a season of pruning, ask God what fruit He’s making room for.
- Pick the one part of the fruit you most need, and pray for it by name every day this week.
- Thank God for the fruit you can see. He started it, and He’ll finish it (Philippians 1:6).

## Study Questions

1. Read John 15:1-8. What does it mean to “remain” in Jesus? How many times does He use the word?
2. Why can’t a branch bear fruit “from itself” (15:4)?
3. Read John 15:2 and Hebrews 12:11. Have you ever been through a season you now see was God pruning you?
4. Read Philippians 2:12-13. What is your part in growth, and what is God’s?
5. Read Mark 4:19. What “thorns” are most likely to choke the word in your life?
6. Which practice in this chapter do you most need to start or restart this week?

# Part Six: Finding and Using Your Gift

# Chapter 39: Finding Your Gift

> *each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves, as good stewards of* ***the*** *manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks,* ***let him speak*** *as oracles of God; if anyone serves,* ***let him serve*** *as from* ***the*** *strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power to the ages of the ages. Amen.*
>
> 1 Peter 4:10-11 (SLB)

By now you've read about more than twenty gifts. Maybe you saw yourself in a few of them right away. Maybe you finished Part Three wondering if you have any gift at all. Either way, this chapter is for you. Here's the most important thing I can tell you before we start: if you belong to Jesus, you have at least one. Peter says "each one, as he has received a gift" (1 Peter 4:10). Paul says "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Not "to the gifted few." To each.

## The Word

**σωφρονέω** (*sophroneo*)
**Say it:** so-fron-EH-oh
**Strong's number:** G4993
**Used in the New Testament:** 6 times
**Plain meaning:** to think soberly, to be of sound mind, to see yourself rightly

**ἀναζωπυρέω** (*anazopyreo*)
**Say it:** an-ad-zo-poor-EH-oh
**Strong's number:** G329
**Used in the New Testament:** 1 time
**Plain meaning:** to rekindle; to stir a fire back to full flame

Right before Paul lists the gifts in Romans 12, he tells us how to think about ourselves.

> *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to be high-minded beyond what it is necessary to think, but to think so as to be sober-minded, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.* (Romans 12:3)

Paul plays with one Greek root four times in that verse: don't *hyperphronein* (think too highly), but *phronein* (think) in order to *sophronein* (think soberly). *Sophroneo* appears 6 times. Mark uses it for the man freed from a legion of demons, "sitting and clothed and being of sound mind" (Mark 5:15). That's the picture. Finding your gift starts with being in your right mind about yourself: not puffed up, not putting yourself down, but seeing yourself the way God sees you.

The second word is from Paul's letter to Timothy: "For which reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). *Anazopyreo* appears just 1 time. It's the picture of stirring up the coals of a fire that has burned low and blowing on them until they flame up again. Timothy had a gift. He'd let it cool down. Paul's answer wasn't to go find a new one. It was to stir up the one he had.

## What the New Testament Shows Us

The New Testament never gives a method for discovering gifts. Nobody in the Bible takes a test. But it does show us how gifts came to light in real people, and the pattern is worth following.

**Gifts were seen while people served.** The Seven in Acts 6 were picked to serve tables. Two of them, Stephen and Philip, turned out to be powerful preachers (Acts 6:8-10; 8:5). They didn't discover those gifts first and then serve. They served, and the gifts showed up.

**Others recognized them.** The apostles told the church to "select from among you seven men being well attested, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Timothy "was well attested by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium" (16:2). James, Peter, and John "having known the grace that was given to me" gave Paul the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9). Gifts were confirmed by the church, not just claimed by the person.

**Leaders tested them.** "And let these also be tested first; then let them serve" (1 Timothy 3:10). The church watched how a person served before giving them more responsibility.

**The church prayed.** "And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart now for Me both Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). God made His will known while the church was worshiping and seeking Him.

**Gifts could be neglected or rekindled.** "Do not neglect the gift in you" (1 Timothy 4:14). "Rekindle the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6). A gift you don't use grows cold.

**Some gifts can be desired.** "Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts" (1 Corinthians 14:1). "Seek that you may abound for the edification of the church" (14:12). It's right to ask God for the gifts that would build up His church most, as long as love comes first and the Spirit still decides (12:11).

## Why I Don't Use a Scored Test

You may have taken a spiritual gifts test, the kind with a hundred statements you rate from one to five, and a score sheet at the end that tells you your top three gifts. Many churches use them, and some people have found them a helpful starting place. I'm not against asking good questions. But I don't recommend relying on a score, and here's why.

1. **They measure what you like, not what God gave.** Most questions ask how you feel about something: "I enjoy organizing events." That tells you about your personality and preferences. It may line up with a gift, or it may not. Moses didn't feel like a speaker (Exodus 4:10). Jeremiah said he was too young (Jeremiah 1:6). God called them anyway.

2. **The lists don't match.** Different tests include different gifts, and different numbers of them. Some add craftsmanship, music, or writing, which the New Testament doesn't call spiritual gifts. You can get a different "top three" depending on which test you take.
3. **They can depend on your mood.** Take one in a hard season and one in a good season, and you may get different results.
4. **They can become an excuse.** "Mercy isn't my gift" can become a reason not to visit a sick friend. But every believer is called to show mercy, give, serve, and share the gospel. The gifts are special abilities for the church. They don't cancel the commands given to all of us.
5. **They leave out the church.** In the New Testament, gifts were recognized by other believers. A test you take alone at your kitchen table can't do that.

So instead of a score, Appendix C has a worksheet. It has questions to think and pray through, and it asks you to talk with people who know you. There are no points and no top three. It's a way to start a conversation with God and with your church.

## Five Steps That Work

Here's the approach I'd suggest. It's simple, and it follows the pattern we just saw in the New Testament.

1. **Pray.** Ask God to show you how He's gifted you, and ask Him for a willing heart to use whatever He shows you.
2. **Serve.** Say yes to needs in your church. Help in the nursery, greet at the door, visit a shut-in, teach a class, set up chairs. You'll learn more about your gifts in six months of serving than in six years of thinking about it.
3. **Notice.** Pay attention to what happens when you serve. Where do you see fruit? What do people thank you for? What do you find yourself drawn back to? Where do you feel God's strength, not just your own?
4. **Ask.** Talk to mature believers and church leaders who know you. Ask them what they've seen. "Let a stranger praise you, and not your mouth" (Proverbs 27:2). Other people often see our gifts before we do.
5. **Grow.** Once you see a gift, develop it. Get training. Find someone with the same gift who can mentor you. Paul told Timothy to "rekindle" his gift. Gifts grow with use.

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture Jason, twenty-six. He wanted to find his gift. He took two online tests and got two different answers. Then an older man in his church, Walt, asked him to help with the men's breakfast. Jason started setting up tables. Pretty soon he was running the sign-up sheet, then planning the menu, then organizing a work day for a widow's house. One morning Walt said, "Son, you know you've got the gift of administration, right?" Jason laughed. He'd never thought of it that way. He just liked making things work. But the men around him had seen it for months. Now Jason helps plan the church's whole outreach calendar. He didn't find his gift by looking inward. He found it by serving and listening.

Now picture Maria, in her fifties. She's sure she doesn't have a gift. She doesn't teach or sing or lead. But every week she notices who's missing from church and calls them. She sends cards. She brings soup. When someone in the church is grieving, Maria is the first one at the door. When her pastor told her she

had a gift of mercy, she cried. She'd thought she was just doing what anybody would do. Most people don't. That's how you know it's a gift.

## Watch Out For

- **Waiting to serve until you know your gift.** You'll probably find your gift by serving, not the other way around.
- **Gift envy.** "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He willed" (1 Corinthians 12:18). Your gift is His choice.
- **Gift pride.** "What do you have which you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).
- **Using your gift as a wall.** "That's not my gift" is never a good reason to ignore a need right in front of you.
- **Burying it.** The servant in Jesus' parable said, "having been afraid, having gone away, I hid your talent in the ground" (Matthew 25:25). Fear is often the reason gifts go unused.

## If You've Found Your Gift

- Thank God for it. It's grace.
- Use it "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). A steward manages what belongs to someone else.
- Keep growing in it, and keep serving outside it when there's a need.
- Help someone else find theirs.
- Remember the goal: "so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).

## Study Questions

1. Read Romans 12:3. What does it mean to think about yourself "soberly" when it comes to gifts?
2. Read Acts 6:1-10. How did Stephen's and Philip's gifts come to light?
3. Why do you think the New Testament has other believers confirm a person's gifts?
4. Read 2 Timothy 1:6. Is there a gift in your life that needs to be "rekindled"?
5. Which of the five steps (pray, serve, notice, ask, grow) do you most need to take next?
6. Ask two mature believers this week what gifts they see in you. Write down what they say.

# Chapter 40: Things Often Called Gifts

*And everything, whatever you do, work from **the** soul, as to the Lord and not to men*

Colossians 3:23 (SLB)

If you've ever taken a spiritual gifts test or read a few books on the subject, you've probably seen gifts that weren't in any of the lists we've studied. Music. Intercession. Craftsmanship. Deliverance. Missionary. Martyrdom. Voluntary poverty. Some books list them as spiritual gifts right alongside prophecy and teaching.

Are they? This chapter looks at each one. The short answer is that the New Testament never names these as *charismata* in its lists. But most of them are real ways God uses His people, and several are clearly works of the Spirit. The question isn't whether they matter. It's what to call them, and how to think about them.

## Why Naming Matters

You might wonder why it makes any difference whether we call something a "gift." Here's why. In Chapter 3, we saw that the New Testament gift lists are examples, not a closed catalog. Paul's lists don't all match, which suggests he never meant to give a complete set. So it's possible God gives gifts that aren't named. Many Bible teachers believe that.

But we also need to be careful. If we call something a spiritual gift, people may start to think that only some believers are responsible for it. If "intercession" is a gift, then the rest of us might think we don't need to pray for others. That's a real danger. Several of the things in this chapter are commands for every Christian. Calling them special gifts can quietly excuse everyone else.

So for each one, we'll ask two questions: What does Scripture say? And is it a command for all, a special calling for some, or both?

## Music

Music fills the Bible. Moses and Miriam sang after the Red Sea (Exodus 15). David played the lyre for King Saul, and Saul was refreshed (1 Samuel 16:23). David set apart "the sons of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals" (1 Chronicles 25:1). There were 288 of them, "trained in song to the LORD, all the skilled" (25:7). The book of Psalms is a hymnbook.

In the New Testament, music is part of what being filled with the Spirit looks like: "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:18-19). And in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "each of you has a psalm."

**How to think about it:** Every believer is called to sing. Some believers are clearly gifted to lead others in worship through music, much like the Levites were. Whether we call that a spiritual gift or a natural

talent given to God, the test is the same: does it build up the church and point people to God, or to the musician?

## Intercession

Some believers seem to pray more, longer, and with more burden than others. Many books call this the gift of intercession.

Scripture is clear that prayer for others is every believer's job. "I exhort, therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). Notice "first of all." And the Spirit Himself intercedes for us: "the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26).

Still, some believers stand out. Epaphras was "always struggling for you in the prayers, so that you may stand mature and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12). Anna in the temple served "with fastings and petitions night and day" (Luke 2:37).

**How to think about it:** Intercession is a command for all. Some may have a special burden and calling for it, and the church is blessed when they do. But no one should say, "Prayer isn't my gift."

## Craftsmanship

This one has the strongest Old Testament support.

> *See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him **with** the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all **kinds of** work, to devise designs, to work in gold and in silver and in bronze* (Exodus 31:2-4)

Bezalel is one of the first people in the Bible described as filled "with the Spirit of God," and the purpose was to build the tabernacle. God also gave him and Oholiab the ability "to teach" others (Exodus 35:34). The Spirit gave skill with gold, silver, wood, stone, and cloth.

**How to think about it:** This is clearly the Spirit's work, so it's fair to say God gives skill in craftsmanship for His purposes. In the New Testament, it isn't named in the gift lists. But a carpenter who builds a church's ramp, a seamstress who makes clothes for the poor like Dorcas (Acts 9:39), and an artist who serves the church with her work are all using what God gave them for His people. "And everything, whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23).

## Deliverance or Exorcism

Jesus cast out demons often. He gave the Twelve and the seventy authority over demons (Luke 9:1; 10:17). Paul cast a spirit out of a slave girl in Philippi: "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out from her" (Acts 16:18).

But the New Testament never lists casting out demons as a spiritual gift. The closest gift is "distinguishing of spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10), which we studied in Chapter 11. And Acts gives a sobering warning about people who tried to use Jesus' name like a magic word. The seven sons of Sceva tried it,

and “the evil spirit, answering, said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I am acquainted with; but you, who are you?’” (Acts 19:15). It didn’t go well for them.

**How to think about it:** Faithful believers differ here in the same ways they differ on the sign gifts (Chapter 5). All agree that Christ has defeated the devil, that believers are to “resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7), and that we fight with “the full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11). All agree that real deliverance comes through Jesus’ name and authority, not through a technique. Jesus also gave a warning to people who get excited about this: “do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice that your names were written in the heavens” (Luke 10:20). If someone you know seems troubled by evil, go to your church’s elders, and don’t neglect wise medical and mental health care. Many troubles that look spiritual have physical causes, and some have both.

## Missionary

Some books list “missionary” as a gift: a special ability to minister in another culture. The New Testament doesn’t use that word. But it does describe people sent out to carry the gospel to new places. The Holy Spirit said, “Set apart now for Me both Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). Paul made it his goal “to preach the gospel not where Christ was named, so that I may not build on another’s foundation” (Romans 15:20).

**How to think about it:** This overlaps with what we studied in Chapter 13 about apostles in the wider sense, “sent ones,” and in Chapter 12 about evangelists. A missionary is usually someone with gifts like teaching, evangelism, or leading who is called to use them in another culture. The call to go into all the world belongs to the whole church. Some are sent. All are to pray, give, and send.

## Martyrdom

Some lists include martyrdom as a gift, based on Paul’s words: “and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but do not have love, I am profited nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Paul’s point there isn’t that martyrdom is a gift. It’s that even the ultimate sacrifice is worthless without love. Still, Scripture does speak of suffering as something God grants: “For to you it was granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on behalf of Him” (Philippians 1:29). The word “granted” there is *charizomai*, from the same family as *charisma*. And Christians through the centuries have testified that God gives special grace to those who face death for Him. Polycarp, whom we met in Chapter 35, is one example.

**How to think about it:** No one should go looking for martyrdom. But every believer should be ready to be faithful to death (Revelation 2:10), and we can trust that if that day comes, God will give the grace we need for it.

## Voluntary Poverty

The same verse is used for this one: “And if I give away all my possessions to feed others” (1 Corinthians 13:3). Some believers have felt called to give away nearly everything they own. Jesus told one rich young man, “If you desire to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you

will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). The early church in Jerusalem sold land and houses so that "distribution was being made to each, as anyone had need" (Acts 4:35).

**How to think about it:** Jesus didn't give that command to everyone. Zacchaeus gave half his goods (Luke 19:8), and Jesus said salvation had come to his house. Lydia kept her house and used it for the church (Acts 16:15). But Jesus does call every believer to hold possessions loosely, to be generous, and to follow Him above all. Some believers have a special calling to simplicity for the sake of the gospel, and many missionaries have lived that way. Others serve God by earning well and giving much. Both can be faithful. Remember what Paul says of Jesus Himself: "for your sake He became poor, being rich, so that you by His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

## Other Things People Call Gifts

You may also see gifts like writing, humor, counseling, or technology. The same approach applies. Ask what Scripture says, ask whether it's a command for all or a special calling for some, and ask whether it's being used to build up the church. A God-given ability doesn't have to be on Paul's list to be offered back to Him.

## Watch Out For

- **Gift lists that excuse disobedience.** Prayer, generosity, and faithfulness under pressure are commands for every believer.
- **Spiritualizing everything.** Not every skill is a spiritual gift. Not every strong feeling is a call.
- **Downplaying God-given skills.** The other danger is acting as though only "spiritual" gifts count. Bezalel's craftsmanship was Spirit-filled work.
- **Chasing the dramatic.** Jesus told the seventy not to rejoice that demons obeyed them, but that their names were in heaven (Luke 10:20).

## If God Uses You in One of These Ways

- Give it back to Him, whatever you call it.
- Use it to build up the church, not to build a name.
- Stay under the oversight of your church's leaders.
- Keep love first (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

## Study Questions

1. Why might it be risky to call something like intercession a "gift" that only some people have?
2. Read Exodus 31:1-5. What does Bezalel teach us about the Spirit and practical skills?
3. Read Acts 19:13-16. What went wrong for the sons of Sceva?
4. Read Philippians 1:29. How can suffering be something God "grants"?
5. Read Matthew 19:21 and Luke 19:8. How did Jesus deal differently with these two men and their money?
6. What skills or abilities do you have that you've never thought of offering to God for His church?

# Chapter 41: Gifts and Fruit Together

> *but speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being joined together and held together through every joint of the supply, according to **the** working in **the** measure of each individual part, makes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*
>
> Ephesians 4:15-16 (SLB)

We started this book by saying that gifts and fruit belong together. Now that we've looked at each one, I want to end where Paul did. He wrote 1 Corinthians 12 about the gifts and 1 Corinthians 14 about using them. In between, he put chapter 13, about love. That wasn't a detour. It was the point.

## The Word

**οἰκοδομή** (*oikodome*)
**Say it:** oy-kod-om-AY
**Strong's number:** G3619
**Used in the New Testament:** 18 times
**Plain meaning:** building up; the act of building a house; edification

*Oikodome* appears 18 times in the New Testament. It comes from *oikos* (house) and a root that means to build, and its first meaning is a building or the work of building one. Jesus' disciples used it for the temple buildings (Matthew 24:1). Paul used it for the church: "you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

It's the word Paul keeps coming back to whenever he talks about gifts. "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26). "Seek that you may abound for the edification of the church" (14:12). Gifts are given "for the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). And then Paul tells us what the building is made of: the body "makes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

That's the whole book in one verse. The gifts are the tools. Love is the material. The building is the church.

## When Gifts Go Wrong

The Bible is honest about gifted people who failed. It's not a pleasant list, but it's an important one.

**Samson.** "And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him" (Judges 14:6), and he did things no one else could. But Samson had almost no self-control. He chased women he shouldn't have, broke his vows, and toyed with the very things that would destroy him. One day he woke up and said, "I will go out as time after time, and shake myself free." Then comes one of the saddest lines in Scripture: "And he did not know that the LORD had departed from on him" (Judges 16:20). Great gifts, almost no fruit.

**Saul.** "The Spirit of God rushed on him, and he prophesied in their midst" (1 Samuel 10:10). Saul started with real gifting. But jealousy, impatience, and disobedience took over, and "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (16:14). Saul is a warning that a gift used without obedience doesn't protect you.

**Balaam.** He spoke true prophecies about Israel, including "a star will march forth from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17), which many have seen as pointing to the Messiah. But Peter says he "loved the wage of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). Balaam had a gift and the heart of a hired gun.

**The Corinthians.** "You are not lacking in any gift" (1 Corinthians 1:7). And yet Paul said, "I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly men, as to infants in Christ" (3:1). Why? "For where there is jealousy and strife and dissensions among you, are you not fleshly?" (3:3). Every gift, and still babies.

**The "many" of Matthew 7.** This is the most sobering of all.

> *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.'* (Matthew 7:22-23)

These people had prophecy, deliverance, and miracles. They used Jesus' name. And He said He never knew them. Gifts aren't proof of salvation. Fruit is the evidence Jesus pointed to just a few verses earlier: "So then, by their fruits you will know them" (7:20).

Notice something about these stories. In the Old Testament examples, the Spirit came on people for a task, and could leave. In the New Testament, the Spirit lives in every believer and seals us "for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). A true believer doesn't lose the Spirit the way Saul did. But the warning still stands. Gifts can keep working for a while in a life that has stopped growing, and that's dangerous, because it can fool the person who has them. Many gifted leaders have fallen, and often the people around them said afterward, "But God was using him." God may use a gift while He waits for a heart to repent. That doesn't mean He approves.

## Gifts Without Fruit, Fruit Without Gifts

Think about the two kinds of mistakes a church can make.

One church prizes gifts. It wants powerful preaching, great music, exciting ministries, and dramatic answers to prayer. Nobody asks much about character. Over time, the church gets a reputation for being exciting and for chewing people up.

Another church prizes fruit, or thinks it does. Everyone is pleasant. Nobody makes waves. But nobody uses their gifts either. The same few people do everything, and the rest sit and watch. The church is nice, but it isn't growing, and its people are starving for real ministry.

Paul wants both. Romans 12 starts with gifts (12:6-8) and goes straight into love: "Let love be without hypocrisy... in brotherly love devoted to one another, in honor preferring one another" (12:9-10). First Peter 4 puts them in one breath: "And above all things, having fervent love among yourselves... each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves" (1 Peter 4:8, 10). And Ephesians 4 says the gifts are

given "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). The goal of the gifts is mature character, Christlikeness. The gifts serve the fruit.

## Gifts Are for Now, Fruit Is Forever

Paul makes one more point that puts everything in perspective.

> *Love never fails; but whether **there are** prophecies, they will be done away; whether tongues, they will cease; whether knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, then that which **is** in part will be done away.*
> (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)

Bible teachers disagree about when "the perfect" comes, as we saw in Chapter 5. But everyone agrees that some day, the gifts will be finished. We won't need prophecy in heaven, because we'll see Jesus face to face. We won't need teaching, because "then I will fully know, even as I also have been fully known" (13:12). We won't need mercy, because there'll be no more suffering. We won't need evangelists, because everyone there will already know Him.

But love will still be there. "Love never fails" (13:8). The fruit of the Spirit is a preview of heaven. The gifts are scaffolding. The fruit is the building. When the building is finished, the scaffolding comes down.

That changes how we think about both. Your gift matters a great deal right now. Use it. Stir it up. Don't bury it. But your character is what you'll take with you. The person you're becoming in Christ will last forever.

## What It Looks Like Today

Picture two men in the same church.

The first has the gift of teaching. People love his classes. He knows his Greek, and he can explain anything. But he's short with his wife, impatient with people who disagree with him, and quietly proud of his knowledge. His class is full. His home is tense.

The second also has the gift of teaching, but he's not as polished. He stumbles over words sometimes. But he loves the people in his class. He prays for each one by name. He calls them when they miss a week. He's patient with the slow learners and gentle with the know-it-alls. His wife says he's the same man at home that he is at church.

Which one would you rather learn from? Which one looks more like Jesus? Paul's answer is in 1 Corinthians 13:2: "If I have prophecy, and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge... but do not have love, I am nothing."

Here's the good news. The first man doesn't have to stay that way. The same Spirit who gave him the gift can grow the fruit. And the second man shouldn't think his gift is small just because it isn't flashy. God uses faithful, loving people with ordinary gifts to do more good than gifted people without love ever will.

## Watch Out For

- **Measuring spiritual maturity by gifts.** The Corinthians had every gift and were still infants (1 Corinthians 3:1).
- **Excusing bad character in gifted people.** "But he's such a good preacher" is not a reason to ignore sin.
- **Using "fruit" as an excuse not to serve.** Being nice isn't the same as obeying "serving it among yourselves" (1 Peter 4:10).
- **Losing your first love.** The church in Ephesus did good work, tested false apostles, and endured. But Jesus said, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:2-4).

## Putting It Together

- Use your gift, and keep asking God to grow the fruit.
- Let love shape how you use your gift, every time.
- Let people closest to you speak into your character, not just your ministry.
- Value the fruit in others more than their gifts.
- Remember the goal: a church built up in love, growing to look like Jesus (Ephesians 4:13-16).

## Study Questions

1. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What are the gifts given for, and what is the building made of?
2. Read Judges 16:20. How can a gifted person not notice that something has gone wrong?
3. Read Matthew 7:15-23. Why are gifts not proof that a person belongs to Jesus?
4. Is your church more at risk of valuing gifts over fruit, or fruit over gifts? What would help?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Why does it matter that love lasts forever and the gifts don't?
6. How has God used this book to show you something about your gift, or about the fruit He wants to grow in you?

# A Closing Word

> *being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete **it** until **the** day of Jesus Christ*
>
> Philippians 1:6 (SLB)

When I started this book, I thought it would be mostly about the gifts. That's where the arguments are, and that's what most people ask about. But somewhere around the chapter on patience, I realized the fruit was preaching to me more than the gifts were. I can talk about Greek words all day. Being patient with the slow driver in front of me on the way home is another matter.

Here's what I hope you take with you.

God has given you something. If you belong to Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in you, and He has given you at least one gift to use for the people around you. You don't have to be loud, polished, or impressive. You have to be willing. Find a need, start serving, and let the people who know you tell you what they see. Then stir that gift up and keep using it until the day you see Him.

God is growing something in you. The fruit doesn't come all at once, and it doesn't come by trying harder. It comes by staying close to Jesus, day after day, like a branch in a vine. Some seasons will feel like pruning. Trust the Vinedresser. He knows what He's doing, and He finishes what He starts.

And whatever you believe about the gifts that good Christians disagree on, love the believer across the aisle. Paul put 1 Corinthians 13 between chapters 12 and 14 for a reason. The gifts will someday be done away. Love never fails.

Thank you for reading. Now go use what you've been given, and keep growing.

> *Lord Jesus, thank You for the Holy Spirit, who gives and who grows. Show me the gifts You've given me, and give me the courage to use them for others and not for myself. Grow Your fruit in me: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When You prune me, help me trust You. Keep me close to You, and let everything I do be done in love, for Your glory. Amen.*

# Appendix A: Greek Word Table

Every Greek word that gets a gray box in this book is listed here in the order it first appears. "Uses" is the number of times the word appears in the Received Text of the New Testament (see "About the Greek" in Before You Begin). The chapter number tells you where to read more.

| Greek word | Strong's | Uses | Plain meaning | Ch. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) | G4151 | 385 | wind, breath, spirit; used for the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, and evil spirits | 1 |
| παράκλητος (*parakletos*) | G3875 | 5 | one called alongside to help: a helper, comforter, advocate, counselor | 1 |
| χάρισμα (*charisma*) | G5486 | 17 | a gift freely given out of grace; a grace-gift | 2 |
| χάρις (*charis*) | G5485 | 155 | grace, undeserved favor, kindness freely given | 2 |
| πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*) | G4152 | 26 | spiritual; belonging to or coming from the Spirit | 2 |
| δωρεά (*dorea*) | G1431 | 11 | a free gift, given with no strings attached | 2 |
| δόμα (*doma*) | G1390 | 4 | a gift, a present | 2 |
| διακονία (*diakonia*) | G1248 | 34 | service, ministry; the work of a servant | 2 |
| ἐνέργημα (*energema*) | G1755 | 2 | a working, an effect produced by power at work | 2 |
| φανέρωσις (*phanerosis*) | G5321 | 2 | a making visible, a showing, a manifestation | 2 |
| οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) | G3623 | 10 | a household manager, a steward who handles what belongs to someone else | 2 |
| σῶμα (*soma*) | G4983 | 146 | a body; the physical body, and the church as the body of Christ | 4 |
| μέλος (*melos*) | G3196 | 34 | a limb or part of the body | 4 |
| σημεῖον (*semeion*) | G4592 | 77 | a sign; a mark or miracle that points to something beyond itself | 5 |
| τέλειος (*teleios*) | G5046 | 19 | complete, mature, finished, having reached its goal | 5 |
| προφητεία (*propheteia*) | G4394 | 19 | prophecy; speaking a message from God | 6 |
| προφητεύω (*propheteuo*) | G4395 | 28 | to prophesy; to speak a message from God | 6 |
| προφήτης (*prophetes*) | G4396 | 149 | a prophet; one who speaks for God | 6 |
| ἀναλογία (*analogia*) | G356 | 1 | proportion; being in agreement or in line with something | 6 |
| διδάσκω (*didasko*) | G1321 | 97 | to teach; to give instruction | 7 |
| διδάσκαλος (*didaskalos*) | G1320 | 58 | a teacher | 7 |
| διδασκαλία (*didaskalia*) | G1319 | 21 | teaching; both the act of teaching and what is taught (doctrine) | 7 |
| παρακαλέω (*parakaleo*) | G3870 | 108 | to call alongside; to urge, encourage, comfort, plead | 8 |
| παράκλησις (*paraklesis*) | G3874 | 29 | encouragement, exhortation, comfort; a calling alongside | 8 |
| σοφία (*sophia*) | G4678 | 51 | wisdom; skill in living, insight into how to act rightly | 9 |
| λόγος (*logos*) | G3056 | 330 | a word, a message, a saying | 9 |

| Greek word | Strong's | Uses | Plain meaning | Ch. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| γνῶσις (*gnosis*) | G1108 | 29 | knowledge; knowing, understanding | 10 |
| διάκρισις (*diakrisis*) | G1253 | 3 | a distinguishing, a separating out, discernment; judging between things | 11 |
| διακρίνω (*diakrino*) | G1252 | 19 | to separate, to judge carefully, to discern; sometimes to doubt or waver | 11 |
| εὐαγγελιστής (*euangelistes*) | G2099 | 3 | an evangelist; one who announces the good news | 12 |
| εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizo*) | G2097 | 55 | to announce good news, to preach the gospel | 12 |
| εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) | G2098 | 76 | good news, the gospel | 12 |
| ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*) | G652 | 81 | one who is sent; a messenger with a commission; an apostle | 13 |
| ἀποστέλλω (*apostello*) | G649 | 133 | to send out on a mission | 13 |
| ποιμήν (*poimen*) | G4166 | 18 | a shepherd; one who tends a flock | 14 |
| ποιμαίνω (*poimaino*) | G4165 | 11 | to shepherd; to tend, feed, lead, and protect a flock | 14 |
| πρεσβύτερος (*presbyteros*) | G4245 | 67 | an elder; an older man, and a church leader | 14 |
| ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*) | G1985 | 5 | an overseer; one who watches over (older Bibles: bishop) | 14 |
| διακονέω (*diakoneo*) | G1247 | 37 | to serve; to wait on, to minister to someone's needs | 15 |
| διάκονος (*diakonos*) | G1249 | 30 | a servant; a waiter; a minister; a deacon | 15 |
| ἀντίληψις (*antilepsis*) | G484 | 1 | help, assistance; taking hold of someone to support them | 16 |
| ἀντιλαμβάνομαι (*antilambanomai*) | G482 | 3 | to take hold of in turn; to help, to support | 16 |
| προΐστημι (*proistemi*) | G4291 | 8 | to stand before; to lead, to preside over, to manage, to care for | 17 |
| σπουδή (*spoude*) | G4710 | 12 | diligence, eagerness, earnestness; doing something with real effort | 17 |
| κυβέρνησις (*kybernesis*) | G2941 | 1 | steering, piloting; guiding a group toward its goal | 18 |
| κυβερνήτης (*kybernetes*) | G2942 | 2 | a ship's pilot, a helmsman, the man who steers | 18 |
| μεταδίδωμι (*metadidomi*) | G3330 | 5 | to share, to give a portion of what you have to another | 19 |
| ἁπλότης (*haplotes*) | G572 | 8 | simplicity, single-mindedness; sincere generosity with no hidden motive | 19 |
| ἐλεέω (*eleeo*) | G1653 | 31 | to show mercy; to have compassion and act on it | 20 |
| ἔλεος (*eleos*) | G1656 | 28 | mercy; kindness and pity toward someone in trouble | 20 |
| ἱλαρότης (*hilarotes*) | G2432 | 1 | cheerfulness, gladness, willingness | 20 |
| σπλαγχνίζομαι (*splanchnizomai*) | G4697 | 12 | to be moved with compassion; to feel it deep in your gut | 20 |
| πίστις (*pistis*) | G4102 | 243 | faith, trust, belief; also faithfulness, reliability | 21 |
| πιστεύω (*pisteuo*) | G4100 | 248 | to believe, to trust, to rely on | 21 |

| Greek word | Strong's | Uses | Plain meaning | Ch. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*) | G5381 | 2 | hospitality; word for word, love of strangers | 22 |
| φιλόξενος (*philoxenos*) | G5382 | 3 | hospitable; a lover of strangers | 22 |
| ἄγαμος (*agamos*) | G22 | 4 | unmarried; not married | 22 |
| ἴαμα (*iama*) | G2386 | 3 | a healing; a cure; the result of being healed | 23 |
| ἰάομαι (*iaomai*) | G2390 | 28 | to heal, to cure, to make whole | 23 |
| θεραπεύω (*therapeuo*) | G2323 | 44 | to heal, to treat; first meaning, to serve or take care of | 23 |
| δύναμις (*dynamis*) | G1411 | 120 | power, might, ability; a mighty work, a miracle | 24 |
| τέρας (*teras*) | G5059 | 16 | a wonder; something that makes people stop and stare in amazement | 24 |
| γλῶσσα (*glossa*) | G1100 | 50 | the tongue (the body part); a language | 25 |
| γένος (*genos*) | G1085 | 21 | a kind, a family, a race; a type of something | 25 |
| διάλεκτος (*dialektos*) | G1258 | 6 | a language, a dialect; the particular language of a people | 25 |
| ἑρμηνεία (*hermeneia*) | G2058 | 2 | interpretation, translation; putting into words that can be understood | 26 |
| διερμηνεύω (*diermeneuo*) | G1329 | 6 | to interpret, to translate, to explain fully | 26 |
| διερμηνευτής (*diermeneutes*) | G1328 | 1 | an interpreter | 26 |
| τάξις (*taxis*) | G5010 | 10 | order; an arrangement, a fixed place in line | 27 |
| εὐσχημόνως (*euschemonos*) | G2156 | 3 | properly, decently; in a fitting and becoming way | 27 |
| ἀκαταστασία (*akatastasia*) | G181 | 5 | disorder, confusion, instability; things stirred up and out of place | 27 |
| καρπός (*karpos*) | G2590 | 66 | fruit; a crop, a harvest; the result of something | 28 |
| σάρξ (*sarx*) | G4561 | 151 | flesh; the body; human nature apart from God | 28 |
| ἔργον (*ergon*) | G2041 | 176 | a work, a deed, something done | 28 |
| περιπατέω (*peripateo*) | G4043 | 96 | to walk around; to live, to conduct your life | 28 |
| στοιχέω (*stoicheo*) | G4748 | 5 | to walk in line; to keep in step, like soldiers in a rank | 28 |
| ἀγάπη (*agape*) | G26 | 116 | love; goodwill that seeks another's good | 29 |
| ἀγαπάω (*agapao*) | G25 | 142 | to love; to value, to be devoted to, to seek another's good | 29 |
| φιλέω (*phileo*) | G5368 | 25 | to love as a friend; to be fond of; to kiss | 29 |
| χαρά (*chara*) | G5479 | 58 | joy, gladness, delight | 30 |
| χαίρω (*chairo*) | G5463 | 74 | to rejoice, to be glad; also used as a greeting, "Greetings!" | 30 |
| εἰρήνη (*eirene*) | G1515 | 92 | peace; harmony, wholeness, well-being; the end of hostility | 31 |
| φρουρέω (*phroureo*) | G5432 | 4 | to guard, as a garrison of soldiers guards a city | 31 |
| μακροθυμία (*makrothymia*) | G3115 | 14 | patience, longsuffering; word for word, long-tempered | 32 |
| μακροθυμέω (*makrothymeo*) | G3114 | 10 | to be patient, to bear long, to hold back anger for a long time | 32 |

| Greek word | Strong's | Uses | Plain meaning | Ch. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ὑπομονή (*hypomone*) | G5281 | 32 | endurance, steadfastness; word for word, remaining under a load | 32 |
| χρηστότης (*chrestotes*) | G5544 | 10 | kindness; goodness of heart that shows itself in useful, gracious action | 33 |
| χρηστός (*chrestos*) | G5543 | 7 | kind, good, easy; useful and pleasant to deal with | 33 |
| ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosyne*) | G19 | 4 | goodness; moral excellence that shows itself in doing good | 34 |
| ἀγαθός (*agathos*) | G18 | 103 | good; good in character and good in what it does | 34 |
| καλός (*kalos*) | G2570 | 102 | good, fine, beautiful; good in a way others can see and admire | 34 |
| πιστός (*pistos*) | G4103 | 67 | faithful, trustworthy, reliable; also believing | 35 |
| πραότης (*praiotes*) | G4236 | 10 | gentleness, meekness; strength under control; a mild and humble spirit | 36 |
| πρᾷος (*praios*) | G4235 | 4 | gentle, meek, mild | 36 |
| ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) | G1466 | 4 | self-control; mastery over one's desires and passions | 37 |
| ἐγκρατεύομαι (*enkrateuomai*) | G1467 | 2 | to exercise self-control, to hold oneself in | 37 |
| ἐγκρατής (*enkrates*) | G1468 | 1 | self-controlled; master of oneself | 37 |
| σώφρων (*sophron*) | G4998 | 4 | sensible, sober-minded, of sound mind; self-controlled in thinking | 37 |
| μένω (*meno*) | G3306 | 120 | to remain, to stay, to abide, to dwell, to keep living in a place | 38 |
| κλῆμα (*klema*) | G2814 | 4 | a branch, especially the tender shoot of a vine | 38 |
| καθαίρω (*kathairo*) | G2508 | 2 | to cleanse, to make clean; of a vine, to prune | 38 |
| σωφρονέω (*sophroneo*) | G4993 | 6 | to think soberly, to be of sound mind, to see yourself rightly | 39 |
| ἀναζωπυρέω (*anazopyreo*) | G329 | 1 | to rekindle; to stir a fire back to full flame | 39 |
| οἰκοδομή (*oikodome*) | G3619 | 18 | building up; the act of building a house; edification | 41 |

# Appendix B: The Gift Lists Side by Side

The New Testament names spiritual gifts in five main places: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:10-11. This table lists each gift, where it is named, and the chapter in this book that covers it.

| Gift | Where it is named | Chapter |
|---|---|---|
| Prophecy | Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-29; Ephesians 4:11 | 6 |
| Teaching | Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11 | 7 |
| Exhortation | Romans 12:8 | 8 |
| Word of wisdom | 1 Corinthians 12:8 | 9 |
| Word of knowledge | 1 Corinthians 12:8 | 10 |
| Distinguishing of spirits | 1 Corinthians 12:10 | 11 |
| Evangelists | Ephesians 4:11 | 12 |
| Apostles | 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11 | 13 |
| Shepherds | Ephesians 4:11 | 14 |
| Serving (ministry) | Romans 12:7; 1 Peter 4:11 | 15 |
| Helps | 1 Corinthians 12:28 | 16 |
| Leading | Romans 12:8 | 17 |
| Administrations | 1 Corinthians 12:28 | 18 |
| Giving | Romans 12:8 | 19 |
| Showing mercy | Romans 12:8 | 20 |
| Faith | 1 Corinthians 12:9 | 21 |
| Hospitality | 1 Peter 4:9-10 | 22 |
| Singleness | 1 Corinthians 7:7 | 22 |
| Gifts of healings | 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30 | 23 |
| Workings of miracles | 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-29 | 24 |
| Kinds of tongues | 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28, 30 | 25 |
| Interpretation of tongues | 1 Corinthians 12:10, 30 | 26 |
| Speaking (as oracles of God) | 1 Peter 4:11 | 6 to 8 |

And the fruit of the Spirit, in one list:

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such* ***things*** *there is no law.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

# Appendix C: Gift Discovery Worksheet

This worksheet has no score and no "top three." It's a set of questions to pray through, write about, and talk over with people who know you. Chapter 39 explains why. Take your time. You might fill out part of it now and the rest after a few months of serving.

## Part 1: Looking Back

| Question | Your notes |
|---|---|
| When have you served others and sensed God's strength, not just your own? | |
| What have other believers thanked you for, more than once? | |
| What needs in the church do you notice that others seem to miss? | |
| When people come to you for help, what kind of help do they usually ask for? | |
| What kind of service leaves you tired but glad, rather than just drained? | |
| Where have you seen fruit from something you did: a life changed, a need met, a person built up? | |

## Part 2: Looking at the Lists

Read the gift lists in Appendix B. Then answer these.

| Question | Your notes |
|---|---|
| Which gifts did you see yourself in as you read this book? Why? | |
| Which gifts do you wish you had? Is that wish about building others up, or about you? | |
| Which gifts do you think you probably don't have? Is that because of what you've seen, or because you've never tried? | |

## Part 3: Asking Others

Ask two or three mature believers who have seen you serve. Your pastor, a small group leader, your spouse, or a close friend are good choices.

| Question to ask them | What they said |
|---|---|
| What have you seen God do through me? | |
| Where do you think I'm most useful to the church? | |
| Is there anything you think I should try that I haven't? | |
| Is there anything in my character that might be getting in the way of my gifts? | |

## Part 4: Taking a Step

| Question | Your notes |
|---|---|
| What is one place in my church where I could start serving in the next month? | |
| Who could I ask to mentor me or let me help them? | |
| Which part of the fruit of the Spirit do I most need to grow in while I serve? | |
| When will I come back to this worksheet to see what I've learned? | |

*Lord, You gave me what I have. Show me how to use it for others. Make me willing to serve where I'm needed, not only where I'm comfortable. And grow Your fruit in me while I do. Amen.*

# Appendix D: Words to Know

| Word | What it means in this book |
|---|---|
| Apostolic age | The time of the apostles, from Pentecost (about A.D. 30) to the death of the last apostle, John, near the end of the first century. |
| Cessationist | A Christian who believes some gifts, especially tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, ended with the apostolic age. See Chapter 5. |
| Charisma (plural charismata) | The Greek word for a spiritual gift, built on charis, grace. See Chapter 2. |
| Complementarian | The view that men and women are equal in worth and that the office of elder or pastor is given to qualified men. See Chapters 14 and 27. |
| Continuationist | A Christian who believes all the gifts of the New Testament continue today. See Chapter 5. |
| Edification | Building up; making someone stronger in faith. From the Greek oikodome. See Chapter 41. |
| Egalitarian | The view that men and women are equal in worth and that every office in the church is open to both. See Chapters 14 and 27. |
| Elder | A church leader who shepherds and oversees a local church. The New Testament also calls them overseers and shepherds. See Chapter 14. |
| Exhortation | Coming alongside someone to urge, encourage, or comfort. See Chapter 8. |
| Fruit of the Spirit | The nine qualities the Holy Spirit grows in every believer (Galatians 5:22-23). See Part Five. |
| Lexicon | A dictionary of an ancient language, such as Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon. |
| Open but cautious | A Christian who does not forbid any gift but tests claims carefully and is slow to label anyone as having a sign gift. See Chapter 5. |
| Received Text (Textus Receptus) | The printed Greek New Testament behind the King James Version and the Steadfast Literal Bible. This book counts words from the 1894 Scrivener edition. |
| Septuagint | The Greek translation of the Old Testament made before Jesus' time and often quoted by the apostles. |
| Sign gifts | Tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, and miracles, the gifts that served as signs in Acts. Prophecy is often included. See Part Four. |
| Strong's number | The number James Strong gave each Greek and Hebrew word in his 1890 concordance, used today in most Bible software. |
| Transliteration | Writing a Greek or Hebrew word in English letters, such as charisma for the Greek word. |

# Appendix E: Sources and Credits

**Scripture.** All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. Words in bold italics inside a quotation were supplied by the translator to make the English read clearly.

**Greek text and word counts.** Word counts were made from the Translators Amalgamated Greek New Testament (TAGNT), published by STEPBible.org and Tyndale House, Cambridge, under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license (CC BY 4.0), counting only the words of the Received Text (Scrivener, 1894). STEPBible's data is free at github.com/STEPBible/STEPBible-Data.

**Strong's numbers and definitions.** James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890), from the public domain digital edition published by Open Scriptures (github.com/openscriptures/strongs).

**Meanings.** Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1889), public domain.

**Early church writers.** These are the writings quoted or described in this book, with the chapter where each appears.

- *The Didache* (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), chapter 11, on testing traveling prophets (Chapters 5 and 6). Public domain translation at Project Gutenberg (ebook 42053).
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 82 (Chapter 5), and *First Apology*, chapter 67, on Sunday worship (Chapter 27). In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1.
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 2, chapter 32, and book 5, chapter 6 (Chapter 5). In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1.
- *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, chapter 9 (Chapter 35). In *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, at Project Gutenberg (ebook 77576).
- Tertullian, *Apology*, chapter 39 (Chapters 28 and 29). In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3.
- Eusebius, *Church History*, book 7, chapter 22, preserving a letter of Dionysius of Alexandria (Chapter 29). In *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, volume 1.
- John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, homily 29 (Chapter 5). In *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, volume 12.
- Augustine, *The City of God*, book 22, chapter 8, translated by Marcus Dods (Chapter 5). Project Gutenberg (ebook 45305).
- Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 20, chapter 7, on Felix and Drusilla (Chapter 37). Translated by William Whiston; Project Gutenberg (ebook 2848).

# About This Book

*Given and Grown* is a book about the two things the Holy Spirit does in every believer. He gives gifts, and He grows fruit.

It walks through every spiritual gift named in the New Testament, from prophecy and teaching to helps, mercy, tongues, and healing, and through all nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. For each one, it opens the Greek word behind it, with its Strong's number and how many times it appears. It shows how the New Testament uses the word, looks at how the gift or fruit showed up in the lives of the first believers, and brings it home to an ordinary church today.

Where faithful Christians disagree, especially about whether tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles continue today, the book lays out each view fairly and points to the tests that every view agrees on. It closes with help for finding and using your own gift, a look at things often called gifts, and a reminder that gifts are for now but love lasts forever.

Every chapter ends with study questions for personal reading or small groups. The back of the book has a Greek word table, the gift lists side by side, a discovery worksheet, a glossary, and a Scripture index.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

# Scripture Index

This index lists every Bible passage that is named with its book somewhere in the text, with the pages where it appears. When a chapter refers back to a verse by chapter and verse alone, such as (14:27), that page isn't listed separately.


**Genesis** 1:2 (7); 1:31 (153); 6:3 (145); 11:1-9 (115); 11:7-9 (112); 18:1-8 (97, 100); 19:1 (97); 39:7-12 (168); 39:9 (167); 39:12 (167); 41:33-36 (82)

**Exodus** 4:10 (176); 7:11 (109); 17:8-13 (76); 17:11-12 (75); 18:13-27 (83); 18:17-18 (82); 31:1-5 (182); 31:2-5 (7, 15); 31:2-4 (180); 31:3 (44); 34:6 (144); 35:34 (180)

**Numbers** 11:29 (7); 12:3 (161); 24:17 (184)

**Deuteronomy** 6:7 (39); 13:1-3 (110); 18:20 (33); 18:22 (35)

**Judges** 14:6 (7, 183); 16:20 (183, 186)

**1 Samuel** 10:10 (184); 16:13 (7); 16:14 (7); 16:23 (179)

**2 Samuel** 9:1 (149)

**1 Chronicles** 25:1 (179)

**Ezra** 7:10 (39)

**Nehemiah** 1:4 (79); 2:11-18 (80); 8:8 (39); 8:10 (137)

**Job** 2:13 (91)

**Psalms** 1:3 (172); 23:1 (66); 34:8 (153); 37:11 (161); 51:11 (7); 68:18 (11); 107:1 (153)

**Proverbs** 3:7 (46); 9:10 (44); 15:1 (162, 163); 16:32 (144); 20:6 (158); 25:28 (164); 27:2 (177)

**Isaiah** 9:6 (141); 28:11 (113); 42:3 (161); 43:2 (124); 52:7 (57); 53:5 (103)

**Jeremiah** 1:6 (176)

**Lamentations** 3:19-26 (159); 3:22-23 (156); 3:23 (157)

**Ezekiel** 34:2-4 (66, 69)

**Daniel** 1:8 (167); 5:25-28 (117); 6:4 (158)

**Joel** 2:28 (34); 2:28-29 (7)

**Amos** 9:11-12 (45)

**Habakkuk** 3:17-18 (137, 139)

**Matthew** 4:19 (56); 4:21 (161); 5:5 (161); 5:7 (90); 5:9 (140, 142); 5:16 (153); 5:44 (131, 134); 6:1 (73, 86, 155); 6:3-4 (85); 7:11 (152); 7:15 (35); 7:15-23 (186); 7:16 (16, 28, 126); 7:16-20 (126); 7:17 (128); 7:20 (16); 7:22-23 (16, 18, 109, 184); 7:28-29 (37); 8:16-17 (103); 9:13 (90); 9:36 (89); 10:8 (105); 11:28-30 (151, 163); 11:29 (160, 161); 11:30 (148); 12:20 (161); 16:21-23 (55); 16:23 (54); 17:20 (93, 95); 18:23-35 (147); 18:26 (146); 18:27 (89); 19:12 (98); 19:21 (182); 20:34 (89); 21:5 (161); 21:19 (126); 22:21 (45); 22:37-39 (132); 23:23 (156); 23:25 (165); 24:1 (183); 24:24 (105, 109, 110); 25:14-30 (13); 25:21 (138, 157, 159); 25:25 (178); 25:35-36 (90); 25:40 (71); 27:29 (136); 28:19 (6); 28:20 (37, 39)

**Mark** 1:19 (21); 1:31 (72); 1:41 (89); 3:14-15 (62); 4:19 (172, 173); 4:28 (171); 4:38 (142); 5:15 (175); 8:2 (89, 108); 9:22 (89); 10:16 (153); 10:17-18 (155); 10:18 (152); 10:42-44 (78); 10:42-45 (80); 10:43 (79); 10:43-44 (71); 10:45 (12, 70); 10:46-52 (91); 10:47 (88); 11:22 (93); 16:9-20 (105); 16:17-18 (105); 16:18 (105)

**Luke** 1:8 (120); 1:28 (136); 1:54 (74); 2:10 (137); 2:36 (34); 2:37 (99, 180); 3:11 (84); 6:32 (134); 6:35 (148, 149, 150, 151); 6:45 (153); 7:13 (89); 8:3 (72); 8:15 (172); 9:1 (180); 9:1-2 (103); 10:17 (180); 10:20 (181, 182); 10:30-37 (91); 10:33 (89); 10:33-35 (89); 10:33-34 (150); 10:36-37 (88, 89); 10:38 (97); 10:38-42 (73); 10:40 (70); 10:40-41 (73); 14:12-14 (99); 14:28 (83, 94); 15:7 (58, 137); 15:20 (89); 16:10 (157, 159); 16:31 (108, 110); 19:8 (182); 21:1-4 (87); 21:3-4 (86); 21:9 (121); 21:15 (45); 22:24-27 (73); 22:26-27 (71); 24:27 (39, 116, 117)

**John** 1:14 (127); 1:38 (117); 1:42 (117); 2:5 (70); 2:9 (70); 2:11 (108); 2:15 (153); 2:25 (49); 3:2 (37); 3:8 (5); 3:16 (131, 135); 3:19 (131, 135); 4:16-26 (51); 4:17-18 (49); 6:26 (110); 6:66 (110); 9:7 (117); 10:11 (66); 10:12-13 (68); 11:3 (132); 11:25 (108); 11:35 (91, 138); 12:37 (108, 110); 13:15 (71); 13:34-35 (132, 135); 14:16 (7); 14:16-17 (5, 8); 14:26 (5, 6); 14:27 (140); 15:1-8 (173); 15:2 (173); 15:2-3

(170); 15:4-5 (170); 15:4-11 (169); 15:5 (169); 15:11 (136, 139); 15:16 (128); 16:7 (6, 8); 16:14 (8, 27); 16:22 (137); 16:27 (132); 16:33 (141); 17:13 (136); 18:22-23 (163); 18:23 (162); 19:30 (157); 20:21 (61, 64); 20:30-31 (110); 20:31 (103, 108); 21:15-17 (67)

**Acts** 1:8 (107, 112); 1:21-22 (62, 64); 2:1-11 (115); 2:6 (112); 2:7-8 (112); 2:8 (117); 2:16 (7); 2:17 (25); 2:22 (107, 108); 2:38 (11); 2:39 (25); 2:42 (38, 123); 2:43 (63, 108); 2:46 (97); 3:6 (104); 3:12 (110); 3:16 (94); 4:31 (114); 4:32 (133); 4:34 (85); 4:35 (182); 4:36 (146); 4:36-37 (41, 86); 4:37 (42); 5:1-2 (49); 5:1-4 (87); 5:1-11 (86); 5:3 (53); 5:3-4 (6); 5:12 (63); 5:15-16 (104); 5:41 (138); 5:42 (38); 6:1 (90); 6:1-4 (71); 6:1-7 (73); 6:1-10 (178); 6:3 (16, 45, 82, 176); 6:4 (71); 6:5 (57, 93); 6:7 (72); 6:8-10 (176); 6:10 (45); 8:4 (57, 59); 8:5 (176); 8:5-6 (57); 8:14 (59); 8:18-20 (8); 8:20 (11, 28); 8:23 (49, 53); 8:30 (59); 8:30-35 (59); 8:35 (59); 9:1 (162); 9:26-27 (42); 9:31 (142); 9:34 (104, 106); 9:36 (75, 116, 154); 9:36-42 (76); 9:36-39 (90); 9:39 (180); 10:36 (141); 10:38 (103, 153); 11:22-26 (155); 11:23-24 (42, 154); 11:24 (93, 152); 11:28 (33); 11:29 (86, 90); 12:1-7 (143); 12:6 (142); 13:1 (34); 13:1-3 (62, 64); 13:2 (5, 176, 181); 13:9-10 (54); 13:13 (42); 14:4 (62); 14:9-10 (94); 14:14 (62); 14:22 (42); 14:23 (64, 67); 15:19-20 (45); 15:22 (78); 15:32 (33, 42); 15:36-39 (42); 15:37-39 (146); 15:39 (142); 16:6-7 (6); 16:14-15 (100); 16:15 (97, 182); 16:16-18 (53, 55); 16:18 (180); 16:22-25 (139); 17:11 (3, 123); 18:11 (38); 18:24-26 (38, 39); 18:26 (67); 18:27-28 (38); 19:9-10 (38); 19:11-12 (25, 104); 19:13-16 (182); 19:15 (181); 20:17 (69); 20:20 (38); 20:28 (66, 69); 20:29-30 (67); 20:31 (67); 20:35 (74, 76); 21:8 (57); 21:8-9 (58); 21:9 (34, 67, 99, 122); 21:11 (33); 24:24-25 (168); 24:25 (165); 27:11 (81); 27:20-25 (95); 27:21-36 (45); 27:25 (93); 27:37 (150); 28:2 (150); 28:7 (97); 28:8-9 (104)

**Romans** 1:11 (10, 84); 2:4 (145, 147, 149); 3:3 (156); 3:12 (149); 4:18-21 (95); 4:20-21 (93); 5:1 (140, 143); 5:5 (132); 5:8 (132, 134); 5:10 (140); 5:15 (10); 6:22 (126); 6:23 (9); 7:18 (153); 7:18-25 (155); 8:6 (142, 143); 8:9 (7); 8:26 (6, 180); 10:14-15 (56); 10:15 (57); 10:17 (95); 11:22 (149, 151); 11:29 (10); 11:33 (50); 12:3 (92, 175, 178); 12:6 (9, 10, 33, 192); 12:6-8 (17, 192); 12:7 (36, 70, 71, 192); 12:8 (32, 40, 77, 84, 192); 12:11 (77); 12:13 (96, 97); 12:15 (91, 138); 12:18 (141, 143); 12:21 (154, 155); 13:10 (132); 13:13 (121); 13:14 (166, 167); 14:1 (52, 94); 14:17 (137); 14:19 (141); 15:4 (41); 15:14 (48, 152); 15:20 (63, 181); 15:26 (90); 15:28 (126); 16:1 (72); 16:1-2 (67); 16:1-16 (76); 16:4 (75); 16:5 (97); 16:6 (75); 16:7 (62); 16:23 (97)

**1 Corinthians** 1:5 (48); 1:7 (10, 25, 126, 184); 1:9 (156, 157); 1:22-24 (46); 1:24 (44); 2:6-7 (45); 2:11 (5); 3:1 (186); 3:6 (158); 3:9 (183); 4:2 (157); 4:7 (10, 178); 4:17 (158); 4:21 (162); 6:11 (166); 6:12 (166); 6:19 (167); 7:5 (165); 7:7 (10, 96, 98, 100, 192); 7:9 (166); 7:32-35 (98); 8:1 (39, 49, 50, 133); 8:1-3 (51); 9:1 (62, 64); 9:22 (58); 9:24-27 (165, 168); 10:13 (157); 11:5 (34, 67); 11:21 (134); 12:1 (10); 12:3 (8, 27, 53); 12:4 (10); 12:4-6 (6, 15); 12:5 (11, 71); 12:6 (12); 12:7 (12, 14, 15, 175); 12:8 (48, 192); 12:8-10 (17, 192); 12:9 (10, 92, 93, 102, 192); 12:10 (52, 107, 111, 116, 180, 192); 12:11 (6, 126); 12:12-13 (19); 12:13 (115); 12:15-16 (20); 12:18 (178); 12:21-22 (20); 12:24-26 (20); 12:27 (19); 12:28 (10, 36, 61, 74, 81, 102, 111, 192); 12:28-30 (17, 192); 12:28-29 (192); 12:29-30 (16, 28); 12:30 (10, 102, 192); 12:31 (10, 131); 13:1 (1); 13:1-3 (21, 126, 133, 182); 13:2 (35, 93, 94, 185); 13:3 (181); 13:4 (148); 13:4-7 (22, 23, 133, 134, 135); 13:8 (16, 22, 114); 13:8-9 (49); 13:8-12 (28); 13:8-13 (135, 186); 13:8-10 (185); 13:9-10 (26); 13:10 (25); 13:13 (22, 131); 14:1 (176); 14:3 (31, 32, 33, 35); 14:5 (118); 14:13 (116, 118); 14:16 (119); 14:18-19 (111, 115); 14:21-22 (114); 14:23-25 (122, 124); 14:25 (32); 14:26 (28, 124, 179, 183); 14:26-40 (120, 121); 14:27-28 (118); 14:29 (32, 52); 14:32 (35); 14:32-33 (124); 14:33 (121); 14:34-35 (122); 14:39 (25, 26); 14:40 (81, 82, 83, 120); 15:1-4 (56); 15:3-4 (59); 15:8 (63); 16:2 (82, 86); 16:14 (134); 16:15 (72); 16:19 (78, 97)

**2 Corinthians** 1:3-4 (41, 43); 1:4 (43); 1:11 (10); 3:18 (172); 6:5 (121); 6:6 (146, 150); 6:10 (137, 138, 139); 8:1-5 (85, 87); 8:2 (85); 8:5 (87); 8:9 (182); 8:18-21 (83); 8:19 (82); 8:20-21 (82); 8:23 (62); 9:6-7 (85); 9:7 (84, 86, 87, 89); 9:15 (11); 10:1 (161); 11:13 (63); 11:13-14 (53); 11:28 (63); 11:32 (141); 12:7-9 (103); 12:7-10 (106); 12:12 (25, 108); 12:15 (146); 12:20 (121)

**Galatians** 1:1 (62); 1:6-8 (58); 1:8 (57); 2:2 (64); 2:9 (176); 3:5 (109); 4:13 (103); 5:14 (131); 5:16 (129, 130, 166, 167, 171); 5:19-21 (127, 130); 5:22 (126, 156); 5:22-23 (16, 126, 130, 192, 195); 5:23 (121, 160); 6:1 (161, 162, 163); 6:2 (74, 76); 6:10 (152, 154, 155)

**Ephesians** 2:7 (149); 2:8 (92); 2:10 (152, 154, 155); 2:14 (141); 2:19-20 (61, 62); 2:20 (25, 26, 32, 63, 64); 3:5 (32); 3:7 (71); 4:3 (141); 4:7-8 (11, 14); 4:11 (17, 36, 57, 61, 65, 192); 4:11-12 (21, 23, 59); 4:11-16 (186); 4:12 (58, 183); 4:13-16 (186); 4:15 (134); 4:15-16 (21, 183); 4:16 (183); 4:28 (84); 4:30 (6, 171, 184); 4:32 (148, 149, 151); 5:9 (128, 152); 5:18 (114, 171); 5:18-19 (179); 6:5 (85); 6:11 (181)

**Philippians** 1:1 (16, 72); 1:6 (172, 173, 187); 1:11 (128); 1:20-23 (136); 1:22 (126); 1:29 (181, 182); 2:12-13 (171, 173); 2:25 (62); 2:27 (25, 90); 3:8 (48); 3:8-10 (50); 4:3 (67); 4:4 (137, 138); 4:6 (143); 4:6-7 (141, 143); 4:7 (141, 143); 4:16 (86)

**Colossians** 1:7 (156, 157); 1:10 (128); 1:11 (145); 1:20 (140); 2:3 (45, 48, 50); 2:5 (121); 3:12 (150); 3:14 (131); 3:15 (141); 3:16 (38, 172); 3:22 (85); 3:23 (73, 179, 180); 4:7 (75, 157); 4:9 (157); 4:12 (180); 4:14 (105); 4:15 (78)

**1 Thessalonians** 1:6 (137); 2:6 (62); 2:6-7 (63, 64); 2:7 (162); 2:8 (84); 4:12 (121); 5:12 (77); 5:12-13 (78); 5:14 (41, 43, 145, 147); 5:19 (171); 5:19-21 (24, 26); 5:20 (25, 35); 5:20-21 (33, 35); 5:21 (28); 5:24 (157)

**2 Thessalonians** 1:11 (152); 2:9 (109, 110)

**1 Timothy** 1:12 (158); 1:13 (90); 1:15-16 (147); 1:16 (145); 2:1 (180); 2:12 (68, 123); 3:1-7 (18); 3:1-13 (16); 3:2 (68, 96); 3:4-5 (77, 80); 3:5 (77, 78, 79); 3:8-13 (72); 3:10 (176); 3:12 (77); 3:13 (72); 4:3 (99); 4:14 (10, 176); 4:16 (39); 5:17 (77); 5:23 (25, 104); 6:2 (74); 6:17 (137); 6:20 (48)

**2 Timothy** 1:6 (10, 176, 178); 1:7 (166); 1:16-18 (72); 2:2 (36, 37, 39, 158); 2:13 (157, 158, 159); 2:24-25 (161, 163); 2:25 (162); 3:3 (165); 3:10 (146); 4:2 (145); 4:3 (37, 39); 4:5 (57, 58); 4:10 (131); 4:11 (42, 75, 142, 146); 4:20 (25, 94, 103)

**Titus** 1:5 (67, 82); 1:5-9 (16); 1:8 (96, 165); 2:3-4 (38, 67); 2:10 (156); 2:11-12 (166, 168); 3:3-7 (151); 3:4-5 (149); 3:4-7 (151); 3:5 (155); 3:8 (77); 3:14 (77)

**Hebrews** 2:3-4 (25, 108); 3:1 (61); 3:2 (157); 3:13 (40, 41, 43); 5:6 (120); 5:14 (52, 53, 55); 6:10 (73); 6:12 (145); 7:2 (117); 10:23 (157); 10:25 (41); 11:6 (92); 12:2 (137, 138); 12:11 (128, 171, 173); 12:14 (141); 13:2 (96, 97, 100); 13:3 (90); 13:4 (99); 13:7 (78); 13:17 (68, 69); 13:20 (66)

**James** 1:2 (137); 1:5 (44, 46, 47); 1:17 (15); 1:19 (147); 1:21 (161, 163); 1:27 (90); 2:13 (90); 3:1 (37, 39); 3:2 (166); 3:6 (111); 3:13-18 (46); 3:14-16 (46); 3:16 (121, 124); 3:17 (44, 45, 46); 4:7 (181); 5:7 (145); 5:14-15 (28, 29, 102, 103); 5:14-16 (106); 5:16 (105)

**1 Peter** 2:3 (149); 2:23 (162, 163); 2:24 (103, 106); 2:25 (66); 3:4 (161); 3:15 (57, 161, 162); 3:20 (145); 4:8 (184); 4:9 (96, 97); 4:9-10 (96, 192); 4:10 (1, 7, 10, 13, 14, 175, 178, 184, 186); 4:10-11 (17, 175, 192); 4:11 (18, 71, 73, 178, 192); 5:1-2 (66); 5:2-4 (65, 67, 69); 5:3 (68); 5:4 (66, 69)

**2 Peter** 1:5-7 (166); 1:20-21 (32); 2:15 (184); 3:9 (144, 145, 147); 3:18 (48)

**1 John** 1:9 (167); 2:1 (7); 3:16 (132); 3:18 (132, 134); 4:1 (28, 52); 4:1-3 (53, 55); 4:8 (132); 4:10 (132, 134, 135); 4:19 (132)

**Revelation** 2:2 (63, 64); 2:2-4 (186); 2:10 (157, 158, 181); 2:13 (158); 7:9 (111, 112); 13:13 (109); 18:17 (81); 19:11 (156); 21:4 (105); 21:14 (62)