

SPECIAL MESSAGES

USE WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED

1 Peter 4:10-11

It certainly is a blessing for me to be able to say that I've been here at Riverside for 30 years. You know, anniversaries are mutually celebrated and I want to thank you. How many individuals have been here all 30 years that I have been here, or longer? You are amazing people. You deserve an award – some kind of recognition. It is wonderful to serve together with you.

This Sunday is the second of our Serve Sundays. As you've heard, we have a volunteer fair that's taking place after the service. We are hoping that everyone goes there, has a great time, finds a place to serve, and gets connected. I want to share this passage. We looked at it Friday night when Adam shared it at our volunteer fair. We had about 150 volunteers for a big dinner Friday night and we just celebrated. We gave Tony Bell the Riverside Achievement Award for 36 years of service here at Riverside. Amazing! We had a great time of celebration.

Let's look at this passage again this morning and see what God has for us. 1 Peter 4:10-11:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In addition to today being a Serve Sunday, today is graduation Sunday. And graduates, I want to say to you: We don't expect you to have everything figured out. I want to release you from feeling any pressure, like you have to have all the answers, that you know exactly where you are going in life, and know everything that you are going to do. I certainly didn't when I was finishing high school. I believe that today's message does provide for you a point of focus, even if you don't have everything figured out. There are two simple points right from this text that I think will give you direction. So let's just jump right in. Let me share these two points with you:

- I. You are gifted.**
- II. Use your gift.**

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Hence, the title of the message: “Use What You Have Received.” It’s right there in the text: “As each has received a gift, use it...” We could go to four or five different places in scripture that provide for us this emphasis. This is a call from the Lord, that every person who follows Jesus Christ has a gift, perhaps and most likely multiple gifts. God calls us to use those gifts to serve here in the church so that the church will be built, and also so that the community will be reached and touched with the love of God and the truth of God.

It seems to me that we miss this truth, or at least the impact of it. We started talking about this last week. We shared that in order to really grab ahold of this with all of its impact, we have to unlearn some things. One of the reasons we don’t really grasp the significance of this truth is that we see ministry as something that professionals do. You know, “There’s Adam, and Adam, and Brian; there are the pastors, and maybe the elders – those people do the real ministry.”

So we started last week by saying that no, that’s actually not the case. In fact, we looked at Ephesians 4:11-12 where scripture tells us that God “...gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...” There’s a group of leaders. We won’t try to explain what all of those mean and how they apply in this moment, but just grab ahold of that aspect. These leaders are a gift to the church. Here’s what they do: they equip. “...to equip the saints...” Saints is just another word for “Christian,” scripturally. “...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” How do you like that? According to this verse, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are a minister. There you go. You are a pastor. You say, “Uhhh, not so quick!”

Wonder Woman, the movie, has been released. I have not seen it. The heroine, the star of the movie, is Gal Gadot. She is an Israeli. She was Miss Israel and she represented Israel in the Miss Universe pageant. She fought in the army for Israel for two years and actually trained people in combat. She is about six feet tall, and rather attractive. Not that attractive, but as Miss Universe contestants go, she is rather attractive. And she plays this character who evidently can do some damage.

She had an interview last week. She came in to be interviewed and they went to sit down when she said, “Can I just stand?” They were like, “Okay, yeah,” and they all stood up. They asked why and she said, “Well, my back hurts.” *Wonder Woman* – right. Just think -- even this pretty amazing person, exceptionally gifted – she is fragile. She’s just human. It illustrates for us, and it’s so fitting with the superhero theme of the movie, a scriptural truth: **God never intended for one person to do**

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everything. He never intended for one or two or three or four people to be superheroes in the body of Christ.

In fact, he warns us against that kind of behavior. He specifically warns us against making a big deal out of one or two or three people and thinking that only this gift matters, or only this person matters. He also specifically, again, warns us: Don't despise your gift. Don't despise your place. Every person is important in the family of God. He uses this analogy repetitively, that we are like a human body. The Church of Jesus Christ is compared to a human body, and every part is important.

When we miss that, what happens is that we may have the main organs of the body functioning, but the extremities are not valued. We have limited mobility, limited movement, limited activity, and limited fruitfulness. The body isn't functioning the way the body is supposed to function when people don't grab ahold of this truth that it's not about professionals. It's really about everyone ministering.

Let me just say before I move past that first idea – please don't misunderstand me. It's not that your pastors here don't want to minister to you personally. That is not the idea. We have a model for pastoral ministry where the shepherds are actually to be available for the people and to care for the people and to equip the people. This is not a veiled justification for pastors being removed. I don't want to be misunderstood. It's a joy for us to be in your lives and to be a part. But, I just want to dismantle this whole idea that only a few people matter.

Here's another reason why we don't fully grasp the significance of this teaching, of these truths. We have a very restricted, narrow understanding of the gifts that God has given us. A few months back, we looked at Acts Chapter 6 and the launching of deacons in the Church. There was a problem in the Church. Some individuals were put forward, the leaders confirmed those individuals, and they went out and solved the problem. What you see in Acts 6 is that the leaders did not really tell them how to do it. They didn't just delegate to them: "Here, go stand here, and give this, and hand out this." They just gave it away. Those individuals were entrusted with creating a vision and a solution for a very difficult problem in the Church.

I think sometimes our understanding of how ministry works is: "Okay, when it comes to church things, there are a few people and they tell everyone what to do." Obviously, there are leaders. And yes, there are times when we do some very simple things. We stand at a door, we greet people, and we hand out brochures. We do things that are not really all that complicated to do. I just would

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suggest to you that doing those things well makes a huge statement, but that we not limit our understanding of how God wants to use all of us in those kinds of ways.

Here's what I mean. Just looking at this group, there are some pretty smart people here, right? Some of you are very skilled in a variety of ways. You shouldn't have to check your mind at the door when you come to serve. You shouldn't have to abdicate those skills. You should use them to the glory of God. Sometimes we are too narrow in the opportunities that we give, and too restrictive.

There's another way that I think we miss the magnitude of this truth, and that is that we misunderstand what it means to be spiritual. We are almost "too spiritual." When it comes to serving God we think, "Well, prayer, worship, certain spiritual gifts are of significance." "But maybe the things that I can do," you might say, "Well, those aren't really spiritual." That's not a biblical understanding at all.

In fact, there's an interesting passage in the Old Testament, in Exodus Chapter 35, where they were building the tabernacle, and I just want to share it with you. Exodus 35, beginning in verse 30: "Then Moses said to the people of Israel, 'See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel...and he has filled him with the Spirit of God...'" Look at that: "...he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab..."

If you read this whole section of Exodus, you find out there were these two men. They worked with stone and wood and fabric and all kinds of things. They were constructing the articles of the tabernacle, and they were teaching others to do it. Scripture says they were inspired by God and full of the Holy Spirit. There was this remarkable thing happening, where there was this magnificent structure being built, and you know what Moses did in the middle of it? People were all using their gifts and cooperating. The Old Testament Church was thriving, and Moses went and said something you've never heard me say. He told them, "Guys, you have given so much, we need you to stop giving." He literally tells the people that! "Stop bringing donations. Stop bringing articles. We can't use all that we have. We are filled up."

That is a picture of how the Lord has put into this church family, into this body, everything we need to function with health. And he wants every member to work properly, to borrow from Ephesians 4:16, again a text we looked at briefly last week. Let me put it before you quickly. Ephesians 4:16: "...

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when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” **You are gifted. Use your gift.**

Now, I am anticipating, for example, our high school graduates thinking, “Alright, I have a gift. I’m not sure I know what my gifts are. I am not to sit on those gifts; I am to use them. I don’t really know how to use them.” I want to try to give some biblical answers to those questions. **How do I discover my gifts? And how do I use them?**

I will say this, just so I don’t forget, that we have one tool that is available to help you. We gave it out. I preached on this subject a few weeks back. It’s a spiritual gifts assessment. It will help you just go through some personal evaluation. I recommend that if you haven’t done it, grab one of those before you leave today and look at it. But I want to give some more direct biblical explanation, instruction on this important topic.

Before I do, let’s just make a few observations about the 1 Peter 4 text. In 1 Peter 4:10-11, notice that there are two categories of gifts. Verse 10: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace...” In the text, I have underlined: “whoever speaks,” so just take note of those two words. “...whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.”

I think these are the two categories. There are speaking gifts, then there are doing gifts, serving gifts. I hesitate to give that to you, because in one sense, it could be harmful if it’s misapplied, misunderstood. It could narrow our understanding of the gifts, and I don’t think that’s biblically what we want to do. You could come away from that and say, “Okay, speaking, doing – there are really just two gifts.” No, the bible lists almost 30 gifts and I think that’s not comprehensive. There are actually many more. But it’s helpful to understand these two general categories. I’ll explain as we move through. Let me give one or two more observations about this passage.

Two purposes are given. We are told in this passage that whoever receives a gift is to use it:

- **Purpose #1: To serve one another, and**
- **Purpose #2, toward the end of the text: In order that in everything God may be glorified.**

Now we are beginning to unpack this a little bit and we could say this: **You have a gift. You may have many gifts. Generally, those gifts fall into two categories: Speaking and Serving. And the purposes that God has given you those gifts to accomplish are to serve and bless people and to**

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glorify him. So, high school graduates, the message to you could be as simple as -- you may not see it completely, but you have been given gifts from God. Use what God has given you, speaking and doing, to glorify him and to bless other people, to serve others.

Just one more observation on the text, and that is that there is one source. **There is one power source that is identified here. We are told that we are to glorify God, and that God might be glorified in everything through Jesus Christ.** We are told that the one who speaks is to speak the very oracles of God. The one who serves is to serve in the strength that God supplies. **The source is obviously Christ. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we are gifted by the Lord, and we live out and exercise those gifts in the strength that God gives us.**

The implication is that if we have a speaking gift, that's not just to be used on the platform, or in a larger setting of teaching, but just in encouraging others. There is a certain accountability. God will give us the words to share and he wants us to share that which is really from him and his truth. We are not encouraged to just kind of make this up as we go along. Aren't you glad? Then secondly, as we serve we are going to be tempted to run out of resource and energy and strength and to give up. We say, "No, no, no. God is the one who supplies."

Now, I want to address this question: Alright, how do I do this? How do I live this out? How do I know what my gifts are? I can go and take this spiritual gift assessment, and I encourage you to do that, but how does the bible teach us to live in a way so that we are experiencing relationally who God is, and there is a fulfillment of living out the gifts that he has given us so that others are blessed and God is glorified?

I think the key idea for us here is to understand that this is the work of the Holy Spirit in you. The Spirit of God desires to use you to bless other people. And I would go so far as to say that when we are experiencing that joy – that everything that God has done for me and put in me is flowing through me to other people, where it's not about me, it's not about me using my gift or me finding a place, but really, somehow God has given me grace to say, "No, this is about other people, blessing and serving them, and glorifying God," I begin to know Christ in a way that I have not previously known him. I begin to grow spiritually.

Friends, I want to help you. I want to get really practical and help you. If you would say, "You know what? I'm an American, or at least I live here, and I'm very influenced by the culture," one of the challenges that we face is that we have been hard-wired to think as consumers, so that everything

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we do we evaluate in terms of: “What is the benefit to me? What is the value to me? And what do I want to do?” There is this huge temptation for you after the service to go over and say, “Hmm...let me check out the volunteer fair. I wonder if there’s anything really for me.” Right? “What will fulfill me?” This is kind of a contradiction to the whole idea of serving, isn’t it?

I am saying the whole message is: No, no, no -- God has gifted you, so there is going to be a sense of “This is for me; this is what I’m gifted to do.” But I’m praying that God will awaken in all of us the whole idea of “What I really long for relationally, what I really long for spiritually is less of me and more of him.” Right? There is some unlearning that takes place, but it’s magnificent in the sense that I’m really discovering who I was made to be. The Spirit of God is in me, working.

Ironically, the most important thing you can do to discover your gift is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because he’s the one who gives you the gift. He’s the one who flows through you. Let’s look at Ephesians Chapter 5, verse 18, where we read: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery...” Let’s not ignore the scripture, okay? If you enjoy a glass of wine or some similar beverage, as your pastor I can say to you that scripture gives you permission to do that if your conscience does not stop you or you’re not offending another brother or sister. I know I’ve just offended some of you in saying that, but I can’t apologize. Scripture clearly teaches this. It’s an important decision. There are principles given to us in scripture, but this is taught in God’s word. It’s an individual choice that you have to do to the glory of God, according to the faith that’s in your own heart.

Having said that, don’t get drunk. Right? Scripture is really clear. It’s not like this is gray. So allow me just to be your mom or dad for a moment. If you’re getting drunk, stop it. Just stop it. If you need help, get help. It’s the bible. Let the bible speak to you. You will have a better life in Jesus not getting drunk. That’s my word to you from that, okay? I just couldn’t leave that.

High school seniors: “Do not get drunk with wine” (or anything else) “for that is debauchery.” Okay, so “...be filled with the Spirit.” Here’s the interesting thing about being filled with the Spirit, and here’s where Paul, I think, is taking us with this comparison. He is saying to us: “You know what? Alcohol kind of makes you different. It takes over. You lose control. You lose self-control.

There is a way where being filled with the Spirit is like that, and then completely different. You get full of the Spirit. You get a boldness. You get a freedom. You are a different person. But in this case you are filled with self-control, because that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

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Now I'm going to test you. What were the two categories of gifts? Speaking and serving/doing. Notice how those two categories show themselves in what follows. "...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." All of that you could categorize as what? Speaking, right? You are thanking God; you are praising him. "...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." I think that's a serving phrase, a doing phrase. And what follows in the rest of Ephesians is Paul unpacking what that looks like in marriage, in parenting, being a child in a family, and business. How do we submit to one another? How do we serve? How do we do in life in those various relationships?

So, what we see here is that as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are speaking and serving. What's the question I want to ask when I read this? "Okay, Paul. How do I do that?" You are telling me to be filled and then do those things. The way you're phrasing it, Paul, it sounds like these are the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit. But I think the results answer the how question. When the Holy Spirit is in you, just let the Holy Spirit do what the Holy Spirit wants to do. Here's what that will look like, and that's how you get filled up. You let the Holy Spirit be the Holy Spirit in you. Do you hear that? The results are the how. That leads to my final 12 points of this message. Okay, it's only three, but three doesn't sound like a lot now, does it?

When scripture gives us instruction about the Holy Spirit, we get instruction like this: Be filled. But we frequently get negative instruction. Basically, what the scripture is saying to us is: Just don't hinder the Holy Spirit. Cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Walk in faith with what the Spirit of God is doing in your life.

The Puritan John Owen pulls out of scripture three don'ts.

Don't #1: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Here's this idea of grieving. God is not like you and me. It's not like in human relationships where someone tells us no, and then we are grieved. We go away sad and sullen, and we are grieved in that sense. God is whole and self-sufficient. Though there is a sadness to his grieving, it's a little different. It's kind of like the sadness you might experience when you go to help someone and they won't let you help them. You leave saddened because you know you could have

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helped them, but they are not going to have that benefit. That's what Paul is describing here. He is saying don't grieve the Spirit. **Don't resist the help that he's giving you.**

When you know the context of Ephesians 4, you immediately grab ahold of the meaning of grieve. Here's one of the ways that you hinder the work of the Holy Spirit, you grieve him. Ephesians 4 is all about holiness. It's all about obeying God. It's super practical. One of the areas that I apply all the time – he says don't get angry and sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, giving the devil an opportunity. In my marriage, I constantly apply this scripture. I know it's hard to believe, but there are times I get angry. And I'm sorry, Babe, there are times I want the sun to go down on my anger. In other words, what I want to do is go to bed and be angry. And you know what? "Dadgummit, I want to get up tomorrow and be angry! And you know what? I'm going to be angry forever! I'm purposing right now...I don't care if you come and own it, like you really should own it, because you never do, I always do, I'm always the one who starts it, but I'm vowing right now, if you really, for the first time ever, own this, I'm not going to forgive you." I'm telling myself right now: "Don't soften. I know you'll soften, Brian. Don't do it. You hold onto this."

Can you relate? You're like, "No, man. You are one troubled soul." It feels good, right? It feels good to say, "No. I'm going to make this person pay." Obviously, I'm exaggerating. I'm embellishing, but in another way I'm not. I'm saying there's a fight to forgive people who offend us. And it gets multiplied. It gets layered. Because if I really believe I'm right, then you act like you're doing me a favor, I'm going to boil over. Don't you know what a gift I am?

Jesus taught us a lot about how relationships work. He told us, as a universal principle: "In those moments, Brian, you have a log in your eye. You are so blind to your own sin, you can't see the speck in your mate's eye, or your friend's eye, or your friend, or whoever it is."

This teaching will revolutionize marriages and parent/child relationships, especially as your children become adults. But you only get the help if you don't grieve the Holy Spirit. If you choose to say, "No. It just feels too good. I'm not letting this go," the Holy Spirit will back away and say, "I had so much for you. If you could see the relationships I have, if you could see the fruit that I want to bring in your life... Don't resist this. Don't hinder what I'm trying to do." So, #1: Don't grieve the Holy Spirit.

Don't #2: Don't quench the Holy Spirit.

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1 Thessalonians 5:19. There are many times a supernatural work that God wants to do – a spiritual work, spiritual gifts. They can be very natural. They can be skills that God has given us, but they can also be healing and all kinds of dramatic things that God wants to do through the work of his Spirit. Quenching is really just the idea that there is a fire -- the Holy Spirit is often likened to fire -- and we just put it out. We just don't obey those impulses that God gives us, and we quench the Spirit of God. So in 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul said to his son Timothy in the Lord: "Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." In other words, he says, "Use what I've given you." Obey the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. Okay? Now we go to the third don't.

Don't #3: Don't resist the Holy Spirit.

This is where we will end. Stephen was preaching. He was speaking to a very religious group and he gave this statement: "You stiff-necked people. You always resist the Holy Spirit." I don't recommend this approach if you are a preacher or a teacher. You can only get away with this so much. And in Stephen's case, the chapter ends with him getting executed, stoned, but I think that was already coming. He actually called them out and there is a very specific application. I am borrowing from John Owen. He says, "The Holy Spirit comes to you with the word of God and you either receive it or you resist it."

There is a message that goes out right now: There is life in Jesus' name. Trust in Jesus Christ. Confess your sin. Receive the gift of eternal life. Follow him as the Lord of your life. And know that you are gifted and use that gift. That word comes to you, at various levels and various places. James Chapter 1 tells us: "...in meekness receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

So that's my prayer for us, that we would not hinder the work of the Spirit of God, that we would not resist his word, but that we would with meekness, with humility, receive his word. I'm going to ask you to bow your head if you would.