

## “Gifted”

Romans 12:3-8/Genesis 12:1-3/Luke 9:10-17  
FPC/Stewardship Sunday/November 20, 2011  
By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

### I. Text

Read Romans 12:3-8.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### II. Introduction

“Gifted to share.” That’s what he thought: “Gifted to share.”

This week I remembered a story I heard years ago from Willow Creek mega-church, senior pastor, Bill Hybels. Bill shared that when he was a young man he had a lot of unfocused drive to serve Christ. He wanted to do something, but he didn’t know what to do. So the pastor of the church he was attending suggested that he take a “spiritual gift survey.” Such surveys were popular then. The pastor told Bill that the survey would identify his area of spiritual giftedness, the gift God had given him, and he could then serve God using that gift.

It all seemed to make sense, so Bill filled out the survey. It was more than 200 multiple choice questions. It took more than an hour. Bill took the survey seriously. The preface to the survey said that 123 different spiritual gifts had been identified in the Bible. This “spiritual gift survey” would identify which gift God had given Bill.

A week later Bill got the survey back. He was excited, and a little nervous. “Gifted to share,” he thought as he sat down with the results of the survey. “Gifted to share.” Now he would know his gift, and ponder how to share it.

His eyes scanned the survey looking for his spiritual gift. He was quietly hoping for something like leadership, or teaching, or missionary, or evangelist. But what he saw surprised him. There is bold type on the front page is said: “Martyrdom; giving you life for you faith.” “A martyr?”.....he hadn’t seen that coming. And as he thought more about that he thought, “That stinks. I can only share that gift once.” He then asked about retaking the spiritual gift survey.

Bill Hybels then went on to laugh and share that spiritual gifts are not best discovered in a paper survey. Rather it is the messy process of paying attention to interests, what you like, what grabs your attention, what you seem to do well.....and then checking it out by doing it. Try it out. See what you learn. And if it isn’t right, there’s no shame in quitting, and trying something else.

I think of a couple things when I remember that story. First, I’d really question any paper survey that said I was gifted to be a “martyr.” Second, I think Bill Hybels is right; gifts are best discovered in doing. And third, we are gifted by God to share.

Salvation includes spiritual gifts to share in a community. The grace that saves is the grace that gifts.

### III. Brief Exegesis

Gifted to share. It's a major theme for Christian stewardship, and a major theme in salvation, and a major theme in Christian ways of life. And it's good to know it's also a major theme in the Bible. Gifted to share.

We see it in Genesis 12. After the creation, things do not go well. There is the issue of desiring to be like God and the fruit, and Cain kills Able, and Noah's flood, and the confusion at the tower of Babel. Things have gotten into a mess. Creation is falling into chaos. It's then that God calls Abraham and Sarah. They will be involved with the hopes and plans of God for the world. Only two people in all the vastness and mess of creation....but that's God's plan. Maybe their gifts were faith. And to this older couple God promises land (which they don't have), descendants (who they don't have), and a special blessing from God through whom all people will be blessed. Blessed to be a blessing....gifted to share...it's the salvation plan of God for the world from the beginning. And it does come to pass.

And we see it in our reading from Luke 9. It's the familiar story of the feeding of the 5000, the only miracle story in all four Gospels. As John tells the story, a little boy shares his lunch; 5 loaves and 2 fish. As told in Luke it appears that the lunch was what the disciples could "rustle up" amongst themselves. Or maybe it was donated by one of the people there. I really don't think that matters. The point is; what was enough for one is freely given for all. As I thought about it I wondered what it was like to sit there with your lunch in your hands, hear Jesus, and then have to choose. It reminds me of those times I'm visiting a church when it comes time for the offering, and I look in billfold to discover I have a \$20 bill, and a \$1 bill. That's it; a \$20 or a \$1? What to choose? I've not always been as generous as I would like to be. I hope to grow in that. But the generous choice is made here. The lunch is given. Gifted to share. And in the hands of Jesus it is enough.....and there's leftovers. Gifted to share. There's the miracle of food, and the miracle of community as they shared that food.

And it's what this text from Romans 12 is all about. Paul begins by saying that Christians are not "pressed" and shaped by the pressures, and commercials, and ways of life all around them. Rather, they are transformed, completely changed from the inside out (Romans 12:1-2). They live new lives in the same old world.

One of the first changes is Christian life together.....Christian communities.... churches. The grace that saves is also the grace that gifts each of us. We're not gifted to take, or gifted to consume, or gifted to "get my needs met." That's the way of

the old world that will not be part of the new creation. Sadly, that does sometimes find its way into a church. Ministry, faith and life together then become distorted. But Christians are really gifted to share. And when we share these gifts given to us we form Christian community.

All people are gifted. The gifts given by God differ from each other. Often they fit our personalities and interests. Sometimes we have to do the messy work of trying this and that to discover them. I'm sure there are more than 123. And rarely do we find them by taking a test. Paul here only lists a few; prophecy, teaching, encouragement, financial generosity. The point is that all are gifted by the same God and the same grace that saves. And the point is that these gifts are to be shared in community. In fact, I'll say it again; as they are shared they build Christian community. In the economy of God, gifted to share builds Christian community. The blessing to be a blessing.....a small lunch of fish and bread....a spiritual gift of leadership, or encouragement, or financial generosity.....gifted to share is part of the salvation hopes and plans of God.

#### IV. Reflections

It's Stewardship Sunday today. It's the Sunday we do some direct preaching, thinking and praying about money.....the money that is a part of our lives.....money that God has gifted us with to share. And the Christian Gospel has a way of turning things upside down, and inside out. Instead of asking, "Where's mine?" the Gospel reshapes us so we say "Here's mine." And when we understand that our money is about gifted to share....and we believe it.....and we do it.....we build Christian community. How are you gifted to share?

And what about time and talents? What about the gifts that God has given you? We don't have a 200 question "spiritual gift survey" that will identify your gift out of 123 gifts listed in the Bible.....which might say "martyr." But we do have invitations, opportunities, and a graciousness for all of us to try different missions and ministries. And if they don't work out, we are all free to try something else. It's the joyful mess of being a community that follows Jesus Christ. We are all gifted to share.

Years ago when my daughter Katanya was in Junior High School she told me one day with a bit of frustration, "Dad, all my friends have pools." The rest of the unspoken sentence was, "and we don't have a pool." It was the pressure of fitting in. And in one of those moments when somehow a parent manages to say something wiser than he or she is, I smiled and said, "Katanya, isn't that great; **"all"** of your friends have pools." It wasn't the answer she had possibly hoped to hear, but she knew the truth of it; we weren't getting a pool, and she could swim at her friends' pools.

But now looking back there was also a greater truth that came to be. We didn't have a pool, but we did have a trampoline. And so Katanya and her friends would swim

at someone's pool, and some days they would come to our backyard and jump on the trampoline. Some had pools. We had a trampoline. Families shared what they had. It was gifted to share. And in the sharing a community of friendship happened.

We cut our decorative grass down last Sunday. It was a nice day, and my wife Jeanne reminded me that it is a much more pleasant chore when done in warmer weather. I cut down the 2 foot high sheaves that hid the transformer in the front yard, and the 6 foot high sheaves that waved in front of our dining room windows. Now there are short, stiff mounds of grass stalks ready for winter snow.

But the other morning I looked out the dining room window as I ate my breakfast and I missed the golden-green color of the grass. I missed the gentle sways and swoops of the wind driven dance. I missed the texture of leaf, stalk and wispy head. Our yard seemed bare, and void of life, color and movement.

Jeanne then pointed out that a neighbor still had her decorative grass up. Across the yard I could see gold-green stalks wave in the wind. And I realized a neighbor was sharing a gift.....the gift of art and grass with neighbors. In a way, it was gifted to share. It was good....and I was glad. I watched the dance in the morning breeze. And I thought in the spring and summer when our grass grows again, we will share our gift with the neighbors, and in some quiet way help build community too. Gifted to share.

Thanksgiving is upon us this week. And in some homes between turkey, stuffing and football games, people will be counter-cultural and share for what they are thankful. Not what they want, or think they need, or maybe really need.....but for what they are thankful. It's a good exercise.....and good reflection.

But what might happen if a few people went another step and thought about "gifted to share?" What if we thought about the gifts that we have to share, and the gifts shared with us.....and give thanks? I thought I'd try it out this week. So;

I had note cards and little time, and sent notes to my parents and daughter;

I had time, and prayed to stay awake, and went with Jeanne to pick up her son

Tristan at mid-night at the bus station in Pittsburgh;

I made time, and had coffee and encouraged a friend.

And some folks were gifted and shared with me:

A friend mailed me a comic she thought I might enjoy;

Another friend bought my lunch;

My daughter had a few minutes on her way to get her oil changed so she just called to say "hi;"

Jeanne surprised me with a card on my pillow.

And this week:

I saw folks gifted with time, patience and care, share as mentors, cooks and helpers in our AfterSchool mission for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders;

I heard South Sudan missionary Nancy McGauhey, gifted with healthcare skills,  
tell about her clinic in South Sudan where she shares;  
And I heard those gifted with voice and instrument share in preparation and  
practice for the Messiah concert this afternoon.  
Small and bigger gifts....it's all gifted to share.

Gifted to share.....give thanks. Gifted to share.....it builds Christian community  
Gifted to share.....it's another name for Christian stewardship, and it's living the  
Gospel where Christ is present.