

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 28 May 2018)**Read - Ephesians 2:1-10**

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” v 10

In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul is talking about being made alive in Christ. He talks about how we are changed and made alive through God’s grace.

He then emphasises that this life comes not because of any good works we have done but purely because of the underserved grace of God in sending Jesus to die for our sins and then raising Him up again. This is the essence of the gospel.

But then Paul ends this section with verse 10 where he says we have been *“created in Christ Jesus to do good works”*. So although our salvation and life does not come through good works, good works are the necessary outcome of being made alive in Christ.

He also makes the point that there are specific good works *“which God prepared in advance for us to do”*. The question then naturally arises is how are we able to do these good works that God needs us to do.

The answer to that question is that the Holy Spirit empowers us to be able to do these tasks through the spiritual gifts that He gives each of us. These gifts of the Spirit are the theme for this week.

You will remember that Jesus told even His disciples to wait in until they were empowered by the Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8)

Prayer: Fill me with Your Spirit Lord.

DAY 2**Read - 1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

“Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.” v 1

Paul was eager that all Christians should not be “uninformed” about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We will see that he discusses them in many of his letters. Unfortunately we tend to be quite uninformed because we usually focus on them only once a year.

So what is a spiritual gift? Richard Wagner and the Network course define spiritual gifts as follows: *Special abilities given by the Holy Spirit and distributed to every believer according to God’s design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ.*

That is quite a mouthful so we will look at that definition clause by clause in order to be able to understand it well. In essence spiritual gifts are ‘special abilities’ that God gives to us through the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to perform the various tasks that need to be performed in His Kingdom.

So in our church we need leaders, preachers, teachers, administrators, carers, counsellors, musicians, welcomers etc. We need all these people to be properly empowered by God so that they can be most effective in what they do.

We find quite often that leaders in business are not necessarily good leaders in the church. This is right because some have a natural ability, but in the church we need those who are empowered by God to lead God’s way!

We don’t do God’s work in our own strength!

Prayer: Father, please show me Your way.

DAY 3**Read - 1 Peter 4:7-11**

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” v 10

Peter here complements what Paul said in 1 Cor 12 and in the process highlights two of the clauses in our definition.

Firstly spiritual gifts are given to ‘every believer’, ‘each of you’. It is not that some have gifts and serve and the rest get served. Each one of us has at least one spiritual gift. Paul said: *“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”* (1 Cor 12:7)

So while no-one has all the gifts, we each have some special ability through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

The second point that both Peter and Paul make is that the purpose of the gifts is for service (Peter) – the ‘common good’ (Paul). Spiritual gifts are given to each one of us so that all of the Body of Christ can benefit. They are not for our personal benefit (to make us better Christians or feel good about ourselves) but so that others around us can benefit from the service that flows from our gift.

In the act of using our gift, we may benefit, but we must always remember the purpose is to serve others. This means we should not be proud of our gift and neither should we hide it – since others benefit when we use it, others lose out when we don’t use it.

God has made each of us special for each other.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to use my gift in Your service.

DAY 4**Read - Romans 12:3-8**

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us." v 6

We see Paul talking about spiritual gifts to the Romans as well. Here he clarifies that we have all received different gifts and that we should use those gifts as they are intended.

One point worth highlighting here is that some of the things listed as gifts are things that we should all be doing – giving, encouraging, serving, showing mercy etc. The point is that some people have been given a special ability.

If your gift is teaching and you are a Sunday School teacher, that does not mean you should not be encouraging or serving your children! It does mean that you should focus on teaching as your main act of service but still being a caring, encouraging, serving Christian at the same time.

However, if someone really needs some counselling, it would be best for them to go to someone with that gift. But if you are the only one around at the time, counsel them and God will bless them and you in that moment.

Paul also highlights in our reading that spiritual gifts are gifts of grace. This means firstly, that we don't earn them (like long-service awards) but that God *"distributes them to each one, just as he determines"* (1 Cor 12:11).

Secondly it means that when we use our gifts, we are sharing God's grace with others. We become a means of grace to others.

Prayer: Father, please help me to be a gift of grace to others.

DAY 5**Read - 1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ... Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many." v 12, 14

We have now covered the various phrases in the definition of spiritual gifts and I hope we are all less uninformed.

Paul uses the analogy of a body to help us to picture this and it is helpful to see our church as a body. There are all sorts of different things that need to be done and they all require different pieces of the body. The body works best when the parts work together using their special abilities.

So if I need to move my body somewhere it works best if I use my feet. I could use my hands or even roll there, but using my feet works best. If I want to hear what God is saying to us as a body, I should use my ears (the gift of prophecy or wisdom). We, as a church, need to discover how God has distributed His gifts among us so that that we, as a body, can be most effective.

The other useful use of the analogy of a body is that if part of a body does not work, we call it disabled. Our church is also disabled because many of our members are not using their spiritual gifts.

Since the gifts are given for the 'common good' it is all of us who suffer as a result. We, as a church, are thus not able to perform at our best and so God is not able to do all He wants in and through us.

Meditate: What do you think your spiritual gift may be? Are you using it for the good of others? Why not?

DAY 6**Read - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." v 2-6

1 Corinthians 12 is the main teaching chapter on spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 13 is the chapter we often read at weddings, but it is clear from the beginning of the chapter that it is not really about romantic love, but about love in service.

Paul is highlighting that having a spiritual gift is the first part of being able to do the *"good works which God has prepared in advance"*, the second part is about how we use our gifts. If we don't do our service in love, it does not benefit anyone.

Doing service God's way requires love, patience, kindness etc. These are the fruit of the Holy Spirit and we will discuss them next week.

Spiritual gifts are the way God empowers us normal human beings to be able to do the work that needs to get done so that all in the body of Christ, and in the world around us, are blessed and know God's love and grace.

Just as God needed the first 12 disciples to change the world, so He needs us too to make a difference around us. He does not expect us to do it in our own strength, He gives us what we need to perform that task. We simply need to act.

How blessed we are that we can make a difference!

Prayer: Father use me!