

## Introduction

I read an article yesterday that caused me to stop in my tracks. Lifeway Research is an organization that does, well, *research*, focusing on the church and church ministry. The article made this profound statement:

Many churchgoers may have their bodies in a pew each week, but their hearts are on Amazon, according to a Lifeway Research study.

Aaron Earls, <https://research.lifeway.com/2025/01/14/5-hidden-dangers-of-consumerism-in-the-church/>

The research referenced shows that those who regularly attend religious services more than once a week are the most likely group to say *shopping makes them feel worthwhile*. To say that another way, shopping is what forms their *identity*. They're also the most likely to say they're *driven to accumulate nice things*. This is a very consumeristic mindset. Our American economy and culture are based on consumerism. We buy and buy and buy and never have enough. It's not hard to see the havoc this mindset could wreak in a church.

When our minds—our *hearts*—are set on consumption, commitment to a church is like commitment to a product. We'll stay loyal to a brand or product unless and until something “better” comes along, and “better” may not be objectively better. Too often commitment to a church becomes commitment to *attend*, and rarely does it really mean commitment to a specific people.

Christian hip-hop artist Tedashii has a song called “26's”, referring to 26-inch wheels. In certain parts of our culture flashy cars that have been modded and upgraded are a sign of status. In that song Tedashii has the lyric “Self-proclaimed kings bragging ‘cause they're on chrome, but 26 inches is a *pretty low throne*”.

When we replace real and costly commitment with a consumeristic mindset, a mindset that pursues what one wants rather than pursuing one's *true purpose*, we find ourselves sitting on some pretty low thrones. We elevate ourselves by putting our needs and desires ahead of our very purpose in this world and in order to elevate ourselves we actually must lower ourselves because that throne is not very big. These “thrones” are thoroughly unsatisfying, yet we gladly give up a life of meaning and significance for these cheap seats.

In our text today Peter has some instructions for us regarding spiritual gifts, only the instructions aren't really about spiritual gifts. This simple and straightforward and largely unremarkable command—to use our spiritual gifts—actually points us to a deeper purpose for life, both in the church and in our community. It is this purpose that reveals a life of meaning and significance. We're in 1 Peter 4, verses 10–11.

<sup>1</sup> Pet 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> 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.

1 Peter 4:10–11

## Life In Community

We must remember what Peter is doing in our text before we can truly embrace his instructions in it. I have preached these verses on three occasions. Jim preached them once, not including last week. And here we are looking at them in context. At a quick glance, they are about using spiritual gifts to serve one another. That is literally the primary instruction in these two verses: use the gift you have received to serve one another. The question I want to answer this morning is why. What is Peter really doing with this instruction?

We're at the end of a section in which Peter has been instructing these elect exiles who find themselves in a world that is hostile to faithfulness to Jesus. The world isn't hostile to Jesus per se. Unbelievers around them don't care all that much if they worship Jesus. They find it odd—strange, even—but they are not hostile to these believers for worshiping Jesus. In that culture people worshiped all sorts of strange deities. The people were hostile toward them because these believers would *only* worship Jesus. These believers refused to worship the gods the culture worshiped and so were seen as bad citizens, as haters of humanity, for by not worshiping the gods they were not doing their part to ensure peace and prosperity for all.

Peter is finishing up a section in his letter in which he instructs these Asian believers how they are to remain faithfully present in a world that is foreign to the gospel of Christ. In chapter 2 he tells them how they are God's holy nation wherever in the world they are found. They are God's people for his own possession and are therefore sojourners and exiles in the world. This means they are not truly at home in the world but remain here as outposts of the advancing kingdom of Christ. The time is coming when his kingdom will encompass the entire earth. Until that day comes, each local church is an outpost of that invading kingdom.

Remember the central point of his letter: keep your conduct among the nations honorable so that when they see your good deeds they will glorify God on the day of judgment. They must not withdraw from their communities by forming their own little enclaves where they do not interact with non-Christians. They don't withdraw from society. While they do not withdraw, they also cannot participate fully! He said in the beginning of chapter 4 the world is surprised that Christians don't join them in their "community building" activities—sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, and lawless idolatry.

He told them in chapter 3 they must not fear harm from others. Instead, they must always honor Christ as holy. That is, they must live in such a way that they reflect his holiness in their manner of life and good deeds. They must always be prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for their hope. He doesn't say to be ready with a reason for voting the way they do or for how they spend their money or for their position on public policy issues or social morals or for anything else. They must always be prepared to proclaim the good news of Jesus, for Jesus is their hope.

Further, they must be prepared to suffer, for Christ also suffered. He suffered for our sins and so we must be ready to suffer for the sins of others. We do not suffer for the sins

of others in the manner in which Jesus suffered, yet we suffer because others are sinful and rebel against God. The good news is we are saved through the resurrection of Jesus, for every baptism is a victory in a spiritual war we only catch glimpses of.

Then he says the end of all things is at hand. We hear the words “the end” and we think chronologically. The time is almost up. I don’t think that’s what Peter is saying. The word “end” has a wide semantic range. It can mean something like “time’s up”, but it can also mean the purpose or the meaning of a thing. A man gets up and goes to the gym every morning at 5:00 and works out. To what *end*? I’m not asking when he finishes his workout. To what end? To get in shape. To be fit. The purpose or the intended outcome—the end—is physical fitness and health.

Peter says the end of all things is at hand. That is, we are in the final stage of redemption. We are, right now, in the last days—we have been since Jesus ascended into heaven. That doesn’t mean time is almost up. It means this is the final stage of redemption and it will be completed when the Lord Jesus returns. The end of all things—the purpose of redemption—is experienced in this present life. As I’ve said a number of times, salvation is eternal life, and eternal life *begins now*. We are, right now, experiencing our salvation. The end or purpose of our salvation is here.

Jim shared with us the implications of this last week. Because this is the very reason for Jesus coming the first time, we must live lives of pivotal repentance, of continually pivoting or turning toward Christ. That’s why we must be self-controlled and sober-minded. That’s why we must keep loving one another earnestly. That’s why we must show hospitality without grumbling.

God has placed us here as an outpost of his kingdom. We must keep our conduct among the nations honorable so that they may see our good deeds. The outcome of this is that on the day of judgment God will be glorified. All this means is that faithful presence requires our earnest pursuit of holiness. We must live transformed lives in such a way that the world can see it. Peter expects there to be questions from unbelievers about our motivations, about the hope that is in us. Life in Christian community is a significant part of our Christian witness.

## **Each Has Received a Gift**

This is the context for our two verses this morning. In light of all this Peter says to serve one another. He says each one has received a gift, and this spiritual gift—or “gift of the Spirit”—must be used to serve one another. We serve the church with what we have received. What, exactly, are spiritual gifts? Paul gives extended teaching on spiritual gifts in his letter to the Corinthians.

<sup>1</sup> Cor 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles,

to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1 Corinthians 12:4–11

Paul says there are varieties of gifts. That is, there are many gifts the Spirit gives, but those gifts have the same Spirit. He says it is the same God who empowers them all—all the spiritual gifts—in everyone. To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given. The Spirit reveals himself in us through our spiritual gifts, and does so for a reason.

Simply put, each person who is in Christ has been given a spiritual gift *for the common good*. That is, a spiritual gift is not a personal blessing but a gift given to a person for the benefit of others. Paul is emphatic here: all have a spiritual gift and all the gifts are given by the Holy Spirit of God who empowers them.

Notice also, the Spirit *apportions* these gifts. Not only does the Spirit determine which gift or gifts an individual believer receives, the Spirit determines the degree to which a person is gifted. Two people may have the spiritual gift of encouragement but this does not mean they are gifted in encouraging to the same degree. Rather, the same Spirit empowers each one to exercise that spiritual gift and the Spirit determines the fruitfulness of that spiritual gift.

Each person has received a spiritual gift. This happens when a person believes the gospel and receives the Holy Spirit. The promise of the new covenant is that inward transformation that comes through the indwelling Spirit of God. This was the promise given through the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezek 36:27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Ezekiel 36:27

This happens at the new birth. As Paul makes clear in his letter to the Galatians, the sign of the new covenant is the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. The evidence you are in Christ is the Spirit of God working in you! A significant way, and an under-appreciated way, in which we see this is through the exercise of spiritual gifts. This doesn't mean you need to know what your gift is in order to be assured of salvation. It means others must be able to see evidence of the Spirit working in your life.

Paul also makes clear in his letter to the Ephesians what the real nature of the spiritual gift is.

Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

Ephesians 4:11–12

Apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching are all underlying spiritual gifts. Paul here indicates God has given *gifted people* to the church. In our Ephesians series in 2024 we looked at this text and saw that these are not offices in the church but spiritually

gifted people in the church. In this text Paul doesn't mean *the* apostles or *the* prophets or *the* pastors, any more than he means *the* evangelists. There is no such office in the church. Rather, these are believers, men and women, who are gifted in these particular ways and given to the church for building up the church. To say this another way, each person in the church *is the gift given to the church*.

Each person is gifted because each believer has received the Spirit. Therefore each believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit of God for the good of the church. The expectation of both apostles is that these spiritual gifts given to spiritually gifted people will be used to serve the church. Peter says directly, as each one has received a gift, use that gift to serve one another.

## Stewards

He adds a clarifying—and sobering—comment: “as good stewards of God’s varied grace”. “Varied grace” is simply another way to say the gifts are varied. There are a variety of gifts. There are many gifts listed in the Bible and this doesn’t mean they are the *only* spiritual gifts. We know of things like the gift of teaching, encouragement, administration, serving, speaking in and interpreting tongues, miracles, faith, giving, exhortation, shepherding, evangelism, discernment, etc., but consider a profound spiritual gift given in the Old Testament.

Ex 31:1 The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, <sup>3</sup> and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, <sup>4</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. <sup>6</sup> And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

Exodus 31:1–6

This ability and intelligence, this knowledge and all craftsmanship was given to create and build the furnishings for the tabernacle. That is, the Spirit of God supernaturally empowered Bezalel in a powerful way to produce what was needed for the tabernacle. To a similar degree, the Spirit also empowered Oholiab. Then, to a somewhat lesser degree, the Spirit of God also empowered “all able men” the ability to make the things necessary for the people to worship.

Spiritual gifts are not necessarily natural abilities, but abilities given by the Spirit *for building up God’s people*. This means in whatever way you are able to build up God’s people you are, in fact, using your spiritual gift. A natural ability becomes a spiritual gift when that ability is used to build up God’s people! Surely there were other skilled craftsmen among the people of Israel, those capable of designing and building things. Only those empowered to do them for the people of God were *spiritually gifted*.

A spiritual gift implies a responsibility. This is why Peter adds they are good *stewards* of God’s varied grace. A steward is not an owner. That is, God does not give a person a spiritual gift so that she may keep it all to herself. A spiritual gift is only a spiritual

gift when it is given away—or as Peter puts it, when it is used to serve one another. The seventh-century Spanish bishop Braulio put it well:

Our creator and dispenser so orders all things that love is increased when the divine gifts which one does not see in himself are bestowed to be possessed by another. Thus the manifold grace of God is well dispensed when the gift received is believed to belong also to the one who does not have it and when it is believed to have been given for the sake of him with whom it is shared.

Braulio of Saragossa, Letters 5

The idea of not seeing the gift in one's self is to the spiritually gifted person, the gift seems so very *ordinary*. Implicit in this statement is the idea that one who is gifted by the Spirit has the Spirit of God and the Spirit produces humility. I have said before that I have the spiritual gift of teaching. That is, I am a gifted teacher. This does not mean I am really good! I don't mean that I am gifted in the sense that a person is a gifted musician or a gifted athlete. If you received socks for Christmas, you are *gifted*. That's what I mean. A gifted teacher is simply one who has received a gift.

God gives spiritual gifts to a person in order for that gift to be given to another. A spiritual gift is only properly used when it is given away to others. The entire reason God gives one person the gift of giving is because he has not given another person sufficient resources *directly*. God *has* given sufficient resources, but he often gives them through a person with the gift of giving. God uses means! One person may lack understanding yet God has given sufficient wisdom for that person; it just so happens that the sufficient wisdom is given through the person with the spiritual gift of wisdom.

If you ever need to make a difficult decision, talk to Dan. Dan has the gift of wisdom. Here's how you know it's wisdom: when Dan says something it is immediately so obvious that you're left wondering why *you* didn't think of it! But you didn't think of it because God gave wisdom through the spiritually gifted person given to you.

God has so set up his church that a gifted person gives the gift he or she has received to others for their benefit. That is, they use their gifts to serve one another. The gift of teaching I have received is not *my* gift, but *your* gift! Pete's gift of shepherding is not *Pete's* gift, but *your* gift. Melanie's gift of discernment is not *Melanie's* gift, but *your gift*. Taylor and Jessica's gifts of service aren't theirs, but yours. Sam and Andrew's gifts of teaching aren't theirs, but yours. So-and-so's gift of giving isn't So-and-so's, but yours.

Each follower of Christ has the Spirit of God and so each follower of Christ has received a gift. Each follower of Christ, then, is a steward, a caretaker of something that does not belong to him or to her and therefore must be used for its intended purpose. Peter tells us that purpose: "use it to serve one another".

## Word and Deed

Peter says there are a variety of gifts. Rather than try to list them all, he gives two broad categories of spiritual gifts. He says in verse 11, "whoever speaks", that is, whoever has a spiritual gift centered on *speaking*, speaks "as one who speaks oracles of God". No wonder James says we shouldn't all try to be teachers! Those with spiritual gifts that are *speaking*

gifts, gifts like wisdom and exhortation and teaching and evangelism and encouragement and prophecy, speak as those who speak on God's behalf. Your words ought to be words from the Lord. That is, when you speak with your particular speaking gift, you ought to say what God himself would say if he were the one speaking directly.

Remember Peter's added caveat: as good stewards. The gift of prophecy is not about self-promotion. So many so-called "prophets" out there are speaking words that promote themselves. There are lots of self-proclaimed prophets today who somehow get rich and famous while "prophesying".

I met with a young man years ago who had sat under such "prophets". He was having marriage troubles and asked me for advice. I simply shared with him what Scripture has to say to husbands. He had never before heard that he was supposed to love his wife as Christ loves the church, which means he was to sacrifice for her! None of those "prophets" had ever called him out for being so selfish in his marriage, so unloving toward his wife.

At the end of our conversation he asked how much he owed me. Owed me? For what? He told me that in order for a prophetic word to come true he had to seal that prophecy with a gift to the prophet. In our circles we tend to conflate many speaking gifts with the gift of teaching. In his circles it seems every speaking gift was prophecy. Regardless, this idea of "sealing" a prophecy is what he had been taught by so-called prophets! Ever notice the prophets in the Old Testament? They were not exactly shining examples of hashtag-blessed-and-highly-favored. Then again, the prophets called out sin for the most part. They usually suffered for speaking oracles of God!

Spiritual gifts in general, and speaking gifts in particular, are not about self-promotion. Speaking gifts are the gifts that tend to be noticed the most. The great preacher is noticed far more than the faithful saint who quietly prays for everyone in the church. The effective evangelist gets far more recognition than the faithful saint who shows up to help in whatever way is needed—so long as it's behind the scenes. The reality is that for every Charles Spurgeon or D. L. Moody there are countless men and women who have the gift of faith and so pray for such men and they, just as much as a Spurgeon and a Moody, are the reason for such fruitfulness in those ministries.

Each spiritually gifted person is but a steward. That is, you are not representing yourself, but God. You are speaking on his behalf and whatever you say must be for his glory and not your own. I've been seeing more and more video clips of sermons that are obviously written by AI because the person reading the "sermon" reads the prompts AI often adds. I saw one recently in which a young man confidently reads his manuscript and declares, "If you'd like, I can give you five clear examples of this from Scripture". That's clearly an AI prompt!

That's not stewardship. A steward manages someone else's property. A steward does not have such control over that which is being stewarded that he or she can do whatever he or she wants. If you are managing someone's financial portfolio, you can't just decide to use some of those funds to buy yourself a car. And so the words you speak must be words God wants you to speak and those words are always for his glory.

This applies to all speaking gifts. Teaching tends to be very public. Exhortation can be. Wisdom can be. Most speaking gifts are not usually exercised publicly, however. Most teaching takes place over coffee or in a City Group. Those who have a speaking gift must seek to share that gift with others, for you speak as one who speaks oracles of God. Listen: you don't need a platform for that.

There is a second category of gifts. Just as those with a speaking gift speak on God's behalf, so those who serve do so in the strength God supplies. This broad category of gifts is one of very practical service. There is, of course, the gift of service, which is the ability to help in physical, practical ways. By the way, this is the most widely distributed spiritual gift. It seems we need servants far more than we need talking heads! We see this gift in helping someone move or in raking the leaves for someone in need or in cleaning up after a family meal. The gift of administration is not something you use on a Sunday morning during a worship service. It's a very practical sort of gift.

The gift of giving is the spiritual gift to meet financial needs others may experience. The gift of mercy is the divine empowerment by the Spirit of God to empathize with those who are hurting and take action to help with that pain—even if “help” simply means sitting next to that person quietly. The gift of hospitality is the extraordinary ability to make others feel welcome. We all must be hospitable, of course, just as we all must be generous. Some are gifted by the Spirit to do this in a more profound way.

Peter says those who have serving gifts, serve “by the strength God supplies”. That word “supplies” is interesting. It was used for those who pay the expenses on behalf of others. If you were a wealthy benefactor you might pay the expenses for your favorite drama group to come to town and put on a show. You *supplied* their needs. The idea here is those whose spiritual gifts are in physical acts of service have their “expenses” supplied by God himself!

When you care for someone hurting or you help a sister in need or you show up for work night here at the building, God is supplying the strength you need. This obviously refers to the physical strength necessary, but there's something deeper happening as well. In God's economy, the physical, tangible service you offer others is empowered by the same Spirit who enables a sermon to have a powerful impact in the life of the church. Just because no one else can see what you're doing doesn't mean you are not acting on God's behalf and in God's economy are having a profound impact in this world. Remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12!

It is the same Spirit who gives one wisdom and another faith and another healing and another administration and another service, etc. Do you see Peter's point? The Spirit has given to each a gift to be given to others and whether a gift is an upfront, more visible sort of gift or a behind-the-scenes less visible gift, God is empowering the gifted person to serve the church.

Those who have received spiritual gifts, that is, all believers must use those gifts for they are but stewards of those gifts, and they must use those gifts for the intended purpose: “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ”.

## **The End of All Things**

Peter began this section by reminding us “The end of all things is at hand”. That is, the ultimate, final purpose for which God is working in this world is at hand—it is a present reality and a present experience for those who are in Christ. Think of what Peter is getting at here.

Why must we arm ourselves with the same way of thinking as Christ who willingly suffered for us? Why must we no longer live for human passions but for the will of God? Why must we be self-controlled and sober-minded? Why must we keep loving one another

earnestly, showing hospitality without grumbling? Why must we remain faithfully present, that is, maintaining a faithful presence in the lives of those who do not love the Lord Jesus as we love him? The end of all things is at hand! What is that end? "...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ".

The final stage of redemption is a faithful life in the present day. That final stage will be completed at the return of Christ, but we're in the final stage of it! The end of all things is at hand, whether the Lord Jesus comes later today or in another 2,000 years! We are experiencing that final stage right now, and the intended purpose of this final stage is that in everything God may be glorified through the Lord Jesus.

You and I have each received a gift we must use to serve one another, and that gift is given as a manifestation of the Spirit. That is, a spiritual gift is intended to show others what God is like. If you have a speaking gift, whether teaching or prophecy or encouragement, etc., your words must be what God himself would say if he were the one speaking. If you have a serving gift, whether service or giving or administration or mercy, etc., your actions must be what God himself would do if he were the one physically present. When you use your spiritual gifts to serve one another you are showing one another what God himself is like.

Notice carefully what Peter says: you are stewards of God's *varied* grace. God is truthful, so we need teachers. God is wise, so we need those with wisdom. God loves and pursues the lost, so we need evangelists. God is merciful, so we need those who can help the hurting. God *sees*, so we need those with discernment. God is generous, so we need those who give. God is trustworthy, so we need those with the spiritual gift of faith. God is ever speaking to us, so we need prophets who will speak truth. God is our strength, so we need encouragers. God is not a God of disorder, so we need gifted administrators. God is the sort who would give up his Sabbath rest to help a friend dig his donkey out of a ditch, so we need gifted servants.

Spiritual gifts, when given away, show us what God is like. Serving one another according to our giftedness is a significant witness to one another and to the world around us. This service is part of the good deeds we must engage in, that the world might see them and glorify God for them. Think carefully about what Jesus said in John 13.

Jn 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34–35

How did Jesus love his disciples?

Mk 10:42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:42–45

Peter is wrapping up a significant section of his letter in which he instructs these elect exiles how to remain faithfully present in a foreign land, a land that is hostile to the gospel of Jesus. He doesn't tell them to exercise their spiritual gifts because their various churches needed help in various ways. He tells them to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another because the world is watching them. By serving one another they are loving one another and loving one another is central to their Christian witness.

Peter says in chapter 2 verse 12 they must keep their conduct among the nations honorable so that when they speak against them as evildoers the people may *see* their good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Do you see why Peter ends this section on living faithfully among the nations the way he does? The end of all things is at hand. The central component of God's purposes in Christ is here, right now. The very purpose for the Son of God coming to this world, living, dying, and rising again is here. We must, therefore, maintain our public witness by serving one another with our spiritual gifts, "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

It is no surprise that Peter ends in doxology! The outcome of our faithful witness, a witness that endures suffering, that pursues holiness, that loves one another earnestly, that serves one another according to our giftedness, is that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus, for to him belong all glory and honor forever and ever.

This is our purpose. This is our identity. Life isn't about what we accumulate or what we get when shopping. Life is not about asserting my will for my preferences. Life is not about elevating myself in any way. It is about the glory of God in the face of Christ. That glory is seen in a significant way when we use our spiritual gifts to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.