



## *Grace, Gifts... and Generosity*

### **Session 3: Our gifts.**

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of our Lent study sessions.

So far, we have

- thought quite a bit about Grace, the unearned and undeserved love, forgiveness, acceptance and blessing of God,
- we've reminded ourselves that as children of God we have grace at work in us – for our **sanctification** – ie to transform us so we become ever more Christlike and for our **salvation** – to ensure our eternity with God.
- And last session we looked at what New Testament epistles say about gifts and thought about the close relationship between the fruits of the Spirit at work in us and the gifts we display.

And so we come to session 3:

This is a practical session, exploring the questions

- Why does God give us gifts?
- How do we identify our gifts?
- What gifts do each of us have?
- and finally, How might we use them?

So let's start with an easy question and one that we thought about in session 2:

Why does God give us gifts? .

Before you leap to answer that, a reminder of some scripture –

Ephesians 2:10

*For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

Here's a verse we've seen before

1 Peter 4:10

*Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

And from Hebrews 10: 24 -25

*... let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ... encouraging one another... ( I love that word "provoke"! I think this may be the only time it is used positively!)*

And finally, Galatians 6: 10

*... whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.*

So why does God give us gifts?



The reasons different epistles give are slightly different – Ephesians tells us that we have gifts because that's why God created us! God created us so God could give us gifts! The verse from 1 Peter says it is to *serve* each other, Hebrews to *encourage* each other, while Galatians extends this to include serving people beyond the community of faith.

I'm guessing those might be familiar verses and, as with all things familiar, there is a risk that we can miss the seriousness or urgency of their message. So here is another passage, this time from the Letter of James.

**Read James 2: 14 -20**

*<sup>4</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and*

*yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

*<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?*

This is one of the hardest hitting passages in scripture. **Take a moment to read it again.**

James’ message is different again from the other verses we’ve looked at.  
What is his reason for using our gifts?

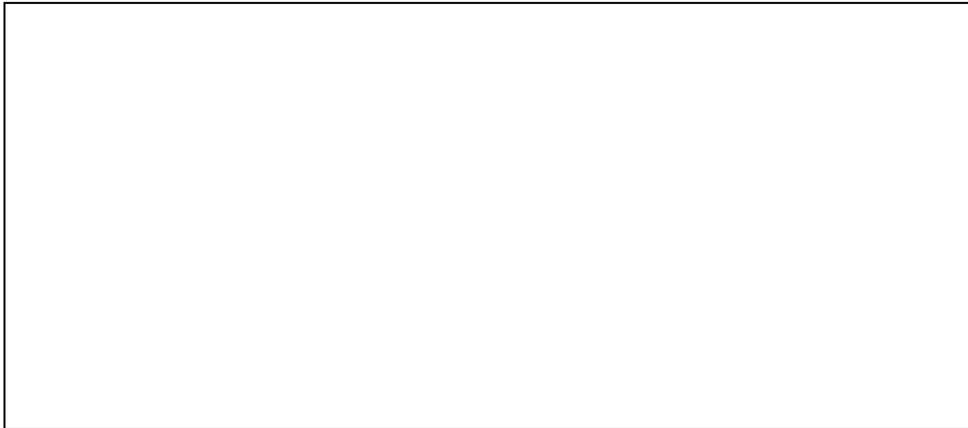


James puts the spotlight on us! The value of service is to us! If we are without good works, our faith is dead! And the way we keep our faith alive is by using our God given gifts. No excuses.

These letters were written to groups of Christians in different parts of the Roman Empire, in the early days of what we call “the church”, people who were trying to figure out how to *live* their faith, within and beyond their Christian community. And the instructions they receive give a clear overall message.

- We should expect God to give us gifts ( Ephesians),
- for the benefit of other Christians ( Peter, Hebrews and Galatians)
- and for people as yet outside the faith community ( Galatians)
- And they are to be used for our own benefit too ( James)

We'll come back to using our gifts a little further on but now, **think about the question, What are the hallmarks of a gift? / How do we know that something is a gift we have been given?**



I think we could give a number of ways. Here are 2 !

- We can do it! ( At least in some measure! We don't have to be world class!)
- We enjoy doing it! ( Gifts meant to be used with enjoyment )

I think these give us a good starting point – we shouldn't ignore ability and enjoyment – but they could apply to a lot of things! And as I don't think my skilful enjoyment of Candy Crush on my i-pad is what we are talking about here, let's move on to 3 other hallmarks:

- It serves/ encourages other people.
- We see its value in God's eyes.
- Other people recognise this as a gift (at least in some measure, while also acknowledging that some gifts are exercised so quietly that few people know about them).

**You might like to reflect more about this matter of identifying gifts, now or later.**

But now you have some criteria to help you more accurately identify your gift(s) – have some fun with the questionnaire below.

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### ***Looking at my gifts***

Different epistles in the New Testament list a variety of gifts, all of which are to build up and support the body of Christ and the work of the body beyond the church family.

Below are the main gifts listed, edited so each gift is listed only once. Remembering last session, exercise sober judgement ! and be honest with yourself and work your way through it.

Put a ✓ against or note down any / all the gifts you think you have.

*From Rom 12*                      prophecy  
   ministry/ service ( understand this as you will!)  
   teaching  
   exhortation (encouraging / motivating)  
   giving  
   leadership & diligence  
   compassion & cheerfulness

*From 1 Cor 12*                      wisdom  
   knowledge  
   faith  
   healing  
   performing miracles  
   discernment  
   tongues  
   interpretation of tongues

*from Eph 4*                              evangelism  
   pastoring

*not forgetting*                      hospitality  
   administration

*and from Gal 5*                      love  
   joy  
   peace  
   patience  
   kindness  
   generosity  
   faithfulness  
   gentleness  
   self-control

My additions

Now put a X against any you think you do not have.  
Add any that you think should be (or St Paul might!) include today (and mark with a ✓ or X)

Now make a note of any gift you think you once had but have no longer and /or make another note of anything that you think is a recent gift .

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I hope you enjoyed that exercise!  
Let's think about that last part, the matter of changing gifts.

If you did identify changes to your gifts (any gift "lost" or recently "found"), what might you deduce from this? (Even if you have not identified this change in yourself, think perhaps of an older person who can no longer exercise a gift that once was a major part of their Christian life... What does this tell us?)

I believe this leads us to consider that God blesses us with both "fixed and fluid gifts".

**Fixed gifts ...**

Gifts that we seem to have always had or had for a very long time that we know we still have, and gifts that are the Fruits of the Spirit: the gifts God wants us to have always, in full measure

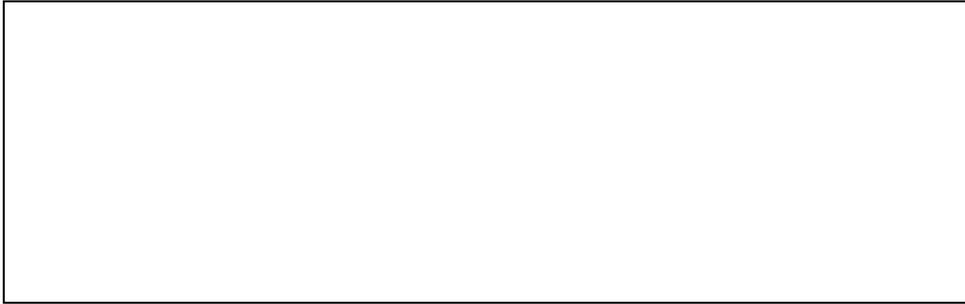
In contrast, we have

**Fluid gifts ...**

are gifts that may vary in duration, according to circumstances

I think the idea of fixed gifts is pretty straightforward ... but why might God bless us with fluid gifts?

If you



have  
thought  
the fact

about

that *we* change and our *circumstances* may change, and the *needs* in the places we find ourselves differ one place and time from another, we are thinking on the same lines!

God is always ahead of us in knowing us *and* the needs around us. So although some gifts are fixed, others may be fluid, as God matches our gifts to needs that we can meet at the time they are needed.

And rather than fret about, for example the inevitable changes or even limitations that come as we move through life, try thinking about God giving us new gifts to meet new times or circumstances - drawing us from something in order to draw us to something new.

So where are you now in terms of your current gift(s) and the needs around you, in St Thomas and in the wider communities of which you are part ?

As you think about that question, here is another!

Is there anything you should consider giving up?



The danger when thinking about gifts is that the emphasis is on what we do or can do. And we can end up feeling guilty about what we are not doing – or fed up because we are still doing the job we've been doing for years and there doesn't seem to be anyone else to take over from us.

But if we take seriously the idea of fluid gifts, if we acknowledge needs and our circumstances / capabilities change, this is the question we should ask... if for no other reasons than giving something up can allow God to do new things in us – and allow the gifts of others to flourish.

Something to ponder ...

Now let's move to the final part of our session.

At our recent Community focussed service we heard from various church groups and their needs. The great and positive news is that people did offer gifts, particular in relation to Children and Youth work.

Here are some updated needs...

- **Knit and Natter** need people Marie and Tony can call on, mainly when they are away, to help with setting up for group at 9am (setting out tables and chairs and clearing them at 12 noon.)
- **Hope House** need prayer support for the residents and staff – and financial support
- **Children / Youth** still need volunteers to help with one-off children's activities – helping with the children and practical things like setting up beforehand and clearing up afterwards.
- **Sunday services** (aka Rotas!) Always room for more to share the load of stewarding, welcoming, cleaning the church ...

Even where there are no specific updates, all our groups and activities need Prayer

- **TWAM ( Tools With A Mission)**
- **Tom's Blokes**
- **Mission group**
- **Flower group**
- **Tom's Golden folk (Rendezvous)**
- **PCC**
- **The Centre**

We can and should be using our gifts here, there and anywhere, but as a starting point, **take a minute or so to run your eyes down that list and think where your gifts might match the current needs around you, for the people of St Thomas and for the Brampton community....**



If you can't see a match between your gift and a need here, think more widely.  
Where/ how might you use your gift (of whatever it is) to serve or encourage others?



As this session ends, you may also like to **re-visit your questionnaire and chat this through with God, seeing where God directs your thoughts.**

Now let's end with prayer.

Lord of grace, source of our gifting and blessing,  
I am sorry for not properly recognising the specific gifts you have poured out to me.  
I am sorry for not always being ready to use my gifts.  
I am sorry if I have clung to past gifting and not recognised your call to different challenges and been reluctant to explore new gifts.  
Forgive me, cleanse me and fill me again with God's Holy Spirit,  
that I may use my gifts to God's praise and glory. **Amen**