



Session 2: God's gifts.

Welcome to the second session of our Lent 2022 study course, Grace, Gifts and Generosity.

Last session we thought about grace for salvation and sanctification – God's grace provides the means for eternal life - salvation, and for our lives in the here and now, moving us on along the road to holiness - sanctification.

We recognised that as we are children of the God of grace, we have grace at work in us.

And we ended the session with a passage from Paul's letter to the church in Rome and a promise that ...

... this session

we would look at the different kinds of gifts that come from our God of grace – and what we think about them.

So, let's begin where we left the last session.

Read Romans 12: 3-8

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to

faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Please keep the first part of the passage – think about yourselves with sober judgement – simmering away on the back burner of your mind, because at the end of this session we will be coming back to this.

But begin by looking at verses 6 to 8, the list of the gifts with which God blesses us.

Have a moment to re-read those verses ...and think -

What do you make of the list of gifts that Paul has dictated here? Did anything immediately stand out for you?

Take a moment to think about that ...

So - ministry, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing compassion, being diligent and cheerful ... That's quite a list, isn't it?

But the New Testament hasn't finished on this subject! The epistles have a *lot* to say about gifts, there are different lists in different epistles, with descriptions of what they are for and how to use them – and none of them is exhaustive!

So leave Rome now and move to Ephesus – **Ephesians 4: 11-12**

“The gifts [God] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ ...”

We're beginning to compile a lengthy list now.

Gifts of prophesy, evangelism, and pastoring - to add to the gifts mentioned in Romans .

In addition there are passages such as 1Corinthians 12, where we find another list of gifts, including verse 28, the reference to administration in “forms of leadership” , NRSV translation of the Greek word meaning ‘to steer’ as in steer a boat, with the idea of being at the helm, keeping the ship on course.

Perhaps we should tell Becky and Julie that we appreciate they do more for us than getting out rotas!

And there is one gift that gets more mentions than any other.

Any guesses what this is?

Think before looking below!

Gold star if you went for Hospitality!

Among the many references to this gift, we have

1 Peter 4:9 “Be hospitable to one another without complaining”

Romans 12:13 & **Hebrews 13:2** ...“extend/ show hospitality to strangers”

and **1 Timothy 3:2** where hospitality is among the qualifications for a bishop.
(I’ve booked the church in for tea with bishop Libby next week)

And apart from the numerous references in specific verses in many, many of the epistles, we have positive descriptions of hospitality going back through to the gospels, into the Old Testament and right back to Genesis.

Exercising the gift of hospitality, welcoming strangers, is encouraged again and again in scripture – even in a culture where this was as foundational as putting the kettle on is to us.

And perhaps this is the reason it does not feature in the longer lists of gifts we’ve looked at! Believers don’t need to be told about this, whereas new Christians from different cultures need to be reminded ...

So a couple of questions!

Are the gifts listed in the epistles the ones we need today?

If you were compiling a list, what would you keep from these, what might you add?

Take a few moments quiet to think about that ...

OK so - what do you think about the gifts named in these lists?

Any additions or subtractions?

So - what does your response tell you about how we read these New Testament passages?

If you're puzzling about that, think what Paul might write today...

I think we need to remember that these were gifts appropriate to the time/ context/ culture of the writers and the recipients of their letters. And while I suspect St Paul would include many of the same gifts were he writing today, I am pretty sure the words he would use would be different and his list would not be exactly the same! So we should not be afraid to make adjustments of language appropriate to our time and culture, so that God's word lives for people today.

And along with these extracts we also have passages such as **Galatians 5:22- 23**.

Read this:

"... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy , peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control ..."

Paul has been encouraging the Galatians to live with the Holy Spirit at work in them. In the preceding verses (19-21) he lists the ways we could forfeit our inheritance as children of God (anger, jealousy, and so on). Now he contrasts that behaviour with the behaviour of people who live with the fruit of the Spirit at work in them.

Take a moment to compare / contrast these Galatians verses with the verses we have pulled out of Romans and Ephesians What might be the relationship between them?

As we dig a little deeper into the gifts of the Spirit – the gifts with which God blesses us – I think we encounter an interesting interplay / relationship between gifts and fruits of the Spirit.

Think for a moment about our Christian lives, in 2 dimensions –

- What we do ... and
- How we do it

In broad terms, I think we can understand *gifts* as enabling us to do what we do, and *fruits* as influencing or affecting how we do it.

An example!

If you were trying to teach me to knit, this would be a very different experience for us both, with and then without the fruit of patience at work in us both!

We might also say

If you were trying to teach me to knit, this would be a very different experience for us both with and then without the gift of patience at work in us both!

So the relationship between *gifts* of the Holy Spirit of God and *fruits* of the Spirit is very close indeed!

Paul has something to say about the fruits of the Spirit at work in us.

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 4 - 11 (where Paul gives us another list of gifts) –

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Then recall that in his following chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul states the great truth: unless we do things with love, nothing we do counts for anything.

And as love is both the greatest of God's gifts and the first of the fruits of the spirit, although gifts can be different from fruits, I think we can legitimately understand fruits as gifts too.

... And if we *do* read the Galatians verses as a list of examples of grace, I think there's something interesting going on here...

Remember last session we identified that the grace of God was shown in who God is - *God's being*, as well as in what God does - *God's doing*?

As God's children, I think we can see the same 'being' and 'doing' simultaneously in us.

We have gifts relating to what we do - "doing" gifts, and we have gifts that affect how we do things, "being" gifts. And these "being" gifts **also** transform who we are

We have gifts that enable us to do things ...

And we have gifts in the form of fruits of the Spirit, that enable us to do things with love, joy, peace, patience and so on. ie they enable us to do things God's way!

And by doing things God's way, our being is steadily transformed into the person God wants us to be.

The fruits of the Spirit, the "being" gifts, determine how we do things AND steadily transform us into the person God wants us to be, into God's likeness.

Take another nanosecond to sit with that thought...

And whereas with what we might describe as the "doing" gifts, there is variety : _____
"I'm hopeless at anything crafty but you are brilliant." ...

and there's also difference of level:

I'm reasonably good at admin but you are much better...

the fruit of the Spirit, the "being" gifts, are for us all, in full measure.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit in us, is to transform us – increasing in each of us all the attributes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – and probably others that the scribe didn't manage to get down!

Irrespective of our differences of personality and whatever "doing" gifts we may have, at whatever level, we all need to be transformed - so that all these fruits, these "being" gifts, develop in all of us!

Now look again at the verses from Galatians 5 ... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*

What fruits are particularly active in you?

And remembering that we are in the penitential season of Lent, what might need some attention?

Think soberly and honestly about this.

And in the silence, pray for yourself, as Jesus might pray for you.

Let's move on now and think again about the predominantly "doing" gifts.

Remind yourself of 1 Corinthians 12 : 4-11

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

We've touched on the fact that gifts come in different forms and different measures but now let's focus on the reason Paul gives for them.

What is the key phrase/ verse that tell us why God blesses us with gifts?

Again. No looking below until you've thought!

The reason given again and again in different epistles, is essentially that, like giant bags of crisps, these gifts are *for sharing and for serving others, to enable the body of Christ to work together effectively.*

1 Peter 4:10 *Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

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.*

And back to **Romans 12**, the idea that we are all members of the same body, and our different gifts, like the different parts of our body, are made to work together.

So with that truth firmly in mind, **return to that passage from Romans** you read at the beginning of the session.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

If you have been keeping those verses simmering away on the back burner of your mind, they should be coming to the boil about now, so a question:

How did / how do the first couple of verses, particularly phrases like “think [of yourself] with sober judgment” and “not all the members have the same function” make you feel?

Take a moment or two to think about that

First, if you boggle at the idea of thinking about yourself with sober judgement, or you find it difficult to have an accurate assessment of your gifts, you are not alone!

I think there are a number of reasons why this is difficult.

If you are English - with self- deprecation in your DNA - or brought up not to think too highly of yourself, you may have an overly low judgement of yourself.

Or perhaps you were brought up to believe you were brilliant at everything! Again, this may not be helpful in enabling you to be realistic.

We can be hampered by nature and nurture!

And then we have to acknowledge that sometimes we can be lazy! We know we could do something but we don't want to be landed with a task...

When it comes to thinking about different members having different functions, we may find this truth liberating! ('I really don't have a gift for that but someone else will have'.)

We may find it reassuring. ('I don't have to worry about not having the same gifts as so-and-so')

But we may also acknowledge that we ourselves can hamper the flourishing of gifts. The fact that you have a gift I would like, can tempt us to be – let's say it – jealous. Sometimes we can be resentful. I used to do that ... That used to be my job ...

Take that moment to sit in God's presence ... Pause...

Search your memory, your mind and your heart.

If necessary, repent. Ask for God's forgiveness for wrong attitudes and ask God for right thinking in relation to your gifts -and the gifts of others.

And end this session now, with prayer

Lord I am sorry for not always recognising the range and diversity of gifts and blessings you have poured out to me and to others.

I am sorry that the fruits of your Holy Spirit are not always evident in me and that I do not always rejoice in my own and other people's gifts.

Lord God, source of all we have and all we are able to do,

forgive me, cleanse me and fill me again with your Holy Spirit,

that I may show the fruits of the Spirit and use my gifts to your praise and glory.

Amen

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We have covered a lot of ground this session. We have:

- looked at various New Testament passages and noted what they say about gifts
- thought about gifts of "being" and gifts of "doing" and how the fruits of the Spirit affect the way we use our gifts AND transform us into God's likeness
- tried to be honest with ourselves about our response to the gifts God has given us

Next week will be a practical session and we will be looking at the gifts we have, the gifts we think we have (!) and what we do with them!