**Series: Core Values of Agape Christian Church**

**Sermon: The Gifts God Gives**

Attempt to play a song “I wrote about this sermon.”

I’d love to be able to put some of my thoughts into songs with consistent rhythms and catchy tunes, and lyrics that speak to your heart, but honestly, I just don’t have it. Maybe I should just leave song writing to people who have the gift for it.

Guys like Christ Tomlin and Bebo Norman have a gift. They can write songs that express what we think and feel so that we can sing them in worship to speak to and about our Savior.

I don’t have that gift. But that doesn’t mean that I have no role to play in the Kingdom of God. I have different gifts. If I identify them I can serve in the ministry of the kingdom of God.

The Sahara Desert is one of the largest expanses of dry ground on Earth. 3.5 million square miles of sand and rock, much of it useless for growing crops and sustaining life. On one of her 28 missions, Space Shuttle Columbia determined by echo that there are 26 lakes and miles of underground rivers beneath that arid land. Sadly millions of people have starved because that water goes largely untapped.

I believe that there are great untapped resources in the kingdom of God that if used could accomplish great ministry in the kingdom of God. God has already given unlimited resources to His church, much of which goes unused. Maybe some people hold back because they don’t have the gifts they would like to have. Maybe they think their gifts aren’t important enough.

I wonder how much kingdom work is not done because we aren’t using our gifts? How much potential lies in individuals just waiting to be applied?

One of the core values of Agape Christian Church is: **We recognize that God enables ministry by giving gifts to individual believers and we will seek to match each believer’s gifts, motivations, and maturity with appropriate ministry**.

Today we’re going to talk about the gifts that God gives to individuals. The Apostle Paul began 1 Corinthians 12, *now concerning spiritual gifts*. For three chapters he taught about the gifts God gives to individual disciples; what they are; how they work; how we should apply them. He also taught about them in Romans and Peter wrote about them as well.

We can’t cover the whole topic of spiritual gifts in one sermon so we’ll limit our talk today to three basic rules about spiritual gifts. If you’ve never studies spiritual gifts before this should help you understand God’s plan. If you have previously explored this topic it will be good for you to get back to the basics.

They’re called spiritual gifts,  because God uses the agency of the Holy Spirit to endow us. The Bible calls *them the manifestation of the Spirit* in1 Corinthians 12:7. Elsewhere they’re called , gifts of grace.

Here’s the first basic rule about spiritual gifts: **God gives gifts to every disciple**. *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* 1 Corinthians 12:7

*To each one*. That’s all inclusive. I have been given gifts. You have been given gifts. Look around, everyone here has been given gifts. Whether you’re a member of this church or not you have gifts; whether you’ve been worshipping here for years or this is your first time you have gifts. We all have spiritual gifts. We all have something to bring to kingdom ministry.

Peter assumed that we each have been given a gift or gifts when he wrote, *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.* 1 Peter 4:10

You have at least one gift. Don’t make the mistake of looking at the gifts other people have and conclude that since you don’t have what they have, what you have doesn’t matter.

* *I don’t have the gift to stand before the whole church and teach God’s Word.*
* *I don’t have the gift to play worship music.*
* *I don’t have the gift to lead a Bible study.*

That’s OK. God gave you the gift/gifts that He knows you can use in His kingdom.

The next time you watch a football game, count how often on offense the quarterback handles the ball. He touches the ball on almost every play. The wide receiver, on the other hand, might only touch the ball for 5 or 6 plays. Some players, linemen for example, almost never touch the ball.

John McKay, who led USC football for 15 very successful years once said, *It’s not the superstars who win football games, but average players giving their best*.

That’s good theology. *It’s not superstar Christians who do the greatest ministry, but average Christians giving their best of their gifts*.

Antonio loved music and wanted nothing more than to sing in the Cremona Boys Choir, but his voice was too squeaky. He tried violin lessons hoping to play for the choir but neighbors convinced his parents to make him stop torturing the cat. Others at school made fun of him because the only thing he seemed to be good at was whittling.

Eventually he applied his gift of whittling to making musical instruments. He whittled 1116 instruments, 960 of them violins, each one with a label: “Antonio Stradivari”.

Your gift may not be the one you really want. It may not be something everybody at church sees. It may not even be within the church. Whether seen or unseen, whether inside or outside the church setting, it still matters to the kingdom of God.

From the moment Jesus was born to a humble man and woman in a manger in Bethlehem, Christianity has been about ordinary people doing extraordinary things with the gifts God has given.

The important thing is not where your gift lies, but whether or not you’re using your gift in kingdom ministry. God will determine the effectiveness of your gift as long as you put it to work. As one writer wrote, God will…*take care of the ability if we’ll take care of the availability*.

You have a gift or gifts from God that can serve in the ministry of His kingdom.

The second basic rule about spiritual gifts: **The purpose of the gifts is to enable the church (us) to do kingdom of God ministry**.

Now, I can’t give you a specific verse that defines the purpose of spiritual gifts. You can trust me as I explain it or you can find a different interpretation. I’ll show you the scriptures that lead to my conclusion about the purpose of spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:7 says, *the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* Your text may read “for profit” or “for advantage.” In extra-biblical literature of that time  indicated something that was of profit or advantage for a group.

Paul didn’t use it to speak of profit for an individual. In the contexts about spiritual gifts both Paul and Peter wrote about how the different spiritual gifts endowed affected the church doing what the church is intended to do. It’s never about what I get out of it. It’s always about what the kingdom of God gets out of it.

Paul wrote that God, through the Holy Spirit, gave certain gifts; apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers…*to prepare God’s people for works of service.* Ephesians 4:12 Notice the purpose – to prepare individuals for ministry.

God didn’t intend for professional staff to do all the kingdom work. He intended for the whole church, equipped by her leaders, to each use their gifts in ministry. Herb Brooks, the coach of the Gold Medal winning 1980 US Olympic hockey team said, *man for man they were inferior than most of the teams they beat. But together as a team, each man contributing, they won it all*.

Kingdom work is not a one-man-show. Kingdom work is all of us contributing our gifts to accomplish the work God sets before us. God has gifted you for kingdom ministry.

If you see a need, that’s probably God calling you to serve. If you have a gift to meet that need, do it. You don’t need my permission.

If you bring a need to me I’m most likely going to ask you how you intend to meet it. I’m not trying to guilt you into something. I believe if God puts it on your heart He expects you to act.

The leaders of our church want you to develop your abilities and talents as the Holy Spirit has gifted you. That’s a core value.

I’ll add a thought here. If you don’t do what God gifted you to do and there is a need that must be met, someone else will have to pick up the slack.

Have you ever heard of Dizzy Dean? He was a great pitcher for the Cardinals and Cubs in the 1930s and 40s. His career ended when he was hit in the toe by a line drive. Immediately he had to change the way he pushed off the mound. This compensation caused him to overextend his arm and before long he was through playing baseball.

When there are non-functioning members of the body of Christ, someone has to compensate. That has negative effects on the entire body.

What flies a kite? Is it the sticks? Is it the paper, the string, the boy holding the string? Is it the wind? None of the above. They all fly together. If any part fails the whole kite fails.

So it is in kingdom ministry. It takes all of us to succeed. Paul got it. *The Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.* 1 Corinthians 3:5f

Keep this in mind as you think about spiritual gifts. Their purpose is not to make you popular or to earn you a special place in the church. The purpose of every gift is to facilitate the church carrying out the kingdom work that Jesus started.

One more basic rule about spiritual gifts: **God expects us to use the gifts He gives us**.

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.* Romans 12:6-8

What I want you to see in this is how the emphasis is on using the gifts, whatever gift a man has, let him use it.

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.* 1 Peter 4:10 A good paraphrase of this is:

*Every disciple should be a faithful steward of the gift God has given, using it in kingdom ministry*. Again, notice the emphasis on using the gifts God gave us.

Most everyone is familiar with the story Jesus told called the Parable of the Talents. In case this is new to you here’s a short story version of the story, which Jesus prefaced by saying this is what the kingdom of God will be like:

* A rich man was going away for a while. Before he left he gave a sum of money to each of three men who worked for him.
* He gave one man $10K; to another he gave $5K; and to the third he gave $1K.
* The man to whom he had given $10K invested and doubled the money.
* The man to whom he had given $5K also invested and doubled the money.
* The man to whom he had given $1K hid the money.
* When the rich man returned he called his workers to give an account of the money.
* The first two men happily showed him how they doubled his money, and were rewarded handsomely.
* The third man smugly said, and now I’ll quote from Jesus:

*Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your money in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.* Matthew 25:24f

* In other words, he didn’t do anything with what the rich man gave him.
* Here is how Jesus said the rich man responded, again quoting:

*You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?*

*Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

*Take the talent* (money) *from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Matthew 25:26-30

I’m not reading into this when I conclude that Jesus was saying that we will be judged if we fail to use what God has given us.

Another interesting takeaway from this story is that the idea that “*all men are created equal*” is false. We’re all equal in the sight of God, but we are not equally endowed. Some people are born with great natural talent. Some are born with exceptional ability to learn. Others have less talent or are slower to learn.

The standard of judgment Jesus taught here is not how much do we have, but how faithful are we with what He gave us.

One more thing someone pointed out to me: we’re not judged on how much we think we have been given. We’re judged on how we use what God actually gave us. I think that means we are each responsible to detect, discover, develop, and deploy the gifts God gave us.

* Detect – identify potential gifts.
* Discover – determine the validity and extent of those gifts.
* Develop – practice our gifts like a doctor practices medicine or a lawyer practices law, getting better and better over time.
* Deploy – actually do something with our gifts in kingdom ministry

Everyone has a gift or gifts which purpose is to use them in kingdom ministry. It’s up to us to put them to work. The way Jesus ended the story tells us that, with respect to our gifts this principle applies: “*use ‘em or lose ‘em*.”

I have a lot of tools in my garage. Some I use often, some I use rarely. I’ve learned, especially with power tools, that if I don’t use them they will deteriorate over time. At least once a year I operate each one. Even if it’s just to turn it on and run it for a bit. I know that if I don’t it might not work when I do need it.

Tools that have engines get started and run about 3 or 4 times each year. If you’ve ever tried to start an engine that hasn’t run for three years, you know exactly what I’m talking about. Things happen inside that engine that will prevent it from running properly if you don’t operate it for too long.

Everybody is a somebody in the kingdom of God and nobody is a nobody. Whether you are multi and greatly talented or you’re just not very good at anything, the size of your gift is not so important. What is important is that you use it.

\*God gives gifts to every individual disciple.

\*The purpose of the gifts is to enable the church (us) to do kingdom of God ministry.

\*God expects us to use the gifts He gives us.

We can make this more personal. Read them with me:

* God gave me gifts.
* The purpose of my gift is to do kingdom ministry.
* God expects me to use my gift.

What will you do with the teaching this morning? You may choose to ignore it.

* Maybe you think I’ve misinterpreted the scripture.
* Maybe you’ll say to yourself, *That’s nice Rod, but it’s not for me*.
* Maybe you’ll just decide, *I’m not doing it*.

Unless I’m completely wrong in my interpretation, these three basic rules about spiritual gifts concern you. God has gifted you, so that you can serve in kingdom ministry, and He expects you to put your gifts to work.

It’s one of our core values that **we recognize that God enables ministry by giving gifts to individual believers and we will seek to match each believer’s gifts, motivations, and maturity with appropriate ministry**.

At our last Elders meeting we decided to commit four Sunday evenings to study and discuss what it means to be an externally focused church with each member identifying and using his/her gifts.

* Nov. 5 – Being an Externally Focused Church
* Nov. 19 – What the Bible Says About Spiritual Gifts
* Dec. 3 – Spiritual Gift Assessment
* Dec. 17 – Out Live Your Life

We invite and challenge you to join us we can seek to fulfill God’s intended mission for Agape Christian Church.