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Don't Squander Your Gift -- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

- Have you ever received gift, where, for whatever reason, you just squandered it?...
 - you didn't use it for its intended purpose, and when it comes right down to it, you might as well have not even received it in the first place?
- that happens for a lot of different reasons, doesn't it?...
 - maybe you didn't like the gift...you open that box that has a shirt or pair of pants or whatever---and though you would never say this...you know in your heart—you're never going to wear that...the money spent on that gift was entirely wasted from the perspective of how many times you're going to use it...
 - or maybe you're just busy – someone gives you a gift card which was really nice, and you put it somewhere---but we're all busy---and then you come across it a year later, or two years later...and you look at the expiration date and oops, that would have been a really nice meal...but our schedule didn't allow us to use it – so what used to be worth \$50 is now just a useless hunk of plastic.
 - or maybe you didn't like the giver---the fact that so-and-so gave it to you is an association you really don't want to even have in your mind...
 - but I imagine that we've all had that happen...where we just squandered a gift...
- and a lot of times, it happens innocently---we didn't set out to do it...we just did...
- when I was in Bible college, I served as a youth pastor at a church in Trenton, New Jersey...
 - the church was 2 ½ hours away from the Bible college...and they had had some rather significant financial challenges...
 - so one of my professors began going down on the weekends to try to help the church and I went with him to work with the teenagers...
 - at the end of my sophomore year, my professor resigned from the school and began pasturing the church full-time...he also of course moved his family to Trenton and they lived in a parsonage right there on the church property...
 - he asked me if I would keep driving down on my own for my last two years of college even though they couldn't afford to pay me – I did because I wanted to help the church and I thought it would be great experience for future ministry...
 - so the way it worked---I lived at the college M-F, and then with he and his family on the weekends...
 - that schedule became really intense, especially during my senior year---because Kris and I were engaged by then...
 - so I had a full load of classes...I was working 40 hours a week to pay for tuition and also save for a surprise honeymoon because I really wanted to take Kris to Bermuda before we started seminary...
 - and then I had my weekend ministry responsibilities...
- the pastor and his family appreciated what I was trying to do with their youth group---so they responded by trying to make my stay with them as comfortable as possible...
- and one of the ways that played itself out was the pastor's wife fixing my favorite meals as soon as she found out what they were...
- and I didn't catch on right at first---but then there was the weekend that I just casually mentioned that I liked mushrooms---the next week, every dish was some variation of mushrooms...they just wanted to bless me in that way...

- well, not surprisingly---at some point the issue of banana cream pie came up...I love banana cream pie—that had always been one of my mom’s specialties...
- so sure enough, the next weekend we had banana cream pie for dessert...honestly, it wasn’t the best banana cream pie in the history of man—but the fact that the pastor’s wife was that thoughtful was really meaningful to me...
- that weekend, we had our regular evening church service...then we had our youth meeting...
 - so it was about 9:30 Sunday night – I’m scurrying around trying to do my final packing and get back to school...
 - I still had a 2 ½ hour drive ahead of me...so I was hustling...
 - I came down the stairs with my briefcase and my hanging bag, and the pastor’s wife said...hey, I also made you a banana cream pie to take back to campus this week...
 - I thanked her – that was really thoughtful – but it was one of those awkward moments where I couldn’t really carry it – probably should have made two trips (but I never do that)...
 - so I got everything balanced...and headed out for my car which was parked right next to the church dumpster...
 - I’m trying to unlock my doors...we’ve probably all done this...but I just set the pie on the top of my trunk while I messed with my keys...
 - I opened the car door---put my briefcase and my suit bag in the back seat...and drove off...
 - I didn’t think about that pie all week long...it just never crossed my mind...
- there was someone else, though, who was thinking about it quite a bit...
 - because the pastor’s wife went out the next morning to take out the trash...and guess what is laying right next to the dumpster...the homemade banana cream pie that she had given me...
- when I came back the next weekend---they had already pretty much figured out what had probably happened...they knew my eating habits well enough by then to know that I never turned down or wasted food...I was a college guy...a bottomless pit...
 - so we had a good laugh about it – but what terrible thing...to completely squander a gift someone had graciously given...
- well, here’s where that stops being funny – when the giver of the gift is God Himself, and people like you and me simply waste the gift he’s given...
- please tell me that no one here would ever want to find themselves in that position...
- with that in mind, please now open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 12...page 154 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- this year we’re doing a series entitled **Taking the Next Step...With Joy.**
 - this is a verse by verse exposition of the book of 1Corinthians...
 - one of the observations we’ve made as we’ve worked our way through this book is that while there are overarching themes or big ideas...there are also clear divisions in the material...
- for example, in chapter seven Paul began answering questions that the Corinthians had posed to him...that wasn’t the case in the first six chapters...but there’s a clear break in the content of the book...
- another example was chapters 8-10 – all devoted to the subject of Christian liberty...
- so you have an overall book...

- and you have its historical context...and the overarching theme...
- but then you have these smaller segments of material...
- today begins an entirely new one...Paul is going to discuss a subject that has not been mentioned at all in this book...and this is going to go for 3 entire chapters...
- 1 Corinthians 12-14 are all about the issue of spiritual gifts...and we want to start wading into that issue today...**read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31**

- we're going to organize these verses around this idea...**Taking the Next Step, with Joy, by Not Squandering Our Gifts...**
- with the time we have remaining, let's study **3 ways to properly use the spiritual gifts God has given you.**

I. Learn What God's Word Teaches Us about Our Gifts.

- you can't properly use something that you don't understand...
- that's why Paul said in verse 1... **1 Corinthians 12:1 - Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.**
- **unaware – agnoew – “not to know, be ignorant of” – agnostic**
- Paul said, I don't want you to be an agnostic regarding the issue of your gifts...
- well, there's at least 3 questions that you need to be able to answer if you're going to be in line with this part of the passage:
 1. What is a spiritual gift?
 2. What are the spiritual gifts? (how many are there, how are they different, etc)
 3. Are all the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture still in use today?

A. What is a spiritual gift?

- there are several Greek words that are translated gift in the NT...
- having a bit of understanding about these words is an important part of this study...

1. charisma

- we of course get the word charismatic from that...
- some churches in our town are charismatic...meaning that they believe in exercising all the spiritual gifts for today...
- well, the word literally means **favor, or beauty, or grace**...
- the verb form, charizomai – literally means to show favor, or to show grace...
- it is a beautiful word in the Bible...Kris and I selected this name for our second daughter...who I think most folks know is adopted...
- we were so thankful that her birth mother allowed her to live, and then decided that she and Karis' biological father were not in the best position at that time to raise a daughter...so they allowed her to be adopted...
- and when we received that unexpected call and then began making preparations in literally a day or two to bring her into our home...
- that's the word that kept coming to our minds...someone was giving us a beautiful gift...they were showing us favor, or grace...

2. pneumatikos

- **pneuma – spirit**
- that's the word we have here in verse 1...in fact, in your Bible, the word gift is probably in italics...that's because the word gift doesn't even appear in verse 1 – it's just supplied because of what comes next in the text...
- the emphasis is on the source of the gift – the Holy Spirit of God...
- the issue isn't that they are showy, or miraculous, or intended to draw attention to the person...
- the focus is on the fact that this is something the Holy Spirit gives His children...

3. merismos

- **merismos – “I divide”**
- the idea here is division, or distribution...
- here’s an example... **Hebrews 2:4 - God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.**
- the word gift in that text is merismos – and the emphasis is on the fact that God has divided these gifts up among His people and distributed them in a way that is consistent with His will...
- there are other words, but that’s enough for our time this am...
- **Spiritual gifts are divine enablements for ministry, characteristics of Jesus Christ that are to be manifested through the body corporate just as they were manifested in the body incarnate.**
- now, the next logical question is... **B. What are the spiritual gifts?**
 - you might be a little bit disappointed with this answer, because the Bible does not give us what would appear to be an exhaustive list of the gifts...
 - I say that because in each of the specific passages on this subject, the lists are different, and would not at all appear to be an attempt to be comprehensive...
 - here they are... **Romans 12:6-8 - Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**
 - and you might look at that and say, well, wait a minute---that’s a different list than the one in 1 Corinthians...that’s true...here’s another one...
 - **1 Peter 4:11 - Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

Bible scholars do not agree on the exact number and distinction of kinds of gifts. Because the scriptural lists are not identical, it seems clear that God did not intend to give His church either a rigid or a precise and exhaustive compilation, but rather general categories. One should be careful not to over define the gifts. Because they may resist over-classification, there is not much value in taking tests, formal or informal, to determine what spiritual gifts we have. A believer’s gifts can be an overlapping combination, taken in different proportions from the categories of gifts. One person may be obviously strong in a single gift, such as teaching. Another may not be strong in any one gift but have some measure of three or four categories. It is best to see each person’s gift as a unique blend of the categories of giftedness, granted to that individual in connection with his or her traits and experiences and the needs of the church. Each believer becomes as unique spiritually as his fingerprints are physically. (John MacArthur, Commentary on 1 Corinthians).

- now, one other question, and then we’ll try to start applying some of this...
 - C. All of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture still in use today?**
 - our question to that is, no...

- in fact, if you peek over at chapter 13 for a moment, I don't see how you could answer otherwise...we'll talk about this more in a couple of weeks...but clearly Paul believed some of the gifts were temporary in nature...
 - well, why?...because the NT was in the process of being completed...
 - many of these gifts were revelatory in nature...special revelation was being given to the church because the NT was being completed...
 - but once Scripture was complete, the so called sign gifts were no longer necessary, so just like Paul explained, many of them died out on their own...
- now, you may have other questions about that and we can suggest other resources...but here's the real question at this point...what spiritual gifts has God given you?...and how are you using them to further the mission God has given us as a church?...
 - let's not worry about the revelatory ones right now – let's focus on the ones that are clear and indisputable...the gift of administration, and the gift of serving, teaching, leading the gift of giving, and even showing mercy...
 - how has God gifted you, and how are you using them here as God seeks to further His mission by drawing men and women to Himself?...
 - you haven't inadvertently thrown your banana cream pie in the dumpster, have you?...
- now you might say – well, why are the revelatory gifts emphasized in the book of 1 Corinthians?...when you think about it, I bet many people could answer that question...
 - it's because of the context...one of the reasons for their division was that they were enamored with, and coveting the showy gifts to bring attention to themselves...
 - well, that's not really an issue in our culture, or in our church---so that allows us to focus in on the non-revelatory gifts that have not died out...
- here's some great news – there are a tremendous number of men and women in this church that use their gifts to serve Christ here...'
 - think about people who love babies and children...it will take hundreds and hundreds of men and women to provide child-care today to free adults up to the study the Word and to teach scripture to children...and people have been gifted by the Spirit of God to serve in that way...
 - all of the folks who worked to get the building ready...
 - the men and women who are gifted musically, or with all our technology...
 - then there's youth workers...
 - and then we could start marching right through a typical week of ministry...
 - Paul's desire for the church in verse 1 was that the church not be unaware of their spiritual gifts...
 - well, by God's grace...many people here get it...
 - but I need to ask you – is there evidence that you do?...
- you say – well, what if I'm not using my gifts in serving here...
 - what's the theme of this year?...Taking the Next Step, with Joy...
 - here's some steps...
1. Be sure you know Christ.
 - trusting Him is when the Holy Spirit takes up residence inside of you...
 - not trusting Him is squandering the greatest gift ever given...
 2. Begin growing and building relationships.

- that's why ABF's are so important...because many times that's where you get to know people, and learn about the needs and service opportunities...

3. Attend Intro to Faith, and consider membership...

- (explain why membership is important for some serving positions—i.e. childcare)

- let me tell you another reason we have to be very thankful about this topic...

- it is the way many of the people in this church exercise the gift of giving...

- conventional wisdom would suggest that giving would be down in an off economy like this...

- that has not been true here at all, and each month when we meet as pastors and deacons, we specifically thank God for the faithfulness He is giving His people...

- many churches have had to cut back on their missions programs...thank the Lord, we're going the opposite direction...

- and I had the opportunity to see that at work first hand last week in Brazil...

- one of our service niches for missions regards teaching national pastors and leaders how to use God's Word to meet the needs of people who are counseling...

- we believe God's Word is sufficient...

- we believe it answers for how to grow and become closer to Christ even in the midst of great difficulty...

- and we believe offering those answers to the church family inside the church and to the community outside the church can be a great help to a church accomplishing the great commission of making disciples...

- several leaders in Brazil attended a training conference here and then asked us to partner with them and take that conference to Brazil...

- **(pics 1-3 of students studying)**

- we've been doing that informally for years, and formally last year and then again last week...

- so Dan Wickert, and David Selvey and I were at a conference with about 200 national leaders last week...

- **(pics 4-6 of coalition meeting)**

- we also participated in a meeting of about 20 leaders who are exploring the idea of finding ways to work together in their country...perhaps launching a coalition similar to the BCC we're seeking to develop here in the US...

- this was a wonderful conference in many ways...but here's a couple I'd like to mention to you...

1. It was under national leadership...

- **show pics 7-8 of the training notebook...**

2. we were able to partner with three of our church's missionaries in Brazil...

- **show pics 9-11 of the missionaries...**

- it was so encouraging to these men and their wives to be able to work together and bring these truths to the people of the country to which they have devoted their ministry lives...

3. we also were able to serve right alongside one of our brand new seminary grads and his wife...

- **show pics 12-15 of Sacha**

- please think carefully about this – think about the issue of multiplication...[could contrast to work trips, etc]
- now, here's the question – where does the money come from to support those missionaries?...and to have a conference like that?...
- answer – the faithful giving of the people of this church...who aren't discarding their banana cream pie by the dumpster...they are exercising the spiritual gift of giving...

II. Be Sure You Use Your Gifts to Draw Attention to Christ.

- that is the point of verses 2-3.
- you used to be led away by mute idols...now what message does a person who is using his/her gifts well communicate...
- **1 Corinthians 12:3 - Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.**

A. Instead of using your gift to glorify yourself.

- [develop people who have the gift of wisdom, but use words and arguments to draw attention to how smart they are...]

B. Instead of becoming frustrated with people who do not have your gift.

- maybe you have the gift of administration...great – but some people just chafe when they're around someone who can't organize things like they can...well, was that gift given to glorify you, or Christ...

C. Instead of letting your gift becoming your curse.

- [develop people who have the gift of administration, but get so caught up in using that ability in the workplace, they never have any time/energy to use it in the church house...]
- one of the things that made a huge impact on these national pastors was the fact that Dan and Dave came...
- [show pics 16-19 - pics of Dan and Dave]
- [develop – not a staff run church – equipping men and women to do the work of the ministry...]

III. Celebrate the Diversity of Gifts in God's Family.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 - Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.

- develop Dave's ability to do administration...
- **show pics 20-23** – develop the privilege of national leadership (diversity)

- **1 Peter 4:10 - As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.**
- there is great joy in living this way (not discarding your banana cream pie)
- please tell me what the common theme is in these pictures...
 - show pics **24-28** – discuss the common theme of having a great time serving the Lord...