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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 26, 2021**

**Gifts Differing**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the blessing that you give to us in your word. And Lord, once again we are about the business of trying to open up that word and understand what you have for us there, and there's a lot this morning and I just I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit to be especially powerful this morning. I pray that you would give us insight and grace and each of us individually might understand just what it is you have for us this morning. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well last week we looked at the founding of the very first church. We just kind of studied it. The Lord had already ascended into heaven, the apostle Peter had just preached a message convicting thousands of their need to get right with God and the Holy Spirit was moving in the crowd mightily. And Luke, the author of Acts, says: *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the*

*breaking of bread and the prayers.*

And so we looked at those four critical aspects of what churches do; that is teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. And I just want to reiterate briefly what we spoke about. We said that teaching is not any kind of teaching, it's the apostles' teaching. It is teaching that is found in the scripture alone. You see, our preaching authority comes completely and solely from the Bible. And to the extent that our preaching stems from that authority found only in scripture, it will have power, it will have authority, it will have the Holy Spirit giving it life; and to the extent that it comes from my authority, it will be ultimately useless.

Second on the list was the word "fellowship" or "koinonia" which means a great deal more than, "Hi, how ya' doing". Fellowship involves, as we said, the people around you knowing you enough to know when things are not going well, knowing you enough to know when you're struggling to ask hard questions, to seek to know you way beyond simply asking "how's it going." Again that's the point of fellowship. I mean, the church's singular goal is to have its members grow in holiness and the ability to know God and serve him, and fellowship is a big part of how we get there.

Communion, our third point, is a focus on two very important things: It's a focus on community and worship. And finally we looked at the fourth item which is prayer. And I said that the simplest and shortest way of understanding prayer is that it's God's way of involving his image bearers in the process of how he rules this earth. I said when God desires to move a mountain, he doesn't just move a mountain, he first starts moving people to pray that the mountain would be moved and then in response to those prayers he removes the mountain. And he does so so the universe can see our fingerprints on the process that God uses to rule a world filled with his image bearers who are going to one day rule the universe with him. So those four fundamental functional areas of the church are teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer.

Now what I did not have the time to go into, however, is the role that we individuals each have in making the body a vital and healthy expression of Christ on earth. And so at the end of the message, I asked, okay, where do I fit in this enterprise known as "the church"? Well the answer may be a shock to some but God says every single member of his church is a minister, not just the leadership because every one of us has been given a spiritual gift in order to build up the church.

So the first and most important part of becoming a new believer in

Christ, as you all know, is the fact that you get indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And the amazing thing is that God, he doesn't dwell in temples any more as he used to in the Old Testament, now he dwells inside human beings. We are living temples. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit because God's Spirit now lives inside you. And when he comes into you he manifests his presence through a gift, through a spiritual gift given to each individual for the building up of the body of Christ. Listen to how Paul puts this in *1 Corinthians 12:7*. He says: *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 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. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.* Now there's the nine different gifts that are listed here and in the interests of time we're only going to be able to briefly touch on each one. I just want you to get a sense of what these gifts are and how the Holy Spirit might be moving in you to exercise each particular gift.

So the first one that Paul mentions is wisdom. What's wisdom?

Well, it's the ability to respond to difficult situations with supernatural wisdom. Listen to what Jesus said in *Luke 21*. He said: *But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.* Well we saw this happen. If you recall, the most brilliant defense of the gospel ever given historically was not given by Paul the theologian, it wasn't given by Luke the physician, it was given by Stephen, a deacon famous for waiting on tables. Wisdom is just that, it's the supernatural ability given by God to handle extraordinary circumstances.

Well next is knowledge, and we've seen this repeatedly in the book of Acts where miracles occurred by someone having a supernatural knowledge that they couldn't possibly have had by any other means. Paul once addressed his fellow sailors on a ship that was literally falling apart. In Acts 27 he told them they should have listened to him at the first but then he told them that there would be no loss of life, only the loss of the ship. There were hundreds of people on the ship but no lives were lost. He was absolutely correct. And the only way he could have known that, he could have

possibly known that was from a supernatural word of knowledge from God. Unfortunately today the word of knowledge has been reduced to a caricature work by someone who's either a flat-out fraud working with a hidden radio or some other contact to exploit his audience with knowledge. That's not supernatural at all. It's knowledge gleaned from some other source. But there is still genuine cases of people in these modern centuries who have the word of knowledge.

Charles Spurgeon speaks of his conversion. That was all the way back in 1850, but it happened through a word of knowledge that he received from a very unlikely source. It seems there was a tremendous blizzard in London one Sunday and most of the churches had been shut down, Spurgeon's own church being one of them. Spurgeon was not a believer at this point but he was interested in going to church every week and in the midst of this blizzard he made his way to a local primitive Methodist Church that had about twelve or fifteen people in it. Apparently their minister couldn't make it as well. And so a shoemaker decided that he would take over the pulpit and try his best. As Spurgeon said, after ten minutes the man was at the end of his tether and so he looked around at this tiny little congregation and he saw this stranger in Spurgeon and he said -- quote -- "Young man, you look very miserable." Spurgeon said, "Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the

pulpit before. However, it was a good blow struck. He continued: 'And you will always be miserable -- miserable in life and miserable in death -- if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.' Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can, 'Young man, look to Jesus Christ.' There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ." See, that shoemaker was given the word of knowledge. I can't tell you how many times I have seen God use highly unlikely sources like that just so that we would know that this knowledge came from him and not from that particular person. I personally had a similar occurrence happen to me the night that I came to Christ. There was a woman sitting right next to me who I had never met before in my life, and unbeknownst to her I had just met the living God. I was staring down at the floor and I was saying to God, I now believe you are the one true living God, but I don't owe these people in this room that information at all. I looked up directly and I happened to look right at this woman, she looked right at me, she said, "Young man, I don't know you but I know for a fact you need to be praising God." That's what a word of knowledge looks like.

The next gift is faith. And I'm not talking here about saving

faith, about saving faith in the gospel, the understanding that every one of us is lost and that God became a man, that he lived perfectly on this earth, he came to the cross and offered up his life as a perfect sacrifice and that by faith in him we can stand before God with his righteousness in our place now worthy of heaven, that's not the faith I'm talking about. This gift that God is speaking about is a gift that is unique. The gift of faith is given to every single believer. This particular gift is a miraculous ability to actively pursue God's kingdom through extraordinary faith. Again, I don't have the time to go into all of the details but I would suggest you look up George Mueller and the orphanages that he used to run strictly by extraordinary faith and you'll get a sense of what I'm talking about with this gift.

Next is healing. Paul says: *To another gifts of healing by the one spirit.* Now God gave the church many, many gifts of healing as it was starting out. We see this in the book of Acts. It says in *Acts 5: And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.* Well, we look at that and say why does that happen then, why not



now? Well, one of the primary reasons for it happening so frequently at the start of the new church was this need for fishermen and tax collectors and other common men who had been with Jesus to be legitimized through their miraculous actions, and healing was a large part of that. Two thousand years later the church has proven itself to be the body of Christ, it's proven itself over and over again and yet we hear reports constantly about what takes place as the church is advancing in areas without medicine, in areas without modern conveniences, in areas where presenting the gospel faces the same kind of circumstances that the apostles faced. There we find that God can and does do great and mighty healings still. But not frequently in countries such as ours that are already blessed with medical progress.

Verse 10 goes on to say: *To another the working of miracles.*

Again this gift closely follows the gift of healing. It served primarily to legitimize the infant church. And again we see the same pattern repeated with miracles being done in areas where the church is advancing into territory where it hasn't been before. I mean, in areas where the church has been established miracles are still possible but they're rare. You say why is that? Why do we have these extraordinary miracles in the Old Testament at the start of the church and then everything just seems to peter out? I mean you look at the Old Testament, we have Elijah calling down fire, we

have Moses with the ten plagues, we have Daniel and the lions' den, we have Jesus's miracles including raising the dead and yet very few of those miracles are reported around today, particularly around here. Well again you have to understand miracles, they're not so miraculous when it comes to advancing the church and bringing people to Christ. I mean I've spoken repeatedly about how Jesus's miracles oftentimes all they did was serve to turn people's hearts harder and make their demands grow higher and higher. We have a case of Jesus flat-out telling his followers that their desire is not for him because they saw so many of his miracles, all they were really interested in is the food that he can provide. In *John 6: Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."* So God still does miracles today but oftentimes in areas where there's no Bible or gospel presence.

Next there's discernment. Discernment is the ability to distinguish between spirits. And again back at the start of the church and even now it was critical, it was critical that God supplied the church with the gift of discernment. Before the Bible was established as it's still being compiled, it was necessary to distinguish what's of God here and what isn't, and so God gifted individuals with the ability to distinguish between the two. We see this played out in *1 Corinthians 14*. Paul's describing how

this works. He says: *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.* And it's when weighing what others say that the gift of discernment, this gift of discerning between spirits becomes critical. You got to understand, this is something I park on a little bit because it's extremely important today. Today the church is under enormous pressure to determine what is the truth. And so this gift is incredibly important and what matters first and foremost is a Berean spirit. You see when Paul and Silas brought the gospel to a group of believers who lived in an area called Berea, they didn't just take it at face value, they wanted to make sure that what they heard was scriptural. Let me just read to you *Acts 17*. It says: *The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* Now this is interesting because what I see here, what God is saying is he gives individuals a spirit of discernment, not necessarily a Ph.D. in Bible history. I've met people who have the gift of discernment who can respond to error by sensing that something's not quite right. They may not have their finger on exactly what it is, but they know in their spirit something's not right here. And that's when they, like the Bereans, go to the scripture. That's how the gift of discernment works.

It says next, it says: *And to another various kinds of tongues and interpretation of tongues.* As you can see when I sat down to do this, I said, Oh, God you really want me to do this? This is a lot of stuff here. And there's a lot of stuff that you can get in trouble with. I could easily spend weeks and weeks on this topic. So what I want to do here is just boil this down to the essence of what we see as our position here at Grace, because I have friends who are strong believers who speak in tongues. And I have friends who are strong believers who say without a doubt there is no tongues; it ceased. I have friends who believe that tongues is a known spoken language. I have friends who believe that tongues are an ecstatic utterance of angelic language. Well the one thing that I can say with absolute certainty is that we're not going to resolve this issue here and now. And I will say suffice it to say there's a danger in tongues and that it very easily can and does divide churches. So for that reason our present official position is that if tongues is part of your private personal relationship with Christ, so be it, God bless you. If it becomes a disruptive part of church worship, it's not something that we see as God glorifying. Even Paul addressed this very issue. He spoke about tongues spoken without an interpreter or an understanding of what was being said, and this is what he said in *1 Corinthians 14:9*. He said: *So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For*

*you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. So our goal for tongues and for any other spiritual gift is exactly what Paul is saying here, use it to excel at building up the church. That's what the gifts are for.*

There's a second list of spiritual gift that Paul gives out, it's found in Ephesians. He says: *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* You look at this list and you see most of these gifts that Paul's speaking about here, they harken back to the historical nature of the very first church. He's speaking of apostles. Well the apostles were simply the original immediate witnesses of Christ. They were the ones responsible for starting the church, they were the original gift of God to the church along with prophets and evangelists, shepherds and teachers. And as we look at the third list in Romans 12 we see

that these gifts are developed even further. The chapter starts out with an overarching theme that applies to virtually every single born again Christian. This is the way Paul is introducing this whole idea. He says this in *Romans 12:1*. He says: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* So what Paul is saying is we are all sacrifices. We happen to be living sacrifices offered up to God for his service. And instead of the word "spiritual" and "spiritual worship," some translations say instead "which is your reasonable" or "logical service." And what they mean there is given what you've been given, it's only reasonable, it's only logical that we give back our lives as living sacrifices. I mean in essence what it's saying is that worship involves not just lifting up your hands, it involves lifting up your whole life, your whole being, everything that you've been given to the service of God who saved you. This is how Paul goes on to express it in *Romans 12:4*. He says: *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in*

*generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

You might notice there's a lot more gifts listed here; there's seven to be exact. And along with the other two lists in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians we have all this, literally a plethora of gifts that God has given to his church. Some are repeated and some are elaborated in this next list of which each gift is. So I just want to work my way through this list. Paul says in verse 6: *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.* You mention prophesy and almost everybody thinks, oh, that's prophets, they tell the future, that's what they do. Prophecy doesn't mean as many things, the simple ability to tell the future. Prophecy is the ability to actually speak the truth, specifically God's truth. Folks are speaking prophetically when they say -- what they say accords with scripture and expounds on it as well. And prophesy also includes words of encouragement that are given to other church members. Listen to how Paul puts this in *1 Corinthians 14:3*. He says: *The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.*

One of the most outstanding examples that I can think of of someone speaking prophetically to encourage someone occurred at my daughter

Lydia's church when she was living in Jacksonville, Florida. She had been struggling a great deal with thoughts from the enemy that centered around how unworthy she was, how God couldn't possibly love her, and so she wrote this email to me to explain what had happened. She's also given me permission to share it. Let me just read to you what she said. She said: "It had been a hard week in Jacksonville. Depression, anxiety and loneliness living there. There was a song I listened to throughout the week that encouraged me a lot that week. The main line was: 'I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God.' Okay. So fast forward to church that Sunday. I couldn't pay attention to the sermon and I was in a particularly bad spot emotionally and spiritually. The worship team started to play this song. I immediately perked up and was like, ok, I love this song. I can listen and I can worship. As soon as I had decided this, Satan began to whisper to me, 'You're a child of God? So what. So are the hundreds of other people in this church. You know what? Make that millions of other people in the world singing this song. You aren't special. You may be a child but you are one of billions. How can you be that important to God.'" She goes on to say: "That's when I tried to battle it with it using verses like God has a name just for me that only He knows in heaven, et cetera. That didn't really work so I just sort of went back into my slump feeling particularly small and unnoticed by God. After the sermon a lady came up to me. She laid hands on



me and didn't speak for a long time. Finally she looked directly at me and said, 'Can I tell you something that I feel God wants me to tell you?' I said, 'Yes,' and she said, 'He wants you to know that he sees you. You are his beloved. You are his pearl and he sees you and he loves you so much.'"

Well Lydia thought right then and there, if I ever have a little girl I'm going to name her Pearl and that's why we have Pearl today. I should also point out that Lydia said this woman made a b-line directly to her from the very front of the church to the very back, and she was a complete stranger to Lydia. She was on a mission to tell her that she was loved by the Lord. This is what Lydia said. Said: "God was using the church to speak to me. I mean my thoughts were centered on how insignificant I was when this woman tells me God wants me to know I am his pearl? I still can't repeat this story without tearing up. I am thankful that this woman let the Holy Spirit move through her. She didn't know the thoughts I was having related to that song." See, prophesy like that, it's a gift that obviously builds up the church. Think of what Paul said, he said: *The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.*

Well next Paul says in verse 7: If service, in our serving. This is a big one. The Greek word for "servant" here is "diaconate."

One commentator accurately described the word as "rendering practical service." If this gift is not the most important one, it is certainly one that is probably given to more people in the church than any other gift. See the goal of the church is the same as the goal of individual members who make up the church and it's summed up nicely by Jesus who says in *Matthew 5:16*: *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* Folks, we know we live in a wicked world and we see it growing increasingly wicked and increasingly fallen, so we really have two choices: We can either just wring our hands and just stand idly by while the world goes to hell in a hand basket or we can choose at the very same moment of the very same increasing darkness to highlight the light that God has given to each of us. How? By doing just what Jesus did, by serving. In *Philippians 2* it says: *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death -- even death on a cross!*

Now, I don't know about you but last week we had that the reports,

Steve gave the reports about what was going on with the youth group. When Steve started detailing the service that our youth group renders not just to the church but to the community, I started wondering are they the only ones that are really understanding what this service gift is all about? I mean it seems to me that our young people are clearly leading the church in this area. I'll be first to admit that some of that is our fault as leaders. We have not managed the gift of service well. One thing that we've tried to emphasize for years is this concept of the vine and the trellis. Let me just explain that a little bit. See, the vine is the people themselves, the heart that they have for serving and the direction they would choose in which to serve. A trellis is the infrastructure that the administration designs and builds to help support that trellis. Let me just give you an example. My son Ben works for a large church in Baltimore. The name of the church is "Grace Fellowship," believe it or not. His job is to get food resources to as many of the local small churches and to help get that food distributed. And they recently partnered with Amazon through their partnership through Whole Foods, to help distribute foods that were ordered but never delivered either due to an order being canceled or changed or something. So they have this huge warehouse that Ben goes to. He might show up one day and find three hundred pounds of bacon that he's now got to distribute. This is cases and cases. This is stuff he's actually found: Cases

and cases Haagen-Dasz ice cream bars that he's got to figure out how to get to freezers all over Baltimore. The volunteers that are distributing the food, they're the vine and the freezers and the trucks and the routes and the routing itself, they both have to operate as trellises. And they to both operate well in order for people to serve well. I mean it's really not that much different from the organizing that the disciples had to do in order to properly wait tables in the first church. And so on a much smaller scale I have to confess we have not managed our vine and trellis as leaders as well as we should have. And you know, one of the mistakes that churches make is many churches, they try to build the trellis first and then they try to jam the volunteers onto that kind of trellis structure instead of doing it the other way around. The way the vine and the trellis is supposed to actually work is that opportunities to serve should arise via the Holy Spirit within the body itself because it's his church. Once they're affirmed, then the church administration should be basically building a trellis to support what the Holy Spirit is doing. And you know practically speaking, this is the way it works: Mary has an idea how she can help single moms with their clothing needs. She presents her ideas to the congregation and finds three or four people who are in agreement and excited about it, maybe she finds one, but they go forward with a plan. The administration now has a direction in which to build a trellis to support that. I mean it

may be something as simple as buying a storage locker for clothing to be sorted or kept or some other thing, I don't know what in particular. But the point is the gift of serving, of being that light, it needs to be nurtured, it needs to be developed, it's something that God has given to everyone in the church. He's given it to every church, he hasn't given it to every single person but the majority I would say have the gift of serving. And he wants to see his church actively involved and impacting this community in such a way that people see the light of Jesus Christ and give glory to our Father in heaven.

Another example that we have is this whole idea of nursing homes. You know, Vanessa ran into somebody who worked at the nursing home and the youth group made a mural for them. He said they were blown away by that. He said some were brought to tears just by the thought that somebody outside was thinking of them. They haven't had a visitor in two years because of COVID. So we're thinking down the line, you know, we're hitting this reset button. We want to get involved, we want to put that servant gift to use. We can't do it just yet, they haven't opened it up to people but we want to be ready and willing and waiting for when we can present the gospel to these folks. And what we're looking for is for people to prayerfully seek out for opportunities to put the gift of service to work.

Next Paul says *the one who teaches, in his teaching*. Well, this particular gift can be exercised only by those who have received it. James 3 says: *Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness*. I mean in the secular world you know that physicians and lawyers, they're judged with greater strictness because they require training and dedication to do their jobs. How much more so those who handle the word of God? I don't think we realize how blessed we are to have folks who love Jesus and are willing to put in the hard work of studying to prepare for the privilege of teaching God's word. We have to be aware of this warning in 2 Timothy which says: *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*. And it's amazing to me but every single teacher in our Sunday school has been willing to put in the time and the effort to exercise their gift in a God glorifying way. I've been personally blessed by Dave's adult class. That's the only one I get to sit in and it's been a huge blessing.

Next Paul says *the one who exhorts, in his exhortation*. Well the gift of exhortation is a combination of teaching and encouragement.

A great exhorter is a great coach. That's someone who inspires others to advance the kingdom. *1 Thessalonians 2* says: *For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*

Next Paul says: *The one who contributes, in generosity.* That's the gift of giving. Now, I've done a whole series on the ideas of stewardship, that's the idea that God gives us physical blessings not necessarily for us to keep but for us to bless others with, and this also applies to the gift of giving and everyone who comes into the kingdom understands that stewardship involves cheerfully giving one's resources back to the kingdom. And in this case someone with a gift of giving, this is somebody that is uniquely gifted especially by God in both taking in resources and then distributing to the kingdom. And I've heard Randy Alcorn, he describes the right attitude toward giving is that of someone who recognizes that God puts resources in his hands not necessarily for the purpose of him getting a bigger house, a bigger car or a fancier investment portfolio but so that he might have the ability to pass it on to someone else. Just like you'd be shocked and appalled if your UPS guy took something that was given to him to pass it along to someone else, if he took it as his own property, so the one who's been blessed with extraordinary wealth is going to have to ask

himself for what reason did God give me this? So if you've been extraordinarily blessed, chances are good that God is giving you these things and trusting you to distribute them. It was Randy Alcorn who spoke about the people upping their tithe as their income grew and he said instead of buying fancier homes and fancier cars and living a fancier life-style, these people simply kept their own unimpressive but pleasant life-styles and used their increase in funds to channel more funds into the kingdom. And he actually talked about folks who started out giving ten percent as a tithe who wound up becoming extraordinarily wealthy and wound up giving reverse tithes in which they were keeping ten percent and giving away ninety percent. Understand I'm not looking for this for our church, we're fine, God has blessed us abundant and we have no need of additional funds. What I'm talking about is the many needs of the many legitimate Christian organizations that exist out there right now. And anyone who's looking to expand their giving, they will find no shortage of outlets, trust me. The bottom line with all giving is that there is really no set number given anywhere in the New Testament about what is appropriate in terms of what you should give. God just expects you to be cheerful and generous in your giving, knowing that he doesn't need it but he's giving it to you as an opportunity for you to express your love, and one of the things that's unique about the gift of giving is the secrecy with which it must be undertaken. As Jesus put it in



*Matthew 6, he said: But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Well next Paul says: *The one who leads, with zeal.* I just want to read two scriptures from Hebrews 13 that remind us as leaders and as congregants what God is speaking of here. He says this, this is *Hebrews 13:7, he says: Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.* Praise God, you need folks that you are willing to imitate. Praise God that we have people who are godly and willing to be imitated. Verse 17 says: *Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.* One thing that we as elders are acutely aware of is that we are going to one day stand before God to give an account for you guys. That's heavy duty stuff. I truly believe that God has raised up each of our elders for this task and that God moves in their lives to make this task something that they really desire to undertake. And I've said it before, I believe the reason why we've been blessed these last 30 years is because there's no egos that need to be served on this board. We all recognize that we're all

fallen, we're all sinners, and we all recognize that it's only by the grace of God that we've been privileged to serve. *1 Timothy* says: *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*

And finally Paul says *the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness*. Acts of mercy is a reference to visiting the sick, it's visiting the infirm, and it partners with the gift of service perfectly in the idea of ministering at nursing homes, those kind of things. And what I find interesting about this gift is there's a second sub requirement for this gift. The sub requirement is cheerfulness. I mean the last thing you need when visiting those who are already downcast is someone who himself or herself is in that same frame of mind. I mean this is a gift that requires a cheerful disposition. *Proverbs 17* says: *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones*. That's basically the list.

You've been hit with enormous amounts of material this morning; I get it. We very briefly have looked at the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, and miracles, of discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues, of apostles, prophets, shepherds, teachers, and finally prophecies, service, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy, just that. God gives gifts differing. And he

gives those because he loves the church so much he was willing to die for it and he wants to equip it. As you can see many of these gifts are linked, they're related to each other but all of them have one goal and that is to build up the local body of Christ. This is where God's kingdom advances.

We were serious last week about hitting the reset button at Grace Fellowship and understanding that you have been gifted, every one of you have been gifted, and what your gift is is a huge part of the process of us hitting that button. So I'd ask that you prayerfully consider what gifts you've heard about this morning that may have piqued your interest. I know we've given a very brief treatment of it. But if something seems interesting to you, study it out a little bit, talk to us. I've got all kinds of resources that could further develop what thought you might have. And one thing I haven't pointed out is that the body itself will serve to verify the gifts that you think you have. So regardless of what gifts you think you have, ask God prayerfully to help you develop and use it, because he promises he has given each of us at least one, and he's returning soon and he's expecting a return on his investment. Again *Romans 12:4: For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace*

given to us, let us use them. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you that you haven't left us on our own, you haven't just said, "Here, figure it out." You've given us an enormous amount of gifts, each of us individually, collectively, some have one, some have many but they're all designed to build up the local body of Christ. I pray you would touch each and every one of us that they might hear and realize and understand the unique gift that they've been given and that you would give them not just the gift but the heart and the desire to use it and that you would give us as leaders the ability to effectively harness that gift and use it to advance your kingdom. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.