

Journey to Pentecost

GIVE TO THE LORD

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, June 1, 2014

For the last four weeks, we've been making it personal with the Holy Spirit, focusing on improving our understanding of, appreciation for, and attention to His presence and activity.

I spoke to you about the three dimensions of relationship with the Holy Spirit that each of us may enjoy—with us, in us, and upon us. As a result, we are growing deeper in love with the Holy Spirit.

As we continue our journey to Pentecost (next Sunday), God has asked me to speak with you about spiritual gifts.

I could say to you, Sunday church meetings are all about giving. You might react by thinking I am another money-grubbing preacher, but hear me out.

Giving money is important for just two reasons: (1) it funds ministry—whether evangelism or Sunday School or missions or church operations, and (2) whether you have it or you don't, money threatens to steal away your devotion to God.

So, in order to put money in its proper place in your life and accomplish something good in the lives of others, give some of your money to the Lord through His church.

But I'm talking about much more than money.

Money is the result of your time and attention (your work), but in your relationships, don't let money become a *substitute* for your time and attention.

Husbands and wives sometimes do that. Parents sometimes do that with their children. People sometimes do that—they substitute money for their time and attention.

Even with God! Someone will write a check to the church or for a project or mission, but won't pray or volunteer his time.

It takes money to run the church, but the church doesn't run on money. If everyone of us sent our full tithe to the church this week, but none of us showed up next Sunday, would we have a church?

Yet, the Bible ties giving and worship together.

They Go Together

*“Give to the Lord the glory he deserves!
Bring your offering and come into his presence.
Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor.”*
(1 Chronicles 16:29; NLT)

Each of us is to BRING something to church. *“Bring your offering and come into his presence.”*
Now, that means more than just money.

Our worship on Sunday is the culmination of our worship through the week. *Your* worship on Sunday is the culmination of *your* worship through the week.

How do you express your worship through the week? Do you pause to give thanks to God before each meal? Do you quiet yourself in the presence of the Lord to pray and read the Bible? Do you sing songs of worship? Do you attend Bible studies? Do you notice the little things around you and give God thanks? Do you go out of your way to help someone else?

If you intend to get in the game, you need to practice for it through the week.

How do you *prepare* for Sunday worship?

If you come to church one Sunday and leave pretty much the same, not getting much out of it... Before you criticize the musicians, or the ushers, or the preacher, ask yourself, “What did I put into this? What did I bring to the table?”

Don’t think you’re doing God a favor by just showing up. That would be like showing up for a potluck meal with a fork in your hand, but no plate of food to share.

Everyone is to bring something! Much of what you bring will just be shared with the Lord, because He is the object of our worship. But sometimes, God may give you something for someone else in the congregation—something to help them worship the Lord more deeply or freely.

I think you need to prepare to give, and I think you need to prepare to receive. Grace flows in both directions. Be prepared for both.

Have a *readiness to give*, and be on the lookout for an opportunity, especially one that matches your gifting.

Have an *openness to receive* whatever the Lord may have for you, and by whomever He chooses to use.

If we are in tune with the Holy Spirit every day of the week, all of our spiritual senses will be at their peak when we come together on Sundays. Make this your aim.

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”

(1 Corinthians 14:26; NIV)

If your intention is to strengthen the church, share your gift.

Are you a musician? Bring your instrument and play it for the Lord.

Do you love poetry? Share a poem and tell us why it moves you.

Are you a comedian? Make God’s people laugh.

Are you a singer? Sing a song for Jesus.

Do you see someone new? Greet them warmly.

Has God illuminated His Word for you? Read it and tell the people what He said to you.

Do you have a spiritual burden? Lead us in a prayer.

Do you see someone hurting? Encourage them.

Did you get to speak with someone about Jesus’ love? Tell us how it happened.

Did God do something special for you? Tell us what He did.

Variety is the Spice

Look at the variety of spiritual gifts!

“Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing

by the one Spirit, to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.”

(1 Corinthians 12:4-11; NET)

And that’s not all!

“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; NIV)

Did you even know that serving and encouraging and showing mercy are gifts from God?

Each one of us has been gifted for the benefit of others.

“A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.”

(1 Corinthians 12:7; NLT)

God is an equal-opportunity employer. He wants to work in and minister through *everyone’s* life.

Receiving and giving. Like breathing in and breathing out. Both are necessary and provide a natural balance.

The Heart of Service

Of course, most of us know that gifts—even spiritual gifts—can be abused, or simply used ineffectively.

God wants you to know how to use the gifts He has given you to their greatest effect. Here’s the secret (which is *not* a secret).

Perhaps you are familiar with 1 Corinthians 12, in which Paul describes the source and aim of the gifts of the Spirit.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 14, he offers advice concerning the method and application of spiritual gifts.

Sandwiched in between is 1 Corinthians 13, which we commonly think of as the Love Chapter. Indeed, this is the *heart* of the Spirit's gifts.

"If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing."
(1 Corinthians 13:1-3; NLT)

Love is the heart of gifted service.

Spiritual gifts are to be motivated by love, governed by love, and demonstrate love. If it isn't aroused by love, led by love, and expressed in love, please don't bring it to church.

If love is your aim, you're halfway there. The other half is to make sure that you offer your gift in a loving manner.

Some people intend to be loving, but have never given a thought as to *how* that can be communicated effectively—tactfully, appropriately.

The moment you think of something to share, or remember it, is not necessarily the appropriate moment to give it. Think it through. Better yet, pray about it—if God has given you the what, ask Him also for the how and the when or the where.

When you arrive for worship next Sunday, what will *you* bring?

Private moments to share with someone else can be found if you arrive early or stay late.

If it's something for the whole group, ask the pastor to coordinate time for you to share. The more advanced notice you give him, the easier it will be to accommodate you.

Say this aloud with me:

"A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other."

(1 Corinthians 12:7; NLT)