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Reigniting Your Godly Gift

Memories come wrapped in various packages. Some come like the rouge fishing line on my Zebco spinning reel! Forget to hold the bail and suddenly the line is all knotted. Don't waste the day on an impossible task. Cut the knots quickly (forgive) and get on with fishing! Other memories come wrapped up like a birthday gift bringing a blessing. Paul shares one of the latter kinds with Timothy: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim.1:6). The NIV renders it "fan into flames" from the Greek word,

anazopureo (again liven your fire). Paul knew this one particular memory had the potential of "reigniting" Timothy's "willer" and "wanter" for the best things of God.

Timothy's "gift of God" had come through Paul's hands. What was this gift? Let's eliminate at least one thing it is not. Timothy was already a Christian when he met Paul, so we know it was not his baptism. Let's also avoid the temptation of trying to identify the timing, or even the "gift," since the Holy Text leaves that unanswered. If Paul had been specific, we might have felt constrained to speak only about the specific gift given to Timothy. Having left the subject matter unspoken, it opens the door for us to think more openly, broadly of the scope of its meaning for even us.

NATURAL VS SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

The bible assures Christians that we all have some spiritual gifts. Is there a difference between natural abilities and spiritual gifts? Very likely since even the unredeemed are born with natural gifts, but only those of the church receive these spiritual gifts (Eph 4:11ff; 1 Cor 12:4ff; 14:12ff).

ARE THESE GIFTS MIRACULOUS?

Since we are dealing in a period of time where God was using the miraculous to establish his church and his Word we may assume, at least in some part, what Paul, an Apostle, bestowed upon Timothy was a miraculous gift (Acts 8:18; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; 1 Pet. 4:11). On a more modern side, we still believe God is the giver of spiritual gifts to his Church. How is he doing that? We must conclude from our human perspective that it is something "other worldly" and that whether through God's natural Spiritual Laws or maybe in God's own omnipotent and omniscient ways, that we, too, are being gifted with spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11).

THE BIBLE ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In the context of spiritual gifts in Romans 12 the Apostle Paul says that though we are many members that we co-exist with God and Christ in one body. The context in Romans 12 appears to favor the miraculous. However, these same gifts (prophecy, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy) are also visibly alive in



the Lord's Church today. Prophecy, while it could be foretelling, is today's forthtelling of God's word. Ministry, teaching, exhortation and all the others seem to find similar abilities to fit on either side of the equation, whether miraculously or in modern spiritual gifts.

The list in 1 Corinthians 12 even lends itself to the miraculous age with the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues (languages) and interpretation of tongues (languages). Later in the chapter, Paul explains how God has set some in the church to be apostles, prophets, and teachers, along with the gifts of healings, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues.

We understand from 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 and Ephesians 4:7-13 that the miraculous gifts did eventually end. When did they end you might ask? The most obvious is that if the gifts were given through the "laying on the hands of the Apostles" (Acts 8:18) that when the last Apostle died so did the ability to pass along these miraculous gifts. However, the biblical texts cited seem to show that God, the "gift giver," continues to fill his earthly body, the church, with the gifts necessary for the work of the church.

HOW DO I FIND MY GIFT FROM GOD?

First, a spiritual gift from God will not be something that you have to create or fake. Likely, the easiest way to discover your gifts from God begins with asking God to help reveal them to you. God most often will reveal your gift(s) simply as you experience daily life. Let's say your gift is encouraging. Being an encourager will come easier, almost naturally, but not perfectly at first. Maybe your gift is giving --- so your time, money and even giving of yourself seems no great chore to share with others. The gift of teaching is a much-needed gift for the church, but like all the spiritual gifts, it will require some developing. The key to using all our gifts may relate to Paul's encouragement for Timothy to "stir up" his gift from God into a flame.

HOW DO YOU STIR THE GIFT FROM GOD?

Let me use an illustration --- not from the fire pit -- but from the kitchen. Occasionally, Sandy allows me to help her. She puts all the ingredients in a

bowl or skillet. My task is to "stir." Each of the ingredients by itself may not be very tasty (eggs, flour, salt), but as they are stirred together and then cooked a flavorful dish emerges. The same is true as God puts in our bowl (body & life) all the ingredients for his glory. Stirring (or fanning the fire) means that God is giving us some responsibility in this process. So how do we go about this spiritual "stirring"?

Let me suggest the most obvious:

1) We stir when we read the Word of God and meditate on it (2 Tim. 3:15-16). God's word is alive and active (Heb. 4:12). Like yeast to bread, his Word will take our tiny lump and make it grow into just what God has planned.

2) We stir when we fast and pray (Acts 13:2). Prayer connects our mind and heart to the mind of God. The Holy Spirit can do more with us connected, than disconnected. Nothing is more appealing or comfortable, even in a difficult situation, than when God's plans become visible.

3) We stir when we obey (2 Tim. 2:3,15, 20-22). God gives gifts to be used, not stored for later. We'll learn more, develop faster and feel the connection to God's plan when we step out of the shallow waters and into the depth of his service. It requires faith in God and his promises (Mark 5:36). Remember, God will not send us to do a task that he has not first prepared and equipped us to do (Heb. 13:21; Eph. 2:10)

4) We stir when we do it again. G.K. Chesterton wrote, "God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon." "It is not monotony," declares Chesterton, "but rather God's 'theatrical encore.'" This is one of the beauties of God's gifts. Gifts are given to be used, not just once, but over and over again. Most find the more time they devote to improving a recipe that each adjustment either makes the dish more delectable or a reminder that there is no need to fix "what's not broken." We don't stop after teaching one person, but learn to make adjustments from what we have learned and experienced to teach another and another.

Don't be timid. When the fire turns to burning embers --- and they will from time to time --- stir the

gift God has given you back into a flame! God has gifted you for his purposes and glory!

Bill Adcox
Oklahoma City, OK

Bill & Sandy Adcox just completed their 40th year of full-time work with the 50th Street Church of Christ in Oklahoma City. They have five amazing children (2 who married into our family) and four of the best looking and most adorable grandsons!

Faith of Our Fathers and Mothers

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” 2 Tim. 1:1-5

A drill sergeant was frustrated in his efforts to make a soldier out of a certain recruit. The trainee lagged behind on marches, used any excuse to go on sick call, grumbled constantly about the food, and never made his cot up properly. But one day, a noticeable change took place in the young man's attitude. When asked to what he attributed the soldier's change in attitude, the drill sergeant explained, “Threats and punishment didn't work, so I had to resort to the ultimate weapon: I called his mother!”

It was Lord Shaftesbury who said, “Give me a generation of Christian mothers and I will undertake to change the whole face of society in twelve months.”

Mothers write on the hearts of their children what the rough hand of the world cannot erase. For example, John Quincy Adams said, “All that I am my mother made me.” Abraham Lincoln said, “All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.” Dwight Moody said, “All that I have ever accomplished in life, I owe to my mother.” As another old saying goes: “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the

world.”

Although Timothy's father was a Greek, he had a solid background in the faith through his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. This reminds us of how strong the influence of parents and grandparents can be in the lives of children. It also illustrates that a mother who is faithful can compensate for a father who is not a believer.

The faith passed on to Timothy was rooted in Jewish teachings and traditions. The only portion of the Bible then in existence was the Old Testament. However, we must understand that when Jesus came, he did not bring in a new God or a new religion. Jesus came to fulfill all the prophecies and types from the Old Testament. The OT faith culminated in the NT faith. The Messiah spoken of by Moses and the prophets appeared in the person of Christ. There is no contradiction in preaching Moses and preaching Jesus. Moses was a type of Christ, and the nation of Israel is a type of Spiritual Israel, the church.

Faithful Jewish parents raised Paul, and he was faithful to his Jewish roots. However, God specifically called Paul to be an apostle and to preach the promise of life which is found in Christ. We read about his calling in the Book of Acts:

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias

coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.’ Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake’” (Acts 9:10-16).

There were many who doubted Paul and cast dispersions on his apostleship. Paul’s answer to his critics was:

“Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:8-11).

When pressed by his detractors, Paul was forced to defend his apostleship. He said it was foolish to boast about these things, but he felt a need to respond:

“I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!” (2 Cor. 12:11-13).

The relationship between Timothy and Paul was so close that Paul referred to Timothy as his “son in

the faith” (2 Tim. 1:2). While Timothy was grounded in his faith in God by his grandmother and mother, his relationship with Paul led him to understand the truth regarding Jesus Christ and the gospel. Paul was an example to Timothy and served as his mentor.

One of the examples that Paul modeled for Timothy was thankfulness. Paul thanked God (2 Tim. 1:3) and served God with a pure conscience. What Paul had done earlier in persecuting the church he had done in ignorance. He mentions his forefathers again in this context, and this further emphasizes the natural progression from the faith of the O. T. in a Messiah who was coming to the faith of the N. T. in the Messiah who had come (2 Tim. 1:12-17).

Even in prison, deserted and facing death, Paul was thinking of things for which to be thankful. This would have had an impact on Timothy as well as others. During his first imprisonment Paul wrote:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:4-9).

Paul emphasized that his thankfulness led him to pray. When he says that he prayed “night and day,” it does not indicate that is all Paul did all day and all night long, but it does indicate that Paul

prayed regularly every day. Here is another powerful example for his son Timothy. Even when restricted in prison Paul could still pray. When we can't do anything else we can still pray.

Paul speaks openly about his desire to see Timothy (2 Tim. 1:4). They had labored for several years together. He wanted to see Timothy once more to refresh himself and to encourage Timothy. So often our frequent trips to various places so that we can encourage and instruct and build up the church, builds strong relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ. We find that we want to return; we want to see them again because it refreshes us.

The faith was passed on to the third generation in Timothy. From his grandmother, Lois, to his mother, Eunice, and then on to Timothy. Each generation must make the faith its own. Timothy had a solid upbringing, but his faith had to become his own.

Faith is something we must take seriously because of the eternal consequences...

Faith is something we must take seriously because of the eternal consequences of our choices. It isn't a new religion that we must form, just like it wasn't something new for Timothy. The O.T. faith culminated in the N. T. faith in Jesus. It wasn't a new God; it was the same God whose purpose had been expressed throughout the ages. We can trace the hand of God from Adam through Seth and Noah and on to Abraham and Moses.

The coming of Jesus was the fulfillment of OT truth concerning the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called

least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-20). There is no contradiction in preaching Moses and preaching Jesus because Moses was a type of Christ.

Paul writes to the Romans: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:1-4).

Timothy's grandmother and mother passed along the faith as they had been taught and understood it. New insights into OT prophecies were revealed through the preaching of the Apostles. The Apostle Paul became a great influence on Timothy and guided him into the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, this was possible because of the foundation laid by Lois and Eunice. The faith of our mothers and fathers is foundational, and we are called to build upon that foundation.

Four scholars were arguing over Bible translations. One said he preferred the King James Version because of its beauty and eloquent old English. Another said he preferred the American Standard Bible for its literalism, the way it moves the reader from passage to passage with confident feelings of accuracy from the original text. A third man preferred Moffatt because of its quaint, penetrating use of words, the turn of a phrase that captures the attention of the reader.

After giving the issue further thought, the fourth scholar admitted, "I have personally preferred my mother's translation." When the other scholars

chuckled, he responded, “Yes, she translated it. She translated each page of the Bible into life. It is the most convincing translation I ever saw.” (1 Tim. 2:15)

Those who have been blessed with a mother and

father who have lived the faith before them are doubly blessed. We thank God for the faith of our mothers and fathers.

L Scott Gage — Fayetteville, AR

Hidden Treasure

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Matt. 13:44-46

Did you know that you have hidden treasure at your house? In fact, you may be holding it in your hand, if you have a bible application on your phone. That’s right! The hidden treasure is the word of God. Most of us may have the bible in several different translations. How often do we seek the treasure hidden there?

In Acts chapter eight, we read about a treasurer from Ethiopia who had been to Jerusalem to worship. He was a very important man in the kingdom of Ethiopia under Candace the queen. This man must have been devout and dedicated because he had traveled about fifteen hundred miles one way to worship. Some of us today will not travel two miles to worship. This Ethiopian can teach us some valuable lessons about the importance of worship.

As he returned home in his chariot, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. He had some questions about what he was reading and whether the prophet Isaiah was speaking about himself or some other man. He was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.”

As he meditated about who Isaiah was speaking, suddenly he heard a voice asking him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” When we are sincere in our treasure hunting, God will provide the

answers that we seek. In this case, Philip had been instructed by the Holy Spirit to approach the chariot and speak with this Ethiopian who was diligently reading God’s word and trying to understand it. How diligent are we in digging into the treasures of God’s word? This Ethiopian must have been sincere in his desire to understand God’s word, and he was diligent to the point of reading as he traveled along.

Philip was invited to join the Ethiopian in the chariot, and the Ethiopian asked him the question that had been burning in his mind, “Of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man” (Acts 8:34)? And then we read that Philip began at that same scripture and preached Jesus to him.

The Ethiopian came to understand that Isaiah was speaking about Jesus when he wrote these things many centuries before. This was some of the hidden treasure that was uncovered by the Ethiopian that day. He was so excited and convinced of the truth about Jesus Christ, that when they came to a body of water the Ethiopian exclaimed, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized” (Acts 8:36)? There was no longer any hindrance in the way. The barrier of misunderstanding had been taken out of the way. The truth about Jesus had been preached by Philip and believed by this dedicated and sincere seeker of God’s word. They commanded the chariot to stop; they both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. This Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing in the Lord. He was a treasurer who found the hidden treasure in God’s word! Dear friend, we encourage you to open God’s word and discover the eternal treasures that are there.

L Scott Gage
Fayetteville, AR
Vitamin E - Dec. 1, 2023



Volume 43 - Number 1 - Jan/Feb 2024

BC is published every other month. Send all inquiries, address changes and subscriptions to the editor: L Scott Gage, PO Box 3425, Fayetteville, AR 72702-3425 Voice 479-521-6809

Email: Lsgage129@cs.com

www.basicchristianity.net