

A Thousand Unseen Gifts

Servival Kit, Part 4

1 Peter 4:11

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Being a Christian means being a part of something much bigger than yourself. It requires being a part of the Body of Christ, glorifying God and honoring Him with the gifts you have been given. When you become a Christian and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you are gifted in many ways to serve your Creator and bring Him praise. When Peter talks about what is necessary for the life of a Christian to please God, He talks about the necessity of using your spiritual gifts to build up the church. In 1 Peter 4:11 he labels speaking and serving gifts and spurs on his audience to be active in edifying the Body.

Discussion Points:

It is common for us to hear about spiritual gifts and to be prompted to search out what our spiritual gifts are so that we can serve others.

- What are some of the benefits of being encouraged to identify your spiritual gifts?
- What are some of the negative aspects of being pushed to know your spiritual gifts?
- Can you serve in an area where you are not especially gifted?
- How should you deal with ministries within the church that have great need, yet you are not gifted in that area?
- How can you help encourage others when you recognize how they are gifted?

Discussion Guide cont.

Sometimes there can be an overemphasis on seeking out your spiritual gifting. All believers are meant to build up the church in multiple ways, some of which do not require gifting by the Holy Spirit.

- How would you answer a person who said they could not help set up or clean up after an event because it was not their gifting?
- How would you keep people from overvaluing certain gifts and thinking they are more important than others?
- How would you describe the metaphor of the church being the Body of Christ to encourage people about their individual importance?

Peter speaks about gifts in a much more broad sense than Paul does.

- What are the categories of gifts that require proper stewardship according to Peter in 1 Peter 4:11?
- What are some of the spiritual gifts that Paul labels?
- How would you define a spiritual gift based on the Biblical text?

Most of the work to be done by the church can seem mundane. Most of the work happens behind the scenes and may go unnoticed.

- How can you keep a proper perspective on the importance of every Christian and every gifting?
- How can you be sure to fight pride in seeking more visible areas of service?
- In what ways did Jesus give us an example of humility in service?
- How can you keep serving even when it gets difficult or discouraging?
- How can you help others press on when they are discouraged?

Gospel Connection:

The Body of Christ has many parts to form the whole. Christians are all gifted by the Holy Spirit to do the work of the church, but we are all gifted in different ways. We are unique and have been tasked to serve in different ways. We are all meant to do our part in following the head, Jesus Christ. None of us are special. None of us were chosen by God because of anything we could bring to the table, but when He redeemed us, he made us useful. Jesus came to die on the cross so that we could have fellowship with God. We were separated from God and utterly hopeless. We were enslaved to be enemies of God before Jesus rescued us from our despair and God adopted us as sons. From that point on, we have a new directive in life. We have been given grace upon grace and we have been called to be good stewards of what God has given us. Now through the Holy Spirit we are able to honor God with what we do and what we say, so let us serve and glorify Him with all our being.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Have you believed in Jesus as your Savior? If so, are you an active member of the Body of Christ? How are you benefitting the Body? How are you serving?
- Pray:** Ask God to show you areas of need within the church. Ask Him to lead you where He wants you to go. Pray that He will direct you to an area to serve and that He will supply you with the strength to honor Him in everything in that service.
- Do:** Inquire about areas of need in the church. Look for opportunities where you can serve. Encourage others and build up the Church to be more like Christ and to make His glory known throughout your community.

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Servival Kit, Part 4

1 Peter 4:11

After Apollo 11's incredible feat of placing three men on the moon in July of 1969, astronaut Michael Collins said, "All this was possible only through the blood, sweat, and tears of thousands of people. All you see and hear about are three of us, but behind the scenes are thousands of others."

Author Catherine Thimmesh wrote that thousands of people indeed served to make it happen—people you'd never think about, like spacesuit seamstresses, radio telescope operators and parachute designers; but everyone's abilities and contributions made it possible to get men to the moon, get them home, and let the rest of the world watch it happen.

At Kennedy Space Center, during this historic event, there were 17,000 engineers, mechanics, soldiers and contractors involved.

Then there were the "Two Bobs" —two guys named Bob who monitored how little fuel was left in the lunar module during its descent to the surface.

The Team also included a 24-year-old computer whiz kid named Jack who helped solve computer glitches during the *Eagle's* landing.

The computer code that ran all the systems was developed by a team of software engineers at MIT.

At least 500 different people contributed to the design and workmanship of the astronauts' space suits, including one seamstress who commented, "We didn't worry too much about the space suits until the astronauts on the moon started jumping up and down . . . it made us all twitch."

If you can imagine it, 400,000 people were involved in that space project.

When Neil Armstrong stepped out of that lunar module onto the surface of the moon and said, "One small step for man . . . one giant leap for mankind", what no one knew was the fact that before that one small step could take place, 400,000 people had been involved—400,000 contributions.¹

Thousands of unseen gifts and talents and sacrifices made it possible for mankind to take that one giant leap forward.

When I read that recently, I couldn't help but think of the church. The church advances not because of a few gifted people in the spotlight, but

because of thousands of unnoticed gifted people at work.

In fact, when you think about it, in this local church there must be a thousand unseen gifts and thousands of steps taken in quiet, faithful service, for the church to ever leap forward.

The Apostle Peter is writing to the First Century Church – and he wants her to advance and for every believer to play a role in spite of:

- an adversarial culture;
- growing persecution;
- lacking so many advantages that we today take for granted.

And the Spirit of God knows – and communicates through the Apostle Peter – that if the church is ever going to take some giant step forward, there will have to be a thousand steps taken behind the scenes.

Turn back there to *1 Peter and chapter 4*. If you have just joined us in our study, we've spent an entire session on the biblical description of the next event on the prophetic calendar – the rapture of the church – and the meaning of Peter's opening statement in *verse 7 of chapter 4*, that *the end is near*. We are to expect, at any time, the end of human history as we know it in this dispensation of the church.

But instead of telling us to prep for the end by preparing to hide, Peter commands us to live out in the open.

Instead of thinking only about ourselves and our families, Peter reminds us that this is the time to think about the world around us and the gospel and our church family.

Thus far in our study, Peter has challenged us as the end of all things draws near, to remain calm and stay focused (v. 7); to keep praying and continue loving one another (v. 8) and to be available to others (v. 9).

Next, Peter challenged us to start serving one another as well. And he introduced to us the subject of spiritual gifts.

Notice *verse 10* again; *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

In other words, when God was crafting you in the womb – as we studied last Lord’s Day – God wove and embroidered you in your mother’s womb in such a way that you’d be able to do the things you do, love the things you love, notice the things you notice, enjoy the things you enjoy and contribute the things you contribute.

From the Bible’s perspective, God also enabled you with something that you would begin developing and exercising after your new birth – your spiritual birth by means of faith in Jesus Christ – Peter calls it a special gift.

We uncovered some of the implications of Peter’s inspired words in verse 10:

- **First, you didn’t get overlooked in God’s distribution of gifts.** Peter takes it for granted that every believer who is reading this letter understands they’ve been given an enablement for spiritual service.
- **Secondly, you didn’t choose what you’d be good at.** God did that. He’s responsible for your abilities, disabilities and inabilities.
- **And thirdly, you don’t get to keep your gifts to yourself.** Peter writes here to employ them; put them into service for the sake of the Body of Christ.

It may be about now that you are beginning to wonder what these gifts look like.

And what Peter does next – and for our study today – is that he gives us two illustrations in the form of two broad categories – notice *verse 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 (1 Peter 4:11a).

So Peter gives us two categories of spiritual gifts without any of the details provided by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the church. Peter simply whittles it all down to the speaking gifts and the serving gifts.

Before we dive into the details, keep in mind that gifts don’t let any of us off the hook.

In other words, God expects all believers to participate in exercising most of the gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament.

What I mean by that is that most of the gifts specifically mentioned in the New Testament are also responsibilities for every believer.

For instance, Paul lists evangelism as a gift, but the New Testament tells every believer to be prepared to give a reason for the faith they have. (*1 Peter 3:15*) We can’t say, “Well, I’m just not that gifted or comfortable with being a witness for Christ.” You might not be comfortable with it, but you’ll be disobedient if you don’t do it.

Paul lists giving and discerning as gifts, but then again, he commands us all to test everything and discern what is truly good (*1 Thessalonians 5:21*) as well as to give financial contributions to the Lord’s work (*2 Corinthians 8:7*).

In other words, no one should dodge the normal responsibilities of a church family by claiming they don’t have that gift.

On a very practical level, no one can get a free pass from mundane tasks like nursery duty or setting up chairs by claiming, “Hey, that isn’t my gift.”ⁱⁱ

So if these gifts are also responsibilities for every believer, how are we to understand Peter’s clear reference that we individually have received from God some kind of special gift – a speaking or serving gift for the benefit of one another?

Let me put it this way: a Spiritual gift is a heightened capacity endowed by God’s Spirit for something other believers can do to a lesser degree.

Think about this in terms of the gift of teaching. We’re all told that a mark of maturity for every believer is that we become teachers

(*Hebrews 5:12*). In fact, the writer of Hebrews asked, “Aren’t you all teaching by now?”

Every believer is a teacher and the writer of Hebrews isn’t thinking of formal teaching opportunities in the church. He is thinking of every believer taking those teaching opportunities that might be to one person, or to your children, or to a co-worker who asks you a question about God or the Bible and you deliver to them a biblical answer. And guess what – *you just became a Bible teacher!*

Every believer is to mature and learn to communicate Biblical truth to their world around them.

But *a heightened capacity* – what I’m defining here as Peter’s designation of *a special gift* – is an ability where the Holy Spirit takes the normal responsibility for every believer and excels it, expands it, and heightens it in the lives of a few believers.

That gift of teaching creates room for a regular teaching role reserved for fewer believers in the local church. They become identified as endowed, gifted teachers, and their commitment to teach becomes a regular, fruitful service to the Body of Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

It might be as a Sunday school teacher, a Bible study teacher for men or women or young people, a pastor/teacher, a missionary, a small-group leader, a counselor or a discipler of new believers. In other words, the gifted teacher is devoted to exercising their gift in some kind of regular role for the sake of the Body.

And it becomes regular simply because you just have to do it – you desire to exercise it – you think about ways to put it into practice – you’re not happy unless you can find ways to share it with the Body of Christ!

One author defines spiritual gifts this way: A gift is a capacity and desire for ministry, given by God for regular use, to bear fruit in the church.^{iv}

Now with that as a more specific backdrop, in Peter’s mind, and for our study today, every one of us is going to fit into one of these two general categories. Speaking gifts or serving gifts.

So in case you check out and think you’ve been left out of the parade, listen, *there is no such thing as a Christian who cannot contribute to the body of Christ in some way.*

You might be that astronaut jumping around up there on the moon, but more than likely you’re the seamstress who made his suit, or the engineer, or the guy who glued the decals on the module, or the one who packaged the food they would eat in space – or even invented that powdered drink they took to the moon – I think it was called Tang. Any of you remember that? They should have left that on the moon!

You might not be one of the three astronauts watched by the world walking on the moon, but you might be one of the 400,000 people who made it possible.

Now let’s take a closer look at Peter’s categories of spiritual gifts.

Verse 11: Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God.

The word Peter uses for *speaks* is a verb which is used rather generally in the New Testament for the use of speech – or communicating truth. It can be used for teaching, exhorting, evangelizing, or speaking a word of testimony.^v

Some New Testament scholars believe it can even refer to singing – certainly speaking words of encouragement through counseling one-on-one or in community gatherings.^{vi}

But this speaking isn’t just talking about the weather or sharing your opinion about life and politics. It is viewed here by Peter as those opportunities where you are speaking on behalf of God regarding the word of God.

In fact, Peter adds here the caution that whenever you speak like that, you are ***delivering the utterances of God*** – in other words, the message you are delivering is His message, not yours.^{vii}

If you’re in a position or at an event or some setting where you are speaking or sharing something from God’s word, this phrase doesn’t mean that whatever comes out of your mouth is true just because you say it is or just because it’s coming from behind a pulpit or lectern.

What Peter is cautioning the speaker here to remember is to be careful and conscious that you're not creating the content – you're not making it up; you're not sharing your opinion. You had better be truly delivering the truth of God's word!

Let me give you a fact for every speaker of God's word – here it is – you are absolutely unoriginal. You are not an improviser, you are a messenger.^{viii}

You need to understand the warning, not just for speaking gifts and serving gifts but every gift: there is a potential dark side to every gift in the Body of Christ.^{ix}

It's possible for:

- A skillful speaker to use his or her gift to gather a following;
- Someone with the gift of teaching to lead people astray after his own opinion;
- Someone with the gift of mercy to stroke their own ego with the thought that they are the only one who cares;
- Someone with the gift of giving to do it for recognition;
- Someone with the gift of administration to think they're indispensable to the organization;
- Someone with the gift of evangelism to want to see decisions but not care about making disciples.

Every special gift has the potential for our sinful hearts to distort God's purposes for our own advantages.

And Peter especially cautions the public speaker – who gets a lot of attention where the danger is even greater – that it isn't about them. In fact, when you deliver the truth, you didn't come up with it, you didn't originate it, you're just the messenger boy.

So when you speak, make sure that God wouldn't mind signing His name to what you said, since you are representing Him in public.

It is the word of God which will not return empty; it is the word of God that will accomplish what God desires. (*Isaiah 55:11*)

Now Peter moves to the serving gifts. Notice next: *Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies. (1 Peter 4:11b)*

The word Peter uses is transliterated into noun form to give us the word for *deacon*. Peter is not referring here to just that one office, but to a plethora of ministry services.

Diakonos is the typical word for a household servant in the first century – men and women who were given the responsibilities to administrate a household.^x

This would include every possible menial task – most of it behind the scenes. But in the household and in the church, *you don't have to be seen in order to be significant.*

You don't have to be visible to be vital in the Body of Christ. Yes, speaking gifts proclaim Christ; But service gifts portray Christ to others.

Yes, speaking gifts explain truth; But service gifts apply truth.

Yes, speaking gifts tend to get the attention while the serving gifts often go unnoticed.

But just keep in mind that speaking gifts are the mouthpiece, but serving gifts are the muscle. And since a body has more muscles than mouths, not surprisingly, the predominant gifting of the Spirit to the church happens to be this category of serving gifts.

In fact, if you trace this word for service through the New Testament, it appears more than 100 times – and you discover it is used in a multitude of scenarios:

- The serving of deacons is illustrated in *Acts 6* (and by the way, this Lord's Day there is a card for nominations to the office of Deacon. Our deacons are godly men who serve in their biblical office and are so critical to the ministry of this church. Frankly, we need 70 deacons instead of 50 – and I met with them recently and they are praying for men to be willing to serve.
- The word here for service is also used for anyone – not just deacons – in

helping other Christians in a variety of ministries. (*Hebrews 6:10*)

- It's used for the giving of relief funds to a needy church. (*Acts 11:29*)
- It's used for performing menial physical tasks. (*Philemon 13*)
- It's used for sharing the gospel. (2 *Corinthians 8:19*)
- And it's used for waiting on tables – literally supervising meals. (*Luke 10:40*)

And on and on and on – and most of this service takes place behind the scenes.

Part of our problem is the fact that we view gifts as if some were more important than others, like there is a ladder to climb in the church.

So maybe the church ought to promote people to more public gifts – you know from parking cars, if you do that successfully and no one crashes out there, then you ought to get promoted to ushering indoors and if you don't drop the offering plate and you don't push people around, then you ought to get promoted to Sunday school teacher, and then to deacon, and then to elder.

That kind of thinking ignores the instruction of God's word regarding spiritual gifts. There is no ladder to climb. *There are no promotions in the church – there are only placements in the church by the Holy Spirit.*

He (the Holy Spirit) master-plans the church. He endows us to serve or to speak in a way that enables His church to move forward. It isn't about you or me. It's about us, taking a thousand steps so that the church can take one giant leap forward.

I came across this news article recently where a renowned German orchestra was rife with division. Evidently the violinists were suing for a pay raise, claiming they played many more notes per concert than their colleagues did. The 16 violinists declared how much more important this made them to the orchestra – obviously more important, they said, than their less busy colleagues who played the flute and the oboe.

Their lawsuit didn't work out, but you can only imagine the damage. This is going to be one messed up orchestra.

Beloved, the church is like an orchestra in that every person plays their part – long or short, loud or soft.

Even with the occasional cymbal player. I don't know about you, but I have never heard a cymbal solo. That's a deep thought! It's early, but I have never heard a cymbal solo. Yet when it's played at just the right time – wow!

In an orchestra and in the church, everyone plays a role, and there is absolutely no room for people who keep track of how many notes they played.

No wonder, notice again in the text – ***Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies (1 Peter 4:11b).***

Notice how Peter encourages the service-gifted people to remember that they are serving ***by means of the power that God supplies.***

Serving can be exhausting, but we not only rely on God for the message if we're speaking, we rely upon God for the power if we're serving.

I love this word here translated *supplies* – ***The strength which God supplies.*** In the first century this word, *choregei*, was used for someone who paid the expenses of a choir or for actors in a drama.^{xi} From *choregei* we get our word choreography.

Here's the implication: God is doing all the choreography and all the arranging of all the parts and He's supplying all the strength you need as you play your Divinely-choreographed role.

Serving others can be wearying because serving means working.

Are you willing? Are you willing to lend your muscle or maybe your mouth? Are you willing to pray and experiment and pick your spot?

In the lobby today are tables representing our major ministry departments; they are staffed by people who really want to talk to you. We have so many places for gifted people to serve, and

since all of us have been gifted by the Holy Spirit, there is a place for every one of us to serve.

But why bother? I'm not finished yet! Why would you ever want to add something to your already busy life? Why bother with the church in serving or speaking? Why should you get involved?

Peter anticipates that question and he quickly moves beyond the gifts and gives us the goal.

Notice the rest of *verse 11* – ***So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11c)***

How great is that?! What a goal! What a reason for living and serving and speaking!

One author wrote it this way: there are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born and the moment you realize why.

Here it is: to bring God glory! To so live through the mundane, the tiresome, the

repetitive, the difficult, the sacrificial, and the service in order to use what God gave you to bring Him honor and glory.

Here's why: so that we bring to one another needed ministry and we bring to Christ greater glory. And when we do that, His reputation and His church take another giant leap forward.

Because of a thousand steps and a thousand contributions and a thousand unseen gifts given on His behalf and for His everlasting glory.

So what do you say about that? What do you say about that kind of potential in our lives and in our church? There's only one thing you can say – Peter ends with it here – ***Amen***.

Amen. Which means, so be it! It's the truth; or in our vernacular – bring it on! Let's live it out.

Amen! And all the people said . . . Amen! So let's go do it.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 01/28/2018 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Matt Woodley. Editor, PreachingToday.com; source: Catherine Thimmesh. Team Moon (HMH Books, 2015)

ii Ibid, p. 184

iii Adapted from Ibid, p. 185

iv Ibid, p. 181

v D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (BMH, 1992), p. 276

vi Daniel G. Powers, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude* (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 134

vii Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 222

viii D. Edmond Hiebert, p. 276

ix Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians* (Crossway, 2015), p. 225

x David R. Helm, *1-2 Peter and Jude* (Crossway, 2008), p. 144

xi Adapted from Fritz Reinecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 763