



## You Have a Gift!

### Ephesians 4:1-16

### September 4, 2005

You have a gift! That is the theme of the series of messages we are beginning today. For the next several weeks, in many of your Sunday Morning Bible Study Groups and here in worship, we will be encouraging you to discover the spiritual powers that God has placed in you (we call them spiritual gifts). We believe every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift.

We will be helping you find out what that gift or gifts are. And, once you discover them, we will be challenging you to find somewhere in the world to put that gift to work, because that's what it's there for. God has given you spiritual powers to build up God's church and to serve in God's world.

Try to remember the greatest gift you have ever gotten, maybe under the Christmas tree, or on your birthday. Remember the joy and excitement as you unwrapped it and realized what it was. When you unwrap your spiritual gift, there is even more joy. The spiritual gifts in you are the clues to God's purpose and will for your life. They are the antidote to all the guilt you have felt for all the things you felt obligated to do but knew you just didn't do very well. They are your source of joy as you finally get to do what you were meant to be doing where God meant you to do it.

All of this is what we will be about in the next several weeks. But I must be honest with you. This week it's been hard for me to concentrate on this message, or on anything other than the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina. It is the worst natural disaster in the history of our nation. As we have watched this horror unfold, we have seen things we never thought we would see in America, things we would expect to see in Somalia, or in Fallujah, but not in Biloxi, or Gulfport, or New Orleans. This week has been full of bad news at every turn. It has been hard to concentrate on anything else.

#### DISUNITY AND HELPLESSNESS

There have been two recurring nightmares from the events of this week: a nightmare of chaos and disunity, and a nightmare of helplessness. Usually when a disaster hits the U.S., the nation comes together as one, and help is on the way, and the momentary chaos of the storm yields before a mighty army of relief. But not after Katrina, not at first. The storm was so massive and the surge of water so high that it unleashed a destructive power equivalent to a string of nuclear detonations across the Gulf Coast. And then came a second wave of human chaos, and the relief effort faltered. And then Americans, who are not used to waiting for anything, despaired. The Mayor of the City of New Orleans was heard furiously yelling on the radio for help. The Governor

of Louisiana issued an S.O.S. Imagine -- a *state* issuing an S.O.S. This week was a nightmare of chaos and disunity.

And as we watched, we all felt helpless. Oh yes, we know we will give, and generously. In our church office, strangers have come off the street to write checks. And oh yes, some of us will go to the Gulf Coast in the weeks to come. But this week, we watched helplessly, watching a woman collapse in diabetic shock, watching a baby struggle for breath in a powerless ICU, watching bodies lie wrapped in blankets by a side entrance to a convention center.

#### FROM DISUNITY TO UNITY

So this week I struggled to concentrate on an ancient letter written to a first century town called Ephesus. As I tried to truly hear that letter, it dawned on me that while I was seeing disunity and helplessness, two themes of that old letter were unity and power. In the midst of all the brokenness of this disaster, I read this call for unity:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

That is just what our country has been lacking this past week: no unity of the spirit, no bond of peace. But this old letter opposes the forces of division and destruction, and lifts up things that contribute to peace and unity and growth. And the letter goes on to reveal just where it is that unity comes: through “one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all.”

Unity comes as a gift from God. One can do all kinds of planning and preparation for united action. We can work for unity, yearn for unity, plan and prepare for unity. But in the end none of that is enough, it is a gift we receive from God. Unity on a team, unity in a family, unity in the workplace, unity in church, unity in a nation, is a gift from God.

#### FROM HELPLESSNESS TO POWER

I read further into this old letter, trying to concentrate despite all the helplessness I was feeling, and I read:

But to each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.  
(Ephesians 4:7)

In the midst of my helplessness, I realized I was reading about power: the power of God called grace (charisma), the word the Bible uses to describe the spiritual powers God gives to each one of us.

In the midst of chaotic disunity, God grants the gift of unity.

In the midst of utter helplessness, God grants the gift of spiritual power.

We are not helpless, for we have within us these uncanny spiritual powers called gifts of the Spirit.

In the next several weeks, we're going to be exploring what kinds of spiritual powers God gives:

- We're going to marvel at how each believer has at least one spiritual power
- We're going to help each one of you discover what your spiritual power(s) are
- We're going to challenge you to find some way you can put that spiritual power to work to serve God in the church, and to serve God in the world.

Now one more thing about what discovering and employing your spiritual gifts have to do with disasters like Katrina. Besides feeling helpless, we feel guilty because we might not feel we can do all the various kinds of things that need to be done. But, when you know which spiritual gifts you do have,

a) there can be *joy* for the things you CAN do

b) there can be *relief* that there are some things you are not meant to do and are not responsible for!

In other words, the specific gifts God has given to you are clues about what God expects you to do and what God does not expect you to do: about a hurricane, about any situation large or small, about life. For example, in the Bible there are spiritual gifts called the gift of mercy and the gift of service. Not all of us are gifted with these specific spiritual powers, but some of you are. And those spiritual powers of mercy and service will be needed for this disaster for months and years.

Also, if you have the biblical gift of hospitality or the gift of leadership, you will probably be called upon to put those gifts to work for this disaster. But, if you are not gifted in any of these ways, that is a clue that God might not be calling you to help with this. God has given to you other gifts for other kinds of work and service. Some of them might be helpful for this situation, but some of them might be useful for some other needs.

The spiritual gifts God has given you are clues about what you can do about this disaster, or about any other situation. The spiritual gifts God has NOT given you are clues about what you are not expected to do in a situation, and therefore you are free from any sense of guilt about that. That's just not your gift, and that is not your ministry. You have another gift and another ministry.

As people employ the gifts they DO have for the common good, then a miraculous thing happens, UNITY, for everybody is pulling together with their own gifts for the common good of a family, a church, a neighborhood, a nation! The gifts of God are for unity.

So stick with me for these next several weeks, and I guarantee you that you will discover the spiritual powers and gifts God has placed in you, and you will know the joy, the peace, the unity and the power of putting those gifts to work for God.

-- Douglas E. Murray