

A Gospel People

EQUIPPED

We will develop and identify our God given gifts.

Take a look at yourself. What is the most important part of your physical body? Maybe the most obvious initial thought would be your heart, but it doesn't really take me to tell you that without your other parts, the heart, in isolation, is of no value or use at all.

What a fantastic picture of how important and valuable each one of us is in the body of Christ at C.B.C. Without you and all that God has created you to be, the body at CBC cannot function properly. Does that make you feel encouraged, to know that you are just as valuable to the family here as anybody else? Or does that make you feel scared and pressured, because you feel you have nothing to offer. Or perhaps you do not have the confidence to step out and use your gifts, or the time and energy for building up the church to the Glory of God?

A few reflections :-

Our gifts, given to us by God, are given by design and make each one of us unique. Therefore when we come together as the church, we experience a great diversity - and our differences are by Gods Design.

“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 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 v6-8.

Challenge

Are we hindering the growth and development of our own gifts by saying. “If only I had that gift, I would be able to use it for glory to God.” Do we chase after

gifts that are not gifts that are ours at all? Do we think that other gifts are more important, have more status, more value in the Kingdom of God? We can use lots of excuses and reasons for not using the gifts we have been given. What stops you from using your gifts?

A Story

'A loving father went out and purchased the best gift that he could for his child, it was costly and took all that he had, but he valued his child that much and knew it was the gift that was most appropriate for his child in their season of life. The gift was wrapped beautifully with a label that said "My precious child I have chosen this gift especially for you, Enjoy it, Treasure it, Take care of it, Use it. The more you use it the more you will value it and it will not just bring you pleasure and joy but to all who you share it with also." He gave the gift to his child, who took it and said thank you so much for your love and gift, I will open it later, when the time is right, the beautiful box was carefully placed in a cupboard out of sight, and left.

This child continued its journey of life, with its ups and downs, never feeling particularly fulfilled or satisfied. Always admiring others within the home, social life and work place. Eventually the child couldn't quite summon up the energy – physically and emotionally – to engage in life, never felt that it fitted and died very tragically from the effects of depression, feeling totally unsatisfied with life. At the child's funeral the father with a very heavy heart spoke with great tenderness and love for his child, and said the greatest sadness for him was that years ago he had given his child a gift that if opened and used would have helped his child to find fulfilment, meaning and purpose in life and may have been a real key in helping his child enjoy his life and indeed - in sharing it with others could have brought life, joy and encouragement to the community they were part of."

The father represents God, you are his child. Do you have a beautiful gift boxed up and unopened and therefore not used? Or are you able to take the gifts God has given you – open them and use them within the family at CBC, home and the workplace?

How can we help each other?

1. I believe Network is a tool that can help us unpack who we are and begin to explore the gifts we are given by God, however, that is only part of the process.
2. I believe encouragement is another tool that can help us explore and use gifts God has given us, maybe that's where our small groups come into play, we can encourage each other to try things within a safe environment, so we can always be ready to pick each other up, if or when we fall, or don't get it quite right.
3. I believe honesty is another tool that can help us explore and use gifts God has given us, let us be people of integrity who really want the best for each other, and not colluding with people who are, quite frankly, striving after something God has clearly not given them! I think that takes wisdom and love and how many people have you got that kind of honesty with? It is very releasing if we can be honest and say, I don't think I see that as a gift God has given you, but I can very clearly see how God has blessed you with this gift..... whatever it may be.

Let us grow in our love for each other and pray for wisdom, that we may all be using our God given gifts. Then I believe the jigsaw will be complete, let me explain:

I think one way of looking at the body of Christ is like a jigsaw, the outside pieces are Gods love encompassing the whole of the picture and each one of us is a piece of the puzzle, each a different shape, but only when put in the right place is the picture complete, miss one piece and the picture is incomplete. If you or I are not using or developing our gifts the puzzle is not complete.

I believe faith and trust are tools that can help us explore and use the gifts God has given us, we in the end, I believe, have to be the ones to open the box, take God at his word and trust that, he who has called us, will equip us. I do believe gifts are given and – if you like – waiting to be used, and we must choose to use them. If we are rooted in the good soil and nourishing our souls with living water, we are more likely to develop and use the gifts, we do need to choose to take the

step of faith to use them. Sometimes I think we need to push a door, and simply put ourselves in a place of being happy to trust God – we are not asked to do things in our own strength. I believe it's when we take the gifts God has given us and submit them to use for his glory and ask for the Holy Spirit to equip us to use them well, that's when the picture comes so together, so to speak. Do you and I need to trust God more to be able to develop and use the gifts God has given us? Your uniqueness and diversity are all part of God's plan for our lives as individuals as well as our corporate lives together.

Remember God has carefully selected each believer's gifts. "Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for common good." 1Corinthians 12v7. "All these are the work of one and the same spirit and he gives them to each one just as he determines." 1Corinthians 12v11. "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 1Corinthians 12 v 18.

Diversity is not Division

"As it is there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand 'I don't need you.' And the head cannot say to the feet. 'I don't need you,' so there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other, if one part suffers every part suffers with it, if one part is honoured every part rejoices with it." 1Corinthians 12v 20-21 + 25-26.

The diversity of these gifts is simply a reflection of who God is. "There are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works in all of them in all men." 1 Corinthians 12v 4-6

Interdependent Relationship

God designed each part of the body to work towards the purpose of being in an interdependent relationship with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and all the other parts of the body. Sometimes in church we can feel like all we do is very minor, each person on their own may not be completely effective,

but when the church (each part of the body) come together, we create something we could never accomplish on our own – remember the jigsaw puzzle.

This is the way God intends the church to function. Believers come together by serving with their gifts, each doing their part, creating something we could never accomplish on our own and the fullness of Christ is revealed. It is about receiving and giving – in allowing God to use others to minister to us, about believing in how important interdependent relationships with God and each other is on our journey of life. Just as the physical body has many parts that work interdependently so we as believers are called to serve with our gifts in the body of Christ – The church.

What does that look like:

- Committing who we are and what we have to serve others
- Knowing what we can offer to and what we need from others
- Enjoying the fruit of diverse gifts, operating in unison and being mutually dependant
- Let us remember interdependent relationships reflect God’s design for his church.

What if the kidneys said “I quit – I’m tired of cleaning up all the time, let someone else do it!” The body would die! When we all do what we were created to do and we do it together we will be a healthy, interdependent, harmonious church. People will see the body of Christ, experience the love of God and hear the gospel – isn’t that what being a gospel people is all about?

As we worship I would invite you to take a piece of the puzzle from this box to remind you that you are part of the community here or as an act of commitment

- To choose to believe that you are a valuable part of the body of Christ at CBC

- To believe and therefore commit to develop and use the gifts that God has given you – maybe that means not chasing gifts you wish you did have!
- To encourage another part of the family as they use their gifts week by week.
- To embrace the person God has made you to be.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 28th June 2009 by Sandra Warner