

Small Group Notes

The Extraordinary in the Ordinary:

Study 1: The Unopened Gifts? 1 Cor. 12 v 1-11

Here are some questions for discussion:

Read this story:

One day, a group of people gathered in a shop for the sale of some antiques. The auctioneer brought out an old, dusty violin. He told the audience that it was a rare Stradivarius and that it was worth a great deal of money. No one, however was impressed; only one for bid £5 was offered. Meanwhile a man had entered the shop from the street. He was very tall and thin, and wore a velvet coat. He walked to the front of the shop, picked up the violin, and dusted it. He then held it to his ear and reached for the bow. As he did so, a murmur went around the room, "Paganini". For the next few minutes, the great musician held every one spellbound with the most exquisite virtuoso performance. Then he stopped. As he did so, the people started clamouring for the violin: £50, £60, £70, £80, £90. Eventually the violin was sold to Paganini himself for £100, and that evening he held a vast audience of thousands in rapt attention as he played the dirty, dusty violin once again.¹

1. How does this story remind us of what God does for each one of us and how he sees, even when we struggle to value ourselves sometimes?
2. How is it a picture of the fact that we have been fearfully and wonderfully made, and we have been created to bring a blessing to others?
3. How can we fulfil our potential and our God given purpose? How far would you agree that in Christ God is in the business of giving ordinary people and extraordinary purpose?
4. Perhaps the most important part of the story is that we become what we were created to be when we let the master have control. Stibbe says that when we do this the melody of God's creativity can come forth from our lives! How far do you agree with this thought? What challenges does it present you with?
5. In CBC we place a strong emphasis on using our God given gifts to create (in Stibbe's language) God's creative melody as a community. How well do you think we are doing?

The word translated as gift in the New Testament is the Greek word *charisma*. It is best translated as "grace-gift", but in modern Greek, it means "birthday present".

6. Read 1 Corinthians 12 v 1 – 11
7. Where do all these gifts come from?
8. List the gifts, or presents, God wants the church to have?
9. How have you seen or experienced these gifts in church? How do you respond to the thought that Paul expects that in a healthy church all these gifts will be seen?
10. What do you think Paul is teaching by following his teaching on gifts in ch. 12 with his wonderful passage about love in Ch. 13? What challenges does it have for both those of us who are want to see more of the gifts in church and those of us who are quite happy with the way things are or who don't want this kind of thing to happen in the church?
11. Pray that as we go through this series, we will grow together as community and become a more vibrant family where God's creative melody can be heard.

1. Mark Stibbe: "Know your spiritual gifts", Zondervan 2004 page1

Small Group Notes

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Study 2: The Unopened Gift: Wisdom

Here are some questions for discussion:

1. What do you understand the gift of wisdom to be?
2. In the sermon it was expressed in the following way: "It is the gift of being able to understand and express some thing of God's wisdom, in such a way that the Church is built up and strengthened." How far do you agree with this statement? What questions does it raise for you?
3. Read John 8 v 1 – 11
4. What does this teach us about the gift of wisdom and how does it show Jesus exercising the gift of wisdom?

Perhaps the following questions you could use to reflect on personally and then share together your thoughts and responses:

5. Have you ever been given a special insight into the general purposes of God?
6. Has God ever anointed you with a word of wisdom about the cross of Jesus as you have witnessed to a non-believer?
7. Has God ever given you a particularly clear understanding about a subject you studied as you prepared to lead a Bible study or a Small Group meeting?
8. Have you ever heard anyone give a word of wisdom which settled a difficult dispute or solved a really complex problem?
9. Are you facing a situation right now in which you require a word of wisdom from the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps you can reflect together on the following for the church:

10. How much evidence is there that the gift of wisdom is alive in CBC today?
11. How do you think the gift of wisdom should be seen in the church?
12. What are the things we should be careful about when exercising this gift?
13. How can the church encourage those with this gift to use it well?
14. Pray that God will build up the church through those to whom he has given the gift of wisdom.

Small Group Notes

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Study 3: The Unopened Gift: Knowledge

Here are some questions for discussion:

1. What do you understand the gift of knowledge to be?
2. In the sermon it was expressed in the following way: "The word of knowledge is an inspired insight into the mind of Christ which is then expressed in words given by the Holy Spirit. As such, it is a revelatory gift through which the body of Christ is edified." How far do you agree with this?
3. How does this definition challenge the perhaps common understanding that the gift of knowledge happens when a person is given a specific fact about another person they could not have previously known. Have you ever experienced this happening? Has this happened to you? Has anyone ever spoken this kind of thing to you when it was in fact true? How did this affect your Christian life?
- 4.

The view of the gift of knowledge as an insight into the secrets of a person's heart or situation is much closer to the gift of prophecy which we will come to later in the series. The gift of knowledge is knowledge about the things that God has already revealed and is the anointed description of what God has done in Christ which is then applied to the church.

Hopefully questions 5, 6, and 7 may help explain this understanding!

5. Read Ephesians 1 v 3 – 14
6. How does this passage that Paul writes demonstrate the gift of knowledge i.e. an insight into what God has done in Christ applied to the church?
7. In this passage Paul is teaching the church about what God has done and how it applies to them. What does this show about the relationship between teaching and the gift of knowledge? What does this suggest and who might have this gift and the way it is to be used in the church? Where do you see this in CBC now?
8. How responsibly do we in CBC handle the various gifts of the Spirit?
9. How can words of knowledge be used to build up the body of Christ? What do we need to be careful of in encouraging this use of this gift? How can it be encouraged?
10. Pray that God will build up the church through those to whom he has given the gift of knowledge.

Small Group Notes

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Study 4: The Unopened Gift: Faith

Here are some questions for discussion:

Here is the story of Zerubbabel. And it is the story of how he needed the gift of faith:

In the year 538 BC, God raised up Zerubbabel to lead 50,000 Jews from their exile in Babylon to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple. And that is what they did for two years, building the foundations of the temple.

- Read: Ezra 3 v 1 - 6

However, in 536 BC, the work stopped because the people living around them set out to discourage them from building. Also some of the priests who remembered the former Temple began to moan that Zerubbabel's temple would not be as glorious.

- Read Ezra 3 v 12 and 4 v 1 – 5

The result was that for the next 16 years no building took place. The people built their own beautiful houses, but not the house of God. In 520 BC God spoke to Zerubbabel through the prophet Zechariah, encouraging him to build the temple once again.

- Read Zechariah 4 v 6 – 8 and also Haggai ch. 1 - 2

Essentially what God is saying to Zerubbabel is that he is to finish building the temple, and that he will do it with God's help. What might seem like mountains in the way, the Spirit of the Lord will remove. And in 516 BC the building of the temple was completed.

1. How might this be a story of faith?
2. What do you think might have been the key for Zechariah in hearing the words of God through the prophets Zechariah and Haggai?
3. What happened to, or in Zerubbabel that enabled him to lead the people to complete the building?
4. What do you think may be a key verse from this story in understanding the gift of faith? (Zec. 4 v 6) What does this remind us about where the gift of faith comes from?
5. The gift of faith may be described as: the certainty that is an unshakeable confidence that God is about to resolve a seemingly impossible situation, for the edification of the church. Have you ever had an experience where you had what you would describe the gift of faith? Share your stories.
6. Is it right to believe that God will give us everything we ask him for?
7. What are the needs of CBC for which we need the gift of faith?
8. Pray for one another. Are there "mountains of impossibility" that you face and could ask others to pray for?

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Study 5: The Unopened Gift: Healing

Here are some questions for discussion:

Note: This is possibly the most difficult of the gifts of the Spirit to study because it causes so much controversy. People will come to the group and to this subject with differing experiences and understanding. Perhaps the most important thing is to be sensitive to the group whilst at the same time recognising that Paul does tell us that some people have the gift of healings (it is plural in 1 Corinthians). God is able to heal and does heal and to some he gives the gift of healings through whom he then works. Pray for wisdom as you lead this study.

1. What are your experiences of healing? How have they affected the way you think about and understand this subject?
2. How do you respond to this definition of the gift of healings: *“a special, charismatic ability to heal illnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit, and through faith in Jesus Christ. The ability is given to some people in the body of Christ, and they are expected to use this gift faithfully and continuously until the Lord Jesus returns and does away with sickness for ever.”*
3. Read Acts 3 v 1 – 10, 16
4. Here Peter and John heal a crippled beggar and exercise the gift of healing. Verse 16 suggests that there may be another gift operating as well – the gift of faith (see last week’s notes!). How do these two gifts relate to one another and why is it important that they work together?
5. We have not come onto the gift of prophecy yet, but it is also important in the exercise of the gift of healing. The gift of prophecy is the spiritual ability to know by revelation the secrets of a person’s heart. This could relate to sin, or sickness. Why would this be important when the gift of healing is used?
6. We know that God does not always heal when we ask him to and he certainly doesn’t heal everyone of everything. Why is this?
7. How might suffering be more helpful to us than healing?
8. Spend time in prayer together and give him all the things that you find difficult about this. Pray for one another.

Small Group Notes

The Extraordinary in the Ordinary:

Study 6: The Unopened Gift: Miraculous Works

Here are some questions for discussion:

As with the gift of healing, you may find that your group's experience and attitude is varied. The view here is that miraculous works do happen today and that some have the gift of miraculous works. Miracles are the breaking in of the kingdom of God and are glimpses of the future. Pray for the wisdom to lead your group through this subject.

1. Have you ever witnessed or heard about what you might describe as a miraculous work?
2. What is your attitude to miracles? Why?
3. From Paul a definition of the gift of miraculous powers might be: *the special ability to perform acts of extraordinary supernatural power. These actions are performed through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ, and they wonder in many, and faith in some.* How do you respond to this?
4. What other gifts do you see working with the gift of miraculous works? (Think back to the gift of faith and what we learnt there.)
5. Read Acts 9 v 36 – 43
6. What can we learn from his story about the workings of miracles? Following the sermon, the following points were made which you may like to discuss:
 - Miracles occur in the context of great need
 - Miracles occur in an atmosphere of faith
 - Miracles occur through true disciples
 - Miracles occur when compassion prevails
 - Miracles occur when we look up to God
7. Do you expect miracles to happen today? If so, how do they happen? What part, if any does prayer play?
8. How do you distinguish between a genuine miracle and a counterfeit one?
9. What kind of evidence would you need to be satisfied that an event was in fact a miracle? Can the devil inspire counterfeit ones? If so, what is his purpose?
10. What is the purpose of miracles?
11. Pray for one another and for the CBC that we might be a vibrant family where the gifts of the Spirit are released for the building up of the church.

Small Group Notes

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Study 7: The Unopened Gift: Prophecy

Here are some questions for discussion:

1. What do you understand the gift of prophecy to be?
2. What are your experiences of people using the gift of prophecy? (These might be positive or negative.)
3. The sermon described prophecy as essentially a word of revelation which is divinely inspired but made a distinction between prophecy and teaching or preaching. How far do you agree with this definition?
4. Read: John 4 v 1 – 26. What can you say about the gift of prophecy from this passage? (Some prophecy is about “revealing the secrets of a person’s heart”).
5. Who do you think this kind of prophecy is usually for and what effect does it have on them? (This is for unbeliever’s to convict them. The woman’s response is to go and tell the whole village what has happened and they come to see Jesus!).
6. Read: 1 Cor. 14 v 3 – 5. What does Paul say about prophecy in these verses? Who is he speaking about and what does prophecy do? (Prophecy is for the church and to strengthen, encourage and comfort.)
7. Read: 1 Cor. 14 v 22. From this verse, what is the primary function of prophecy and who is it for?
8. Read: Acts 2 v 17 and 18. Here Peter is speaking on the Day of Pentecost. What does this say about the type of revelation that we might call prophecy? How might it happen? (The point here is that prophecy is not just “speech”. It can come in varied forms e.g. visions or dreams).
9. Have you ever had an experience of wanting to say something that God has laid on your heart? Share your experiences. Looking back would you now describe what God laid on your heart as “prophecy”?
10. How do you respond when a prophecy is given in church?
11. How do you respond to Paul’s challenge in 1 Cor. 14 v 1, that we should all, eagerly desire the gift of prophecy?
12. How significant is it, that in the same verse he also urges us to: “follow the way of love”.
13. Read also: 1 Cor. 13 v 2. What does this teach us about how to handle the gift of prophecy in the church?
14. Pray that God would speak to his church today and that we would be willing to be his mouthpiece for the benefit of the church.

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Study 8: The Unopened Gift: Discernment of Spirits

Here are some questions for discussion:

1. Paul says that one of the gifts God gives to the church is the “discernment of Spirits”. We might describe this gift as: “the special ability to discern whether the human spirit, the Holy Spirit, or a supernatural spirit (good or bad) is at work behind a particular phenomenon”. Why is this gift important in the church?
2. There are different examples of the gift of discernment in the Bible. Look up the following references and discuss the different ways the gift is exercised:
 - John 1 v 43 – 51: Jesus and Nathaniel. (Also look at John 2 v 24 and 25.)
 - 2 Kings 6 v 8 – 23: the key verses are 16 and 17
 - Acts 6 v 1 – 6: Ananais and Sapphira
 - Acts 13 v 6 -12: Peter with the magician Elymas
 - Acts 16 v 16 – 18: Paul and the slave girl
3. How far do these references agree with the definition of the gift of discernment above?
4. We have said that some of the gifts go well together. The gift of discernment of spirits goes with the gift of prophecy? Why?
5. Share your experiences of when prophecy has been given. How did you discern whether it was God given? Who had the responsibility? How did they go about it?
6. Suppose a “prophecy” was given one Sunday morning. What would you expect to happen? How would it be handled? Suppose you felt you had a prophecy given to you. What would you do?
7. In his book “Know your spiritual gifts”, Mark Stibbe suggests these questions as criteria for the task of discernment. How helpful and accurate do you think they are? (Note: he is not suggesting that all of these apply in every situation, but is suggesting them as a guide.)
 - Is your gut reaction this “is of the Lord”?
 - Are others witnessing that this is the Holy Spirit?
 - Is it consistent with the character of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture?
 - Is it consistent with the Word of God and with orthodox Christian doctrine?
 - Is this something we’ve seen before and judged as authentic?
 - Does it draw attention to the Lord Jesus or to someone or something else?
 - Is it frenzied, uncontrolled and disorderly?
 - Is it done/uttered in a loving manner?
 - What kind of fruit do you envisage from it?
 - Is this something “for the common good”?
8. Pray that as we grow in the gift of prophecy and in the use of the others gifts, so God will give the gift of discerning the spirits to us too.