

The Garden: Serve and Bless the Church

1 Peter 4:10-11

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Steve DeWitt

Our teaching series is laying out the biblical blueprints for a vibrant church—the vision and dream we have for Bethel. Using the picture of a house, we want our church built on *the foundation* of Jesus Christ, seeing the *living room* and all of life as worship, with a *family room* of fellowship and love, a *kitchen* nourishing the church with the Word of God proclaimed and applied, and today we go to the family garden.

How many of you grew up in a home with a garden? I did as well. In fact, it was one of the great sufferings I had growing up because of the unfairness of it all. First of all, we had a big garden. In Iowa, throw any seed down and it grows. Corn. Beans. Tomatoes. Potatoes. Cucumbers. Other things. The garden and its chores was for me a blight on my existence. I have three siblings and early on my parents decided the family garden was a great opportunity to teach the children responsibility. As the oldest, I was assigned five large rows in the garden that I had to keep free from weeds. My sister Barb, a year younger, was given four rows. Scott, three years younger, had three rows. Teri, the spoiled rotten youngest, got two rows. There was great injustice in this because over the years, the allocation of rows never changed.

So Barb continued only to have four rows even though she was older than the age I was when I was given five. Soon Scott was the age I was when I had five, yet he continued to only have three. Teri, the spoiled rotten youngest, had a mere two rows throughout growing up. For us children, we despised the garden. Did we have the thought that what we were doing was helping the family? Did we consider that the fruit of our hands was putting food on the kitchen table? Did we care that the garden saved my parents from buying all these things for a family of six? No. Why? That doesn't matter. I didn't like weeding. My lack of enthusiasm for serving in the garden showed my self-orientation in the family.

Every church has a garden; really *is* a garden. Our garden is the needs and opportunities for serving in our church and in our community. The needs require everyone to have their row and to serve and care for that row with excellence and diligence. Not as a duty—though there is a duty, but as a delight and an expression of love for the Lord of the house, Jesus, our blessed Savior.

A few years ago our leadership and staff spent a great deal of time defining discipleship here at Bethel. We asked the question, *What does the life of a follower of Jesus look like?* We did this so that we could create a simple paradigm for our church. Something simple, memorable, and doable. We distilled it down to three essentials of a quality disciple: Exalt, Experience and Engage. *Exalt*—Worship, both corporate and lifestyle. *Experience*—Commitment to horizontal Christianity in community with other believers. *Engage*—a strong motivation to serve Christ.

Here is 1 Peter 4:10-11—

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Our focus is on verse 10: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another; as good stewards of God's varied grace.* There are three clauses here which make a nice outline.

As each has received a gift... (Verse 10)

All Christians have at least one spiritual gift

Each one has received a *gift*. The Greek word is the familiar *charismata*. Literally, "grace-gift." We call them "spiritual gifts" as other passages, 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, tell us that in salvation and growth as a Christian, the Holy Spirit gives each believer both a heart to serve and a gift or enablement to serve. "A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1016)

People debate whether our natural gifts count as spiritual gifts. I believe any ability that we have can be used for ministry. What makes an ability "spiritual" is whether the Holy Spirit is empowering its use for spiritual purposes and spiritual fruit. You may naturally be good with numbers and financial planning. That was true before you became a Christian. Now that ability can be used for spiritual purposes as the Lord uses you. Or perhaps you are skilled with your hands and the Spirit's gift to you is service and he uses your natural gifts expressed through your spiritual gift to bless many.

That said, spiritual gifts are often abilities and desires that prior to salvation we didn't have and likely had no interest in doing. But our heart was broken by our sin and with eyes of faith we looked to the cross and a Savior hanging there in our place. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*" We die by dying to ourselves. We live to Christ by serving him. Get that? You died to yourself when you trusted in Christ and now with Jesus as Lord, you are energized and enabled to serve him by the Spirit.

So what are some of these gifts? There are five passages in Scripture that give examples:

<u>1 Corinthians 12:8-11</u>	<u>1 Corinthians 12:28</u>	<u>Romans 12:6-8</u>	<u>Ephesians 4:11</u>
<i>Wisdom-word</i>	<i>Apostles</i>	<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Apostles</i>
<i>Knowledge-word</i>	<i>Prophets</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Prophets</i>
<i>Faith</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Teaching</i>	<i>Evangelists</i>
<i>Healing gifts</i>	<i>Miracle-workers</i>	<i>Exhorting</i>	<i>Pastors/Teachers</i>
<i>Miracle-working</i>	<i>Healing</i>	<i>Giving</i>	
<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Helps</i>	<i>Leadership</i>	<u>1 Peter 4:11</u>
<i>Distinguishing spirits</i>	<i>Administration</i>	<i>Mercy-ministry</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
<i>Speaking in tongues</i>	<i>Tongues</i>		<i>Serving</i>
<i>Interpreting tongues</i>			

These are not meant to be exhaustive lists. They are representative of the kind of enablements Christ gives to his church.

This leads to the natural question, *How do I know what my gift is?* What is curious is that there is so much in the Bible about spiritual gifts, but no mention as to how to know what your gift is. I think the reason for the silence is that the Bible assumes that all Christians will serve Christ and the discovery of the gift comes quite naturally in the context of doing ministry.

We could compare it to a pickup basketball game. Pickup basketball is where random guys meet at the court to play. Typically, they will shoot for teams. The first five to make a free

throw are a team. What you never see in a pickup game is a huddle before the game to decide who is going to do what on the floor. Who is going to dribble? Who is going to rebound? Who is going to shoot? They simply begin to play. The player naturally inclined to dribbling gravitates toward doing that. The player gifted for rebounding, gravitates to being under the boards. All pickup basketball players think they're gifted for shooting so that doesn't apply.

Do you see the point? They began to play and while playing, their gifts became evident. The same is true in spiritual gifts. If you never play, you'll never know. If you never serve, never step out and try something, you'll never know how the Holy Spirit has empowered you. *Get in the game. Find a place to serve. See where you develop a passion to serve.*

The best way to find out where you are gifted is to get involved in ministry and ask God to give you insight into what he would want you to do. This is why the Bible doesn't give a how-to guide. It *assumes* all Christians will serve and will discover their gift in the context of active ministry.

...Use it to serve one another... (Verse 10)

All Christians are to serve one another

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

The goal of your spiritual gift isn't to know your spiritual gift but to use it, to serve for *the common good*. We often have this backwards. We think, "The church exists for me. The church is here to provide services for me. It's about me." Then serving the needs of the church feels like what weeding the garden did to me as a boy, a kind of guilt obligation.

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer) Read the text yourself: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.* What is this other than following in the same path of our Savior? If there was ever someone who shouldn't have had to get his hands dirty in the garden of humanity serving us, it was Christ. *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45)

Who's taking care of the most rows in this garden? Who has done the most work? Who has sacrificed the most? Given the most? "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Die to living for myself. Die to my own agenda. Die to me but live to something else. Live to love. Live to give. Live for Christ. For me to live is Christ. How do we express that? We serve the Lord by serving his church.

...As good stewards of God's varied grace. (Verse 10)

We will be held accountable for our gift stewardship

Peter exhorts us to be "good stewards" of these grace gifts. We are all stewards. The question is whether we are good ones or bad ones. What would a bad steward look like? What does the row of his garden look like? God will judge the rows he puts us in and the judgment is not a quantitative one but a qualitative one.

This is the point of both the *Parable of the Talents* and the *Parable of the Ten Minas* (Matthew 25:14ff; Luke 19:11ff.). In both parables there are three servants who are given an amount of money. Some are given more than the others, but each is required to be a

steward of what was given. The master returns and the one who was given five talents made five more. The one who was given two, made two more. Both were commended as "Good and faithful servants." But the servant given one talent didn't do anything with it. The other two receive commendation but listen to what is said to the one who did nothing:

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents... And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:26-28, 30 NIV 1984)

Why does the master call him wicked and lazy? It wasn't that he only had one talent; it wasn't that he only had one row of opportunity in the garden, it was that he failed to steward it. He didn't do anything with it. His row didn't produce anything. The quality of his service brought the sharp condemnation. All Christians will give an account for the quality of our service. Let's look at God's criteria for service.

God's Criteria for Service

Work ethic

The master calls the wicked servant "Lazy." How was he lazy? He didn't do anything with the talent. He produced no profit. He took the easy way out and just buried it. What is God looking for from his people? God expects us to give him our very best effort—not to be lazy but diligent. Not half-hearted or mediocre, but the very best we can.

I saw high quality ministry service up close during our recent Bethel on a Mission service day. Jennifer and I signed up and we were assigned to serve at the Arc ministry in Gary. We arrived with several other cars of folks. We arrived and there were Ben and Brianne Boggs, Bethelonians from Bethel (like that sentence). They got there early. They had things arranged. Some time ago their small group adopted this ministry. They knew the people, the facility, and what was needed. Our folks got to work and they provided leadership. They had smiles on their faces and energy in their service, and I left there very impressed and I have to think that God noticed it too.

Effectiveness

The one who had five talents made five more and was commended. The one with two made two more. The servant given one produced no profit. Each servant was measured by their effectiveness. What did they do? What fruit did they produce? One reason we need to know our gift and use it is that we want to make this one life effective for Christ. I was raised on the principle, *"Only one life twill soon by past, only what's done for Christ will last."* A quality disciple will spend their time on what matters for eternity. This is the great tragedy of living our lives for hobbies or money or entertainment or some other thing that can be good in its proper place. You don't want to stand before Almighty God and try to explain why your kids' baseball league and a thousand other things kept you from faithful service of Christ. We are stewards of these gifts. It is our responsibility.

Faithfulness

- *Well done, good and faithful servant!* (Matthew 25:21 NIV 1984)
- *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.* (1 Corinthians 4:2 NIV 1984)

Faithfulness is “stick-to-it-iveness.” Ministry over the long haul. The master said, *Well done, good and faithful servant!* “Good” is the quality of service, “faithful” is the quantity and longevity. Lots of people start a race but far fewer finish. God rewards the finishers—those whose service is faithful in the ups and downs of life and the life of a church.

Let’s ask ourselves now, *Is the quality of my service in the garden marked by a work ethic, effectiveness, and faithfulness?*

Look at the goal. The 1 Peter passage concludes with verse 11, *in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.* Here we are back at the foundation of the whole house. When the servants of Christ use their gifts faithfully in the garden, it brings glory to the Lord of the house. It shows we know him as Savior and love him as Lord.

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