

## Regifting

Preached January 27, 2019

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Sue's birthday is next week; and while browsing on-line for creative gift ideas I stumbled across a Reader's Digest article entitled "What Not to Buy Your Wife."

Certain that this could not be coincidental, I thought it might be in my best interest to stop what I was doing and read it.

Here are a few of the author's suggestions on what not to buy your wife:

1. Don't buy anything that plugs in. Anything that requires electricity is seen as impersonal and housework related.
2. Don't buy clothing that involves sizes. The chances are one in seven thousand that you will get her size right, and your wife will be offended the other 6999 times.
3. Don't buy anything that involves weight loss or self-improvement. A six-month membership to a gym, for example, could easily be misconstrued as a suggestion that's she's out of shape.
4. Don't buy jewelry. The jewelry your wife wants, you can't afford. And the jewelry you can afford, she doesn't want.

In his first letter to the Church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul takes the trouble to supply some useful information of his own with regards to gifts. He writes, "Now, concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed."

Paul's advice though, is not concerned so much with choosing gifts for someone else as it is about what to do with gifts we have received. He calls them "spiritual gifts" but the original Greek term is more accurately translated as "gifts given by the Spirit."

A spiritual gift is a God-given ability, distributed to individual Christians by the Holy Spirit that allows God to work through their lives to help the church fulfill its purpose. The Spirit is the giver of these gifts, and we are the recipients.

Paul says that there are varieties of these spiritual gifts. They come in all shapes and colors. God doesn't stress about whether a particular gift will fit us or not. God knows our size.

The list of spiritual gifts he gives includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues and interpreting what is spoken in tongues for others to understand.

This is a representative, not an exhaustive list of the gifts that the Spirit gives.

It does not say there is a variety of gifts and these are all of them. It says that there are varieties (plural) of gifts, and these are some of them. The variety of spiritual gifts is literally endless. One way we can know this to be true is that it says each gift is a manifestation of the Spirit.

It's like each spiritual gift is one tiny facet of the Holy Spirit, revealing a fragment of God's nature. Since God is limitless, it makes sense that there can be no end to the variety of expressions of God's nature revealed in the gifts of the Spirit.

Have you ever witnessed one of those stadium displays where each person as they enter are given a placard based on their seating location? And on the awaited signal, everyone holds up their placards in unison and together they form a massive image or message?

In a way, the Church is like that. We are each entrusted with a fragment of what God is like. When we are all using the spiritual gifts we have been given, the world sees something like the fullness of God when they look at the Church. If some, or even one person refused to hold up their placard, or convinced their neighbor not to raise their placard, the image or message of what God is like, would be incomplete and inaccurate.

Despite the immeasurable diversity of these gifts, they all share one thing in common, and that is the purpose for which they are given. It says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The gifts of the Spirit are given to each person but they are not intended for keeping to ourselves. They are meant to be passed on to others.

Sometimes, despite our best intentions and good advice like what I found in that article from Reader's Digest, unappreciated gifts are given and received. An American Express survey about Christmas gifts found that the fruitcake was chosen most often from a list of "worst" holiday gifts. It even finished ahead of getting "no gift at all."

When asked how to dispose of a bad gift, 30% would hide it in the closet, 21% would return it, and 19% would give it away.

There's a name for unloading an unwanted present onto someone else, like that.

It's called Regifting.

And just as there are warnings to guys about what not to buy for wives, there are some precautions to heed when it comes to regifting.

First, you don't want lose track of who gave you the gift in the first place and then inadvertently regift it back to them. That would be really awkward.

You wouldn't even want the person who gave YOU the gift to find out that you have regifted it to someone else. That would be almost just as awkward.

Equally important is that the person to whom you are giving the gift does not know that they are being regifted.

When it comes to regifting gifts of the Spirit you don't have to worry about any of that. Not only is God NOT OFFENDED if we regift spiritual gifts; regifting them is actually the WHOLE POINT.

In this passage we are even given some suggestions on HOW to regift them. In one place it says that the variety of spiritual gifts can be regifted through varieties of service. The Greek word used there for "service" is the same word from which we get "Diaconate." A deacon was originally a person who used their gifts to be of service to others in need. That was their job description. And it is still the job description of the Church to this day.

The variety of services this passage refers to are the variety of ministries through which the Church serves God and serves God's purposes. We call them committees, which is kind of unfortunate because committees sound businesslike, which takes away from understanding them as ministries. Last year, the Stewardship Committee acknowledged this by officially changing their name to the Generous Giving Ministry because that more accurately describes their particular form of service as a ministry of helping us all understand generosity as a gift of the Spirit.

The regifting Paul describes in this passage flows from the varieties of individual spiritual gifts to varieties of service, eventually leading to varieties of activities. These are the specific, concrete actions through which the ministries of the church find tangible expression for the common good. You might say, it is where the regifting of our spiritual gifts bears fruit.

It's where the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit are rewrapped and regifted, without a trace of awkwardness; because God WANTS you to be a regifter of what you have received.

Think of the Annual Reports we will soon be reviewing during our Annual Meeting as a kind of catalog of the varieties of services and varieties of activities that are possible when the varieties of spiritual gifts we have been given are used for the common good.

So, here's my invitation for 2019.

Consider what spiritual gifts God has given you, and how you are, or could be using those gifts.

It says in this passage, "to EACH is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." If you don't know what your gift is, pray for the Holy Spirit to help you discover it. The more people that are aware of their spiritual gifts and whose gifts are activated the stronger we are together as a church.

Once you know WHAT your spiritual gift is, the next question is WHERE is it?

Is it being used for the common good? Or, is it squirreled away in some closet or on a shelf in the basement where it isn't doing you, God or anybody else much good? If it is, then it's time to dust it off and bring it out into the light of day. God has someone, somewhere in mind, who is waiting for you to regift it to them.