

Transcribed from:
“STIR UP THE GIFTS”
Empowering Believers for Victorious Living and Ministry Tasks
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CHAPTER 4
BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A steward is one who manages something that does not belong to him. He is not the owner. He is the administrator or trustee. We are not the source of our Spiritual Gifts. They are given by God and distributed by the Holy Spirit. God never comes to us empty handed, but with manifold grace. He has Gifted us for a purpose. The purpose is not self-aggrandizement. The purpose is to serve others. We must be good stewards of our Spiritual Gifts; and we are reminded that a good steward is found faithful. It is impossible to please God without faith. Therefore, faith is needed to be a good steward of our Gift. Every Spiritual Gift is a resource given to us by God to be used to the best of our ability and in His strength, beyond our natural capabilities. Spiritual Gifts should not be displayed in a trophy case.

As good stewards of our Spiritual Gifts, we are to be ministers of the Gifts that have been given to us. We are not to administer what has been given to someone else. We are not to be copycats. Don't copy others' Gifts or judge others' Gifts. God shows you what He wants you to do by what He gives **you**. What God has for you, He has for **you**. Find out where you fit and fashion your ministry accordingly. Ducks cannot be made to run like rabbits and rabbits cannot be made to swim like ducks, but both are a needed part of God's creation. God has given diverse Gifts to the Body of Christ. Just as the circulatory system of the human body is dependent upon the respiratory system to provide oxygen to carry blood to the various cells of the body to be used by the muscular system that reacts to the commands from the nervous system. Likewise, it is the same with the diverse and various Spiritual Gifts purposed to edify the Body of Christ, the Church. God tells us that, *As every man hath received the Gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen* (1 Peter 4:10-11).

In these verses God shares six principles for being a good steward of our Gifts. First, He teaches us to give priority to using our Gifts based on the urgency of the times in which we live. Second, Gifts should be exercised with authority because they come from and belong to God. Third, God is keeping a record on how we use our GIFTS.

Fourth, we should exercise our Gifts to bring honor and glory to God. Fifth, God should get the credit for all Gifts. Sixth, manifold grace begets manifold Gifts.

In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 2, page 245, Ellen White makes five significant points regarding the manifold grace of God: (1) None need mourn that they cannot glorify God by talents He never gave them and for which they are not responsible; (2) God requires no more of them than to improve upon what they have, as stewards of His grace; (3) The varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities; (4) Heaven apportions to all their work and it should be their ambition to do this work well, according to their capabilities; (5) God requires that all, the weakest as well as the strongest, fulfill their appointed work.

WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT-

Before you can become a good steward, you must first acknowledge that God is creator of all. It all belongs to Him. He is the source. He is the Gift giver. Both natural talents and spiritual Gifts come from Him. Spiritual Gifts are grace Gifts. By His grace, He has divinely chosen to gift every believer with at least one supernatural Gift. However, as long as we think for one second that we earned these abilities, we will not be good stewards of our Spiritual Gifts. If we think by some manner we developed these special Gifts, we will not demonstrate Godly stewardship of Spiritual Gifts. If by some reason we think the Gifts belong to us and not to Him, we have lost the Christian quality of good stewardship. Our Gifts come through us but not from us, for they come from God.

RECONCILIATION-

An unreconciled checkbook will cause you to either spend too much or not spend enough to live fully. Such is also the case with unreconciled relationships in the Church. Spiritual Gifts are designed to dwell together in unity. We depend on each other and must also accept and love one another. We are the vessels of our Spiritual Gifts, therefore, we must always keep our relationships reconciled. Jesus said, *“Therefore if thou bring thy Gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother has ought against thee; leave there thy Gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy Gift (Matt 5:24).* Unreconciled differences prohibit the effective use of Spiritual Gifts. We must be in obedience to God’s word before He allows us to fully use the Gifts He has given us. *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15; 32).* The fruit of the Spirit must be honored before the Gift of the Spirit can be effective. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23 is love, joy, peace, long

suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. They represent Christian character. Christian character must first be established before the Gift of the Spirit can be utilized fully. Reconciliation, therefore, is essential. *Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Eph. 4:3).

AVAILABILITY-

Although availability may be seasonal, we must remember that time belongs to God also. Good stewardship means managing our time, Gift/talents and money. God is not in time. God owns it all. We must be good stewards of our time in order to be good stewards of Gifts. Availability means allowing enough time in our busy schedules to be available to be used by God. Often Spiritual Gifts remain inactive due to lack of availability. Availability relates to priority. We **make** time for what we desire or love best. Believers are called to manage their time well and focus their time on Godly pursuits. Being Godly timed-focus is a Christian stewardship character trait. If God remains first in our lives, we will prioritize our time for His purpose and schedule our lives by His watch.

MOTIVATION-

What motivates you to serve? Your motivation for service is a key factor in being a good steward of your Spiritual Gifts. Do you serve to be recognized by people, or do you serve to please God? Demonstrating our love, thanksgiving and obedience to God should be our motivation for service. We should not serve to please self or man, but rather to please God. We should not serve out of duty, but rather we should serve out of love. We should not serve because we must serve, we should serve because we want to serve. We must change our “got to’s” to “get to’s.” Often we say, “I have got to go to choir practice or Bible study.” Yet we “get to” to the ball game, go shopping, or play sports. Serving in our Spiritual Gifts should always be in the “get to” category. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

SPIRITUAL MATURITY-

In my book entitled *Growing Up To The Head: Ten Growth Essentials To Becoming a Better Christian*, (Page 25), I stated the fact that there is a difference between being spiritual and being spiritually mature. Being spiritual generally means practicing spiritual disciplines such as tithing, fasting, meditating, observing quiet time, praising, and praying. These are good, necessary and should be practiced on a daily basis by all Christians. However, believers are not spiritually mature until they are fulfilling all of God’s purposes. God’s purposes for the church are worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and service/ministry. Being a good steward falls primarily into the category of service/ministry. Unless you are serving in a ministry task, you are not fulfilling the purposes of God for the Church, or for your life. Therefore you are not spiritually mature. Spiritual maturity is necessary if we are to be good stewards of our Spiritual Gifts.

SACRIFICE-

Sacrifice is another factor that figures into being a good steward of our Spiritual Gifts. Sacrifice means giving up something of ourselves for the benefit of others or for a greater cause. In baseball a home run hitter gives up the opportunity to hit a home run and raise his personal batting statistics by executing a sacrificial bunt to move another player closer to scoring for the good of the team. God expects us to use what He has given us for the benefit of others and for the benefit of His body, the Church. The parable of the widow's mite illustrates that God is more concerned with equal sacrifice than equal giving. The widow pleased God in her giving because she gave out of her want, whereas, others gave out of their abundance (Mark 12:41-44). God has abundantly spiritually gifted you and He expects you to serve abundantly. If He gave you one Gift, your service of your one Gift is just as pleasing to Him as those who serve with many Spiritual Gifts. Stirring up the Gifts is an inclusive calling. All have at least one Gift and all are expected to serve. There are no exceptions. Determine your level of Giftedness and stir it up.

ACCOUNTABILITY-

We will be held accountable for the use we make of our Spiritual Gifts. God will return and we all will stand before the throne of God in a servant's judgment. Many believers think that only non-believers and unconfessed sinners will stand before the throne of God. Not true. There will be a believer's judgment wherein every man's work will be judged. The Apostle Paul, speaking again to the Corinthian church which seemingly encountered more problems and misunderstandings concerning Spiritual Gifts, reminds them and us that every man's work will be judged. *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned. He shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire* (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

God is saying to us, be careful how we do the task of ministry, for we will be held accountable even though we are believers. If we do the ministry according to God's will, it will be akin to building with gold, silver and precious stones and we will receive an eternal reward, But if we do the task of ministry our way, we will experience regrets. We are accountable to God for all our stewardship and especially the stewardship of our Gifts. Our Spiritual Gifts will be tried in the fire to determine whether we are faithful concerning Spiritual Gifts. How are you using your Spiritual Gift? Will your service stand the revealing fire of the servant's judgment? Will you come out like pure gold?

FAITHFULNESS AND NEGLECT-

We are warned by God not to neglect our Gift. *Neglect not the Gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery* (1 Tim. 4:14). We must be faithful to use our Gift. Often we undervalue our Gift to the point of neglect. By way of prophecy, believers affirm the Gifts of other believers and the Church is challenged to put her stamp of approval and acceptance on the affirmation. Spiritual Gifts are not to be hidden or put in storage. Rather, they are to be highlighted and activated. Neglect causes spoilage. Like fallen fruit on the ground perishes and Decays, so it is with Gifts that remain inactive. Like good fruit that is ripe for picking. Gifts should be found attached to the True Vine. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.* (John 15:5).

Gifts that are neglected are often perverted or turned to disloyal uses. Neglected Gifts that are not faithful to their duties and responsibilities are often transferred to a different vessel. Such was the case in Matthew 25:28, when the one steward in the parable of the talents hid his talent. His one talent was transferred from him and was given to the one who had faithfully used the five talents God had given him. Also, Gifts that are neglected, particularly identified, and discovered Gifts, seek spiritual employment. If these Gifts don't find employment in one Body (CHURCH) they will seek employment in another body. Growing churches provide an employment agency for Gifts. Sometimes when we think believers are church hopping, they may really be employment shopping.

A BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION OF FAITHFULNESS AND NEGLECT

In Matthew 25:24-25 and Luke 19:20-24, two parallel passages, Jesus connects faithfulness to Gifts with neglect of Gifts. One is referred to as the Parable of the Talents (Matthew) and the other is referred to as the Parable of the Pounds. Both parables speak to us about the stewardship of the grace-Gifts of God. In each parable the owner gives the non-owner (steward) something to manage or oversee for Him until He returns. Upon the owner returning, the stewards are held accountable for their management or trusteeship. If the stewards had not neglected their Gifts, they were rewarded for their faithfulness. *Well done thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* (Matt. 25:21) (Luke 19:17).

However, the stewards that neglected their Gifts were punished. In the parable of the talents, the unfaithful steward neglected his Gift by hiding it in the earth; and the unfaithful steward in the parable of the pounds stored his Gift by wrapping it in a napkin or handkerchief. Can you imagine having a precious stone (diamond) buried in your backyard, or a million dollars in a zip lock bag stored in a freezer?

The United Negro College Fund has as its motto, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” God’s Spiritual Gifts are also a terrible thing to waste. It is a tragedy to neglect our Gifts. The biblical lesson clearly teaches us that God wants us to use what He has given us. He is not interested in our excuses about what we don’t have. He wants us to use what we do have. He wants you to be a good steward and cultivate and use your Gifts to the glory of God. Therefore, be faithful and stir them up. Stir up the Spiritual Gifts of God.

SERVICE: THE INITIAL MOTIVE AND THE END RESULT

God’s motive for giving us Spiritual Gifts and our end result should be the same, which is service. Service is the undergirding purpose and it must also be the final outcome. God’s reason for Gifting us is to serve others. Our responsibility and duty is to serve others and edify His Body, the Church. Failing to do so means we are not faithful and we must continue to remind ourselves, it is impossible to please God without faith. You are not to cultivate your Gift for yourself. If a church decides to have a Gift-based ministry, the goal should be to mobilize believers for service. Good stewardship always results in service. Spiritual Gifts are to be stirred up for service to others so God can be glorified.

Remember, God is not going to stir up your Gift for you. He did His part when He gave you the Gift. He is the giver, not the stirrer. Don’t expect others to stir your Gift. You must stir your own Gift. Although God won’t stir your Gift, He has promised to be with you as you stir. He will not forsake you or leave you. That is His promise and He is a promise Keeper. So stand up, shape up, straighten up and stir up the Gift of God.

HAPPY ARE YOU IF YOU DO THEM

Jesus concludes His greatest example of servanthood by telling His disciples that if they know how to be a servant and indeed, practice being a servant, they will be blessed. *If you know these things, happy are ye if ye do them* (John 13:17). Jesus demonstrated a great lesson in servanthood by washing the dirty feet of His disciples. Can you imagine kneeling in a vulnerable and humble position to wash another’s dirty feet? In an effort to teach us about the end result of our being good stewards Jesus washed dirty, dusty feet. *So, after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, know ye what I have done to*

you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet (John 13:12-14).

God promises not only to be with us as we stir up our Gifts; He also promises to bless us if we stir up our Gifts for the right purpose and motive. Happy are we if we use our gifts for service to others. Happy are we if we are good stewards of our Spiritual Gifts. Being good stewards of our Spiritual Gifts is fulfilling. If we are faithful, we will be fruitful. And if we are fruitful, we will be fulfilled (blessed). Be good stewards of your Spiritual Gifts. Don't neglect them. Be available, faithful, cheerful, purposeful, fruitful, and fulfilled (happy).

CHECKPOINT

1. What is a steward?

A steward is one who manages something that does not belong to him.

2. What does it mean to be a good steward?

To be a faithful minister of whatever God has entrusted to you.

3. Give a summary sentence for each of the following characteristics of a good steward

*** ACKNOWLEDGEMENT -- One must acknowledge that God is the source, owner and giver of all Gifts**

***RECONCILIATION -- One must always be reconciled to God and to others in order to be a good steward of God's Gifts.**

***AVAILABILITY -- One must recognize that time, gifts/talents, and money belong to God. Availability means allowing time in our busy schedule to be available to be used by God.**

***MOTIVATION -- Your reason for serving God must be to demonstrate your love, thanksgiving, and obedience to God rather than to be recognized by people.**

***SPIRITUAL MATURITY -- To fulfill all of God's purposes for you in the Church. Worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and service/ministry.**

***SACRIFICE -- Sacrifice means giving up something of yourself for the benefit of others or for a greater cause.**

***ACCOUNTABILITY -- We will be held accountable for the use we make of our Spiritual gifts. There will be a believer's judgment wherein every man's work will be judged.**

***FAITHFULNESS-- We must be faithful to use and not neglect the spiritual gift or gifts that God has entrusted to us.**

4. What does Jesus say about faithfulness and neglect of the gifts?

In the Parable of the Pounds and in the Parable of the Talents, Jesus makes it clear that if stewards do not neglect their gifts, they will be rewarded for their faithfulness.

5. Describe the significance of service as it relates to spiritual gifts.

God gives us spiritual gifts so that we can serve him and each other. It is the initial motivation and it must also be the end result.

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. A steward is one who _____ something that does not belong to him. (**manages**).
2. Our gifts come _____ us but not _____ us, for they come from God. (**through**) (**from**).
3. _____ means giving up something of ourselves for the benefit of others. (**sacrifice**)

HELPFUL DIALOGUE

1. Have you ever feared that you are not being a good steward of God's Gifts?
2. Are you happy in the church? If not, perhaps it is because you are not doing what God has gifted you to do?
3. The motive for finding and using the Gifts of God must be service. Service must be the end result also.

WHAT IF I DON'T BELIEVE

*If I don't believe that being a good steward of Spiritual Gifts is important, I will never be effective in the Church. I will never serve God as I was intended because I will always fall short of good stewardship of the Gifts of God.

*I will never seek and perfect my Spiritual Gifts

*I will never be fruitful and fulfilled

CHALLENGE:

1 Peter 4:10-11

2 Corinthians 9:7

Mark 12: 41-44

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

1 Timothy 4:14

John 15:5

Matthew 25:28

Luke 19: 17

John 13:12-17